

For immediate release

Canada Must Not Abandon its Leadership on Official Languages

Montreal, February 5, 2021 – The Government of Canada must not retreat from its legal and moral obligation to Canada’s linguistic duality, and support for our French and English linguistic minority communities.

In a letter to Federal Official Languages Minister Mélanie Joly, Quebec’s Minister Responsible for Canadian Relations and the Canadian Francophonie, Sonia LeBel, states that the sole official minority language across Canada is French. Minister LeBel was providing Quebec’s perspective on the modernization of the federal Official Languages Act.

Quebec is seeking exclusive jurisdiction over questions of language rights in the province and staking a claim for pan-Canadian leadership regarding the protection of French across Canada.

“That’s a non-starter,” QCGN President Marlene Jennings retorted: “Quebec is attempting to territorialize language by demanding that the Government of Quebec have sole jurisdiction for linguistic planning and control on its territory and displacing federal leadership on the protection of Canada’s official language communities.”

“Quebec’s perspective on Canada’s Official Languages Act is just that – a provincial view. It is not a national vision,” Jennings said. “This distinctly self-serving provincial perspective undermines more than a half century of consensus around official languages and linguistic duality as a pillar of Canada.”

The QCGN maintains that it is the Government of Canada’s duty to safeguard its jurisdiction in Constitutional matters. We adamantly oppose Quebec’s call for the application of the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101) to all matters related to official languages in this province, even areas outside of Quebec’s jurisdiction.

“Quebec has consistently fought against the rights of Francophone communities across Canada, intervening in minority-language education rights contained in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms against Francophone parents and their school boards,” Jennings noted. Recent examples include Quebec’s intervention in cases involving Francophone schools in the Yukon and British Columbia.

“To cede federal responsibility to a province on questions related to Canada’s official languages would grievously erode the rights of English-speaking Quebecers and the door would be thrown open to a patchwork of provincial and territorial language regimes,” Jennings maintained.

“The future of Canada’s English and French linguistic minority communities is intertwined,” Jennings concluded: “We need our federal government to stand firmly against asymmetry in the Official Languages Act.”

The Quebec Community Groups Network is a not-for-profit organization bringing together English-language community organizations across Quebec. As a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action it identifies, explores, and addresses strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of the English-speaking community of Quebec and encourages dialogue and collaboration among its member organizations, individuals, community groups, institutions, and leaders.

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