

For immediate release

Government Must Not Territorialize the Equality of Canada's official Languages

Montreal, September 24, 2020 – The Speech from the Throne yesterday reiterates a core Canadian value – in the spirit of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and the Official Languages Act.

The Throne Speech emphasizes that our two official languages are woven into the fabric of our country and reaffirms the federal government's duty to defend the language rights of Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs), both English and French, wherever they live in this country. To quote the Charter, "English and French are the official languages of Canada and have equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada."

That is why it is so important for the federal government to support the equality of both official languages across the country said the Quebec Community Groups Network.

Within the foundational framework of Official Languages, all recognize that the situation of the French language is unique. French is a minority language in Canada. It requires special attention. This explains why Official Languages policies and programs place particular emphasis on the preservation of French. The Action Plan for Official Languages – 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future, like all federal official language strategies, commits the bulk of its resources to Francophone minority communities and the teaching of French as a second language.

All this is understandable. Francophones outside Quebec are fighting to keep their language alive and to resist linguistic assimilation. They are striving to build and sustain their own institutional base, an arduous and costly task.

In contrast, English-speaking Quebecers are not facing linguistic assimilation or the fear that our language will die. The challenge for English-speaking Quebec is to protect a unique culture and the management and control of our institutions that we built and supported for more than two centuries.

Canadians are equal under the law and enjoy the equal protection and equal benefit of the law. This is why the Official Languages Act, and the Government of Canada's official languages policies, must continue to reinforce the equality of English and French. Programs must be equitably administered to address the specific challenges and concerns of our individual linguistic minority communities, as is now the case.

But the law must not favour one language group over another.

Thus, the Government must not territorialize the equality of Canada's official languages. This was a path abandoned by the authors of the report of Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, who understood that doing so would destroy the national vision of a bilingual country from sea to sea to sea.

There are those who continue to disagree with this unifying vision – the dream that a Canadian can live a full life in his or her official language of choice no matter where they decide to live in Canada. Leadership for this vision belongs to the Government of Canada. It must not abandon the field.

The Quebec Community Groups Network repeats its call on the Government of Canada to modernize the Official Languages Act in a way that respects the equality of our two official languages and extends the language rights of all Canadians.

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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