

For immediate release

## **QCGN wraps up 24<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting Prepared to Face Government Threats**

**Montreal – June 17, 2019** – The Quebec Community Groups Network concluded its two-day Annual General Meeting Saturday united and ready to contend with an unfriendly Coalition Avenir Québec government jeopardizing the fundamental rights of our minority community.

“The Government’s agenda represents an attack on our community’s rights on various fronts,” said QCGN President Geoffrey Chambers. Among them, he noted, is the threatened abolition of our democratically elected school boards; legislation forbidding many minority members from wearing religious symbols at work; and imposing various obstacles that impede our access to health and social services in our language.

On hand were representatives from QCGN’s 60 member organizations and stakeholders, including the Alliance for the Promotion of Public English-language Education in Quebec – aka APPELE-Québec, the Coalition Inclusion Québec and the Provincial Committee for the Provision of Health Services and Social Services in the English Language, commonly called the Provincial Access Committee.

The meeting was launched by the Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Thériège, who acknowledged it has been a difficult year for official language minority communities in Canada. He cited the elimination of the Office of the Commissioner of French Language Services in Ontario; cuts in legal translation in Manitoba; and recent cutbacks to second-language learning. Here in Quebec, he pointed to the education minister’s decision to invoke special executive powers in the Education Act to force the transfer of English language minority schools to a French-language school board, as well as impending legislation to abolish school boards and school-board elections.

“Obviously, I am dismayed and disappointed by this turn of events,” Thériège told delegates from across Quebec gathered in Montreal. “I never thought I’d have to make public statements about language rights setbacks in 2019, just as the Act is celebrating its 50th anniversary.”

“These are certainly trying times for language rights in Canada,” Chambers echoed. “It seems we are taking giant leaps backward at a time when we should be celebrating linguistic duality.”

After working with neighboring linguistic minority communities over the past year, Chambers announced a coalition with l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario (AFO) and the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau Brunswick (SANB) to work together on common issues – particularly ahead of the fall federal election. “Our three communities of 1.9 million people represent 89 per cent of all Canadians living in official language minority communities,” he noted.

“All Canadians living as official language minorities must work together to protect and advance language rights and come to each other’s aid when necessary. Our fates, like our rights, are tightly wound together,” Chambers said. He added that the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) du Canada, which represents all francophone Canadians living outside Quebec, will join the group as an observer.

The QCGN also celebrated 10 Community Innovation Fund projects that transformed the lives of individual English-speaking Quebecers. Funded by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program - Children and Families Component, and managed by the QCGN, the Fund targeted the particular needs and priorities of vulnerable English-speaking youth, seniors and newcomers.

“The many lives that were permanently changed for the better provide the greatest measure of the Fund’s success,” said QCGN Director general Sylvia Martin-Laforge. “Almost 2,000 vulnerable seniors, youth and newcomers received new services to help them find jobs, fight isolation or learn new skills. By this measure alone, the Fund generated a tremendous return.”

“A core goal of the fund – that all these projects be sustained into the future – was realized,” she said, adding that the Community Innovation Fund made it possible for Quebec’s English-speaking community groups to address social issues more effectively.

During the Annual General Meeting Saturday afternoon, some old and some new faces were elected and re-elected to the Board of Directors. They include Eric Maldoff, Mary Ellen Beaulieu, Clarence Bayne, Cheryl Henry-Leggio, Edward Sweeney, and Guy Rodgers. They will be joining president Chambers, vice-president Gerald Cutting, secretary Eva Ludvig as well as directors Christopher Neal, Sharleen Sullivan, Maureen Kiely, and Chad Bean. The board said goodbye to Directors Stella Kennedy, Elise Moser and Linton Garner.

The Quebec Community Groups Network ([www.qcgn.ca](http://www.qcgn.ca)) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together 60 English-language community organizations across Quebec. Its mission is to identify, explore and address strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of English-speaking Quebec and to encourage dialogue and collaboration.

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