

**For immediate release**

## **Bilingualism essential for evolution of our laws and access to justice for English and French-speaking minority communities**

**Montreal – October 22, 2015** - The Bar of Montreal laments the fact that Quebec’s jurisprudence is seldom integrated into our national jurisprudence because of language - a gap that is worrisome and a serious failure of our legal system.

“The Bar of Montreal strongly believes that one must not only read the laws that are adopted, but it is essential to question how they are adopted,” stated Madame la bâtonnière Magali Fournier in the course of a conference entitled “Language of Statutes and Judgments” organized by the Bar of Montreal, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Language Rights Support Program and the Quebec Community Groups Network. One of the objectives of the event was to identify solutions to improve access to justice for Quebec’s minority English-speaking communities.

“Court decisions across the country must be translated into Canada’s two official languages; otherwise how can national jurisprudence evolve equitably to reflect all regions of our country,” declared lawyer Casper Bloom, co-chair of the conference for the Bar of Montreal.

“Access to justice for English-speaking Quebecers must start with provincial laws written in English that are exactly the same in content and intent as the French version,” said Sylvia Martin-Laforge, Director General of the Quebec Community Groups Network. “This means that laws must be simultaneously developed in English and French, and considered in these two languages through the legislative process within the National Assembly. It is unacceptable and possibly unconstitutional for laws to be written in French, and then translated by non-legally trained translators.”

“Improved access to justice for all, in the context of constitutional language rights, can be achieved three ways: educating the public on their constitutional language rights, communities and lawyers playing an active role in the advancement of language rights, and an active offer by institutions that have linguistic obligations,” declared Geneviève Boudreau, Director of the Language Rights Support Program.

More than 50 lawyers and jurists participated in the conference that took place in Montreal to discuss the importance of using both official languages in the pieces of legislation in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, as well as the lack of visibility of Quebec jurisprudence on a national scale. Speakers and panelists included Graham Fraser, Commissioner of Official Languages; Geneviève Boudreau, Director of the Language Rights

Support Program; Karine McLaren, Director of the Centre de traduction et de terminologie juridiques of the University of Moncton; Gerard Hernando, Director of French Legislative Services, Office of Legislative Counsel, Ministry of the Attorney General of Ontario; Philippe Hallée, Chief Legislative Counsel, Justice Canada; Matthew Harrington, Full Professor at the Faculté de droit of the Université de Montréal; as well as the Honourable J. J. Michel Robert, former Chief Justice of Quebec.

Speakers discussed the quality as well as the judicial and constitutional consequences of the English version of Quebec laws. As a point of comparison, the conference looked at the process used by other provinces - Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick – and the federal government to draft legislative texts. Speakers and participants then examined the impact of the lack of visibility of Quebec jurisprudence in the rest of Canada and proposed some solutions. The event raised awareness of jurists on the importance of legislative bilingualism and proposed solutions to enable them to better serve the English and French-speaking communities of Quebec.

The Quebec Community Groups Network ([www.qcgn.ca](http://www.qcgn.ca)) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together 48 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.

**For further information:**

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