

SUMMARY REPORT ON MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS

October 6, 2003

Minority Francophone Community Groups Representatives

On Monday, October 6, 2003, Ministers Stéphane Dion, Lucienne Robillard, Martin Cauchon, Denis Coderre, Anne McLellan and Allan Rock held consultation sessions with minority French-language community leaders. Also in attendance were Mauril Bélanger, Chair of the House Standing Committee on Official Languages, and Ethel Blondin-Andrew, Secretary of State (Children and Youth). The consultation session fulfilled the Government's commitment under section 36 of the Accountability and Coordination Framework of the *Action Plan for Official Languages*.

Opening Remarks :

The Honourable Stéphane Dion opened the consultation session by noting that these annual consultations are an important step toward strengthening communities' relations with the different departments represented in the *Action Plan*. He highlighted the place of this dialogue in the evaluation and planning cycle, including performance indicators in all fields, the mid-term report, and eventual discussions in connection with the final results report in 2008. He invited participants to share their ideas on next year's consultation process.

The President of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA), Mr. Georges Arès, described this first consultation session as an "historic meeting" with so many ministers, and proof of how seriously the ministers are addressing the implementation of the Action Plan. He noted that the *Plan* "has room for improvement" in terms of arts and culture, as well as accountability. He talked of ensuring consistency of actions across government, from the ministerial level right down to regional offices. He also noted the importance of the Minister responsible for official languages in effectively transmitting communities' messages to ministers, deputy ministers and their officials.

Canadian Heritage :

On behalf of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Ms. Judith A. LaRocque, Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage, spoke of the longstanding relationship with communities in connection with minority-language education, second-language learning, bursaries, monitors, service agreements and support for community life. The Deputy Minister recalled the objectives of the *Action Plan* in the area of education, and the fact that the Minister has talked with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) on this subject; the Minister has also entered into talks with the provinces and territories on the targeted education funds. Service agreements expire in 2004, and an assessment is underway. Ms. LaRocque pointed out that her department is no longer the only vehicle to obtain assistance for community life, adding that the program assessment will be made public shortly and that a consultation process on the main findings will be organized

Treasury Board:

The Honourable Lucienne Robillard expressed her satisfaction with the new momentum the *Action Plan* has engendered within the Public Service toward a revitalized official languages program. She described changing the corporate culture as a primary challenge; although linguistic duality is well received, public servants do not always understand the resulting rights and obligations. She presented an update of ongoing activities: awareness workshops, initial tender call for projects to be funded under the two new funds, and amalgamation of the Canadian Centre for Management Development and the Centre for Language Training to facilitate integration of the second language in the career path. The Minister expressed her desire to streamline the too numerous Treasury Board policies, and to strengthen follow-up and audit on services in both official languages, noting that no decision has been made to date to follow up on the 2001 census data.

Justice:

The Honourable Martin Cauchon reiterated the *Action Plan* commitments: fulfilling obligations on implementing the *Legislative Instruments Re-enactment Act* and the *Contraventions Act*; and access to justice in both official languages. Around ten projects are under consideration in connection with the new Support Fund, and recommendations are being developed by jurists' associations on core funding distribution for the associations. An advisory committee will be struck in the fall; it will be the community counterpart to the federal-provincial-territorial working group. The Program for the Integration of Both Official Languages in the Administration of Justice (POLAJ) has been transferred from Canadian Heritage and training tools are being prepared for Justice Department counsel. In short, implementation is well on track.

Community Feedback:

Ms. Mariette Carrier-Fraser, co-chair of the Canadian Heritage/Francophone and Acadian Communities of Canada Committee, described the mandate of the Committee, which she co-chairs with the Department of Canadian Heritage. The two meetings held to date have helped identify three areas where more information is required: rural migration, Francophone leadership, and the link between culture, education and the arts and cultural field. Future meetings will include an update on the *Action Plan*, and issues relating to the census, historical heritage, public policy on rural migration, and coordinating the youth component and cultural issues.

Ms. Paulette Gagnon advanced the priorities of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française (FCCF): support for local cultural development organizations, concerns about new questions raised by Canadian Heritage on the operation of a new “arts and culture” agreement, forthcoming projects in connection with the multiparty agreement renewed in March 2001, clarification of the federal government’s plans on the infrastructure file, and the study on relations among language, culture and education to enhance cooperation among the three sectors. Ms. Gagnon indicated that for the time being, the place of culture in the *Action Plan* remains fluid.

Mr. Tory Colvin, President of the Fédération des associations de juristes d’expression française de common law (FAJEF), said the network is being developed through core funding from the *Action Plan*. This approach builds on both FCFA’s progress report and overall development policy. Mr. Colvin commended the concept of bilingual itinerant courts and mentioned an international component that would promote Canadian bijuralism in Europe, citing examples of existing consultation mechanisms in British Columbia and Manitoba. He concluded by thanking his Justice Canada colleagues, with whom “we can always see eye to eye, even if we are not always on the same side in court.”

Citizenship and Immigration:

The Honourable Denis Coderre highlighted immigration agreements with the provinces, noting that no agreement could have been concluded without a clause on respecting French-speaking communities. He announced the forthcoming signing of an agreement with Alberta and expressed his desire that Ontario’s new government would help facilitate an agreement that would take the Francophone element into account. He also expressed his desire to expand immigration outside Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal through customized strategies. He noted an overall heightened awareness on the ground beyond so-called ‘traditional’ immigration, and stressed communities are taking charge of the need to adapt to changing circumstances. He expressed his optimism about the future, due in part to the efforts of the advisory committee, whereby “consultation takes on its full meaning with respect to immigration.”

Community feedback:

Mr. Marc Arnal, co-chair of the National Steering Committee on Immigration in Francophone and Acadian Minority Communities, noted the great complexity of the immigration file, and hence of the multi-disciplinary and intergovernmental structure of the committee. He pointed out that agreements with the provinces talk of community development, rather than bilingual services. He noted racial minorities’ decreased trust in Francophone organizations and the problems this is causing, notably in Toronto and Ottawa. He nevertheless praised the work being carried out in Acadia. He then addressed the redefining of identifiers occasioned by recent immigrants from less traditional regions; he noted that learning English is essential for newcomers, which increases the challenge to attract them to French. He expressed his belief that the *Strategic Framework to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities* is just one step toward a better understanding of the issues.

Health Canada:

The Honourable Anne McLellan reiterated her personal commitment, and that of the Government, to community development. She outlined the *Action Plan's* objectives in the health field one by one, and reported on the realistic progress in terms of networking, professional training and primary care access. She noted the creation of the new Contribution Program to Improve Access to Health Services for Official Language Minority Communities. She encouraged community representatives to continue their cooperation with the Government and public servants. She introduced Mr Marcel Nouvet of Health Canada and commended Mr Hubert Gauthier, thanking him for his dedication to the cause of French-language health services.

Community feedback:

Mr Hubert Gauthier, President of the Société Santé en français, highlighted the accountability process provided for in the *Action Plan*. "The Government said it, and the Government has done it!" he noted. He thanked the Honourable Allan Rock for laying the groundwork when he was health minister, and then praised the progress made by Ms McLellan and the important support of Ministers Robillard and Coderre. In closing, he noted the challenges raised by the Honourable Stéphane Dion had served communities well. He compared the health component of the *Action Plan* to a newborn child, which will require constant care. Among the implementation challenges, he noted how quickly teachers will have to be recruited on the ground and the difficulties in "bringing the provinces to the table" to discuss networking with communities. He described the *Action Plan* as a good start, emphasizing that ongoing dialogue will be needed to ensure service availability.

Industry Canada:

The Honourable Allan Rock outlined the economic component of the *Action Plan*. He referred to the language industries as a golden opportunity on the international scene, offering extraordinary expertise. He then described the key aspects of government actions: outreach and counselling to facilitate access to government services, pilot projects on distance learning and distance training, government youth internships, and funding of the Francommunautés virtuelles program to counterbalance the markedly Anglophone reality of the Internet. The Minister sees his role as one of ensuring access to economic development for all Canadians, which would be meaningless if community development were not included.

Human Resources Development Canada:

The Honourable Jane Stewart was held up en route from Toronto to Ottawa, so Mr Bill Ferguson, Assistant Deputy Minister and Special Advisor to the Deputy Minister, outlined HRDC's contribution to the *Action Plan* on the Minister's behalf. He emphasized early childhood development, noting the efforts of the National Committee for Canadian Francophonie Human Resources Development (NCCFHRD) and the Co-ordinating groups on Economic Development and Employability (CEDE).

The Honourable Ethel Blondin-Andrew, Secretary of State (Children and Youth), mentioned that she knows very well the needs of Francophones in the Northwest Territories.

Community feedback:

Ms Claire Bélanger-Parker, co-chair of the NCCFHRD, mentioned the leverage effects of HRDC, whose investments are multiplied by a factor of 10 to 25 depending on the region. She highlighted the priority given youth/employment issues, the economic development and employability research and strategic development centre (in which Industry Canada's participation is being sought), and youth entrepreneurial qualities, which will help young people stay and work in their communities. Ms Bélanger-Parker expressed her desire for greater flexibility on the part of the *Action Plan's* federal partners.

Ms Ghislaine Pilon, chair of the Commission nationale des parents francophones (CNPF), expressed regret over the precarious situation of minority childcare services. The CNPF has met with Minister Stewart to inform her that the links between the details of HRDC projects and the *Action Plan* objectives had not been made, that the accountability framework imposed a duty to consult with the Government, and that a formal mechanism needs to be created to that end between HRDC and CNPF. Ms Pilon has faced the same challenges for early childhood development as for the school systems ten years ago; she has asked that an early childhood development centre be attached to each school and that a minimum threshold of 80% for attendance in the Francophone system be achieved for early childhood development. She expressed her belief that the non-governmental organization support component is going well, but that the research and literacy components of the *Action Plan* will require more work between government officials and communities. She also expressed her desire that early childhood development be integrated into Canadian Heritage's education initiatives.

Closing:

The Honourable Stéphane Dion closed the discussions by expressing his regret that he was unable to give all participants the opportunity to take the floor. Mr Georges Arès suggested that problem be remedied next year.