

FCFA of Canada Proposals for Implementing the Federal Government's Commitment to Protect French Across Canada

In the Speech from the Throne of September 23, 2020, the government committed to strengthening the *Official Languages Act* and taking into account the unique reality of French. For the first time, it acknowledged that it has a responsibility to protect and promote French not only outside Quebec, but also within Quebec.

Traditionally, the federal government has promoted French in three main ways:

- by funding francophone and Acadian community organizations and institutions;
- by transferring funds to the provinces and territories for French-as-a-first-language and French-as-a-second-language education and the provision of services in French; and
- by funding official languages learning in the federal public service.

This document sets out, in no particular order, additional ways the government could fulfill a new duty to protect and promote French across Canada.

A modernized *Official Languages Act* should clearly recognize the following principles:

1. French is the official language that needs support to achieve substantive equality. The federal government must take the measures necessary to protect and promote French and the communities that speak it on an ongoing basis.

- Mechanisms or actions:
 - (a) Strengthen the preamble to the Act to clearly indicate the unique reality of French.
 - (b) Continually and permanently promote francophone communities' historical, social, economic and cultural contributions to Canada.
 - (c) Establish a Canadian Council for French. This independent, non-partisan para-public agency would be supported by a set of partners from governments and from francophone communities. The Council would be responsible for the following:
 - promoting French;
 - monitoring the status of French in Canada;
 - proposing public policies to promote and advance French throughout Canada; and
 - producing evidence-based studies measuring the impact of public policies and investments to promote French.

- (d) Establish a trust fund, managed by and for francophone and Acadian communities, to help civil society promote French among the majority of Canadians on a permanent basis.
- (e) Specify the responsibilities of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and La Francophonie to promote French globally, including at multilateral cooperation organizations, and the obligations of Canada's missions and embassies abroad to promote Canada's bilingual character.

2. To ensure social cohesion among all parts of Canadian society, the federal government has a responsibility for civic education.

The government must foster a better common understanding, by all Canadians, of the social choices that were made over the years to create an open and welcoming society that supports the success of all its communities. These choices include linguistic duality, cultural diversity and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

- Mechanisms or actions:
 - (a) Set out a government duty to continuously raise Canadians' awareness of the principles and values underpinning the *Official Languages Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* through civic education initiatives.
 - (b) Clarify certain provisions of CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate to promote better mutual understanding among Canada's francophone, anglophone and Indigenous populations.
 - (c) Work with the Conference of Ministers of Education to have the provinces and territories add modules on the history of francophone communities to school curricula across the country, ensuring that some of this education occurs in English for the benefit of the anglophone majority.
 - (d) Support formal initiatives to combat disinformation about minority rights in Canada, including the rights of francophones.

3. The federal government is responsible for ensuring that francophones remain a certain proportion of Canada's population.

Francophones' demographic weight has eroded over the past few decades, in part because of assimilation and because their population has not grown at the same rate as the English majority. The government must take action to boost francophone immigration and enhance the social and cultural vitality of francophone communities.

- Mechanisms or actions:
 - (a) Specify the federal government's duty to adopt a national francophone immigration policy that includes an annual target for francophone immigrants in the spirit of redressing previous harms.

- (b) In the spirit of redressing previous harms, increase the 4.4% target for francophone immigration to minority communities to make up for lost time.
- (c) Enable francophone communities to take charge of the key steps in managing the entire francophone immigration process, including promotion and integration and settlement services.
- (d) Specify the federal government's duty to promote immigration to Canada in the countries of the Francophonie.
- (e) Specify the federal government's duty to promote an education continuum and a continuum of services that enable people to live and work in French.

4. The federal government must recognize the right of all Canadians to learn French, no matter at what age they decide to learn it.

- Mechanisms or actions:
 - (a) Work with the provinces and territories to provide universal access to French programs, throughout the education continuum (early childhood, K–12, post-secondary and adult education).
 - (b) Recognize the ability of francophone and Acadian communities to take charge of or manage some aspects of French-language learning by directly funding minority-managed institutions.
 - (c) Provide immigrants with universal access to instruction in both official languages in the years following their settlement in Canada.
 - (d) Support the creation of internships that enable Canadians to practise their French in a francophone setting.

5. The federal government has a responsibility to foster connections between francophone communities across the country in order to secure the future of French and of francophone cultures in Canada.

- Mechanisms or actions:
 - (a) Support the creation of partnerships between francophone civil society organizations and institutions in order to establish exchange programs and expertise-sharing between Canada's francophone communities.
 - (b) Promote economic relations between Canada's francophone communities.
 - (c) Foster francophone mobility, for both students and workers.
 - (d) Clarify the mandate of Radio-Canada to promote better mutual understanding between Quebec and francophone and Acadian communities outside Quebec.

6. The federal government has a duty to promote cooperation between the different levels of government (federal, provincial, territorial and municipal) and francophone communities to ensure that French speakers have access to the full range of services in

their language while fostering the long-term development and empowerment of Canada's francophone communities.

- Mechanisms or actions:
 - (a) Establish a permanent coordination and cooperation structure between the various levels of government and representatives of Canada's francophone communities to ensure language policies are properly aligned and strengthened to support francophone communities.
 - (b) Encourage communities to take charge of their own development ("by and for") through agreements between the various levels of government and communities. These agreements would recognize the ability of these communities' organizations and institutions to meet the needs of francophone residents by giving them the right to manage their own affairs in certain areas crucial to their development.

7. The federal government must promote the French language and francophone and Acadian communities in its official communications and publications, given their minority status in Canada.

- Mechanisms or actions:
 - (a) Highlight Canadians' and the federal government's commitment to growing and enhancing the vitality of francophone minority communities through all of the means at its disposal.
 - (b) Acknowledge the federal government's role in protecting and promoting the status and use of French in Canada through all the means at its disposal.
 - (c) Draft and pass the French version of the Canadian Constitution, in accordance with section 55 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.