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Notes for a speech to be given to
the National French-Second Language Stakeholders' Forum

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Good morning to you all.

At the Symposium on Official Languages held in Toronto last month, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages played two roles, that of organizer and that of facilitator. Our objective was to support the key players, which include all of you, and to encourage them to work together, develop common strategies and, above all, define a “road-map” to mobilize all key sectors of society. The *Action Plan for Official Languages*, including the Plan’s goal of doubling within ten years the number of high school graduates with a working knowledge of both English and French, represents a new phase in our work to achieve Canada’s linguistic vision.

In order to make this endeavour a success, all players must coordinate and harmonize their efforts.

That is why we have helped gather representatives from the education, business, arts, culture and sports sectors to develop concrete actions that are tailored to their respective fields. It was equally important to mobilize a strong common effort among all these players, with a view to pooling their resources and energy.

I was pleased to see the quick response to the commitment made by Minister Pettigrew, in partnership with Canadian Parents for French. I am pleased to see that you have begun implementing the recommendations put forward at the Symposium by holding provincial and territorial consultations with groups of stakeholders involved in the teaching of French as a second language. This initiative has made it possible to determine the needs of each province or territory and to make recommendations tailored to each one.

Furthermore, I congratulate you on having spread the spirit of the Symposium on Official Languages to all regions of the country. Certainly, the matters discussed did not pertain solely to education, but also included the role that your sector could play at a broader level, by cooperating on the implementation of the strategies developed in Toronto last month, whether they pertain to business, the arts or education *per se*.

At the Symposium, we agreed that greater awareness and participation by Canadians are essential to achieving our objectives. Indeed, the solutions that we adopt must not only allow our youth to learn language skills, but must also encourage them to value these skills and develop them further during their university education and throughout their careers.

We would also like to know how employment opportunities can be created in all sectors for bilingual young Canadians, whose numbers, thanks in great part to your efforts, will be increasing.

The Symposium participants identified four main areas for action.

1) Promoting bilingualism

- by developing a rationale concerning the economic benefits of bilingualism;
- by creating opportunities for language exchanges; and
- through national recognition of efforts made to learn a second language;

2) *Establishing structures to encourage and facilitate the acquisition of language skills;*

- in particular by providing continuity in the teaching of French from primary school to university, an issue that emerged clearly from the Symposium;
- by making available the resources, knowledge and expertise relating to bilingualism and the acquisition and maintenance of a second language in order to better equip stakeholders, young people and parents. The objective is, in a sense, to establish monitoring of strategic information on bilingualism; and
- by conducting a national strategy to promote our two linguistic cultures so that the spirit of openness and discovery that is part of learning and using a second language becomes part of the reality of young people, not only at school but also in their various activities such as sports, the Internet, music and other recreational activities.

3) *Improving and expanding education programs*

- by acting at various levels to ensure that our schools can offer appropriate educational material, stimulating cultural content and qualified instructors.

4) *Coordinating the actions of the players involved*

- primarily, by coordinating government policies and investments to direct their impact towards common objectives;
- by developing greater consistency in the promotion, distribution and dissemination of cultural information and educational resources; and
- by forming grassroots groups who can monitor the implementation of the Action Plan over the next ten years. This requires community responsibility, local and provincial mobilization, and ongoing dialogue and sharing among sectors to ensure that, for instance, models from the culture or business sector are used in classrooms.

Accordingly, education stakeholders play a fundamental role in achieving this blueprint for society. They are responsible for the management of education programs, overall school curriculum, and by extension, the language training of young people. They ensure that official languages are taught with the most appropriate methods and sufficient resources. They also play a role in promoting the official languages, since course material and teaching methods are, for students and their parents, part of the attraction of learning a second language. Finally, the education network could be used to forge links with various sectors in society for whom bilingualism is positive but that often lack information and experience with the official languages.

Education is a key sector, which understands bilingualism issues; it is also made up of motivated and competent stakeholders who are accustomed to communicating and putting forward initiatives.

While exploring the specific challenges of education, which must form the basis of any action to promote bilingualism, education stakeholders also have the tools to obtain support from other sectors of society such as business, the arts and culture. Everyone must continue to act as a catalyst in his or her own environment and network with other sectors. The holding of these

consultations shows that a number of steps have been taken and substantial mobilization has occurred in a short time. This momentum must be maintained and cooperation increased.

The Office of the Commissioner will continue to play its monitoring role to ensure that the federal government serves as a champion and leader for various sectors of society.

I would also like to thank you for your work in following up on the recommendations from the regional consultations and for creating a leverage effect by establishing cooperative ties with other networks. It is up to you to work your influence to ensure that future generations have the abilities and knowledge that will be essential assets for the Canada and world of tomorrow.

Thank you.