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## A Word from the Commissioner



Last December I asked for ideas, suggestions and comments from readers of INFOACTION by means of a questionnaire. As I stated, the Office of the Commissioner is currently considering ways to improve all of its communications with Canadians. INFOACTION is an integral part of this process.

Many of you responded to the invitation. We have analyzed your responses and found in them a gold mine of excellent ideas. You will no doubt notice that the current issue, while not altering its appearance, has undergone some changes for the better. We have taken some of your comments and suggestions into account. Insofar as possible,

and as the resources available allow, we will try to meet your expectations.

On behalf of the Office of the Commissioner I wish to thank you sincerely for responding so thoughtfully. It is a sign that you really want

INFOACTION to be a part of your reading. It will continue to appear regularly, along with the four seasons. We hope you find this Spring 2000 issue useful and invite you to contact us again.

The Office of the Commissioner's team needs you.



Dyane Adam

**IN MOTION... FROM COAST TO COAST**



The Commissioner of Official Languages, Dyane Adam, attaches the utmost importance to teamwork in her effort to fulfil her mandate as effectively as possible.

In her view, Canadians are all part of the extended team that supports her in carrying out her mandate. Accordingly, to start the first phase of her seven-year term, she undertook a round of cross-Canada consultations.

From the Atlantic to the Pacific, this round affords her the opportunity to meet with associations, individuals from all sectors of Canadian society, young and old, representatives of the media, etc.

First of all Dr. Adam wants to consult the persons she is meeting on the directions the Office of the

Commissioner is adopting with regard to the organization’s mission and basic values. She also wants to inform them of her concerns regarding the approach and the working methods the Office should adopt.

As well, the Commissioner would like Canadians to share with her their analysis of the principal official languages issues. Finally, she will discuss the Commissioner’s annual report, based on a discussion paper prepared for this purpose.

This cross-Canada tour, organized in close cooperation with the Commissioner’s five regional representatives, has already proven to be a highly rewarding exercise.

INFOACTION will keep you posted ... from coast to coast.



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## ONCE UPON A TIME ... IN SUMMERSIDE A true story!

If you heard them tell of the odyssey that took them from their kitchen in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, to the Supreme Court of Canada, you would call it a tall tale. Not at all; it is a true story and one worth hearing!

It was covered by all the media, on January 13, 2000, and in the days that followed. On that memorable day, the Supreme Court handed down its ruling: Summerside would have its French-language school. Acadian pupils in this lovely Prince Edward Island town will no longer have to travel two hours by bus every day to get to school.

More than anyone else in Canada, two parents were so thrilled they could not believe their eyes or their ears. Noëlla Arsenault-Cameron and Madeleine Costa-Petitpas, along with the Fédération des parents de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, hailed the victory. A unanimous decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, signed by Mr. Justice Major and Mr. Justice Bastarache, ruled in favour of the French-speaking parents of the Summerside region who have been calling for a French-language school since 1982.

INFOACTION wanted to know why these two parents embarked on an adventure that has lasted eight years and is still not over. What has kept them going? The following are some excerpts from a conversation we had with them.

Noëlla is an Acadian from Prince Edward Island and Madeleine a Franco-Ontarian from Kapuskasing. Both very much wanted to pass on to their children the rich heritage of their French language and culture. Was this possible when there was no French-language school nearby? They were reminded every day of the fragility of their heritage, and time was passing.

So for the sake of their children and grandchildren, they both accepted the invitation of the Fédération des parents de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard to embark on a mission that turned out to be longer and more complex than they imagined. Bear in mind that both of these parents had full-time jobs.

Noëlla and Madeleine fought so their children could have the choice to be educated in their mother tongue. At first they did not know that this choice existed. "But it is there, the choice", Noëlla told us. "I knew hardly anything about the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Once I knew about this fundamental right, nothing was going to stop me. I did not have the right not to give my children the right to education in

their mother tongue." And so the odyssey began. It involved hundreds of meetings, interminable hours of reading, long periods of waiting, victories and defeats, but the plan to fight for a fundamental right never faltered.

"We could not give up. It was impossible", said Madeleine. "One word gave me strength and motivation. I repeated it continually: INEVITABLE. That word was magical to me. Victory was inevitable because it would be the fruit of a right guaranteed by the *Charter*."

What they take away as a fundamental lesson is the strength that parents have when they know their rights. The more they became involved in this battle at various levels of the legal system, the more they realized that their efforts were aimed not at creating a new right but rather at ensuring respect for a right that already existed, a tool that belonged to them. Noëlla and Madeleine say that they developed confidence in and great respect for the justice system.

To be sure, there were difficult times. They have not forgotten them but much prefer to share what they consider the essential lesson. Strangers often come up to them on the street and say, "Thank you, your victory is for us and for the whole country." That is the image they had in mind when they crossed the threshold of the Supreme Court of Canada in Ottawa. There they felt that their adventure had implications well beyond their children's education. They realized that their struggle, and especially their victory, was everyone's.

"And here we are again!" Madeleine exclaims. The champagne and celebrations quickly gave way to serious meetings. Strongly supported by the Fédération des parents, Noëlla and Madeleine have started to pursue their dream: the establishment of a school and several community learning centres. Everything remains to be done! The reality is a long way from the dream.

When Noëlla and Madeleine become grandmothers, their grandchildren will speak to them in French, and little children all across Canada will be able to do the same because of what they started ... once upon a time in Summerside.



From left to right: Pierre Foucher, Christian Michaud, Noëlla Arsenault-Cameron, Paul Rouleau, Madeleine Costa-Petitpas, Daniel Mathieu, Robert McConnell, Richard Tardif.

## You Answered Our Questions

**Many readers completed the questionnaire that accompanied INFOACTION in December 1999. The following are some excerpts from the responses received. Unfortunately, we cannot publish all of them.**

The layout and content of last December's INFOACTION make it much easier to read. Articles are shorter. Very interesting. Keep it up!

*A reader from New Brunswick*

Why not a "Readers' opinion" page in INFOACTION?

*A reader from Nova Scotia*

Too many problems when talking about the official languages. Are there any successes? INFOACTION rarely publishes "success stories," especially when they have taken place in federal departments.

*A reader from Ontario*

Many Canadians are not even aware of the existence of the *Official Languages Act*. The Office of the Commissioner should provide us with better information by publicizing the Act via the major media and, especially, the Internet.

*A reader from Alberta*

INFOACTION is a relevant publication that covers all official languages issues well.

*A reader from New Brunswick*

Explain some complaint cases to us and describe how the process works. It is not clear to most of your readers.

*A reader from Quebec*

Why not a youth column in INFOACTION and a column on the Internet? When officers visit the regions they should meet with senior citizens clubs.

*A reader from Saskatchewan*



INFOACTION would probably be published more often if it became a newsletter from the Commissioner.

*A reader from British Columbia*

INFOACTION publishes too few articles dealing with English Quebecers.

*A reader from Quebec*

Can a complaint to the Commissioner really change anything? Give us some examples.

*A reader from Ontario*

Do you not think that the Office of the Commissioner should have more of a presence on television and radio? You use community radio stations very little.

*A reader from Prince Edward Island*

INFOACTION should use simpler and less bureaucratic language.

*A reader from Ontario*

Please do some publicity to advertise your Internet site, a good way to speak to a large number of Canadians.

*A reader from Manitoba*

I really liked the last issue of INFOACTION, especially the interview with Dyane Adam. From reading the article, I have a better understanding of her role and know her objectives.

*A reader from Ontario*

I like the way the Office of the Commissioner treats its clients. For example, they thank you in writing when you make a complaint.

*A reader from Manitoba*



## THE INTERNET: A PRIORITY

On the agenda of the Office of the Commissioner there is one issue that has priority: the Internet. In August 1999, Dyane Adam published a special study entitled *The Government of Canada and French on the Internet*. This study was an urgent appeal to the federal government for immediate action to make up for lost time and develop a critical mass of content and services in French on the Internet.

To the Commissioner's delight, the government responded favourably to the study. Dr. Adam was gratified to find that the government is committed to developing a coherent action plan including deadlines and mechanisms for follow-up and regular reporting on the progress achieved. Without any doubt, the government's determination will increase French-language content and services. In this regard, the Commissioner has stated that "the development of the Information Highway in Canada must include respect for the two official languages, in terms of both communications between the federal government and Canadian citizens on the Internet and government policies to increase Internet content."

Dr. Adam will closely monitor the implementation of the government's commitments. She invites members of the public, especially readers of INFOACTION, to share with her their comments and suggestions on the issue of French on the Internet through the Office of the Commissioner's Web site: [www.ocol-clo.gc.ca](http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca)



## IMPACT OF MAJOR TRANSFORMATION

Major transformations have taken place in government in recent years. In the federal administration, devolution, restructuring of departments and programs, privatization, budget cuts and other measures designed to modernize and rationalize the provision of service to Canadians have profoundly altered the administration of official languages.

In January 1999, a task force created by the Treasury Board to follow up on the Office of the Commissioner's study tabled its report on the major transformations throughout the federal administration.

The Fontaine Task Force recommended that the government establish partnerships, with the official language minority communities, in the form of pilot projects, to provide certain services.

Some federal departments have, in fact, concluded agreements with community organizations. Several of these agreements have to do with economic development and labour market development.

What conditions must be fulfilled, when the delivery of a government program or service is delegated to the communities, to ensure respect for the *Official Languages Act*? Under what conditions do the new modes of delivery encourage the development of the communities?

In the months ahead, the Office of the Commissioner will conduct a large-scale study to determine exactly that.



## FROM 1982 TO 2002: RIGHTS, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

The official language minority communities have made significant gains in the field of education. What does the current situation look like and what are the trends? How can the communities ensure their future?

Those are two questions that the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages is trying to answer at the start of the millennium. To do so, Dr. Adam has retained the services of Angéline Martel, a specialist who has published many studies and is conducting important scientific research.

The study will chiefly concern the implementation of section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in the schools of the French-speaking minorities. This section deals specifically with the right to instruction in French. Court decisions, including three by the Supreme Court of Canada, have affirmed the right of the minority communities to enhance their vitality by establishing and managing French-language schools. Has section 23 produced the desired results? The ongoing study will attempt to answer this difficult question.

Ms. Martel will also look at the situation of the rights holders; i.e., children with at least one parent whose mother tongue is French. Some data indicate that the number of eligible pupils is steadily dropping. However, the implementation of section 23 has led to a slower decline in recent years and to an increase in the number of French-language schools.

Finally, the study will identify ways to achieve the objectives of section 23 in order to ensure the vitality of the official language communities.

INFOACTION will inform you of the findings of this important study.



## THE WORLD OF HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORT

We know the place that high performance sport has in the lives of Canadians. Over the years parents, athletes, coaches, sports associations, and politicians have asked questions about the role of the official languages in the world of high performance sport.

In 1998, a parliamentary subcommittee published a study on sport in Canada dealing mainly with the funding of high performance sport. Some members of Parliament, however, criticized the scarcity of services available for French-speaking athletes. They also expressed concern about the slim chances that such athletes have of being chosen to represent Canada on various national teams. Accordingly, two MPs asked the Commissioner to investigate whether French-speaking athletes have the same opportunities to train in the language of their choice as their English-speaking colleagues. This is a broad-ranging and complex question.

It should be noted that the sports associations that administer training and development programs for high performance athletes are non-profit organizations and, as such, are not subject to the *Official Languages Act*. However, the federal government provides them with funding through Sport Canada, which is part of the Department of Canadian Heritage. These associations have made a commitment to providing services to athletes in both official languages.

In September 1999, the Office of the Commissioner therefore began a special study on the official languages in the entire system that supports high performance sport in Canada.

The study is making good progress. Officers from the Office of the Commissioner have undertaken a rigorous review of various documents concerning the structure of high performance sport associations. They are inquiring into the status of the official languages in the various games in which Canada participates and analyzing the concerns expressed at public hearings held by the parliamentary subcommittee on sport. Finally, the officers in

**(continued on page 8)**

## The complaint: A tool for change

Our readers have asked us for examples of complaints filed with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages that have produced fruitful results. Without revealing the identity of those who have informed the Commissioner of certain situations deemed in violation of the Official Languages Act, the following three cases illustrate how the complaint is a tool for change.

### An Anglophone in Quebec improves a situation

#### THE FACTS:

In February 1999, an English-speaking client in Terrebonne went to the postal counter in a local pharmacy. He was unable to obtain service in the official language of his choice, English, and filed a complaint with the Office of the Commissioner, which investigated Canada Post Corporation. The Corporation's retail sales representative met with the persons in charge of the postal counter in question and reminded them of the linguistic obligations set out in their contract.

#### RESULT:

Thanks to this complaint, service to the public is now available in both English and French at the Terrebonne postal counter. A spot check by the Office of the Commissioner verified this.

### Security in the language of one's choice

#### THE FACTS:

In June 1999, a traveller approached a kiosk in the security inspection area of Edmonton International Airport. He greeted the employee at the counter in French and was answered in English: "Ten dollars, please." The traveller made a complaint to the Office of the Commissioner in Edmonton. During the investigation that ensued, an officer of the Office of the Commissioner met with the client service

manager to discuss the situation. Following this meeting, the manager reminded Protect Security Services of its linguistic responsibilities.

#### RESULT:

The airport administration took firm measures to ensure that the *Official Languages Act* is duly respected, and the security firm put corrective measures in place to ensure the availability of services in English and in French at all times at Edmonton International Airport. After several checks, the Office of the Commissioner confirmed that such services are available in both languages.

### Yes, children have language rights

#### THE FACTS:

Last year, some students at École Émilie-Tremblay in Whitehorse participated in French in the Canada Post Corporation "Stampin' the Future" contest. The seven semifinalists from this French-language school received a letter of congratulation from the corporation in English only. A complaint was therefore made to the Office of the Commissioner. After an investigation, it was found that an error had in fact been made in sending the letters.

#### RESULT:

Canada Post Corporation sent a letter of congratulation in French to the semifinalists in Whitehorse and changed the entry form for various contests to include a box asking participants to specify their official language preference.

## ON THE GROUND



## AND IN THE AIR

On February 17, 2000, the Minister of Transport, David Collenette, tabled a bill to regulate Air Canada's virtual monopoly in the airline industry. This bill is intended to clarify the obligations of Air Canada, its affiliates and regional carriers with regard to application of the *Official Languages Act*.

The Commissioner expressed great satisfaction with the Minister of Transport's intention to make Air Canada's regional carriers subject to the *Official Languages Act*.

In the past five years, the Office of the Commissioner has received over 900 complaints against Air Canada and its regional carriers. Thus it is easy to understand Dr. Adam's insistence on measures to rectify the situation.

In November 1999, the Commissioner appeared before the members of the Standing Committee on Transport and the Standing Committee of the House and Senate and recommended to the government of Canada that the provisions that previously applied to Air Canada remain unchanged and be fully assumed by any new owner. She asked that the good intentions of the government to ensure respect for the *Official Languages Act* in any restructuring of the air transportation industry be put into practice. Dr. Adam hoped that specific and effective accountability procedures would be spelled out in the new legislation.

On February 17, the Commissioner was pleased to find that Minister Collenette and the government had followed her recommendation. She told a CBC reporter from Moncton, "For the Commissioner, this is really an important day, and I am pleased to congratulate the Minister for having taken a strong leadership role on this issue." Minister Collenette, for his part, could not have been firmer in his determination to ensure that Air Canada and its regional carriers recognize their linguistic obligations. At a press briefing, he stated, "It is not just a matter of providing for prerecorded announcements, for automated announcements; it will not only be to indicate where the washrooms and the emergency exits are. All Canadians have the right to feel comfortable and safe and to be served in their own official language aboard Air Canada and its regional carriers."

Dr. Adam and her team are quite hopeful that Air Canada will do everything possible to ensure that the official languages have their rightful place ... both on the ground and in the air.



## THE WORLD OF HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORT

(from page 6)

charge of the study have met with over one hundred persons involved in the high performance sport community—athletes, officials of sports associations, and researchers in the field of sport. In the course of the study they visited multisport centres in Calgary, Winnipeg and Montreal.

The study is well on its way to completion and will be made public shortly.



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## WHEN YOU WERE



## THREE YEARS OLD

mother tongue. And if your early childhood was spent in Canada, it is likely that English or French is your mother tongue.

If you still speak the language of your childhood, you most likely were able to attend a school in your mother tongue. Unfortunately, not all children have the opportunity to be instructed in their mother tongue, even if it is one of Canada's two official languages.

Last January 29, Commissioner Dyane Adam delivered a speech to the French-language Early Childhood Summit held in Toronto under the auspices of the Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario. Parents, teachers, school board trustees, administrators, and professionals working for the Ontario Ministry of Education met to reflect on the mission of providing instruction in the language of the minority.

Since 1982, section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has given the official language minority communities the right to primary and secondary instruction in their own language. Rulings of the Supreme Court of Canada have affirmed the right of the communities to manage their own schools. Yet, for various reasons, not all children enjoy this privilege. This is seen as one of the causes of the decline in the number of Francophones in Canada.

The Early Childhood Summit explored this issue and considered the fundamental importance of the first six years of life, and particularly the first three. Dr. Adam took the opportunity to remind the participants that the early childhood project must bring together all the parties concerned and mobilize all those who support women, couples and families throughout their lives. She added:

What language did you speak to your parents when you were three years old? In what language did you play games with your brothers, sisters and friends? Do you still speak that language today? If the answer to the last question is “yes,” according to Statistics Canada, you still speak your

“This Summit could not be more timely. Thanks to your work, you can be among the first to submit proposals under the federal-provincial programs being developed pursuant to the National Children's Agenda, which was announced in the last Speech from the Throne. The more you present a clear vision of what you want to achieve and how you expect to get there, the more your efforts will be crowned with success.”

The Commissioner strongly encouraged the participants in the Early Childhood Summit to draw up detailed plans and mobilize to find the resources required to achieve the aims of section 23 of the *Charter*.

The text of Dr. Adam's speech is posted on the Office's web site at [www.ocol-clo.gc.ca](http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca) under What's New. Printed copies are also available from the Office of the Commissioner.

## CELEBRATION IN SUDBURY



The Commissioner, Dyane Adam, surrounded by actors of La Troupe from Laurentian University in Sudbury, was the guest of honour at a series of events paying tribute to André Paiement, whose name remains associated with the flowering of artistic creativity in northern Ontario, although he is no longer with us.

On March 10, Dr. Adam attended *Paroles de Paiement*, a collage of dramatic readings and music by André Paiement, under the artistic direction of Madeleine Azzola.

On the same day, the Commissioner also participated in a round table and gave a talk at the launch of the “Programme et Arts d'expression” at Laurentian University.

## Some final WORDS

### Greetings, net surfers!

Increasingly, the Internet is becoming as essential as ... a toaster! It is now impossible to do without it. The survey of INFOACTION readers showed that 60.5 percent of the respondents are wired. And to our great satisfaction, 26.3 percent visit the Office of the Commissioner's Web site. This trend encourages us to make our site a crossroads where net surfers interested in the official languages will encounter one another more often.



### DO YOU KNOW ABOUT CINEROUTE?

It's a fact worth knowing: the National Film Board is 60 years old. For the occasion, this venerable institution has just launched CineRoute, the pilot project of a national on-request cinema service that will soon be available in every Canadian institution and home connected to the Internet. At present, the Université de Moncton is participating in this pilot project that will make some 800 audio-visual works accessible. The Université de Moncton has obtained authorization to access the CineRoute site because it is connected to the Ca\*Net3 Internet network (a wide-band network independent of the commercial Internet).

The pilot project is in its initial stages. In the second phase, primary and secondary schools, public libraries, community organizations and individuals will be invited to participate in this ambitious project.

### A QUIZ

#### THAT WILL NOT MAKE YOU A MILLIONAIRE

Quizzes of all kinds are in vogue. Would you like to take part in an interactive question-and-answer game? You will not become a millionaire, but you will enrich your knowledge of the official languages and have fun. Quizzing ... Languages for All Tastes, an initiative of the Official Languages Support Programs of the Department of Canadian Heritage, has an appointment with you on the Internet at the following address: [www.pch.gc.ca/offlangoff/quiz/english/intro.htm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/offlangoff/quiz/english/intro.htm)



### TAKE UP YOUR PENS, READERS!

Thank you for taking the time to answer our questionnaire. One of your suggestions was that we give our readers a chance to be heard. Starting with the Summer 2000 issue, INFOACTION will publish the column "Our readers write." The ball is now in your court, or should we say we are tossing you a pen? You don't need to use a pen, however. The Internet is at your service. Give us your feedback at [www.ocol-clo.gc.ca](http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca) or write to us at our postal address: Canada Building, 344 Slater Street, Third Floor, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0T8.

INFOACTION will publish a selection of signed letters (please include your address and telephone number, which will be kept confidential). We reserve the right to edit them for brevity.

*It's your turn!*