

The task of speaking to you about La Francophonie and Canada's role in its development is quite understandably a very agreeable one for me. I have been working in this area for some time now - first with the International Association of French-speaking Parliamentarians, or the AIPLF, then as Francophone Affairs advisor to the Prime Minister and to my colleague, the Secretary of State for External Affairs - duties which have often taken me to francophone countries - and today as Minister for External Relations.

La Francophonie can mean many things. Perceived in different ways, according to one's own sensitivities, it is a word charged with emotional overtones, unlike the neutral word "Commonwealth." For us francophone Canadians, La Francophonie carries over to the francophone regions outside Canada, to our solidarity with them, and to the sharing and mutual assistance brought about through co-operation. It also expresses our desire to keep French, one of our two official languages, alive and functioning in Canada and throughout the world.

This was all started by initiatives from non-governmental sources. Most of the international francophone associations came into existence or made themselves known just after the last war. I am thinking of the Institute for the Right to Expression in French, or the IDEF; the Association of Partly of Wholly French-speaking Universities, or the AUPELF; the International Association of French-speaking Parliamentarians, or the AIPLF; the International Union of French-speaking Journalists, or the UCJLF, and others. These were all started by French-speaking Canadians - Quebecers, Acadians and Franco-Ontarians - who were tired of being isolated and who wanted to reach out to other francophones around the world.

There was an important need for our foreign policy to bear the imprint of the country's French component. Just as our membership in the Commonwealth resulted in a large proportion of Canadian cooperative aid being channeled to India and East Africa right after the war, so beginning in the sixties, the new francophone republics of West Africa became recipients of Canadian development aid. When the first important intergovernmental agency of La Francophonie,