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Canada's official languages act is ten years old

Canada's Official Languages Act, making English and French official languages and ensuring that Parliament and government institutions reflect the bilingual nature of Canada, marks its tenth anniversary, September 7.

The English and French languages have been in everyday use in various parts of Canada for almost 400 years. The existence of the two major language groups has been considered one of the dynamic forces that has shaped Canada and contributed to its unique character.

The mother tongue of 60 per cent of Canadians (13 million people) is English and the mother tongue of 27 per cent (5.8 million people) is French; the remaining 13 per cent have another mother tongue. Four million Canadians, comprising 20 per cent of the total population, speak only French.

Legislation principles

These facts led in 1969 to the language legislation which encompasses three basic principles:

- Canadians should be able to communicate with, and to obtain service from, Federal Government institutions in the official language of their choice;
- Canadians of the two official language groups should have equitable opportunities for employment and a career in

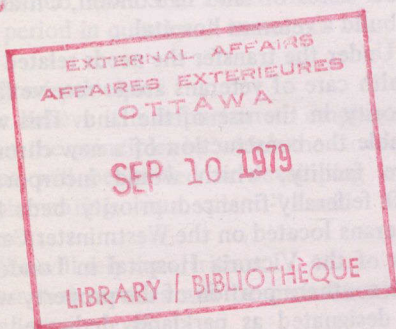
Federal Government institutions and for work in the official language of their choice; and

- the two official language groups should participate equitably in Federal Government institutions.

The Act applies to about 180 parliamentary government institutions, including Crown corporations, judicial or quasi-judicial bodies, commissions and other agencies at the federal level. These branches of government are obliged to make documents intended for the public available in both official languages.

The Act also has led to the establishment of "bilingual regions", where the two official languages are in use. In these regions, in the national capital region and where there is sufficient demand, Federal Government services are available in both official languages. The languages in these areas also have the status of working languages in the federal administration. A unanimous resolution of the Canadian Parliament in 1973 further outlined the conditions under which the two official languages were to be used as languages of work within the government.

The Official Languages Act also creates the Office of Commissioner of Official Languages, whose responsibilities are threefold: to act as ombudsman on behalf of individuals and groups whose



<p>EN FRANÇAIS OU EN ANGLAIS ?</p> <p>A vous de choisir... A nous le plaisir de vous servir</p>	<p>IN ENGLISH OR FRENCH ?</p> <p>The choice is yours... The pleasure to serve you is ours</p>
<small>Commissaire aux langues officielles</small>	<small>Commissioner of Official Languages</small>

Twenty-seven years ago this week...
Canada's first television station was opened in Montreal.

A poster used by the Commissioner of Official Languages to promote the use of both French and English in Federal Government departments.

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