
Contribution of the Provincial Governments

The attempt to strengthen Francophone ties not only involves the federal government, but is the concern of many Canadians. Quebec took an early interest in La Francophonie and the federal government has encouraged the governments of the other provinces with large Francophone populations to become actively involved. Thus representatives of four provinces (Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Manitoba) were part of the Canadian delegation to the founding conference of the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation in 1970. As the main centre of French language and culture in Canada, Quebec from the outset has held a special position in La Francophonie at the government level, having the status of participating government in the Agency. In December 1977, New Brunswick, the population of which is 42 per cent French-speaking, requested and received from the federal government the same participating-government status.

The important contribution made by the provincial governments, especially Quebec and New Brunswick, is not confined to the activities of the Agency. It also applies to the other governmental institutions such as the Conference of Education Ministers and the Conference of Ministers of Youth and Sports. Indeed, the leader of the Canadian delegation to such ministerial meetings is often a provincial minister speaking on behalf of Canada. In addition, the governments of these provinces are actively involved in the work of the non-governmental Francophone organizations.

Participating-government Status

In 1971 the federal and Quebec governments agreed on the form of Quebec's participation in Agency institutions, programs and activities. Identical arrangements were made with New Brunswick in 1977.

Participating-government status allows Quebec and New Brunswick to be specifically identified in the Canadian delegation, to have a seat and an identification plaque at the Conference table (in other words, the right to speak). They also communicate directly with the Agency on questions of program structure. These two governments pay a separate contribution to the Agency, equivalent to a fraction of that of Canada. There are few such arrangements elsewhere, whereby a federal government grants to the government of a federated or provincial state the status of a participating government in an international or regional organization.

Information and consultation arrangements have been established between Quebec, New Brunswick and the federal government, in order to make active, original participation possible for each of them while ensuring unity of action within the community of Agency members.

The Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation

In January 1968, the initial steps were taken to establish the concept of La Francophonie at the government level and to make it the basis for a new form of multilateral co-operation. Government leaders from the African and Malagasi Community met and made plans to inaugurate an annual Conference of Francophone Heads of State. To realize this goal, they asked the ministers of education of the countries concerned to meet first and investigate organizational structures of La Francophonie. On February 17, 1969, representatives of 28 Francophone countries assembled in Niamey, Niger to hold the first intergovernmental conference. They adopted the principle contained in the resolution of the ministers of education that there should be an Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation. An acting secretary general was instructed to prepare a report on the constitution and possible activities of the future organization. This was submitted at the next conference in 1970.

Jean-Marc Léger, a Canadian journalist and Secretary-General of the Association of Partly or Wholly French-language Universities (AUPELF), was named Acting Secretary General. He became Secretary-General of the Agency at the second Niamey conference in March 1970. The current Secretary-General is Mr. Paul Okumba d'Okwatsegue, a Gabonese.