



1. Historical Background

La Francophonie may be defined as the community of peoples who speak French or use it to varying degrees, either in their own countries or internationally. It can also be viewed as an institutional framework of official and private organizations pursuing dialogue and co-operation in areas of activity and interest shared by the community's members. For some years, the term "**Francophonie**" has been used to describe the movement that is striving to provide an organized framework and functional structures of co-operation and exchange for those whose common language is French.

La Francophonie was founded on the French language, which is regarded above all else as a vehicle for communicating and promoting national cultures and languages. Although countries participating in the various French-speaking institutions usually have a common linguistic and cultural heritage, they are nevertheless not homogeneous from a socio-cultural, political or economic viewpoint. Moreover, the diversity of national cultures and languages represented in the Francophone community is a dynamic factor in the development of La Francophonie and its activities.

The Canadian Government has been associated with La Francophonie from the outset, in the creation and development of its various institutions. The flourishing **French culture in Canada** and its broad international significance have provided considerable motivation for Canadian involvement in La Francophonie.

Internationally, La Francophonie has its roots in various private French-speaking associations, some of which have existed for more than 40 years. Among the members and, in some cases, the founders of each of these associations, are Canadians who, in co-operation with their colleagues in other French-speaking countries, have laid the foundation for co-operation among Francophones on the multilateral level.

The federal government acted quickly to incorporate La Francophonie into its foreign policy, as a natural extension of Canada's bilingualism on the international scene. Canada participates in all multilateral French-speaking associations and is one of the founding countries of the **Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation (ACCT)**, where it has played a very active role since the beginning. Canada is also involved in two annual Francophone intergovernmental conferences — the **Conference of Ministers of Education (CONFEMEN)** and the **Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers of French-Speaking Countries (CONFESJES)**.