



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 71/28

A FRENCH COMMUNITY IN AMERICA

Remarks by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau
to the Opening Session of the General Conference
of the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation,
Ottawa, October 11, 1971.

It is a great honour for Canada to welcome the representatives of so many countries who have come from almost every continent to be here today. This great assembly constitutes in a way a mirror of the world, and we find in its decision to meet here, in this still-growing country of the New World, a source of profound joy and pride.

Almost four centuries have passed since the first French presence on this soil. In all that time, despite many difficulties and despite the ubiquity of the English language in North America, the French "fact" has survived and the French language has been spoken and jealously preserved here. Not only has it survived but, as you will find on your travels in this country (particularly in Quebec), it is sung and celebrated.

We all know of the community of spirit that binds the French-speaking peoples of the world together, but you will appreciate how deeply we are moved to see them assembled here in a common resolve. It is as if the permanence of French Canada were being acknowledged in every corner of the world.

Not only does this General Conference of the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation hold a very special importance and significance for Canada, it is also a major turning-point in the life of the Agency.

In less than two years, it has grown so rapidly that we can already see the international stature of its influence abroad in the world. A noble idea has taken concrete form to serve the common good of peoples. The Agency is one of those all-too-rare institutions that enable different continents, races and cultures to make common cause. Its function in the world is one of co-operation, exchange and development.

Now that it has acquired permanence, your deliberations this week will endow it with maturity, and you will then be able to initiate the various kinds of activity that will occupy its future. Cultural promotion, mass education using the latest teaching techniques, the training of technologists and administrators, the dissemination of scientific and technological

information -- all these things are possibilities, and all are bound to do nothing but good for all members of the Agency.

The instrument we have at our disposal, in the form of the Agency, is a product of modern thinking; what our governments expect from it is a receptive attitude towards change in the world, the social and cultural integration of the most daring creations of science and technology, and other no-less-important contributions. Our co-operation is inspired not by nostalgia but by a desire for progress. *La Francophonie* is not a memory but a vision.

With substantial resources at its disposal, and with a growing understanding of what its functions are, the Agency is clearly the prime instrument of our co-operation and the broadest and most solemn expression of our common desire to work together. This Conference will no doubt give a fresh impetus to its efforts to discharge the mission our governments have entrusted to it, and increase its capacity to co-ordinate multilateral activities of member countries.

The Agency is dedicated to dialogue and the free exchange of ideas. It is not a cultural melting-pot. Its intention is that each culture should both intensify and share its peculiar strengths through genuine and mutually-enriching exchanges. As their originality and richness are thus increased, different cultures inevitably produce echoes despite the barriers of diversity and distance, and men of all backgrounds and regions come together in recognition of their common human condition.

Such is the spirit that gives vitality to our association, and it is nothing if not constructive. "Continuing cultural dialogue", "promotion and growth of national cultures", "mutual understanding", respect for "the individual characteristics" of each member -- these are the Agency's fundamental ideas and objectives, expressed in the very words of its Agreement and Charter.

Let me point out here how very close this is to the Canadian ideal -- the achievement of solidarity through the fostering of diversities. Canada, your host, fully shares your aspirations. Its representation bears witness to its desire to bring together in the community of the French language all the resources and men of goodwill seeking that means of expression.

The French "fact", which is in full flower in Quebec, also has roots in several other Canadian provinces. Ontario has more than half a million French-speaking citizens; in New Brunswick, nearly 50 per cent of the population is French-speaking, and a substantial French minority in Manitoba is making its voice heard more and more vigorously. This is why the governments of Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba have been participating with us for years in the co-operative effort that led to the creation of the Agency, and continue to have the broadest possible access to it. They all took part in its founding Conference and participated in Canada's signing of the Agreement, as well as in the first meeting of the General Conference.

The Conference gave its consent to this manner of proceeding; the Charter made provision for participation by these governments in the Agency's institutions, programs and various forms of activity, subject to the approval

of the Government of Canada and in accordance with the procedures that Canada would jointly define with them.

Accordingly, the governments of Canada and Quebec have established the terms and conditions whereby the government of Quebec is now a "government participating in the institutions, activities and programs of the Agency".

Through its resources and the interest it has shown in the Agency, the government of Quebec has made a special contribution to our effort. Henceforth it will be in an even better position to continue and broaden its assistance. Indeed, this is the point we wished to make by proposing that a portion of your work be carried out in Quebec, the cradle of French civilization in America.

There is a place for a French community in America. If this were not so, why would the French "fact" have persisted here? Why would the Government of Canada have recognized French as one of its two official languages? Why would Canadians look upon it as a factor in their identity, a guarantee of their independence and therefore an essential heritage for each and every one, whatever his culture and his language?

By holding its first full, regular meeting in Canada, the Agency, and the French-speaking communities of Europe, Africa and Asia, acknowledge once and for all that they have both a future and a partner in America.

The word *Francophonie* describes to perfection the bond that unites us -- a common language, French. Because of it, the obstacles normally raised by so many differences in culture, temperament and attitude are easily overcome, even swept aside. We can all communicate directly without having our exchanges distorted and our thoughts watered down -- as inevitably occurs when an interpreter is required. For each of us, our words are meaningful human expression. Nothing is more enviable than such ease of communication between statesmen and between senior officials in a world where peace and harmony are increasingly dependent on our ability to understand one another.

New programs, designed to further our common objectives, will undoubtedly result from your discussions. The countries represented here will again have an opportunity to appreciate the inestimable value of concerted effort. At the same time, the quality and importance of your work, your projects and your achievements will, I am sure, impress upon the other French-speaking countries that have yet to join our association not only the usefulness and dynamism but also the apolitical nature of the Agency. Perhaps in this way these countries will be prompted to join us sooner or later. If such should be the case, I believe that I speak for this Conference when I say that they would find generosity, open-mindedness and good fellowship in our company.

Ladies and gentlemen, I extend to you the warmest and most friendly of welcomes, and hope that your discussions will bear fruit.