

# News Release

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## PRESIDENT OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF LA FRANCOPHONIE TO VISIT CANADA

Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet today announced that the President of the Permanent Council of La Francophonie (CPF), Mr. Émile-Derlin Zinsou, will make an official visit to Canada from June 12 to 15, 1995. Mr. Zinsou will meet with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Minister Ouellet in Ottawa.

"I am very pleased to welcome Mr. Zinsou only months away from the sixth Francophone Summit. The visit of the President of the Permanent Council of La Francophonie provides another opportunity for the Government of Canada to show its commitment to La Francophonie," said Mr. Ouellet.

The Minister and the President will discuss preparations for the sixth Francophone Summit to be held next December in Cotonou, Benin. They will also discuss the Conference on Preventive Diplomacy, an initiative proposed by Mr. Ouellet at the last ministerial meeting in Ouagadougou. This conference will be held in Ottawa in September and will be hosted by Mr. Ouellet on behalf of the Government of Canada. It is expected to result in proposals that will be tabled at the upcoming Cotonou Summit.

After his visit to Ottawa, Mr. Zinsou will travel to New Brunswick and Quebec, where he will meet with government authorities. Both provinces have participating-government status in La Francophonie.

The CPF is made up of representatives of the Heads of State or Government of 15 countries and is responsible for the preparation and follow-up of Francophone Summits. Mr. Zinsou, who is of Beninese origin, has been President of the CPF since the last Francophone Ministerial Conference in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in December 1994.

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## **Backgrounder**

### **LA FRANCOPHONIE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

#### **LA FRANCOPHONIE**

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 international framework of official and private organizations and associations engaged 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 sociocultural, 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.

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 collaboration with their colleagues in other French-speaking countries, have laid the foundation for the present co-operation among Francophones at the multilateral level.

#### **CANADA AND LA FRANCOPHONIE**

Recognizing the importance of the French fact at home, as well as its broad international influence, the Canadian government has associated itself with La Francophonie from the outset by participating actively in the creation and development of its numerous institutions.

La Francophonie is an integral part of Canadian foreign policy: it is a natural extension of Canada's linguistic configuration on the international scene. Canada is thus a member of all the multilateral French-speaking organizations, and 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 also takes part in two standing conferences: the Conference of Ministers of Education (CONFEMEN) and the Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers (CONFESJES).

Since 1986, the Francophone movement has gained new momentum thanks to five conferences of Heads of State and Government of countries using French as a common language. These are now commonly known as the "Francophone Summits." Canada hosted the second Summit in Quebec City, which followed the Paris Summit and preceded the Dakar Summit, and has been actively involved in all phases of the Summit process. The Summit conferences have been held in Paris (1986) Quebec City (1987), Dakar (1989), Chaillot (1991) and most recently, Mauritius (1993). The next Summit will take place in Cotonou, Benin in December 1995.

Canadian participation in La Francophonie at the multilateral level is indicative of Canada's desire to project its image clearly on the international scene. Furthermore, this effort to bring the Francophone community closer together is of interest not only to the federal government, but to all Canadians.

Canada holds an enviable position on the international stage: not only is it a member of the major organizations of the international community, but its linguistic duality and cultural richness make it a partner that is in demand, both in the Commonwealth and in La Francophonie.

For Canada, membership in La Francophonie thus means membership in the rich network of 47 countries and governments that share the use of the French language. It also means revealing the traits of its identity to the rest of the world and giving French-speaking Canadians, and all Canadians who appreciate the French culture, a window to the world and opportunities to have an effect in a vast array of countries in every major region of the planet.

Quebec plays a leading role in the international community of La Francophonie, and the governments of the other provinces with a significant Francophone population also participate actively. Thus, in 1970, the representatives of four provinces (Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Manitoba) took part in the founding conference of the ACCT. Canada has the status of member state in La Francophonie, while Quebec and New Brunswick are recognized as participating governments.

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