



Greetings, dear colleagues,

To begin, I'd like to say how pleased I am to be here with you again this year, and I'd like to thank the organizers for another conference on extremely interesting topics, as always.

I am delighted with the fact that my presentation is on language and identity. For Ontario, 2015 was the 400th anniversary of the French presence there. In 1615, French explorer Samuel de Champlain arrived in the region known then as Huronia.

There were events and celebrations across Ontario throughout the year. For me, those 12 months were an occasion for reflection on Franco-Ontarian identity. At times, I was moved by that pride, that desire to proclaim loud and long the sense of belonging to a language community.

Four hundred years to win recognition not only of one's rights but of one's very existence might seem like an eternity. But it's nothing compared with the situation of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, who are struggling to survive. Their languages are slowly dying. Their identity is fading. They're known as the First People, but they're often the last thing people think of.

But I'm not here to give a history class! I just wanted to point out that Canada's Aboriginal people have been dealing with extremely complex language and identity issues.

But let's get back to the French language, which is my cause. In Canada, as you know, French and English are the two official languages; they are even governed by the *Official Languages Act* and have equal status in that respect. But that's only at the federal level. The provinces also have jurisdiction over languages, and only one of them recognizes both French and English as official languages, and that's New Brunswick. Ontario, meanwhile, has the *French Language Services Act*. The province's Francophones enjoy almost the same rights as their counterparts in New Brunswick, except that in Ontario, the word "official" is a problem, because it's considered politically loaded.

A people doesn't get its identity from a law. The Supreme Court of Canada acknowledged this in 1985:

*"The importance of language rights is grounded in the essential role that language plays in human existence, development and dignity. It is through language that we are able to form concepts; to structure and order the world around us. Language bridges the gap between isolation and community, allowing humans to delineate the rights and duties they hold in respect of one another, and thus to live in society."*¹

¹ re Manitoba Language rights, [1985] 1 S.C.R. 721



Without a community, without a society, language no longer performs its function of transmitting and conveying culture. In addition to culture, it also transmits heritage and memory.

I'd like to share with you an observation made by Canadian anthropologist Serge Bouchard:

“The root is old, and runs across the vast continent. French was often the first European language learned by the indigenous peoples. They remember it in the land of the Dene and the Sioux, they remember it everywhere, from Colorado to the Yukon, from California to Newfoundland. The names of places, the family names—they are all still there. The traces endure, the memories persist. There isn't a corner of Canada that doesn't have some kind of ties with French history. I'm speaking of course of those strong original communities: the Acadians, Fransaskois, Franco-Manitobans, Franco-Ontarians, and all those other versions of ourselves. As the source and cradle of French civilization, Québec obviously leads the way, along with Acadia. But it bears repeating that it's no longer a question of statistics and numbers. Wherever we find ourselves, there we are.

Today, duty and passion compel us to gather and reassemble the pieces, to patiently rebuild the puzzle of our torn family portrait.”²

At the end of what was referred to as Quebec's Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, a society-wide movement that mirrored many other movements of the same type around the world, people who used to call themselves “Canadiens” and later, after the arrival of the English, “Canadiens français” (French-Canadians) turned toward their own province and started calling themselves Québécois.

In the 1960s, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was established to try to understand the growing upheaval in Quebec society, Quebec being a largely French-speaking province. Acting on the Commission's recommendations, the federal government adopted its multicultural policy in 1971. And even today, in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the preservation and enhancement of Canadians' multicultural heritage are protected. Since 1969, one objective of that policy has been to encourage immigrants to learn at least one of Canada's two official languages, to help them become full-fledged members of Canadian society.

At the same time, a regional Francophone identity began to take shape. The 1960s marked the end of the use of the term “French-Canadian” as we knew it and the emergence of Québécois, Franco-Ontarians, Franco-Manitobans and Franco-Albertans, to name just a few. This list does not include the Acadians, the very first French nation established in North America, since they have had their own flag and self-identity since the 19th century. In 1969, the *Association canadienne française de l'Ontario* boycotted the Estates General of French Canada, thus confirming the end of the solidarity of the French-Canadian family, at least at that time.

² Translated presentation by Serge Bouchard. Forum de la francophonie canadienne. La francophonie @ cœur. Québec City. May 28, 2012.



The unfurling of the Franco-Ontarian flag in 1975 reinforced the community's ownership of its cultural and linguistic identity in the province.

Nevertheless, as the Centre de la francophonie des Amériques noted at last fall's meeting of the North American Francophone and Francophile Cities Network:

"The French culture in the Americas is a historical and geographical reality. Today, what we call French America is presented as a set of language and cultural derivatives whose boundaries usually remain invisible. Yet this Franco-America dispersal continues to resist and assert its differences, to structure its language and claim its Francophone identity. Across the continent, sometimes in isolated communities, French heritage resonates. From Acadian shores to the vast prairies of Western Canada, through Louisiana and the Caribbean, French in America continues to vibrate, to laugh, to cry, to dance, to sing and to live."³

Did you know that some 33 million Francophones⁴ live in the Americas?

- 9.6 million in Canada
- 11 million in the United States
- 200,300 in Mexico
- 9.7 million in the Caribbean area
- 2.6 million in Central and South America

I agree that Francophone culture and heritage resonate in every part of America. And yet I have to wonder about the consequences of that dispersion. In my opinion, linguistic minorities do not feel as if they are in a position of strength, precisely because they are so scattered. And that's why offices like mine exist: to defend the right of minority Francophone citizens to receive services in their language.

With its population of 14 million, Ontario has the second-largest number of Francophones after Quebec, 612,000. There are Francophones in Toronto, the biggest city, but also in the Ottawa area, Northern and Southern Ontario, and elsewhere.

One way of combating the effects of dispersion was to redefine the very notion of what a Francophone is. French Ontario depends on diversity.

³ Centre de la francophonie des Amériques. <http://www.francophoniedesameriques.com/la-francophonie-dans-les-ameriques/> Page consulted on October 20, 2015.

⁴ Centre de la francophonie des Amériques. <http://www.francophoniedesameriques.com/la-francophonie-dans-les-ameriques/> Reference to a study conducted in 2013 by Étienne Rivard, scientific coordinator, Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises (CIEQ), Université Laval. Page consulted on October 20, 2015.



As Canadian historian, journalist and diplomat Jean-Louis Roy wrote in his book *Ontario in Transition: Achievements and Challenges*: "The radiant center of Ontario's culture has a name, its identity and also creative horizon, and it is the same: diversity. In it are concentrated the idea of society, its constituent memories and shared hope. In it, is illuminated a large area for the deployment of all forms of cultural hybridization awaiting their realization and their exploration, painful or light. In this space, the concepts of majority and minority representation as a hierarchy fade."⁵

It's that diversity which the government wanted to recognize when it introduced the IDF, the Inclusive Definition of Francophone, in 2009. Under the IDF, people whose mother tongue is not necessarily French or English but who know French and speak it at home are deemed to be Francophones. This new definition increased the number of Francophones in the population by 50,000.

In my view, the IDF strengthens newcomers' sense of belonging and reflects their contribution to Ontario's Francophone community.

Because it's a constant and ever-present challenge to integrate newcomers into the Franco-Ontarian community. When I urged the government to adopt a new, inclusive definition of Francophone, I was addressing the government, of course, but I was also sending a message to the entire Francophone community of Ontario. Defining yourself as Franco-Ontarian should not mean you have to take a blood test or be able to go back so many generations. You should be able to come from somewhere else and feel welcome.

In the Greater Toronto Area, where the Francophone population is growing steadily, nearly half of the Francophones were not born in Canada. When I visit schools in the GTA, the diversity I see there is as striking as it is refreshing. There aren't many students who speak only two languages; most of them speak three, four or even five languages.

The criteria for admission to Ontario's French-language schools have been relaxed to provide easier access for all those students from other parts of the world, but it's still not as simple as for the majority-language schools, where people just have to walk in, and no questions are asked.

In the end, I can only hope that the members of the Franco-Ontarian community are thrilled by the fact that the community is being enhanced on a daily basis by the influx of Francophone newcomers. Similarly, I sincerely believe that the new definition is having a profound impact on their sense of belonging and their pride in being Franco-Ontarian, as many people report.

⁵ Jean-Louis Roy, *Ontario in Transition: Achievements and Challenges*, Mosaic Press, 2013.



Quote: *“Personally, it was thanks to the core French program at my English school that I was able to learn, appreciate and love French, which offers innumerable advantages. French is special within the Francophile community, because it is a second language which is not limited to any particular ethnicity. In fact, it unites us all as Canadians, because regardless of our origins, we can learn it and use it every day in our bilingual communities.”*⁶

Daniel Hu
Ambassador, French for the Future, Toronto

Quote: *“Franco-Ontarian? I don’t know. Francophone? Absolutely. Personally, I had always, rightly or wrongly, associated being Franco-Ontarian with having a Francophone ancestry. But thanks to the new definition, I have the impression, for the first time, that I am a full-fledged member of the Francophone community. Of course, I don’t have the same connection with the French language as those who have fought to preserve it, but our common denominator is that we live in French every day and we have a desire to transmit the language to our children.”*⁷
[TRANSLATION]

Ayan Aden
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The IDF was the subject of my first recommendation to the Ontario government as Commissioner. I am obviously very happy that it has been implemented effectively. And I will spare no effort, between now and the end of my term, in continuing to ensure that the Francophones of my province are treated with respect for their language rights. Every time a Francophone Ontarian receives a service in French to which he or she is entitled, it helps strengthen his or her identity.

⁶ FLSC. *Annual Report 2011-2012: Straight forward.*

⁷ Ibid.