The Governments of Canada and British Columbia Sign a Multi-Year Agreement on French-Language Services

VANCOUVER, April 6, 2009 – The Honourable James Moore, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, and the Honourable Joan McIntyre, British Columbia’s Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations, today announced the signing of the Canada–British Columbia Agreement on Official Languages for 2009–2010 and 2010–2011. It supports practical measures to increase the province’s capacity to offer services to the Francophone community.

“This agreement demonstrates the commitment of both governments to Canada’s linguistic duality. It marks the beginning of a new cycle of federal-provincial cooperation in French-language service delivery,” said Minister Moore. “We are supporting Francophones and Francophiles across the province and increasing the availability of French-language services.”

“This agreement reaffirms British Columbia’s commitment to Canada’s official languages, which act as a unifying force across the country, as well as for the province’s Francophone community,” said Minister of State McIntyre. “With this agreement, the Government of British Columbia wishes to chart its course over the next two years for its collaboration with the federal government to increase our capacity to service our Francophone community, ensuring that it continues to be a thriving and dynamic force in the province.

The governments of Canada and British Columbia are contributing equally to the two-year bilateral agreement, which is worth a total of $2.8 million. The Government of British Columbia will implement a strategic plan with two objectives: to strengthen the administration of British Columbia’s Francophone Affairs Program and to support the development, planning, and implementation of services in the priority sectors of health, economic development, immigration, arts and culture, social services, justice, communications, information, and consultations.

Part of the funding announced today is being provided under the Roadmap for Canada’s Linguistic Duality 2008–2013: Acting for the Future, an unprecedented government-wide investment of $1.1 billion over five years. Support for this initiative reaffirms the commitment of the Government of Canada to linguistic duality and the vitality of Francophone and Anglophone minority communities.
For more information on intergovernmental cooperation on services to official-language minority communities, visit the website of the Department of Canadian Heritage at www.canadianheritage.gc.ca.

For more information on British Columbia’s Francophone Affairs Program, visit www.gov.bc.ca/igrs/francophones.

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Information:

Deirdra McCracken  
Director of Communications  
Office of the Minister of  
Canadian Heritage and  
Official Languages  
819-997-7788  
deirdra.mccracken@pch.gc.ca

Alex Dabrowski  
Public Affairs  
Bureau Government  
of British Colombia  
250-920-8534

Media Relations  
Canadian Heritage  
819-994-9101  
1-866-569-6155

(This news release is available on the Internet at www.canadianheritage.gc.ca under Media Room.)
Providing Services to British Columbia’s Francophone Community

Intergovernmental Cooperation on Minority-Language Services aims to help provincial and territorial governments offer provincial, territorial and municipal services in the language of the official-language minority community, as well as the necessary infrastructure to provide these services.

Cost-shared investments are made within the framework of multi-year cooperation agreements with provincial and territorial governments. Under the 2009–2010/2010–2011 agreement, the governments of Canada and British Columbia will each provide $700,000 per year for French services in the province. These agreements include multi-year action plans. The Province has developed a two-year strategic plan that includes objectives and priorities that are relevant to British Columbia’s French-speaking community.

Since it was first signed in 2001, the Canada–British Columbia Agreement on Official Languages has supported programs and services in priority sectors for Francophone British Columbians and enhanced the capacity of the Province to deliver services in French.

The Province of British Columbia has worked with the Francophone and Francophile community to build a strong and collaborative relationship.

The activities undertaken by the Government of British Columbia in past three years to provide service to the Francophone community include:

- two bilingual social support worker positions at La Boussole in Vancouver, who work with the homeless and persons with special needs;
- a $50,000 contribution from the Province to Société Inform’Elles Society in 2008 to support its work delivering outreach and counselling services for French-speaking women in British Columbia;
- the recruitment of skilled workers in France under the Provincial Nominee Program, and an increase in the provision of settlement services for French-speaking newcomers; and
- the translation and promotion of the B.C. HealthGuide and other health information materials, such as B.C. HealthFiles, 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

The Government of Canada is working with partners and key stakeholders, such as provincial and territorial governments, official-language communities, and all Canadians, to implement the Roadmap for Canada’s Linguistic Duality 2008–2013: Acting for the Future so that people across the country can benefit from it. The Roadmap aims to strengthen the vitality of official-language minority communities and offer all Canadians the benefits that French and English—our country’s two official languages—give them.

The Roadmap targets five areas of action: emphasizing the value of linguistic duality among Canadians, building the future by investing in youth, improving access to services for minority official-language communities, capitalizing on economic benefits, and ensuring efficient governance to better serve Canadians.