

## WHY A MOVEMENT FOR AN OFFICIALLY BILINGUAL CAPITAL OF CANADA

On February 14, 1970, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism recommended that, in the capital of Canada, “... the French and English languages have full equality of status, and that the full range of services and facilities provided to the public be available in both languages throughout the area”, adding that this was a recommendation not only to the municipal government of Ottawa but to the private sector as well. According to the Commissioners, “... the issue is the capital of Canada and as such, it symbolizes the reality of a bilingual country”.

The *Movement for an officially bilingual Capital of Canada* believes that the time has come to act. Its purpose is to inform Canadians as to the linguistic status of the national capital and rally their support so that the City of Ottawa and the other levels of government declare Ottawa officially bilingual before the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017. The *Movement for an officially bilingual Capital of Canada*, the City of Ottawa, and the provincial and federal governments have approximately two years to achieve this goal.

## HISTORICAL FOUNDATION OF BILINGUALISM IN CANADA

Section 133 of the *Constitution Act* of 1867 mandates the use of either English or French in the debates of Parliament and in federal court proceedings. This section also stipulates that both languages must be used in the records and journals of Parliament and that its laws must be enacted and published in both languages. The *Official Languages Act* of 1969 recognizes French and English as the official languages of Canada and granted both languages equality of status and equal rights and privileges in Parliament and throughout the federal administration. In 1982, changes to the *Constitution Act* and the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms reinforced bilingualism in Canada. In 1988, the federal government adopted the new *Official Languages Act* that reinforced the provisions of the original Act and added two new sections: Part V gave federal civil servants the right to work in the official language of their choice and Part VII dealt with the obligation of the federal government to promote both the development of French and English-speaking minorities in Canada and the full recognition and use of both official languages in Canadian society.



Mouvement pour une capitale  
du Canada officiellement bilingue

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## BILINGUALISM IN ONTARIO AND OTTAWA

Since the late 1960s, the government of Ontario has offered services in French wherever it was deemed reasonable and necessary to do so. In 1984, Ontario enacted the *Courts of Justice Act* that confirms French and English as the official languages of its provincial courts. In 1986, the government of Ontario adopted a legal framework, the *French Language Services Act*, aimed at actively offering all government services in French, in designated bilingual areas throughout the province, including Ottawa.

The City of Ottawa has a policy on French-language services dating back to the 1970s. In 2001, the provincial government amalgamated Ottawa and 11 surrounding municipalities, including two traditionally French ones, Orléans and Vanier, both located in the eastern part of the city. As a result, the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton disappeared. In the process of amalgamation, one of the major issues was the status of French in the future city, given that municipalities with a Francophone majority would be merged with majority English-speaking municipalities.

When the government of Ontario announced the creation of the new City of Ottawa, it did not declare it "officially bilingual". On May 9, 2001, the City of Ottawa adopted *Regulation 2001-170* as well as a policy on bilingualism that recognized both official languages. In 2005, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario adopted *Bill 163* amending the *City of Ottawa Act, 1999* requiring that it allow for the use of French and English in all or parts of its administration and in the provision of all or some of its municipal services. The City of Ottawa implemented this policy in 2007, though there are a number of notable exceptions.

In November 2012, participants at the Summit of the *États généraux de la francophonie d'Ottawa* requested that the capital of Canada be designated officially bilingual. The term "officially bilingual" means that French and English would be the official languages of the City of Ottawa. To this end, both official languages would have equal status at all times with respect to the language of work, municipal administration and services, negotiations, employment, representations, regulations and laws, communication, signage and advertising. In addition, the three levels of government would use all means required to ensure that the private sector in the capital of Canada would, to the greatest extent possible, also operate in both official languages.

## A VISION LEFT UNFINISHED

The *Movement for an Officially Bilingual Capital of Canada* seeks to fulfill the unrealized vision of the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*. Nearly 50 years after the Commission's report and in anticipation of the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017, it is time for the governments of Canada and Ontario, and the City of Ottawa to recognize and proclaim French and English as the two official languages of the Capital of our "officially bilingual" country. To date, the Capital of Canada continues to be, in essence, officially unilingual English. As our nation's capital, the linguistic status of the City of Ottawa generates confusion, given that Canada officially recognizes the equality of French and English. This lack of linguistic coherence must end.

## Ottawa is not just a city like any other. It is the Capital of Canada.

Our Web site, [www.capbilcap.ca](http://www.capbilcap.ca), is an information hub on the subject and offers various ways of supporting the Movement for an officially bilingual capital of Canada.

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