A LONG ROAD TO INCLUSION FOR FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRANTS

Secretary General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO from 2021 to 2023, **Roda Muse** has also been a manager at the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Industry, and Ontario Regional Director for Status of Women Canada. A former vice-president and trustee of the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario (CEPEO), she has been an active member of Ontario's francophone community. Roda Muse co-founded the Acacia Foundation, a charitable organization dedicated to fostering excellence in young visible minority francophones through education and mentoring.

An excerpt from the speech given on the occasion of the inaugural conference of Metropolis Francophonie Mondiale in December 2021 as Secretary General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

I have joined you from Ottawa, located on the Algonquin Anishinaabe unceded territory. The members of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation have lived on this land for millennia, and their culture and presence continue to enrich this place. This acknowledgment of the land has a special meaning to me as someone who came to Ottawa 28 years ago. This land has allowed me to grow, raise my family and contribute to the society in which I have become a member.

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO connects Canadians to the work of UNESCO and helps to bring the perspectives of Canadian and Quebec civil society to the international stage. This contributes to achieving a triple objective: a more peaceful, equitable and sustainable world.

With this in mind, we have established a fruitful partnership with the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) and its Metropolis Institute. I will not discuss all of our joint projects, but I would like to take you back a few years earlier to the issue of Francophone immigration and integration.

The *Francophonie mondiale* represents not only a space for diversity and sharing common values and knowledge but also a space for promoting peace and culture. It is also a space for migration, whether chosen or forced. In Canada, about twenty years ago, it was natural that most French-speaking immigrants would settle in Quebec. Francophone communities outside Quebec struggled to receive and retain their share of Francophone immigrants. Settlement services were in English, and Francophone minority community organizations were not prepared to integrate immigrants for their survival.

Francophone immigrants who came to Ottawa organized themselves collectively as elsewhere in the country. This led to multiple demands from organizations, such as the lack of financial support and the challenges of integration within Francophone communities which were perceived as the result of negative biases towards racialized and ethnocultural communities.

In this context, two consultants, Mohamed Brihmi and Mesmin Pierre, and I were mandated in 1999 by the Department of Canadian Heritage to hold consultations to establish the needs and priorities of the said racialized and ethnocultural Francophone communities. In 2001-2002, I met with Jack Jedwab for a study commissioned by the Office of

the Commissioner of Official Languages entitled "Immigration and the vitality of Canada's linguistic communities: policy, demography and identity. This report by Jack Jedwab was the genesis for the federal, provincial and territorial governments' consideration of Francophone immigration outside Quebec. It is on this basis that all the strategies for francophone immigration outside Quebec will emerge as well as the need to have a target for francophone immigration in the annual immigration plan of the federal government.

During my discussion with Jack Jedwab, I reiterated one of the issues that my colleagues Mohamed Brihmi and Mesmin Pierre and I had heard during our consultations. It was about the types of cooperation needed between immigrant and non-immigrant Francophones to meet the needs of newcomers. For us, it was essential to have three types of partnerships for groups:

- partnerships between organizations that represent racial and ethnocultural minorities to align efforts better and avoid duplication;
- Partnerships with existing Francophone institutions and organizations that go beyond the appointment of a racial or ethnocultural minority representation on boards and committees to ensure fair representation of members of these communities;
- partnerships with various levels of government and the private sector.

While Jack Jedwab's report at the time advocated in its recommendations that Anglophone settlement services implement programs for Francophones, I can tell you that today, settlement services by Francophones for Francophones exist from coast to coast.

If I continue on my personal experience, there is a dimension that I do not hear about in this issue of integration in Francophone immigration. It is the diaspora's contributions a vector of integration and inclusion. When I arrived, I was lucky enough to be in contact with people from my country of origin who guided me and paved the way for me to facilitate my integration. The diaspora can share its experiences, explain the pitfalls, informs about resources, and offer shortcuts, which no settlement service can offer.

> "I want to conclude by saying that while Canada and Quebec are continuing their efforts to attract Francophone immigrants, we still have a long way to go to ensure that all Francophone immigrants, regardless of their race, religion or gender, are included, accepted and can contribute to society to their fullest capacity."

In Canada, we are seeing more and more leaders from the diaspora heading up settlement services. This resulted in remarkable vitality as integration becomes inclusion.

I want to conclude by saying that while Canada and Quebec are continuing their efforts to attract Francophone immigrants, we still have a long way to go to ensure that all Francophone immigrants, regardless of their race, religion or gender, are included, accepted and can contribute to society to their fullest capacity. This is why the fight against racism remains one of the priorities of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.