

JOINT STATEMENT FROM NEW BRUNSWICK ACADIAN AND FRANCOPHONE ORGANIZATIONS

Almost a week after the provincial election, there is still a sense of uncertainty in New Brunswick about the form our next Government will take. At this moment, we do not know how the situation will unfold and who will emerge as the victor after this tightly-fought duel. Whatever the final outcome of the election may be, one thing is certain: francophone and Acadian communities have ample reason to be deeply concerned about the lack of leadership of New Brunswick’s political parties in the area of Official Languages.

When bilingualism and duality are still election issues, on the same level as wild turkey hunting and license plates, today, 50 years after the *Official Languages Act* was passed, it is reasonable to fear that the survival of the French language in Canada’s only officially bilingual province is seriously threatened. When ideological arguments and counter-arguments about language serve as political tools to polarize the attention of the electorate, it is conceivable to believe that the platforms of parties vying for votes are anchored in an unthinking attempt to win power.

Members of New Brunswick’s francophone and Acadian communities have no other choice: regardless of their political affiliation, they must work together. In the end, this election has no winners, only losers. The election of a minority government, the rise of the populist vote, and potential political alliances seem to be bad signs for anyone who supports linguistic and cultural diversity, tolerance, social justice, and equality among the different groups in our province.

Language should no longer be a source of divisiveness and tension in New Brunswick. The reality is quite different, unfortunately; francophones are treated as second-class citizens.

No one can predict the future, but there is a good chance that heated debates will occupy the political and media landscapes for the next few days or weeks. What serious issues will be put forward to gain the trust of New Brunswick’s electors? Will our citizens finally be moved to think and act on important matters that deserve our attention, issues such as gender equality, First Nations, education and literacy, health, the strengthening of local governance and municipalization, the arts and culture, social inequalities, the environment and sustainable development, among other concerns? Or will another election be called soon, leaving people to continue their one-sided conversations, unable or unwilling to understand each other?

Francophone and Acadian communities should not have to pay the price of a lack of political will and leadership towards our Official Languages. In this matter, the obligations of the Government, whether it has a majority or a minority, are clear. A government which refuses to respect the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is not worthy of holding the reins of power.

