

**Annual General Meeting of the *Société nationale de l'Acadie*
Memramcook, New Brunswick
July 21, 2006**

Mr. Michel Cyr (President of the *Société nationale de l'Acadie*),
Members and friends of the *Société nationale de l'Acadie*,
Federal and provincial government representatives,
Distinguished guests,

One hundred and twenty-five years ago, more than 5,000 Acadians gathered here, in Memramcook, to found an organization mandated to promote the social, cultural and economic development of Acadia in North America.

Today, our large presence in this wonderful part of the country is proof that this organization fulfilled its mandate.

Few Canadian organizations can take pride in having a history as rich as that of the *Société nationale de l'Acadie*. Founded in 1881, the SNA is as strong and persevering as the Acadians it represents.

Over the years, the SNA has shown itself to be a key player in defending and promoting the interests of Acadians in Atlantic Canada.

This recognition is widespread. Barely a year ago, in July 2005, the *Société nationale de l'Acadie* became an official non-governmental international organization of the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*. This new title will enable the SNA to be even more active on the international stage.

This is good news for Canada. Having a strong Acadian community with a voice on the international stage helps to strengthen the Canadian Francophonie, both here and abroad.

The SNA is also an important partner of the federal government in implementing programs and delivering services for all Acadians and Francophones in the Atlantic provinces.

Thanks to your excellent work, to the volunteers, the dedicated employees and SNA management, the Acadian community made huge strides in areas as varied as arts and culture and youth development.

Moreover, over the past two years, the Acadian people celebrated important historic moments. In 2004, Canadians across the country celebrated the 400th anniversary of Acadia and the first French settlement in North America. In 2005, we marked the 250th anniversary of the Great Upheaval.

Thanks to your efforts and hard work, these celebrations made it possible for all Canadians to discover Acadia's history and the hopes, challenges and achievements of Francophone communities.

The celebrations showcased the richness of Francophone culture and the contributions of Acadians and Francophones to our country's history.

The French language is at the heart of our identity. For the new Canadian government, it is impossible to imagine a dynamic and prosperous Canada without the vitality of millions of Francophones who live in every region of the country, especially the 300,000 Francophones who make up the Acadian community in Atlantic Canada.

This is why we are clearly committed to supporting the *Official Languages Act*.

This is why Prime Minister Stephen Harper appointed a minister for la francophonie and official languages to his cabinet. The Honourable Josée Verner recognizes the importance of promoting and defending French language and culture across Canada.

She had the opportunity to meet with representatives of your organization, and she intends to continue this dialogue with you and other representatives of minority-language communities to ensure that the support given by our government is as effective and well-aimed as possible.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), the Honourable Peter MacKay, also recognizes the significant contributions of Acadians and Francophones to the cultural and economic development of our communities. Because of your organization's leadership,

Atlantic Canada is one of the most dynamic regions in the country.

Furthermore, the Senate of Canada, which protects and defends the interests and rights of minorities in Canada, is attuned to your needs and interests. As you know, many senators come from Acadia, and they have your needs at heart. Senators Gérald Comeau and Fernand Robichaud come to mind, as well as Senator Rose-Marie Losier-Cool.

The 125th anniversary of the first Acadian National Convention vividly demonstrates the vitality of the Acadian community, which for over 400 years has been a source of enrichment and a model of courage and vivacity for the entire country.

In the well-chosen words of Pierre Amand Landry, the chair of the organizing committee of the first Convention:

“A national convention is a meeting of people through their delegates to debate issues of interest to the nation, to review its situation and to provide means for improving it, avoiding obstacles that may slow its progress toward social, material, and political success.” [translation]

One hundred and twenty-five years later, while we are gathered here for your Annual General Meeting, these words are relevant now more than ever.

Thank you for your warm welcome.

May Acadia and the *Société nationale de l'Acadie* have a long future!