

# INTRODUCING THE CANADIAN COMMISSION FOR UNESCO



CANADIAN COMMISSION FOR UNESCO  
COMMISSION CANADIENNE POUR L'UNESCO

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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) works to improve the conditions of life among civilizations and peoples based upon respect for commonly shared values.

**(UNESCO 2006)**

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# WHAT IS THE CANADIAN COMMISSION FOR UNESCO?

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO was created in 1957 and operates under the aegis of the Canada Council for the Arts. Its role is to act as a forum for governments and civil society, and to catalyze the participation of Canadian organizations and committed individuals in UNESCO's mandated areas: education, natural and social sciences, culture, and communication and information.



[WWW.UNESCO.CA](http://WWW.UNESCO.CA)

## The Commission is:

- a network of 400 members throughout Canada including government and non-governmental organizations, and individual experts in UNESCO's fields of education, sciences, culture and communication and information
- a 17-person Executive Committee which includes government and non-governmental representatives and individual members from across Canada
- three Sectoral Commissions: Education; the Natural, Social and Human Sciences; and Culture, Communication and Information
- a Secretariat in Ottawa, headed by a Secretary-General.

## What does the Commission do?

- coordinates and implements UNESCO programme activities in Canada
- facilitates Canadian participation in UNESCO activities internationally
- advises Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada on the UNESCO programme and budget
- carries out activities in Canada in support of UNESCO's programmes and objectives.

The Commission's activities are carried out in **partnership** with government and non-governmental organizations and civil society throughout Canada. It favours a **transdisciplinary** and **multi-stakeholder** approach to addressing the complex issues facing today's world.

# WHAT IS UNESCO?

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was created in 1945. Its purpose is "to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations."

(UNESCO Constitution, Article 1)



[WWW.UNESCO.ORG](http://WWW.UNESCO.ORG)

## Canada was one of 20 founding members of UNESCO.

UNESCO is based in Paris. It is one of **19 Specialized Agencies** of the United Nations System.

Other examples of UN Specialized Agencies are: the International Labour Organization (ILO); the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the World Health Organization (WHO); and the World Bank Group.

UNESCO is the only UN agency to have a system of National Commissions established by its Member States. The **Charter of National Commissions** was approved by UNESCO's General Conference in 1978.

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO is one of a network of 192 National Commissions around the world. Regionally, it belongs to the Europe and North America group.

## World Challenges

UNESCO is actively working to help achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals by 2015, especially the following:

- reduce by one half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty
- achieve universal primary education
- eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education
- combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- ensure environmental sustainability

[www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)

- 1 Education**
- 2 Natural Sciences**
- 3 Social and Human Sciences**
- 4 Culture**
- 5 Communication and Information**
- 6 Intersectoral Activities**



## Education

As the only United Nations specialized agency for education, UNESCO works to improve education worldwide. It is leading the international movement to achieve **Education for All (EFA)**, a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults by the year 2015. [www.unesco.org/education/efa](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa)

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO works actively to support these goals in Canada. It frequently works in partnership with the **Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)**, an inter-governmental body which serves as a forum for ministers of education and represents the education interests of the provinces and territories internationally. The Commission also works with **non-governmental education organizations and individuals** across Canada.

### The Commission's activities include:

- promoting International Adult Learners' Week in Canada
- promoting the UN Literacy Decade 2003-2012
- furthering innovative and participatory approaches in education in areas such as access to basic education, early childhood care and education, adult education and higher education.



## Natural Sciences

The overall vision for the Natural Sciences Sector is to ensure that the creativity of science is used for the benefit of society. This is done by providing and encouraging leadership in expertise and international cooperation in natural and basic sciences and engineering and promoting the principles valued by UNESCO such as universality, diversity, solidarity and the sharing of knowledge. It promotes '**science without frontiers**' and the application of scientific knowledge to the pursuit of peace and sustainable development. Water and associated ecosystems are a priority.

Through its **international and intergovernmental programmes** on hydrology, oceans, earth sciences, basic sciences and on Man and the Biosphere, Canadian experts participate in improving assessment and management of the Earth's resources. Canada's biosphere reserves, designated by UNESCO as model areas for sustainable development, are recognized worldwide for their exemplary community involvement.

The Canadian Commission actively promotes **inclusive science** by encouraging a wider participation by all societal groups, particularly youth and women, through various partnerships with the private sector, institutes and non-governmental organizations, and by promoting a comprehensive definition of science which includes local and traditional knowledge.



## Social and Human Sciences

**Ethics and human rights** are at the centre of UNESCO's concerns. UNESCO plays a major role as an ethical, philosophical and scientific forum on issues ranging from human security and conflict prevention, to citizenship, eradication of poverty and globalization.

### **Promotion of standards and follow-up for their implementation in Canada:**

In the life sciences, UNESCO has developed three Declarations in the field of bioethics:

- the *Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights*
- the *International Declaration on Human Genetic Data and*
- the *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights*.

In another important field, UNESCO adopted:

- the *International Convention against Doping in Sport*.

Canadians played a key role in developing these instruments and working to achieve international consensus. Now work is going forward on their implementation.

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO and its partners are actively involved in programmes such as the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) and in launching the call for a **Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination**. The Commission also marks World Philosophy Day every November.



## Culture

UNESCO is internationally respected for its work to protect and promote the **universal heritage of humanity** and **cultural diversity** through key standard-setting instruments including:

- the *Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* (the Hague Convention)
- the *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*
- the *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (13 World Heritage sites in Canada)
- the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*

Canada plays a leadership role in relation to these and other UNESCO instruments.

The Commission promotes Canada's cultural heritage, the importance of dialogue among cultures, and cultural and linguistic diversity through activities such as World Poetry Day. It frequently works in partnership with organizations which sponsor cultural events that reinforce the contribution artists make to society and foster mutual understanding.



## Communication and Information

UNESCO works to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image and to improve access to information for the peoples of the world to help build pluralistic and inclusive knowledge societies. It focuses on the **human dimensions** of the digital divide, including cultural and linguistic diversity of contents and empowerment of civil society. To achieve its objectives, UNESCO works not only with information technologies, but also with more traditional means such as broadcasting, libraries, archives and newspapers. UNESCO also promotes **freedom of expression and press freedom** as a basic human right.

The Canadian Commission made an important contribution to the World Summit on the Information Society, bringing the perspectives of Canadian civil society to this groundbreaking international forum. It continues to promote the concept of knowledge societies and their four principles: freedom of expression, universal access to information and knowledge, equal access to education, and cultural diversity. It promotes freedom of expression by organizing annual events to mark World Press Freedom Day, as well as other activities.



## Intersectoral Activities

### YOUTH NETWORK

Over 400 youth organizations and individuals across Canada form the Commission's **Youth Network**, ensuring that the point of view of young people is fully integrated into the Commission's work. In addition, a **Youth Advisory Group (YAG)** ensures constant youth engagement at the Commission. Youth are active in files such as:

- sustainable development
- intercultural dialogue
- conflict resolution
- HIV/AIDS education
- human rights
- arts
- media and information technologies

The Youth Network works in partnership with the Commission to prepare the international **UNESCO Youth Forum**, which is held every two years in conjunction with the UNESCO General Conference in Paris.

## ASSOCIATED SCHOOLS PROJECT NETWORK IN CANADA (ASPNET)

ASPnet is a network of over 7900 educational institutions in 176 countries committed to promoting UNESCO's ideals through innovative pilot projects including heritage, intercultural dialogue and environmental issues. Associated Schools are active in Canada, working locally in their communities and taking part in joint projects with other schools in Canada and internationally.

### **The Commission and its partners are also active in promoting:**

- The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World 2001-2010
- The International Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2015
- Arts and Learning
- UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks in Canada.

# CANADIAN LEADERSHIP AT UNESCO

- 1945** UNESCO is founded on 16 November 1945. Canada is one of 20 founding members.
- 1946** A Canadian, Victor Doré, is the first President of UNESCO's Executive Board.
- 1951** The Massey-Lévesque Report recommends the establishment of the Canada Council and of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.
- 1957** The Canada Council Act is passed by Parliament. It provides for the creation of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, operating under the Council's aegis.
- 1959** UNESCO's Director-General Vittorini Veronese and the Prime Minister of Canada, John G. Diefenbaker, attend the Canadian Commission's first Annual General Meeting.
- 1968** UNESCO organizes the first conference on sustainable development, leading to the creation of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme. Canada's first biosphere reserve, Mont Saint-Hilaire (Québec), is designated in 1978.

- 1972** The Convention concerning the Protection for the World Cultural and Natural Heritage is adopted. The first sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1978, including Canadian sites L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site (Newfoundland) and Nahanni National Park (Northwest Territories)
- 1978** Canada is the first importer/exporter country of cultural property to sign the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.
- 1980** UNESCO adopts the Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist. Canadian Paul Siren chairs the Joint Committee of Experts.
- 1991** Canadian Marie Bernard-Meunier is the first woman to be elected Chairperson of UNESCO's Executive Board.
- 2001** The Canadian Commission for UNESCO becomes coordinator of National Commissions of the Europe Region until 2005.
- 2005** UNESCO adopts the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the International Convention against Doping in Sport and the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights.
- 2006** The Canadian Commission celebrates  
**2007** its 50th anniversary.

# CONTACT US

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