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\$9.7 million cut from volunteer assistance

THE RÉSEAU DE L'ACTION BÉNÉVOLE DU QUÉBEC, THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS AND THE LIBERAL PARTY CONDEMN THE HARPER GOVERNMENT

Ottawa, Tuesday, December 5, 2006 – Today, on International Volunteer Day, the President of the *Réseau de l'action bénévole du Québec*, **Marc Turgeon**, the Member for Laval and Bloc Québécois Third Age critic, **Nicole Demers**, the Member for Ottawa—Vanier and official spokesperson for Canadian Heritage, **Mauril Bélanger**, spoke out against the Conservative government's decision to cancel the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative (CVI).

“On behalf of the two million volunteers in Quebec, we are calling upon the Conservative government to restore funding as quickly as possible for the CVI, which helps volunteers in all provinces and territories,” stated **Marc Turgeon**.

The *Réseau de l'action bénévole du Québec* reproaches the Harper government for not offering any alternative and for its claim that supporting volunteerism “does not reflect the priorities of the federal government or of Canadians.”

Eliminated as part of the strategy to reduce spending that was announced by the Harper government on September 25, 2006, the CVI seeks to improve organizations' ability to make the most of volunteers' contributions, to encourage Quebeckers and Canadians to join volunteer organizations and to make volunteers' experience more rewarding.

The Bloc Québécois spokesperson, **Nicole Demers**, is also opposed to the elimination of the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative, which supports the social economy in Quebec and in Canada alike.

“It is absurd to see the Harper government cut this program on the pretext that it does not reflect the priorities of Quebeckers and Canadians, when the Canadian Heritage website reports that 80% of them believe that the government should encourage people to invest in volunteerism,” noted **Nicole Demers**.

The Bloc Québécois spokesperson maintains that the Harper government must continue funding a volunteer assistance program and restore the \$9.7 million it has cut.

“These cuts to volunteerism are an instance of federal withdrawal at the expense of the provinces and of the groups that strive every day to improve the quality of life of the less fortunate. Far from contributing to the elimination of the fiscal imbalance, this decision exacerbates it. In Quebec alone, two million people do 308 million hours of volunteer work. The Harper government must correct this quickly,” added **Nicole Demers**.

For his part, **Mauril Bélanger** noted: “Volunteerism is a fundamental value in Canada’s social, economic and political fabric. We condemn the Harper government’s decision to eliminate the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative. This cut not only hurts volunteers from all walks of life and from all age groups throughout the provinces and territories, it also hurts a very important Canadian value. This raises serious questions about the government’s real motives.”

“It should be noted that on December 5, 2001, on International Volunteer Day (IVD), after the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative was launched, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan congratulated Canada on its exemplary commitment. Unfortunately today, on December 5, 2006, we do not have the same cause for celebration,” concluded **Mauril Bélanger**.

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