

# Civic Participation is Democracy in Action

A Publication of the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association



Citizenship and  
Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et  
Immigration Canada

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**April 1, 2009**

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*Using the Glossary of Terms*

*Throughout the text of the publication, there are bold italicized terms. These bold italicized terms can be found in the Glossary of Terms found at the back of the publication. The bold italicized terms are in alphabetical order and provide definitions.*

## **CIVIC PARTICIPATION IS *DEMOCRACY* IN ACTION**

- **Civic Participation is community involvement, volunteering, active membership in a group, participating in fund-raising, and board membership.**
- **Civic Participation is regular voting in elections, persuading others to vote, displaying buttons, signs and stickers, making campaign contributions, volunteering for *candidates* or other political organizations, or being a *candidate* in an election.**
- **Civic Participation is having a political voice by contacting officials, demonstrating or approaching the media.**



In a *democracy*, citizens participate in political and social activities that build communities and shape the nation. These activities can take place in government, places of worship or voluntary associations. This kind of civic responsibility creates productive, responsible, caring and contributing members of a *democracy*.



### **Rights and Responsibilities**

In a *democracy*, all citizens have equal access to power through participation and voting. All citizens enjoy *political and civil rights* including *universal voting rights*. All citizens must engage in civic participation in order to ensure the continuing life of the *democracy*. It is a responsibility.

## **CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND NEW CANADIAN WOMEN**

When women arrive from other places in the world to make a home in Canada, they become a new Canadian. They have made a commitment to become a Canadian. This commitment includes civic participation. When a new Canadian woman becomes a Canadian citizen, she can vote and run as

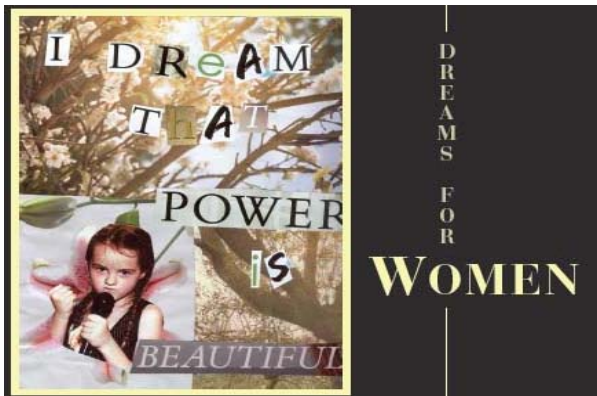


a ***candidate*** in Canadian elections. There are many opportunities for a new Canadian woman to participate before becoming a citizen: community involvement, membership in a group, participating in fund-raising, board membership, making ***campaign*** contributions, volunteering for ***candidates*** or other political organizations, contacting Members of ***Parliament***, Members of the ***Legislative Assembly***, or local officials like ***Aldermen***, or approaching the media.

### The Voices of New Canadian Women

The following voices of new Canadian women and their feelings about civic participation are found in the study of Carolle Simard entitled "The Political Involvement of New Canadians, An Exploratory Study".

([http://www.elections.ca/eca/eim/article\\_.asp?issueid=19&lang=e&frmPage](http://www.elections.ca/eca/eim/article_.asp?issueid=19&lang=e&frmPage))



*"I began to get involved in various boards of directors and community groups. I am involved because I want to bring about change."*

(Woman of Haitian origin)

This Haitian woman fled her homeland, Haiti, after struggling with extreme poverty and harsh political oppression under the dictatorship of Baby Doc Duvalier.

*"I vote most of the time. It is my responsibility as a citizen. In my country, that responsibility was taken away from me."* (Woman of Lebanese origin)

This Lebanese woman left her country because of the war and the religious divisions.

*"People must get involved so that things work as they should, so that the parties are also aware of people's needs."* (Woman of Peruvian origin)

This Peruvian woman emigrated from Peru, where in the 1980s, one of the most difficult economic situations in Latin America was experienced.

These women greatly value ***democracy*** and civic participation. Voting is seen as the foundation of ***democracy***. It is as important as the ***rule of law***, freedom of expression, a free press and the redistribution of wealth to the have-nots.



## THE HISTORY OF WOMEN AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN CANADA

Civic Participation is the business of a man and a WOMAN.



*“Never retract, never explain, never apologize – get the thing done and let them howl”*

(Nellie McClung)

### A Women's Place is in the House

Prior to women gaining the right to vote and to run for political office in Canada, there were many views about a 'women's place'. Some felt that women were not 'people' in the same way that men were 'people'. Others felt that women were naturally kinder, gentler, and more concerned about the weaker members of society like children. They believed that although a woman's place was in the house, she should be able to influence laws which impacted upon that house. Yet others felt that men and women should be equal in every way and that there was no such thing as a woman's 'natural role'. All adults should be able to vote and run for political office, whether rich or poor, male or female, and regardless of race.

### The First Woman Elected to the House of Commons

Agnes Campbell MacPhail was the first woman to be elected to the Canadian *House of Commons*. She was also one of the first two women to be elected to the *Legislative Assembly* of Ontario. Agnes entered the *House of Commons* in 1921 and the *Legislative Assembly* of Ontario in 1943. There was great resistance to the nomination of a female *candidate*.



### Women are People Too



This Statue of the "Famous Five" is in downtown Calgary.

In April of 1928, the *Supreme Court of Canada* ruled that the word "person" in the *British North America Act* did not include a female person. An individual had to be 'fit and qualified' to hold public office and a woman was not. Five Alberta women – Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung (member of the Alberta *Legislative Assembly*), Louise

McKinney (first woman elected to the **Legislative Assembly** of Alberta), Emily Murphy and Irene Parlby (first female **Cabinet Minister**) appealed the decision. On October 18, 1929, Canada's highest court of appeal ruled that women were indeed 'persons' under the law and so they could serve as members of the **Senate** of Canada.

- 1916 - Manitoba becomes the first province where women had the right to vote in provincial elections
- 1918 - Women gain full voting rights in federal elections
- 1919 - Women gain the right to run for federal office
- 1982 - The Canadian **Charter of Rights and Freedoms** guarantees all adult citizens the right to vote and all other **political and civil rights**

### **New Canadian Woman Now Holds High Office in Canada**



Her Excellency Michaëlle Jean became the 27<sup>th</sup> Governor General of Canada on September 27, 2005 by appointment of Queen Elizabeth II upon the advice of the Prime Minister of Canada. She holds her office at **Her Majesty's Pleasure** but by convention usually serves for approximately five years. Acknowledging her Haitian roots, she said on the day that she became the Governor General of Canada:

*"My own story begins as a young child in another country, one 'draped in barbed wired from head to toe' in the powerful words of the Haitian poet in exile, Rene Despretre, who is also my uncle. The story of that little girl, who watched her parents, her family, and her friends grappling with the horrors of a ruthless dictatorship, who became the woman standing before you today, is a lesson in learning to be free."*

(for this quotation and more information on the Governor-General of Canada <http://www.gg.ca>)

### **The Role of the Governor General in Canada**

Canada became a country at **Confederation** in 1867. The system of government is a **constitutional monarchy**. Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of State in Canada. The Governor General represents the Queen in Canada. Her duties include:

- swearing in the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of Canada and **cabinet ministers**
- ensuring that Canada always has a Prime Minister and a government
- summoning parliament, reading the Speech From the Throne, and giving Royal Assent to make acts of **parliament** law
- holding the right to consult, encourage and warn the Prime Minister and other government officials
- acting as the Commander in Chief of the Canadian forces



- receiving royal visitors and heads of state
- presenting awards, like the Order of Canada, to recognize exceptional deeds or activities
- promoting Canada's national identity and unity and ensuring that Canada is a compassionate society

## Role Models for Canadian Women

Her Excellency Michaëlle Jean is a role model for new Canadian women. New Canadian women have powerful voices that do create change.



*“The voice of the oppressed and excluded is necessary because it stirs our consciences, forces us to re-examine how we think, allows us to take stock of how far we have come and to identify all that still needs to be done if we are to build a more fair and more human world.”* (Her Excellency Michaëlle Jean found at <http://www.gg.ca>)

*“His (Barack Obama's) ‘Yes We Can’ reminded people that anything is possible and invited individuals and entire populations to join together, to believe in their power to act, and to redefine the world.”* (Her Excellency Michaëlle Jean found at <http://www.gg.ca>)



Yes, a woman's place is in the house – The **House of Commons**, the **Senate**, the **Legislative Assembly**, and City Hall. Senator Mobina Jaffer who has a special interest in human trafficking and who was born in Uganda belongs in the **Senate**. Senator Vivienne Poy is the first Canadian of Asian descent to be appointed to the **Senate**. Yasmin Ratansi, whose roots are in Tanzania, sits in the **House of Commons** and is currently the Chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. She is also the first Muslim woman to be a Member of **Parliament**. Teresa Woo-Paw was born in Hong Kong and is a Member of the **Legislative Assembly** of Alberta. And Diane Colley-Urquhart is a woman who is an **Alderman** in Calgary.



## **ALDERMEN, MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (MLA), AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (MP) ARE THE SERVANTS OF THE PEOPLE**

Government leaders are not bosses; they are elected to represent and help the people who live in their electoral district.

New Canadian women have many settlement and integration issues: housing, employment, child-care, social assistance, transportation, health care, school, and senior pensions. After the system has failed, a government official can be contacted for assistance.

The offices of the City of Calgary *Aldermen*, the Members of the *Legislative Assembly* (MLA) and the Members of *Parliament* (MP) can provide information and assist in solving a problem that cannot be resolved in a city, provincial or federal government bureaucratic department. Sometimes a person may want to exercise political voice and ask the appropriate official to introduce a law or change a law or policy. These offices can often direct you to the right person and place.

### The Structure of Canada's Government

The system of government in Canada is a *Constitutional Monarchy* and a *Parliamentary Democracy*. In the Canadian government, Governor General Michaëlle Jean is the head of state representing the hereditary monarchy and Prime Minister Stephen Harper is the elected head of government. The government structures were first set out in the *British North America Act, 1867* and this constituting document now forms a part of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.



In Canada, sovereignty is divided between a central governing authority – the *Parliament* – and a smaller unit of government – a province or territory. This is called federalism. The Constitution sets out the system of government and its roles and responsibilities. The responsibilities of the provinces and territories are different than the responsibilities of the government of Canada.

### The Parliament of Canada

In the *House of Commons*, there are 308 Members of *Parliament* who represent the people living in their *ridings*. They are elected to office by the citizens of Canada who are over the age of eighteen years and stay in office until their resignations or the *dissolution of parliament*. The *Conservative Party of Canada* currently has 143 Members of *Parliament* and so its leader, Stephen Harper, is the Prime Minister of Canada. The *Liberal Party of Canada* currently has 77 Members of *Parliament* in the *House of Commons*. Its leader is Michael Ignatieff and he is the leader of the opposition. It is the duty of the Opposition Party to challenge the Prime Minister and the Party with the greatest number of Members of *Parliament*. There are two other Parties currently

represented in the *House of Commons*. The *New Democratic Party* has 37 Members of *Parliament* and the leader is Jack Layton. The leader of the *Bloc Quebecois* is Gilles Duceppe and this party has 49 Members of *Parliament*.

In the *Senate*, there are 105 members who are appointed by the Governor General upon the advice of the Prime Minister. Senators may remain in office until the age of 75 years. Seats are assigned on a regional basis with each of the four major regions (Ontario, Quebec, the Maritime Provinces, and the Western Provinces) receiving 24 seats each. The smaller regions are Newfoundland and Labrador, the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut.

(For further information on the Parliament of Canada: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>)

(For further information on the Senate: <http://www.sen.gc.ca>)

### **The Legislative Assembly of Alberta**

The *Legislative Assembly* of Alberta is made up of the 83 Members of the *Legislative Assembly* (MLA) and the Lieutenant-Governor. There is no equivalent of the *Senate* in the *Legislative Assembly*. Members of the *Legislative Assembly* are elected by Canadian citizens who are at least 18 years of age and who have been ordinarily resident in the province of Alberta for the six months prior to the election. They stay in office until their resignation or the *dissolution of the Legislative Assembly*.



Currently, the Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta is Norman Kwong. The Lieutenant-Governor is appointed by the Governor General of Canada on the advice of the Premier of Alberta and stays in office *during the pleasure of the Governor-General* which, by convention, is approximately five years. Lieutenant-Governor Norman Kwong is the 16<sup>th</sup> Lieutenant-Governor and was appointed on January 20, 2005. He is the first person of Chinese heritage to serve in this office. This is the Queen's representative in Alberta and his duties can be divided into three roles: constitutional (gives Royal Assent to make bills into law), summons and ends legislative sessions, makes certain that there is always a Premier and a government in Alberta), ceremonial, and social.

Citizens vote for Members of the *Legislative Assembly* who represent the people of their *riding* and who also support a political party. The role of the Member of the *Legislative Assembly* is very similar to the Member of *Parliament* excepting that the Members of the *Legislative Assembly* deal with issues affecting the Province of Alberta. Although the Progressive *Conservative Party* of Alberta, the Alberta *Liberal Party* and the *New Democratic Party* hold similar philosophies to these federal parties, they are not affiliated.

The leader of the Progressive **Conservative Party** of Alberta is also the Premier of the Province of Alberta providing that he or she is an elected representative of a **riding** in Alberta. Currently, the Premier of Alberta is Ed Stelmach and his Progressive **Conservative Party** has been elected to 72 **ridings** in the Province. The Progressive **Conservative Party** has been the Government of Alberta since 1971 without interruption.



The leader of the Alberta **Liberal Party** is David Swann. This Party has 9 Members elected to the **Legislative Assembly** of Alberta. Since 1933, this Party has been the official opposition in the **Legislative Assembly**. They are the critics. They keep the governing Party in check. They have a shadow **Cabinet** which mirrors the actual **Cabinet of Ministers**. Although their philosophies align with the Alberta **Liberal Party**, they must remain loyal to the Government of Alberta. The leader of the **New Democratic Party** of Alberta is Brian Mason. This Party has 2 Members represented in the **Legislative Assembly** of Alberta.

(For further information on the Legislative Assembly of Alberta:

<http://www.assembly.ab.ca>)

(For further information on the Lieutenant-Governor:

<http://www.lieutenantgovernor.ab.ca>)

## Local Government

It is a constitutional responsibility of the provinces to create local government or municipal government. In Calgary, the local government is composed of the Mayor and 14 **Aldermen** who are elected to represent their wards or electoral districts. These local leaders make decisions that relate to local issues and services such as road maintenance, transportation, water and sewer services and garbage collection. There are other municipalities in the Province that govern other cities, towns, villages and rural areas. The City of Calgary also has two school boards (Calgary Board of Education and Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School) and the members (trustees) of these boards are elected at the same time as the Mayor and the **Aldermen**. However, the municipal government and the school boards are elected and operate separately. The citizens of Calgary vote for the Calgary City Council every three years. Dave Bronconnier is the current mayor and the 35<sup>th</sup> Mayor of Calgary.

(For further information on local government:

<http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca>)



## Canadian Government Leaders Serve All People Living in the Electoral District

Everyone, including immigrants who are not yet citizens who reside in the electoral district of a Member of Parliament, a Member of the Legislative Assembly, an Alderman, or a School Board Trustee may approach the leader to listen to their problems, questions, or ideas. These leaders may be contacted in writing, by telephone or by attending at their office in the represented electoral district.

## Immigrant Seniors, Pensions, and Members of *Parliament*

Many pensions in Canada are determined and administered by the Government of Canada. When residents or citizens of Canada have questions about these pensions, they can attend at an office of the Government of Canada or they can approach their Member of *Parliament* to direct them or answer questions. Sometimes, the system is not working for some members of Canadian society, so a Member of *Parliament* can be contacted to help with these concerns and perhaps represent these concerns in the *House of Commons*.



## Penniless Immigrant Seniors

The following situations are taken from an article written by Nicholas Keung and found in "Immigration Watch Canada" in its October 9, 2008 issue.  
(<http://www.immigrationwatchcanada.org/index.php?module+pagemaster&PAGE>)

*At 73, Balkar Singh Bajwa cares for his two grandsons, taking them to school, parks and doctors' appointments. At times, the Brampton man, a retired principal from India, gets calls to work as a certified Punjabi translator. The little money he makes is his sole income. "Many of us, immigrant seniors, are penniless. If you need money, you have to put your hands out and ask your children for money." sighed Bajwa, who came here in 1999 under his son's sponsorship and is a naturalized citizen. Unlike their Canadian-born counterparts, most immigrant seniors are not entitled to government income supports, such as old age security or the guaranteed income supplement, until they have lived in Canada for ten years. In order to receive the maximum monthly benefits of \$1,100, elderly immigrants must have lived in Canada for 40 years and arrived by the age of 18 to qualify. Immigrant seniors from the 50 countries that have reciprocal agreements with Canada are not bound by the residency limit, but most of today's newcomers are from the developing world and lack any social safety net. About 2.3 per cent of Canada's annual 250,000 landed immigrants are seniors.*

*Kifleyesus Woldemichael, 75, and his wife live on a \$1,341 monthly welfare cheque, of which \$900 goes to rent. "We have to think twice before buying anything. We can't go*

*out much because the TTC isn't cheap," said the retired judge, who fled Ethiopia for Canada in 2002. "I looked for jobs, but no one would hire a 75-year-old."*

In this case, a **private member's bill** was initiated. If the **bill** had become law, it would have reduced the old age security residency requirement to three years. Unfortunately, the **bill** died because **Parliament** was dissolved.

Someone can now approach their Member of **Parliament** and initiate another **bill**. It could be an affected senior or a concerned person. If the Member of **Parliament** is not interested in taking action, there is the option of approaching a Member of **Parliament** from another Party represented in the **House of Commons**. Since Canada has the freedom to contact the media or to demonstrate, these are also possibilities. This is democracy in action.



### **The Landlord is Raising the Rent Again, A Member of the *Legislative Assembly*, and an *Alderman***

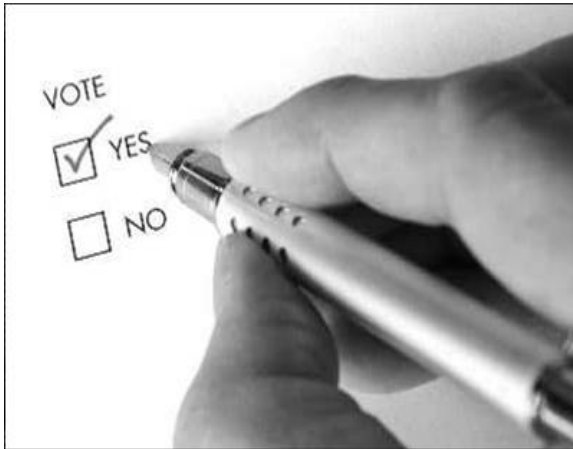
In this hypothetical situation, an immigrant woman living in Calgary with her three young children has learned that her landlord is raising the rent again. He raised the rent last May from \$500 per month to \$600 per month. Now it is February 1 and she has received a written notice from the landlord stating that the rent will be raised on May 1 from \$600 per month to \$1000 per month. This woman knows that Calgary is an expensive city in which to live but she feels that this amount of money is way too much and anyway, she cannot afford that much rent. She has done some investigating and discovered that everything that her landlord is doing is in accordance with the laws of Alberta.

Since landlord and tenancy matters are the responsibility of the Province of Alberta, this woman decides to approach her Member of the **Legislative Assembly**. When she talks with the Member, she is told that the Progressive **Conservative Party** of Alberta believes that there should be no control on rent because the Party believes in a free market where economy and in particular, business, controls the rent. Of course, she knows that one option is to move but she wants to exercise her political voice so she goes and speaks with a Member of the **Legislative Assembly** who is associated with the New **Democratic Party** of Alberta. Although this Member tells her that it is unlikely that there will be immediate change, she understands that she has planted a seed for change when she realizes that this Party is more inclined towards rent controls. In any event, this Member of the **Legislative Assembly** advises her to contact her **Alderman**. When she meets with her **Alderman**, she is advised that she would qualify for affordable housing through the City of Calgary.



electoral district is the winner. The Party with the most electoral districts will determine the Prime Minister of Canada or the Premier of Alberta.

Voting in Canada occurs in secret and there is a very detailed process to ensure that the results are an exact reflection of the will of the people. These leaders will represent the people in *Parliament*, the *Legislative Assembly* and Local Government. This is representative *democracy*.



Referendums are a form of direct *democracy* because each adult citizen answers a question in the form of a 'yes' or 'no' by way of secret ballot. No political leader determines the answer on behalf of the people in the electoral district. The results of a referendum are binding. Referendums can be held at any level of government. There have only been 3 federal referendums: on the question of prohibition in 1898, conscription in 1942 and constitutional reform (Charlottetown Accord) in 1982.

The best known provincial referendums were held in Quebec in 1980 and 1995 on the sovereignty issue. Although it never happened, the past Premier of Alberta, Ralph Klein, suggested a national referendum on the issue of same-sex marriage.

(For further information on federal elections: <http://www.elections.ca>)

(For further information on Alberta elections: <http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca>)

(For further information on local government elections:  
<http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca>)

## **CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN *NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS***

Becoming a board member in a *Not-For-Profit Organization* is very good training ground for people who later want to become involved in government politics. Like volunteering, acting as a board member is a form of civic participation and is active *democracy*.

Immigrants, like all people, volunteer for a variety of reasons. They may wish to contribute to their communities, acquire new skills, gain job experience, make new friends, or advance a particular cause.



## **New Canadian Experiences**

The following new Canadians explain how their involvement with ***Not-For-Profit Organizations*** helped them to build a life in Canada. These stories are taken from a study by Katherine Scott, Kevin Selbee, and Paul Reed: "Making Connections, Social and Civic Engagement among Canadian Immigrants."  
(<http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2006/makingconnections/>)

### **Volunteering Clarified a Columbian-born Woman's Career Direction**

*Three months after she moved from Columbia to Nova Scotia with her six-year-old daughter, Carmen Moncayo started volunteering at the Canadian Mental Health Association in Halifax.*

*A practicing psychologist in her home country, she faced a long and expensive process to obtain her Canadian accreditation. Before embarking on it, however, she decided to try a little volunteer work "to understand how the mental health system worked in Canada."*

*It was the best thing she could have done. The work made Carmen feel validated at a time when she couldn't practice her profession and was still struggling to learn English.*

*"The volunteer coordinator, who was a psychologist herself, treated me with such respect," she says. "I felt useful."*

*Volunteer work also clarified her career direction – and spared her the trouble of recertification. "I realized that I was not really interested in individual counseling anymore. What I really wanted to do was social work," she says, "and for that, you don't need to be certified."*

*Buoyed by this realization, Carmen took a step into her newly identified profession by volunteering with the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association (MISA).*

*MISA's volunteer coordinator invited Carmen to several conferences on women's rights. "She gave me information that was very useful to me, and I met people working in the field." Soon, Carmen was helping organize the World March of Women in the Atlantic region. In 2001, MISA hired Carmen as their Family Violence and Cross Cultural Awareness Co-ordinator.*

*It doesn't surprise Carmen that immigrants in the Atlantic volunteer more hours than do Canadian-born residents. "It's the only way to make friends, the only way to get known," she says. Her first two work references came from volunteer work.*

## **Young Congolese-born Woman Represents Canada with the Commission for UNESCO**

*When Luketa M'Pintou first moved to Quebec City from Zaire at the age of 24, the last thing on his mind was volunteering. "I had all the friends and social activities I needed," he says.*

*Later, when he was seeking refugee status, working part-time, and studying for his MBA in Montreal, he didn't have much time for volunteer work. "My main focus was survival."*

*It's a strange turn of events that Luketa is now a leader in Alberta's voluntary sector. He is Alberta's representative on the Citizenship and Immigration committee on francophones in minority situations. And he has recently been chosen director of the Western and Northern regions of the federation of francophone and Acadian communities. "That took some work, to gain the trust needed to obtain that position," he says.*

*Luketa made his name by founding and directing an Edmonton-based settlement organization for young francophone immigrants and their families. Having just celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Alliance Jeunesse-Famille de l'Alberta Society (AJFAS), he is now a passionate proponent of volunteerism among immigrant Canadians. "I tell them that getting involved will create a network for them," he says. "They can succeed, by getting involved." .....*

*Luketa is now mentoring other young immigrants in leadership roles. The AJFAS sponsored Congolese-born teenager Rachel Thinyembe to attend the national consultations of the Commission for UNESCO. She was then elected to represent all of Canada with the Commission.*

This is **Democracy** in Action.

