

REPORT: *A SENSE OF BELONGING*  
MONTREAL REGIONAL VISIT  
October 25<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007



*A Sense of Belonging* aims to promote diversity and combat racism and discrimination in local communities across Canada through community outreach and public education. The United Nations Association in Canada's overall goal is to bridge gaps between distinct minority and "mainstream" groups to promote cross-cultural understanding and collective action and to promote fulsome and equal participation in Canadian society.

**Objectives:** The *Sense of Belonging* (SB) project is in its second fiscal year. The SB team is re-engaging and returning to its nine target communities to assess the issues and concerns of the first round of regional planning meetings.

The objectives of these regional visits can be outlined as follows:

1. Re-introduce the project to key community stakeholders. These presentations and dialogues include UNA-Canada's mandate; project history; how *A Sense of Belonging* came to be; Objectives and Methodology; the Community action plan framework.
2. Follow up to see how SB has made an impact in the community. Regional Coordinators discuss what has been accomplished in the first year of the project and what is forecasted for the next. Community stakeholders provide their input on how their own organizations can collaborate and help achieve the Action Plan. An outcome of the Regional Roundtables is to define indicators to evaluate the SB effects at the local level by the end of the project.
3. To draw on expertise of local stakeholders, including:
  - What initiatives are currently underway in the community to address racism and discrimination? How can SB integrate different organizations' involvement?
  - Where might *A Sense of Belonging* be able to support some of these initiatives (i.e. instead of duplicating efforts)?
  - Where do gaps still remain where *A Sense of Belonging* might focus its resources?
  - Brainstorming for final legacy research product of SB

Additionally, the Roundtables will aid Project Officers in assessing how *Sense of Belonging* will most benefit the community and fill identified gaps in its next phase after March 31, 2008.

Objectives Specific to Montreal:

- Strengthened relationship between RC, Project Officers, and our partner organization, the Montreal Branch of UNA-Canada
- Explore the influence of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission on Quebecois identity and ethno cultural and religious groups, specifically in the realm of Employment Issues
- Reestablish connections between community stakeholders and build partnerships within the community

## **Regional Roundtable**

**Saturday, October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

The Roundtable aims to provide a snapshot of diversity in Montreal in the words of local stakeholders. SB consults, discusses and identifies key recommendations for easing integration in Quebec. Further, the Roundtable serves as a follow up on the 2006 Regional Planning Meeting held at the project's launch in Montreal. A list of attendees can be found in Appendix B.

Appendix C outlines the agenda of the Roundtable. At the start, Mara Brotman, Project Officer for SB, provided a summary of the *A Sense of Belonging* Synthesis Report (presented at the Metropolis conference in March 2007). This dealt with pan-Canadian trends and the feedback from all of SB's nine communities. Copies of the synthesis report were disseminated in both official languages.

Regional Coordinators Riham Sayed Omar and Christina Raneburger presented the activities of *A Sense of Belonging* in Montreal over the past year. Raneburger and Omar further discussed their plans for the future of the project, achieving the aims of the Action Plan. Please see Appendix D for the PowerPoint display highlighting the activities of SB in Montreal.

In the second major component, participants provided their input on the Sense of Belonging Priority Areas. The audience discussed how national trends applied to their own community, and where they differed in Montreal's unique situation.

### **Profile of Montreal:**

Statistics Canada reports that Quebec received 42,000 immigrants in 2006, according to Statistics Canada and for the first time since the beginning of the 1990s surpassed the 40,000 mark for a third consecutive year. CBC reports "Quebecers are leaving the province in numbers not seen for more than a decade, a trend some observers are blaming in part on a visceral public debate about immigrant accommodation. According to Statistics Canada data, there has been a recent spike in migration to other provinces not seen since the 1995 Quebec referendum on sovereignty. In 2006-2007, 41,831 people moved out of Quebec, while 26,263 settled in the province - a net loss of 15,568 people."

### **Reasons for Migration out of Quebec**

Roundtable participants stated strongly that subtle discrimination had increased noticeably in the past year. Many cited the media and the effect of the Bouchard-Taylor investigation as a major element in this increased tension around Montreal. Some argued that this was a positive step, that "people were finally acknowledging their inner prejudices and feelings of alienation" within the province. Other participants said that they felt "increasingly under scrutiny" as visible minorities. Many people at the Roundtable felt that they were not welcome in Quebec, though many were decades-long residents.

## **Secularism vs. religious expression**

A key theme emerging from the Roundtable was the unique clash within Quebec between religious traditions and laity/secularism. In contrast to SB's other communities, where the focus tends to be on certain groups marginalized by the mainstream, Montreal participants said that their greatest struggle was a marginalizing of all religions in favour of secularism. This includes a Muslim participant who was outlawed from wearing her veil while teaching at public school, and other participants who saw the same negative treatment of Orthodox Jews. Most participants at the roundtable self-identified as religious / observant and felt that they were discriminated against by the majority of Quebecois.

“Is there a gulf between neo-Quebecers vs. real Quebecers? No, I refuse to accept this vocabulary. In a lot of this diversity discourse people frame it as them and us, when I want to speak about all of us.”

“The general public thinks that there is a lot of opportunity for visible minorities, but this is not the case. Discrimination exists when people think that visible minorities get more opportunity when this is really not the case.”

“I wanted to come to Quebec, I'm happy to be here, and I consider myself Quebecois.”

## **Public acknowledgement / visibility of diversity**

After an introduction from Gilles Gingras, Vice President of the Montreal Branch of UNA-Canada, Roundtable discussion dealt with the UN Declaration on Human Rights. Mr. Gingras noted that Quebec's documents on Human Rights are the strongest in Canada and most closely follow the example of the UN Declaration. One participant took issue with terminology – using the word ‘race’; she sees diversity “not as an individual fight but rather a fight together toward a common goal.”

Female participants described how they were received by the public when wearing a veil. When the public were genuinely curious and directly asked these women about the veil, participants were happy to discuss it. One woman mentioned that she had recently begun wearing a veil and her treatment in public had changed dramatically for the worse. People no longer spoke to her in stores or on the Metro. They ignored her or stared without engaging in conversation. She felt a complete difference, as if she had been suddenly alienated from her own home.

Institutionally, participants felt that there was a lack of acknowledgement of the problem within government and the school system.

## Employment:

Employment was the most important theme of the Roundtable. Every participant stated that there should be more significant programs and real measurements to reinforce New Canadians in the workforce. As with many SB communities, recognition of foreign credentials ranks high in priority for New Canadians.

“There is a particular problem in Quebec with integration. Because Quebecois culture feels threatened and is thus entrenching itself, it is uniquely difficult to find employment for veiled women and Muslims in general. Even 2nd and 3rd generation Quebecois of different origins have trouble, they never get to the interview stage because of the name on the resume.”

One of the largest gaps in government employment strategies seems to be one of communications. As one participant noted, “There are lots of great policies in the government, it’s just how to get it from policy to the action / habitual stage.”  
“The provincial govt. has programs but no one knows about them. How do we get information out about the programs that do exist?”

For most participants, employment is the main pillar of settlement and of giving New Canadians a true sense of belonging. When people cannot find employment that is equal to their skill level or can’t find jobs at all, diversity discussions become secondary to daily material needs.

“True Quebecers live outside of town or in the East. There’s a danger of ghettoization for ethnic communities unless they can get employment in public areas not just in jobs from own community.”

## Priority Areas

Discussion centred on the three priority areas for Montreal: Prejudice and Indifference, Civic Participation, and Formal and Informal Education.

These priority areas were decided at the outset of *A Sense of Belonging*, and we continue to assess their value for the community. The following table gives a snapshot of responses obtained:

Prejudice and Indifference	“I would say that 10 years ago if I wore the hijab it was no big deal. Now it is a big deal.” “I go outside sometimes without my hijab. But today I felt like it and I wore it... I can feel the difference: This morning in the bus, the driver did not even look at me! Without the hijab the bus driver always says hi to me. People look at me if I were it. I feel the difference.”  Accommodation for physical spaces in which to eat special food or pray / meditate rarely exists. “There is no place for
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	<p>me to pray at universities or in most institutions. If there was a non-partisan, multi-faith room we could all share, it would help everyone.”</p>
Civic Participation	<p>A barrier to civic participation is media perception. “The media is a huge problem. For example in Herouxville, there was not a big issue but it was blown up in the news. It’s worse than a farce. I went to Herouxville to try to speak with people. And everyone warned me not to go, that they would throw tomatoes. But everyone I met there was great and kind. They were stereotyped by the media too!”</p> <p>Politically, New Canadians do not see themselves reflected in any mainstream party. “It’s pretty shocking to see a party called Liberal for example which has little to no diversity. It accepts diversity as a concept but not as a practice.”</p>
Forman & Informal Education	<p>Education is the basic building block to create and open up new generations about who we are and what we can do. “What is it the new generations will learn? Should be how to live together and how to teach tolerance.”</p> <p>One woman worked with a private Muslim school to encourage activities and participation between their children and a local Jewish school. Regional Coordinators Christina &amp; Riham are trying to encourage more dialogue / visits between faith groups to demystify the religions for the general public. “Otherwise there is fear and misunderstanding.” “To approach schools, they often want to know how the project can increase the profile of the school (for marketing!). To convince principals and school boards you really have a worthwhile cause and project, it’s necessary to frame it in this way and how it will benefit the school.”</p>

**Timeline:** October 25 - 27, 2007.

**Invitees:**

For the Regional Roundtable, the focus was on inviting members of the public sector and NGOs dealing with immigration, ethno-cultural and interfaith / religious leaders, along with members of local school boards, the Chamber of Commerce, the private sector, and government representatives. Both the Regional Roundtable and individual meetings with Project Officers were well and enthusiastically attended.

Appendix A: Action Plan Items for Montreal

1 Community Fact Sheet

1 youth challenge

2 presentations in schools

3 school workshops

1 Community Fact Sheet

3 community events/youth forums

1 Community Participation Sheet

1 directory of community leaders/anti-racism/diversity committee

1 supporting organization for in-kind contributions and local support

Appendix B: Roundtable Agenda



United Nations Association in Canada  
Association canadienne pour les Nations Unies



**Agenda: Community  
Roundtable**  
(October 17, 2007)

10:00-10:15 am	Introduction to the <i>A Sense of Belonging</i> project
10:15-10:45 am	Introduction of participants
10:45-11:00 am	Presentation of synthesis report
11:00-11:15 am	Discussion of report findings
11:15-11:45 am	Group discussion on priority areas
11:45-12:00 am	Break
12:00-12:15 am	Reconvening on group discussion
12:15-12:45 am	Brainstorming: community collaboration
12:45 am -1:00 pm	Brainstorming: future of project
1:00 – 1:30 pm	Conclusion