Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship

Canadian citizens have rights and responsibilities. These come to us from our history, are secured by Canadian law, and reflect our shared traditions, identity and values.

Canadian law has several sources, including laws passed by Parliament and the provincial legislatures, English common law, the civil code of France and the unwritten constitution that we have inherited from Great Britain.

Together, these secure for Canadians an 800-year old tradition of ordered liberty, which dates back to the signing of **Magna Carta** in 1215 in England (also known as the Great Charter of Freedoms), including:

- Freedom of conscience and religion;
- Freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of speech and of the press;
- Freedom of peaceful assembly; and
- Freedom of association.

Habeas corpus, the right to challenge unlawful detention by the state, comes from English common law.

The Constitution of Canada was amended in 1982 to entrench the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which begins with the words, "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law." This phrase underlines the importance of religious traditions to Canadian society and the dignity and worth of the human person.

The Charter attempts to summarize fundamental freedoms while also setting out additional rights. The most important of these include:

- Mobility Rights — Canadians can live and work anywhere they choose in Canada, enter and leave the country freely, and apply for a passport.
- Aboriginal Peoples' Rights — The rights guaranteed in the Charter will not adversely affect any treaty or other rights or freedoms of Aboriginal peoples.
- Official Language Rights and Minority Language Educational Rights — French and English have equal status in Parliament and throughout the government.
- Multiculturalism — A fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity. Canadians celebrate the gift of one another's presence and work hard to respect pluralism and live in harmony.

Queen Elizabeth II proclaiming the amended Constitution, Ottawa, 1982

The Equality of Women and Men

In Canada, men and women are equal under the law. Canada's openness and generosity do not extend to barbaric cultural practices that tolerate spousal abuse, "honour killings," female genital mutilation, forced marriage or other gender-based violence. Those guilty of these crimes are severely punished under Canada's criminal laws.

Citizenship Responsibilities

In Canada, rights come with responsibilities. These include:

- **Obeying the law** — One of Canada's founding principles is the rule of law. Individuals and governments are regulated by laws and not by arbitrary actions. No person or group is above the law.
- **Taking responsibility for oneself and one's family** — Getting a job, taking care of one's family and working hard in keeping with one's abilities are important Canadian values. Work contributes to personal dignity and self-respect, and to Canada's prosperity.
- **Serving on a jury** — When called to do so, you are legally required to serve. Serving on a jury is a privilege that makes the justice system work as it depends on impartial juries made up of citizens.
- **Voting in elections** — The right to vote comes with a responsibility to vote in federal, provincial or territorial and local elections.
- **Helping others in the community** — Millions of volunteers freely donate their time to help others without pay—helping people in need, assisting at your child's school, volunteering at a food bank or other charity, or encouraging newcomers to integrate. Volunteering is an excellent way to gain useful skills and develop friends and contacts.
- **Protecting and enjoying our heritage and environment** — Every citizen has a role to play in avoiding waste and pollution while protecting Canada's natural, cultural and architectural heritage for future generations.

Defending Canada

There is no compulsory military service in Canada. However, serving in the regular **Canadian Forces** (navy, army and air force) is a noble way to contribute to Canada and an excellent career choice (www.forces.ca). You can serve in your local part-time navy, militia and air reserves and gain valuable experience, skills and contacts. Young people can learn discipline, responsibility and skills by getting involved in the cadets (www.cadets.ca).

You may also serve in the Coast Guard or emergency services in your community such as a police force or fire department. By helping to protect your community, you follow in the footsteps of Canadians before you who made sacrifices in the service of our country.