



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Call for Common Sense and Cultural Reason

Montreal, August 19, 2008 – On behalf of over 500 Quebec dance professionals, RQD vehemently condemns the decision taken by the Harper government to abolish several arts support programs and the war tactics it has used to secure votes against artists. Every citizen has a right to demand that a democratically elected government, even one that is in a minority position, will act with integrity, accountability, rigour, watchfulness and transparency.

By adopting a piecemeal approach to how it releases information on the abolition of several support programs for artistic creation, promotion and training, organizational consolidation, international touring and the export of cultural products, the government has engaged Canada's cultural communities in a veritable war of nerves, particularly since rumour now has it that the government has set its sights on other programs, as well.

We are asking that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Josée Verner, finally breaks her silence in response to media pressure, clarify her government's objectives and priorities with respect to culture and explain how they justify abolishing the programs that were cut last week. Out of simple respect for her constituents (artists, workers, business people, audiences, readers, art lovers, moviegoers, consumers of cultural products, teachers, students, etc.), we are asking her to respond as soon as possible with a complete list of the programs that her government plans to eliminate and the total amount of savings that it expects to achieve at the expense of arts and culture.

If Ms. Verner cannot guarantee that the appropriations for programs that have been or will be abolished will be maintained or transferred to the Canada Council for the Arts, we urge her to explain to artists and cultural workers how her government intends to help them do better with less funding.

As the Minister responsible for a sector that injects over \$43 billion annually into the Canadian economy and on which the cultural and economic lives of our communities depend, we are asking her to become a tireless defender of arts and culture within the cabinet and to the public.

We expect David Emerson, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, to fight tooth and nail in defence of cultural diplomacy as the third pillar of Canadian foreign diplomacy. We expect him to convince his colleagues within the government to not only bring back the PromArt program, but also to reinvest in the cultural budgets of Canada's embassies. Defending and promoting Canada's cultural distinctiveness is a critical political and trade issue, and Canada cannot afford to do without the natural ambassadors provided by Quebec's and English Canada's artists and cultural workers, first and foremost, not to mention the presence of our cultural trade agents in foreign markets.

Other artistic and cultural communities have denounced the Harper government's decisions and actions, as have the media and elected members of the opposition parties. Quebec's professional dance community fervently

hopes that the government will listen to reason. Abolishing programs like PromArt and Trade Routes has seriously compromised the future of professional dance in the short term in both French and English Canada. As part of an industry that has been seriously affected by cuts to other support programs, the Quebec and English Canada dance communities are deeply concerned about the future of Canadian culture.

For several decades we have worked together to build a distinctive culture and identity. We refuse to have our point of view lost in the surrounding cacophony.

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SOURCE:

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