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*Federal budget cuts*

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**Members of Le Mouvement pour les arts et les lettres  
Will Address the Public**

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**Montréal, November 15, 2006** – **Le Mouvement pour les arts et les lettres** publicly expresses its deep concern after having obtained, through the media, a clear response from Minister Bev Oda stating that the Harper government is firmly committed to doing some housecleaning in its diplomatic representations. After such an admission, how can we believe that the Minister of Foreign Affairs is truly interested in supporting arts and culture? Of the planned \$12 million in cuts in Public Diplomacy, \$7 million has already been eliminated from the budgets of Canadian cultural missions abroad. These cuts are part of a “budget strategy” designed to reduce government expenditure by \$2 billion over two years. The initiative will affect all departments, including Canadian Heritage.

In an effort to bring the government back to its senses, a government that, for all intents and purposes, is blindly making cuts and justifies its actions with arguments as fallacious as wanting to ensure better use of public funds, **Le Mouvement pour les arts et les lettres invites all artists, craftspeople, writers and cultural workers, at every possible occasion in this and coming weeks (performances, exhibitions, book and craft fairs, seminars, workshops, symposia, public readings, interviews, etc.) to deliver the following declaration to the public:**

“I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the deep concern that has engulfed the arts and literature community over the last few weeks.

We are very shaken by the announcement of cuts to the Department of Foreign Affairs’ budget for Public Diplomacy, funding that provides assistance to the international tours of Canadian artists and Canadian cultural missions abroad. This \$12 million cut over two years is part of a \$2 billion package of cuts announced in the last federal budget.

If the cultural community has reacted strongly to this announcement, it is simply because this funding represents a large, even critical part of budgets for the international dissemination of Québec creations, whether in dance, theatre, music, the circus arts, film, visual arts, media arts or arts and crafts. Cutting assistance to tours and all other forms of international dissemination of Québec works constitutes a threat to the very existence of artistic creation! Following the mobilization of our community, the government finally indicated that the Arts Promotion program, which supports international dissemination, will be maintained... but the issue of the program’s future is as pertinent as ever, since Minister Oda has confirmed that all aspects of the program will be under close scrutiny.

In addition, last week the media confirmed significant cuts to budgets for cultural action in Canadian embassies, cultural centres and High Commissions. Positions held by cultural representatives in Paris and Berlin are threatened, and five such positions have already been

eliminated at Canada House in London. These extremely dynamic centres that welcome Québec artists from all disciplines have therefore been denied the means to promote Canadian art and culture and assist our artists, strategically and operationally, in their dissemination and audience development efforts at the international level.

Finally, the government has also announced \$32 million in cuts to the Department of Canadian Heritage's budget for the current year. As we know, this department is involved in the arts in many different ways, supporting infrastructure projects; professional arts schools; equipment used in creation, production and dissemination; museums; specialized dissemination agents working across the country; etc. Will we see funding to essential programs slashed, affecting our practice of the arts and the cultural life of our cities and regions? Faced with Minister Oda's determination to continue her housecleaning of arts and culture programs, we fear the worst...

If we want our artistic community to continue to create, produce and disseminate their work, here and abroad, if we want Québec's and Canada's presence in the world to be not only military and utilitarian but also highly representative of our artistic and cultural identity, we must take action. Taking a stand together, we must tell Peter MacKay, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Bev Oda, Minister of Canadian Heritage, that they cannot play with arts and culture budgets and programs without causing serious harm to a great part of, if not all, our community.”

**Le Mouvement des arts et les lettres** comprises eight provincial organizations and thirteen regional culture boards in arts and literature. They represent close to 14,000 professional artists, craftspeople, writers and cultural workers. Membership of Le Mouvement pour les arts et les lettres includes Le Conseil québécois du théâtre, Le Conseil québécois de la musique, Le Conseil des métiers d'art du Québec, Le Conseil québécois des arts médiatiques, Le Regroupement québécois de la danse, L'Union des écrivaines et écrivains québécois, Le Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec, En Piste – the national circus arts group – as well as the regional culture boards of Estrie, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Montérégie, the Saguenay, the Mauricie, Centre du Québec, the Ouatouais, the Laurentians, the Lanaudière Area, the Lower Saint Lawrence, the North Shore, the Gaspé Peninsula and the Québec-Chaudière-Appalaches region. The mission of regional culture boards is to support the development of arts and culture in their regions.

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