



The Centre for Israel
and Jewish Affairs
Le Centre consultatif des
relations juives et israéliennes

Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Senator,

As members of the Young Leaders Circle (YLC) at the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), we ask you to support Bill C-91, an Act Respecting Indigenous Languages, which will soon be reviewed by the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples.

The YLC is a sub-committee of CIJA comprising a diverse group of young Canadian leaders dedicated to improving the quality of life for Canada's Jewish community, and for all Canadians, through advocacy of sound public policy.

At the YLC, we understand the importance of language. Language is not only a means of communication but also a repository of history, culture, and identity. Revitalization of Indigenous languages is important to Indigenous people, and it should be a priority for all Canadians. According to Statistics Canada, in just ten short years (2006-2016) the proportion of the Indigenous population able to converse in an Indigenous language dropped from 21% to 15%. Furthermore, UNESCO's list of vulnerable languages includes 87 Indigenous languages in Canada, 32 of which are designated as critically endangered.

This trend must be reversed, and Bill C-91 is an important step in that direction.

Because language both communicates and conserves cultural and historical meaning, the loss of language constitutes a loss of cultural and historical connections. Jewish people know first-hand the meaning of this reality. A little over a century ago, Hebrew, the Indigenous language of the Jewish people, was considered effectively dormant, confined to religious texts and spoken prayers in the synagogue. In 1890, the Jewish community, living in what is now Israel, took bold steps to restore and expand the Hebrew language for use as a spoken language in all facets of daily life. The revitalization of Hebrew was pivotal to the rebirth of the Jewish nation, and to the enrichment of Jewish cultural practice in communities worldwide, including here in Canada.



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While the situation of Indigenous languages in Canada varies from that of Hebrew, we believe similar outcomes can follow with the adoption of Bill C-91.

Bill C-91 has the power to pave the way for a comprehensive set of language immersion and cultural programs across the country, developed and led by Indigenous peoples. Canada's Jewish community stands ready to support this historic initiative.

We urge you, as a parliamentarian, to support the rapid passage of Bill C-91. Thank you. Merci.

Sincerely,

The Young Leaders Circle

CC - the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism