



Unacceptable Violations of the Language Rights of Federal Public Servants at the Negotiating Table for their Working Conditions

Currently bargaining with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat for the renewal of its collective agreement, the UCCO-SACC-CSN union, representing 7,500 federal correctional officers across the country, denounces a significant, worrying and unprecedented violation of the spirit of the “Official Languages Act”.

For 20 years and four rounds of bargaining since the creation of the Union, the federal government has always offered simultaneous translation services in both official languages, French and English. Breaking completely with this practice, since January 2023, the federal government has required unions to give up simultaneous translation or pay 50% of the costs for this service, otherwise they would refuse to negotiate.

The federal government justifies this by the need to use external translators and also mentions that in any case, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages does not have the power to force the government to provide and fund simultaneous translation at the negotiation table.

A contemp from the government that is worrying

The national president of UCCO-SACC-CSN, Jeff Wilkins, denounces disregard for correctional officers that is as dangerous as it is worrying:

“In negotiations, words matter. If all parties at the table cannot understand the content or context of the discussions, we cannot represent our members properly. Our members expect us to speak on their behalf at the bargaining table, and we cannot do this in these circumstances. In a perfect world, all the parties would be perfectly bilingual, but this is not the case on both sides at the negotiation table. Everyone must understand what is being said, and that responsibility belongs to the employer, who has a duty to promote both official languages in Canada. We are therefore asking the Government to fulfill its legal obligation and provide translation”.

Beyond the situation of correctional officers alone, National Vice-President Frédéric Lebeau deplores the fact that the government does not allow the union to negotiate in good faith in the language of their choice:

“As a union, we represent members across Canada, and like them, our bargaining committee includes Anglophones and Francophones. Regardless of the official language they choose to use, they must be able to be understood in the language of their choice and understand what is

being said at the negotiating table. It is their right and it is also the right of the members they represent. The right to discuss, to exchange with our federal employer in French or in English is at the heart of Canadian democracy. It is neither an accommodation nor a favor granted to us, but an obligation regularly reaffirmed by the highest authorities in the country.”

UCCO-SACC-CSN therefore invites the federal government to assume its responsibilities and provide quality linguistic service at the bargaining table with the unions with which it negotiates, as it has done for at least 20 years. We thus reaffirm with great emphasis that this request is necessary for serene and fruitful negotiations. It is a matter of respect of the law, the history of Canada, and the parties.

About the Union

The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO-SACC-CSN) represents over 7500 members in the five major regions of Canada: the Pacific, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, and the Atlantic. UCCO-SACC-CSN represents correctional officers in 49 federal institutions.

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