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Brief on the role for a public broadcaster in the 21st century

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendations from the Independent Media Arts Alliance to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for its investigation of the role for a public broadcaster in the 21st century, an examination of the various services including the adequacy of regional programming and an examination of the issues posed by new media.

- *That the federal government sustain funding to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/Radio-Canada so that it may develop its programming to reflect **all** artistic disciplines and cultural sectors equitably.*
- *That the federal government add specific requirements to ensure that funding to the CBC/Radio-Canada address the regional discrepancies in its programming.*
- *That the federal government invest in new media public broadcasting to advance its mandate in reflecting diverse cultural and indigenous communities and to ensure accessibility to each of these.*
- *That the federal government increase funds to the CBC/Radio-Canada to support the archiving and preservation of the audio/visual works and invest in new media for the dissemination of this material.*

INTRODUCTION

The Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA) is a national association representing over 80 independent film, video, and new media production, distribution, and exhibition organizations across Canada, who in turn serve over 12,000 independent media artists and cultural workers. We have member organizations divided into 5 regions in all 10 provinces, as well as in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. In 2005, the IMAA formally established the National Indigenous Media Arts Coalition (NIMAC), a caucus consisting of aboriginal media artists and organizations across the country.

We would like to thank the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for the opportunity to present this brief on behalf of our members and the diverse communities that we represent.

CBC/Radio-Canada MANDATE

The mandate of the CBC/Radio-Canada as set out in the Broadcasting Act in 1991 clearly expresses the aim to provide quality programming that reflects all facets of Canadian culture and is accessible to all Canadians. In this manner the CBC/Radio-Canada has the important role of producing and disseminating stories, media art works and information about Canadian culture to the world stage. Since 1991, the CBC/Radio-Canada mandate has been met with various levels of success reflected differently in each region and within each cultural sector.

The IMAA positions the CBC/Radio-Canada as being the primary cultural broadcasting institution for Canadian arts and culture. The CBC/Radio-Canada has the essential role of being a place for the production and presentation of independent media art works in addition to being a primary source for the diffusion and promotion of our events, and reporting on our activities. In so doing, the CBC/Radio-Canada is key to audience and market development for the independent media arts sector.

Sector-based and regional discrepancies

The CBC/Radio-Canada is mandated to “actively contribute to the flow and exchange of cultural expression”. There is question on how successful the CBC/Radio-Canada is on fulfilling this part of the mandate with consistency within each region and within each artistic discipline. While in some regions the reporting and support that the CBC/Radio-Canada provides independent media artists and organizations is adequate, in other regions, it is felt that the CBC/Radio-Canada is not providing enough coverage or actively contributing to the independent media arts sector.

Independent media art must be recognized as a fundamental form of cultural expression. The independent media artist chooses to work outside the conventional media industry in order to reflect the true stories from our diverse communities, to illustrate the eclectic landscape of our country, and to foster new, creative ideas to accompany the uses of new technologies. Media art is the visual and audio language of our times. Independent media art is central to our expression of Canadian identity and helps shape our values in relation to inclusiveness, diversity, tolerance and multiculturalism.

As such, the federal government must recognize the vital role it has in supporting public

broadcasting in Canada. The IMAA recommends that the federal government sustain funding to the CBC/Radio-Canada so that it may develop its programming to reflect **all** artistic disciplines and cultural sectors equitably. The IMAA also recommends that the federal government add specific requirements to ensure that funding to the CBC/Radio-Canada address the regional discrepancies in its programming.

Youth and emerging art forms

The growth in the media arts is tremendous, as more and more artists are working in film, video and new media to advance artistic creation and innovation in the 21st century. This is in large part due to the pervasiveness of media as a form of audiovisual expression within our culture.

Canada's youth are exposed to and become familiar with television, the Internet, video, film, and other new technologies long before most other forms of visual communication or artistic production. In view of this "new" reality, many emerging artists are moving to the media arts as a dynamic form of creative expression.

Programs such as *ZeDTV*, and *Socket* (which aired on CBC radio) featured young Canadian art-makers and plugged listeners into current issues and aesthetic concerns of emerging artists. Not only were these programs instrumental in building new audiences, they cultivated a fertile ground for positive discussion about contemporary art. Unfortunately both of these programs have been cancelled. The trend of cutting arts programming when the CBC/Radio-Canada faces funding challenges is shortsighted. The IMAA urges the federal government to acknowledge the long-term benefits of funding public programs that support independent media artists.

Artists benefit by the promotional support and by the direct financial gains that these kinds of programs offer. Whether it is paying royalties to play "Can con" music, or paying for a drama TV series, documentary programming, Canadian artists benefit by these programming initiatives. The IMAA believes that artists must be paid for their work and advises that all forms of programming must reflect this whether it is using new media, radio or television broadcasting.

Audience: regions and language

The IMAA also recommends that the CBC/Radio-Canada place an emphasis on active reporting, to seek out local content and events that highlight the work of emerging artists alongside the more established artists. The CBC/Radio-Canada can go a long way towards promoting emerging artists, artists from diverse cultural backgrounds and indigenous artists. The spin-offs of raising public awareness and appreciation of these works will go a long way in building a sense of community in addition to launching and supporting artists' careers.

Many of the IMAA member organizations and artists working within these centres are funded by the Canada Council for the Arts. A key goal for all sectors within the Council is to develop a broader audience and to raise public awareness and appreciation for the arts. This is also true for the film sector. One of the key goals of the "*From Script to Screen*" policy was to build larger audiences, and aim for 5% of the overall box office. The Canadian government must acknowledge the role that the CBC/Radio-Canada has in reaching and developing new audiences.

The CBC/Radio-Canada has the ability to generate excitement, to feature independent Canadian productions and to report on and present context around current exhibitions, screenings and festivals. In other words, public broadcasting has the vital role of building bridges between the artist and the general public.

The CBC/Radio Canada endeavors to “be in English and in French, reflecting the different needs and circumstances of each official language community, including the particular needs and circumstances of English and French linguistic minorities, and strives to be of equivalent quality in English and in French.”

The available means for subtitling, closed captioning and other forms of versioning need more support. Films need to be accessible to all Canadians. For example the majority films produced in Québec are not distributed outside of the province because they don't have access to a subtitling programme. Also, Canadians with hearing impairments are limited to mostly American commercial films with closed captioning. The government must commit to increasing funding for CBC, the NFB, the Canada Council and Telefilm in order to work towards bridging Canada's two solitudes.

Cultural and Indigenous communities

In certain regions, CBC/Radio-Canada has been very proactive in getting involved with Indigenous and Diverse communities, either with training and development, sponsorships, advertisements, joint programs, and through the CBC/Radio-Canada website. For example in Manitoba, CBC/Radio-Canada participates quite extensively in the First Nations community.

For example, *First Stories* is the result of a new Aboriginal Filmmaker's Program, presented by the National Film Board, CBC Manitoba, MANITOBA FILM & SOUND and Telefilm Canada. It Launched in March 2005, *First Stories* provided 15 emerging Aboriginal filmmakers from across the province the opportunity to take hands-on documentary workshops with experienced professionals. This CBC broadcast showcased the work of three of these Aboriginal filmmakers.

In another example, *Mix Flicks* includes provocative short films by self-styled guerrilla filmmakers from a variety of cultural backgrounds. These mixed flicks showcase countless interesting lives. This aired on CBC Television and some films screened at the 2006 Multiculturalism Day in Manitoba.

The CBC/Radio-Canada sponsors events and festivals that highlight cultural diversity such as the *Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival*. The federal government must recognize the value that such festivals have within their communities that are made possible in large part due to public funding support.

These kinds of programs need to be fostered, increased and strengthened in all regions within Canada. The federal government must invest in programs that support the production and dissemination of Indigenous programming and ensure accessibility to all Canadians. The CBC/Radio-Canada aboriginal web portal is another way for these issues and stories to be made visible to the larger Canadian audience.

The mandate of CBC/Radio-Canada states that it sets out to “actively contribute to the flow and exchange of cultural expression” in addition; to “reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada”. There should be greater emphasis on the specific needs of the Indigenous

communities within Canada and above all, the Indigenous community must be consulted in this process.

Archiving, preservation and dissemination

The preservation and archiving of film, video and new media work is a major concern amongst all media arts organizations. Throughout Canada's media arts centres reside thousands and thousands of valuable works reflecting the history of media arts in Canada.

Audio/video/film collections include experimental, narrative and documentary works by artists; edited and raw recordings of events, processes and sites; historical and cultural documents; workshop experiments; sponsored projects; compilations of local productions; tapes deposited by visiting artists; and compiled programs.

Due to the ongoing funding problems in media arts centres, these archives have not been stored in ideal situations. There are few funding sources accessible for maintaining them. We must, therefore, begin to give serious consideration to how these new forms will be preserved, stored, and accessed, and try to develop a system which will accommodate new works.

In addition, Canada's Indigenous cultural works are in critical need of being preserved. The loss of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage within the Aboriginal Media Arts Community would be a serious loss for Canada, and an even greater loss for humanity. Aboriginal culture is the foundation of Canadian identity. The visual records of our nation are held on videotapes, film reels and other new media formats that must be maintained.

The preservation of this resource is of urgent concern. If the issue is not addressed very soon, we are in real danger of losing this audio-visual heritage forever. We urge the Federal Government to increase support to the CBC/Radio-Canada specifically to expand the process of preservation, archiving, cataloguing, and collection maintenance of Canadian media art works and to invest in new media to make these media works accessible to all Canadians.

New media and the role of public broadcasting

We can identify at least two ways in which the emergence of new media is impacting the way CBC/Radio-Canada is carrying out its mandate. On one side, it is pulling the national public broadcaster into an environment that has different boundaries than those regulating the radio and television sector and enforced by the CRTC. On the other, the prevalence of new media is changing the way Canadians access Canadian content through new platforms.

Satellite, Internet and mobile (cellphone/PDA) broadcasting is a free marketplace environment. As such, it has enabled private broadcasters to disseminate these new practices where the increase of demand, and range of options dominates over "quality" programming. Given this, there is a risk that CBC/Radio-Canada's ability to fulfill its mandate is challenged by a move into a less regulated new media paradigm. As such it will be the vital role of the federal government to fund new media initiatives to ensure Canadian cultural content has a strong presence within these new formats.

The issue of accessibility should also be considered. A more diversified and broad-reaching set of technologies will benefit Canadians. Satellite-based communication networks and portable

access devices are tools that help to bridge northern communities (especially indigenous people) and the more populated southern regions. New formats are presenting the potential for CBC/Radio-Canada to advance and further its mandate.

This being said, it will be important to ensure that no matter which platforms are privileged the content produced and disseminated by the public broadcasters is available across Canada and most importantly to Canadians of all socio-economic backgrounds. More than 50 years after the introduction of cable television in Canada and well past its massive expansion in the 80's, the availability of CBC/Radio-Canada via the airwaves has been a key factor for its success. The federal government must investigate ways of ensuring means and access to all Canadians.

The CBC/Radio-Canada web-based service offering is going to play a key role in its ability to gain a strong foothold in the 21st century media environment. Government funding has enabled CBC/Radio-Canada to have a strong presence on the Internet and must be maintained to ensure that it keeps up with current trends and platforms such as user feedback systems, weblogs, multimedia applications, customizable news alerts, podcasts, mobile/PDA services and RSS feeds. These tools will enable public broadcasters to target audiences on a regional, cultural, ethnic or linguistic basis, while helping to build a national consciousness and identity that reflects our diverse society.

As previously mentioned, the independent media art sector applauds initiatives such as CBC's *ZeD TV* which began in 2002 and unfortunately went "off the air" in 2006. *ZeD TV*, billed as "open source television", applied a series of new ideas revolving around user interactivity and niche programming. For the independent media art sector, *ZeD TV* offered a platform to showcase a vital section of Canadian culture almost entirely left out by the traditional television and radio programming. Other CBC programs maintain podcasts; streaming audio websites, that must continue to be developed and be available online. Not only do these initiatives reach new audiences within Canada, it brings Canadian Content to the world.

Canada is one of the most technologically sophisticated countries, and we are in a position to be at the forefront of the digital media revolution, and it stands to benefit independent media artists, making possible many new economic models for production and marketing.

Finally, we hope to appear in person before the Standing Committee on Heritage, to present additional information in support of our recommendations.

We thank you again for this opportunity.

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