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IHLA 30th Anniversary Message

Honoured dignitaries, IHLA founders and members, ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to be able to attend the thirtieth anniversary of IHLA. Having been present at the 10th, 15th, 20th, and 25th anniversaries I also hope that I will be able to celebrate IHLA's 40th, 50th, 60th and 70th celebrations as well!!

It is said that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. This evening we are here to honor a whole – an organization whose name has changed over the decades but whose whole - whose mission and *raison d'être* - have remained constant. The mission of the Alberta Ethnic Language Teachers Association - AELTA, the Northern Alberta Heritage Language Association – NAHLA, and now the International and Heritage Language Association - IHLA has been to serve a unique purpose in society – the maintenance and development of a nascent Canadian resource – language - and to contribute to the recognition of bilingualism, trilingualism and multilingualism in society and its development among our youth.

By partnering with numerous government and community organizations over the decades, AELTA - NAHLA - IHLA has lobbied and served heritage language teachers through professional development workshops, seminars, certificate programs and university courses for three decades. To do so has called for an unrelenting spirit and conviction and on the occasion of this anniversary beckoned me to pause and take stock. As I reflect on this whole, this organization known as IHLA, I must honour its founding fathers and mothers, many of whom have already been mentioned and several who are here with us today, as well as all who have continued to take on the responsibility for its mission. They embodied courage, foresight and conviction. As John Kenneth Galbraith states in *The Age of Uncertainty*:

All of the great leaders have one characteristic in common: it is the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of the people in their time.

The IHLA founding parents did indeed confront a need of the times – a need for heritage language communities to rally together and make the labour and love of each language community a legacy for all Canadians.

In pausing to take stock the question that comes to me is: to what can we attribute IHLA's success? what has it taken to lead? A quick perusal of leaders in the world offers us insight into why IHLA has succeeded. I have selected seven characteristics of leadership that match IHLA and the wise words of nine world class leaders.

The first and necessary characteristic is vision. In the words of Theodore M. Hesburgh, an American Roman Catholic priest and educator who was devoted to public service¹: ***“The very essence of leadership is that you have to have vision. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet.”***

As I have already stated, the founding parents of AELTA-NAHLA-IHLA had vision. They knew that there was a need to unite as different ethnic communities to support one another's common cause. They also knew that this would mean double the work – everyone would still have to remain active in their own ethnic communities and keep them advancing forward as well as making a contribution to sharing with one another in order to move the unique role of heritage language schools forward on Canada's multicultural agenda.

Second, a leadership organization must have a pioneering spirit. Composed of pioneers – immigrants to Canada or children of immigrants, IHLA's founders and continued membership recognize that a new social and political landscape meant learning new ways to express values of freedom, justice, and equality for which so many of them had worked so hard in their former homelands. They knew that there is much to learn and that only through courage could they succeed. In the words of the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson²:

Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

And we here today are both following that trail and creating new paths for our communities.

The third important characteristic of leading is modeling. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi³:

We must become the change we want to see.

¹ Theodore M. Hesburgh is an American Roman Catholic priest and educator who achieved national prominence through his public-service work. He became president of the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, and transformed it into an institution known and respected for its academic record as well as its athletic one and

² Emerson was a 19th century American essayist, philosopher, poet, and leader of the Transcendentalist movement. An outstanding orator, Emerson was known for the egalitarian respect he conveyed to his audiences.

³ Gandhi led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. He was also the pioneer of the *Satyagraha* philosophy that is concerned with truth and 'resistance to evil through active, non-violent resistance'.

IHLA members know the significance of being the change they want to see, of modeling what they believe is important. They are themselves at least bilingual, raise their children to be at least bilingual and biliterate and nurture language learning, cultural understanding and intercultural dialogue among the youth in their own schools and communities.

The fourth characteristic that great leaders talk about and IHLA embodies is the building of networks and communities. In this room we see two layers of community. At each table people are joined by others from their own language background. As I walked around the room at the beginning of this evening I heard many of these language communities. The second layer of community is that which connects people from these tables – this organization known as IHLA. As the American civil rights activist and Baptist minister Reverend Jesse Jackson put it:

Leadership has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together.

The fifth characteristic of leadership is hope. IHLA is an organization that since its inception has brought hope to its membership communities. As heritage language instructors deal with more and more diversity – from children who do not speak the language of their parents at home to those who are fluent in oral and written language - and face the invisible pressure of becoming anglicized in mainstream daily life, heritage language instructors face the challenge of instilling in them a love of something they cherish. In this poorly paid ‘giving’ endeavour these teachers also need to ‘receive’. From IHLA they receive inspiration and hope: the hope that their labours will yield a bountiful harvest of language, culture and spirit in the next generation.

Yes, IHLA has been a leader for many new immigrants, especially women, who brought teaching credentials and experience with them from their mother countries, and needed to translate them into Canadian credentials. Napoleon Bonaparte has said that ***A leader is a dealer in hope.*** IHLA has dealt hope to these teachers – hope for the value of their language, their future careers and that the values that they have can be passed on to future generations.

Sixth, strength. Let us not forget the important leadership characteristic of strength in the face of adversity. Over IHLA’s 30 year history it has undergone difficult times as well: reductions in government grants, sometimes unstable leadership, the passing of good friends and along with them knowledge and wisdom. . . And this that IHLA has endured has been described well by Max DePree, laureate of the American National Business Hall of Fame: ***Leaders don't inflict pain. They bear pain.***

In bearing pain IHLA as a leadership organization has demonstrated that what ***“we call 'failure' is not the falling down, but the staying down”***, to quote the Academy Award-winning Canadian motion picture star Mary Pickford. IHLA has never failed for it has never stayed down. It has been able to respond to change brought about by technology,

economics and politics by transforming its name, its mandate, its partners and its programs.

The final characteristic of leadership that I would like to mention today comes from the journalist and philosopher Walter Lippmann: a leader *leaves behind him/her in other men [and women] the conviction and the will to carry on*. As we all know, IHLA's future is in this room and in our heritage language schools and it behooves us to carry on IHLA's mission – all of us, from politicians to advisors, from teachers to consultants, from school boards to governments. We must continue in the spirit of AELTA-NAHLA-IHLA's founding parents and demonstrate ongoing vision, pioneering spirit, modeling, networking across and between communities, hope, strength and courage. It is true, as writer and photographer James Baldwin has stated:

Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.

Thank you and once again, happy anniversary, IHLA!!