



QUEBEC REGION

Concerns of the Jewish Community in Quebec

November 2008

Quebec Region

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Concerns of the Jewish Community in Quebec

B'nai Brith Canada is the independent voice of the Jewish community, representing its interests nationwide to government, NGOs and the wider Canadian public. Since 1875, it has been respected for its groundbreaking work on matters relating to antisemitism, racism and human rights, its strong advocacy on the pressing issues of the day, and the important social services it provides.

The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide candidates in the 2008 Quebec provincial election with an understanding of the key issues of concern to B'nai Brith and the Quebec Jewish community, as well as to offer suggestions for addressing these issues. As a non-partisan organization, B'nai Brith Quebec Region is committed to collaborating with the Quebec government, to meeting the needs of the Jewish community and to reaching out to all Quebecers.

I. Reasonable Accommodation

It is apparent from the reaction of Quebec society and the wording of media reports that there exists some confusion about what the term “reasonable accommodation” actually encompasses. The misunderstanding of this concept at its core has served to fuel an unproductive debate and divide Quebec society along minority/religious group lines.

In order to address these misconceptions, B'nai Brith has published an educational guide intended for use by community organizations, government agencies, health care facilities and schools. This pamphlet provides specific information about the legal definition of reasonable accommodation, an overview of how it can be applied, case studies illustrating where it applies and where it is not applicable, as well as information about the misconceptions often associated with the term.

B'nai Brith Canada – Quebec-Region has recently commended the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (CCAPRC) for raising public awareness of the issues relating to reasonable accommodation that have proved divisive within Quebec society and is supportive of many of the suggested recommendations set out in the report.

Recommendations:

1. B'nai Brith urges the Government to implement measures to ensure that the concept of reasonable accommodation is clarified, by working **with groups that have expertise in this area, such as B'nai Brith's League for Human Rights.**
2. **We ask the Government to make available throughout the province relevant resources, such as the League's educational guide on reasonable accommodation.**

II. Combating Racism & Discrimination

a. Antisemitism

Since 1982, B'nai Brith Canada has published its annual *Audit of Antisemitic Incidents*, a systematic analysis of antisemitic activity across Canada. This document is the single most credible source on antisemitism in this country and is consulted by government and law enforcement agencies the world over, including Statistics Canada, the US State Department, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), among others.

The 2007 *Audit* reveals a disturbing trend with 1,042 incidents reported throughout Canada, an increase of 11.4 % from the previous year. The numbers for Quebec highlight this upward trend with 291 of those incidents taking place in the province, representing an increase of 28.8 % over 2006. Furthermore, the numbers for regional Quebec reveal another troubling picture: incidents in that region have increased almost fourfold from 11 in 2006 to 42 in 2007.

These figures, coupled with the number of incidents for 2008 recorded to date, confirms that antisemitism is indeed a continuing threat to the safety and welfare of Canadian Jews at home, at school, on the streets and at work. Throughout 2008, and in particular over the summer months, our Montreal office was inundated by calls regarding incidents of assault and vehemently antisemitic graffiti, including swastikas and other Nazi insignia spray-painted on Jewish community property.

To deal effectively with such incidents of antisemitism, B'nai Brith urges the Quebec Government to take decisive action towards combating not only antisemitism, but all forms of racism. B'nai Brith has a history of successful partnerships with schools and community groups in terms of adopting a zero tolerance policy to antisemitism and racism, and can thus offer crucial resources and training in this area.

Recommendations:

1. B'nai Brith urges the Government of Quebec to increase the vigilance and responsiveness of government officials, police, the courts, school boards, and society as a whole in order to enhance protection for victims of racism and bigotry in the province.
2. B'nai Brith urges the Attorney General of Quebec to become more aggressive in the pressing of hate crime charges pursuant to sections 318 and 319 of the *Criminal Code* against those persons who wilfully incite or promote hatred against identifiable groups distinguished on the basis of colour, race, religion, ethnic origin or sexual orientation.
3. Hate charges should be laid where applicable for the crime of mischief against religious property under section 430(4.1) of the *Criminal Code*, to help ensure as a matter of priority the security of religious institutions of vulnerable at-risk communities.
4. The Attorney General should ensure that the increased sentencing provisions of s. 178 of the *Criminal Code* are applied rigorously.

5. Stringent legislation should be enacted provincially as well as federally to prohibit membership in a racist organization and the display of racist symbols.
6. **A careful examination of legislative amendments is needed to combat the dissemination of hate material**, including Holocaust denial.
7. **All major police forces in the province should have dedicated hate crimes units with specific training in determining and investigating hate-motivated crimes**, so that protective legislation can be enforced and zero tolerance towards hate crimes in Quebec can be promoted,
8. **B'nai Brith recommends that the Quebec Government include mandatory anti-discrimination and anti-violence education in the curriculum of Quebec schools.**
9. Funding should be increased for organizations such as B'nai Brith's League for Human Rights that can assist schools, public sector agencies and community groups to develop curriculum, recognize the warning signs, and take action against hate in their local schools and communities across Quebec.
10. More public funding should be directed to anti-racism initiatives such as the League's *Taking Action Against Hate* training program, which has been successfully offered to thousands of educators, students, law enforcement professionals, public and private sector workers and vulnerable minority groups across the country. Securing this type of program for Quebec schools and communities would put our province in the lead in terms of anti-racism education and encourage a spirit of human rights activism in many sectors of our multicultural society.

b. Hate on the Internet

The growing problem of hate on the Internet was the subject of an international conference that B'nai Brith's League for Human Rights convened in September 2006, which included the participation of experts from Quebec, as well as the rest of Canada and countries around the world. As the world's fastest growing means of telecommunications, the global reach and relative ease of use make the Internet a unique, highly effective tool for the promotion of human rights, with a growing audience worldwide. Unfortunately, the very mechanisms that make the Internet an exciting educational tool also render it a dangerous, albeit efficient, means of promoting hatred against racial and religious minorities. In fact, hate mongers were among the first to realize the tremendous power of the Internet to spread their messages. As a result, the computer is replacing conventional modes of communication as the dominant medium for hate propaganda.

In 2007, the League's Anti-Hate Hotline received 310 reports of web-based hate activity with a Canadian connection in terms of content, perpetrators and/or victims, compared to 254 in 2006 and 164 in 2005. This number is the tip of the iceberg in terms of the proliferation of hate propaganda being disseminated via the Internet. Moreover, because the Internet is oblivious to

international borders, material prohibited by Canadian law flows freely and unchallenged both into and out of this country.

While B'nai Brith understands that addressing the problem of hate on the Internet necessarily involves all levels of government, we urge the Quebec government to take the lead and commit its resources to addressing this increasingly serious problem. A coordinated effort is necessary on several fronts, using all resources available within the framework of protection, partnerships and prevention. In this struggle, our three most powerful tools are the law, community action and education.

Recommendations:

1. We recommend that the Government encourage dialogue between law enforcement professionals, NGOs, educators and Internet service providers as the first step towards ensuring a coordinated approach to fighting Internet hate.
2. Appropriate levels of government funding should be directed to tracking hate and developing blocking software.
3. B'nai Brith suggests the establishment of a task force to study the problem that will include all stakeholders, using as a model the approach taken by the organization in planning for its September 2006 3rd International Symposium on Hate on the Internet.
4. There should be increased efforts to incorporate human rights education into our schools. For example, computer literacy courses need to include strategies to teach impressionable young students how to recognize lies and propaganda, in spite of how credible the purveyors of online hate may try to make them appear.

III. Promoting Tolerance

As a grassroots community organization, providing front-line services to both the Jewish and the non-Jewish community for over 130 years, B'nai Brith understands the critical need to cultivate harmonious intercultural relationships between new immigrants and existing cultural, religious and/or ethnic groups that are already established in the province. The linguistic, ethnic and religious composition of Quebec society is diverse and dynamic. Whether Quebecers identify most strongly with their mother tongue, ethnic origin, religious denomination, or a combination of affiliations, it is apparent that Quebec is a unique multicultural society that seeks to integrate the distinctive identity of its immigrants into its pluralistic society.

As the number of immigrants accepted by Quebec continues to increase, it is important that efforts towards promoting their integration and acceptance in Quebec society are intensified. At present, a wide range of services is available to immigrants upon their arrival, including the opportunity to meet with an integration officer from the Ministère de l'Immigration et des

Communautés culturelles (MICC) and participate in information sessions about settling in Quebec, finding employment, accessing the health care system, among other issues. While concrete assistance towards meeting basic needs is critical for the establishment of newly-arrived immigrants, any orientation should include educational material on the challenges and benefits of living in a multicultural society.

B'nai Brith Canada-Quebec Region has welcomed the Government's inaugural initiative to educate new immigrants about Quebec's democratic values, as unveiled in its action plan for 2008-2012. **The 2008-2012 action plan appears to be an important step towards educating newcomers to Quebec, though we are still waiting to see how this program will be implemented.**

Recommendations:

1. B'nai Brith urges the Government to establish a vigorous educational program for new immigrants, especially those who come from countries with no entrenched democratic traditions, and might import their hatreds and prejudices into Canada,
2. **Funding should be directed to community groups such as the League for Human Rights, so that they can offer additional community-based initiatives focusing on human rights education and diversity training for new immigrants.**

IV. Poverty

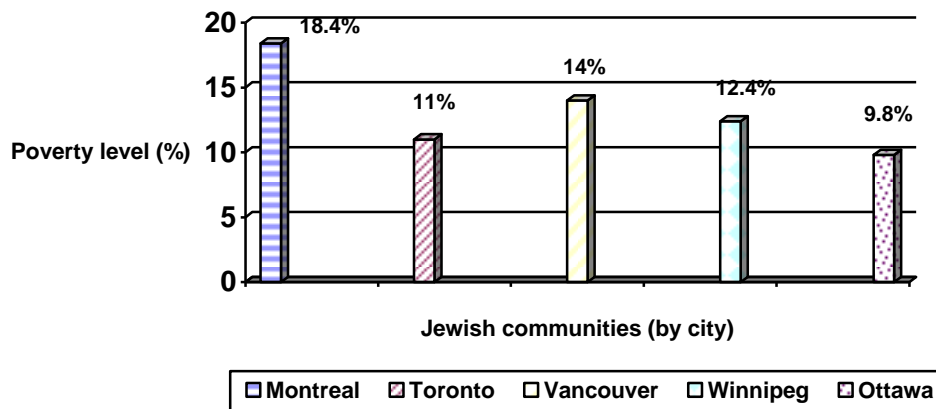
According to the Canadian Association of Food Banks, between 1997 and 2008, the number of people using food banks has increased 6%. Each month over 704,000 hungry Canadians received food from a food bank, illustrating the growing number of people in Canada living in poverty.¹

A case in point is the percentage of economically disadvantaged people that has been steadily rising in the Montreal Jewish community since 1971 and is now the highest of any major Jewish community in Canada.²

¹ Food Banks Canada <http://www.cafb-acba.ca/main2.cfm?id=10718648-B6A7-8AA0-6A3C6F3CAC0124E1>

² Shahar, Charles and Karpman, Susan. 2004. The Jewish Community of Montreal Part IV: The Jewish Poor, 2001 Census Analysis Series, 2004.

The poverty level of major Jewish communities in Canada (2001)



Based on data from The Jewish Community of Montreal Part IV:
The Jewish Poor, 2001 Census Analysis Series.

Demographic research also reveals that the 1981 and 1991 poverty rates were significantly higher for Montreal Jews than both the national Jewish average **as well as the national average for the entire Canadian population.**³ By 2001, 18.4% of the Jewish community or 17,110 people were living in poverty in Quebec.⁴

A more in-depth examination of this demographic group reveals that as many as 20% of the elderly and fully 32% of single parent mothers are considered poor in the Jewish community.⁵

These figures present a stark contrast to the preconceptions held by both Jews and non-Jews regarding the supposed affluence of Jews in our society.

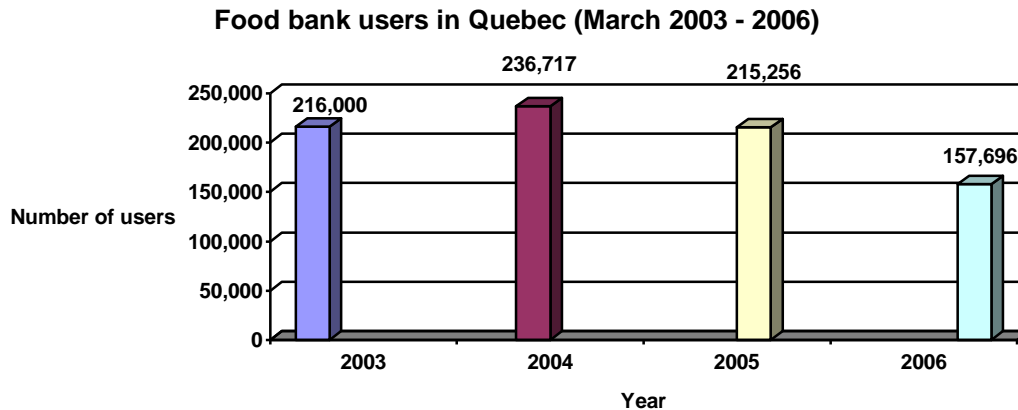
While food bank use in Quebec actually dropped in March 2006 by 26.7%, as many as 41.2% of food banks in the province reported increases this past year, amounting to a 10% increase in the number of people accessing food banks and relying on social assistance as their primary source of income. The number of children accessing food banks increased 9.2% between March 2005 and March 2006, mounting to 43%.⁶

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Shahar, Charles and Susan Karpman. 2004. The Jewish Community of Montreal Part IV: The Jewish Poor, 2001 Census Analysis Series.

⁶ Canadian Association of Food Banks. 2004. Poverty in a land of plenty: Towards a Hunger-Free Canada.



Data taken from the Canadian Association of Food Banks'
Hunger Count 2003-2006

While no statistics are available regarding the use of food banks specific to the Jewish community, it is apparent that Quebec Jews, like other Quebecers living in poverty, rely on food banks to meet their dietary needs. In fact, the cost of living a Jewish lifestyle and maintaining a Kosher diet can add additional financial burdens to Jewish Quebecers trying to meet their basic nutritional needs as well as conform to the practices of their tradition.

Food banks, as well as community food programs, widely accept that their services and initiatives are insufficient for meeting the long-term needs of low-income Quebecers and that the root of food insecurity must be addressed through public policy solutions. However, the use of food banks and food programs continues to grow, illustrating that government action towards reducing poverty and hunger has not yet been able to meet the challenge of providing for the needs of those who must struggle everyday to put food on the table. It is for this reason that B'nai Brith believes that community-based measures must be pursued at the same time as the problem is tackled in a more comprehensive manner by the government. Nutritional adequacy is largely regarded as one of the most important determinants of health, and the role of community-based food programs in helping to alleviate the problem must be recognized and supported.

For more than 60 years, B'nai Brith has delivered food and gift baskets to both Jewish and non-Jewish families in communities across Canada. This year, B'nai Brith-Quebec Region distributed more than 4,000 food baskets to individuals in the Greater Montreal Region, Laval, the South Shore, and Quebec City before the Jewish religious holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Passover. The program also supplies food to Sun Youth, the Generations Program, Multicaf and MADA Community Centre.

The Program operates on a yearly budget of approximately \$150,000, which is raised through the annual B'nai Brith Kosher Food Basket Golf Tournament. Almost 60 volunteers work every evening and weekend leading up to the distribution of the baskets to complete the service. Unlike other charities and food programs, there are no administrative costs for the project. B'nai Brith's well-established food basket program has the potential to reach many more families and individuals in crisis than it does at present. The organizational structure of the program in place is only limited by its financial resources.

While the political will to fully implement legislation aimed at reducing hunger is critical in the fight to eliminate poverty, there is still a need to address this issue concretely and immediately.

Recommendations:

B'nai Brith urges the Government to allocate **government funding to the food basket program, which would allow the organization to expand the number of people to whom it provides food, as well as to increase the number of times per year it can offer its service.** This would reduce the number of people in the province who are forced to confront poverty and hunger on a daily basis.

V. Housing

The need to provide affordable housing to families, seniors, individuals and people with disabilities continues to be ongoing and pressing.

Steady increases to the cost of housing coupled with a scarcity of affordable housing, particularly in areas where a significant number of poor Jewish individuals live, has created an untenable situation for many individuals. Evidence of this phenomenon is apparent when it was reported in 2001 that one in four tenant households in Montreal – a total of 163,415 households – were paying 50% or more of their income on rents.⁷ In the case of low-rent dwellings, some 15,000 applicants are on a waiting list for a low-rent dwelling. About 2,000 dwellings become available each year, resulting in a waiting time of more than 7 years.⁸

This trend appears to be holding, with data from the 2006 Canadian Census revealing that 245,755 of tenant households in Quebec are paying between 30% and 50% of their income on rents, 116,010 between 50% and 80% and 87,075 more than 80%. These figures correspond to the 35.8% of the total number of tenants in Quebec, showing no significant change of percentage or improvement since 2001 (35.9%).⁹

Nowhere is the housing crisis more significant than among the Jewish elderly, where a total of 4,210 (21% of the Jewish community) individuals live below the poverty line according to the most recent census analysis available.¹⁰

Disabled and poor seniors are also among those individuals vulnerable to economic disadvantages. In Montreal, the percentage of disabled persons among elderly Jews is 37.9%,

⁷ National Housing and Homelessness Network. 2001. *A report on Housing and Homelessness in Canada*.

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ Statistics Canada, [2006 Census of Population](#).

¹⁰ Shahar, Charles and Tobman, Harriet. 2004. *The Jewish Community of Montreal Part III: The Jewish Elderly*. 2001 Census Analysis Series.

which includes 2,140 (10.6% of the Jewish community) seniors who are disabled and live alone.¹¹

As part of B'nai Brith Canada's time-honoured commitment to serving the needs of the community, an affordable housing program was established in 1979 with the assistance of all three levels of government.

In 2004, *Residence B'nai Brith House* was created to respond to the increasing need for social housing among members of the Jewish community. The goal of B'nai Brith House is to provide housing for low and modest income seniors, as well as those challenged by immobility, isolation or frailty. The project provides 85 one-bedroom, and 10 two-bedroom apartments in a conveniently located area in Montreal.

Evidence of the need for this type of housing is apparent when one considers that without any advertising or media campaign, B'nai Brith received more than four applications for every available apartment. The building was officially opened in June 2006 and was filled to capacity within weeks. At present a waiting list of more than 200 people exists and discussions regarding the possibility of building another senior's residence are underway.

The building of *Residence B'nai Brith* would not have been possible without the assistance of the Quebec Government's AccèsLogis Québec program, as well as the City of Montreal and generous donations from B'nai Brith supporters.

Providing low-income seniors with affordable housing options where they can live safely and independently significantly reduces the probability that they will suffer from isolation, malnourishment and illness. Maintaining seniors in the community also alleviates the strain on the health care system by reducing the likelihood that they will require admission to more costly assisted-living arrangement or nursing home facilities. In addition, providing services that meet the religious and cultural needs of the residents offers an enhanced quality of life that greatly increases their overall well being and emotional health.

Recommendations:

1. B'nai Brith urges the Quebec Government to facilitate the construction of affordable housing by increasing the financial assistance available to non-profit organizations wishing to undertake such community-based social assistance projects.
2. B'nai Brith also urges the Government to expand the number of apartment units eligible for rent subsidies beyond the current 50% limit under Section I and II of the Rent Supplement Program. We believe that the government could significantly reduce the severity of this problem by offering rent subsidies for 75% or more of the units in low-rental housing.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Synopsis of B'nai Brith Canada's Activities

i. WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO

B'nai Brith Canada is the Jewish community's foremost human rights agency, operating in this country since 1875. Its team of dedicated volunteers and professional staff is engaged in combating antisemitism, bigotry and racism in Canada and abroad. Its wide-ranging educational and social programming, charitable work and human rights initiatives, demonstrate its commitment to the principle of "People Helping People".

B'nai Brith Canada is the Jewish community's only independent, self-funded, national organization. Its popular-based grassroots support consists of thousands of Canadian families with diverse backgrounds and interests, empowering the organization to speak on their behalf on key issues of concern to the Jewish community.

Through its field services offices, B'nai Brith Canada coordinates a national network of regional offices and lodges. B'nai Brith members are located in the following communities:

Brantford	London	
Calgary	Medicine Hat	Sarnia
Cape Breton	Mississauga	Sudbury
Cote St. Luc	Montreal	St. Catharines
Edmonton	Moose Jaw	St. John's
Fredericton	North York	Timmins
Guelph	Oshawa	Town of Mount Royal
Halifax	Ottawa	Toronto
Hamilton	Peterborough	Ville St. Laurent
Kingston	Portage La Prairie	Westmount
Kitchener	Port Huron	Windsor
Lethbridge	Regina	Winnipeg
	Saskatoon	

ii. DEPARTMENTS OF B'NAI BRITH CANADA

CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

The Centre is responsible for recruiting members across Canada, who form the core of a network of B'nai Brith lodges across the country. Through this network, the Centre initiates many diverse and creative social programs that address local needs, and co-sponsors a variety of activities with social agencies and community groups. Its program of Volunteer Services provides diverse social action programs in support of the aged, the physically and emotionally challenged and

others in need, such as its Affordable Housing Programs in Toronto and Montreal, and a free-standing Alzheimer's Home in Toronto.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS OFFICE

This office liaises regularly with members of parliament, civil servants, ambassadors and opinion-makers residing in the nation's capital, providing a strong voice on issues of concern to the community. B'nai Brith's leadership meets regularly with Canadian politicians and government ministers to discuss issues of concern to the Jewish community, and to present the organization's positions on the key issues of the day, both national and international.

LEAGUE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The League for Human Rights works to combat antisemitism, racism and bigotry, providing training on multiculturalism, human rights education, harassment and equity issues. It operates a 24/7 Anti-Hate Hotline (1-800-892-BNAI [2624]) for victims of antisemitic incidents, and publishes an annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents. League members interact with the community, the police, synagogues and schools, legal and legislative experts, and government agencies. Its outreach activities and educational initiatives are geared toward fostering positive inter-community dialogue, for example, through its Black-Jewish Dialogue, Women's Interfaith Dialogue and interaction with the aboriginal community.

INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

B'nai Brith Canada created the Institute for International Affairs to monitor human rights abuses worldwide. It advocates on behalf of Jewish communities in distress, and intervenes at both the governmental level and at international fora on a wide range of issues, whether political, religious, or cultural. The Institute conducts periodic fact-finding missions, and partners with other human rights organizations and academic institutions. It provides public lectures, confidential briefings and in-depth publications on issues relating to the safety and security of the State of Israel and the Middle East conflict in general.

CANADA-ISRAEL PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE (CIPAC)

The mandate of CIPAC is to encourage positive Canada-Israel relations through a progressive activist agenda involving all sectors of the community. CIPAC, which works in conjunction with the Institute for International Affairs, has committed itself to holding a series of nation-wide town hall meetings each year to elicit input from the community on issues affecting Canada-Israel relations.

CAMPUS DESK

B'nai Brith professionals provide advice, assistance and resources for beleaguered students on campus, who face vehement anti-Israel campaigns and rising antisemitism. B'nai Brith also assists students in their own Israel-related activities, by providing research and educational

materials, as well as expert speakers on a wide range of issues. The organization offers internships to students, and training in the areas of human rights and international affairs.

LEGAL DEPARTMENT

The Legal Department works closely with League and Institute professionals to provide an integrated approach to the organization's human rights work. The Department advises on the legal ramifications of proposed domestic and international legislation relating to issues such as hate, racism, citizenship, terrorism, and human rights. It also provides a mentorship program for *pro bono* law students.

THE JEWISH TRIBUNE

The *Jewish Tribune*, the weekly newspaper published by B'nai Brith, covers the key issues of relevance to the Canadian Jewish community. With the largest circulation in Canada of any Anglo-Jewish paper, it reports on events across the country in an honest and forthright manner, and solicits opinions from a wide variety of Canadian stakeholders, spanning the political, cultural, and social arenas.

SPORTS CORPORATION

B'nai Brith Canada offers its members an opportunity to participate in diverse sporting events. Through its rapidly expanding baseball, hockey, basketball, soccer and bowling leagues, athletes of all ages share in the camaraderie and social events that are part of the dynamic sports network. B'nai Brith Sports is also heavily involved in national and international tournaments, including the first annual B'nai Brith Israel Classic, which featured the Israeli Junior National Hockey Team. B'nai Brith Sports demonstrates the value of good sportsmanship, and is open to Jewish men and women at least 18 years of age who are members of the organization.

THE FOUNDATION

The B'nai Brith Foundation is responsible for raising the funds that enable the organization to realize its continuing commitment to the ideal of "People Helping People". With the assistance of a dedicated volunteer base, the Foundation generates the financial support that secures the present and future viability of services and programs that enrich the community. An independent charitable organization, B'nai Brith relies on the generosity of individuals to realize its goals, and assist the organization in maintaining its commitment to the next generation of members. The Foundation was proud to honor E. Hunter Harrison, President and CEO of CN in 2006, Diane Giard, Senior Vice President, Quebec and Eastern Ontario Region, ScotiaBank and Jacques Maurice, Investment Executive ScotiaMcLeod, Head of Investment Advisory Services Scotia Private Client Group, in 2007, as well as Robert E. Brown, President and CEO of CAE Inc. in 2008, for their distinguished records of community service and extraordinary contributions furthering core Canadian values, such as democracy and human rights.