

Private broadcasters: Ensuring a reflection of Canada's diversity

Canada is home to almost four million individuals who identify themselves as cultural, ethnic and racial minorities—and this minority population is growing much faster than the total population. Aboriginal peoples' share of Canada's population is on the rise: 1.3 million people report having at least some Aboriginal ancestry.

Canadian private television broadcasters are committed to reflecting the diverse communities they serve and practising cooperation, respect and openness towards all segments of society.

In August 2001, referencing changes to Canada's demographic landscape, the CRTC called on the CAB through Public Notice 2001-88, to prepare an action plan for defining issues and sponsoring research with the goal of identifying industry "best practices" for ensuring the fair, accurate and non-stereotypical portrayal of Canada's cultural, ethnic and racial minorities and Aboriginal groups on television.

The CAB responded by creating the Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television, comprised of both industry and non-industry members, that would examine the state of cultural diversity on Canadian television.

The Task Force is co-chaired by Madeline Ziniak, Vice-President and Station Manager for Toronto's Omni Television, representing the broadcast industry, while the non-industry co-chair is Beverly J. Oda, a former CRTC Commissioner, who also chaired the Commission's Task Force reviewing sex-role stereotyping. Other Task Force members include Stefany Mathias, a writer and actor for television and feature films as well as a hereditary Chief of the Squamish Nation; Marie Anna Murat, a journalist with RDI and the first broadcast journalist

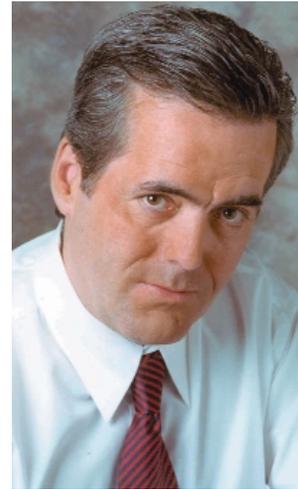
of Haitian descent to anchor a prime-time national newscast for Quebec's largest francophone television network; Raj Rasalingam, President of the Pearson-Shoyama Institute (PSI), a national public policy think tank; Elaine Ali, Senior Vice-President, CTV Stations Group; Sarah Crawford, Vice-President Public Affairs—CHUM Television; Rita Cugini, Vice President, Regulatory Affairs and Business Development for Alliance Atlantis Communications; and Pierre Lampron, President of TVA films (a division of Groupe TVA) and former President of TV5.

On July 4, 2002, the Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television held its inaugural meeting. It established the need to select an expert consultant to assist in the development of a research strategy. There was consensus among Task Force members that the project needed to be both relevant and practical in advancing the reflection and portrayal of Canada's cultural, ethnic and racial diversity within the broadcasting industry.

In addition to conducting a content analysis on the current state of cultural diversity on television, the Task Force will develop a set of industry-best practices that will address issues relating to on-screen portrayal and stereotyping, as well as behind the scenes program production, acquisition and commissioning, media education, industry and community outreach and equitable recruitment, hiring and training opportunities.

In February 2003, the Task Force announced that Solutions Research Group Consultants Inc. (SRG), a Toronto-based market research consulting firm, and Johnston and Buchan, LLP, would be conducting the research component of the initiative. This research on cultural diversity will be one of the most comprehensive projects of its kind ever done, anywhere.

Working with the research team, the Task Force will, over the next few months, be conducting a five-phase research strategy which includes a summary of national



Glenn O'Farrell is President and CEO of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters. He can be contacted by phone at (613) 233-4035 or by e-mail at cab@cab-acr.ca.

and international research and literature on cultural diversity and related initiatives, a review of existing best practices on cultural diversity both within and outside the broadcasting sector, and an in-depth content analysis of Canadian programming that will be supported by one-on-one interviews with relevant stakeholders and viewer focus groups.

The Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television has been proactive in ensuring that its study reflects the scope of issues outlined in the CRTC's Public Notice. When speaking about the Task Force's mandate, Beverly Oda said that "Canadian society is increasingly becoming racially and culturally diverse and our role is to commission research that will help define the issues and present practical solutions that contribute to television programming that accurately reflects cultural and racial minorities and Aboriginal peoples and communities."

The CAB places great value and importance to the work and efforts of the Task Force and has every confidence that its work will result in a stronger and healthier Canadian television system. Madeline Ziniak reiterated this by saying that "this is an increasingly important issue that needs to be examined. Broadcasters and communities alike respect the need for the reflection of today's Canada."