



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**for immediate release**

### **Canadians Deem National Volunteer Service Indispensable in Engaging Youth**

**Montréal, June 26, 2008** – According to a recent national survey of public attitudes conducted by EKOS, more than eight in ten Canadians feel that national volunteer service creates a culture of active citizenship and civic participation. Almost nine in ten feel that a term of full time national volunteer service improves the communities where youth volunteer. Moreover, three in four Canadians feel that volunteer service provides youth with clearer direction for post-secondary education.

Because of the steady decline in the number of citizens actively volunteering and in particular the disengagement of youth from the democratic process, Canadians feel it is important for the Government of Canada to implement a national youth service strategy that will put «national youth service» on a sound footing, with stable federal funding support.

Adopting a national policy would allow more youth and more communities to benefit from social, civic, and community-building programs. This could provide for the number of young Canadian volunteers to attain the same level, per capita, as does the American US Civilian Conservation Corps and Americorps. Over its 30 year history, Katimavik has provided over 28,000 youths with opportunities to serve, however, the current capacity is only part of the annual demand for participation.

“I am delighted by the high level of support revealed by the survey,” stated Robert Giroux, Chairman of Katimavik’s board of directors. “These results reflect the belief that Canadians, including our youth, have a civic responsibility to better their communities. This belief is consistent with the view that the federal government should make it a priority to establish a volunteer youth service strategy in order to consolidate and stabilize funding for organisations that create these opportunities,” concluded Giroux.

A policy at the national level would provide an integrated, inter-disciplinary and coherent strategy, thus resulting in an environment that fosters lifelong active citizenry for the benefit of society. The government could provide the framework that would lead to the harmonization of all related policies directly and indirectly affecting young people and their development as valuable members of society. While Canada offers national service opportunities to a certain number of Canadian youths annually, it does so outside of the context of a national policy.

“A strong national youth service policy would produce visible evidence of our commitment to ensure that this vital segment of our population is included into the socio-economic life of our society,” commented Jean-Guy Bigeau, Executive Director for Katimavik. “The federal government, in collaboration with non government organisations involved in youth development, should create a long-term implementation strategy. Such an initiative would benefit all Canadians while supporting and strengthening the voluntary sector across the country,” Bigeau added.

For further information on Katimavik or to get a copy of the EKOS survey, please visit [www.katimavik.org](http://www.katimavik.org)

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### **About Katimavik**

During their nine-month service experience, participants aged 17 to 21, live in three Canadian communities, where they volunteer 35 hours a week for a variety of non-profit host organizations. Everyday life consists of living with ten other young people from across the country, along with a project leader. The staff member provides supervision and facilitates the implementation of structured learning programs through a series of workshops and activities pertaining to leadership skills development, learning our official languages, environmental stewardship, experiencing cultural diversity and integration first-hand, as well as adopting a healthier lifestyle. The intent of the program is to shape responsible citizens while contributing significantly to the social and economic development of Canadian communities. In 2006-2007, 957 participants contributed the equivalent of 743,997 volunteer work hours to over 700 non-profit organizations. The value of these volunteer hours is estimated at \$11,630,000.<sup>1</sup>

1. Calculated using the average wage in the volunteer sector, according to Statistics Canada.

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