

Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship

Canadian citizens have rights and responsibilities. These come to us from our history, are secured by Canadian law, and reflect our shared traditions, identity and values.

Canadian law has several sources, including laws passed by Parliament and the provincial legislatures, English common law, the civil code of France and the unwritten constitution that we have inherited from Great Britain.

Together, these secure for Canadians an 800-year old tradition of ordered liberty, which dates back to the signing of **Magna Carta** in 1215 in England (also known as the Great Charter of Freedoms), including:

- Freedom of conscience and religion;
- Freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of speech and of the press;
- Freedom of peaceful assembly; and
- Freedom of association.

Habeas corpus, the right to challenge unlawful detention by the state, comes from English common law.

The Constitution of Canada was amended in 1982 to entrench the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which begins with the words,

“Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law.” This phrase underlines the importance of religious traditions to Canadian society and the dignity and worth of the human person.

The Charter attempts to summarize fundamental freedoms while also setting out additional rights. The most important of these include:

- **Mobility Rights** — Canadians can live and work anywhere they choose in Canada, enter and leave the country freely, and apply for a passport.
- **Aboriginal Peoples’ Rights** — The rights guaranteed in the Charter will not adversely affect any treaty or other rights or freedoms of Aboriginal peoples.
- **Official Language Rights and Minority Language Educational Rights** — French and English have equal status in Parliament and throughout the government.
- **Multiculturalism** — A fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity. Canadians celebrate the gift of one another’s presence and work hard to respect pluralism and live in harmony.



Queen Elizabeth II proclaiming the amended Constitution, Ottawa, 1982