

February 6, 2014

## Swap Café Celebrates International Mother Language Day at the Royal BC Museum

Victoria, BC — International Mother Language Day is Feb. 21. To mark the occasion, the Royal BC Museum is hosting a Swap Café interactive community dialogue to raise awareness of the many First Nations languages and dialects that make up the rich cultural tapestry of British Columbia.

As home to 34 First Nations languages, BC is the most linguistically diverse region in Canada. Although there was a significant historical disruption of these languages, many of the once-fading tongues still have a strong and growing core of fluent speakers. In this *Swap Café: Language, Identity and Culture*, four linguistic experts will be swapping their thoughts and ideas with participants on the complexity of these languages and efforts to document and revitalize them.

On the panel will be John Elliott, a master speaker of SENĆOTEN, the language of the Saanich First Nations group, and Shaylene Boechler, endangered languages project manager for the First Peoples Cultural Council. Also joining the dialogue are Dr. Suzanne Gessner, University of Victoria professor in the Indigenous Language Revitalization Program and Dr. Lorna Williams, who holds a Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Knowledge and Learning.

The Swap Café session is taking place in anticipation of the *Our Living Languages: First Peoples' Voices in BC* exhibition, opening in June. Developed in partnership with the First Peoples' Cultural Council, the 300 sq. m (3200 sq. ft) exhibition will provide visitors with an opportunity to learn about the important role of First Nations communities and their languages in this province's history. Visitors will come to a new realization about the importance of language diversity and the renewed future for First Nations languages.

International Mother Language Day is observed globally to increase awareness for the preservation of languages and to celebrate their diversity. The event commemorates the day in 1952 when four students were killed in Pakistan while fighting for the right to use their mother tongue, Bengali.

Tickets for this Swap Café event, on Friday, Feb. 21 from 7 to 9 p.m., are \$5 and are available in advance, online, at the Royal BC Museum Box Office, or at the door beginning at 6:30 p.m. For more information visit [www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca](http://www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca) or call 250-356-7226.

### About the Royal BC Museum

As the provincial museum and archives, the Royal BC Museum explores the province's human history and natural history, advances new knowledge and understanding of BC, and provides a dynamic forum for discussion and a place for reflection. Through collections, research, presentations and partnerships, the museum and archives tell the stories of BC in ways that enlighten, stimulate and inspire. Its two-hectare cultural precinct in Victoria includes a number of historically significant buildings and First Nations sites.

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