

Introduction to the country's legal system

Canada is a federal State made up of 10 provinces¹ and 3 territories². As a federal State, it has both a federal parliament in Ottawa to make laws in matters of national interest for all of Canada, and a legislature in each province and territory to deal with local matters. The legislative authority of the provincial and federal governments arises from Canada's *Constitution Act, 1867*. For more information on the division of powers, please see The Constitutional Distribution of Legislative Powers at: <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/aia/index.asp?lang=eng&page=federal&sub=legis&doc=legis-eng.htm>

Canada is a bijural State where the common law and civil law coexist. The common law tradition applies throughout Canada in all matters of public law (e.g. criminal law, administrative law) and in all of the provinces and territories except the province of Québec. The civil law applies in Québec in all matters of private law, including matters of family and child law.

Canada is a bilingual State with English and French as its two official languages.³ The federal Parliament adopts and publishes legislation in both official languages, and both versions are equally authoritative.

Aboriginal peoples in Canada also contribute to our legal system. Aboriginal rights and treaty rights are recognized and protected under the Constitution. Self-government agreements set out arrangements for Aboriginal groups to govern their internal affairs and assume greater responsibility and control over the decision making that affects their communities. Self-government agreements address: the structure and accountability of Aboriginal governments, their law-making powers, financial arrangements and their responsibilities for providing programs and services to their members.

For more information on Canada's legal system, see **Canada's System of Justice** at: <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/eng/dept-min/pub/just/>

¹ British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Québec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador.

² Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut.

³ There are eleven official languages in the Northwest Territories (English, French, Inuvialuktun, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Chipewyan, Dogrib, Cree, Gwich'in, North Slavey and South Slavey) and four official languages in Nunavut (English, French Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun).