

The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, C.P., C.C., C.M.M., C.O.M., C.D.

detailed biography



Michaëlle Jean was elected Secretary General for La Francophonie on November 30, 2014, at the 15th Summit of la Francophonie.

Michaëlle Jean was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in 1957. In 1968, she immigrated to Canada with her parents, one of thousands of families fleeing the dictatorial regime of François Duvalier. Emigration and the pain of being uprooted become part of her experience.

Quebec becomes her new homeland. At the Université de Montréal, after a Bachelor of Arts in modern literature and languages (Italian and Spanish), she completes her Master's in Comparative Literature and teaches Italian language and literature. Three scholarships allow her to pursue her studies at the University of Perugia, the University of Florence, and the Catholic University of Milan. Ms. Jean is fluent in five languages: French, English, Italian, Spanish, Creole, and she reads Portuguese.

Concurrent to her studies, Ms. Jean works for 10 years building a wide network of emergency shelters for battered women and their children, throughout Quebec and in other Canadian provinces.

Her marriage to filmmaker, essayist and philosopher Jean-Daniel Lafond creates a new bond, from the heart, with France, land of culture where he comes from. The couple has a daughter: Marie-Éden, born in Haiti. Michaëlle Jean's life is thus intimately linked to the South and the North, the Old Continent and the New World.

She also takes part in documentary films produced by her husband: "*A State of Blackness: Aimé Césaire's Way*", "*Tropic North*", "*Haiti in All Our Dreams*", and "*Last Call for Cuba*", all of which earned awards in Canada, and internationally.

From 1988 to 2005, Michaëlle Jean enjoys an outstanding career as a journalist, presenter and news anchor for the Canadian public broadcasting corporation, Radio-Canada in French, and the English network CBC Newsworld. Her accomplishments in journalism earn her numerous awards.

On September 27, 2005, Michaëlle Jean becomes the 27th Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada. The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean crisscrosses Canada's provinces and territories tirelessly. From coast to coast to coast, she nurtures dialogue and solidarity, encouraging field initiatives from civil society, stimulating constructive synergies, advocating for the disadvantaged, paying special attention to youth. Canadians everywhere ask to see her, as she dedicates more time to meet and encounter her fellow citizens, to hear and be heard, to build bridges and to further the creation of pan-Canadian action networks. As Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Armed Forces, she maintains a strong presence among them. She travels to Afghanistan to salute their valour, and attends with compassion to the families of those killed in action, and the wounded. Governor General Michaëlle Jean puts Canada's international profile at the core of her actions with much passion. Over the five years of her mandate, she leads some forty missions and State visits abroad: in Afghanistan, China, ten African countries, nine countries of the Americas, and over ten European countries.

The memory of her roots never leaves her. On January 12, 2010, a terrible earthquake devastates the country of her birth, taking 300,000 lives. The outpouring of solidarity from Canada is unprecedented. In October 2010, her mandate as Governor General coming to an end, she agrees without hesitation to serve until October 2014 as UNESCO Special Envoy for Haiti. For four years, she devotes all her energy and all her powers of persuasion to support the post-earthquake reconstruction efforts and the will of Haitian men and women to end dependency on foreign aid.

Michaëlle Jean is convinced that youth is a force and a hope for every country. That is why she cofounded with her husband the Michaëlle Jean Foundation, whose programs serve to inspire and empower, through the arts and culture, at-risk youth in Canada; means through which she furthers the mission of solidarity and civic responsibility that has always directed her life.

From 2012 to 2015, Michaëlle Jean agrees to serve as Chancellor of the University of Ottawa, the largest bilingual French and English campus in the world. She promotes a major program of partnership, joint supervision (cotutelle) and joint graduation (co-diplomation) with other universities of the Francophonie dedicated to building capacity, knowledge and professionalization.

Michaëlle Jean has long been a vocal proponent of the Francophonie, as she showed when she filled with vibrancy and great rigour the role of Grand Témoin de la Francophonie at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, following a request by the Secretary General of the International Organisation of La Francophonie, in 2010.

Titles and Awards

The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean holds the following official titles: Member of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada (C.P.), Companion of the Order of Canada (C.C.), Commander of the Order of Military Merit (C.M.M.), Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces (C.O.M.) and the Canadian Forces Decoration (C.D.).

On July 13, 2011, France elevates Ms. Jean to the dignified rank of the Grand Cross, the highest distinction granted by the order of the Legion of Honour, in recognition of "her acute awareness of the rights and freedoms that she defends on all fronts", her "deep sense of solidarity", "her unwavering courage to fight the injustices of this world", her "strong connection with France" and her "eminent contribution to Franco-Canadian friendship".

On June 30, 2014, the country of Benin elevates Ms. Jean to the rank of Grand Cross of the National Order of Benin. On April 14, 2015, Cameroon honours and decorates her with the distinction of Grand Officer of the Order of Valour of Cameroon. On June 17, 2016, the President of the Republic of Mali elevates in turn Michaëlle Jean to the honour of Grand Cross of the National Order of Mali, the country's highest distinction, as an expression of gratitude for the role of the Secretary General of La Francophonie in supporting Mali through its current crisis.

In 2003, the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie had highlighted her outstanding merit by naming her to the Ordre des Chevaliers de La Pléiade. The City of Montréal and the Ministère de l'Immigration et des relations avec les citoyens du Québec also made her an Honorary citizen.

In 2009, Michaëlle Jean was awarded the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Canada Award for her outstanding contribution in advancing gender equality. That same year, she received the Board of Governors Recognition Achievement Award from the National Quality Institute for her contribution to the quality of life of Canadians, and humanity.

In 2011, the Universities Fighting World Hunger international network launched the Michaëlle Jean Award granted to students who have made a major contribution to combating hunger in an emergency relief situation.

Honorary Doctorates

A number of universities have conferred honorary doctorates recognizing her commitments and accomplishments:

- University of Ottawa (2006);
- University of Foreigners of Perugia in Italy (2006);
- McGill University (2006);
- York University (2007);
- University of Manitoba (2007);
- University of Alberta (2008);
- Université de Moncton (2009);
- Université Laval (2009);
- Royal Military College of Canada (2010);
- Université de Montréal (2010), her alma mater;
- University of Guelph (2011);
- University of Calgary (2011);
- The Law Society of Upper Canada (2012);
- Carleton University (2012);
- École normale supérieure de Lyon (2012);
- DePaul University of Chicago (2013);
- NorQuest College (2013);
- Laurentian University (2014);
- University of Yaounde I – Cameroon (2015).