*Check against delivery*

**APPEARANCE BEFORE ETHI COMMITTEE**

**OPENING REMARKS – MARCH 7, 2023**

J’aimerais d’abord vous remercier

de m’avoir invitée une fois de plus à me présenter devant votre comité

dans le cadre de votre étude du système d’accès à l’information et de la protection des renseignements personnels.

During my last appearance before this committee,

I noted that I was looking forward to the conclusion of the Government’s review

of the access to information regime,

which was launched in 2020.

Last December,

the Government finally released the final report

on its review.

After such a long wait,

what I read was honestly disappointing.

I posted a statement expressing my dissatisfaction with the government’s report

on my office’s website.

In my view,

this report is deficient across the board.

But in the interest of time,

I will limit my focus to a couple of key points.

Je me réjouis du fait que le gouvernement

a tenu compte des préoccupations que j’ai soulevées

concernant les longs délais de consultation entre les institutions, l’absence d’un cadre de déclassification et

les répercussions néfastes qui en découlent

sur le système d’accès.

Cependant,

je trouve regrettable

qu’aucune mesure concrète n’ait été proposée

pour accompagner l’analyse du gouvernement.

Indeed,

I find few–if any–tangible commitments within the report’s pages that will begin to effect change now

in areas that require immediate attention.

More importantly,

it appears that the Government has decided no further modifications to the law are to be made,

at least not in the near term.

When the 2019 amendments were introduced,

I noted that these represented a step in the right direction,

but that more changes would be required.

Many legislative changes that have been proposed by experts in their submissions to the review

merit the Committee’s careful consideration.

These include recommendations to:

* broaden the scope of the *Access to Information Act* to cover Ministers’ offices as well as the Prime Minister’s Office
* make Cabinet confidences subject to the Act,

and

* reduce the scope of some exemptions, including section 21 on Advice and recommendations.

Par ailleurs,

je doute que le renforcement du droit d’accès à l’information

de la population canadienne

figure au nombre des priorités financières du gouvernement.

Le fait que l’accès à l’information soit absent des lettres de mandat des ministres

et que je n’ai pas eu de nouvelles de la part du gouvernement concernant ma demande de financement supplémentaire

est très révélateur.

On the topic of funding,

I strongly believe that a model that gives the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister

the power to limit the required funding of Agents of Parliament

is contrary to our oversight role.

As agents of Parliament,

we report directly to Parliament

rather than to the Cabinet or a particular minister.

Frankly, the manner in which we are funded

should reflect this independence.

My priority has always been to tackle our inventory

and I have been able to significantly increase my office’s efficiency since I became Commissioner,

as shown in the reference document I submitted to this committee.

But we have reached the limit of what we can do

with the budget provided.

The Government may have turned the page on access to information,

but I have not,

which is why I look forward to the results of this committee’s study.

In closing,

July 2023 marks the 40th Anniversary

of the *Access to Information Act*.

On the eve of this milestone, I unfortunately see little to celebrate.

Le Canada a encore beaucoup à faire pour se mettre au diapason des normes internationales en matière d’accès et de transparence ainsi que pour affronter les difficultés considérables qui pèsent sur le système.

Je vais m’arrêter ici et je vais maintenant répondre à vos questions avec plaisir.