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Study advocates media bridges to cross linguistic and racial divides

A new Simon Fraser University study commends BC's thriving multicultural media for helping immigrants adapt to Canadian society, but recommends stronger connections between ethnic news services in order to improve intercultural understanding and collective citizenship.

Catherine Murray, a researcher in SFU's Centre for Policy Studies on Culture and Communities, says the study, *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Media in BC*, "awards high marks to ethnic media for helping their audiences bridge 'here' and 'home'. But given that BC has one of the highest rates of immigration and cultural change in the country, we urgently need to promote stronger links between the various linguistic and cultural groups."

With support from the Department of Canadian Heritage, Murray's team tracked 144 Vancouver-based news media outlets in 22 languages over a representative month. Among their findings:

- Ethnic media offer balanced geographical coverage of international and local news, but little national or provincial news
- Ethnic media are better than English-language media at covering so-called "news you can use": accessible stories about social and cultural policies, immigration laws and regulations, healthcare and education
- There are vast linguistic and racial divides: headlines reflect very different news priorities among the ethnic communities, and Mandarin, Cantonese, Punjabi, or Korean media in particular include little cross-cultural reporting in their news coverage
- International news relevant to BC's ethnic communities is thin in English-only media
- BC's ethnic media market is large and competitive: nine new newspapers launched during the study period (Sept.-June 2007), and a third of all ethnic media outlets were started since 2000. Korean and Iranian print media are the fastest-growing sector of the industry
- Co-ventures on news exchanges between ethnic and English media are increasing
- Multicultural reality is either under- or misrepresented in BC's English-only media

Murray says the study recommends independent monitoring of ethnic media news coverage during the next federal and provincial elections in order to know if citizens have

access to enough high quality news to make informed decisions. As well, industry, community and media leaders should develop a code of practice on intercultural reporting; and both federal and provincial governments should improve distribution of translated government information and advertising across ethnic media.

-30-

Clarification:

“Ethnic media” refers to media produced in languages other than English, French or Aboriginal languages, or produced in English for audiences immigrating or descended from communities where other languages are in the majority.