



March 2, 2018

Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister
Minister of Youth
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

Re: Youth Policy

Dear Prime Minister:

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) appreciates the increased focus on young people and the stated plans to develop a national youth policy for Canada. We also appreciate the stated intention to take the views of young people into consideration in the development and implementation of the youth policy. We would like to make two strategic suggestions for your consideration.

First, development of a national youth policy provides a significant opportunity to incorporate Canada's commitments to young people under the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic policy. The Convention provides a helpful comprehensive framework to integrate the policies and priorities identified by young people and ensure their rights are respected in the many different policy areas that have impacts for their lives. While the Convention specifically addresses children aged 0 – 18, the basic principles are relevant for adolescents and the transition from childhood to adulthood, which is the focus for the youth policy.

Important Convention principles to ground the youth policy include: recognition and respect for the dignity, rights, and increasing agency of young people; recognition of the right to have their views considered in matters that affect them; realization of their right to develop their full potential; and freedom from all forms of violence, discrimination, and exploitation. In addition to these core principles, the Convention embodies respect for the “evolving capacities” of young people, which provides a sound basis for both empowering young people to gradually take more responsibility for their own decisions and providing an appropriate level of protection because of the particular vulnerabilities involved with the ages of adolescence and early adulthood. Members of the Coalition who work directly with children and youth consistently report that young people want to learn about their rights and how to exercise them with respect for the rights of others.

As well as providing a useful, comprehensive framework, the Convention can assist in addressing the range of specific concerns identified in the analysis provided by Statistics Canada, such as greater likelihood to report discrimination, concerns about education and employment, higher rates of experiencing violence, and concerns about privacy and access to information..

In addition to explicit recognition of the Convention, the Coalition encourages the government to draw on the General Comment on the Rights of Adolescents, published by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Children on February 10, 2017. It provides useful guidance to address many of the issues that have been identified in the consultation document for the development of the national youth policy. For the transition from school to work and youth employment, as one example, the Convention and the General Comment combine implementation of the right to develop workplace skills that can contribute to developing the full potential of young people with protection from exploitation and safety in the workplace. In other areas as well, young people will be well-served by grounding specific policies and priorities in the context of Canada's obligations under the Convention.

Secondly, this worthy initiative leaves younger children as a population group without a clear policy framework at the national level. Ironically, this phase of life is the most vulnerable, impacted by decisions made by many different departments without any explicit consideration of their rights, and without any means to exercise their voice in the political system. The Coalition strongly encourages the government to complement the formation of a national youth policy with incorporation of the Convention into domestic law as a comprehensive, rights-based policy framework for children from age 0 – 18.

Adding this step would be timely, given that Canada is currently undergoing its 5th/6th official review of how it implements the Convention in Canada. In the last review, Canada received a strong recommendation that

“the State Party find the appropriate constitutional path that will allow it to have in the whole territory of the State Party, including its provinces and territories, a comprehensive legal framework which fully incorporates the provisions of the Convention and its Optional Protocols and provides clear guidelines for their consistent application.” (Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations: Canada*, paragraph 11, CRC/C/CAN/CO/3-4, p. 3.

A positive response to establish a clear direction for Canada could include a timeframe to work out all the details, similar to the ten years for implementation that was included when gender



equality was first established. Taking this bold step would make federalism work better for children and youth by closing gaps that affect children negatively and inspire Canadians to realize the aspirations for children that lead Canada to be one of the first countries to adopt and ratify the Convention. It would also be consistent with the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples. General Comment No. 11 on the Rights of Indigenous children was developed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child with significant input from indigenous children's organizations in Canada ten years ago.

A serious commitment to domestic implementation in Canada will also improve Canada's international reputation as a leader for the rights of children globally.

The Coalition would welcome an opportunity to discuss these two directions in greater detail with you and/or staff. We have a national network of organizations and individuals who are committed and have been working diligently at all levels for the past 27 years to implement the Convention across Canada.

Sincerely,



Kathy Vandergrift, Chair
Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children
937 Alpine Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K2B 5R9
613-820-0272; kathyvandergrift@rogers.com