



## CRC 2003 Review: Background Note 6 on Vulnerable Groups<sup>1</sup>

# Child Rights can Help Vulnerable Groups

Canadians want all children in Canada to have a good start in life. That is why vulnerable children require implementation of the recommendations given to Canada by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2003. Canadians need to be informed about the benefits of these recommendations and the inequalities that vulnerable children currently experience; this will build public support for the necessary changes. Children who require special attention to achieve equitable protection of their rights include the following groups:

### Aboriginal children

Special attention for Aboriginal children is suggested under several themes in the 2003 Review. The Review specifically asks Canada to “*pursue its efforts to address the gap in life chances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.*” (Concluding Observations, paragraph 59.) It cites similar recommendations made by other UN bodies, highlighting the fact that respect for the rights of Aboriginal children in Canada is a matter of international concern.

Commitments to Aboriginal children were a high priority in Canada’s *Plan of Action for Children*, adopted in April 2004. The April 2007 Standing Senate Committee report on children’s rights found that little progress has been achieved and made 11 specific recommendations for immediate attention.<sup>2</sup>


### Homeless children and street children

The 2003 Review highlighted the following facts:

- Children are living on the streets in Canada, but no data on this appeared in the government’s report on the status of children
- Children are a “substantial portion” of the homeless in Canada
- Children live on the streets due to poverty, abuse, and neglect—matters that fall under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

<sup>1</sup> This is sixth in a series of background notes on the 2003 Review of Canada’s Second Report under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It accompanies an overview of the recommendations, entitled “Canada and the CRC: 2003 Review Report,” prepared by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children.

<sup>2</sup> Children: the Silenced Citizens. Final Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, pp. 169-190.



The 2003 Review called upon Canada to assess the scope of the problem and the causes, and then develop a *“comprehensive strategy to address the needs of homeless children...with the aim of preventing and reducing this phenomenon in the best interest of these children and with their participation.”*(Concluding Observations, paragraph 55.)

In April 2007, the Standing Senate Committee report on children’s rights found that little progress had been made and added a note of urgency; it focuses on poverty as a cause of homelessness and recommends the development of *“a federal strategy to combat child poverty that **should be put into effect as soon as possible**, with clear goals and timetables. Among other things, such a plan should include preventive measures aimed at high-risk families and a comprehensive housing strategy.”*<sup>3</sup>

### **Working children**

The 2003 Review noted that Canada works against exploitative child labour in other countries, but fails to provide information on its own domestic situation. Of particular concern were children under 13 years of age who, in some provinces, work for pay with little protection. Canadian children also lack protection in less formal working conditions, such as farm labourers.

In 2003, Canada was asked to *“conduct nation-wide research to fully assess the extent of children working in order to take, when necessary, effective measures to prevent the exploitative employment of children in Canada.”*(Concluding Observations, paragraph 51.) Canada was also asked to ratify ILO (International Labour Organization) Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment.

In 2007, the Standing Senate Committee Report noted that working children often do not know their rights, and recommended that all governments *“ensure that safe conditions exist for children who do work, and that such children are informed of their rights and encouraged to remain in school.”*<sup>4</sup>

### **Other vulnerable children**

Refugee children, child victims of sexual exploitation, abducted children and abused children were also cited in the 2003 Review recommendations as other groups in need of special attention.

### **Responding to recommendations will protect children**

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) proposes that the government respond to the review recommendations before the next report in 2009, with enough time for the identified groups of children to fully participate in assessing the government response

<sup>3</sup> Children: The Silenced Citizens. Final Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, pp. 146-154.

<sup>4</sup> Children: The Silenced Citizens. Final Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, pp. 83-85.