

November 15, 2021

Honourable Pablo Rodriguez
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada
K1A 0A6

Re: 5th/6th Review of Children's Rights in Canada

Dear Minister Rodriguez:

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) congratulates you on your appointment to Cabinet as Minister of Canadian Heritage. Within the next month you have an opportunity to show leadership on children's rights through making improvements in the way Canada engages in the 5th/6th review of how Canada implements the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As the Minister responsible for human rights, you have a real opportunity to reassert Canada's leadership internationally by showing we take the implementation of Conventions seriously. Your department is responsible for raising awareness and understanding of human rights, conducting promotional activities for all Canadians, and reporting to the United Nations on Canada's international human rights obligations. As such, we ask you to make this review an early priority and use this opportunity to make significant progress for children's rights in Canada.

The CCRC is a national umbrella group of organizations and individuals across Canada who promote the rights of children and the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Canada and globally. The CCRC has worked with other civil society organizations in Canada to make this review more productive for children in Canada. For example, more than 30 alternative reports were submitted by groups and individuals for the first phase of the review. These reports highlight significant areas for attention and also show that there is broad support across Canada for improving the way Canada implements children's rights.

We have also repeatedly submitted suggestions to improve the review process in Canada to make it more productive. Most recently we made suggestions to improve the final steps in the process, in a meeting attended by the Minister for Canadian Heritage at the time, Minister Steven Guilbeault, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, MP Julie Dabrusin. Those suggestions included asking the Minister to:

- Share drafts of what Canada plans to submit in December to the Committee long enough in advance to facilitate some discussion with and feedback from youth and civil society organizations, to enable presentation of a final government report that takes account of civil society concerns.

- Organize transparent conversations with young people both before meeting with the UN Committee and after concluding observations are received. Invite relevant cabinet ministers and focus on what can be done to implement recommendations made during reviews, and how the process of regular engagement with civil society and children in Canada can be improved.

With regard to the important substantive matters in the review, the CCRC has focused on practical ways the federal government could take action on past recommendations that would be of benefit to children in Canada, if implemented. This would model leadership for the provinces and end the pattern of blaming other jurisdictions instead of taking seriously the duties we all share to create conditions where children can realize their full potential in Canada. The CCRC report on past recommendations can be found here:

<http://rightsofchildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Close-Gaps-through-Systemic-Change-CCRC-Report-to-UN-Committee-March-1-2020.pdf>

In the next month you could make a significant, long-lasting difference for children in Canada by improving the way your department and others engage in this process. Furthermore, November 20 is the 30th Anniversary of Ratification of the CRC, and you have the opportunity to show that Canada takes the ratification of human rights treaties seriously. We would welcome an opportunity to provide more information and we look forward to seeing major improvements in substance in this Parliamentary session.

Sincerely,

Kate Butler, Chair
Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children
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