



Native Women's
Association of Canada
L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada



NATIVE WOMEN'S
SHELTER OF MONTREAL
FOYER POUR FEMMES
AUTOCHTONNES DE MONTRÉAL



PRESS RELEASE

CANADA BEFORE THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD: CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS URGE COMMITTEE TO ASK TOUGH QUESTIONS ON CANADA'S RECORD

For Immediate Release

Montreal, May 16, 2022 – On the eve of Canada's appearance before the Committee on the Rights of the Child, several civil society groups are calling on the UN to probe Canada's record in light of the country's poor performance in children's rights in many areas, especially where Indigenous and racialized children, children in poverty, and children with disabilities are concerned.

At a national press conference held today, representatives of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, the Native Women's Association of Canada, Justice for Girls, the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal and the Center for Research-Action on Race Relations, located in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver, emphasized Canada's duty to take all necessary means to fully implement the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), hailed as one of the most important international human rights instruments which Canada has ratified in the last thirty years.

The groups are unanimous about Canada's failure to live up to its international obligations to children in many areas, due to the lack of coherent or comprehensive policy framework in place, and the omission of children's rights from proposed legislation and policy documents that come before cabinets and legislatures. Government departments, including child protective services, human rights commissions and school boards, often neglect to integrate children's rights in their services and programs, resulting in uneven and deficient protection of children at many levels.

Canada's actions to combat climate change continue to fall short of their international commitments and scientists' recommendations. This failure poses a grave threat to the rights of children and future generations; among children, girls, Indigenous children, children with disabilities, children in poverty, minority and racialized children, LGBTQ+ children, along with many other marginalized and disadvantaged children, suffer the harshest consequences.

Child poverty in Canada still remains a "national disgrace." Recent data show that 1 in 5 children live in poverty. For Indigenous children, the rate is 1 in 2. Children with disabilities are twice as likely to live in households relying on public assistance. 1 in 5 racialized families live in poverty, compared to 1 in 20 non-racialized families. While there have been significant increases in funding for children, such as the Canada Child Benefit, the outcomes for children, as measured by UNICEF indicators of child well-being, have not improved substantively.

Canada's record on Indigenous children is dismal. Recent investigations and a growing number of lawsuits related to birth alerts in several provinces show that even child welfare and health care agencies fail to respect their legal obligations to act in the child's best interests. According to recent data, more than half the inmates in federal jails are Indigenous women, though they are only 4% of the population. More than 60% of those are single mothers. More than half of the children in foster care are Indigenous, though they are only 7% of the child population.

The over-incarceration of Indigenous women and poverty result in the over-placement of Indigenous children in foster care, representing the newest system of cultural genocide, following in the footsteps of the state-sponsored residential school system. These concerns are echoed in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' final report.

Racial profiling is also a factor leading to disproportionate stops by the police, reporting to youth protection by schools, and placement and of Black children in care, as recent inquiries in several provinces have confirmed (such as the Laurent Commission in Quebec). Black children, especially those who are of low income and have special needs, are also particularly vulnerable to systemic racism in education, particularly the School to Prison Pipeline whereby these children are disproportionately stigmatized, sanctioned and reported to child protective services and streamlined into the youth criminal justice system.

The four organizations, and other civil society groups in Canada, have filed their own Alternative Reports to the CRC.

To view these reports, as well as the Official Government of Canada Reports:

https://rightsofchildren.ca/childrens-rights-under-review/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=watch-the-un-review-of-canada_77

To view Canada's appearance before the CRC on May 17 and 18: <https://media.un.org/en/webtv>

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QUOTES

KATE BUTLER, Chair & President, Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children

“Too often, we hear that children’s rights are too complicated in Canada because of different jurisdictional responsibilities. However, it is clear that this is not true - implementing children’s rights would make Canada’s federal system of governance work better for children, families, and communities across the country.”

SARAH NIMAN, Student-at-Law, Native Women’s Association of Canada’s legal unit

“Indigenous children are more likely than other Canadian children to grow up facing discrimination, limiting their ability to claim their rights under the UN *Convention for the Rights of the Child*. Canada must answer for this discrepancy to fulfill its promises of reconciliation with Indigenous People.”

ZOË CRAIG-SPARROW, Director of Indigenous Rights & Environmental Justice, Justice for Girls

“Ten years ago, when I was 15 years old, I attended Canada’s review by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. At that time, I called on Canada to take urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and respect the specific rights of girls, especially Indigenous girls. Since then, little has changed. The rights of children continue to be violated, with Indigenous girls in particular facing genocide, violence, environmental degradation, criminalization, and institutionalization. Canada can, and must, do better.”

NAKUSET, Executive Director, Native Women’s Shelter of Montreal

“Historically, Indigenous families have been fighting for their children, from Residential schools to the 60’s scoop, the practice of taking our children hasn’t ended. One needs to ask if the system refuses to change, despite the many recommendations and calls to actions (from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Viens Commission and the Laurent Commission in Quebec), who does it serve?”

CLEMENTINE JARRETT, Former Youth In Care, Undergraduate Student at Carleton University

“In the past 8 years, I’ve been in 7 different foster placements, and have had to put my safety and wellbeing in the hands of complete strangers; in almost every case, it was abused. Now, as I navigate the world being low-income and a sexual assault survivor, diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder, PTSD and disordered eating, it is clear that the system that vows to protect children is the very same thing that puts us in harm’s way.”

FO NIEMI, Executive Director, Center for Research-Action on Race Relations

“Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy, which recognizes the need to combat systemic racism directed at Indigenous, Black and Asian Canadians with an intersectional perspective, needs to integrate children’s rights in all government actions to promote civil rights and access to justice for those most vulnerable to discrimination, at all levels of government and in every sector of civil society.”