



202 - 1193 Kingsway, Vancouver, V5V 3C9  
Tel (604) 873-8437/1-800-307-1212  
Fax (604) 874-9898  
info@firstcallbc.org • www.firstcallbc.org

July 2008

## **Recommendations for Preparation of Canada's 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Reports on Children's Rights Submitted by First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition**

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition is pleased to provide the following suggestions for Canada's 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Reports on our progress in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to the United Nations.

First Call is a cross-sectoral, non-partisan coalition of over 80 provincial and regional partner organizations in British Columbia committed to strengthening support for the well-being of children and youth in BC. Through public education, community mobilization and public policy advocacy our non-profit coalition aims to ensure children and youth receive "first call" on society's resources. Our work is founded on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **Organization of the Report**

We note that many of the issues already identified for inclusion in the report do cover issues cited in the 2003 review of Canada's 2<sup>nd</sup> Report by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. For clarity and focus we suggest that the provinces and federal authorities be directed to supply data responding specifically to the Committee's recommendations.

Additionally, it is important for Canada's report to reference the articles in the Convention it is addressing under various issues and activities. This will help the UN Committee and the Canadian public to assess our progress in upholding and protecting specific areas of children's rights.

### **Content of the Report**

First Call solicited the views of its partner organizations and interested individuals in preparing this submission. They told us that Canada's report should include reference to our performance in the areas outlined below.

We realize that the following list focuses on identified shortcomings and concerns, as these were the matters that were top of mind for our partners, many of whom work with populations of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and youth on a daily basis. We want to acknowledge at the outset that we understand that there are many areas where Canada and individual provinces have made good progress in upholding children's rights both through policy and practice during the reporting period, and we fully expect these advances will be detailed in Canada's report.

1. **Failure to appoint a national commissioner for children and youth** to monitor the implementation of the Convention, the state of children's rights in Canada, and promote improvements.

2. **Child Poverty** – Review of progress on our national commitment to its elimination and the effect of federal and provincial policies in both creating poverty and reducing it. Specific concerns include:
  - Income assistance rates so low that families cannot meet their children’s basic needs for healthy food, shelter and clothing; and, in some cases, leading to children being surrendered to state care due to their lack of income;
  - Measures to combat the systemic discrimination apparent in the over-representation of Indigenous children, children of lone mothers, immigrant and refugee children, children with disabilities, and racialized (‘visible minority’) children in child poverty statistics;
  - Steps taken to address health and educational inequities and social exclusion resulting from increasing income inequality, with specific reference to the need **to eliminate financial barriers to equity of access to education**, including school fees in public schools and high tuition rates for post-secondary education.
  - A high rate of low-wage jobs trapping young families in long-term poverty.
3. **Low levels of federal and provincial investments in supports and services for young children (0-6 years)**, including:
  - Examination of the lack of accessible, affordable, inclusive high quality child care services;
  - Steps taken to address the inadequacy of supports and services for young children with special needs;
  - Steps taken to increase the number of Aboriginal Head Start programs
  - Efforts to improve the inconsistent and limited support available for teen parents and their children
4. **Protection of Children’s Physical Safety**
  - Review of the failure to prohibit the legal use of force against children (reference to Section 43 of the Criminal Code);
  - Steps taken to eliminate the number of public schools at risk of collapse in an earthquake;
  - Review of the weakening of child labour protections in British Columbia (Bill 37, 2003).
5. **Lack of supports and services for youth**, including:
  - Steps taken to eliminate sexual exploitation and trafficking of children and youth in Canada;

- Measures taken to reduce the high numbers of homeless youth and youth with addictions to harmful substances;
  - Steps taken to reduce the extreme vulnerability of particular youth populations: Indigenous youth, youth in state care, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth, immigrant and refugee youth, and victims of domestic violence.
6. **Measures to uphold the collective, cultural and linguistic rights of Indigenous children** as contemplated in Article 30 of the Convention.
7. **A focus on access to healthy living conditions for all children**, including:
- Examination of the availability of supports for children and youth with disabilities to enable them to be active and to participate in their communities;
  - Measures taken to ensure access to clean air and water for all children;
  - Measures taken to ensure children's access to healthy natural environments for play, exercise and sustaining community;
  - Measures taken to ensure children's environments and food supply are free of toxins and other harmful substances.
8. **Treatment of child soldiers**, with specific reference to Canada's failure to uphold the rights of Omar Kadr, a Canadian citizen who was a child at the time he was recruited into a fighting force in Afghanistan.
9. **Issues not covered** in the proposed outline that need to be addressed:
- Steps taken to increase public understanding of the rights of children and indicators of the level of public awareness in Canada (Article 42);
  - Indicators of progress in respect for the right of children to have their views taken into consideration during decision-making processes that affect them (Article 12);
  - Public dissemination of reports and response to previous recommendations (Article 44).

Again, we emphasize that Canada's reporting on these issues should go beyond a listing of legislative provisions and programs introduced or sustained to **include data on levels of access, changes in outcomes for children and youth, and analysis of the well-being of specific populations (e.g. by age, gender, location, status, and other factors)**.

We echo the opinion of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children that the reporting period should not stop at 2007, but should include information and data from 2008 where it is available.