

July 30, 2021

Attention: Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P., Minister of Canadian Heritage

Dear Minister Guilbeault,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (the CCRC) and our member organizations in March.

We appreciate the fact that you agreed with the need to improve the process and found these suggestions reasonable. This letter is to follow up on the meeting, and to highlight some of these suggestions that we hope to see leading into the 5th/6th Review in 2022.

More than 30 alternative reports were submitted by individuals and groups for the 5th/6th review of children's rights in Canada. They include evidence from more than 100 organizations because several were group submissions. The evidence and recommendations in these reports cover a wide range of conditions that Canada has a duty to address so that children can realize their rights in Canada, and some of our member organizations have and will offer further insights in their areas of expertise. They also show there is broad support across Canada for improving the way Canada implements children's rights. For a more complete understanding of the substantive issues, please consult the alternative reports now posted: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&CountryID=31&TreatyID=5.

In the March 2021 meeting, the CCRC made 2 short-term requests:

- 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 a revised government report to be presented that is reflective of civil society concerns.
- Organize transparent conversations with young people both before going to Geneva and after concluding observations are received. Invite relevant cabinet ministers, and focus on what can be done to implement the CRC's guidance, and how the process of engagement with civil society and children in Canada can be improved.

In addition to these suggestions for Canadian Heritage, the CCRC and some others have urged that the Chairs of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Children's Rights and federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group allow the participation of CCRC and its members in those meetings and other engaging in other practical ways to have a more productive process with government, to show the benefits for children and model leadership for the provinces in their local consultations. This would also contribute to ending 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, which is the goal of the Convention.

The CCRC umbrella report focuses on past recommendations that would be of benefit in Canada, if implemented, and systemic changes to advance children's rights and prevent further violations. It 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 long-term and drawing on 30 years of efforts to improve implementation of the Convention in Canada, the CCRC recommends a systems approach. This also addresses the challenge of federalism faced by the Continuing Committee of Officials for Human Rights, chaired by Canadian Heritage. This would include in brief:

- Ensuring that Child Rights Impact Assessments are conducted before statutes, regulations, and program budgets are considered
- Creating a senior-level federal government coordinating body with transparent deliberative process
- Developing, and continuously improving guidance on child-sensitive budget analysis
- Creating a senior-level federal/provincial/territorial coordinating body
- Creating a complaints process for addressing failures to apply the Child Rights Impact Assessment policy with authority to administer meaningful remedies.
- Create the office of a Children's Commissioner with adequate security of tenure to champion the rights of children and work with child rights advocates in civil society.
- Ratifying the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to allow children to bring complaints to the United National Committee on the Rights of the Child when local redress mechanisms prove to be ineffective.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions or to discuss this in more detail.

Sincerely,

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children