



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

**June 21, 2022**

### **Advocate for Children and Youth Remains Concerned about Lack of Progress on Children's Rights over Last Decade**

SASKATOON – As a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Canada is required to report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child every five years on its progress in implementing the UNCRC.

On June 9, 2022, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee) released its Concluding Observations for Canada as its final step in this reporting cycle (found [here](#)). Concluding Observations acknowledge progress achieved, identify areas of concern, and make recommendations to State parties for the full implementation of the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols.

The Committee last issued Concluding Observations to Canada in 2012. Unfortunately, due to Canada's inaction, many of the same recommendations from 2012 remain in 2022.

"Although Canada ratified the UNCRC over 30 years ago, it has either stalled progress or has neglected to act entirely on a number of matters critical to ensuring the rights of children and youth are respected in our country," said Lisa Broda, Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, and President of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA).

The Committee put a strong emphasis on improving accountability for the implementation of children's rights. Its recommendations are in alignment with the CCCYA's own long-standing advocacy efforts for equal access to legal protections and independent monitoring processes in every jurisdiction and at every level.

For instance, the Committee reiterated recommendations for Canada to ensure its laws are compliant with the UNCRC by "develop[ing] a comprehensive law on children's rights at the federal level" and "repeal[ing] section 43 of the *Criminal Code*" to prohibit corporal punishment and legally sanctioned violence against children. "The CCCYA and our office have long advocated for the repeal of section 43, and it is reprehensible that Canada continues to allow corporal punishment of children – it must do better and repeal this from the *Criminal Code*," said Broda.

The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth (together with the CCCYA) has been a persistent advocate for improved youth suicide prevention and is encouraged by a recommendation of the Committee recognizing the need to "strengthen mental health services and programmes for children" and to make a federally legislated suicide prevention framework more child centred.

"We urge Canada to go a step further and create a National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy, setting out clear jurisdictional mandates, multi-sectoral, responsibilities, resources, and timelines, to serve as the foundation for addressing this devastating outcome," said Broda.

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Both the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth and the CCCYA have pressed for the establishment of an independent child rights monitoring body at the federal level, such as a National Commissioner for Children and Youth, provided that its legislation appropriately recognizes relevant jurisdictional boundaries. However, Canada failed to meet the Committee's 2012 recommendation to create such a body. The Committee reiterated and again urged Canada to "[e]xpeditiously establish an independent mechanism at the federal level" with a mandate to monitor children's rights, receive, investigate, and address complaints by children and produce public reports on children's rights in Canada. This mechanism is critical to ensuring children's rights, interests, and well-being are championed within federal legislation, services, and policies that affect their lives.

The Committee again recommended that Canada ratify the Third Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on a communications procedure, which would allow children or their representatives to take complaints directly to the Committee should recourse for child rights violations be unavailable or ineffective. Although this Optional Protocol entered into force in 2014, Canada has taken no action towards its ratification, leaving children without the same access to justice at the international level as has been afforded to other groups whose human rights may be violated.

Canada will report to the UN Committee again in 2027. This is an important opportunity to implement both new and long-standing recommendations and for Canada to regain its position as a leader in the promotion and protection of children's rights. "This onus on Canada also extends to Saskatchewan. And we are reassured of the Province's recognition of these obligations given its adoption of Saskatchewan's Child and Youth First Principles in 2009. The Committee's Concluding Observations are a powerful tool to push for and measure progress, and we encourage all those working in support of children and youth to use them to continue advocating for change in the best interests of all children," said Broda.

*The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. She leads a team of professionals who work on behalf of the province's young people. Our vision is that the rights, well-being, and voices of children and youth are respected, valued, and supported to assist young people to reach their full potential. Follow us on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @saskadvocate.ca*

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