SASKATCHEWAN advocate FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

Media Release
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Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth Recognizes 35 Years Since the Ratification of Children's Rights in Canada

SASKATOON – Today we celebrate the 35th year since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

November 20th is National Child Day - a day to celebrate children and youth, and a reminder of Canada's commitment to children's rights. In 1991, Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) with the agreement of all provinces, including Saskatchewan. The Government of Saskatchewan further committed to upholding the rights in the UNCRC when it adopted Saskatchewan's Children and Youth First Principles in 2009 (see here).

The UNCRC is a legally-binding international human rights instrument and outlines 54 articles that cover a range of special rights and protections for children by setting standards in health care, education, and legal, civil, and social services. Saskatchewan has much to be proud of - but there is much more work to do. Thirty-five years later, children and youth continue to face barriers in having their basic needs met and their full potential realized, and their adult allies continue to fight to have their rights upheld - especially by governments.

On June 9, 2022, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child released its Concluding Observations to Canada as last step in that reporting cycle (found here). These include observations on Canada's progress in implementing children's rights under the UNCRC, as well as recommendations for how we can do better. Many of these recommendations impact services under provincial jurisdiction. While some work has been done, Canada has still not acted on several long-standing recommendations of the UN Committee, such as the establishment of a National Commissioner for Children or a National Child Strategy.

For its part, Saskatchewan has also missed opportunities to create a structural framework for the realization of children's rights within its borders. In March 2022, our office recommended the Government of Saskatchewan develop a Children's Strategy to improve the well-being of children and youth, and in July 2023, we urged the Government to develop an Action Plan to implement the recommendations of the UN Committee that fell under provincial jurisdiction. We have not seen sufficient action on either.

Children need these mechanisms to hold our country and our province to account for recognizing their rights. "While we take this day to celebrate children, we also know that the level at which many children in Saskatchewan experience safety, protection, and overall well-being is not satisfactory," said Dr. Lisa Broda, the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth and President of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA).

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“It is difficult to reconcile that children continue to fall behind in a developed country such as Canada. This is certainly represented when examining child poverty,” said Broda. Child poverty is at an all-time high in Canada, having nearly doubled since 2020. Today, one in five children live in poverty according to Statistics Canada. Alarmingly, despite some positive initiatives, Campaign 2000 reports that Saskatchewan has the highest child poverty rate among the provinces, and Food Banks Canada’s *2026 Poverty Report Cards* gives Saskatchewan a D+ grade overall, indicating that Saskatchewan’s performance on child well-being is not improving.

“Poverty contributes to or exacerbates other rights violations. As a prosperous province, why is Saskatchewan not a leader in upholding the rights of children at the highest level?” Broda stated.

Both Canada and Saskatchewan must do better for children. As we celebrate young people on this especially important day – and every day – we must also continue to advocate for their right to the best possible life. We cannot continue to allow our children to fall even further behind. Our country and our province must step up and implement all recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It is time. Our young people are our future and deserve nothing less.

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. The Advocate leads a team of professionals who work on behalf of the province’s young people. Our legislated mandate is to ensure young people receive the service to which they are entitled and that their rights are respected, valued, and supported to assist them in reaching their full potential.

For more information, visit www.saskadvocate.ca

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