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Canadian Coalition For the Rights of Children Coalition canadienne pour les droits des enfants
October 3, 1994

U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child

Centre for Human Rights

Palais des nations

1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Dear Committee Members,

It is with pleasure that the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children submits its NGO report, in both official languages, on Canada's progress in implementing the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child under article 45(a) of the Convention.

The Coalition represents over 50 national and international NGOs concerned with promoting the rights and well-being of children. Our members felt it was important for the Committee's work to receive input from the NGO community, particularly since the Coalition has some specific concerns with regards to the Canadian report in terms of its lack of specific goals, strategies

and benchmarks for implementing and monitoring the Convention.

It is not the purpose of the present report to make specific recommendations as this has already been done in two previous reports submitted to the Canadian government (titled *Will Canada Continue to Care Enough for the World's Children?* and *Will it Be a Brighter Future?: An Analysis of Canada's National Action Plan for Children*) but rather to highlight certain cans detected in the report submitted by the Canadian government to your committee.

The Coalition is very interested in participating in the working group to answer any questions the committee may have. We hope the information provided will be useful to the Committee's important work.

Sincerely,

Landon Pearson

Chairperson

Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child The Canadian NGO Response

Submitted to:

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

Submitted by:

The Canadian Coalition for the

Rights of Children

September 1994

Executive Summary

The Government of Canada has introduced many important initiatives with respect to protecting the rights and improving the well-being of children. However, the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, which includes over 50 national and international NGOs, feels its Action Plan and Report to the UN failed to set out clear and measurable goals for implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Nor is there provision in any of the federal documents or the UN reporting guidelines for the participation of youth in all decisions policies and programs that affect them.

The Government of Canada can improve general measures of implementation by articulating clear, focused and measurable objectives and by developing a mechanism that would involve youth and the NGO community on an ongoing basis in monitoring the implementation of the Convention. With respect to specific domestic problems, the Coalition would like to see additional focus upon eradicating child poverty, enhancing support for families, encouraging best practices in child welfare and improving the juvenile justice system.

At the international level, there are several problems with the general measures of implementation of the Convention. Canada's foreign policy lacks a clear statement of direction, especially with respect to children. Moreover, the amount of foreign aid not only has shifted in recent years, but also has shifted away from meeting basic needs toward supporting infrastructure programs. The Government of Canada, in conjunction with youth and the NGO community, should develop a clear direction for its foreign policy based on the principles of provision, protection and promotion, and a set of verifiable objectives for the short and long terms by using the World Declaration as a framework for action. Canada can also play a much more active leadership role in safeguarding the rights of children throughout the world and in ensuring their protection from exploitation and abuse.

Introduction

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children welcomes the opportunity to present its views to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on Canada's progress in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Coalition includes more than 50 national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which have come together to protect and promote the rights of children at home and abroad. It has prepared this response after consultations and discussions with representatives from NGOs throughout the country. The Coalition also organized special workshops at which the views and concerns of young

people were sought.

This report is divided into two sections: domestic issues and international issues. Each section discusses concerns regarding the general measures of implementation of the Convention and then explores specific problems regarding the well-being of children that require special attention.

The focus on selected aspects of the Convention is not intended to minimize the importance of all the provisions of that document. In fact, the Coalition has identified concerns regarding the entire Convention that were expressed by the NGO community at a national consultation. The Coalition submitted these issues to the federal government for consideration in the preparation of their first Report to the UN.

It should be noted that the Coalition has not addressed the concerns of Aboriginal Canadians regarding the implementation of the Convention. Organizations representing Aboriginal Canadians are holding consultations and are preparing their own report for submission to the UN. Nonetheless, the Coalition wishes to point out the gravity of the problems facing Aboriginal children, especially with respect to poverty, poor health, drug abuse, domestic violence and suicide. The exclusion of their concerns in no way is intended to minimize the seriousness of the difficulties they face and the disproportionate incidence of problems they experience relative to other Canadian children.

The Coalition would like to recognize at the outset the pivotal role that Canada has played in promoting the awareness of children's rights and in encouraging the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child around the world. The Government of Canada provided important leadership on the international front when former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney co-chaired the world Summit for Children at the United Nations in September 1990.

The Coalition also wants to acknowledge that the Government of Canada has introduced many important initiatives to promote the rights of children and improve their health and well-being. At the same time, however, there is concern that certain federal and provincial actions in recent years have eroded supports and services to families and children, and have had the effect of undermining both the spirit and letter of the Convention.

I. DOMESTIC ISSUES

i. General Measures of Implementation

The concerns regarding general measures of implementation of the Convention fall under three main themes: harmonization, monitoring progress and guiding principles.

a. harmonization

The Coalition recognizes that the harmonization of legislation and practices among jurisdictions is particularly difficult in a federal system like Canada in which constitutional responsibility for education, health and social services lies with the provinces. This constitutional imperative places more responsibility upon the Government of Canada to play a leadership role in trying to harmonize the wide range of laws programs and practices that affect the rights, health and well-being of children. The federal government can provide leadership by identifying best practices in programs and services for families and children, monitoring and coordinating diverse efforts throughout the country, and Facilitating the sharing of information.

A major concern regarding harmonization arises from the fact that the province of Alberta has not formally supported the ratification of the Convention. Apparently, a number of provincial legislators were opposed to the document because of its perceived infringement of parental rights. Provincial approval is not required in order for a State Party to sign an international agreement. However, there is concern about the implications of Alberta's actions and whether its opposition will impede the adoption of laws, policies and programs that both respect and promote the provisions of the Convention. Alberta's refusal is particularly serious in light of the

recent drastic cuts to health education and social services in that province.

b. monitoring implementation

Canada responded to the World Summit for Children through four key initiatives. In December 1991, the House of Commons ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In February 1992, the federal government announced a new Child Tax Benefit that reconfigured existing child benefits in order to provide more financial assistance to working poor families. In May 1992, Canada tabled its Action Plan for Children entitled Brighter Futures. The Action Plan consisted of more than 30 steps and programs intended to address the well-being of children. The fourth key measure was the introduction of the Child Development Initiative - a five-year series of programs, worth \$500 million, intended to address conditions of risk that threaten the health and well-being of children especially those between the ages of 0 and 6.

A Children's Bureau was created to ensure consistency among and coordinate federal programs and policies for children. The Children's Bureau, the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, and the National Film Board have used a variety of creative methods to promote awareness of the Convention's principles and Provisions.

More recently, the newly-elected federal government announced a series of initiatives designed to assist children considered to be at high risk. In May 1994, Canada committed \$85 million to a four-year Prenatal Nutrition Program for low-income pregnant women. It also announced a Headstart program for Aboriginal children. The federal government has expanded efforts to promote breast-feeding. There has been considerable progress in developing a set of national health goals for children. The Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program is another noteworthy measure. The federal Social Security Review currently under way is expected to consider some changes to the Child Tax Benefit to help reduce the extent of child poverty and to the federal government's commitment to an injection of additional dollars into the child care system.

The Coalition supports these initiatives as well as other federal measures designed to improve the welfare and quality of life of Canadian children. It is pleased about the Child Development Initiative which recognizes the importance of investing in the psychological development and emotional well-being of children especially during the very early years of their lives.

Despite the fact that Canada's Action Plan includes a series of laudable initiatives, it is possible that little concrete progress will be made toward implementing the provisions of the Convention. The Action Plan makes no mention of specific goals, desired outcomes or proposed time frames. There is no discussion of the need to identify baseline measures and to assess policies and programs against these standards. It will not be easy to evaluate strengths and the areas which require improvement; neither will Canada be in a position to present specific outcomes when it is required to report once again to the UN in five years' time.

The Coalition recognizes that there are serious difficulties in setting measurable objectives and outcomes. For example, the use of national averages for establishing baseline measures and desired goals masks the disparities that exist between children from poor and better-off families. A second problem arises from the fact that 'hard' indicators often employed to assess the health of a population, such as morbidity and mortality, do not take into account comprehensive measures that may be equally important. It is important to combine outcome data with measures of process -such as the establishment of youth committees. There is also a serious problem with respect to the availability of data. Information on public programs, social spending and program effectiveness is either lacking or not readily available. Part of the difficulty arises from the federal-provincial nature of the country in which provinces are primarily responsible for the administration and delivery of programs and services for families and children.

Despite these problems, Canada should attempt to articulate a set of desired goals and use these as barometres for measuring progress in implementing the provisions of the Convention. Moreover, some form of ongoing mechanism is required for tracking and reporting changes in

policies and programs and for determining their impact on families and children. This mechanism must include an active and ongoing role for youth as well as the NGO community.

It is difficult to determine from Canada's report to the UN the impact that the ratification of the Convention has had on new directions - especially at the international level. Similarly, the provincial reports within the Canada Response are basically descriptions of the status quo. All levels of government in this country appear to be monitoring their existing programs to ensure that these are consistent with the provisions of the Convention. Governments are using the Convention to ensure that any new measures do not contravene its spirit or letter. However, there appear to be few instances (aside from the Child Tax Benefit and Child Development Initiative) in which the Convention actually has inspired or moved governments to take action to enhance and promote the rights of children.

c. guiding principles

The Coalition believes that the implementation of the Convention - all plans, decisions and actions taken in respect of this document - should be guided by the following principles: provision, promotion, protection and participation.

Provision refers to ensuring that sufficient resources are directed toward the survival and development needs of children; they must have the first call on resources. The 'best interests of the child' must be the paramount guiding principle in the development of all policies and programs. In the absence of explicit objectives and measurable outcomes, it is virtually impossible to determine whether the 'best interests' principle is being met in the initiatives announced both in Canada's Action Plan and in recent months. While the Government of Canada and the provinces note in their Report to the UN that this principle guides all their work, the concept is subject to a wide range of interpretation which may not actually place the needs of the child first. The absence of measurable goals in Canada's Action Plan means that commitment with the terms of the Convention will remain a subjective exercise. It will be based on assumptions and conjecture with no objective standards or basis for comparison.

Promotion refers not only to promoting the terms of the Convention but also to promoting the intrinsic value of children. One notable initiative is Rights from the Heart - the National Film Board animated series on the Convention intended for young children. Much more promotion work needs to be done; the Manitoba Coalition on Children's Rights notes that neither the federal government nor the province of Manitoba has done enough to disseminate information about the Convention. For example, there is a lack of material and training tools for educators, parents and children about the Convention.

Protection for children, especially those who are at risk developmentally or emotionally, should be provided through adequate legislation and regulation as well as partnerships among different levels of government, the NGO sector, communities and children and youth.

Participation means the active involvement of children and youth in decisions and programs that concern them. The absence of a specific reference to this principle is a major gap not only in Canada's Action Plan but also in the reporting requirements of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: One of the key principles set out in the Convention is the importance of children speaking on their own behalf. Yet Canada's Action Plan was developed with no input from children or youth. Neither was there any reference to youth participation in Canada's Report to the UN. Moreover, the federal government does not appear to have any plans to involve youth in monitoring the implementation of the Convention or in future policy decisions.

In recognition of the importance of youth participation, the Youth Committee of the Coalition facilitated a workshop of youth at the Stronger Children, Stronger Families international conference in June 1994 in Victoria, Canada which focused on the status and implementation of the Convention. The young participants emphasized the need to "hear their voices." They made a number of recommendations for increasing youth input - including the need to incorporate the views of children and youth in all forms of decision-making and at every level of a given project's development and implementation. Youth committees represent an important

mechanism for capturing and expressing the thoughts and views of young people.

The Coalition believes that youth involvement in planning, -implementing, monitoring and evaluating programs is a key principle that should guide the work of governments and non-governmental organizations. It supports the efforts of provinces that have -established councils to represent the views of youth, such as the Youth Advisory Council of Newfoundland. While the Government of Canada notes in its report that it recognizes the importance of the perspective of children being brought to bear in all policy decisions affecting them, it has done little to put this commitment into practice.

ii. Specific Problems

Elsewhere the Coalition has identified concerns about the wide range of laws, policies and programs that affect the rights and the general health and well-being of Canadian children. For the purposes of this report, the focus will be on four key themes: child poverty, supports for families, alternative care and juvenile justice.

a. child poverty

The Coalition notes with consternation the high and growing rate of child poverty in Canada. In 1989, the House of Commons passed a unanimous Resolution to work toward the elimination of child poverty by the year 2000. Since that announcement, child poverty actually has increased; at last count (1992), 1,265,000 children aged 18 and under, or 19 percent of all children, lived in poor families. Our child poverty rate is three times that in Sweden and twice that in Western Germany.

The situation is worse for children in single-parent families in which 60 percent of all children raised by single mothers are poor. This situation is serious, given the well-documented links between child poverty and increased risk of social and health--related problems - including poor school performance, low self -esteem, developmental disabilities, and involvement with the child welfare and criminal justice systems. According to the Canadian institute of Child Health, almost 89% of young children under the age of 7 who live with single mothers who have never been married are poor and the infant death rate is twice as high in poor neighbourhoods than in rich neighbourhoods.

The Coalition recognizes that child poverty must be placed in context; children are poor because their families are poor. The financial well-being of families is tied directly to the health of the economy. The labour market has become increasingly volatile, marked by persistently high rates of unemployment and underemployment and profound structural changes. In addition to the shortage of paid work, the wages for those who are employed generally have stagnated in recent years.

The current system of federal child benefits has done little to offset the impact of poverty. The Child Tax Benefit, announced as part of Canada's Action Plan, has had a marginal impact on poverty, primarily because the design of the benefit extends assistance to families relatively high up the income scale. Families with two children (one under and one over age 7), for example, continue to receive some benefits up to net incomes of \$70,981. Only working poor families and low-income families with three or more children gained from the new Child Tax Benefit.

Child poverty is the root cause of many of the problems that the Convention is designed to address. Eradicating child poverty would represent one of the most important stews that the Government of Canada can take to improve the conditions that place many children at risk.

b. support for families

The Coalition is concerned about the impact of increasing social and economic stress upon families' capacity to assume their child rearing responsibilities. Particularly worrisome are the stresses arising from the time deficit that most Canadian families with children now experience.

The time deficit is tanked directly to the dramatic rise in the labour force participation rates of women. Nearly two-thirds of married women with children under the age of 6 are in the workforce, as are the majority of single parents with children.

Neither public nor private employment policies have kept pace with the considerable strain on families and children generated by labour market changes. Employment-related policies that help employees balance their work and family lives - such as flexible hours, part-time work with associated benefits and leave for family responsibilities - would ease the time pressures that, in turn, create emotional stresses for families.

employment policies

The Government of Canada can play a key role in helping employees balance their work and family responsibilities by acting as a model employer for the country. The federal government could consider, for example, extending its provisions for maternity and parental leave to allow parents to spend more time at home with very young children. While Canada's Response to the UN notes that there are several projects under way in the area of work and family, it makes no reference to the federal government's role both as a direct and as a model employer.

child care

The majority of mothers with children participate in the paid labour market. Employment earnings represent an important - and often essential contribution - to household income. This shift in family roles has not come without emotional stresses. One of the most serious arises from the lack of high-quality, affordable child care; the demand for this service far outweighs the supply. The need has been documented over the years in countless studies and reports. Yet the Government of Canada backed away from its promise to augment the supply of licensed child care spaces when it failed to pass the Child Care Act in 1988 and did not proceed with alternative legislation. Canada's Action Plan made no mention of the current child care crisis in Canada. Neither is there any official recognition or statement to the effect that high quality child care is essential to the health and well-being of children.

The Coalition was heartened by the recent federal budget which promised an injection of funds into child care worth \$120 million in 1995-96 and \$240 million in 1996-97. While it supports the intention of this initiative, some crucial questions remain unanswered; for example, if the dollars for child care may be taken from some other program that serves children and families; the net result may not be entirely positive.

According to a report compiled by the Canadian Institute of Child Health, The Health of Canada's Children, released in the fall of 1994, in 1988, 2.6 million children needed child care yet in 1990, only 320,000 licensed child care spaces were available to serve these children.

child development

While the Coalition supports the Child Development Initiative, the fundamental problems in this area have not been addressed. There is a lack of support services for families, and for child development and preventive mental health care. Part of the problem is due to the fact that the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) - the major piece of legislation under which the federal government shares with provinces in the cost of social services - includes a narrow definition of what it will allow for cost-sharing purposes.

CAP currently provides support for several different types of services for children, including child care and child welfare. The problem with CAP in relation to child welfare, in particular, is that these services tend to focus on intervention after a problem or crisis has occurred. This is not surprising, given the fact that the legislation originally was intended as 'last resort' assistance and was designed primarily to help those most in need. Few dollars are spent on less formal supports, such as self-help or parenting programs. There is very little expenditure on prevention and on the type of services that are 'social investments' - such as parent preschool resource centres.

Yet all the research on child development points to the benefits of investing in services that support good parenting and caregiving - especially at the very early stages of a child's life. While it is difficult to quantify the social benefits of supporting parents in their child rearing responsibilities, enriched preschool programs and parent support programs have been shown to be effective in compensating for the lack of developmental opportunities at home.

In addition to the restrictions that the legislation places on service delivery, cutbacks to social services at both the federal and provincial levels as a result of fiscal restraint have seriously curtailed and even eliminated many programs that provide supports and assistance to families and children. While the Coalition acknowledges the \$4 million that the Government of Canada has set aside to help schools and child care centres integrate children with disabilities into their programs, there are still not enough supports to help families in their homes.

Finally, the Coalition notes that the decline in public funds for human services creates pressures for the voluntary sector. At a time when demand for services is high and growing, voluntary organizations - such as family counselling agencies and food banks - are caught in a squeeze as their funds become increasingly scarce and insecure. The pressures on the voluntary sector may get worse; the last budget announced that the federal government will be reviewing the funds that it currently allocates to all NGOs.

health care

The Government of Canada has introduced a number of measures to improve the health of Canadian children - particularly those considered to be at risk. While the Coalition supports these initiatives, it is concerned about the context within which many of these measures are being implemented. Despite the fact that Canada has a universal health care system which is accessible to all citizens, there are serious health disparities among Canadian children. There are profound inequalities in health status between children from lower- and upper-income families. The infant mortality rate for children from families with the lowest income is almost twice as high than for families with the highest income. The health problems among Aboriginal children are particularly acute; they are at higher risk of suicide, drug abuse, injuries and early death.

The quality and accessibility of the health care system have been eroded in recent years by the steady decline in federal cash transfers to the provinces for health. Provinces have been forced to cut back on health services, raise taxes or consider charging user fees to offset the shortfall. Moreover, the cuts limit the amount of funds that provinces can transfer to municipalities for police and fire services, sewage treatment and recreation as well as to school boards for education. This means that the infrastructure of communities is also being eroded.

The Coalition supports Canada's universal health care system; it wants to ensure that this system is properly protected with national standards firmly in place. While the importance of high-quality health care services is recognized, the Coalition wants to stress the need for investing in primary prevention and health promotion. Despite the importance of these forms of health care, they receive a disproportionately low percentage of total health care funding.

Moreover, certain positive measures to promote child health have been offset by policies which have negated the impact of these initiatives. The Government of Canada recently restricted the availability of tobacco products to youth under age 18. Several months later, however, the federal government lowered the taxes on tobacco, which has effectively made cigarettes more available, especially to young people.

The Canadian Institute of Child Health's report, *The Health of Canada's Children*, also contains startling findings about the health of children in Canada. For example, in 1990 almost 22,000 low birth weight babies were born in Canada and the rate of low birth rate has not changed appreciably over the past decade.

c. alternative care

Provincial governments in Canada are primarily responsible for family law and child welfare services. There are wide variations not only in the availability and quality of these services but also in child welfare practices.

In a country in which child welfare practices vary so widely, it is almost impossible to determine the extent to which the principle of the 'best interests of the child' is being respected. It will be difficult to track and monitor the Enforcement of the provisions of the Convention related to child welfare, especially given the fact that the UN Committee reporting guidelines do not refer to the concept of or need for youth participation. This problem is compounded by the lack of clear measures against which to measure progress in Canada's Action Plan and its Report to the UN.

A serious problem in child welfare arises from the fact that there are relatively few preventive supports for families; these generally come into play only after a family crisis has occurred. The Nova Scotia Coalition notes that the recently proclaimed Nova Scotia Children and Family Services Act sets out a philosophy of the least intrusive means of intervention. At the same time, there is a serious lack of permanent, coordinated, adequately funded and preventive in-home programs which assist families to remain intact and improve the quality of care given to children and youth.

The Coalition acknowledges that some progress has been made in the prevention of sexual abuse through the Caring Countries Project whose purpose is to prevent sexual abuse. It also recognizes federal efforts to combat this problem and the contributions that the Government of Canada has made toward the Child Sexual Abuse Initiative and the Family Violence Initiative. Yet there are still many problems -including the lack of sufficient sanction from the courts for sexual abuse, the absence of a national registry of abusers and the lack of child advocates.

d. juvenile justice

Provincial governments in Canada are primarily responsible for matters relating to children in conflict with the law and for the administration of juvenile justice. The federal government has jurisdiction over criminal law and the Young Offenders Act.

The Coalition's primary concern with respect to juvenile justice is that the principles of the Convention do not appear to have been incorporated in the philosophy either of governments or of the judiciary in dealing with children in conflict with the law. There has been virtually no overall improvement in the law or administration of juvenile justice as a result of the Convention. For example, the Criminal Code still allows for the correction of children by force. Child development research has found corporal punishment to be an ineffective form of behaviour modification.

Another concern arises from the fact that the Young Offenders Act presumes that children throughout the country have access to mental health services and to custody facilities. This is not the case; facilities which are administered by provincial governments; the quality and availability of these supports varies widely. In most jurisdictions, there are few resources for recovery and reintegration once youth have come into conflict with the law. The voluntary services which once helped fill this service gap have suffered as a result of the recession and cutbacks in government support. Service gaps are particularly acute for young offenders between the ages of 15 and 17.

Moreover, the Young Offenders Act is applied inconsistently across Canada. The principle of the 'best interests of the child' does not appear to be the most important factor in court decisions; in some cases the interests of the community have assumed priority over the needs of children. In fact, in response to public pressure, the federal government is in the process of amending the Young Offenders Act with a view toward toughening its provisions and allowing certain youth to be transferred to adult court.

The Coalition is particularly concerned about the reservation that the Government of Canada has placed on article 37 (c) of the Convention regarding the incarceration of youth separately

from adults. The reservation is an affront to article 3 of the Convention which requires that the best interests of the child should prevail in decision-making. The Coalition believes that the federal objection to article 37(c) arises not so much from lack of resources, as claimed, but from the fact that the Government of Canada wished to protect amendments to the Young Offenders Act which ease the transfer of children to adult court. Article 37(b) is also violated by many provinces which allow overcrowding in their facilities, lengthy waits for court hearings and a lack of equal access to bail.

The Coalition is concerned about the high financial and emotional costs associated with the current legal system. Children have no recourse when their views are not heard or when their rights have been jeopardized. The creation of child advocate offices at the provincial, national and international levels -much like the role played by the Ombudsman for Children in British Columbia - would help address this problem. Finally, there is a need for a streamlined and uniform collection of data from the provinces that can be used for comparative purposes to facilitate reporting in the field of juvenile justice.

II. INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

i. General Measures of Implementation

Three key issues regarding the implementation of the Convention that must be addressed at the international level: clear objectives, guiding principles and foreign aid.

a. clear objectives

The Coalition acknowledges that Canada has assumed a prominent leadership role in the international community. Over the past 40 years, this country has been one of the leading nations in caring for the world's children.

In collaboration with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) , the Children's Bureau established a \$16 million Partners for Children Fund to help children at risk, female children and Aboriginal children. CIDA set up a \$2 million NGO Fund for Children in Difficult Circumstances, and also makes other substantial contributions through international organizations and NGOs to assist people who are the victims of war and conflicts, a large percentage of whom are children, in the Horn of Africa. In 1991-92, Canada contributed \$51.5 million to UNICEF. The country will spend \$50 million over five years on its International Immunization Program which includes 130 immunization projects in more than 60 developing countries. Canada supports programs aimed at improving vaccines for children in the Americas through the Pan-American Health Organization. It has provided leadership in the development of the World Bank's IDA Replenishment Agreement, which governs the largest source of Development Assistance (ODA); this will ensure that the World Bank will put more emphasis on lending for basic human needs and will help address directly the problem of poverty. Similar leadership was shown in the Replenishment Agreements of the Interamerican Development Bank and the African Development Bank. The Canadian government also recently announced a 50 million program for the female African child at the World Population conference in Cairo.

While the Coalition supports these and other important initiatives, it has several concerns about Canada's international efforts. Neither the Government of Canada nor CIDA, its agency for international development, has an explicit policy for how it proposes to help children around the world. The section of Brighter Futures which dealt with the world's children was not a plan; it was simply a review of Canadian aid programs already in place. There is no explicit statement of intentions, objectives or goals, or planned actions to help promote the provisions of the Convention outside this country. Canada has announced no new measures at the international level in respect of its signature of the Convention.

Two problems arise from the absence of a clear statement. First, the federal government appears to lack official direction in terms of its foreign aid policy; in fact, a review of Canadian - foreign policy is currently under way. Second, without an explicit statement of intention, it is virtually impossible to determine the extent of progress (if any) that Canada has made or will

make toward implementing the provisions of the Convention. As in the case of Canada's Action Plan, progress cannot be measured without readily identifiable benchmarks against which to assess various actions.

In the absence of any new measures or long-term directions, the Coalition would like to see a review of programs, such as the Children in Difficult Circumstances Fund and the Partners for - Children Fund, to determine whether these should be continued or revised.

b. guiding principles

As the problems facing the world's children continue to grow, the Coalition is concerned that Canada's international role in caring for children not be diminished but rather be maintained and expanded. It would like to see Canada develop, in conjunction with the NGO community, a mid-to long-term plan with clear and coherent policies and programs for addressing the needs of children throughout the world. The plan would be founded on the principles of provision, protection and promotion.

Provision is the immediate priority. Its purpose is to ensure child survival; according to UNICEF, 30,000 children under age 5 still die every day from preventable causes. The cornerstone to survival is mother and child health - which can be promoted through programs such as birth spacing, breastfeeding, immunization, portable water, sanitation, oral hydration, growth monitoring, food security and health care. Studies by CIDA, USAID, the World Bank and other development institutes have shown consistently that the highest rates of return for individuals and communities are achieved by investing in the basic needs of children. Priority should be given to children who are most vulnerable - those in countries with the highest mortality rates, those unaccompanied or unprotected by family, children cared for by single mothers, those in zones of conflict and female children who are generally more vulnerable to exploitation, neglect and abuse than male children.

Child protection is the Midterm priority. This principle refers to the presence of policies and programs that protect children from forces which destroy the quality of their lives. These forces include actions related to exploitation, sexual abuse and the treatment of children in conflict and refugee zones. The most effective way of protecting children is through supporting families, particularly in times of conflict and disaster. The reunification of children with their families is a prime example. Measures that support and strengthen families - including extended families and communities - should be raised at international meetings and in bilateral relations with other countries. Children also need protection from diseases - such as AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other respiratory infections.

The long-term priority should be the promotion of child well-being through efforts that support child development. Programs that promote the basic health and education of children have shown consistently positive results for individuals, families, communities and entire countries. The Coalition would like to see a review of Canada's Food Aid Program to ensure that food is provided directly to those who most need it - children and nursing mothers.

The key to long-term nutrition is not food aid but adequate income for mothers; greater program support to measures, such as educating women, should be directed toward this end. As is the case in Canada, child poverty is the greatest threat to the health and well-being of children in other countries. In the long term, efforts that promote local economies are the most effective way to overcome conditions of poverty.

The Government of Canada made a commitment to the world when it signed the Declaration at the World Summit for Children. The federal government agreed through that signature to abide by the principle of 'first call for children.' Any review of Official Development Assistance (ODA) , as well as any national plan of action for caring for the world's children, must respect and promote that principle; it should set clear, measurable and verifiable targets for the short and long term.

c. foreign aid

Both the UN Convention and the Declaration, provide a solid framework for coherent international action for children. For the first time in history, an internationally accepted framework exists with guiding principles and targets to guide policies and programs. This coherent action has not happened in Canada.

The Coalition notes the decline in Canada's general overall support for foreign aid - which fell by 10 percent in real terms in 1993 from the previous year. For more than 15 years, Canada has promised that it would move toward allocating .7 percent of GNP toward international aid. Despite the promise, which was reiterated on several occasions including the World Summit for Children, the ratio has been falling. It was .5 percent in 1986, .4 percent in 1993 and is projected to be less than .35 percent in 1997. Despite the fact that Canada is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, it shares fewer than one percent of its GNP with the poorest nations.

In addition to the decline in foreign aid, the Coalition is concerned about the direction of this assistance and its implications for social well-being. There appears to be a shift in foreign aid policy from basic human needs to infrastructure programs. Less than five percent of CIDA's current budget allocation is devoted to health and only two of 600 bilateral projects are for primary education. While the Coalition recognizes the value of investing in infrastructure, it believes that children, particularly those who are vulnerable and at risk, require direct assistance in the form of food, immunization, health care, education, child welfare and social services.

In addition to the shift away from basic needs, it appears that Canada's foreign aid is being allocated to middle-income countries rather than low-income countries that are much more needy, especially with respect to children. Funds are being directed increasingly toward stimulating trade and achieving economic objectives rather than meeting human needs. Canada recently contributed \$122 million in foreign aid to countries that used to comprise the Eastern European bloc; this amount represents one-half of its total contribution to the 31 poorest African nations.

ii. Specific Problems

The Coalition has identified in other documents its wide range of concerns about various practices that affect the rights and the health and well-being of children throughout the world. This report highlights two key themes: safeguarding of rights and protection from exploitation.

a. safeguarding of rights

The Coalition is concerned about the difficulties involved in assessing and implementation of the monitoring the Convention, especially in nations which do not give high priority to human rights. Women and children in these countries are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Many signatories to the Convention appear to have little regard for its provisions and have no intention of implementing its rights concerning liberty, access to fair justice and protection from exploitation. Canada's role in protecting children's rights throughout the world needs to be strengthened.

The Coalition is also concerned that immigration officers within Canada are not adequately trained in the provisions of child welfare legislation or the Convention. Immigration and refugee boards appear bound by the Immigration Act with no regard to the implications of the Convention upon their decisions.

Canada also appears to have no immediate plans to implement article 22 of the Convention regarding children seeking refugee status; the federal government has not introduced any policies or procedures to assist refugee children in tracing their parents. There is neither a Canadian registry of refugee children nor any bridging mechanism among federal immigration authorities, provincial child welfare agencies and international NGOs. The Coalition is also concerned about the prolonged family separation caused by Canadian refugee and immigration

bureaucracy. Children are often separated from parents for years - which clearly contravenes article 10(1) of the Convention.

Finally, the Coalition notes the extraordinary difficulties involved in safeguarding human rights in situations of armed conflict. The Coalition is concerned that there is no authoritative voice on behalf of the rights of children who live in areas of armed conflict. No nation involved in the Gulf war for example, appears to have protested against the abuse of the rights protected under the Convention. In light of the prominent and respected role that Canada has assumed as an international peacekeeper, the Coalition would like to see this country actively promote the idea of humanitarian ceasefires at the highest possible levels. Canada could also advocate more vigorously a ban on the use and production of land mines and chemical weapons in situations of armed conflict; it is often children who are maimed or killed as a result of this weaponry.

c. protection from exploitation

The Government of Canada should play a more prominent role in protecting children throughout the world from economic and sexual exploitation. Canadians have played a significant role in uncovering information about the abuses that have been occurring throughout the world. NGOs are able to provide public information and attract support that cannot be enlisted by governments. These resources should be encouraged and strengthened, particularly by helping young people from Canada to form strong alliances with groups in other countries where children and youth are more vulnerable.

The Coalition recognizes that the root cause of child labour throughout the world is inadequate-family income. In order to address this problem, it is essential to deal with the problems of poverty and women's inequality. Progress has been made through CIDA's Fund for Children in Difficult Circumstances, which includes a focus on child workers. However, this program is only temporary and its \$2 million allocation is not sufficient to even begin to address the problem of child labour on a long-term basis. Strong and more long-term actions are required.

The Coalition also acknowledges that substantial improvements are required at home. While the Canada Labour Code sets out conditions for protecting workers who fall under federal jurisdiction, it does not provide similar protection to all workers.

There are different rules throughout the country concerning the employment of youth. The province of Manitoba has passed a child labour law which provides explicit protection from exploitation for children; it can be used as a model not only in Canada but at the international level as well. In addition to guidelines on child labour, Canada needs tough and more explicit measures for eliminating exploitation, such as a ban on the importation of goods produced through child labour.

Conclusion

In recent years, the Government of Canada has introduced many initiatives designed to promote the rights and well-being of children. While these measures are important, they have been introduced as part of an Action Plan that fails to set out clear objectives and goals and does not represent a concerted government policy for children. It also lacks a mechanism for tracking progress in implementing and monitoring the provisions of the -Convention and for involving youth and the NGO community in all aspects of decision-making on an ongoing basis.

Specific issues that require immediate attention include reducing child poverty, ensuring adequate support for families and safeguarding and promoting the rights of children both at home and abroad through increased public education on the Convention.

At the international level, Canada should play a more active role in directing its foreign aid toward children, safeguarding their rights and ensuring their protection from exploitation and abuse. It must also be guided by the framework and targets set out in the Declaration and the principles of the Convention.

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