

December 13th , 2021

Right Honourable Justin Trudeau P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

On behalf of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), I write to you as today marks the 30th anniversary of Canada's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The most widely accepted human rights treaty in history, the CRC sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children and youth. It calls for governments, and by extension society to faithfully nurture, educate, and care for the world's 2.5 billion children, including the eight million who call Canada home.

Protecting Children from Harms Encountered in the Digital World

We urge the Government of Canada to prioritize the safety of Canadian children on gaming platforms, social media, and the web. We are seeking a child-focused response that would include measures and directives enacted to meet the requirements outlined in the 2021 addendum: CRC General Comment No. 25: Children's Rights in the Digital Environment -and section VII on Violence Against Children¹ including the call for age verification measures.

The NCWC strongly supports Senator Julie Miville Duchene's Bill S-210 – An Act to restrict young persons' online access to sexually explicit material.¹ We add our voices to her call for robust measures to counter the exponentially growing presence of risks to the wellbeing of Canadian children online. While we support efforts to improve access to the internet for all Canadian children, we also recognize the critical need to protect minors from online predators and other encounters that can lead to traumatizing harms including sexual exploitation. Please refer to the 2021 report from the Ethics Committee² that highlights important recommendations including that age verification measures be implemented.

National Framework: Ensuring Children's Rights and their Wellbeing

Over the course of the 30 years since Canada ratified the CRC, Canadians of all political affiliations, including Parliamentarians, have called upon the Government of Canada to appoint a non-partisan Commissioner for Canada's Children, mandated by statute, and established as an independent Officer of Parliament responsible for protecting and promoting the rights and wellbeing of Canadian children and youth (0-18).

We believe the absence of a Commissioner puts our children and youth at risk of being systematically overlooked at worst, or, under-prioritized at best.

¹ [S-210 \(44-1\) - LEGISinfo - Parliament of Canada](#)

² [Ethics Committee Report No. 3 - ETHI \(43-2\) - House of Commons of Canada \(ourcommons.ca\)](#)

We join with the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates³, and refer you to Children: The Silenced Citizens⁴, a 2007 report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights as well as Recommendation 12.9⁵ of the Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Call for Justice, all of which call on the Canadian Government to appoint a national dedicated advocate for Canada's children to monitor government implementation of children's rights at the federal level and liaise with provincial and territorial child advocates. We urge the government to move to address, not only the concerns outlined in this letter as they relate to sexual exploitation, the proliferation of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), and online child rape, but also the full range of social justice concerns that currently and regrettably have Canada ranked as 25th of the forty-one richest nations in overall child and youth wellbeing.⁶

CRC Ensuring Effective Implementation of Canada's Obligations with Respect to The Rights of Children

The Interdepartmental Working Group on Children's Rights (IWGCR), created in 2007, has not expressly proven itself to be the vehicle to defend children's rights. Nor has the ministry tasked with Families, Children, and Social Development been demonstratively active in addressing the broad range of concerns outlined above. Indeed, the recent inclusion of youth (of all genders) to the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality and Youth cannot be expected to prioritize and focus on the rights, issues, and concerns impacting Canadian youth, not least of all moving to have Canada adopt and ratify the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure despite over a decade of internal and external recommendations that Canada strengthen the active involvement of children in all institutions and processes affecting their rights.

While we applaud the government's recent efforts to combat hate speech, we note that having included the uncontested crimes of distribution and production of child pornography and child exploitation in the analysis, the ensuing debate on privacy and freedom of speech are delaying actions that are needed immediately to address heinous abhorrent crimes perpetrated against children. This delay in action translates into more victims. Our children and youth deserve and need a resolute advocate with a strong mandate at the Federal level to intervene on their behalf. The crimes are clear; what is needed is enforcement of the laws, swift application of protective measures, and oversight.

To conclude, we urge vigorous efforts be made to meet all our obligations as defined by the CRC, including the protection of children in the digital world. We again urge you to review the history of efforts to have the position of a Commissioner established so that child citizens of the future will flourish.

Sincerely
Patricia Leson, President
National Council of Women of Canada

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Canada is the traditional territory of Indigenous and Metis People. We are grateful to join with others in peace and hope, advocating for an improved quality of life for women, children, families, and society.

³ [0616 CCCYA EN Children's Commission NR FINAL.pdf](#)

⁴ [H1-10th Report - Children Final Version.doc \(sencanada.ca\)](#)

⁵ [12.9 Calls For Justice \(mmiwg-ffada.ca\)](#)

⁶ [UNICEF REPORT CARD 14: Child Well-being in a Sustainable World | UNICEF Canada: For Every Child](#)

Note: The original draft of this letter was prepared by Penny Rankin, NCWC Convenor for Children and Youth.

C:

The Honourable Karina Gould, Minister of Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

The Honourable Marci Ien, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth

The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Heritage

Senator Julie Miville-Dechêne

Senator Rosemary Moodie

Laila Goodridge, Conservative Party Critic for Families, Children and Social Development

Karen Vecchio, Conservative Party Critic for Women and Gender Equality and Youth

Laurel Collins, New Democratic Party Critic for Families, Children and Social Development

Leah Gazan, New Democratic Party Critic for Women and Gender Equality and Youth

Sylvie, Bérubé, Bloc Québécois Critic for Families, Children and Social Development

Kristina Michaud, Bloc Québécois Critic for Youth

Elizabeth May, Caucus Chair, Green Party of Canada
