

March 16, 2022

Dear Ms. Leson,

On behalf of the Honourable Karine Gould, I am responding to your email of January 5, 2022, which the Office of the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau forwarded to her on February 9, 2022. You wrote concerning Canada's implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the importance of protecting children from harms encountered in the digital world. Thank you for taking the time to write on this important issue.

Every child has rights, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status. The Government of Canada is committed to upholding and implementing these rights.

As you know, in 1991, Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the first legally binding international instrument to protect children's human rights. It outlines key civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children, and the responsibilities of governments.

Canada has also ratified two optional protocols on the rights of the child:

- The Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict; and,
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

In general, Canada implements the UNCRC through laws, policies and programs with responsibility for implementing these rights being shared by the federal, provincial, and territorial governments.

At the federal level, these rights are implemented through laws, such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, as well as through policies and programs.

The federal government also coordinates, reports on, and monitors the progress of children's rights in Canada.

For its part, Employment and Social Development Canada supports the implementation of children's rights and helps to ensure the wellbeing of Canada's children and youth by providing:

- Income supports for parents and caregivers, including the Canada Child Benefit, Children's Special Allowances, and Employment Insurance Benefits for pregnancy, care for a newborn or newly adopted child or children, and care for a critically ill child;
- Support for Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC);

- Access to and affordability of post-secondary education;
- Youth training and employment support (which may start at age 15); and
- Funding support to community organizations that support children, youth and parents.

In regards to calls for a national advocate for children, several mechanisms already exist to facilitate the coordination of children's rights and well-being in Canada. For example:

- the Forum of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers on Human Rights and Senior Officials Committee Responsible for Human Rights discuss key priorities related to human rights in Canada and enhance collaboration on children's and other human rights across governments;
- the Continuing Committee of Officials on Human Rights consults and collaborates on Canada's implementation of international human rights treaties, including the UNCRC; and,
- the Interdepartmental Working Group on Children's Rights promotes a whole-of-government approach to children's rights and encourages linkages among federal departments with policies that affect children.

Other mechanisms also monitor implementation of children's rights, for example: Human Rights Commissions and Tribunals; Provincial and territorial advocates and ombudspersons; the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates; and the Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families.

In addition, the Government of Canada has also established in legislation a member responsible for children's issues as part of the independent National Advisory Council on Poverty. This member ensures that children's interests are taken into consideration as the Council engages with Canadians on poverty, advises on a broad range of programs and services regarding poverty reduction, and publically reports on progress being made to meet the government's poverty reduction targets.

Further, federal, provincial and territorial governments are all responsible for the implementation of the UNCRC, and all provinces have independent children's advocates that engage with each other through the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates.

Finally, the Government of Canada is taking action to reduce and limit online harm to children and to protect children's rights online. I encourage you to reach out to reach out to the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Canadian Heritage; the Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Safety; and the Honourable Francois-Phillippe Champagne, Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, who are leading these efforts.

Thank you for sharing the National Council of Women of Canada's views on these important issues.

Yours sincerely,

Hugues Vaillancourt
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Social Policy Directorate
Strategic and Service Policy Branch
Employment and Social Development Canada

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