

In support of Presentation to the

Pre-Sessional Working Group of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
February 6, 2012

Prepared on behalf of Canadian NGO's:
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

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Members of the Committee and Invited Guests:

We are honoured to have the opportunity to share further information with you today about Canada's lack of progress towards realizing rights in early childhood. We are also honoured to be standing alongside the phenomenal young people and our colleagues from other NGO's in Canada, who are speaking to you today about children and youth of all ages who face economic, social and/or cultural barriers to realizing their rights. This is particularly true for Canada's Aboriginal peoples. Finally, we are proud to be among the many who have stood before you in the past, and before numerous other UN Committees, to challenge Canada and ask why one of the wealthiest nations in the world accepts having one of the fastest growing levels of inequality among peer nations – a level of inequality that disproportionately affects children, youth and women. Most importantly, we keep in our minds and in our hearts those who can't be here before you today, who are living the realities of inequality in Canada, and those with whom we volunteer to advance the rights of children and women across our country.

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Our contribution to today's discussion focuses on rights in early childhood, particularly as elaborated in General Comment (GC) 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). We emphasize Canada's lack of progress on two key issues identified in the 2003 Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: reducing child poverty and increasing access to high quality child care services. Our concerns are grounded in the lived realities of families as well as decades of research and evidence, both of which are documented in our February 2011 public report "A Tale of Two Canadas." This alternative report and the accompanying "Declaration for a Child Care System in Canada" have been endorsed by more than 20 national and provincial organizations in Canada.

Our report begins with an outline of the various commitments Canada has made to families with young children, both at home and as a signatory to the UN CRC. We then move to a summary of the findings of several international reports which rank Canada's family policy poorly relative to other developed nations. Next, we highlight the public input shared by an unprecedented range of Canadian civil society groups, including recommendations for improved public support for the early years, particularly child care.

When taken together, the first three parts of "A Tale of Two Canadas" provide a comprehensive and consistent picture of one Canada – a wealthy country whose support for young children is poor relative to identified family needs, international comparisons and signed commitments. Almost 10% of young children are living in poverty in Canada (LICO after-tax), despite the fact that more than one-third of these families have at least one parent working full-time, full-year. And, to summarize the oft-repeated concerns about child care³:

- **Unmet demand** – Although three-quarters of mothers participate in the paid labour force, there are only regulated spaces (other than kindergarten) for about 20% of young children – an increase of only 3% between 2004 and 2008.⁴

³ Throughout this document we use the term 'child care' to refer to services that families access voluntarily in order to provide their children with early care and learning experiences in addition to those provided by parents and other family members or primary caregivers. These services may be part-day or full working-day. In Canada regulated, centre-based programs operate in schools and other public facilities as well as in privately-owned spaces. They are generally led by college-trained early childhood educators, while family child care homes are less likely to have trained caregivers even if those programs are regulated. Kindergarten, available to 5 year olds in all provinces and 4 year olds in a few, is commonly voluntary, free, publicly-funded and provided for 2 – 6 hours per day for 10 months of the year. While Kindergarten could and should be considered part of the child care continuum, its policy characteristics differ so greatly from Canada's marketized approach to child care that the two are usually described separately.

Child care may also be referred to by other names such as *early childhood education and care* (common in the OECD), *early learning and child care* and, most recently, *early care and learning*. The latter name reflects a purposeful strategy by the child care community in British Columbia to retain *care* at the heart of early learning in a context where 'schoolification' of young children is a concern. Finally, while the focus of our brief is on child care for children prior to formal school entry at age 6, the concerns about quality, access and affordability also apply to the before and after school experiences of older children.

⁴ Jane Beach et al, "The Long View," *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2008* (Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, June 2009), 199-202.

- **High parent fees** – Child care in Canada (outside of Quebec)⁵ is provided on a fee for services basis and the too few spaces that do exist are not affordable for many parents. Generally, child care fees are the second highest cost of living, next to housing, and frequently exceed the cost of post-secondary education.
- **Inconsistent quality** - staff training requirements are generally lower than recommended and, largely due to low wages, there are growing shortages of trained early childhood educators.

Yet, Part 4 of the report tells the tale of a different Canada. The public reporting by Canadian governments suggests child care in Canada is performing at generally acceptable levels, and steadily improving. Unfortunately, the lack of transparent and comparable information in Canada's public reporting prevents both the Canadian public and the international community from reconciling and resolving the *Tale of Two Canadas*.

In order to fulfill Canada's commitments to young children and their families, our report concludes with comprehensive, practical and broadly-supported recommendations that are consistent with GC7. With public funding to allow meaningful involvement by non-government organizations, federal and provincial governments are urged to:

1. **Inform** – undertake a broad public education strategy to inform Canadians about Canada's commitments to early childhood, demonstrating the progress to date and acknowledging the areas that require further action.
2. **Plan** - develop comprehensive plans to realize the rights of young children, with timelines and targets to measure success along the way.
3. **Invest** – increase funding to parents (e.g. expand parental leave, reduce poverty) and community services. Specifically, invest 1% of GDP in child care, ensuring accountability for achieving service quality and access targets.
4. **Monitor** – publicly and transparently report on actual results compared to plans, incorporating key indicators of success.

Since our report was issued, a range of civil society groups and academics have published findings that continue to reiterate and reinforce our analysis of the problem while providing practical solutions that are consistent with our recommendations. To highlight just a few:

1. "Does Canada Work for All Generations?" (Fall, 2011)⁶ – A series of Family Policy Reports for all provinces observes that "Canada has become a country in which it is far harder to raise a young family. The country's economy has doubled in size since the mid- 1970's, yet ... the average household income for young Canadian couples has flat-lined (after adjusting for inflation) even though the share of young women contributing to household incomes today is up 53 per cent. Meanwhile, housing prices increased 76 per cent across the country since the mid-1970's." Thus, "the generation raising young children today is squeezed for time at home, squeezed for income because of the high cost of housing, and

⁵ The Province of Quebec began to build a publicly-funded child care system in 1997. Although the system is not yet fully universal, nor does it consistently achieve high quality and affordability for all families, it is significantly further ahead than Canada's remaining provinces.

⁶ Paul Kershaw and Lynell Anderson, "Does Canada Work for All Generations? National Summary," *Human Early Learning Partnership* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2011).

- squeezed for services like child care that would help them balance earning a living with raising a family.” The authors propose a “New Deal for Families” to remedy this situation, calling for expanded parental leave, \$10 a day child care services and flex-time.⁷
2. “Are We Doing Enough?: A Status Report on Canadian Public Policy and Child and Youth Health” (January, 2012)⁸: The fourth assessment of key indicators of child and youth health at the provincial/territorial and federal levels produced by the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) outlines specific actions “based on clear need and on evidence that government intervention is effective” ... “to help policy-makers act in the best interests of children and youth.”⁹ Regarding child care, the CPS report states that “having access to quality early learning and child care is too important for families to be subject to the vagaries of competing government positions... The vast majority of families find child care expensive and hard to access... The Canadian Paediatric Society continues to call on the federal government to implement a national child care strategy, with an integrated system of services that are universal and publicly funded.”¹⁰
 3. “Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning” (April, 2011)¹¹: Two membership-based, non-government organizations in the Province of BC – the Early Childhood Educators of BC, representing the child care profession, and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, representing parents, community groups, child care providers and activists – partnered to develop a “made-in BC” solution that builds on international evidence and plans developed in two other provinces (Ontario and PEI). Consistent with General Comment 7 of the CRC, the Plan specifically incorporates and integrates the best of quality child care and the best of public education. With limited yet crucial funding support from members and community granting organizations, over 10,000 copies of the Plan have been distributed across BC, and 115 presentations and workshops have taken place in 40 communities. To date, the Plan has been endorsed by almost 700 individuals, groups, municipalities and academics who recognize the growing crisis in child care in the Province, and are eager to see the Plan’s solution implemented.

In summary, it is clear that the lack of access to quality, affordable child care programs in Canada today is a serious population health issue that applies across the socioeconomic spectrum. It’s placing our young children’s healthy development at risk. It’s increasing stress on families – and particularly women – who are already struggling with work/life balance. And family stress can in turn be linked to a range of issues – breakdown of relationships, poverty, mental health concerns, violence and substance abuse – in addition to concerns about healthy child development. These factors help us to understand why approximately 27% of young children arrive at school vulnerable in one or more

⁷ See Paul Kershaw, <http://blogs.ubc.ca/newdealforfamilies/new-deal-for-families-2/>

⁸ “Are We Doing Enough: A status report on Canadian public policy and child and youth health,” *Canadian Paediatric Society* (Ottawa, 2012).

⁹ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰ Ibid, 32.

¹¹ “Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning,” *Early Childhood Educators of BC and Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC* (Vancouver, April 2011).

developmental domains,¹² and why the majority of these children come from middle- and upper-income families, where most children in Canada reside.

Given the broad consensus on the need for action on child care, and the available plans for implementation, the obvious next question is: why is there no substantive progress in Canada (outside of Quebec)? Some suggest that the level of public investment required to achieve quality and universality - approximately 1% of GDP - is a barrier to implementation. As you will hear today, there are pressing demands on public budgets to address the needs and rights of children and youth of all ages, not to mention the added challenges of climate change, an aging population and ongoing economic uncertainty. To this we say first that human rights are inherent rights, in good economic times and bad. We then pragmatically point to a broad and growing body of evidence that links reduced inequality to healthier and more sustainable societies, environments and economies.¹³

We further highlight the fact that, for more than a decade, public investment in child care has been assessed in multiple analyses which have consistently shown that the social and economic benefits of quality, universal programs substantially outweigh the costs. Broad access to quality child care programs that are inclusive and culturally-responsive promote health, advance women's equality, reduce crime, address child and family poverty, and deepen social inclusion in communities. For those worried about underperforming economies, we note that child care creates jobs: investing in child care has a bigger job multiplier effect than any other sector, with more employment per dollar of activity.

Quebec is the one jurisdiction in Canada which has made substantive progress on family policy, including child care. Economic analyses have been carried out in Quebec as the system has grown and developed. Although a fully universal, high quality system has not yet been achieved, a recent analysis¹⁴ shows the impact to date: working mothers' increased purchasing power and taxes paid, along with reduced social transfers, means that for every dollar Quebec invests in its child care system:

- Quebec recovers \$1.05 — which more than pays for the \$1.6 billion annual investment it makes; and
- The federal government recovers 44 cents — for an additional \$700 million annually in revenue.

These findings reinforce our assertion that increasing access to quality child care in Canada is not a cost, it is a solution that is central to addressing many of the social and economic challenges facing Canada today.

Yet, this type of publicly-accessible information about the comparative status of child care in Canada, the calls for action, the proposed solutions and the associated benefits and costs, is missing from Canada's public reports. Specifically, Canada's Third and Fourth Reports on the CRC do not meet Canada's own public performance reporting guidelines in key areas, including:

- **Lack of comparative data** – missing data that compares child care service attributes between provinces, among industrialized countries, over time and in relation to a comprehensive plan and to UN CRC/GC 7 commitments. The federal

¹² See Paul Kershaw Fact Sheet, <http://blogs.ubc.ca/newdealforfamilies/new-deal-for-families>

¹³ Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (Penguin Books Ltd, 2010).

¹⁴ Pierre Fortin, Luc Godbout, and Suzie St-Cerny, "Economic Consequences of Quebec's Educational Childcare Policy," Presented at *Early Years Economics Forum* (Toronto: June 22, 2011).

government defers most of the responsibility for public reporting to the provinces and territories, each of whom provide individualized, largely descriptive comments.

- **Lack of key indicators** – missing common key indicators for child care quality (e.g. staff training, compensation), access (e.g. average parent fees, % of children with access to regulated spaces) and public investment (e.g. \$ per space or per child, % of GDP invested).

Lack of civil society input – missing readily-accessible input from a broad range of civil society groups. Where consultations and direct input have occurred, missing synthesis of evidence and policy recommendations received.

- **Lack of transparency regarding public investment** – missing summary and total of public investments over time. The federal government did not disclose its decision to cancel the largest funding agreement ever reached with provincial/territorial governments on child care. As explained in Table 1 below and in our report, Canada’s resulting financial reporting is not transparent. Rather than experiencing a net increase, as the report infers, federal transfers to provinces and territories for early childhood development and child care actually decreased in recent years: most significantly, between 2006/07 and 2007/08, transfers were reduced by \$350 million, or 24%.

Table 1 - Dedicated Federal Child Care Transfers to Provinces and Territories (Department of Finance, 2009a; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives [CCPA], 2010)

<i>\$ millions</i>	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
2000 Agreement on Early Childhood Development (ECD)	500	500	500	500	500	500
2003 Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)	25	150	225	300	350	350
2005 Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)	0	200	500	650	1,200	1,200
Total Committed, Dedicated Child Care Transfers/Funding, 2005	525	850	1,225	1,450	2,050	2,050
Less: 2005 ELCC Agreement terminated effective April 2007					-1,200	-1,200
Add: 2007 Federal Child Care Space Transfer					250	250
Total Actual, Dedicated Child Care Transfers/Funding, 2007	525	850	1,225	1,450	1,100	1,100

We suggest that Canada’s weak public reporting is in fact a serious barrier to realizing rights in early childhood. Why? Because it allows too many Canadians to:

1. Believe in myths

Despite evidence to the contrary, many Canadians still think that we are a generous and compassionate nation with well-resourced public and voluntary systems in place. Specifically, a 2011 national poll confirms that “the majority of Canadians (55 percent) ... do not yet believe that Canada ranks near the bottom of the international pack of countries with developed economies when it comes to investing in families with preschool-age children.”¹⁵ The lack of transparency in

¹⁵Paul Kershaw and Lynell Anderson, “Does Canada Work for All Generations?” *Human Early Learning Partnership* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2011), 20.

Canada's public reporting feeds into this myth and makes it more difficult to engage in genuine dialogue among Canadians about the current status of the rights of young children and the social and economic costs of inaction.

2. Resist adapting to change

The lack of comparative data in government reports means that Canadians do not see the quality and access gaps between our approach to child care – where the care arrangements of young children remain a private responsibility – and those in other countries, and in GC7, where child care is publicly supported. Thus, Canadians in general are not broadly encouraged to consider the impact of our changing society on families with young children today, nor are they informed about the benefits and costs of assuming collective responsibility for Canada's young children.

Canada's 'you had them, you raise them' attitude towards parents is particularly stigmatizing for families that are employed and/or vulnerable. Instead of being supported to realize their right to access quality, affordable child care services to help them balance caring and earning responsibilities and raise healthy children, families receive a small monthly allowance and it's up to them to find, assess and pay for the child care they need.

With the notion of personal and private responsibility for children still entrenched in the Canadian psyche, it has fallen to individuals and communities to try to create child care services to fill the gap. Yet, without public funding, planning and oversight, service development is a patchwork and even high parent fees do not provide equity wages for trained staff.

Until recently, the few child care spaces that did exist in Canada were developed by community organizations and individual Early Childhood Educators, the latter essentially as small businesses. More recently, however, commercial child care chains are growing in Canada and although the evidence shows that these for-profit corporations are less likely than non-profit and public organizations to provide equitable access to quality, affordable services, there are few restrictions on their development.

And, as families struggle to find and pay for quality child care services, many Canadian children are in unregulated arrangements with unrelated caregivers, where there are no program standards or staff training requirements to ensure safe and healthy development. Higher-income families may hire nannies, often through the Live-in Caregiver Program (labelled by many as Canada's defacto national child care program). While this Program may address some needs, there are widespread concerns about Canada's reliance on women generally from developing countries, who frequently leave their own children behind in order to care for our children, and who are subject to restrictive conditions and weak labour standards in our country.

The shortage of regulated quality, affordable child care is most acute for children aged one and two. It is disturbing to observe that a significant portion of the youngest children in Canada are in environments of unknown quality during a period identified by world-renowned Canadian researchers¹⁶ and detailed in General Comment 7 as particularly sensitive to their healthy development.

¹⁶ For example, the late Fraser Mustard (see <http://earlyyearsstudy.ca/>) and Clyde Hertzman (see <http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/people/#director>)

Yet, as previously noted, none of these concerns are described in Canada's reports. If governments don't acknowledge any problems, they're unlikely to move forward with solutions. That's why we call for 'informing' as step 1 in our recommendations, followed by planning and implementation.

We know that informing Canadians about their rights is a responsibility of governments, but it's not happening. So, without any public funding support (for any of our work), our two organizations have launched our 'Child Care is a Right' project.

For almost 30 years, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada have worked with a cross-sectoral range of partners in a child care advocacy movement dedicated to advancing a publicly-funded, universal system of quality, inclusive, non-profit child care in Canada. Our child care movement began as a central issue of the women's rights movement. Over the last three decades, we have responded to every obstacle thrown in the way of achieving this right. We made the economic case. And, as the research began to grow from a range of disciplines, we framed and reframed child care as a child development issue, a family policy issue, a poverty reduction strategy, a labour force attachment issue and a community building tool.¹⁷

We changed our language from daycare to child care to early learning and child care, and now early care and learning. We worked to get business on our side. We reached out to all political parties. We looked for unlikely allies. And at each step along the way we integrated the latest evidence into our arguments and into the concrete solutions we offered for how a child care system could and would work. In fact, we designed the system, laid out an implementation plan, and developed a budget, even though no one had committed to building the system we need.

As Stephen Lewis, whose brilliant and compassionate work with the United Nations has spanned two decades, so eloquently put it in 2004,

*I've never seen an issue so extraordinarily well-documented. The materials are superb, every single aspect of this issue, of this objective, of this remarkable cause, has been analyzed and documented and thought about and written about ad infinitum. It's almost supernatural, the amount of contemplative and intellectual and emotional energy that has gone into the formulation of responses.*¹⁸

And now, after decades of responding to one set of obstacles after another, it's natural that we would return to our roots and to re-explore child care from a women's, as well as a children and family rights perspective. We have identified three goals in this project:

1. **Policy monitoring of Canada's progress** in fulfilling international and federal/provincial/territorial commitments to inform Canadians about, plan for, invest in and publicly report on the results of its support for young children and families.
2. **Engage in the UN process**, as we are today through our submission of *A Tale of Two Canadas*

¹⁷ Rita Chudnovsky, "The Struggle for Child Care: One Advocate's Story," *Our Schools/Our Selves: Spring 2009* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2009), 246-247.

¹⁸ Stephen Lewis, speech at *Child Care for a Change!* Conference (Winnipeg: Canadian Council for Social Development, November 14, 2004), 5.

3. Public education work, to encourage and empower Canadians, especially women, to assert their right to child care.

Public education throughout our advocacy work is a particular privilege. After all of the statistics are analyzed and the reports are read, it is the real lives of children - like those you're hearing about today - and women and families that matter. And so, we conclude this brief by sharing just a few of the many stories mothers in particular have courageously shared with us for more than three decades: stories about

Mary, a single mother living on welfare, who was waiting 3 years to be accepted into nursing school. When she is finally accepted, she is unable to go because she cannot find child care for her children.

Women 'who know other women' working night shift jobs, forced to leave their children sleeping in cars in parking lots outside their workplaces because child care is not available for shift workers.

Thousands of women, like Kathy, who are trying to flee abusive relationships, but feel they have no other option than to return with their children to their abusers. Kathy had been living in a transition home with her children, and had found full time employment, but because she was unable to find child care she had no way to financially support her family.

Child protection workers, like Jennifer, who report that child apprehensions across the country would be far less if enough child care services were available to provide support for families in times of stress.

Professionally trained, early childhood educators, like Carmen, who are leaving the work they love because they cannot feed their families on the poor wages they receive. Neither can they enrol their own children in quality licensed child care because they can't afford the fees.

And I, Susan Harney, also have a story. I've been a child care advocate for 20 years. I used to say "what will it take to make the government listen and create a system of affordable, quality child care? Will children have to start dying?" Well, now children ARE dying in illegal child care run by uneducated, neglectful caregivers. Yet these are the kinds of places too many parents are forced to put their children.

In a 2007 investigation into child care incidents in Ontario, Canada's largest daily newspaper reported that "children ... have been hit, kicked, allowed to play in filthy conditions and fed allergy-triggering food that nearly claimed their lives."¹⁹

More recently—and in our home Province of British Columbia—a woman who ran an unlicensed daycare in her home was charged with "criminal negligence causing death, failure to provide the necessities of life and obstruction of justice" after a one year old boy died in her care. As the local health authority explained, "because the daycare was in a private home and unlicensed, it was not subject to regular inspections."²⁰

And still governments do nothing.

¹⁹ Dirty little secrets: Abuse in daycares. Toronto Star, Robert Cribb and Dale Brazao, Monday May 28, 2007

²⁰Former Coquitlam daycare operator charged after child's 2011 death, Andrea Woo, Vancouver Sun, January 10, 2012

As Canadians we profess that nothing is more important than our children. We say we believe that our future depends on the children of today. We say we would do anything for the well-being of our children. But, as we have detailed in our report *A Tale of Two Canadas* and this *Briefing Update*, Canada is not living up to these ideals.

As you deliberate on Canada's Third and Fourth Reports on the CRC, we ask you to consider the following questions in regards to young children and their families:

1. How is Canada upholding Article 2: non-discrimination? Consider that it's not until age six that all children, including those with disabilities, are entitled to public education. Younger children are not equally entitled, and those with disabilities have particular challenges accessing the early care and learning supports that can help them reach their full potential.
2. How is Canada upholding Article 6: the right to life, survival and development to the "maximum extent possible"? Consider that among its peer nations, Canada, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, provides the weakest public support for families with young children. As a result, child and family poverty in Canada is high, access to quality, affordable child care services is low, and many of Canada's youngest children are in unregulated care settings.

Are the rights of young children in Canada being upheld and advanced? We think not.