

Canada's poor marks on Rights of Child: UN evaluates Canada's record, finds it lacking

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Canada has been celebrating National Family Week in the first week of October since 1981. I was hoping that this year's family week would bring with it good news. Unfortunately, this official appreciation of families does not seem to extend to Canada supporting parents significantly in rearing their children.

On September 26 and 27, Canadian government officials made presentations to United Nations officials in Geneva on how well Canada is upholding its treaty obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I had been hoping for a firm commitment towards accountable investments in our children and in supports to Canadian families in raising our children. No such luck!

Canada must report regularly on its progress, since having ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. I was not surprised to learn that the UN officials found Canada's progress report disappointing. Many of their negative comments are similar to those made a decade ago by the UN regarding Canada's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A PostMedia story quotes Maria Murras Perez, the vice-chair of the UN committee on the rights of the child as saying: "There is a lack of the analysis as to how and how much children's rights have been achieved in the state and how progress has been made... What we're telling you is really to raise the bar and to rise to the challenge, because Canada is one of the top five economies in the world."

More specifically, Canada has a political system of shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments that allows the needs of children fall through the cracks — because nobody is making sure that investments made for children's benefit are evaluated for delivering the desired results. This lack of coordination is leading to marginalization and rising poverty rates for families pf children with disabilities, for aboriginal children and children of immigrant families. The committee also noted that marginalized populations are over-represented in foster care, the health care and judicial systems.

What surprised me was the government's response to the UN's comments. It did not vow to do better, to honour its commitment to children and their families. No, rather, it defended its record.

Harperites shrugged off the UN criticism; rather than vowing to do better, they defended their government's record. How unfortunate that we are receiving this chastisement from the international community and that our elected representatives are not vowing to do better!

Canada came so close to making a breakthrough in following the UN's recommendation of making accountable investments in Canada's children. Remember the child care agreements negotiated by the Canadian government with the ten provincial governments which would have resulted in a pan-Canadian child care system. The system was by no means perfect, but did include accountability mechanisms to make sure that government investments were made in making licensed child care programs available throughout the

country.

Unfortunately scrapping these childcare agreements was the Harper government's first order of business when first elected in 2006.

No one should be surprised, really, that the Harper government is not taking its treaty obligations to Canada's children and families seriously. If you recall, recently Prime Minister Stephen Harper was himself criticized for avoiding attending and speaking at the United Nations General Assembly while already in New York.

When questioned in the House of Commons, Prime Minister Harper responded: "that this government takes strong, clear and independent decisions." I guess he means, making decisions regardless of the international commitments that the Canadian government has signed.

Harper has also openly criticized the United Nations by saying at a Conservative Party Convention that his government's position: "is no longer just to go along and get along with everyone else's agenda. It is no longer to please every dictator with a vote at the United Nations."

Personally, I believe that when Canada makes a commitment to the international community by ratifying a treaty, and more importantly when it makes a commitment to do right by Canada's children and families, that our elected representatives have a responsibility to meet those commitments.

Are Canada's children not entitled to a government that works to improve their civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights? This is what the Convention on the Rights of the Child is all about. It sets the terms upon which countries agree to protect and advance these rights.

As Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, so eloquently said: "There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected."

<http://sqnews.ca/2012/10/canadas-poor-marks-on-rights-of-child/>