

Child care as a human right^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Childcare has been a political flashpoint in Canada for decades, especially since 2006, when the incoming Conservatives canceled the proposed national childcare program and substituted a monthly family payment of \$100 per child. Human Resources Minister Diane Finley caught flack for explaining that the Conservatives oppose any program that would "ensure that parents are forced to have other people raise their children."

Last October, the UN Committee on Rights of the Child called on Canada to provide free or affordable child care, as part of a report on its ten-year review of Canada's efforts to comply with the Convention on Rights of the Child. The Committee found Canada lacking, because of new punitive young offenders measures, inadequate services for aboriginal children and other minorities, and insufficient commitment to childcare.

In fact, child care is a human right, say the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of British Columbia (CCABC). Both of these non-profit organizations have been working for more than 25 years to advance child care as the cornerstone of a progressive family policy. They promote child care services that are publicly-funded, inclusive, high-quality, affordable and publicly-owned and operated.

Unfortunately, Canadian governments have not invested in a range of quality early learning and care programs for Canada's children, although the case for doing so has been made time and time again.

Most Canadians support public child care. A poll conducted by polling firm Environics in October 2008 found that a strong majority of Canadians, 77 percent (86 percent in Atlantic Canada), believe that the lack of affordable child care is a serious issue. An even stronger majority, 83 percent of Canadians (88 per cent of Atlantic Canadians) believe that governments have an important role to play in helping parents to meet their child care needs.

Child care is a right for a number of reasons. First of all, the Canadian government has signed a number of international treaties that say it is a right, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and related General Comment #7, the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

As part of its examination of how well Canada meets its treaty obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the committee also consulted with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to verify the accuracy of the information being provided by government. The CCAAC and the CCABC submitted a brief called *A Tale of Two Canadas* to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The UN Committee slammed Canada's lack of childcare policies and infrastructure. "The Committee is concerned by the high cost of child-care," said their report, "the lack of available places for children, the absence of uniform training requirements for all child-care staff and of standards of quality care. The Committee notes that early childhood care and education continues to be inadequate for children under four years of age and the Committee is concerned that the majority of early childhood care and education services are provided by private, for profit institutions, resulting in services being unaffordable for most families."

Other report recommendations include:

- Adopt a national strategy to implement children's rights, alleviate poverty and prevent violence.
- Address high levels of violence against aboriginal women and girls.
- Ensure child victims of violence have access to restraining orders and other means of protection.
- Help troubled parents take better care of their children instead of sending them into foster care.
- Ensure disabled children are not forced into segregated schooling.
- Monitor the use of drugs to treat mental conditions in children, to curtail over-medication.
- Eliminate user fees in public schools.
- Increase the availability of free or affordable daycare.
- Rehabilitate Omar Khadr.
- Stop detaining child refugee claimants.
- Act to prevent obesity among children.

Unfortunately, this is just the latest example of Canada's bad reviews from the international community on its investment — or should I say its non-investment — in children and families. Other unfavourable reviews came from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and UNICEF.

The Harper government seems headed for more conflict with the international community over childcare. Regardless of its ideological leanings, the Canadian government is still obliged to meet its treaty obligations to its citizens under the international covenants that it has signed.

Region: Canada ^[2]

Tags: children's rights ^[3]

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