

Canadian Council of
Child and Youth Advocates

Conseil canadien des
défenseurs des enfants
et des jeunes

January 23, 2012

Ref: 19239

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The Honourable John Baird
Minister of Foreign Affairs
and International Trade Canada
Government of Canada
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

Dear Honourable Baird:

Re: Optional Protocol to UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) is an alliance of provincially/territorially appointed Children's Advocates from 10 Canadian provinces and territories. When new legislation is brought into force in Alberta in April of 2012, all of the members will be independent Officers of the Legislature in their respective jurisdictions. Although our mandates differ according to the legislation that establishes each office, we share a common commitment to further the voice, rights and dignity of children, especially children who are vulnerable as a result of their life circumstances.

We write today in support of the new *Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Optional Protocol), adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 19, 2011. This Optional Protocol establishes a complaints mechanism for violations of children's rights.

We encourage Canada to engage in consultation with the provinces/territories as a first step toward signing this Optional Protocol in 2012 on behalf of all Canadian children and vulnerable children throughout the world who experience human rights violations and who require an international communications procedure through which to seek remedies to those violations.

Canada led the world in ratifying the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC). By signing this new Optional Protocol, and demonstrating its commitment to ratify, Canada will, once again, place itself at the international forefront of promoting and protecting child rights implementation.

For children to have access to the UN Committee's complaints procedure, States, including Canada, must ratify the new Optional Protocol. To make this Optional Protocol legally binding and to bring it into force, the UN must receive a deposit of 10 instruments of ratification or accession from States. We urge Canada, therefore, to sign the Optional Protocol as soon as possible, to engage immediately thereafter in its process to ratify this instrument internally, and to register its international ratifications as quickly as possible.

In 2012, the UN Committee will be examining Canada on its obligations to implement the UNCRC within its boundaries. During 2012, therefore, Canada has a significant opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to UNCRC implementation by having children, and others, participate in its process leading to ratification and, subsequently, in contributing to the successful implementation of the Optional Protocol. In the absence of a federal children's commissioner, the CCCYA can assist with this initiative, which will also assist Canada to meet its specific UNCRC participatory obligations to children.

By signing and ratifying the new Optional Protocol, Canada will encourage other States and enhance its reputation for leading the world in its commitment to child rights implementation. We strongly encourage Canada to proceed on this path as soon as it is possible.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond
President
Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates

pc: The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada