

**A Dialogue on Canada's  
National Plan of Action  
for Children**

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## Introduction

In May 2002, at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, leaders of the world's governments committed themselves to creating a better world for children. These commitments are described in full in the outcome document from the Special Session on Children entitled *A World Fit for Children*. To help them fulfil their promises, the governments of the world agreed to prepare “national action plans with a set of specific time-bound and measurable goals and targets ... taking into account the best interest of the child, ... and in conformity with all human rights and fundamental freedoms” (paragraph 59 of *A World Fit for Children*).

The Prime Minister of Canada asked the Honourable Anne Mclellan, Minister of Health, and the Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of Human Resources Development, to accept joint responsibility for developing Canada's National Plan of Action (NPA). The Prime Minister also asked Senator Landon Pearson to act as his personal representative to the Special Session on Children follow-up process.

Over the next few months, Senator Pearson is holding a series of dialogues across Canada. A team of government officials, non-governmental representatives and young people will continue to develop Canada's NPA based on what people have said, written and shown. By the end of 2003, Canada's NPA will be submitted to the United Nations.

## Part I: A Dialogue with Canadians

To develop Canada's National Plan of Action so that it will make a difference for children, it is essential that we work with as many interested Canadians as possible. We need to hear from various levels of government, non-governmental organizations, parents, concerned individuals, and, most importantly, from children. What would a world and a Canada fit for boys and girls under the age of 18 look like to you? Your views are important and will help to shape Canada's vision for children.

Guided by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), the NPA should build on the solid foundation that already embodies Canada's commitment to children, address emerging issues and look forward to the future. Canadians of all ages now have the opportunity to work together and to protect and promote children's rights while discussing and building Canada's vision for children for the coming decade.

Already, Canadians have started to say what they believe needs to be done and how it should be done. Many individuals and groups have written to Senator Landon Pearson describing their priorities for action. This preliminary feedback has informed the development of the questions for discussion included in Part II of this document.

### **The United Nations Special Session on Children**

In New York, from May 8 - 10, 2002, more than 7,000 people from around the world participated in the most important international conference on children in more than ten years. The United Nations General Assembly held a Special Session on Children where the nations of the world committed themselves to a series of goals, strategies and actions to improve the situation of children around the world. Heads of state and government and other high-level delegates, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and hundreds of boys and girls (aged 9 to 17) planned for the future.

The Special Session on Children reviewed progress since the World Summit for Children in 1990, identified barriers and emerging issues, and renewed the global commitment to children. Governments also identified strategic solutions to the problems confronting the world's children and promised critical resources to address them. *A World Fit for Children* focuses on four key priorities: (1) promoting healthy lives; (2) providing quality education for all; (3) protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; and (4) combating HIV/AIDS. It contains a global plan of action that describes what the nations of the world must do for and

with children. Progress in implementing the global plan of action will be carefully monitored and detailed in reports by countries to the United Nations in 2006, 2011, and 2016.

The guidebook also includes a section called *A World Fit for Us*, which is the statement made by children at the Special Session. In their own words, boys and girls from virtually every country set out their priorities with clarity and precision. These priorities include respect, protection and promotion of their rights, as well as actions necessary to ensure their well-being such as peace-building, health care, the eradication of poverty, quality education, and the protection of the environment.

In order to achieve the goals set out in *A World Fit for Children* Canadians of all ages must work together to prepare an NPA that is forward-looking, strategic, child-centred and respectful not only of our cultural diversity but also of our constitution. It is fundamentally important that our NPA recognizes and supports parents and families as the primary caregivers of children and strengthens their capacity to provide the optimum care, nurturing and protection (paragraph 6).

### **Taking Action to Build A World Fit for Children**

The dialogues on Canada's National Plan of Action for children being held across Canada will allow for a wide range of opinions, thoughts and ideas to be presented and shared. They are meant to get people thinking and talking about how best to support children and, with them, how to create both a Canada and a world fit for children.

The NPA will build on Canada's existing commitments to improve the lives of children both within Canada and abroad. For example, the National Children's Agenda (NCA) sets out a broad and ambitious shared vision for all children in Canada. Under the NCA, federal, provincial and territorial governments are collaborating to implement key goals to improve the lives of children in Canada, fighting child poverty through the National Child Benefit (NCB), and promoting early development through the Early Childhood Development Agreement (ECD). The Government of Canada has doubled parental leave under the Employment Insurance program, and invested in community-based programs such as the Community Action Program for Children and Aboriginal Head Start. The 2003 federal budget announced new investments in the NCB, an initiative for childcare and supports for families looking after a gravely ill child, spouse or parent. The Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) Action Plan on Child Protection supports vulnerable children around the world. Children's rights also have a place in Canadian foreign policy. (See Appendix A for further details.)

As you discuss how we can build on and improve Canada's work with and for children, think of these as well as non-governmental commitments.

## **Developing Canada's National Plan of Action**

An important message at the Special Session on Children was that children must be a meaningful part of the process of developing NPAs. Governments are urged to involve children in planning, implementing and monitoring them. So far young people have been working closely in our process to make sure that their voices are heard. Their participation in every stage of this process will be essential.

As a first step, Senator Landon Pearson opened a broad consultative process to develop the National Plan of Action by soliciting input from a wide range of Canadians. Boys and girls, young people and adults, as well as non-governmental organizations and the private sector have been identifying priorities, strategies and emerging issues for children for the coming decade. Quality education; improved health care; the eradication of poverty; Aboriginal children; children with disabilities; early childhood care and development; children's participation; child protection issues; and a clean environment all rank high.

Canada's National Plan of Action is currently focusing on four themes. These themes are based both on what Canadians have been saying and also on Canada's domestic and international commitments to children – specifically on the National Children's Agenda and *A World Fit for Children* (see Appendix B). Overall, the principles of the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, participation and survival and development provide the framework for Canada's actions concerning children, including adolescents.

The four themes are:

- Promoting healthy lives, including combating HIV/AIDS
- Providing quality education
- Protecting against abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect
- Enabling social engagement and collaboration

In response to *A World Fit for Children*, Canada's NPA should include specific, time-bound and measurable goals arrived at through a process that is child-centred, multi-sectoral, and collaborative and focused on the long term. Canada's commitment to children and the protection and promotion of their rights needs to be regularly reviewed and reported on. This monitoring can be done at many levels, via governments and non-governmental organizations alike.

To this end, the goals of this dialogue process are:

1. To set priorities and determine emerging issues, and opportunities for action.
2. To identify institutional mechanisms for the promotion of the rights of the child, including greater public awareness of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (paragraph 31).
3. To identify mechanisms for monitoring progress and reassessing priorities (paragraph 31 and 60).
4. To identify ways of mobilizing new and additional resources to ensure that the rights of each and every child in Canada and abroad are promoted and respected (paragraph 48).
5. To establish a model for future involvement in policy development processes for children that is child-centred, multi-sectoral, forward-looking and collaborative.

In conclusion, the process of developing Canada's NPA for children has already started. This process has been designed to identify the views and priorities of a wide cross-section of Canadians, including young people. Canadians bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the dialogues. Already we have heard from many organizations and individuals who have written to us and identified their views on priorities, strategies and emerging issues. The next section of this paper reflects on consultations to date and suggests questions for discussion. By contributing your perspective, you will help shape Canada's National Plan of Action and ensure that it represents the views of Canadians. Only together can we create a Canada and a world fit for children.

## Part II: Questions for Discussion

### Overview

1. Canada's National Plan of Action is being developed within our existing commitments, which combine *A World Fit for Children* with the vision of the National Children's Agenda. The four themes are:

- Promoting healthy lives, including combating HIV/AIDS
- Providing quality education
- Protecting against abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect
- Enabling social engagement and collaboration

**Are these themes adequate to reflect the priorities for Canada's National Plan of Action?**

2. The goals of the dialogue process to develop Canada's National Plan of Action are:

- To set priorities and determine emerging issues, and opportunities for action.
- To identify institutional mechanisms for the promotion of the rights of the child, including greater public awareness of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
- To identify mechanisms for monitoring progress and reassessing priorities.
- To identify ways of mobilizing new and additional resources to ensure that the rights of each and every child in Canada and abroad are promoted and respected.
- To establish a model for future involvement in policy development processes for children that is child-centred, multi-sectoral, forward-looking and collaborative.

**Are these acceptable as key goals for Canada's National Plan of Action?**



## A. Promoting healthy lives, including combating HIV/AIDS

1. The following priorities are among those that have emerged from consultations to date.

- Aboriginal children
- Alcohol, tobacco and substance abuse
- Child poverty
- Childhood injury
- Children's environmental health
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome / Fetal Alcohol Effect
- Health care
- Healthy mother / healthy babies
- Healthy physical and social environments
- HIV/ AIDS
- Immunization
- Mental health
- Nutrition
- Parenting
- Physical activity
- Play, recreation, artistic and cultural expression
- Sexual and reproductive health

Are there important priorities that are not reflected in this list? Please help us identify which of these priorities are immediate and short-term, and if any are long-term priorities.

2. What new and emerging issues are likely to arise for children in the coming decade? As examples, this might include current issues that have yet to be fully explored.

3. What are the most important strategies and actions that governments and other sectors/actors should do to support the promotion of healthy lives (including combating HIV/AIDS) in the coming decade?

Think of who should act and one to three key strategies and actions. Please be as specific as possible, e.g., if you identify 'resources' then please determine the purpose for which they would be required. When possible, include goals that are time-bound and measurable.

Consultations to date have identified the following strategy, which you may choose to reflect on in this exercise: *"A comprehensive strategy to raise awareness and train professionals in order to both prevent the incidence of FAS/FAE and to provide systematic support to affected children and their families."*

## B. Providing quality education

1. The following priorities are among those that have emerged from consultations to date.
  - Early childhood care and development
  - Education on children's rights for children and adults
  - High quality education for all children
  - High quality French language education for francophone's outside of Quebec
  - High quality, culturally sensitive education for Aboriginal children
  - Inclusive education for children with disabilities
  - Literacy
  - National standards for child care
  - Pan-Canadian educational outcomes
  - Trained and professional teachers and early childhood educators

**Are there important priorities that are not reflected in this list? Please help us identify which of these priorities are immediate and short-term, and if any are long-term priorities.**

2. **What new and emerging issues are likely to arise for children in the coming decade? As examples, this might include current issues that have yet to be fully explored.**

3. **What are the most important strategies and actions that governments and other sectors should do to provide quality education in the coming decade?**

Think of who should act and one to three key strategies and actions. Please be as specific as possible, e.g., if you identify 'resources' then please determine the purpose for which they would be required. When possible, include goals that are time-bound and measurable.

Consultations to date have identified the following strategy, which you may choose to reflect on in this exercise: *"Establish clear indicators for early childhood development programs, remuneration and retention for staff (salary enhancement based on education levels), involvement of communities and families in programs."*

### **C. Protecting against abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect**

1. The following priorities are among those that have emerged from consultations to date.
  - Bullying
  - Child abuse and neglect
  - Child labour
  - Children in armed conflict
  - Children living in care
  - Corporal punishment
  - Refugee and asylum seeking children
  - Sexual abuse and exploitation
  - Violent and harmful medias, including the Internet, computer programs and games
  - Youth justice

**Are there important priorities that are not reflected in this list? Please help us identify which of these priorities are immediate and short-term, and if any are long-term priorities.**

2. **What new and emerging issues are likely to arise for children in the coming decade? As examples, this might include current issues that have yet to be fully explored.**

3. **What are the most important strategies and actions that governments and other sectors should do to protect children from abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect in the coming decade?**

Think of who should act and one to three key strategies and actions. Please be as specific as possible, e.g., if you identify 'resources' then please determine the purpose for which they would be required. When possible, include goals that are time-bound and measurable.

Consultations to date have identified the following strategy, which you may choose to reflect on in this exercise: *"Conflict resolution strategies involving children and youth should receive particular attention...; and Canada should support international support mechanisms to protect children threatened by armed conflict."*

## D. Enabling social engagement and collaboration

1. The following priorities are among those that have emerged from consultations to date.
  - A national body, such as a commissioner, ombudsperson and advocate for Canadian children
  - Aboriginal people
  - Child poverty
  - Children and young people's participation
  - Family enabling and child friendly communities
  - Minority and immigrant communities
  - Multi-sectoral collaboration
  - Population health approach
  - Private sector engagement
  - Social inclusion
  - Supporting parents, families and communities

**Are there important priorities that are not reflected in this list? Please help us identify which of these priorities are immediate and short-term, and if any are long-term priorities.**

2. **What new and emerging issues are likely to arise for children in the coming decade? As examples, this might include current issues that have yet to be fully explored.**

3. **What are the most important strategies and actions that governments and other sectors should do to enable social engagement and collaboration in the coming decade?**

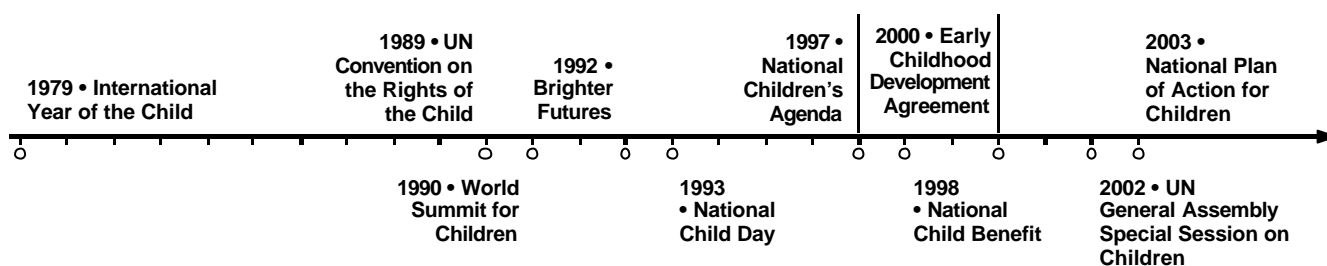
Think of who should act and one to three key strategies and actions. Please be as specific as possible, e.g., if you identify 'resources' then please determine the purpose for which they would be required. When possible, include goals that are time-bound and measurable.

Consultations to date have identified the following strategy, which you may choose to reflect on in this exercise: *“Build a family enabling society. We envision a society where the informal and formal social safety nets strengthen and stabilize the family unit. These safety nets require an infrastructure that would support, amongst others, early preparation for parenting, creation of parenting resource centers and creation of an infrastructure of inter-sectoral collaboration (such as an integrated forum for human services).”*

## Appendix A: Chronology of Canada's Efforts for Children

The following is a brief chronology of Canada's efforts for children. The chronology starts in 1979 with the International Year of the Child, includes major domestic and international initiatives, and ends with the present process to develop Canada's National Plan of Action as follow-up to the United Nations General Assembly on Children. Descriptions and links to the documents are included as additional information.

Chart 1: Timeline of Canada's efforts for children (1979 to 2003)



### International Year of the Child (1979)

The International Year of the Child was instrumental in giving visibility to children's issues and in calling on national institutions to prioritise and strategise on these issues. The Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child developed a national agenda for action. It was tabled in Parliament in 1980 and entitled *For Canada's Children: A National Agenda for Action*.

### Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

Canada took an active lead in the United Nations working group that transformed the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child into the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which was unanimously adopted by the United Nations on November 20, 1989. The CRC is an international human rights treaty about and for children under the age of 18. It spells out basic human rights for all children, everywhere, all the time. It recognizes that children should be active participants in their own development. It recognizes that children's capacity to exercise their rights responsibly evolves as they grow and develop. It also recognizes the important role parents play in the development of children.

The CRC has four main principles:

- The best interests of the child must be the first considerations when taking actions that affect children;
- All children have the right to life, survival and development;
- All children have the right to participate; and
- All children have the right to non-discrimination.

To ensure that Canada is implementing its obligations as a state party to the convention, we regularly submit reports to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children and other groups has also submitted parallel reports that document from the non-governmental perspective the successes and shortcomings of Canada's efforts. Every country in the world except the United States of America and Somalia, which doesn't have a functioning government, has ratified the CRC.

#### For more information

- Full text of the CRC on the website of the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights, at [www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/treaties/crc.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/treaties/crc.htm)
- Child-friendly poster of the CRC (in pdf format) on Canadian Child Care Federation, at [www.cccf-fcsqe.ca/pdf/rights\\_poster\\_en.pdf](http://www.cccf-fcsqe.ca/pdf/rights_poster_en.pdf)

### **World Summit for Children (1990)**

At the request of UNICEF, Canada in collaboration with five other countries (specifically Egypt, Mexico, Mali, Pakistan and Sweden), encouraged the nations of the world to come together at the United Nations in September 1990 for the first summit to focus on the world's children. The World Summit for Children attracted 71 heads of state or government and 88 other country representatives who collectively signed *A World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children* with an accompanying Plan of Action.

In Canada, the World Summit helped shape federal government policies with respect to children, including Canada's ratification of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1991. An action plan was prepared in response to the commitment.

#### For more information

- World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, and Plan of Action at [www.unicef.org/wsc/declare.htm](http://www.unicef.org/wsc/declare.htm)

### **Brighter Futures (1992)**

Following the 1990 World Summit, the Government of Canada initiated a five-year National Plan of Action, called *Brighter Futures*. It focussed attention on the conditions that most often put children at risk, and represented a significant investment for children. Many of the programs that were established as a result of *Brighter Futures* remain part of Canada's current commitment to children.

### **National Child Day (1993)**

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* was adopted at the United Nations on November 20, 1989; exactly 30 years to the day after the United Nations adopted the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*. In 1993, by Act of Parliament, Canada designated November 20 as National Child Day, a day to celebrate Canada's children and promote the CRC.

#### For more information

- National Child Day website at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/english/index.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/english/index.html)

### **National Children's Agenda (1997)**

The federal, provincial and territorial governments agreed in January 1997 to work together to develop the National Children's Agenda (NCA), a shared vision to improve the well being of Canada's children. As part of the NCA, the federal government committed in the 1997 Speech from the Throne to develop the National Child Benefit system; Learning Readiness Indicators; Aboriginal Head Start for on-reserve First Nations children; and five Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being.

In the spring and summer of 1999, a public dialogue was initiated to discuss common values and goals for children within the context of a document entitled *A National Children's Agenda - Developing A Shared Vision*. A supplementary document, *A National Children's Agenda - Measuring Child Well-Being and Monitoring Progress*, promoted discussion about how governments and Canadians can measure children's progress and share information about how to improve children's well-being.

The NCA lays out four goals: "As a nation, we aspire to have children who are: (1) healthy physically and emotionally; (2) safe and secure; (3) successful at learning; and (4) socially engaged and responsible.

#### For more information

- National Children's Agenda on the Social Union website at [www.socialunion.gc.ca/nca\\_e.html](http://www.socialunion.gc.ca/nca_e.html)

### **National Child Benefit (1998)**

As one of the initiatives of a National Children's Agenda, the National Child Benefit aims to prevent and reduce the depth of child poverty in Canada, promote labour market attachment by ensuring that families will always be better off as a result of working, and reduce overlap and duplication by harmonizing program objectives and benefits across jurisdictions. Under the National Child Benefit, the Government of Canada is increasing child benefits it provides to all low-income families with children through the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB). The 2001 Speech from the Throne stated: "The National Child Benefit is the cornerstone of our collective efforts to provide children with a better start. It is the single most important social program to be introduced in this country since medicare in the 1960s."

For more information

- National Child Benefit website at [www.nationalchildbenefit.ca](http://www.nationalchildbenefit.ca)

### **Early Childhood Development Agreement (2000)**

In September 2000, the Government of Canada announced an investment of \$2.2 billion in early childhood development (ECD) over five years through the Canada Health and Social Transfer. Through the ECD Agreement, the Government of Canada is transferring funds to provincial and territorial governments to invest in any or all of the following four areas:

- Promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy;
- Improve parenting and family supports;
- Strengthen early childhood development, learning and care; and
- Strengthen community supports.

Within Canada's Social Union Framework Agreement, each provincial and territorial government tailors its early child development services to meet the unique local needs of children and their families. For Canadian families, these investments mean better access to services, such as pre-natal classes and screening, pre-school programs and child care, and parent information and family support. To give Canadians a clear idea of the progress being made, governments will report regularly on how young children are doing and on their involvement in programs and services.

For more information:

- Early Childhood Development Agreement on the Social Union website at [www.socialunion.gc.ca/eecd](http://www.socialunion.gc.ca/eecd)



## United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children (2002)

In preparation for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, Canada along with most other countries prepared a report in 2001 that reviewed the progress it had made in the decade since it had signed *The World Declaration and Plan of Action* at the World Summit on Children in 1990.

The Secretary-General gathered information from all the country reports in a report to the General Assembly. *We the Children: End-decade review of follow-up to the World Summit for Children* assesses overall progress and identifies the lessons learned from success and failure. *We the Children* was very helpful in informing world leaders as they planned future actions for and with children. By keeping track of what is being done and what still needs to be done, both in Canada and around the world, governments are better positioned to support children and their families.

At the Special Session on Children on 10 May 2002, the General Assembly adopted *A World Fit for Children*. It includes a declaration and plan of action for children for the coming decade.

### For more information

- A *World Fit for Children* guidebook at [www.unicef.org/pubsgen/wffc/wffc-en.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/pubsgen/wffc/wffc-en.pdf)
- Special Session on Children on the UNICEF website at [www.unicef.org/specialsession](http://www.unicef.org/specialsession)
- *Ten-Year Review of the World Summit for Children: National Report – Canada*. This includes Canada's full report [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dca-dea/publications/pdf/children\\_national\\_report\\_e.pdf](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dca-dea/publications/pdf/children_national_report_e.pdf) and a youth-friendly version [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dca-dea/publications/pdf/wsc10youth\\_e.pdf](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dca-dea/publications/pdf/wsc10youth_e.pdf)
- *We the Children: End-decade review of follow-up to the World Summit for Children* at [www.unicef.org/specialsession/documentation/documents/a-s-27-3e.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/documentation/documents/a-s-27-3e.pdf)

## Appendix B: Domestic and International Linkages

Linking priority areas of Canada's National Plan of Action for Children to *A World Fit for Children*, Canada's National Children's Agenda and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Canada's National Plan of Action for Children	<i>A World Fit for Children</i>	Canada's National Children's Agenda	<i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>	
			Guiding principles	Relevant articles
<b>Promoting healthy lives; including Combating HIV/AIDS</b>	Promoting healthy lives (Part B.1)	Healthy – physically and emotionally	Art. 2 (non-discrimination),	Art. 8 (preservation of identity), Art. 21 (adoption), Art. 24 (health and health services), Art. 27 (standard of living), Art. 28 (education), Art. 29 (aims of education), Art. 30 (children of minorities or indigenous populations), Art. 31 (leisure, recreation and cultural activities).
	Combating HIV/AIDS (Part B.2)			
<b>Promoting quality education</b>	Promoting quality education (Part B.3)	Successful at learning	Art. 3 (best interests of the child),	Art. 18 (parental responsibilities and child care), Art. 28 (education), Art. 29 (aims of education).
<b>Protecting against abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect</b>	Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence (Part B4)	Safe and secure	Art. 6 (survival and development),	Art. 7 (name and nationality), Art. 8 (preservation of identity), Art. 9 (separation from parents), Art. 11 (illicit transfer and non-return), Art. 16 (protection of private), Art. 19 (protection from abuse and neglect), Art. 20 (protection of a child without a family), Art. 21 (adoption), Art. 22 (refugee children), Art. 23 (disabled children), Art. 30 (children of minorities or indigenous populations), Art. 34 (sexual exploitation), Art. 35 (sale, trafficking and abduction), Art. 36 (other forms of exploitation), Art. 37 (torture and deprivation of liberty), Art. 38 (armed conflicts), Art. 39 (rehabilitative care), Art. 40 (administration of juvenile justice).
			Art. 12 (the child's opinion).	
<b>Enabling social engagement and collaboration</b>	Parts A, B, D	Socially engaged and responsible		Art. 13 (freedom of expression), Art. 14 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), Art. 15 (freedom of association), Art. 16 (protection of privacy), Art. 17 (access to appropriate information), Art. 30 (children of minorities or indigenous populations), Art. 42-54 (implementation and entry into force).