

# **National Report - Canada: Ten-Year Review of the World Summit for Children**

**-- Youth-Friendly Summary --**

# What is this report? Why is it important to you?

This report is the youth version of Canada's National Report-Ten Year Review of the World Summit for Children, which was sent to the UN in preparation for the the Special Session on Children of the UN General Assembly September 19-21, 2001 in New York City. It describes the progress made by Canada in achieving the goals set out at the World Summit for Children (WSC) in 1990 - its purpose is to report on government responsibilities and achievements.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines many rights of children, including the right of children to participate in decisions that concern their lives, and the right to have their opinions heard. In this spirit, Canada realizes that the participation of well-informed young people is important to the success of initiatives meant to benefit the well-being and development of all children - essentially, implementing the goals of the WSC is a way of realising those rights in your lives. Producing this youth-friendly report is a priority for the Government of Canada because it gives you the means to fully understand the progress Canada has made in the last ten years as well as highlighting areas for improvement.

The government has worked in partnership with two Canadian organizations, the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) and Save the Children Canada (SCC), in order to involve voluntary organizations and children and youth in this Ten Year Review. Children and youth will participate via the internet, through direct involvement in preparatory meetings, in focus groups, as well as in the Special Session itself. For more information on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the World Summit for Children, and on Canada's commitments to children, you can read the "adult" version of this report - you can get it at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/childhood-youth/>. Also, use your local **library or school internet** access to visit the websites mentioned throughout this report for more information.

# Questions and Answers

*What is the Convention on the Rights of the Child? How does it affect Canadian children and youth?*



## DEFINITION

A **child**, according to Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is a young person under the age of 18, except in the case where the age of majority is reached earlier.

To **ratify** means to confirm or assent formally and make an agreement officially valid. Governments must do this to be party to this or any international treaty.

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (referred to as "the *Convention*" in this report) is an international human rights treaty about children and youth. The United Nations (UN) General Assembly accepted it in 1989, and Canada ratified it in 1991. Forty-one of the *Convention's* articles are about specific children's rights; one article is about public awareness and education and twelve articles speak of ways to monitor, ratify and enforce the *Convention*. The *Convention* has been adopted by more countries than any other international human rights treaty. To

read the text of the *Convention* and related documents check out the Canadian Heritage website: [www.pch.gc.ca](http://www.pch.gc.ca)

- ; Human Rights Program
- ; Canada and the International Human Rights System
- ; Canada's Reports on United Nations Conventions and Other Official Documents
- ; The Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Or better yet, get a youth version of the Convention entitled, *Say it Right! The Unconventional Canadian Youth Edition of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* from the Youth Participation Committee of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, found at [www.rightsofchildren.ca](http://www.rightsofchildren.ca)

The *Convention* is not Canadian law, but the principles of the *Convention* must be reflected in Canadian legislation, policies and programs, and any new laws must be

reviewed to make sure they comply with the *Convention*. As a way of making sure that governments progress on the promotion and protection of children's rights, the UN receives periodic reports from national governments, including Canada, on the progress they have made in implementing the *Convention*.

### **What was the World Summit for Children?**

 The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	
website, <a href="http://www.unicef.org">http://www.unicef.org</a> , is a great source of information on the World Summit for Children as well as a number of other issues that concern children worldwide.	

The World Summit for Children (WSC) was a gathering together of 71 Heads of State and Governments, as well as ministerial representatives (like the Ministers of Foreign Affairs) from 88 other countries on September 29-30, 1990. At the WSC, the participating countries agreed to a ten-point

Declaration and Plan of Action which addresses issues and goals which were to be achieved during the 1990s, in the areas of Health, Nutrition, Drinking Water, Education, Sanitation programs, and protection to children in especially difficult circumstances. The countries agreed to create national action plans to reach these objectives, and to provide review reports to the UN. Canada was one of the original six countries that helped UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) prepare for the 1990 World Summit for Children, and Canada also acted as co-chair of WSC. One hundred and fifty-nine countries committed themselves to giving every child a brighter future, and encouraged other countries to do the same. They saw the *Convention* as a chance to make respect for children's rights and welfare truly universal, and as a way to encourage action.

In May 1992, the Government of Canada initiated its National Plan of Action for Children in response to the WSC. The five-year Plan to improve children's well-being, entitled *Brighter Futures*, involved many government departments. It included over thirty different steps and programs and promised a \$500 million investment by the federal government over five years.

### **Why have a review of the World Summit for Children?**

Canada completed a mid-decade review in 1996, providing an overview of efforts

made since the WSC to achieve its goals, as well as reviewing *Brighter Futures*. These reviews provided government with an opportunity to look at the impact their children's programs had, at how effective these programs were, and to see how these programs and policies met the objectives set at the WSC.

### ***Why is the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) being held in September 2001?***

In September 2001, the UN is holding this event to review international progress in implementing WSC goals, as well as to develop the future plan for action to ensure three essential outcomes: the best possible start in life for all children, a good-quality basic education for all children, and the opportunities for all children, especially

#### **FAST FACT**

The Special Session on Children is an unprecedented meeting of the UN General Assembly dedicated to the children and adolescents of the world. It will bring together government leaders and Heads of State, NGOs, children's advocates and young people themselves from 19-21 September, 2001 at the

adolescents, for meaningful participation in their communities. Canada is actively involved in preparing for this Special Session. In June 1999, Senator Landon Pearson - a Senator who has taken as her personal commitment to speak out on behalf of children -- was named Personal Representative of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to the Special Session on Children. You can find more information on Senator Landon Pearson's website: [www.sen.parl.gc.ca/lpearson](http://www.sen.parl.gc.ca/lpearson) if you follow the link to "Special Session on Children". This page also has a link to the UNICEF website, [www.unicef.org/wsc10](http://www.unicef.org/wsc10) that gives more details about the UN's preparations and the activities scheduled for the Special Session on Children.

# Meeting the Goals of the World Summit for Children

## Canada's Achievements

In the ten years since the WSC, Canada has worked towards enhancing and promoting the rights, well-being and development of children. Through many measures and through the combined efforts of

Canadians, Canada has made progress towards achieving many of the Summit goals. This progress includes reducing child- and maternal- mortality rates (the number of deaths among children before their fifth birthday, and number of deaths among women from pregnancy-related causes), certain childhood illnesses, greater access to immunization, and better access to information for children. Although this progress is important, a number of improvements still have to be made to ensure the rights, well-being and optimal development of children and youth in Canada and abroad.

### **FAST FACT**

In 1999, there were slightly less than 8 million children aged 0 (newborn) to 19 years in Canada- 7,979,251- representing about 26% of the Canadian population.

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Canada has announced a focus on children and youth, knowledge and education, health and the environment - all as part of a move into the new century. This focus will mean many things for many people, and translates into a variety of actions in cooperation with a number of governments, including more maternal and parental leave benefits (for parents to stay home with their new babies), more support for early childhood development (young children aged 0 to 6), more family friendly places of work, modernizing laws for child support, custody and access, and the creation of foreign policy and development assistance that focusses more specifically on the rights of children and youth globally (such as working on eliminating the worst forms of child labour, or protecting children affected by war).

## *Investing in Children*

Reducing poverty, particularly among families with children, has been an ongoing priority of the federal, provincial and territorial governments across Canada. During the 1990s, the federal, provincial and territorial governments worked together to make investing in children a national priority. This cooperation between governments on behalf of children is a central element in a number of children's initiatives. These initiatives include Canada's National Child Benefit (NCB) initiative, the ongoing development of the National Children's Agenda (NCA), and the Early Childhood Development initiative. A very important aspect of these initiatives is cooperation - with the involvement of experts, concerned citizens and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), efforts made to benefit children will be stronger than those involving just governments alone.

The NCB system is one of the collective actions taken to address child and family poverty. Before this joint initiative, which is shared between the federal, provincial and territorial governments, was developed, parents who were working at low wages received lower child-related benefits than parents who had to rely on social assistance. This meant that sometimes parents would have to choose between staying on welfare to keep the benefits, and taking a job and losing the benefits. What the NCB initiative aims to do is to increase financial support to low-income families so that parents do not have to choose between staying on welfare to keep benefits for children or taking a job and losing these benefits.

Meanwhile, the NCA is a collaborative effort by governments in Canada to make sure that all Canadian children have the best opportunity to develop to their full potential. The first step in the development of the NCA was government co-operation on a shared vision for Canada's children.

The shared vision includes goals for all Canadian children: to be healthy (physically and emotionally), safe and secure, successful at learning, socially engaged and as responsible as possible.

Federal, provincial, and territorial governments are also working to expand and improve early childhood development programs in four key areas: promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; improve parenting and family supports; strengthen early



childhood development learning and care; and strengthen community supports. Governments also want to be accountable to Canadians for the early childhood development programs and services that they offer so they are going to monitor and report regularly on progress that is made in improving the well-being of children in Canada.

The federal government has sponsored many programs that help local communities in areas such as health and social programs, including the Community Action Program for Children, the Aboriginal Head Start Program and the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program. These programs recognize the importance of early childhood development, parental involvement and education, and partnerships with other governments, non-governmental agencies and communities.

### *Aboriginal Children*

All Canadian children must be able to share in the benefits of meeting the WSC goals. Throughout the last decade, the Government of Canada has worked to improve the well-being of Aboriginal peoples, including Aboriginal children. As the fastest growing segment of Canadian society, the cultural and traditional heritage of Aboriginal children needs to be taken into account when developing policies for young people.

A number of important policies and initiatives have worked towards achieving the enhanced well-being of Aboriginal peoples. For example, the ***Inherent Right Policy (1995)*** and ***Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan (January 1998)***. The ***Inherent Right Policy*** recognizes the right of Aboriginal peoples to govern themselves in key areas of responsibility.

***Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*** includes measures announced as part of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. These measures have a direct impact on young people, so the Government of Canada has made a large effort to address WSC goals as they relate to Aboriginal children. For further information on ***Gathering Strength*** and many other issues relating to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, see the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs' website,

#### **DEFINITION**

Aboriginal Peoples of Canada are the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people - Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

For all definitions related to Aboriginal Peoples of Canada,



## *Access to information*

A young person's right to access information from many sources is an important element of the *Convention* and the goals of the WSC. Canada is taking positive steps to inform children and youth of their rights and to improve their access to information, including the SchoolNet project and the production of this report for you.


## *Knowing Canada's Children*

Information about characteristics of Canada's children, their needs and issues, will help the government better understand factors that influence positive child development, and will be used by governments to develop and evaluate policies and programs targeted at children and youth. *The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* (NLSCY), initiated in 1994, is one research program that tracks the health and well-being of a large group of Canadian children over the long-term.

## *International Action For Children*

Throughout the decade, since the WSC and the signing and ratification of the *Convention*, the rights of children have been a priority of Canada's foreign policy and official development assistance. By working with other countries, international agencies such as UNICEF, Canadian and developing country non-governmental organizations and other members of society, Canada continues to work towards improving the situation of children outside of the country.

In September 2000, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) launched the *Social Development Priorities: A Framework for Action*. This Framework commits CIDA to making investments over five years (2000-2005) in



### FAST FACT

The federal government established Canada's **SchoolNet** in 1993, a collaborative effort to connect all Canadian public schools and public libraries to the Internet by March 31, 1999. This goal was achieved, making Canada the first nation in the world to connect all its schools and libraries. *Canada's SchoolNet* will improve Canadian children's access to information promoting their rights, well-being and development.

developing countries in health and nutrition, basic education, HIV/AIDs, and child protection, with gender equality an important part of these. Children are an important focus throughout these. The Child Protection part focuses specifically on marginalized girls and boys in need of special protection from exploitation, abuse and discrimination especially child labourers and children affected by armed conflict, but are also concerned about protecting the rights of street-involved children sexually exploited children, children with disabilities, children facing discrimination because of their ethnic or religious identity and children in conflict with the law or in institutional care. CIDA's work in child protection will emphasize the rights of children, including the right of children to participate in decisions that affect them.

Canada supported concrete international actions which have expanded and reinforced the commitments made under the *Convention*. Canada has also made progress in areas of international trade, the environment and social justice. Canada believes that for all players to enjoy the benefits of international trade, everyone must work under the same rules in free and fair global markets, and trade goals must be pursued with consideration to their effects on the environment and developing economies. These issues affect young people in a variety of ways, from the prohibition of the use of child labour to respecting the environment so that future generations grow up on a healthy planet.

## *Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*

### *Canada's Record*

Canada's progress in many of the priority areas of the WSC has been significant, yet much remains to be accomplished to guarantee the rights, well-being and optimal development of its children - this section will give an overview of the progress Canada has made in achieving the goals of the WSC.



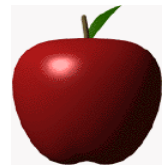
Canada ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in December 1991. Since that time, significant progress has been made in ensuring the Convention's broad implementation in Canada. There has been involvement from non-governmental organizations, municipalities, youth organizations, researchers, advocates, governments, schools, police and professional associations. These groups have made

use of the Convention by developing training workshops, concrete plans for the participation of youth, school curricula for the primary and post-secondary levels, monitoring methods to review government performance, and child and youth-friendly versions of the Convention to more easily share its content with young Canadians.

The Government of Canada has been committed to using the *Convention* to improve outcomes for children. The government reviews all new laws to make sure they comply with the Convention, and works with other organizations to monitor the Convention's implementation and assess policies and programs for children.

### *Health and Sanitation*

The health of Canadian children is generally very high, and has remained so since 1990. Despite progress that was made in many areas, important challenges still remain in addressing the most persistent risks to Canadian children's health. Challenges remain for certain vulnerable groups, and for Aboriginal children, who are most at risk of poor health and social outcomes.



There are many factors which contribute to the health of children. They can be as diverse as family income, social supports, education, access to health services, physical and social environments, biology and genetics, gender and culture.

Also of interest are indicators of health. Infant and child mortality, and low birth weight are major indicators of not only child health, but also of a nation's health in general. Canada has seen an improvement in both of these areas, but the government remains committed to supporting pregnant women who are most likely to experience unhealthy birth outcomes, and to reducing infant and child mortality levels further.

Many of the most basic human needs remain at the foundation of children's healthy development and this is the case for access to safe drinking water and to the sanitary disposal of sewage. In Canada, 99% of the population has access to safe drinking water, and Canada will continue its efforts to ensure that everybody has access to safe and clean drinking water. Safety of drinking water and sanitary disposal of sewage have been a particular concern among First Nations communities. Improvement in on-reserve living conditions continued to rise during the period

between 1991 and 1999. The government continues to work with First Nations and Aboriginal communities to improve and sustain access to safe water and sanitation.

*Do you have asthma?* A growing concern for many developed countries, including Canada, is how children's health can be linked to their environment. One of the clearest examples of this link has been the number of Canadians under the age of 20 who have asthma. The exact environmental factors that cause health problems are still being looked at, but this is an important issue to government who is committed to taking action on it.

Throughout the 1990s there was a decrease in the number of AIDS cases in Canada, however the proportion of women among the total adult cases of AIDS has increased. Like in many other developed countries, this shows the changing nature of AIDS in Canada, which could have an impact on children and youth.

### *Food Security and Nutrition*

The WSC included goals aimed at improving the nutritional status of children and at strengthening child and family food security. Through priorities established by federal, provincial and territorial governments, and strategies such as ***Canada's Action Plan for Food Security and Nutrition for Health: An Agenda for Action***, measures are taken on various elements contributing to the food security and nutrition of children and families, including food safety, agriculture, trade, family income and nutritional education.

The promotion of breastfeeding has long been seen as a first step in ensuring a healthy childhood. Despite variations in statistics, data suggests that Canada has shown progress in the proportion of women who are choosing to breastfeed their children.

In the area of child obesity, reliable information regarding young children (from ages 0 to 5 years) does not exist in Canada. Data for school-age children indicates that



### **DEFINITION**

**Food Security** exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

-**Canada's Action Plan for Food Security, Food Security Bureau, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada**

See: [www.agr.ca](http://www.agr.ca)

the proportion of children in grades 4 and 9 who are clinically obese increased in Canada over the 10 years from 1981 to 1991.

Continuing work is needed to assess children's nutritional status, eating habits and family food security in order to better understand the factors that contribute to healthy nutritional outcomes for Canadian children.

### *Population Policies, Sexual and Reproductive Health*

Gender equality is an important part of all government policy. During the 1990s, Canada has made progress in reducing the number of deaths among women from pregnancy-related causes (called 'maternal mortality'), which is often an indicator of high quality, safe and accessible health care services and facilities. Canada enjoys a maternal mortality rate among the lowest in the world, falling from 6 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 4 in 1995.

Population trends among Aboriginal populations in Canada have followed a similar pattern to other social and demographic trends. While Aboriginal Canadians have made significant progress, social outcomes remain behind the Canadian population as a whole. For instance, life expectancy for Registered Indians at birth continues to be lower than the general Canadian population. Second, while the Registered Indian population recorded a slight decrease in the total fertility rate for 1996, the First Nations' birth rate of 27 births per 1,000 people is twice the Canadian average. Aboriginal children represent the fastest growing population in Canada. Aboriginal Peoples within Canada represent approximately 3% of the total population, a percentage that has almost doubled over the last fifteen years.

### *Education, Literacy and Training*

As is the case with health care, access to education, literacy and training creates and expands opportunities for children to develop to their full potential and to become active, participating members in the society in which they live.



Canada generally enjoys a high rate of literacy. Going to school is mandatory in Canada, in most cases up to a secondary level, which

corresponds to children 14 to 16 years old. With respect to primary school, Canada enjoys a high percentage of children entering first grade of primary school who eventually reach grade 5. This percentage reached 99% during the 1990-1995 period.

Between 1991 and 1996, educational achievement among Registered Indians, both on and off-reserve, improved. The total number of on-reserve children enrolled in kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools increased by 37 per cent between 1988-89 and 1998-99. Also, more Registered Indians are completing their education. In 1996, 80.5 per cent of the Registered Indian population 15 years and over were attending school full-time - 10% more than the total Canadian population.

### *Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances*

The range of situations which describe children "living in especially difficult circumstances" is diverse, including children who are sexually exploited, refugee children, children in care of the state, children with disabilities, street-involved children, and others. What is common to all of these children is that they experience situations that represent an obstacle to, or that serve to compromise, their rights, well-being and development. Effective government action in regard to children at risk can emphasize prevention or reduce the impact of difficult circumstances on children.

### *Aboriginal Children*

Differences exist between the conditions of Status Indians, Status Indians living on-reserve and the total Canadian population. The gap continues to narrow between these groups, but important challenges to progress still remain. First Nations children were five times more likely to be in the care of Child and Family Service agencies than the national average in 1996-1997. Finally, suicide among Aboriginal people is three times the rate for non-Aboriginal people. Suicide rates for First Nation females aged 15 to 24 years are eight times higher than the national rate among females of the same age cohort.



### *Children in Care*

Children taken into care are generally those who as a result of abuse and/or neglect, have had provincial or territorial child welfare authorities take responsibility for them on a temporary or permanent basis. Between 1990 and 1999, the number of children in care increased from 30,180 to 62,450.

### *Children with Special Needs*

Over the past 10 years, there has been a small change in the proportion of Canadian children and youth with disabilities. In 1991, the proportion of Canadians under 19 years who had an activity limitation or disability was 7.2%. By 1996-1997, this proportion had risen to 7.7%. In First Nation communities, disability rates are twice the national average. Action on behalf of persons with disabilities is of continuing importance to governments across Canada. Recent actions by the federal government for Canadians with disabilities have included enhancements to educational grants, housing loans and grants, employment assistance and a range of tax credits.

### *Sexually Exploited Children*

Combatting the sexual exploitation of children is a responsibility that is shared in Canada by several levels of government and many non-governmental agencies and organizations. The Government of Canada, is developing and promoting a Canadian strategy in response to the Declaration and Agenda for Action from the First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Stockholm in 1996. The strategy includes child participation, prevention, protection, recovery, reintegration, information collection and dissemination, international cooperation and follow-up. The committee that is working on the strategy issues and updates a report listing federal government activities that work to eliminate the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Two of the most important elements of Canada's national strategy is opening and maintaining channels of communication, and promoting child participation.

### *Children, Youth and Work*

Legislation exists in Canadian provinces restricting work by children under a given age, in most cases under the age of 14 or 15 years. The Government of Canada also places restrictions on employment of children under 17 years in federal


workplaces. Under provincial law, emphasis is placed on restricting all work that interferes with the schooling of children. However, for children and youth who do hold jobs in Canada, many of these work situations are rewarding, giving young people access to new experiences and information on their personal and career development from a variety of sources. These experiences promote rather than challenge children's rights.

Canada is nonetheless aware of the threat of exploitative child labour both domestically and internationally, and is committed to taking action to prevent and address the harmful employment of children. Canada ratified the *International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Exploitative and Child Labour* on June 6, 2000, following consultations with provinces and territories, as well as with employers' and workers' organizations. The Convention calls for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour including slavery, debt bondage, forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, the use of children in prostitution, pornography and drug trafficking, and work which is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

### War-Affected Children

Among the most urgent objectives for human security is the protection of war-affected children. In the past decade, almost two million children have been killed in armed conflict, more than four million disabled and more than one million orphaned. Over 10 million children have been psychologically scarred by the trauma of abduction, detention, sexual assault and the brutal murder of family members.

Their situation is a central concern for Canada. For this reason, Canada played a leadership role in the negotiation and adoption of the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*. As well, Canada was the first country to sign and ratify the *Optional Protocol* in June and July 2000, respectively. Canada will continue to promote the *Optional Protocol's* wide ratification and implementation internationally, in

**DEFINITION**

**Peacebuilding** is defined as the effort to strengthen the internal capacity of states to manage conflict without violence.

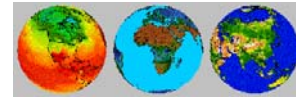
**Human Security** is a shift in perspective which takes people as its primary point of reference, and means freedom from fear for their rights, their safety and even their lives.



order to put a stop to the compulsory recruitment and deployment of child soldiers.

In addition to killing and maiming thousands of children each year, landmines deprive children of their right to protection and a safe environment to work and play. Canada, in cooperation with several other states and non-governmental organizations, played a leading role in bringing into force the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction* (known as the *Ottawa Convention*). Canada was the first country to sign and ratify this Convention, doing so in December, 1997. Canada views the *Ottawa Convention* as the best chance to limit the global threat of anti-personnel mines, and to eventually achieve a world free of land mines.

## Breaking News



Canada hosted an International Conference on War-Affected Children in September 2000 in Winnipeg. The International Conference, a first of its kind, built on recent inter-governmental and NGO regional meetings, resolutions and declarations on various aspects of the war-affected children issues. Youth participation was a key objective and success of this conference. The youths started with their own closed sessions and then participated as full delegates in both the Expert and Ministerial level conference meetings. The Ministerial-level meeting attended by over 40 ministers and representatives from 132 governments, resulted in support by governments of an Agenda on War-Affected Children. The outcomes of the conference will contribute to the 2001 UN Special Session on Children. [www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca](http://www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca) (english) and [www.lesenfantsetlaguerre.gc.ca](http://www.lesenfantsetlaguerre.gc.ca) (french)

In 1998, Canada established a five-year fund to support programs that carry out the aims of the *Ottawa Convention*. Canada has given out millions of dollars from this fund to support mine clearance and related activities, victim assistance and mine awareness programs in every mine-affected region in the world. Also, Canada has provided funding to the international non-governmental community to support activities that promote awareness about the *Ottawa Convention* so that eventually it will be accepted as an international norm. For more information on the impact of landmines on the lives of young people and international action to stop the use of landmines, or to read *A Child Rights Guide to the 1996 Mines Protocol*, see UNICEF's website at [www.unicef.org/landmine](http://www.unicef.org/landmine).

## Environmental Protection

There is growing evidence that many children's health problems are caused or

worsened by environmental pollution, and that children's exposure to environmental hazards are different and often greater than those of adults. The developing fetus, infants and children are in a state of rapid growth, with cells multiplying and organ systems (such as the brain, liver, and immune systems) developing at faster rates than at any other time in life. Environmental toxins disrupt these complex processes and can cause illness, disabilities, and premature death. As well, children have a higher intake of air, water and food in relation to their body weight, which affects them differently than adults.

Environmental protection, sustainable development and the environmental health of children are high priorities for the Government of Canada. Recently, the government of Canada committed to developing a long-term cooperative agenda with Mexico and the U.S. to deal with children's environmental health issues, under the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation.

The Government of Canada is also committed to working with NGOs, the corporate sector and academia to address children's environmental health. The Canadian government participated in a program launched by the Canadian Institute of Child Health (CICH), which included a National Symposium, research and education on children's health and the environment. In the summer of 2000, the Government of Canada hosted the workshop "**Our Children, Our Health: Towards a Children's Environmental Health Agenda**" to identify priority areas for action.

Environmental hazards have been linked to most of the leading causes of death, illness and hospitalization for Canadian children (age 0-19 years), including low birth weight and birth defects; unintentional injuries; cancer; sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS); respiratory infections; and asthma. Over the past 20 years, there has been a fourfold increase in the childhood prevalence of asthma, with 12% of Canadian children (aged 0-19 years) now experiencing asthma, and 29,000 children being hospitalized each year. In addition, exposure to tobacco smoke in the home is responsible for a variety of health issues for children. In Canada, 33% of children under the age of 12 are regularly exposed to tobacco smoke in their home. Further,



 **DEFINITION**

**Sustainable development** is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

*World Commission on Environment and Development 1987*

children's exposure to polluted water, pesticides, organic pollutants, and other chemicals may have serious developmental effects to their endocrine (hormone) and immune systems.

Some improvements have been made in relation to the level of toxins in the environment. Canada has reduced blood lead levels for children and adults to rank among the lowest for developed countries: from 11.9 micrograms per litre in 1984 to 3.6 micrograms per litre in 1992. Carbon dioxide emissions have also been reduced in Canada. Between 1989 and 1994, the per capita carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion have fallen from 16.55 tonnes to 15.65 tonnes.

Needless to say, there remains a need for coordinated and comprehensive research to determine the precise nature of the relationship between environmental hazards and children's health. The Government of Canada has committed to developing and implementing measures to address children's environmental health issues, and will continue to do so in the future.

# WHAT WE'VE LEARNED SO FAR

The actions Canada has taken over the last ten years to meet the goals set at the World Summit for Children, in order to uphold the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, have been aimed at making sure that children have the opportunity to develop in an environment that respects their rights and their well-being. Despite the progress that has been made, Canada realizes there is still room for improvement. The purpose of this report was to find out in which areas the Canadian government had experienced the most success and why, and to identify where it needed to improve the most. What follow are a number of "lessons" that Canada has learned, which should be applied to future actions on behalf of children by the federal government of Canada.

**GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS** need to work with each other and with other governments to improve the effectiveness of Canada's child-related programs and policies. Different but inter-related approaches to children's issues need to be coordinated. There needs to be a shared vision of child well-being among departments and governments.

**TYPES OF PROGRAMS:** It has been shown that the best way to reach all children and offset the effects of poverty and inequality is through a combination of universal social programs (programs that reach everyone), such as health and education systems, and preventive programs that target children at the greatest risk.

**RESEARCH:** There are a variety of reasons for poverty, and as many ways to fight it. Since there are so many reasons for poverty, it is not possible for it to be fought with a single policy or program; a number of factors and solutions must be used.

**RESPECTING THE RIGHT OF CHILDREN** to have a say in decisions that affect them can be achieved through encouraging children to participate in a wide number of areas. Children learn best by doing; through participation, children will become aware of their rights. Also, this is beneficial to the government because governments receive better information about the needs of young people when they hear it from children directly.

( **FAMILY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT** source of support for a child.

The government's first job is to support the family, so that the family is able to support the child. In cases where a family is not providing a healthy, nurturing environment, it is the government's responsibility to protect the child.

L **FORM PARTNERSHIPS** with many people and organizations since these play a strong role in a child's development.

' **FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT** institutions should be given support to find ways to address the specific needs of Aboriginal children that are appropriate to their culture and communities.

# Plans for the Future



## CONTINUING TO INVEST IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The Government of Canada is committed to the goals of the World Summit for Children, and since 1990 has taken a number of actions to enforce the rights and enhance the well-being of children. By way of partnerships between Canadians and all levels of government, Canada has made progress in reaching many of the World Summit goals, and will continue to work toward achieving them in Canada and abroad. Some of the goals attained are: improved children's security; safety; health and development as well as continued actions regarding the implementation of children's rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some of the specific goals attained by the government include: the early childhood development strategy; expanded immunization coverage; increased access by children of information on the internet; strengthened protection of children living in especially difficult circumstances; and increased economic support for children and their families. Further progress needs to be made according to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child built on by the many lessons learned from the experiences of communities, voluntary organizations and governments over the past decade. The more successfully we bring together all aspects and areas of our community, the greater the successes will be for ensuring the well-being, protection of rights and participation of children and youth into the new millennium.

# Chronology of Events

- i 1924: Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child
- i 1959: Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly
- i 1979: International Year of the Child
- i November 20, 1989: The *Convention on the Rights of The Child* is adopted by the United Nations
- i September 1990: World Summit for Children in New York
- i December 13, 1991: Canada ratifies the *Convention on the Rights of The Child*
- i October 9-13, 2000: The Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Children and Social Policy in the Americas, a regional preparatory meeting for the meeting in September 2001 was held in Kingston Jamaica. The first four ministerial meetings on Children and Social Policy in the Americas have taken place since 1990 to measure progress in implementation of the goals of the World Summit for Children
- i September 19 - 21 2001: United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children will be held

## DEFINITIONS: ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF CANADA

**Aboriginal Peoples of Canada:** Aboriginal Peoples of Canada are the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people - Indians, Metis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

**Indian:** Indian is a term that describes all the Aboriginal people in Canada who are not Inuit or Metis. Indian peoples are one of three groups of people recognized as Aboriginal in the Constitution Act, 1982. In addition, there are three legal definitions that apply to Indians in Canada: Status Indians, Non-Status Indians, and Treaty Indians. Many Aboriginal people today find the term "Indian" outdated and offensive. They prefer the term "First Nation".

**Registered or Status Indian:** A status or Registered Indian is an Indian person who is registered under the Indian Act. The Act sets out the requirements for determining who is a Status Indian.

**Non-Status Indian:** A Non-Status Indian is an Indian person who is not registered as an Indian under the Indian Act. This may be because his or her ancestors were never registered, or because he or she lost Indian status under former provisions of the Indian Act.

**Treaty Indian:** A Treaty Indian is a Status Indian who belongs to a First Nation that signed a treaty with the Crown.

**Reserve:** A reserve is land set aside by the federal government for the use and occupancy of an Indian group or band.

**First Nation:** This is a term that came into common language in the 1970s to replace the word "Indian" which many people found offensive. Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term "First Nations peoples" refers to the Indian people in Canada, both Status and Non-Status. Many Indian people have also adopted the term "First Nation" to replace the word "band" in the name of their community.



