

Joint Statement: Canada's Children and Youth Deserve Dedicated Leadership and Protection of Their Rights

As leading organizations committed to advancing the rights and well-being of children and youth in Canada, we are gravely concerned by the recent elimination of dedicated federal cabinet portfolios for **Children, Youth, Women and Gender Equality, and Mental Health and Addictions**.

This decision undermines Canada's obligations under the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** and sends a troubling signal about our nation's commitment to protecting the rights of more than **8 million children and youth**.

Children and youth represent over a quarter of Canada's population and 100% of our future—yet they are being sidelined at the highest levels of government decision-making.

At a time when children's rights are under threat and unmet across this country, Canada is falling dangerously behind on the world stage. We currently rank **30th out of 38 wealthy nations for child well-being**, according to **UNICEF**, and **66th on the global Kids Rights Index**—an alarming reflection of the systemic failures that children face every day.

Children and youth in Canada are:

- **Going hungry**—with over **1 million children living in food-insecure households**
- **Living in poverty**—**1 in 5 children** lacks access to basic necessities
- **Waiting months or years for mental health support**—mental illness affects some 1.2 million children and youth, and by age 25, that number rises to 7.5 million
- **Facing increasing online harms**, including cyber exploitation, cyberbullying and online hate
- **Enduring inequities rooted in colonialism, racism, and gender inequality**

These are not isolated issues—they are deeply connected to the structural neglect of children's rights in our political systems.

We urgently call on the **Prime Minister** to **reinstate a Minister for Families, Children and Social Development**, and a **Minister for Women, Gender Equality and Youth**—not as symbolic roles, but as essential leadership positions to uphold the **human rights of children, youth, women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people** in Canada.

Canada needs dedicated leadership to champion urgent priorities such as:

- **A National Strategy for Children and Youth**, with clear goals and accountability
- Canada's **National Youth Policy**, including the current efforts to host the National Youth Summit and issue a new State of Canada's Youth Report
- **Universal, affordable, high-quality child care and early learning**
- **A National School Food Program**, so no child goes to school hungry and every child is nourished

- **Access to timely and equitable child and youth mental health care**
- **Legislation to protect children's rights in the digital world**
- **Action on child poverty and income inequality**
- **Implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action** and the Calls for Justice from the **MMIWG Inquiry**, with a focus on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and youth
- **Implementation of the Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan**

This is not only a matter of policy—it is a matter of rights and justice. **Children and youth are not the future; they are citizens today with rights that must be respected, protected, and fulfilled.**

In times of national and global crisis, true leadership means prioritizing those most directly affected—and no group is more profoundly impacted, or more essential to Canada's future, than our children and youth.

We urge all Canadians to join us in demanding that children and youth be put back at the centre of the national agenda—**where they belong.**

Signed,

Insert: Name, Title, Organization (alphabetical order by last name)

Sara Austin, Founder and CEO, Children First Canada

Stephanie Howell, Executive Director, SCY Society for Children and Youth of BC

Joelle Lamport Lewis, Executive Director, National Alliance for Children and Youth

Leila Sarangi, National Director, Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty

Dennis L. Stuebing, PhD, Executive Director, Wisdom2Action

Ryan Voisin, Managing Director, Inspiring Healthy Futures