



News Release

For Immediate Release
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United Nations Committee on Rights of the Child representative concludes four-day visit to Canada

OTTAWA – The vice-president of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child today wraps up her four-day visit to Canada which included stops in Ontario, New Brunswick and Québec.

The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) invited Marta Maurás of Chile to visit Canada to observe first-hand this country's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Maurás' visit closely follows the recommendations issued by the Committee regarding the third and fourth periodic report of Canada's implementation of the UN Convention, presented this past September in Geneva, Switzerland.

As part of that review, the UN expressed concern over the lack of improvement to Canada's child poverty rate, continuing Canadian health issues such as unhealthy weights and child mental illness, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms for tracking the well-being of children. The review also found insufficient co-ordination between various levels of government when it comes to serving Canadian children, and unclear accounting of government spending on children.

Maurás has heard directly from many Canadian children and youth during her visit. Among the stops on her tour were: a youth forum in Toronto; a Talking Circle with youth hosted by Elsipogtog First Nation – New Brunswick's largest Mi'kmaq community; a visit with youth at residential rehabilitation units in Montreal; and a meeting at the Canadian Human Rights Commission in Ottawa.

"According to the UNICEF scorecard for industrialized countries, Canada stands 24th out of 35, with one in seven children – and one in four First Nations children – living in poverty,"

Maurás said. “This is a clear deterioration from 10 years ago. Issues of low-quality welfare services – particularly for the many children placed out of their homes for care – domestic violence, bullying and ill mental health affect children, especially if they are Aboriginal or Afro-Canadian, immigrants or suffer from some form of disability. Canada can afford to do better. This is the challenge presented by the Concluding Observations and Recommendations by the UN Committee.”

CCCYA President Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond said it was important for Maurás to visit Canada first-hand, to meet with government and non-government agencies and to hear directly the concerns of children and the country’s child and youth advocates.

In February 2012, the CCCYA presented its report on Aboriginal children – *Canada Must Do Better: Today and Tomorrow* – to the UN Committee during Canada’s pre-session in Geneva. The report urged government to address the key systemic rights issue in Canada – the health, education and safety of Aboriginal children and youth.

“Child advocates across Canada share a number of concerns, including the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care and the quality of services those children receive, child poverty rates, and the lack of consistency when it comes to youth mental health treatment. We are confident this visit will help further inform the UN on the status of Canada’s implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,” said Turpel-Lafond, B.C.’s Representative for Children and Youth.

Maurás said “important steps have been taken in recent years in Canada to address, for example, sexual exploitation and pornography on the Internet. But much more can be done in the short-term to improve the situation of children, such as eliminating fees for early childhood care and pre-school education, and passing legislation to ban corporal punishment.”

She regretted that Bill C-420 to create a national Children’s Commissioner was not passed by Parliament as it represented “a good step forward to ensure that an independent body monitors the application of the Convention in a comprehensive way and that children have a complaints mechanism to resort to if their rights are violated.”

David Morley, UNICEF Canada President and CEO, said “the visit of Ms. Maurás is a timely reminder that the well-being and rights of the children of this country must be given a higher priority. While the primary obligation to implement the Committee’s recommendations rests with government, the responsibility to create a better life for all children rests with each and every one of us in Canada.”

The CCCYA is an alliance of 10 independent provincial and territorial children’s advocates, appointed by their legislatures. Although their mandates differ according to legislation that establishes each office, they share a common commitment to further the voice, rights and dignity of children, especially vulnerable children.

**For more information,
Please contact:**

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Please Note: Marta Maurás is available for media interviews between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. (ET) on Friday, Dec. 7. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond is available for media interviews between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. (ET) on Friday, Dec. 7. Please contact Jeff Rud at the above number to arrange an interview.

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BACKGROUNDER

Marta Maurás, Vice-President of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

Marta Maurás is currently a member and vice-president of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009-2013) and an independent consultant in social policy, human rights and international relations. Maurás is a Chilean sociologist from the Catholic University of Chile. She holds certificates in Public Administration from the University of Connecticut and in Ontological Coaching from the Newfield Institute.

Maurás was invited to visit Canada by the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA). Her visit began in Ottawa on Dec. 4, included stops in New Brunswick and Québec, and concludes today in Ottawa. The visit closely followed Canada's third and fourth periodic review of its implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child this past September.

Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates

The CCCYA is an alliance of 10 children's advocates from across Canada who have mandates to support the rights of children and youth and to promote youth voice.

In one province (Nova Scotia), these activities are carried out through the Office of the Ombudsman. In Québec, they are carried out by the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (Québec Commission for Human Rights and Youth Rights) and, in British Columbia, they are carried out by the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth.

In the remaining provinces/territories (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland & Labrador, and Yukon) they are carried out through Child and Youth or Children's Advocate offices.

The work of CCCYA is guided by an international treaty, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and two supplementary protocols to the CRC.

Although the legislative mandates of the 10 offices differ, the advocates are all independent officers of the legislature in their respective jurisdictions. Through the Council, they identify areas of mutual concern, and work to develop ways to address issues at a national level in the absence of a Children's Commissioner for Canada.

The council does this by:

- Increasing the knowledge and understanding of children's advocacy across Canada;
- Identifying areas for common action;
- Influencing policy and practice affecting children;
- Increasing public awareness of child advocacy and children's issues.

Broadly speaking, these advocates have the authority to become involved in the following activities:

- Work to ensure the rights of children and youth are respected and valued in our communities and in government practice, policy and legislation;
- Promote the interest of, and act as a voice for, children who have concerns about provincial government services;
- Engage in public education;
- Work to resolve the disputes and conduct independent investigations;
- Recommend improvements of programs for children to the government and for the legislative assembly.