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Media Statement about National Child Day

On National Child Day (November 20, 2015), the members of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) repeat their call to the federal government and provincial and territorial governments to come together and address the dire situation of Indigenous child welfare in Canada.

As independent Child Advocates from nine provinces and two territories (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, Québec, Saskatchewan, and Yukon) we are dedicated to promoting and fostering respect for the rights of children and youth, and in particular, their fundamental rights to health, safety, education and wellbeing.

In this regard, we are particularly sensitive to and aware of the circumstances of Indigenous children and youth who are one of the most vulnerable groups of children in Canada. The circumstances of Indigenous children and youth involved in the child welfare system are even grimmer. The number of Indigenous children and youth in care is grossly disproportionate to that of other Canadian children. According to the National Household Survey (2011), of the roughly 30,000 children aged 14 and under in Canada who were in foster care (wards of the state), 14,225 or nearly half (48.1 percent) were Indigenous children even though Indigenous children account for only 7 percent of the total population of children aged 14 and under in Canada; 4 percent of Indigenous children are in foster care, compared to 0.3 percent of other Canadian children. The health and wellbeing outcomes of Indigenous children and youth in care are lower than other Indigenous children, and significantly lower than other Canadian children not in care.

Over the past several years the Council has made repeated entreaties to the federal, provincial and territorial governments to take action to address this situation:

- in June 2010, we prepared a report, *Aboriginal Children and*

Youth in Canada: Canada Must do Better, urging Canadian governments to take action to improve the living conditions and well-being of Indigenous children in Canada

- on National Child Day 2014, we issued a call for concerted and coordinated action by the federal, provincial and territorial governments
- between August 2014 and July 2015, we have engaged in a series of correspondence with The Council of the Federation calling for action on a provincial and territorial front.

We also, in November 2011, submitted a special report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Aboriginal Children – Canada Must Do Better: Today and Tomorrow*, highlighting the critical and worsening circumstances facing Indigenous children in Canada.

The members of the CCCYA were honoured to attend the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) closing events in Ottawa from May 31 to June 3, 2015 with Council members presenting a Declaration of Reconciliation at the *Actions of Reconciliation* session on June 1, 2015. We are committed to continuing the work of reconciliation initiated by the TRC process and to take action to ensure that the rights of Indigenous children and youth are respected and will continue to help elevate their voices.

We appreciate that addressing the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care is a significant challenge compounded by the legacy of colonization, residential schools, racism and extreme poverty. We recognize that addressing this problem is also not the sole responsibility of the federal government or a province or territory. This is a shared responsibility requiring comprehensive and coordinated attention and action among federal, provincial and territorial governments and Indigenous communities. It must also involve community consultation and include the voices of children and youth who continue to be negatively impacted by these unresolved disparities.

We once again call on governments to take concrete action to address the alarming over-representation of Indigenous children in government care. A deeper examination of the causes of the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in the child welfare system and the opportunities for addressing them is required. Federal, provincial and territorial governments must make it a priority to develop and implement a clear, overarching strategy and plan for reducing the number of Indigenous children in care and improving outcomes, including preventative measures and incremental steps

leading to longer term improvement. Enacting the child welfare recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is part of the solution.

Childhood is fleeting and the experiences of childhood can shape the course of our health and wellbeing throughout our lives. All children have the right to be safe, protected, healthy, educated, and to be part of a family and a community. Indigenous children cannot wait and urgent, concerted action is needed now.

The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates

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

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