
Children: The Silenced Citizens Canada: Governments failing native children, report says

Australia is not alone in its failure to provide adequate health and educational services for Indigenous children and in federal and state or provincial governments seeking to avoid the blame and shift the cost to the other level of government.

A recent report *Children: The Silenced Citizens* from Canada has concluded that “consecutive federal governments have not kept the promises that were made upon ratification of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* on 28 May 1990” especially to Indigenous children.

“At the ground level, children’s rights are being pushed to the side and even violated in a variety of situations – one only needs to take a brief survey of the issue of child poverty, or the situation of Aboriginal or special needs children to realize that this is true. The Convention has been effectively marginalized when it comes to its direct impact on children’s lives. The Committee is deeply concerned about this situation, and through this study, emphasizes the importance of living up to our obligations under international human rights treaties. Serious initiatives to implement the Convention by the federal government, and by other levels of government across Canada, could have a profound impact on real children’s lives. In this report, the Committee calls on all levels of government in Canada to comply with our legal obligations respecting children by improving institutions, public policy, and laws that affect them.”

The report states that hundreds of aboriginal children with severe medical problems in Canada are being moved to institutions in big cities because health authorities cannot agree on who should pay for their care.

Yet if these children lived ‘off-reserve’, they would virtually be guaranteed the care they need at home,

according to a report in the latest edition of the Canadian Medical Association Journal.

“That is discrimination, pure and simple,” Noni MacDonald, a professor of paediatrics and a senior CMAJ editor, said in a hard-hitting editorial.

Amir Attaran, the Canada Research Chair in Law, Population Health and Global Development Policy, said the practice is “screamingly illegal,” a clear violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The editorial, co-written by the two academics, says that “governments deserve to be sued” for such a failure.

The pair reject arguments that services for complex medical needs, such as those of ventilator-dependent children, cannot be provided on reserves because communities are too remote.

“Geography is no excuse for the pusillanimous, inequitable distribution of wealth, such that advanced care exists only in the south and first nations children, parents and communities endure psychological and cultural stress to access it,” Dr. MacDonald and Dr. Attaran write.

Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, said that in fact native children are being discriminated against both in remote communities and reserves located close to big cities.

Attempt to rationalise

“This is an attempt to rationalise pretty blatant discrimination,” she said.

At the root of the problem is an age-old dispute about who pays for the medical care of Indian, Inuit and Métis people. Generally speaking, care provided on reserves is paid by Health Canada (or Indian Affairs, if it is a social service) and by the province off-reserve.

But the situation gets complicated when someone

travels away for care and then wants to return to the community and receive continuing care.

The situation came to a head a few years back with the tragic case of a boy named Jordan from the Norway House Cree Nation in northern Manitoba.

Jordan – whose family asked that his last name not be published to protect their privacy – was born in 1999 with a severe neuromuscular disorder. He was referred for care in Winnipeg, where he became wheelchair-bound and ventilator-dependent. But his health stabilised and he was discharged in 2001.

He was placed in a specialised home near his home reserve but Ottawa and Winnipeg could not agree on who would pay.

For two years, bureaucrats warred over the most mundane details of Jordan's care, right down to who would pay for a showerhead required for a wheelchair-accessible shower.

Jordan ended up back in a Winnipeg hospital where he died at age of four.

Patient's interests second

“Jordan's interests fell a distant second; intergovernmental squabbling over the duty to pay came first,” Dr. MacDonald and Dr. Attaran write in their editorial.

“Many of the services Jordan needed would be paid for without question for a white Manitoban, or off-reserve aboriginal. It was Jordan's living on-reserve that caused the bureaucracy to choke.”

The boy's case became a cause célèbre in social welfare and child health circles. The term “Jordan's principle” was coined – the principle being that the needs of a child should supersede bickering over who pays the bills.

A pdf of the report is available at:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/huma-e/rep-e/rep10apr07-e.pdf>
[Source: CRINMAIL Globe and Mail, Canada:
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/>]

UNITED KINGDOM: 5,000 Child Prostitutes

Save The Children's *Small Hands Of Slavery* claims millions of youngsters are regularly attacked and raped in their lives as child slaves. The shocking figures were released to coincide with Slavery Remembrance Day, the bi-centenary of the trade's abolition.

Bill Bell, Save the Children's head of protection, said: “Child slavery is not a thing of the past. There are still millions of children in both rich and poor countries who are being forced to lead slave-like lives under horrific conditions of humiliation and abuse.

“Currently across the world there are, for example, 1.8 million children trapped in the sex trade, over a million children risking their lives working in mines, and millions more, some as young as six, forced to work up to 15 hour days as domestic workers. These children are treated as commodities, liable to be lent or sold to other owners without warning.

“World leaders and international donors must act with urgency to address child slavery and put in place the laws and resources needed to eradicate these terrible practices.”

The report states that 1.2 million children and babies are trafficked every year, including into Western Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean, and the number is increasing.

Gangs involved in child and people trafficking make an estimated profit of 32 billion dollars (£16 billion) per year, the charity said.

Approximately 1.8 million children are being abused through prostitution, child pornography and sex tourism - and 75% of the UK's child prostitutes are girls.

The report states that youngsters often lose their childhood by being sold into adult relationships. The report states: “Child marriage, which often includes mail order and internet brides, is one of the most widespread - yet hidden - forms of slavery. Girls as young as four are forced to live and have sex with their husband, and are often kept trapped indoors. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than women over 20. In Afghanistan more than half of all girls are married before they are 16.”

[source: The Guardian.
See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uklatest/story/0,-6869293,00.html>]