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National Child Day – A Time to Celebrate and Move Forward on Children’s Rights

CHARLOTTETOWN - Prince Edward Island’s Child and Youth Advocate, Marv Bernstein, asks all Islanders to join in recognizing National Child Day on November 20th. This date is important in Canada and around the world because it was on this date in 1989 that the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a universal treaty to protect and promote the human rights of every child around the globe. “The UNCRC takes the perspective of the whole child and this same vision informs the work of the PEI Office of the Child and Youth Advocate,” states Bernstein.

“In Prince Edward Island, we have an additional cause for celebration in that November 20th of this year marks the fourth anniversary of our governing legislation, the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, unanimously passing third reading in the PEI Legislative Assembly before being ultimately proclaimed in force on July 15th, 2020”, says Bernstein.

When Canada ratified the UNCRC in 1991, both the federal government and the provinces made a commitment to ensure that all children are treated with dignity and respect and are afforded every opportunity to reach their full potential. This commitment includes protection from harm, provision of basic needs and participation to ensure their views are considered in matters that affect them.

National Child Day is a celebratory day that not only serves as a reminder that children’s rights are important, but also provides an occasion for reflecting on how far our province has come in our progress towards the full implementation of children’s rights. “In considering our province’s obligations to uphold children’s rights under the UNCRC, it is vital to consider another seminal document – and that is the Concluding Observations or Recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, issued to Canada in June 2022. The public release of these Concluding Observations followed a careful examination of Canada’s report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, and these Concluding Observations set out a series of actions required of provincial and territorial governments, such as Prince Edward Island, in addition to those required of the federal government.”

On June 22, 2023, the Child and Youth Advocate wrote to Premier Dennis King, and copied the Interim Leaders of the Official Opposition and Third Party, calling upon the Province to set out an action plan by National Child Day in response to the June 23rd, 2022 Concluding Observations issued to Canada, with a view to effectively implementing those Committee recommendations falling within provincial jurisdiction, with this work being done in consultation with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

“In my correspondence [click here](#) to the Premier, I expressed the view that ‘the Concluding Observations constitute a road map that could prove transformational in improving the lives of PEI children’ and that ‘the government of PEI is well-positioned, in consultation with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate,

to showcase PEI as an international leader in developing , and later implementing a child rights-focused action plan’.”

“In response to my correspondence to Premier King referenced earlier, I wish to acknowledge, with appreciation, receipt of an encouraging and child rights-based letter from the Premier, dated October 30th, 2023, [click here](#) setting out the components of a preliminary action plan, and reflecting government’s goodwill and commitment to continued collaboration with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate in this important work together, with and on behalf of, the children and youth of Prince Edward Island”, states Bernstein.

“We wish to commend the many brave children and youth engaged with our Office. Their voices and lived experience continue to inform our advocacy work anchored in the UNCRC. Together, as Islanders, we are listening to children and youth and we are making incremental progress in advancing the realization of their human rights. This progress is reflected individually when safe spaces are created for children and youth to participate and have their views considered in matters that affect them. This progress is reflected systemically with progressive amendments to legislation, regulations, policies, programs and services delivered to children, youth and their families”, says Bernstein.

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