



# Organisation pour la Sauvegarde des Droits des Enfants Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate publication

### **International Summit highlights lack of progress in fighting poverty and violence against children in Canada and worldwide**

Fifteen years have passed since ratification of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and since the House of Commons passed a unanimous resolution to eliminate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Yet, in 2004, 1,071,000 Canadian children - nearly one child in six - continue to live in poverty<sup>1</sup> and to be at risk of becoming victims of all forms of abuse and exploitation.

In 1989, the rate of child poverty in Canada was 14.5%. By 2002, the last year for which we have data, it had risen to 15.6%. The poverty rate is even higher for particularly vulnerable populations such as aboriginals, immigrants, children in visible minority groups and children with disabilities. And we are only talking about economic poverty; a large number of children also suffer from emotional, psychological, social and spiritual poverty as a result of family breakdown, lack of educational and preventative programs and inadequate support services for both them and their families. The fact that school dropout, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide rates among youth reach record levels in Canada is particularly revealing.

If, as stated by Prime Minister Paul Martin in his 2003 manifesto, *Making History: The Politics of Achievement*, we are to measure our collective progress by the standard we set for the least privileged among us, Canada would not receive a passing grade both at the national and international level. Nationally, social programs and services which reflect the commitments of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* are undercut or not funded at all. Internationally, Canada, like many other highly industrialized countries, falls very short of meeting its commitment to devote 0.7% of its Gross National Income to development assistance – in 2004, development assistance amounted to only 0.26% of Canada's GNI.

The thirty recognized specialists and leading experts representing 17 different countries from Africa, Asia, North America, Latin America and Europe as well as the twenty-four students from the English Montreal School Board and the three youths from Cuba who took part in the two-day **International Summit on Children, Poverty and Violence** that was held by the O.P.C.R. this past October 22 and 23 in Montreal unanimously concurred that one of the most significant barriers to improving the condition of children worldwide was not insufficient resources but lack of political will and misdirected distribution of resources.

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“We, as citizens, have the power and obligation to hold our governments, decision-makers and elected officials accountable for their lack of respect and follow through on their repeated commitments and pledges to improve the condition of our children” points out Riccardo Di Done, President of the Organization for the Protection of Children’s Rights (O.P.C.R.) and Chairperson of the International Summit. “In spite of the innumerable underlying circumstances and ulterior political motives that ceaselessly stunt the progression of this cause (to help children), we ought to muster the necessary incentive to act judiciously and demand not mere possibilities but actual results”, adds grade 10 student and Summit participant Danya Bowman.

It is therefore with a call for all citizens to reclaim civil society and make it truly work for the benefit of our children and families that delegates at the International Summit highlighted the need for long term solutions and the meaningful participation and direct involvement of children and youth in all matters and decisions that concern them. The International Summit reminded everyone of the importance of fulfilling this promise and vision.

#### **FOR THE LOVE OF OUR CHILDREN!**

1. *One million too many: Implementing solutions to child poverty in Canada.* 2004 report card on child poverty in Canada. Campaign 2000.

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