

May 2, 2007

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa
K1A 0A2

**An open letter re: Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights –
*Children: Silent Citizens***

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

As a Christian child-focused humanitarian organization, World Vision is committed to building a world that no longer tolerates poverty — a world in which every child is able to reach his or her God-given potential. As such, we are calling on your government to take immediate action to ensure that Canada meets its obligations to protect the rights of children, by implementing the recommendations of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights included in the report *Children: Silent Citizens*.

Canada has long been considered a leader on child rights, including our significant role in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, over time, Canada's adherence to the standards of the convention have waned both here at home and abroad. We agree with the Committee's conclusion that while the federal government has been well intentioned in its efforts to protect the rights of children, "the Convention on the Rights of the Child is not solidly embedded in Canadian law, in policy, or in the national psyche."

Good intentions are clearly not enough, and children have paid the price. The cost of inaction has been particularly severe for:

- the 1.2 million children living in poverty;
- immigrant and refugee children, whose poverty rate is twice the national average;
- aboriginal children, who are four times more likely to be hungry than other children in Canada; and
- children subjected to various forms of violence in their homes, schools and communities.

You can ensure the Committee's report marks a turning point for children. By implementing the Committee's recommendations, the Government of Canada will make a tangible impact on children in our own country and will also have greater moral authority to address issues affecting children in the developing world.

Given that the responsibility to uphold children's rights is spread across the federal, provincial and territorial governments, we strongly encourage a well-coordinated response by the federal government and we urge you to do so in a timely manner. The implementation of children's rights should not be subjected to delays due to political processes or jurisdictional disputes. The gravity of the issues at hand demands immediate attention.

World Vision therefore calls upon the Government of Canada to respond immediately to the Committee's recommendations, and in particular to:

- 1) ensure that all existing and new federal, provincial and territorial legislation and policies are in full compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and adopt enabling legislation;
- 2) establish an independent federal Children's Commissioner through legislation, whose mandate should include a complaint resolution process (with a right of refusal and referral), pluralistic representation, accessibility and confidentiality;
- 3) establish an inter-departmental working group to coordinate activities, policies and laws for children's rights issues across the federal government, in order to ensure accountability for all government actions affecting children; and
- 4) ensure ministerial responsibility, accountability and ownership for the implementation of Canada's obligations under international law on the rights of children.

While the federal government has the primary responsibility to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, civil society also has an important role to play. World Vision is committed to supporting the implementation of the committee's recommendations, through:

- educating and engaging Canadians, including children and youth, on children's rights;
- providing civil society input to the review of legislation, policies and guidelines, and on draft enabling legislation for the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and
- building civil society momentum with networks and coalitions, and mobilizing our supporters to encourage the federal government to invest in the implementation of children's rights.

World Vision appreciates the commitment of your government to building a better Canada that works for all of us, and to ensuring that jurisdictional disputes do not hamper our ability to work together in the best interests of all Canadians, especially our children. We also commend the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights for the important work they have undertaken to strengthen the federal government's accountability to the CRC. We wish you continued success with this work, and offer our support to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee.

Sincerely,



Dave Toycen
President and CEO

CC:

Senator Marjory LeBreton, Leader of the Government in the Senate

Senator Raynell Andreychuk, Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights