



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

Statement to the 5th Session of the United
Nations Permanent Session on Indigenous
Issues concerning Agenda Item 4 (c) Indigenous
Children

United Nations Headquarters, New York, New
York

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Chief Ruth Massie
Ta'an Kwach'an Council

- Traditional Greeting
- I am Chief Ruth Massie of the Ta'an Kwach'an Council. I am also a member of the Assembly of First Nations Chiefs Committee on Health.
- We wish to briefly intervene on the serious matter of the realization and protection of the fundamental rights of indigenous children and the poverty they continue to encounter.
- Madame Chair, Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that the rights of all children be respected and ensured without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's ethnic or social origin.
- UNICEF's recent *Report Card on Child Poverty in Rich Countries 2005* found that Canada was in the bottom third of 26 OECD countries with a child poverty rate of 15%. The recently released report, *Campaign 2000*, cites UNICEF's findings and speaks very directly to the overwhelming number of

Aboriginal children who continue to live in 'deep poverty', which is estimated to be twice the rate of child poverty than non-Aboriginal children in Canada.

- Indeed, poverty is an aggravating factor causing the placement of more than one in ten First Nation children into the care of child welfare agencies across Canada. First Nation children in Canada have also been cited by UNICEF to be especially vulnerable to violence and abuse.
- Also, given that little or no resources are in place within First Nation communities and their own internal child care agencies that work within, it is common that children with disabilities are placed with the external child welfare systems to bring to them the resources they require. This removes them from the arms of their families for no other reason that resources to keep them home are not made available.
- The higher rates of socio-economic disadvantage and risk factors related to health and well-being, including substance

abuse and isolation, increase the likelihood for maltreatment of First Nation children and exposure to family violence. Some of the causes of maltreatment and increased incidences of violence within the family are especially preventable.

- With adequate resources, agencies could provide service to First Nation children and their families within their home while maintaining the family unit in tact. With increased access to family support services and outreach, it is likely that the causes that put First Nation children at risk will be substantially reduced.
- Following his visit to Canada in 2004, United Nations Special Rapporteur, Mr. Rudolpho Stavenhagen recommended attention be given to address disparities that exist between Aboriginal people and other Canadians with respect to “higher poverty rates and lower than average health, educational, housing and welfare services for Aboriginal people...”.

- Amnesty International, in its submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, recommends that adequate funding be provided to Indigenous child welfare agencies to ensure that the best interests of Indigenous children are protected and ensured.
- During the thirty sixth session of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recently heard from Canada on its efforts to meet the obligations of the Convention. The Committee noted with particular concern that poverty rates remained very high among disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups such as Aboriginal peoples, African-Canadians, immigrants, persons with disabilities, youth, low-income women and single mothers.
- Therefore, we recommend to that the circumstances of all Indigenous children and in particular those with disabilities be examined through joint sustainable efforts undertaken by Indigenous Leaders, NGO's, Nation States and the mechanisms of

ECOSOC and the UN Human Rights Council.

- Further, that the implementation of the rights of Indigenous children under international human rights law be the focus of such joint sustainable efforts in the second UN Decade of Indigenous Peoples.