

**The Honourable Noël A. Kinsella
Speaker of the Senate**

**Opening Remarks on the Occasion of the Celebration of
National Child Day**

**Senate Chamber
November 24, 2008**

Honourable Senators,
Members of the House of Commons,
Special Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Senate Chamber. For those of you who have not been in this magnificent Chamber previously, it is only here that the three elements which together constitute the Parliament of Canada, namely the Crown, the Senate and the House of Commons, come together. Occasions when the presence of all three is required include the Speech from the Throne, formal Royal Assent to bills which have been passed by both Chambers, and the installation of a Governor General.

If you look up high on the walls on both sides of the Chamber, you will see paintings depicting scenes from World War I. These paintings remind us every day of the sacrifice and work required to ensure that our rights and freedoms are secure and will continue to be maintained in Canada and around the world, now and in the future.

Today, we are gathered in the Senate Chamber with many Canadian children to celebrate National Child Day, a reminder of that future and those rights. It was on November 20, 1989 that the United Nations adopted the text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with Canada as one of the signatories.

Four years later Parliament passed legislation to mark that day as National Child Day. This is a special occasion which encourages all in Canada to reflect on the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and its significance.

The Convention sets out basic human rights to which children all over the world are entitled. Those rights include: the right to have a voice in matters which affect them, the right to be protected from harm, the right to be provided with basic needs, and the right to rest and leisure.

In 2002, Canada participated in the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, which reviewed the progress made since the adoption of the Convention. At that time, the General Assembly adopted *A World Fit for Children*, a declaration and plan of action to implement the Convention.

In response, the Government of Canada released *A Canada Fit for Children*, outlining our country's action plan for implementing the Convention.

Parliamentarians continue to promote the enforcement of the Convention in Canada. In 2007, the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights released a report examining Canada's implementation of the UN *Convention of the Rights of the Child*. In its report, the Committee emphasized the importance of Canada's continued leadership in human rights, evidenced by its ongoing efforts to implement the Convention in Canada.⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, "Children: The Silenced Citizens: Effective Implementation of Canada's International Obligations with respect to the Rights of Children," April 2007, http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/huma-e/rep-e/rep10apr07-e.htm#Table_of_Contents (accessed 17 November 2008).

Canada has not been simply a signatory to the Convention, but rather played a key leadership role in its drafting and adoption by the United Nations General Assembly. In addition to chairing numerous drafting groups, Canadian delegates successfully proposed that the common preamble of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights be included in the Convention.⁽²⁾ These efforts helped more than 40 countries with varying religions, ideological, cultural traditions come together to produce the Convention.⁽³⁾

National Child Day presents us with an occasion to ensure that these efforts are recognized and sustained. In promoting awareness of the Convention, we are giving children a voice. It is our job as parliamentarians to ensure that those rights are respected and acknowledged by Canadians. We are delighted that you are with us today in the Chamber of the Senate of Canada to help celebrate and reinforce the importance of National Child Day and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

⁽²⁾ The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, “Who’s In Charge here? Effective Implementation of Canada’s International Obligations with respect to the Rights of Children,” November 2005, http://www.parl.gc.ca/38/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/huma-e/rep-e/rep19nov05-e.htm#_Toc118603900 (accessed 17 November 2008).

⁽³⁾ Ibid.