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Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates Statement regarding Indigenous child welfare

TORONTO (January 31, 2018) – Following last week's emergency meeting on Indigenous child welfare in Ottawa, convened by Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett, the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) has issued the following statement:

As independent child advocates from nine provinces and two territories, we are dedicated to promoting and fostering respect for the rights of all children and youth and, in particular, their fundamental rights to health, safety, education and well-being.

Federal Ministers and others have stated that the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care in Canada has reached "crisis" proportions. We acknowledge that it presents a significant challenge for our country, compounded by the legacy of colonization, residential schools, racism and extreme poverty.

We recognize that addressing this over-representation is not the sole responsibility of the federal government or a single province, territory, Indigenous nation or organization. Finding solutions is a shared responsibility requiring comprehensive and coordinated attention and action across the country. It must involve community consultation and include the voices of children and youth who continue to be negatively impacted by these unresolved disparities.

In reply to the Ministers' comments and the reasons for this meeting, we respond as privileged witnesses. In our jurisdictions, we hear daily from Indigenous children, youth and their families about their experiences in the child welfare system. We stand with children and youth, and hope that their voices are heard directly. As members of the CCCYA, we agree to the following:

1. We recognize that coordinated solutions with both immediate and long-term actions are required to improve the living conditions and well-being of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children and youth in Canada. We call for immediate and long-term action to address the social determinants of health for these children and youth, including adequate housing, elimination of poverty, improvements to infrastructure, and ensuring clean water and food security.

2. We are committed to a process for change that will support reconciliation.
3. We believe that the voices of children and youth are integral to any process designed to improve their lives.
4. We believe that Indigenous peoples have the inherent right to self-determination, including the right to care for their children
5. As the CCCYA expressed through our Declaration of Reconciliation at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's closing events in June 2015, we call for the implementation of the TRC's Calls to Action. We acknowledge the negative impact that colonization, residential schools, the '60s Scoop and the current child welfare system have had on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children and youth.
6. We believe that the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* is the cornerstone of all children's rights and that its implementation must be informed by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

About the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates

The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates is an alliance of legislatively mandated advocates for the rights of children and youth. These advocates may operate under various titles (e.g. Advocate, Representative, Ombudsman, Commissioner), but all are official representatives in their particular provinces and territories. All CCCYA members are independent statutory officers who report directly to the Legislative Assembly of their respective jurisdictions. Each CCCYA member office is established by legislation to operate in a manner that is independent from government authority or control. Council includes members from the nine provinces and two territories of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, Québec, Saskatchewan, and Yukon.

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