



February 8, 2007

Premika Ratnam, Chairperson
Play At The Park

Dear Members of Play At the Park:

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognizes a number of essential elements for healthy child development. One of these is the importance of play and recreational activities. As well as recognizing the child's right to play, the CRC speaks to the duty of governments to respect and promote the right to play through the provision of age-appropriate opportunities for children within a community context.

Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically addresses this aspect of child development:

States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational, and leisure activity.

When Canada and each of the provinces ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they accepted a responsibility to protect and promote the right of children to play and engage in recreational activities. In a subsequent national Plan of Action, entitled *Canada Fit for Children*, specific commitments were made in this area, to address the growing concern about low activity levels among children. Paragraphs 89 and 90 include the following statements, which are relevant for your situation:

"We in Canada will promote and support physical and mental health among children through sports, physical activity, ... play, recreation, Efforts will also be made to provide adequate facilities for physical, recreational, artistic, and cultural activities. ... We will strive to ensure access to safe and affordable physical activity opportunities. ... We will address low activity levels of children by increasing opportunities for physical activity and play and by creating more positive experiences around physical activity and sports. ... We will remind parents, teachers, and

children of the simplicity and power of play and encourage families to be active together.” (Canada Fit for Children, excerpts, articles 89 and 90)

Safe spaces for children to play in parks are one important way to fulfill our obligations to promote and respect the right of children to play. Other provisions in the Convention on the Rights of the Child speak to giving children priority in allocating public resources and allowing young persons to be heard when decisions are made that affect their lives.

Municipal governments, as well as federal and provincial governments, need to take the rights of children into consideration, also in the planning and supervision of local parks. In some communities, officials have been asked to review their policies in relation to the CRC; in others, young persons and their families are asked to provide input into different areas of policy to ensure that cities also respect the rights of children. Where there are conflicts between different users of park space, such as children and dogs, policies and regulations need to ensure adequate provision for children of various ages to exercise the right to play.

At the national level, the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children is working for the adoption of stronger mechanisms to implement the CRC throughout Canada. As part of the monitoring and reporting process, we encourage local groups, such as yours, to engage with relevant officials on implementation of the CRC in all areas of public policy, including parks and recreation. By working together, we can make progress toward a Canada Fit for Children, which will be a Canada fit for all of us, as the document states.

I wish you well in your continued efforts to ensure that the rights of children, including the right to play in safe areas, free from fear, are respected.

On behalf of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children

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