



**Justice for Girls
&
Justice for Girls International**

**Submission to: UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
At its Sixty-first Session and Periodic Review of Canada
17 September – 5 October, 2012**

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I-Overview

Canada is failing to take the necessary steps to acknowledge and progressively realize the rights set out in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* ('the *Convention*') with respect to the following:

(1) In breach of Article 2 of the *Convention*, Canada is failing to ensure non-discrimination in the human rights of children through gender neutral analysis, policy, and law. These submissions identify girl children¹ as uniquely vulnerable within Canadian society and globally. To ensure that all children's rights are realized, gendered analysis of existing laws and gender-specific children's rights policies and programs must be prioritized.

(2) In breach of Articles 6, 24, and 30 of the *Convention*, Canada is failing to address climate change, which is a threat to the lives and well-being of children, specifically girl children and Indigenous children, both in Canada and abroad.

II-Crucial Perspectives on the implementation of the *Convention*

On November 20th, 2009, the government of Canada submitted its third and fourth report on Canada's implementation of the *Convention*.² With respect, this report did not identify two causes of Canada's many breaches of the *Convention*; gender discrimination and Canada's complete failure to address climate change. The contributors to these submissions seek to remedy Canada's deficient reporting to ensure that the Committee on the Rights of the Child (the "*Committee*") has full information with which Canada's compliance can be assessed.

Consistent with the spirit and intent of the *Convention*, and pursuant to Article 12(1),³ included in these submissions are the perspectives of two teen girls, Zoe Craig and Rekha Dhillon-Richardson. As part of an internship jointly hosted by Justice for Girls and the David Suzuki Foundation,⁴ Zoe and Rekha authored their contribution to these submissions.

Justice for Girls is a Canadian non government organization that works to promote the health, well-being, and human rights of girls who are homeless or living in poverty. Since 1999, the organization has worked to ensure that girls' human rights are upheld and promoted across institutions that impact girls who live in poverty—child welfare, education, health, policing, courts, and youth prisons.

Justice for Girls International is a Canadian non government organization that was incorporated in 2008 to promote the international human rights of girls. It is a sister organization to *Justice for Girls*. *Justice for Girls International* aims to create alliances

¹ We use the term 'girls' and the 'girl-child' interchangeably to mean 'girl-child' as defined by the Beijing Conference. This category includes both girl children and young women who are not legally adults; in Canada, girls younger than 19 years of age.

² Canada's Third and Fourth Reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 20th, 2009, accessed online at <http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/pdp-hrp/docs/crc-eng.cfm>

³ Article 12 (1) States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

⁴ The David Suzuki Foundation is one of Canada's foremost environmental organizations. See www.davidsuzuki.org.

with civil society groups around the globe who will jointly advocate for the human rights of girls in local communities and at the international level.

III. Summary of Recommendations

- Recalling Article 2 of the *Convention*, we submit that the *Committee* must evaluate States implementation of the *Convention* through a gendered lens, and specifically consider the unique situation of the girl child. We urge the *Committee* to review Canada's implementation of the *Convention* as it applies to the specific situation of girl-children.
- The creation of a "United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Girl-Child" may assist State parties and the *Committee* to better understand, articulate, and respond to the global marginalization of girl children.
- We call upon the *Committee* to recognize global climate change as (1) an urgent human rights matter that engages the right to life and numerous other social, economic, and cultural rights of children, and (2) a situation that has a disproportionate and potentially catastrophic impact on girls.
- We submit that Canada cannot meet its obligations under the *Convention* while it continues to both ignore the realities of climate change domestically and block progress to addressing climate change within the international community.
- Recalling Article 12 of the *Convention*, we respectfully urge the *Committee* to insist that children are at the forefront of international and State environmental decision making, and their perspectives are not only sought, **but supported and privileged** due to the disproportionate and potentially devastating impact of climate change upon children.
- Recalling Canada's commitment to the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and Articles 6 and 24 of the *Convention*, we urge the *Committee* to review the urgent matter of sanitation and contaminated drinking water in Indigenous communities in Canada as a serious violation of Indigenous children's rights under the *Convention*.

IV. Discrimination: lack of gender based analysis and gender specific policies

Canada is in breach of its obligations to girls as set out in Article 2 of the *Convention*. Canada has failed to respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present *Convention* without discrimination. In particular, Canada has failed to develop gendered laws, policies and programs that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the girl child.

1. We submit that Canada has failed to recognize and respond to the unique circumstances of girls and to adequately address violations of their specific human rights. In Canada's combined 3rd and 4th periodic report to the *Committee*, a lack of gender based analysis and content is glaringly apparent.

2. This lack of gender-based analysis is particularly egregious in light of the following;
 - a. Girls represent 79% of the victims of family-related sexual assaults reported to a large subset of Canadian police departments. Rates of sexual offences are highest against girls between the ages of 11 and 14, with the highest rate at age 13.⁵ Up to 75% of victims of sex crimes in Aboriginal communities are female and under 18 years of age, 50% of those are under 14, and almost 25% of those are younger than 7 years of age.⁶ The incidence of child sexual abuse in some Indigenous communities is as high as 75 to 80% for girls under 8 years old.⁷
 - b. When girls attempt to escape male violence within the family home, Canadian state authorities, such as police and child welfare systems, frequently respond in a discriminatory manner. Government authorities often return girls to their family homes where the abuser remains. Girls who are removed from their family homes/communities are frequently placed in unsafe and/or inadequate government homes or mixed gender youth shelters. Canadian authorities rarely remove the abusive adult males from the family home or pursue criminal prosecution.⁸
 - a. In 2006 the Committee on Economic, Social, Cultural Rights recommended that “[Canada] give special attention to the difficulties faced by homeless girls who are more vulnerable to health risks and social and economic deprivation, and take all necessary measures to provide them with adequate housing and social and health services.”⁹ The government of Canada has not made efforts towards implementing this recommendation.
 - b. Although the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* stipulates that measures taken against young persons who commit offences should respect gender,¹⁰ teenage girls are continually put at risk through co-educational incarceration and cross-gender monitoring by guards in youth prisons and police lock-ups across Canada. Canadian youth prisons endanger girls and compromise their right to live in safety and dignity. Mixed gender youth prisons and police lock-ups inevitably result in incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault against girls, most of which go

⁵ Canadian Center for Justice Statistics. *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005*, accessed online: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/85-224-XIE/85-224-XIE2005000.pdf>

⁶ FREDA Research Centre, *Violence Prevention and the Girl Child*, accessed online: www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/report/gc01.htm

⁷ Maureen McEvoy and Judith Daniluk, "Wounds to the Soul: The Experiences of Aboriginal Women Survivors of Sexual Abuse," *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne* 36, 3 (August 1995): 221-235.

⁸ Joanna Czapska, Annabel Webb & Nura Taefi, *More than Bricks and Mortar: A rights based strategy to prevent girl homelessness in Canada*. Justice for Girls, 2008. ISBN 978-0-9737527-1-7 Accessed online: http://justiceforgirls.org/publications/pdfs/jfg_housing_web.pdf

⁹ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'Third Periodic Review of Canada,' accessed online: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/E.C.12.CAN.CO.5.pdf>

¹⁰ Section 3, Youth Criminal Justice Act, SC 2002, c.1

unreported.¹¹ Sexual harassment and sexual abuse becomes a part of daily life in penal facilities and occurs in the form of verbal abuse and threats of rape.¹²

3. The rights of girls and the specific conditions of oppression they encounter are frequently overlooked by the Canadian government. Indeed, the issues that affect girls are often eclipsed by concerns general to children, youth, or adult women.¹³ The gender-neutral approach of the Canadian government leaves the girl-child's particular vulnerability due to her age, gender and position in the family unacknowledged.
4. The *Platform for Action on the Girl Child*, arising from the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as the *World Programme of Action for Youth on Girls and Young Women* articulate numerous strategic objectives to eliminate violence and discrimination in the lives of girls worldwide. This Platform also sets out a framework for situating the girl-child within international human rights.¹⁴ Despite these commitments, girls continue to face high levels of violence and discrimination in Canada and around the world.
5. We respectfully submit that, in accordance with the recognition of the specific circumstances of the girl-child arising from the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Canada's implementation of the *Convention* must be reviewed as it pertains to the specific and unique circumstances of girls. A gender-neutral approach by the Canadian government amounts to discrimination and further marginalizes girls.

V. Climate change: an urgent human rights issue for children

By allowing the threat of climate change to go unabated, Canada is in breach of Article 6 of the *Convention*, a child's right to life, Article 24, a child's right to the highest attainable standard of living, and Article 30, the right of Indigenous children to practice their culture. This failure to address climate change disproportionately impacts girl children, especially Indigenous girls, domestically and around the world. Canada's failure to take serious action to stop global climate change is a serious breach of children's human rights requiring urgent action.

¹¹ Amber Dean, *Locking them up to keep them 'safe': Criminalized girls in British Columbia*. Report for Justice for Girls, 2005. ISBN 0-9737527-0-X Accessed online:

http://www.justiceforgirls.org/publications/pdfs/jfg_complete_report.pdf

¹² Amber Dean, *Locking them up to keep them 'safe': Criminalized girls in British Columbia*. Report for Justice for Girls, 2005. ISBN 0-9737527-0-X Accessed online:

http://www.justiceforgirls.org/publications/pdfs/jfg_complete_report.pdf

¹³ Nura Taefi, "The Synthesis of Age And Gender: Intersectionality, International Human Rights Law And The Marginalisation Of The Girl-Child." In *Children's Rights: Progress and Perspectives: Essays from the International Journal of Children's Rights*, ed. Micheal Freeman. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 118-155.

¹⁴ *The United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, accessed online:

<http://www0.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/girl.htm>; *The World Programme of Action*, accessed online: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wpaygirls.htm>.

6. According to UNICEF:

*Greenhouse gas emissions have committed the world to a range of adverse and potentially catastrophic effects that will impact children. Current and future generations of children face declining water security, rising pressures on food production and increasing disasters and disease risks, with long-term consequences on their development.*¹⁵
7. Recognizing the *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the relationship between climate change and human rights*, and bearing in mind the pressing and urgent need for international action to prevent catastrophic climate change;¹⁶ we submit that climate change is a critical human rights issue for Canadian children that requires immediate action by the Canadian government.
8. The United Nations has accepted that there is a relationship between climate change and human rights and that State parties have an obligation to address vulnerabilities within the principle of equality:

*The effects of climate change will be felt most acutely by those segments of the population who are already in vulnerable situations due to factors such as poverty, gender, age, minority status and disability. Under international human rights law, States are legally bound to address such vulnerabilities in accordance with the principle of equality and non-discrimination.*¹⁷
9. In addition, Canada has formally recognized the vulnerabilities of children to environmental degradation by signing the 1997 *Declaration of the Environment Leaders of the Eight on Children's Environmental Health*.¹⁸
10. The *Committee* has also issued observations obliging states to take the appropriate actions to protect children from environmental harms.¹⁹
11. We urge the committee to now recognize climate change as a threat to the realization of children's rights and hold Canada accountable accordingly.

Gender specific vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change

12. Environmental erosion/degradation and disasters caused by climate change exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities, increasing the likelihood of

¹⁵ Children's Vulnerability to Climate Change and Disaster Impacts in East Asia and the Pacific. UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, 2011. Accessed online:

http://www.unicef.org/media/files/Climate_Change_Regional_Report_14_Nov_final.pdf

¹⁶ Report of the Office of the United National High Commissioner for Human Rights on the relationship between climate change and human rights (2009) A/HRC/1061.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ 1997 Declaration of the Environment Leaders of the Eight on Children's Environmental Health, Environment Leaders' Summit of the Eight. Miami, Florida, May 5-6, 1997 accessed online:

<http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/environment/1997miami/children.html>.

¹⁹ Dinah Shelton, "Background Paper Number 2: Human Rights and the Environment: Jurisprudence of Human Rights Bodies" (2002). Joint UNEP-OHCHR Expert Seminar on Human Rights and the Environment.

- girls being raped, forced into prostitution, forced to leave school, and subjected to extreme poverty and disease.²⁰
13. In looking at the gender specific mortality rates in relation to natural disasters, researchers from the London School of Economics found that gender and other forms of inequality have a detrimental impact on women's and girls' survival: *[T]he disaster impact is contingent on the vulnerability of affected people, which can and often does systematically differ across economic class, ethnicity, gender, and other factors.*²¹
14. The UN Commission on the Status of Women has called for governments to: *...integrate a gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of national environmental policies; to strengthen mechanisms; and to provide adequate resources to ensure women's full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels on environmental issues, particularly on strategies related to the impact of climate change on the lives of women and girls.*²²
15. We submit that Canada's colonial policies²³ coupled with the Canadian government's lack of action on climate change has a unique and disproportionate impact on Indigenous girls in violation of Articles 6, 24, and 30 of the *Convention*.
16. Indigenous girls disproportionately live in poverty and experience violence including assault, rape, and murder.²⁴ Indigenous girls are also disproportionately exposed to degraded ecosystems and greatly impacted by deforestation, contamination of drinking water, depletion of fish stocks, and environmental destruction due to resource extraction.
17. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a serious human rights concern for many Indigenous communities in Canada. For example:
- There were 131 First Nations communities with drinking water advisories in 2011,²⁵ and,
 - The Canadian government response to a 2011 call from four remote Manitoba reserves for help to solve the water crisis and sanitation issues on the reserves. The government of Canada responded by

²⁰ Weathering the Storm: Adolescent girls and climate change. Plan International, 2011. Access online at <http://plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications/emergencies/weathering-the-storm-adolescent-girls-and-climate-change/>

²¹ Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plummer. The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981–2002. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97(3), 2007, pp. 551–566

²² Retrieved from: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/

²³ Indian Act, RSC 1985, c I-5

²⁴ Taefi et al., Submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women at its 7th periodic review of Canada. Accessed online:

http://www.justiceforgirls.org/publications/pdfs/CEDAW_Submission-FINAL.pdf

²⁵ “More First Nations under drinking water advisories.” APTN National News, February 12, 2012.

<http://aptn.ca/pages/news/2012/02/03/more-first-nations-under-drinking-water-advisories/>. See also: David Boyd, No Taps, No Toilets: First Nations and the Constitutional Right to Water in Canada. (2011) 57:1 *McGill LJ* 81

sending a shipment of 800 water containers and 1000 slop pails to the reserve to use as toilets.²⁶

18. Water security and sanitation issues are only expected to worsen with climate change.
19. In addition, climate change disproportionately impacts Inuit girls. Inuit culture and ways of life are closely linked to environmental conditions in the Arctic region of Canada.²⁷ Permafrost melt will likely lead to the displacement of Inuit peoples thus depriving Indigenous girls of their homelands and culture.²⁸

VI. Failure to give children a voice in environmental decision-making

Canada has failed to give girls a voice in environmental decision-making pursuant to Article 12 of the *Convention*. Children's perspectives must be on equal terms with adults' in the development and implementation of environmental policy in Canada because children and future generations will face the most devastating impacts of climate change with serious health, environmental, and economic consequences.²⁹

20. The Committee has interpreted Article 12 to mean that States must provide mechanisms for the active participation of children in the promotion, protection and monitoring of the *Convention*. Given that ecological degradation and climate change have a direct and detrimental impact on the realization of girls' human rights, most clearly and urgently in relation to Articles 3, 6, and 24, governments are positively obliged to provide children with information on the state of their environments.
21. Canada has failed to provide children with information about the state of the environment, and any opportunity to meaningfully participate in the development of climate change policy. On the contrary, Canada has recently:
 - launched a campaign of de-funding and attacks against social and environmental justice organizations,³⁰
 - cut funding of environmental science,³¹

²⁶ Puxley, Chinta. "Chiefs outraged after Ottawa sends 1,000 slop pails in response to water crisis." *The Canadian Press*, April 21, 2011.

²⁷ Ding et al. Environmental Rights Report 2008: Human Rights and the Environment. Report prepared for Earthjustice. Accessed online: <http://earthjustice.org/sites/default/files/library/reports/2008-environmental-rights-report.pdf>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ 1997 Declaration of the Environment Leaders of the Eight on Children's Environmental Health. Environment Leaders' Summit of the Eight Miami, Florida, May 5-6, 1999. Accessed online: <http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/environment/1997miami/children.html>

³⁰ "Organizations that have been de-funded by the Harper Government." www.Rabble.ca see: <http://rabble.ca/babble/national-news/organizations-have-been-defunded-harper-government>

³⁰ Ibid; "Factsheet: The defunding of KAIROS by the Harper government" see: <http://www.cjpme.org/DisplayDocument.aspx?DOhttp://piratepad.net/ep/search?query=795&RecID=795&RecIDhttp://piratepad.net/ep/search?query=416&DocumentID=416&DocumentIDhttp://piratepad.net/ep/search?query=675&SaveMode=675&SaveMode>

³¹ Terry Pedwell, "Scientists march on Parliament Hill to protest research cuts" *The Toronto Star*, July 10, 2012 accessed online: <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1224224--scientists-to-march-in-ottawa-to-protest-death-of-evidence>

- silenced environmental research scientists,³² and
- gutted environmental assessments and protections.³³

VII. Canada's failed obligations to children around the world

Canada has withdrawn from, watered down or obstructed international attempts to mitigate climate change.³⁴ As a result, Canada is in breach of the principle of progressive realization and Article 4 of the Convention at dire risk to future generations domestically and around the globe.

23. We submit that Canada must cooperate internationally to address climate change in order to implement the *Convention*. Climate change is an urgent environmental problem that necessitates international cooperation as the effects of climate change impact children, and future generations, from all countries regardless of the location from which greenhouse gases (the cause of climate change) originate. In addition, the impacts of global warming such as changing food and water distribution, increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters and sea level rise do not stay within specific state borders.
24. The *Committee* has interpreted Article 4 to mean that where needed, State parties must work within the framework of international cooperation to fully implement the rights delineated within the *Convention*. For example, in its review of Jordan's implementation of the *Convention* the Committee recommended that Jordan "take all appropriate measures, including through international cooperation, to prevent and combat the damaging effects of environmental pollution and contamination of water supplies on children and to strengthen procedures for inspection."³⁵
25. We submit that Canada has a particularly important role to play in curtailing climate change due to Canada's large Arctic geography and excessive greenhouse gas emissions.
- Canadians use more energy than all of the 760 million inhabitants of Africa;³⁶
 - Canada makes up less than one half of one percent of the world's population, but is the world's eighth largest producer of greenhouse gases (734 million tonnes in 2008);³⁷

³² "Federal scientist unfairly silenced, union says." CBC News, July 29th, 2011. Accessed online:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2011/07/29/fish-scientist-muzzled.html>

³³ "Passing of budget bill is bad news for Canadians and the environment." Press Release, Ecojustice. Accessed at: <http://www.ecojustice.ca/media-centre/press-releases/passing-of-budget-bill-is-bad-news-for-canadians-and-the-environment>

³⁴ Damian Carrington & Adam Vaughan, "Canada condemned at home and abroad for pulling out of Kyoto treaty." The Guardian, December 13, 2011. Accessed online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/dec/13/canada-condemned-kyoto-climate-treaty>; Dale Marshall, "Flaws of Copenhagen Accord Revealed." Accessed online: <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/blogs/climate-blog/2010/02/flaws-of-copenhagen-accord-revealed/>; Mark Kennedy, "Canada pulling out of Kyoto accord" The National Post, Dec 12, 2011

³⁵ Dinah Shelton, "Background Paper Number 2: Human Rights and the Environment: Jurisprudence of Human Rights Bodies" (2002). Joint UNEP-OHCHR Expert Seminar on Human Rights and the Environment.

³⁶ David Suzuki Foundation <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/issues/climate-change/science/canada-climate-change/canadas-emissions/>

³⁷ Ibid.

- Canada has the second worst environmental record of OECD countries, ranking 24th out of 25 countries.³⁸

26. We submit that Canada has ample resources to take action against climate change. Yet, Canada has demonstrated a recent pattern of rolling back domestic laws and policies that aim to protect the environment.

27. We submit that by failing to address climate change and cooperate with the international community Canada is contributing to children's rights violations at an international level. The impacts of Canada's failure to address climate change can be felt across the globe and especially amongst the most marginalized girls, whose human rights, including the right to life, are already in jeopardy.³⁹

³⁸ Thomas Gunton and K.S. Calbrick, "The Maple Leaf in the OECD: Canada's Environmental Performance." Research report prepared for the David Suzuki Foundation by the School of Resource and Environmental Management, Simon Fraser University, 2010. Accessed online:

http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/downloads/2010/OECD_Report_Final.pdf

³⁹ Ding et al. Environmental Rights Report 2008: Human Rights and the Environment. Report prepared for Earthjustice. Accessed online: <http://earthjustice.org/sites/default/files/library/reports/2008-environmental-rights-report.pdf>

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at its Sixty-first Session and Periodic Review of Canada
17 September – 5 October 2012
by: Zoe Craig, Age 15
Justice for Girls**

Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

1. Noting the great jeopardy of the planet due to climate change, and affirming Article 12 of the Convention, I submit that children are entitled the right to provide opinions on environmental and social policies in Canada that affect them.
2. Being Aboriginal myself, I am well aware of the effects of climate change on children and Indigenous peoples. Considering that I am a 15 year old girl, my opinions on climate change should not only be heard, but prioritized seeing as my maturity level is more than adequate to give input and my future will be affected for longer than that of adults.
3. I also respectfully suggest that during its' review of Canada, the Committee recognize girls' within the broad term 'children' because protocols and policies affect the sexes differently.
4. Bearing in mind the Rights of the Child, and Canada's regressive actions in relation to climate change, I believe there is a pressing need for children's representation in environmental and social policies and for immediate action to be taken to preserve the rights of girls and Indigenous women in Canada.
5. Canada's failures and retrogressive position in relation to the Kyoto Protocol and the specific harm caused by greenhouse gas emissions on girls must be noted.
6. Canada's greenhouse gasses have climbed drastically since 1990, the spiking pattern of emissions defying all federal reduction policies. The Kyoto Protocol targeted an incredibly attainable goal of a 6% decrease on behalf of Canada, but in return Canada has increased emissions by 26% in ten years. Our country has continually failed in meeting two goals presented by the government, and is currently 'working' to meet the latest goal of a 20% reduction of 2006 emissions by 2020.*
7. I am shocked at Canada's failures, not just in securing my rights as a child, but also in its' regressive stance on lowering greenhouse gas emissions. These

* All environmental research information gathered from the David Suzuki Foundation. See: www.davidsuzuki.org

- toxic emissions have disproportionate impacts on girls and Indigenous females worldwide.
8. Growing up, I was raised to believe that the world does not revolve around me and that if I really want something, to work hard for it. If Canada was truly serious about reducing emissions to protect my safety, serious action would have been taken. Canada's lack of Federal laws and policies protecting Canadian's health in the context of global climate change has led to an unfortunately dramatic rise in emissions.
 9. A quote that holds a spot close to my heart is: "We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." I worry that we have turned a critical corner and are now "*stealing* from our children."^{*} Children are being considerably affected by potentially catastrophic environmental conditions, our disproportionate levels of exposure to toxic substances dooming our future.
 10. I note with great concern the link between environmental exposure and climate change causing developmental damage and ultimately cancers. We children are in the early stages of our lives and will have a higher exposure to environmental toxins for a longer period of time. I would like to be able to secure *my* own future by having the weighted input into environmental policies that I have the right to. The natural defence systems of children are still developing and bearing this in mind, Canadian environmental protection plans should clearly take into consideration the primary benefit of children– particularly girls.
 11. There is an obvious inadequacy of data collected and shared by the government in regard to the health and safety of children and the environment. The economic balance of the world seems to be the only concern of our government at this time, not their children, their planet, or the people starving on the street.
 12. The climate changes that are occurring now are enough to make me seek answers and help, but I worry that it will take a hurricane in their backyard or ocean levels rising to cover our beaches for Canadian officials to realize the urgency.
 13. Clearly children are important in our society today, so why is Article 12 being violated because of a lack of child representation in Canada? I cannot stress enough how Canada's lack of effort to prevent or reduce extreme amounts of emission exposure must be changed. **Children's input into environmental policy must be privileged.**
 14. The disproportionate impact of climate change on all children is gravely dangerous, but girls are affected as a *gender* as well as being categorized as 'children'. Recognizing the impact that climate change holds over girls in Canada is in need of immediate attention.

* Dr. Jane Goodall, British primatologist, ethologist, anthropologist

15. I respectfully suggest the use of gender-specific terms throughout all documents and that adequate attention be granted on the subject of climate change affecting girls – particularly girls from poor and Indigenous communities.
16. Gender discrimination and inequality is glaring in my day-to-day Canadian life – causing women and girls to be especially exposed to climate-change related risks. Considering that more ‘natural’ disasters are occurring because of climate change, the number of girls affected indirectly is simply uncountable. Girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys when additional stress is put upon a household because of existing discrimination. Though you or your loved ones may not face direct gender discrimination, that does not mean that somebody's little girl isn't greatly struggling because of her gender. Though gender equality is looking up for Canada today, girls are individuals and are affected far differently than males.
17. When girls are chosen to be removed from schooling in a dire time caused by environmental disaster, an infringement of Article 28, the right to education, is occurring. Young boys and girls are the future of this world, already miraculously shaping the world of tomorrow.
18. If girls were a) exposed to an environmentally sustaining education and b) their opinions were respectfully heard and valued, then awareness of climate change would also have great influence over wider household and community actions.
19. **My inherent right to life is being jeopardized not only through climate change, but by my country's lack of environmental standards and policies.** Though our Provincial government may be responsible for water and air standards, it is the Federal government's job to ensure all rights are secure, including children's rights under the Convention. Unfortunately, climate change and a lack of Federal legislation surrounding environmental policies are greatly impacting all Canadians, Indigenous women and children among the most vulnerable.
20. Education has always been held in high regard by my family and peers, and one of the impacts that climate change has on Aboriginal girls is schooling being even harder to pursue. There is an extremely evident impact on the Aboriginal people of Canada due to climate change. After my Elders shared some of their wise, yet disturbing stories, I realized the importance of a National water standard in Canada. I recently learned about mercury poisoning in Musqueam's waters (a B.C Aboriginal tribe,) which is a direct violation of Children's rights to clean water and to a healthy environment.
21. Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child is in violation, as many Children are being deprived of their highest attainable degree of health. The mercury levels found in Indigenous peoples in Canada is shockingly high, far higher than that of other citizens. Inuit mothers in particular are known to be devastatingly poisoning their babies with their breast milk, the toxicity unknown to them.
22. In my community, girls were often sacrificed for the long trek up to the nearest gas station to purchase large jugs of water to lug back home to their families at

times of a water crisis. This increased stress further impeding the success of the already disadvantaged Aboriginal girls.

23. With racial discrimination still an overt issue and many Aboriginal Reservations still without running water, how are Canadian Indigenous girls supposed to succeed?
24. Indigenous peoples are also facing cultural challenges. Many traditional practices are being hindered or halted because of climate change. I have grown up fishing the Fraser River with my Grandfather, but in recent years we have noticed a drastic change in the fish numbers and timing. Another Elder has described the lack of swans, fish, and other birds which he calls upon to inspire traditional dances and songs; explaining to me that the lack of fish has led to a great impact on the ecosystem. The thought that my children may not get to appreciate the vibrant red and greens of the sockeye frightens me greatly. Noting the great importance of Indigenous people in Canada, the culture that the Indigenous children are being raised in is in jeopardy, violating Article 30.
25. Based on my research findings and grounded in my perspective as a young person--an Indigenous person and a female--I believe that Canada must realize the importance of girls and children and the upholding of our rights is crucial to the improvement of Canada. Children are the key to our success as a country and we need the recognition we deserve to save our future.
26. There is a gaping hole in youth representation and perspectives throughout Canada and I find it to be a vital piece that must be improved upon. The Aboriginal peoples of Canada are dependant on the fulfillment of Canada's promises for children's rights and therefore it is imperative that they be abided.
27. I am dreaming of a time when all people- no matter the country, age, gender or race- can come together with the common goal of saving our planet. In order for this to happen, I *need* my country to:
 - a) realize that children are entitled the right to provide recognized opinions on environmental and social policies that affect them;
 - b) regard issues relating to children through a gender-specific lens; and
 - c) take ownership of our contributions to Greenhouse gases and control our emissions.

My future, my friends' futures, and the future of the world's children are all delicately resting in your palms.

**Submission to: UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
at its Sixty-first Session and Periodic Review of Canada
17 September – 5 October 2012
by: Rekha Dhillon-Richardson, Age 13
Justice for Girls**

Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

1. I call upon the Committee with great concern to address Canada's failure to comply with the Convention of the Rights of the Child. I assert throughout this submission, how pressing the matter of climate change is to the successful implementation of children's human rights.
2. As a 13-year-old girl, I can understand why children's rights are needed because they apply to me and others I know. Canada's refusal to address the significance of environmental protections astonishes me because climate change is an urgent problem affecting children's immediate and long-term future.
3. Canada's failure to record data about environmental issues is an urgent problem and a violation of Article 13. Canada does not keep track of deaths pertaining to environmental hazards caused by climate change, particularly natural disasters.* Considering that children have a right to access information, this poses a significant threat to our knowledge about the safety, health, and future of Canada's children. This also creates an environment of uncertainty and inaccessibility. Article 13 states that, as children, we should be able to obtain information about what has happened in our country.
4. This right matters because children should know what is going on with the atmosphere around them. This right also applies to all of the other environmental toxins and climate and social problems in Canada, because if children are not educated or given information about things that may be harmful to them, then what can they do to make change?
5. Canada has also failed to educate citizens and especially children (and girls, who are more vulnerable) about environmental risks that affect them harshly, such as water quality, and food quality.
6. Children should have a say in environmental policies because they are most often the hardest hit victims of climate change. Children are physically weaker than adults, and their immune systems are still developing, thus they are often more susceptible to harm.
7. Girls especially are in more danger when it comes to hazards created by climate

*All environmental research information gathered from the David Suzuki Foundation. See: www.davidsuzuki.org

- change, such as wildfires, storm surges, and heavy flooding. Women are also highly susceptible to environmental hazards. They have a higher death rate in natural disasters than men and boys. Women and girls are frequently given the position of making sure younger children are free from harm, which may decrease their chances of survival during a severe storm or disaster.
8. It's because of the preceding reasons that children need greater protection from the effects of climate change than adults, so I wonder why the government does not value giving it to them.
 9. Kids are most affected by our changing world, so they should have a legitimate and respected voice in how social and environmental policies are made. This is a matter that I urge you to consider with great concern because children are the future leaders of this planet.
 10. My generation will become the lawyers, doctors, politicians, mechanics, scientists, and teachers for the generation to come. It does not seem fair that a group of adults, who will not be around for all of the future, are given all of the responsibility relating to environmental problems, or any problem for that matter.
 11. It is adults making all of the decisions about environmental policies, without any thought or attention paid to what is in the best interests of children. This violates Article 12, which particularly recognizes that children should be heard by authorities in situations where policies impact children directly.
 12. Article 12 also specifies that the child must be "mature enough" to be given thoughtful consideration. I believe that older kids as a general group are knowledgeable enough in Canada to understand what is happening on planet earth.
 13. Not only am I concerned about the devastating condition the world is in environmentally, but I am also concerned that children's fresh and unique perspective will be invisible to adults, and it is our world too that is at stake. Children should also be included in procedures involving climate change in the environment (and other issues as well) because they are the most exposed to the severe, damaging, and harsh results.
 14. Even within the larger category of children, experiences with environmental degradation are different. In First Nations communities, girls, especially, are more vulnerable. The rising global temperatures due to pollution and climate change have caused glaciers to melt, interrupting the age-old tradition of fishing. This impacts the amount and quality of food in these communities.
 15. Such climate changes violate Article 30, which states that Aboriginal communities are permitted to practice their culture and traditions --hunting and fishing are central to Aboriginal practices. Because of global warming, Indigenous communities may be at risk regarding food stock due to their inability to hunt and fish.
 16. This raises the pressing issue of displacement. People may have to move to find food, if there is none where they are living. Displacement obviously puts

Indigenous people at a severe disadvantage because they depend on the natural world that is shifting due to climate change. If the Indigenous people have to move, are they still really a whole culture, or will they become part of another?*

17. Displacement especially victimizes girls because they may drop out of school to help their families with household duties and care of younger children, disrupting their education and potentially violating the right to education under Article 28.
18. Girls are often given the responsibilities of taking care of the house and younger children which limits their right to relax and play under Article 31. Canada is ignoring some crucial needs of a large group of people that may result in very dire consequences not only to Aboriginal citizens, but also to Canada and the rest of the world.

Conclusion

19. I conclude this submission by urging the Committee to address all of the violations I have explained. It baffles me that the Canadian government is not worrying about these social and environmental problems but instead seems concerned only about money. Government officials often claim that putting time and money into social and environmental issues our world is facing will stop the growth of the economy. It frustrates me that people do not understand that unless they stop their erosive ways there will be no economy. There will be no planet.
20. From my research, I understand that in the environment one thing leads to another - like a domino effect. When one thing goes wrong it disrupts the entire system. Nature is a delicate balance and so closely relates to humanity. As humans, we are not separate from nature, but part of it. Canada's constitution was designed as a "living tree" so our government can and should adapt laws and policies regarding the environment. I guarantee that these changes would result in a safer, cleaner, and stronger planet that will thrive for generations to come.

* This also violates Article 8, the right to identity.