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NEWS RELEASE

To: Assignment Editors, Reporters and Producers: Aboriginal Affairs, Politics, Child/Youth Advocacy and Policy

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NATIONAL LEADERS CALLED ON TO ADDRESS THE DEVASTATION AFFECTING ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A national plan is urgently needed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth, says the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates (CCPCYA).

“There are significant deep-seated gaps between the health, education and safety of Aboriginal children and youth in Canada and their non-Aboriginal peers,” said John Mould, President of the CCPCYA. “We believe this is the single most important -- and most neglected -- human rights issue in the country.”

The Council is calling for an urgent special meeting of First Ministers, Aboriginal leaders, and child and youth delegates to develop this national plan. The Canada-wide plan would measure and report on progress so that all Canadians and the Council would be able to track progress, and to bring the voices of Aboriginal children and youth to the fore, Mould said.

In the course of their daily advocacy work in nine Canadian provinces and one northern territory, the child and youth advocates see the deep-seated poverty and exclusion from opportunities that many other Canadian children take for granted. “We see the devastating effects of these,” Mould said. “What we don’t see is any sign of the all-out effort needed to turn things around. Despite spending millions of dollars each year, there is little evidence of improvements to outcomes.”

Aboriginal children in Canada today are disproportionately represented in the youth justice and child welfare systems, they have poorer health status, they lag significantly in educational outcomes, and they are too often the victims of sexual exploitation and violence. Their rates of death and injury are disproportionately high.

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Increasingly, members of the Council are concerned that today's situation has become acceptable to too many Canadians. On the eve of the G8 Summit, where Canada plans to encourage a focus on the health of children and women in the poorest countries in the world, and following the Winnipeg National Event held by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission last weekend, now is the time for Canadians and their leaders to focus energy and resources on this pressing issue.

Members of CCPCYA believe that the current environment presents new opportunities to work towards a path of healing, reconciliation and renewal, with the well-being of children and youth as the focus. Meeting our responsibilities to these vulnerable children requires a clear, outcomes-directed, child-centred national plan.

Additionally, the Council takes up the call for a national Children's Commissioner. The Council joins other national and international organizations and leaders that have repeatedly called for creation of an independent statutory officer of the Parliament of Canada. The Council believes that effective oversight would centralize the focus and accountability necessary to improve the living conditions and well-being of Aboriginal children and youth in Canada.

The twentieth anniversary of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* was marked in 2009. It addresses a broad range of children's rights to health, safety, well-being and education. "As a signatory to the Convention, it is time for Canada to live up to it," Mould said.

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