

Kids Rights Canada's Speech in the IFWY Forum

Hello everyone. This is Heidi from Kids Rights Canada. Today, I'm arguing that children and youth should be a priority area of policy reform.

There's a saying that goes, "*Nations that fail children, fail.*" Children and youth are not only the future — they are also the present. Too often, policy treats them solely as a vulnerable group, deserving of protection but rarely seen as capable contributors to society. Of course, their vulnerabilities matter. But if we only frame children as dependent, we miss their potential. In reality, when we invest in children, we are not only responding only to needs — we are building capability, and we're investing in the nation's future.

I understand - many people think that when we're talking about human rights, we're burning money, we're doing charity, and we are helping vulnerable people and not ourselves. But in an economic perspective, consider this - if a child suffers from illness and doesn't get treated at a young age, the problem continues as they grow up.

Let's talk numbers. In Canada alone, the lack of adequate childcare and family support in the fall of 2022 amounted to an economic loss of nearly 50 million dollars for mothers and 13 million dollars for fathers — a combined cost of at least 63 million dollars in a single season. That is money lost not because parents lacked talent or willingness, but because society failed to support children and families.

The message is clear: prioritizing children is not charity — it is cost-effective, future-focused and investing in our nation. Children are both vulnerable and capable in society - but honestly, aren't we all? If we are empathetic to our children and younger citizens, we're investing in healthier economies, stronger democracies, and more resilient communities.

Here, I call for the establishment of an independent children's commission in Canada and the United States, so that children's voices can be heard from the bottom-up and be advocated in government systems.