

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Saturday, 8 October 2016

Child poverty and children's rights in New Zealand are of deep concern, says UN report

A UN report damning New Zealand's performance in addressing children's rights and child poverty is a wake-up call for the New Zealand Government, public sector agencies and the wider community, according to Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa (ACYA).

ACYA's key role is to provide alternative reports to the UN Committee and hold the Government accountable to its obligations. The organisation also attended the Government's session with the UN Committee in Geneva last month.

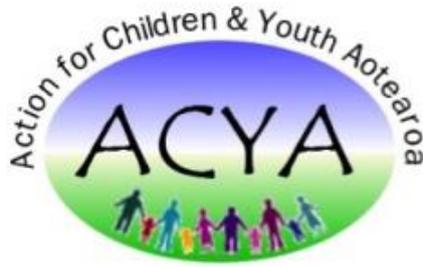
ACYA Chair Dr Sarah Te One said New Zealand was not meeting its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and this was having a pervasive and detrimental impact on the wellbeing of our country's children and young people.

Dr Te One said the examination of New Zealand's performance by the UN Committee was rigorous and the Committee's observations confirm ACYA's own findings that successive governments have failed to build a strong foundation when it comes to children's rights in New Zealand.

"Over the years the UN has made over 35 recommendations to New Zealand for improving children's wellbeing. Many of these recommendations have been made repeatedly," said Dr Te One.

In the 2016 report, released on Saturday morning (NZ time), the UN committee expressed deep concern about the enduring high prevalence of poverty among children and "the effect of deprivation on children's right to an adequate standard of living and access to adequate housing, with its negative impact on health, survival and development, and education".

The Committee's other concerns included the levels of violence, abuse and neglect; the situation for children in care; the adequacy of supports and protections for children and young people who work; and youth justice issues, including the fact that 17 year olds are not included in the youth justice system.



The New Zealand Government has also been told it needs to “consider a different name for the proposed Ministry of Vulnerable Children” and adopt a comprehensive policy and strategy for all children based on children’s rights, as it received observations on its performance from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Dr Te One said ACYA’s members were delighted that the UN Committee had picked up on foundation issues that ACYA had put forward to them last year and discussed with them while in Geneva.

“These are hard hitting observations and recommendations that cannot and should not be ignored.

The UN Committee has recommended a range of changes to better reflect the UN Convention including:

- Better data collection about children, so decision-making is based on good information
- Taking a more cohesive and coordinated approach to issues affecting children, rather than the reactive, piecemeal and ad hoc responses that have tended to be taken in the past
- Making sure all children can access quality, universal services as well as extra assistance when it is needed
- Clearer budgeting for children so we know how much is being spent and can assess how effective that spending is.

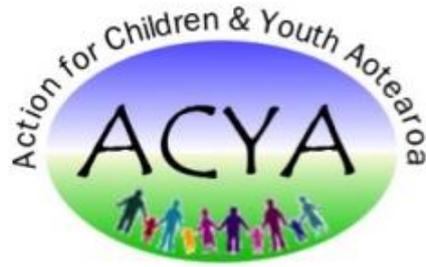
Leader of the non-government delegation Mereana Ruri said the UN Committee has also expressed concern that groups of New Zealand children aren’t doing as well as others, particularly Maori and Pacific children, children with disabilities, migrant, refugee and children from minority communities and children from the LGBTI community.

The report expresses particular concern about the number of Maori and Pasifika children living in deprived circumstances. Both groups are disproportionately represented in child poverty statistics.

“The UN Committee has called for urgent measures to address the disparities in access to education, health services and a minimum standard of living for Maori and Pasifika children. They also expressed deep concern that Māori and Pasifika children are facing discrimination, bias and prejudice in their lives every day. When we talked to the UN Committee they were really seeking to understand the root causes and what might be done to improve the situation and the report reflects this,” she said.

Dr Te One said ACYA has provided successive reports outlining missed opportunities by successive governments.

“Governments have failed to build a strong foundation when it comes to children's rights in New Zealand. Instead responses have been ad hoc and piecemeal; any implementation a happy coincidence rather than part of an overall strategy for children.



“The continued failings are rooted in inequality. We believe, and the UN Committee has confirmed this, that an overarching children’s rights approach is needed which should be embedded in decision making processes, policies, legislation and practice.

“New Zealand is at a turning point in the way we, as a nation, regard children and their rights. We need to make sure there is increased concern on issues that impact on children, and that the measures to make sure policies, practices and service delivery are child-centred are implemented well.”

ACYA will be calling on MPs to table the UN Committee’s recommendations in Parliament.

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For further information:

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About Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa

Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa (ACYA) is a non-profit coalition of non-governmental organisations, families and individuals, whose purpose is to promote and enhance the wellbeing of children and young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

ACYA promotes the rights of our children and young people through advocacy and monitoring of the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child covers all those aged under 18.

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