

Afghan and Canadian children's rights

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MRU club sheds light on inequality

By Fareshta Ali Bik, **Contributor**

Throughout history, there have been children mistreated and denied the rights and respect they deserve. Yet, the rights children are given have proved to be different depending on the country they are born into. The Afghan Children's Society Club at Mount Royal University aims to bring light to the inequality and contrast between the rights of Afghan children and Canadian children.

An international treaty, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), was created to combat the inequality and protect the rights of children globally. Canada and Afghanistan are among the countries who signed. The CRC focuses on protection from abuse, exploitation and harmful substances, as well as education, health care and a suitable standard of living.

Canada respects the outlined children's rights stated on the CRC and children's rights are protected through this treaty. The responsibility for implementation of children's rights is divided between the federal and provincial government. According to the Government of Canada's website,

nearly all Canadian children have access to universal health insurance and tax-supported elementary education. Federal criminal laws help to prevent child abuse by holding the abuser accountable. Additionally, because of the Child Soldier Act, Canadian soldiers under the age of 18 cannot be positioned in army conflict.

In contrast, many children in Afghanistan still face atrocities. Child labor, domestic violence, honour killings, shaming and stoning are still exercised in Afghanistan. According to Humanium, an international child sponsorship NGO that aims to protect children's rights, some of the factors Afghan children face include extreme poverty, violence, malnutrition, forced marriages and sexual abuse.

Though Afghanistan signed the CRC, they have failed to protect their children from trauma, violence, discrimination, neglect, abandonment, kidnapping and other types of victimization. Due to the cultural norms, women are asked to stay at home while men and children work to feed their families. According to Human Rights Watch, the low-income family children take on labor jobs from the age of five for a living to support their families. Many men who provide for their families die on the streets from bombs or suicide attacks, leaving children to provide for their families.

On July 14, 2016, Human Rights Watch reported that in Afghanistan, many children are employed in jobs that are dangerous. These jobs can cause illness, injuries, and sometimes it can lead to death as they “work in poor conditions” under no “enforcement of safety and health standards”. These children mainly work outside and are exposed to harsh weather conditions. In the summer children work in weather that is around 40 degrees celsius and in the winter weather that is around minus 20 degrees celsius.

The same article sheds light on the fact that many Afghan children end up working at home-based carpet factories, industry bonded labor in brick kiln, metal industries as welders, in mines, in agriculture, street vendors, shoe shiners, water carriers, domestic servants, assistance in boutiques, cardboard collectors and beggars. Many work for a maximum of fifteen hours a day, and sometimes do not even get paid.

The Afghan Children's Society at Mount Royal University hopes to spread light on these issues of inequality and create equality. They want to leave the world in a better state than it is now and be the voice for innocent children.

Isabel Maria Pazmino, a member of the society says she joined because she, "would like to make a difference and help those who are helpless."

The club's mission is to address the number of orphaned children between the ages of zero and five in Kabul, Afghanistan. By addressing the need for access to clean water, food, shelter, and warm clothing, this club aims to change the lives of these children and spread awareness across Mount Royal.

Source: The Reflector web site