North America Regional Consultation

The Right of Children & Youth to a Healthy Environment: Building an Agenda for Justice, Equity and Empowerment

From the inextricably linked climate emergency and biodiversity crisis, to air and water pollution, deforestation, mining, pesticides and waste, the breadth and diversity of environmental challenges confronting North America is both astounding and sobering.

No group is more vulnerable to these forms of environmental harms and injustices than children and young people, especially those facing intersecting inequities linked to race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation and other characteristics. The most disadvantaged populations – and children in particular, due to their unique stage of cognitive, emotional, physical and social development – tend to be those most affected by environmental catastrophes, yet most marginalized in public policy decision-making.

At the same time, children and youth have crucial perspectives, expertise, and the capacity to be powerful agents of change.

The Children’s Environmental Rights Initiative (CERI) is partnering with the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF), the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) and a broad network of other organizations to host a virtual child, youth and intergenerational consultation on children’s right to a healthy environment for the North American region. The event forms the North America chapter of a wider series of flagship regional consultations that CERI is conducting with children, youth and other key stakeholders around the world.¹

Taking place in Spring 2021, the consultation will convene a wide diversity of young environmental activist leaders, adults and Elders for an interactive and generative dialogue on challenges, solutions and recommendations regarding the rights of children and youth with respect to the environment. Proactive efforts will be taken to ensure that the participants reflect the most over-burdened populations, and that discussions represent society in its diversity. Likewise, the content of the events will address strategies for transforming social and environmental disparities.

Children, youth and their allies will be empowered to use this opportunity to build relationships that link local, national and international efforts, to foster intergenerational dialogue and collaboratively plan follow-up actions, next steps and initiatives that directly nurture the momentum of the child- and youth-led climate and environmental movement.

Key findings from this summit will be captured in a regional report, providing a foundation for further joint advocacy initiatives at the regional level, and contributing to CERI’s broader activities and mission under the auspices of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment to shape and secure international recognition by States of children’s right to a healthy environment. Specifically, key recommendations and messages from the consultation will contribute towards CERI’s work to develop a new “Global Charter on Children’s Rights and the Environment”, intended to serve as a blueprint for States to adopt new and ambitious universal standards with respect to children’s environmental rights.

**Anticipated consultation outcomes include:**

- **Establishment of a Young People’s Environmental Rights Network:** We will invite young people to the first ever digital convening space for young climate and environmental activists and organizations across North America to form and collaborate on advocacy initiatives and exchange best practices and resources beyond the consultation, with the support of an intergenerational

¹ “Children” in this context includes young people up to the age of 18 and “youth” refers to young adults. Including both groups intends to reflect ongoing discussions about the need to strengthen children’s rights as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child from an environmental perspective, while recognising the social reality that children and youth face similar challenges in this context.
community. This space will be open for organic networking, although a moderating structure will be built for the group’s longevity and for it to function independently.

- **North American Regional Report**: The regional report, highlighting key discussion points, will be developed shortly after the consultation and shared with participants as a tool to raise awareness and move forward with advocacy efforts. The Young People’s Environmental Rights Network can provide a convening space for young people to lead these.

- **Academic community of practice on children’s environmental rights**: A coalition of researchers from across North America will come together across disciplines to develop a research program on children’s rights, the environment and climate change. This newly formed North American regional research network will collaborate on key research areas identified by young people during the consultation. Enhanced strategic links between research institutions and child and youth activists will provide an excellent platform for child-adult partnerships going forward.

- **Global Charter on Children’s Rights and the Environment**: A set of key universal guiding principles on children’s rights and the environment will be developed based on the inputs of the North America and other CERI regional and digital consultations around the world. Work on the draft Charter will culminate in 2021/2022. States will be asked to adopt the Charter to inform child-centered climate and environmental standard-setting and policy development at global, regional and national levels. It is anticipated that participants and organizations in various regions will support this call to action through their networks.

- **Shaping and supporting CERI’s global campaign to secure formal international recognition of children’s right to a healthy environment.**

**Dates**: Spring 2021

**Platform**: Zoom

**Attendance target**: 100 total (2-3 tiers of participation), with public sessions open to larger audiences

**Planning**:

An **Intergenerational Advisory Committee (IAC)** will be convened to advise in the planning and implementation of the consultation, providing space for young people, adults and Elders (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to work together through critical issues.

**CERI Online Poll (one month before)**: An online poll will be promoted approximately one month ahead of the consultation aiming to gather inputs from a wide range of children and young people in North America, so as to reach out to communities beyond those participating in the consultation. These inputs will be integrated in the North American Regional Report and the Global Charter on Children’s Right to a Healthy Environment.

**Participants**: The event will bring together actors from across the region to explore ways to deepen collaboration and alliances. In particular, children and youth who face varying levels of adversity and who may have more limited access to such leadership opportunities will be prioritized.

- Environmental child and youth activists
- Civil society organizations
- Regional and national institutions
- Youth Journalists
- UN Agencies
- Academia
- Governments
- Private Sector
Format

The format will utilize participatory, youth-centred engagement and leadership methods which help to facilitate multi-generational dialogue and maximum participation by all during the consultation. These would include the use of arts-based, storytelling, relational and Indigenous methods. Key consultation partners have extensive experience in designing safe, respectful and culturally relevant spaces for dialogue and creative action. Ensuring the dialogue is grounded in the lived experience and land-based traditions of Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities will be critical. Central to our approach will be the design of activities to support the core principles of reconciliation, anti-racism and decolonization.

Roles:
- Host or MC
- Group session Note Taker
- Photographer/ Recorder/ Social media
- Moderators
- Speakers
- Break out session Facilitators
- Break out session Note takers
- Support group
- Participants

Group sessions: Group sessions are when all of the participants are in the same session. We will encourage speakers to use the interactive features of Zoom regularly to make the session as engaging as possible.

Break out sessions: Break out rooms are the more interactive portions of the workshop that can be divided by topic and languages.

World-cafe: There will be a dedicated session bringing together children and youth from around the world for networking/lessons learned discussion, utilizing break out rooms and potentially live streamed.

Public session: For one or more of the group sessions, the public will be invited to watch a live stream and have the opportunity to provide comments or ask questions via chat. This portion will involve high-level and influential speakers, highlight the results of the digital consultation (online poll) inputs, and ideally incorporate a compelling moment- i.e. spoken word, etc.

Focus areas

Points for discussion:
- Key challenges in the region that hinder progress on fulfilling children’s and youth’s environmental rights
- What measures are required and what opportunities exist (good practices, policy frameworks)?
- What are the issues that need to be prioritized/addressed (topics, groups, rights)?
- Measures/strategies to support children’s and youth’s environmental rights in the region, including youth activism

Environmental and children’s rights topics relevant to North America:
- Environmental justice (intersectionality, equity)
- Climate change
- Indigenous rights
- Intergenerational collaborations (children, youth, adults and Elders) and mentorship
- Child- and Youth-led movements and human rights (links between child/youth action and implementation of rights) and empowerment of children

Important considerations
In order for children and young people to participate fully and meaningfully it is important for us to take special steps:

**Languages:** We will take necessary steps to accommodate the diversity in languages, including French and Spanish, by integrating Zoom live translators and translating event materials.

**Accessibility** *(Resource)*: It is critical to make efforts to accommodate participants with limited access to specific Zoom features, such as those with different abilities or joining from the phone.

**Communications**

A communications plan will be developed integrating the use of media, social media, influencers, multimedia, blogs and websites to:

- Outreach to as many children and young people as possible to participate in the CERI online poll
- Raise visibility of the voices of children and young people at the event and messages from the online poll
- Facilitate collaboration and communication among event participants