

# CHiLD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

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## **NZ pretends recognition of the Rights of the Child**

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has examined the combined third and fourth periodic report of New Zealand on how New Zealand is implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Sue Mackwell, Deputy Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development, fronted up to the committee claiming that although there are some issues that still need work, New Zealand is doing well in many regards. She highlighted the 20 hours per week of “free” early childhood care for all three to four year olds; “free” access to primary health care for all under six year olds and children of low income families; and a “comprehensive income assistance package” for families with children.

These arguments are an inaccurate presentation of what has happened for children, says Child Poverty Action Group’s Susan St John. The 20 hours “free” early childhood education is often a cruel joke, as families have to pay for the hours on either side of the maximum 6 hours under this policy per day. Some poorer areas do not have places for all the children who qualify for the service. The “free” primary healthcare is also an exaggeration: only 82% of children under age six are able to access free primary health care services, and only during business hours. Unfortunately, too, says St John, the “comprehensive income assistance package for families with children” is only offered to families who meet the stringent paid-work requirements and are not in receipt of any other government assistance such as a benefit, a student loan, or ACC.

Maria Herczog, the Committee Expert serving as Rapporteur for the report, said that in spite of the favourable situation for most children, child rights-based policies and an overarching comprehensive child policy did not exist in New Zealand: there is no specific department or ministry responsible for child-related issues; no National Action Plan; very limited coordination; and the Convention is not an integrated internal legal provision or a framework to develop strategies.

The 20% of New Zealand children in poverty was particularly remarked upon. In a gross understatement, Mackwell admitted that “More needs to be done to assist those children who fall through the gap”. CPAG asks: Where is the plan? Where is the commitment to honour our pledge to put the needs of children first? Government policy has created the gap and is, therefore, in a position to stop children falling through it. We can expect an even

worse report next time unless the government makes sure that appropriate resources actually reach the poorest children. CPAG expects this to be a major election issue this year.

See the Report from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child [here](#).

See CPAG's Submission to the UN Committee [here](#).

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