



Global Affairs Canada: Feminist Foreign Policy Dialogue

Thank you for your contribution to the feminist foreign policy dialogue. We invite you to provide your contribution below, within the five (5)-page limit

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Please indicate if you are submitting this contribution:

- ☒ As an individual
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Please indicate the areas covered in your contribution:

- ☐ Overarching considerations
- ☐ Enhanced diplomatic engagement
- ☒ Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
- ☐ Responding to evolving vulnerabilities
- ☐ Inclusive digital transformation
- ☐ Other: please specify

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When the terms 'peace' and 'security' are used in the international arena, particularly within international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, dominant, conventional understandings often obscure and take for granted gender perspectives. This takes a variety of forms, from the physical exclusion of women from peace negotiations, to understanding 'women's needs' in narrow, stereotypical ways, to ignoring the ways in which masculinities and femininities are politically mobilized to justify violence, nationalism and militarism. As a leading country in peacekeeping operations, it is important that Canada develops a robust feminist foreign policy that focuses on gender inclusion, diversity and intersectionality that fosters meaningful participation. To follow in line with its commitments to The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Canada needs to take seriously the experiences of women and girls and include both a diversity of women themselves and gender perspectives in its foreign policy and foreign policy development.

Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and examination of conflict zones highlights this point. Whilst men and women share the environment of conflict, the threats they experience are far from identical. For men, periods of armed conflict and other crises often propel personal safety and bodily autonomy to the fore, whereas the insecurities and vulnerabilities that women and sexual minorities face in times of crises and conflict are strikingly similar to those faced in peacetimes (Cockburn, 1998; Enloe, 2004; Handrahan, 2004). Across the spectrum of violence from 'peace' to 'war', women 'lack the resources that can be used to ensure their own physical integrity' (Enloe, 2004, p. 225). Some of the most obvious examples are sexual and gender-based violence. In so-called peacetimes, sexual assault, domestic violence (DV) and attempts to control women mentally and physically parallels the use of systematic wartime rape, militarized violence against civilian women, and the use of women as symbols/objects in nationalist and wartime narratives (Enloe, 2004; Sjoberg, 2013; Sofos, 1996).

When conventional conceptions of security and peace are applied to peacebuilding, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction, policies only address particular dimensions of security; the public, physical, militaristic and highly masculinized. For instance, police forces, designed to help implement peace, security and law and order are often rebuilt without effective training for dealing with sexual assault and exploitation or DV, leaving (overwhelmingly women) victims vulnerable in peacetimes to a range of violence including sex trafficking (which has historically increased surrounding foreign bases during peacekeeping and other international operations. For examples, see Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haiti and Sierra Leone). Such policies may even fail to recognize women as important actors in implementing peace. Understanding how DV impacts women's lives can enhance peacekeeping missions. Due to weapons increasing the lethality of DV, women, who are often excluded from disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes, often know where guns circulating post-war are located, and are therefore crucial to the collection of small arms and light weapons (Farr, 2003). Thus, without gender perspectives, peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions and policy cannot be robustly effective nor sustainable because they ignore violence outside of narrowly defined public, militaristic 'security'.

It is important to emphasize that gender perspectives are not limited to the inclusion or participation of women or members of the LGBTQIA+ community. In solving the 'gender issue', the first impulse is often to simply add women into decision-making. Gender quotas in parliament or political parties are an example of this, as used in places such as Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Argentina (Krook, 2009). Yet, there is a distinction between the physical or token presence of women, which does not guarantee the inclusion of gender perspectives, and women advocating and working *qua* women in decision-making spaces. Moreover, critical mass, or 'a threshold presence... to help women move from being nominal to effective participants' (Agarwal, 2010, p. 171), matters. The inclusion of one or two women may not be enough to create change. For instance, in South Asia's community forestry groups, which make decisions about local forests, 25% women on the executive committee increased women's attendance (token presence) to community forestry meetings, and 33% women on the committee was the critical mass for women to speak up in the meetings (Agarwal, 2010). Furthermore, intersectionality considerations are important to foster meaningful inclusion. For example, gender quotas in parliament can help to increase women's political participation, these gains are often limited to urban, middle-class women, whereas poorer, rural and other marginalized women's lives remained largely unaffected.

Despite the multitude of vulnerabilities and insecurities women face in conflict that are unique from men, to reflect intersectionality and the diversity of women's experiences, conventional understandings that focus on women exclusively by their victimhood in armed conflict must be overcome. Dominant narratives of war often portray women as helpless, passive (civilian) victims of violence they did not create (Cockburn, 1998; Helms, 2003). Yet women exist as combatants, politicians, resistance leaders and many more roles that do not conform to these narrow depictions. Their experiences of conflict can vary depending on age, class, caste, religion, ethnicity or geographical location. These constructions of women are harmful to their agency and autonomy and can justify further violence. One area that highlights the practical need to challenge these narratives is the shift away from combatants being exclusively adult men (Farr, 2003). For example, DDR programmes often ignore the multiplicity of physical and social locations of women by relying on stereotypes of femininity. Whilst including civilian women in DDR is useful, it ignores the experiences of women who were in combat or supported combatants such as cooks, nurses or sex workers, and can exacerbate the marginalization of women ex-combatants, as seen in Albania's Weapons for Development Programme pilot (Farr, 2003). In Angola, based on assumptions of domestic femininity, women were treated solely as dependents in the distribution of ex-combatant assistance packages, even if they engaged in violence themselves, obscuring violence perpetrated by women and failing to help integrate them post-conflict (Farr, 2003). In order to address the variety of roles that women play in conflict, challenge dominant narratives that portray women as powerless, voiceless victims and improve the perceptions of women's political efficacy, it is imperative to include women at all levels of conflict resolution, peacebuilding and peacekeeping decision-making.

What does that mean for foreign policy in Canada? All levels of decision-making require the active participation of a diversity of women to help foster a culture of peace and ensure women's issues and gender perspectives are given attention. This is in line with United Nations Security Council

Resolution 1325 which recognizes the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls, reaffirms their importance in conflict prevention and resolution and peacekeeping at all levels, and calls for the prevention of gender-based violence in armed conflict (Kaufman & Williams, 2015), and which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.

This also means changing our commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which Canada voted against in 2007. We cannot claim to be a peaceful nation while simultaneously denying our Indigenous folks, and particularly Indigenous women and girls, full protections, access, participation, status and rights in Canadian society, politics and legal systems. For instance, the federal government failed to follow through with any of the recommendations of the National Inquiry of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which linked the high levels of violence against Indigenous women and girls with deliberate, routine human rights abuses and violations against Indigenous folks and their communities. As a site of violent conflict on our own soil, a commitment to feminist foreign policy also starts from recognizing oppression in our backyard and how at the intersection of gender and Indigeneity, violence can manifest more brutally, more persistently, and more visibly (or in this case, invisibly) against women. This is a concrete demonstration of how women's experiences in conflict zones may differ to that of men in the same context and, thus, a commitment to gender mainstreaming and WPS is necessary to addressing all multitudes of violence that contributes to insecurity and conflict.

Lastly, this means taking seriously the gender gap in poverty. The feminization of low-wage, low-skilled work, particularly in the Global South, traps women in circumstances of destitute and poverty, with few opportunities for advancement. According to Oxfam, 75% of women in the Global South are in the informal economy, which is more precarious, lower paid and lacks legal, economic and social protections offered by formal economy jobs. Furthermore, gender expectations often force women into roles of unpaid labour, such as care work, child rearing, cooking and collecting firewood, which may reduce or even deny women time for paid labour opportunities. Inheritance customs or laws and patrilineal practices may also contribute to the poverty gender gap. While this is an overarching concern that should be at the top of any feminist foreign policy, this is particularly important in peace-keeping and post-conflict contexts. Wars and other forms of social and political upheaval often disrupt economic structures, as resources are diverted to military and arms, and the economy is fragmented and disrupted. Poverty and unemployment in post-war conflicts is rife and this can impact women disproportionately, particularly if their husbands have been killed, injured or traumatized by the conflict and women become the sole breadwinner. Women who engaged in armed conflict as combatants may also struggle to reintegrate, be stigmatized or traumatized and their exclusion from DDR programmes may perpetuate their insecurity and poverty in the reconstruction period. Poverty can also be an impetus for engaging in sex work, for which demand increases during the influx of foreign troops in peacekeeping missions for instance, and increases the potential for exploitation and even trafficking. Canada's foreign policy needs to recognize these factors in order to address women and gender equality in post-conflict reconstruction and peace implementation.

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