



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
 - x Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
 - ☐ Responding to evolving vulnerabilities
 - ☐ Inclusive digital transformation
 - ☐ Other: please specify
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Written Contribution:

Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy: The Central Role of Feminist Activists and Movements

Feminist movements have been some of the most wide ranging and effective movements of the last 120 years. There have been changes at the individual level, within families and homes, in business and communities, in national parliaments and international institutions. Although the work is far from finished, there is significant momentum and a strong base to build on. Yet there is also dangerous, consistent and organized backlash - from governments and individuals, in digital spaces, in the halls of the United Nations, and on city streets.

Governments have a role to play in both creating and supporting feminist change. Policies, programs, and investments can support changes happening at social and economic levels as well as lead and set the agenda in specific areas. A feminist foreign policy can catalyze change and deliver meaningful impacts. However, the key drivers of feminist change are feminist activists and movements.

Governments looking to implement feminist policies - either at the domestic or international levels - must learn from, engage with, and work collaboratively with diverse feminist movements.

We applaud the Government of Canada's development of a white paper on its feminist foreign policy. Our submission to this consultation process dives into one specific theme: engagement with and support for feminist activists and movements. We look forward to the next steps in the discussions.

Transformational Change

Building a feminist foreign policy involves embracing global values such as those set out in the [Beijing Declaration](#) and [Platform for Action](#). Despite being agreed to over 25 years ago, these goals (including the full enjoyment of rights by women and girls, peace and disarmament, the eradication of poverty, and sustainable development) are still elusive. Furthermore, the global feminist agenda now also encompasses LGBTIQ rights and brings a much stronger commitment to understanding and reflecting the 'diversity of women' mentioned in the Declaration.

These goals – of a more just, equitable, peaceful and sustainable world – should be at the heart of a feminist foreign policy. A feminist approach involves more than just increasing the number of women and the diversity of people working in all foreign policy institutions. It calls for a transformation of these structures so that they contribute to the implementation of a feminist agenda.

This involves a re-assessment of the view that a country's foreign policy must be an extension of narrowly defined 'national interest.' Though there is considerable [popular support that Canada should promote our values rather than interests](#) in our foreign policy, now is the time to move beyond the false dichotomy that we can either promote our national interest or global values. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a serious reconsideration of what makes us safe and questions the utility of a bounded conception of 'national interest.'

As part of a feminist foreign policy, Canada can:

- Centre the goals of respect for human rights, climate justice, economic equality, peace and disarmament across all domains of our foreign policy and international objectives.

- Engage in and support national and global discussions of gender equality, the rights of women, girls and LGBTIQ people, and feminist change.
- Work to ensure that formal discussions on the rights of women and girls and LGBTIQ rights never result in weaker language. The focus should be on strengthening the global consensus and advancing progressive interpretations and commitments.
- Ensure that our feminist foreign policy is robust and consistent across all foreign policy issues, sectors and discussions (including trade, migration, refugee issues, cyber security, defense, climate policy, international assistance, export controls, international activities of Canadian companies, etc.), as well as consistent with domestic policies and programs.
- Continue to ensure that Canada's diplomatic corps and representatives in international negotiations reflect Canada's diversity.
- Document and share what is changing (and what has changed) as a result of adopting a feminist foreign policy. This will help to demonstrate that actions are important, not just the label.

Feminist activists and movements are essential drivers, sustainers and leaders for change

A growing body of research highlights how feminist movements are key to narrowing gender inequalities. A recent [study](#) found that autonomous organizing by women is an important driver of women's greater economic empowerment. It is also linked to increasing land-ownership, greater legal equality in the workplace, more access to bank accounts, better legal protections for domestic workers, more sexual harassment legislation and more just social policies.

State investments and progressive policies are key steps, but a strong feminist movements are essential to hold governments accountable for these commitments, identify local solutions and build a cadre of leaders who will advocate for the rights of women, girls and LGBTIQ people.

Yet recent years have seen significant backlash. Women human rights defenders (WHRD) and LGBTIQ rights defenders are often attacked and their work threatened. In many places, the space for organizing, mobilizing, protesting is shrinking.

As part of a feminist foreign policy, Canada can:

- Recommit to measures to protect and support women human rights defenders and LGBTIQ rights defenders. One starting point is the [Report](#) of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development from 2019 that recommended an action plan to mount a comprehensive effort to protect WHRDs and promote their work.
- Strengthen [feminist funding practices](#), increasing the flow of resources to feminist activists and movements and the quality of these resources (core funding, flexible, multi-year).
- Develop innovative strategies to protect civil space, building alliances with like-minded governments; strengthen treaty bodies and processes; and follow the lead and direction of feminist activists.
- Enable partnerships between Canadian organizations and feminist activists around the world. Exchange and mutual learning can produce new policy prescriptions and more effective global action on the urgent challenges of our day. A small but crucial change is the importance of addressing Canada's domestic regulations, including the [‘direction and control’](#) requirements for charitable organizations. These requirements inhibit the autonomy and ‘power shifting’ flexibility that are essential to effective partnerships with organizations in the global South.

- Support initiatives that provide security and protection for WHRDs, feminist activists and LGBTIQ defenders in online and virtual spaces.

Centering the voices and perspectives of feminist activists in Canada's analysis and policy development

Traditional foreign policy approaches have been silent on issues of women's rights, the role of feminist movements, and gender analysis of global economic and international relations. The traditional framing of security and dominant understandings of foreign policy have left little scope to explore common global goods, debate what actually makes us safe, and listen to feminist voices for change. This must change.

Feminist analysis and insights have much to offer Canada's foreign policy discussions. There are vital discussions on the [links](#) between gender inequalities and international security/armed conflict, [feminist economic](#) analysis (including better understanding of the care economy), and how [militarized masculinities](#) affect peacekeeping, dynamics within militaries, and conflict resolution. When policy makers at Global Affairs Canada (and other government departments) engage with feminist analysts and activists, their understanding of key issues and policy options will be strengthened.

As part of a feminist foreign policy Canada can:

- Clearly articulate support for the rights of women, girls and LGBTIQ people as a key goal of Canada's foreign policy (across all foreign policy dimensions).
- Fund Canadian organizations active in feminist foreign policy issues (such as the Women, Peace and Security Network-Canada). These voices are essential in fostering discussions and holding the government accountable for commitments, including those in Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.
- Carry out regular and meaningful consultations with feminist activists – both in Canada and from countries affected by Canada's foreign policy. This [guide](#) provides a useful starting point to develop consultation processes that actually achieve results.
- Fund and support the preparation of a 'report card' by a coalition of feminist organizations (from Canada and around the world) to provide an independent review on the progress in the implementation of the Canada's feminist foreign policy. Ideally the Minister of Foreign Affairs (along the Ministers of other relevant departments, such as IRCC, Development, Public Safety, and DND) would publically receive the report card and hear from the activists who prepared it.
- Build on the successful government/civil society collaboration established in Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (CNAP), as seen in the WPS Advisory Group.
- Identify expert witnesses with a strong feminist or gender analysis to appear before Parliamentary committees.
- Ensure that women's rights organizations play a central role in refining and implementing Canada's "Gender Response Humanitarian Action."

Multilateralism, the Rules-Based International Order, and Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy

As a medium-sized country, Canada has a vested interest in a strong multilateral system that supports commitments to human rights, disarmament and planetary survival. Collective responses to crises such as pandemics, climate change, and global displacement are urgently needed.

Feminists around the world have mobilized around the development and implementation of global norms and standards including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (and related resolutions), ILO Conventions, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

There is a need to ensure greater coherence between these global standards for gender equality and the rights of women, girls and LGBTIQ people, and what is traditionally thought of as the rules-based international order. Just as a feminist foreign policy requires policy coherence across all of Canada's foreign policy domains, it also requires feminist interrogation of all global norms and practices. How do current global 'rules' perpetuate gender inequalities and what needs to change to build a more equal and just world? How can structures that recognize women as full rights-bearing subjects be supported?

As part of a feminist foreign policy, Canada can:

- Join with other like-minded organizations to press for meaningful change at multiple levels. This could be via existing processes such as the Generation Equality Forum or the G7 or through new channels (building on the success of the 2018 Women Foreign Ministers' Meeting).
- Amplifying diverse feminist voices in global dialogues and discussions, with particular attention to youth voices and voices that are not often heard (Indigenous, poor, rural, women and girls with disabilities, LGBTIQ, etc.).
- Strengthen capacities to carry out robust gender analysis of multilateral organizations, entities and institutions and their programs of work.
- Hold multilateral institutions accountable for their commitments on gender equality, women's rights and LGBTIQ rights. Ensure accountability for results, not just rhetorical support.
- Engage with feminist legal experts to explore feminist interpretations of international law and identify priorities for global advocacy.

Accountability and Transparency

Accountability and transparency are essential elements in a feminist foreign policy. The white paper should set out how the Government of Canada will report on its commitments and actions, moving beyond a list of actions taken.

As part of a feminist foreign policy, Canada can:

- Construct ongoing transparency and accountability processes including regular reporting (including analysis of obstacles and challenges). This should be in addition to the current reporting to Parliament from GAC and reporting on the plans such as the CNAP. Given the involvement of numerous government departments, a specific annual report on Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy would be welcome and appropriate.
- Work to ensure that global processes and commitments include reporting and accountability structures, for example, follow-up on to G7 declarations on gender equality/women's rights should be a regular output.
- Commit to regular 'lessons learned' reports that include case studies of initiatives – both by the Government of Canada and in coalition with others.
- Hold an annual public briefing at the ministerial level, joint with civil society, on the progress achieved the previous year in implementing Canada's feminist foreign policy.

Ensuring Government Departments are “Fit for Purpose”

The adoption of a feminist foreign policy will only be effective if those entrusted with its implementation have the skills and authority to advance these agendas.

As part of a feminist foreign policy, Canada can:

- Build staff capacity in analysis, consultation and outreach methodologies, including how to build ongoing dialogues, basic Canadian policy commitments, rights-based approaches, etc. This will require an **ongoing** investment to both upgrade the skills of current officials and ensure that incoming personnel have relevant skills.
- Develop new senior specialist positions who champion feminist foreign policy across the government departments involved. For example, a feminist trade advisor, a feminist migration expert, a feminist conflict prevention specialist, etc.
- Encourage staffing interchanges with feminist organizations. GAC could encourage its staff to work for a year or two in feminist civil society organizations and vice versa. This type of cross-fertilization would strengthen understanding and build strong relationships.
- Establish and fund a ‘community of practice’ that brings together officials, academics and civil society practitioners to exchange lessons and overcome obstacles to the implementation of specific policy measures related to feminist foreign policy.
- Ensure that all pre-deployment briefings for staff representing Canada (to both missions and international organizations) include robust and context specific sessions on Canada’s feminist foreign policy and how to effectively advance this policy.
- Consider whether a ‘handbook’ similar to the one [produced](#) by the Government of Sweden would assist government officials understand their responsibilities and support their work.
- Advance work on feminist approaches to monitoring and evaluation, jointly with civil society organizations working on methodologies and reporting structures.

A Final Note on Defining Feminism(s)

As part of these consultations, many will push for a definition of ‘feminist’. While it is important to provide a general definition or include a clear set of principles to guide Canada’s feminist foreign policy, it is important that the definition not be too narrow. While there is often agreement on core themes (addressing power inequalities, rooted in human rights, requiring systemic change, bringing the perspectives of the most marginalized to the front, using an intersectional approach, and including commitments to demilitarization, economic equality, and climate justice), there are often different approaches and strategies. Many organizations and individuals work for feminist goals, without using the term ‘feminism.’ Other so-called feminists may use the word as a form of “pinkwashing” to hide inaction. It is important to go beyond labels and look at what actions are actually taken and what goals are pursued.

Several frameworks already exist that the white paper can learn from and build on.¹

¹ See Ridge, A. Lambert, C., and Crawford, J., Clement, R., Thompson, L., Gammage, S., and Goetz, A.M., 2019. [Feminist Foreign Policy Key Principles & Accountability Mechanisms: A Discussion Summary](#), International Women’s Development; International Center for Research on Women; Center for Global Affairs (New York University); Thompson, L., 2020. [Feminist Foreign Policy: A Framework](#). Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women;