

# BE BRAVE BE BOLD

Recommendations for  
**Canada's feminist foreign policy**



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Prepared by the Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group

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For more background the Feminist Foreign Policy discussions (including many of the submissions from civil society organizations), see: [www.amnesty.ca/ffp](http://www.amnesty.ca/ffp)

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## Acronyms

FIAP	Feminist International Assistance Policy
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UN	United Nations
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

# Introduction

The world needs feminist leadership now more than ever.

Social and economic inequality has reached extreme levels. It is ripping apart societies, undermining human rights and democracy, destroying the planet, and is at the root of the highest levels of displacement since World War II. More than a billion people worldwide live in extreme poverty, while the world's 2,153 billionaires own more wealth than 60% of the global population combined<sup>1</sup> The space for civil society to peacefully advocate for rights is ever-shrinking.<sup>2</sup> Global military expenditures continue to skyrocket. The world also faces a climate crisis, protracted conflicts, and humanitarian emergencies that threaten to displace millions of individuals. Foreign policy efforts thus far, have been unable to adequately address growing poverty and insecurity. Progressive movements, especially those led by women, Indigenous peoples and LGBTI individuals, face intense pushback around the world. These challenges have all been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Six years after Sweden adopted the first feminist foreign policy, it is time for Canada to articulate its feminist foreign policy clearly, ambitiously and unequivocally.

Inspired by the success in other countries, approximately three years ago a group of committed feminists from diverse organizations began discussions on how to promote a comprehensive feminist foreign policy in Canada. Those discussions led to the formation of the Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group<sup>4</sup> which includes civil society organizations, as well as external experts in civil society and academia. The Working Group's membership includes subject matter experts in a variety of topics including human rights, peace and security, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic justice, international development, and disarmament.

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1 Oxfam International, "Time to care: Unpaid care work and the global inequality crisis," 2020, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620928/bp-time-to-care-inequality-200120-en.pdf>.

2 CIVICUS, "11 Countries Downgraded in new global report on civic freedoms," 2020, <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/media-releases/4787-11-countries-downgraded-in-new-global-report-on-civic-freedoms>

3 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Global military expenditure sees largest annual increase in a decade," April 2020, <https://sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/global-military-expenditure-sees-largest-annual-increase-decade-says-sipri-reaching-1917-billion>

4 Members of the Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group are Karyn Keenan, Above Ground; Sarah Hedges-Chou, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights; Jackie Hansen, Amnesty International Canada; Beth Woroniuk, Equality Fund; Odette McCarthy, Equitas; Rita Morbia, Inter Pares; Nadia Abu-Zahra, Joint Chair in Women's Studies, Carleton University and University of Ottawa; Erin Hunt, Mines Action Canada; Diana Sarosi and Siham Rayale, Oxfam Canada; Allison Pytlak, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; and Laura Macdonald, Department of Political Science, Carleton University.

# Context

The Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group believes Canada is well-positioned to play a leading role in advancing feminist foreign policy alongside Sweden, France, and Mexico. In the past four years, the government of Canada has stated that several recent initiatives comprise its feminist foreign policy. These include the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), introduced in 2017 “to eradicate poverty and build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world... [b]y promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls.”<sup>5</sup> Canada's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security<sup>6</sup> and Strong Secure Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy<sup>7</sup> were also introduced in 2017 and are cited as parts of Canada's feminist foreign policy. Also, as part of its “inclusive approach to trade policy,” the federal government adopted several measures to promote gender equality through trade policy.

In 2020, the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced a process to draft an official statement on Canada's feminist foreign policy. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Global Affairs Canada undertook a number of consultations in partnership with stakeholders from civil society. This included a series of engagement sessions organized by the Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group.

This document outlines the recommendations of the Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group. While it is informed by the engagement sessions held in late fall 2020 and a social media discussion under the hashtag #CanFFP, the recommendations contained in this document come from the members of the Working Group. Due to the diverse expertise in the Working Group, each member shares their specific recommendations on behalf of their organization or themselves, following the suggested principles of a Canadian feminist foreign policy. To allow for follow up, contacts have been added at the end of each section who are available to answer questions and provide additional information.

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5 Global Affairs Canada, “Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy,” 2017, [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng).

6 Government of Canada, “Canada's National Action Plan for the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security 2017-2022,” 2017, [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/gender\\_equality-egalite\\_des\\_genres/cnap\\_wps-pnac\\_fps.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/cnap_wps-pnac_fps.aspx?lang=eng).

7 Department of National Defence, “Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy,” 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/canada-defence-policy.html>.

# Principles

After a series of discussions and reflection on input from the engagement sessions, the Working Group drafted a set of feminist foreign policy principles. The Working Group considers the following to be core principles of a feminist foreign policy.

Canada's feminist foreign policy:

- upholds policy coherence;
- includes transformational objectives and is informed by the priorities and perspectives of feminist movements in Canada and around the world;
- is non-partisan;
- is clearly rights-based;
- adopts an intersectional approach, giving priority to equity, diversity and inclusion;
- promotes demilitarization, peaceful resolution of conflicts and non-violence;
- promotes the protection of the environment and sustainable development; and
- follows feminist processes and promotes accountability.

A detailed explanation of these principles can be found in the What We Heard report prepared by the Working Group following the civil society engagement sessions. These principles should guide all actions under a feminist foreign policy. Beyond these basic principles, members of the Working Group have made specific recommendations and suggestions in each of their contributions.

# Our Recommendations

## Demilitarization and Disarmament

Allison Pytlak **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom**

For the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), challenging militarism and elevating non-violence and human security are among the essential elements of a strong feminist foreign policy.

A foreign policy that is guided by feminist principles and gender analysis means questioning and understanding the root causes of violence, oppression, inequality, and conflict. Developing meaningful and effective foreign policy responses to those problems will inevitably require confronting the power structures established by patriarchy, militarization, colonization, and neoliberalism.

Demilitarization is, in WILPF's view, a vital feminist foreign policy principle. And a fundamental component of demilitarization is disarmament. Research and lived experience show us that the production, use, trade, proliferation, and possession of weapons is incompatible with a feminist foreign policy framework.<sup>8</sup> Feminism understands that nuclear weapons are tools of patriarchal power and oppression.<sup>9</sup> Arms production, and profiting from it, sustains the systems of war that facilitate sexual and gender-based violence, human trafficking, human rights violations, and armed conflicts.<sup>10</sup> Autonomous weapons<sup>11</sup> and the militarization of cyberspace<sup>12</sup> magnify power imbalances and biases that feminists seek to dismantle. The approach of adding women or creating gender diversity within military institutions will only perpetuate patriarchal approaches to conflict and militarized

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Developing meaningful and effective foreign policy responses to those problems will inevitably require confronting the power structures established by patriarchy, militarization, colonization, and neoliberalism.

<sup>8</sup> For more than 20 years, WILPF's disarmament programme Reaching Critical Will has highlighted the relationship between feminism, gender, weapons, and disarmament. Learn more at [www.reachingcriticalwill.org](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org).

<sup>9</sup> A significant amount of research and writing exists on feminism and nuclear weapons. See, for example: "Banning the bomb, smashing the patriarchy, TEDx Talk by Ray Acheson, January 8, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rXpp10uS7l>. To learn more, visit RCW's Gender and Disarmament database: <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/index.php/gender-disarmament-database>.

<sup>10</sup> Aicha Madi, "Peace, feminism, and arms exports: Canada's inexplicable and contradictory policy choice," *Hill Times*, September 28, 2020, <https://www.hilltimes.com/2020/09/28/peace-feminism-and-arms-exports-canadas-inexplicable-and-contradictory-policy-choice/264667>.

<sup>11</sup> Erin Hunt, "Killer robots, feminism... and a feminist foreign policy?" *Medium*, February 13, 2020, <https://stopkillerrobots.medium.com/killer-robots-feminism-and-a-feminist-foreign-policy-d55309c60fae#:~:text=In%20general%2C%20autonomous%20weapons%20w,robots%20is%20a%20feminist%20issue>.

<sup>12</sup> Allison Pytlak and Deborah Brown, *Why Gender Matters in International Cyber Security*, April 2020, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/publications-and-research/publications/14677-why-gender-matters-in-international-cyber-security>.

institutions, rather than transform or disassemble them.<sup>13</sup> Violent masculinities are a compounding factor across all these issues. In short: militarism and related approaches and institutions only contribute to and reinforce armed conflict, human rights violations, and challenges to the rules-based international order—known focal points of Canadian foreign policy.

Implementing an effective feminist foreign policy in the area of disarmament will require the government of Canada to take a step back from some of its existing approaches and positions. It will mean revisiting certain policies and relationships, and a willingness to go beyond solely advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment to action that is more transformative by taking into account what "security" means to the most vulnerable.

Here are five recommendations for feminist action in the area of disarmament:

- Become a leader on humanitarian disarmament. Canada pioneered the process that led to the banning of landmines internationally two decades ago but has fallen quiet ever since. Current opportunities for leadership include advancing international talks on a legal instrument to ban autonomous weapons; joining the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons; and challenging the concept of nuclear deterrence within NATO.
- Stop the production and transfer of arms that could lead to human rights and international humanitarian law violations, in keeping with the Arms Trade Treaty and Canadian arms export law. The transfer of light-armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia is of particular concern and must stop.
- Reduce military spending and redirect resources toward education, health, human rights, environmental protection, and housing, among other initiatives that promote human security.
- Continue to champion gender perspectives and support gender diversity within international disarmament fora, including through resolutions, statements, diplomatic initiatives, and capacity building.
- Integrate disarmament activities into Canada's national Women, Peace and Security Agenda action plan, notably in the area of conflict prevention.

*For additional information, please contact Allison Pytlak [allison.pytlak@wilpf.org](mailto:allison.pytlak@wilpf.org).*

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<sup>13</sup> Shreshtha Das, "Equal roles for women in Indian army is not a feminist victory," Al Jazeera, March 3, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/3/3/equal-roles-for-women-in-indian-army-is-not-a-feminist-victory>.

# Strengthening Feminism in the Feminist International Assistance Policy

Rita Morbia **Inter Pares**

As Canada embarks upon instituting a broader, more comprehensive and deliberate feminist foreign policy, the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) has been upheld as one of its strongest pillars and a landmark guidance document. Many civil society and women's rights organizations believe the FIAP demonstrates foundational progress in its centering of gender equality as both a targeted and crosscutting goal; in its recognition of intersectionality as a critical lens; in its sweeping feminist framework that strives to "eradicate poverty and build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world" through addressing root causes in six specific policy arenas; as well as in its commitment to transformational change in power relations. Despite this progress, the FIAP falls short in several areas. It is of critical importance to Canada's feminist foreign policy that the FIAP be strengthened as a living document by correcting its shortfalls in articulation and implementation.

## **Recommendation 1: Recognize and redress aid as a colonial structure.**

Using an intersectional feminist approach means that Global Affairs Canada (GAC) should better understand and act upon the message of anti-racist and anti-colonial movements around the world. It demands an analysis that the history of aid is based in a racist, colonial legacy. To transform that legacy of disenfranchisement and marginalization into one of empowerment and agency requires a strong conceptual framework, accompanied by very practical actions. It includes identifying the real and current vestiges of a colonial approach in international assistance, and rooting out paternalism and racism broadly and specifically. For example, how does the FIAP's framework seek to change the premise of "direction and control" in the Income Tax Act, which contractually obliges local overseas development actors receiving funds from Canadian charities (including GAC funds) to relinquish their agency? Currently, it is silent on this issue.

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Domestically, Canadians fundamentally value universality and accessibility in basic services. Our aid programming should do the same

## **Recommendation 2: Reorient the section in the FIAP on "Growth that Works for Everyone" to "Dismantling Inequality."**

Part of the FIAP's rationale for this policy area is the premise that increasing economic growth, as measured through gross domestic product for example, should be the framework used to address poverty reduction. A feminist foreign policy would replace this basic assumption with a focus on inequality. The notion of economic growth does not adequately capture levels of poverty and inequality (India is a good example); or challenge private sector solutions, such as blended finance within GAC's innovative finance agenda, which benefit the few at the expense of the many. It does not curb corporate power; nor does it prioritize the critical nature of establishing and expanding *public services*, such as healthcare or education. Domestically, Canadians fundamentally value universality and accessibility in basic services. Our aid programming should do the same.

### **Recommendation 3: Accelerate the implementation of feminist processes in disbursing international assistance.**

A constant refrain from civil society and women's rights organizations is the slow pace of change in instituting feminist processes within Canada's aid program. Without a dedicated and concerted effort to more fundamentally and urgently overhaul bureaucratic mechanisms, institute ways to provide core support, prioritize funding mechanisms to more fully benefit local movements, and be more responsive in funding allocations, the FIAP's ultimate aims will be undermined. For example, local groups including women's rights organizations in the Global South, purportedly key actors and recipients, will continue to be unable to access significant support, undercutting the very goals of the policy.

### **Recommendation 4: Continue to prioritize sexual and reproductive health and rights, including advocacy in Canada's international assistance programming.**

Bodily autonomy is a key feminist issue and an essential part of feminist foreign policy. The government of Canada's commitment to the Thrive Agenda, particularly the most neglected areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) has been of global significance. Enabling and demonstrating the pursuit of this agenda through a strong, transparent accountability mechanism, an integrated approach to SRHR programming, more and continued support for advocacy, and a whole-of-GAC approach will advance SRHR program implementation. Canada must also continue to ramp up its programming on sexual and gender-based violence, understanding that violence against women was the global pandemic that both preceded and was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

*For additional information, please contact Rita Morbia [rmorbia@interpares.ca](mailto:rmorbia@interpares.ca).*

# Feminist Foreign Policy and Humanitarian Disarmament: A Perfect Pairing

Erin Hunt **Mines Action Canada**

Mines Action Canada supports the development of a Canadian feminist foreign policy built on the concepts of intersectionality, anti-racism, transformational change, gender equality, human rights, inclusion, decolonialization, and demilitarization. A feminist foreign policy must reconceptualise security away from weapons and deterrence towards what actually makes individuals safe - such as diplomacy, human rights, democracy, international assistance, health care and economic justice. The past year has shown that much of what is classified as security concerns has little impact on the ability of a state to ensure the safety and health of citizens. Canada's feminist foreign policy needs to recommit to Canada's roots by championing humanitarian disarmament.

Humanitarian disarmament is an umbrella term for a collection of disarmament initiatives driven by humanitarian imperatives to strengthen international law and protect civilians. By advancing disarmament from a humanitarian perspective, governments and civil society work together to prevent further civilian casualties, avoid socio-economic devastation, and to both protect and ensure the rights of victims. The main purpose of humanitarian disarmament is the prevention of needless suffering and injury through the regulation and restriction of weapons that pose significant risks to civilian populations both during and after conflict. Canada's leadership in the Ottawa Process pioneered the humanitarian disarmament approach by putting the focus on the humanitarian impact of landmines, by recognizing the expertise of landmine survivors and by ensuring civil society had an equal voice in the negotiations. Canada added to this history when it ensured that the Convention on Cluster Munitions had a robust, inclusive and precedent-setting definition of a cluster munition victim in the treaty text.

Humanitarian disarmament is fundamental to a feminist foreign policy by emphasizing the lived experiences of affected communities, by considering the safety of people over states, by focusing on the human rights of victims and by prioritizing inclusion in both decision-making and programs. Taking a humanitarian disarmament focused approach to peace and security will help reduce the risk of policy incoherence. For example, a feminist foreign policy does not support the sale of military hardware to oppressive regimes nor does it rely on nuclear deterrence for security. Likewise, humanitarian disarmament advocates for restrictions on the arms trade and prohibitions on inhumane and indiscriminate weapons. It also challenges the narrative that threatening mass murder via nuclear weapons results in security. Actions that champion humanitarian disarmament will also serve to implement a feminist foreign policy.

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Humanitarian disarmament is fundamental to a feminist foreign policy by putting the emphasis on lived experiences of affected communities, by considering the safety of people over states, by focusing on the human rights of weapons' victims and by prioritizing inclusion in both decision-making and programs.

Actions needed to champion humanitarian disarmament include resuming a **leadership role on the Ottawa Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions** as well as **joining the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons** and taking steps towards **a legally binding treaty on fully autonomous weapons**. Diplomatic support for humanitarian disarmament is crucial but equally important is the need to **invest in programming to implement these treaties**. Canada should focus on funding programs which seek to **remove barriers to the participation of women and youth in peace and security decision making**. These actions will make a difference in the lives of people around the world and give the government tangible results to demonstrate the effectiveness of Canada's feminist foreign policy to Canadians.

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# Human Rights Must Guide Feminist Foreign Policy

Jacqueline Hansen **Amnesty International Canada**

International human rights laws, standards, and institutions provide a road map, tools, and frameworks to create a feminist foreign policy to counter the global assault on human rights and to promote gender equality.

International human rights laws, norms, and standards outline a broad spectrum of universal human rights and specify the actions states must take to ensure all these rights are respected, protected, and upheld. A feminist foreign policy promotes national and global adherence to human rights because promoting human rights as they pertain to everything from refugee policy to climate change will positively impact gender equality. States cannot pick and choose which rights to uphold—all must be equally applied across all areas of foreign and domestic policy. Promoting universal human rights through an intersectional feminist foreign policy avoids imposing a country's values on others, and inherently supports the redefinition of concepts like security and national interest.

The application of human rights standards is uneven, causing women, non-binary, and LGBTI people to face ongoing discrimination and violence. Black, Indigenous, and other racialized people, displaced women and non-binary people, those living with disabilities, in poverty, and experiencing other forms of marginalization, disproportionately experience human rights abuses. A truly intersectional, rights-based feminist foreign policy ensures that states apply human rights standards equally, prioritizing the rights of those most impacted.

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A truly intersectional, rights-based feminist foreign policy ensures that states apply human rights standards equally, prioritizing the rights of those most impacted.

International human rights law is imperfect. Feminist foreign policy supports the multilateral system and the evolution of international human rights law to become more intersectional and to actively promote gender equality.

Rights-based feminist foreign policy involves regular, meaningful, and ongoing engagement with rights holders and consistently taking concrete actions to create a safe and enabling environment for these activists to carry out their work.

## Amnesty International's 10 expectations for Canada's feminist foreign policy:

- 1 **Ensure policy coherence.** The policy must be applied equally to all areas of Canada's foreign policy including diplomacy, trade, development, security, immigration, and climate change. Foreign and domestic policies must be harmonized.
- 2 **Strong, senior, public leadership.** The Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other senior officials must regularly and publicly champion the policy and ensure that it guides all aspects of Canada's foreign engagements.
- 3 **Greater action than current foreign policy practice.** Change will be iterative, but the policy must include clear, specific, and measurable change goals.
- 4 **Greater investment in gender equality.** New investments must include more public servants with gender expertise, more robust training for all public servants, and more core funding to civil society organizations working to promote gender equality.
- 5 **Co-creation with rights holders.** Creation and implementation of the feminist foreign policy must be undertaken in close partnership with civil society, particularly those most impacted.
- 6 **Become a leader in the multilateral system.** Invest in strengthening international treaty bodies and regional human rights mechanisms and actively work to strengthen international law as it pertains to gender equality.
- 7 **Strengthen commitments to human rights defenders.** Strengthen implementation of the Voices at Risk Guidelines on supporting human rights defenders, make funds more easily accessible to support human rights defenders at risk, implement a relocation mechanism for human rights defenders at risk (including those unable to register with UNHCR), and create a mechanism to support human rights defenders once they have relocated to Canada.
- 8 **Commitment to a learning culture.** Reforming structures and policies to promote human rights and gender equality is a process with inherent challenges. Accept and be transparent about these challenges and be open to transforming state approaches based on input from rights holders.
- 9 **Transformative.** The policy must lead to meaningful change and must go beyond "checklist feminism," be intersectional, apply to the entire public service, and it must transform power relationships and institutions.
- 10 **Independent monitoring.** Policy implementation must be supported by government-funded, independent civil society monitoring to create transparency, measure progress, and identify actions to strengthen policy implementation.

For additional information, please contact Jacqueline Hansen [JHansen@amnesty.ca](mailto:JHansen@amnesty.ca).

# Human Rights: The Centre of a Feminist Foreign Policy

Odette McCarthy & Libertad Benito Torres **Equitas**

A feminist foreign policy will provide a strong framework for Canada to focus its efforts on advancing human rights and democracy, and on tackling the inequalities and power imbalances that are the root causes of poverty and instability in the world today. Based on the understanding of an increasingly globalized and interdependent world, the prosperity and interests of Canada are immensely interconnected to the stability and well-being of the other nations in the world.

Equitas believes that the realization of human rights for all should be at the heart of the feminist foreign policy, informing all of its dimensions (diplomacy, trade, international development, humanitarian, and peace and security assistance, national security, the development of international law, migration policies, etc.). Human rights education is essential to the realization of human rights. It is a powerful tool, for duty bearers (governments and corporations) and rights holders (citizens) to address inequalities, to advance human rights, and to promote gender equality and inclusive democracies by providing opportunities for people to build knowledge and skills and develop attitudes and behaviours conducive to inclusion and advancing human rights.

We encourage the Canadian government to adopt a human rights based approach as a key component of the feminist foreign policy. A human rights based approach reinforces the transformative aspect of a feminist approach by addressing the root causes of inequality, poverty and conflict, and by tackling and deconstructing power relations. A human rights based approach highlights the indivisibility and interdependence of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and supports the coherence between the different dimensions of Canada's foreign policy. It also addresses contradictions between domestic and international policies and practice. The inclusion of a human rights based approach in a feminist foreign policy guarantees the participation and empowerment of the most marginalized groups, including but not limited to women and girls, LGBTI people, people living with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, youth, racialized people, and ethnic and religious minorities. Their participation and that of human rights defenders and civil society, is essential to building solutions from people's experiences. Their voices must be included at global decision making tables, from trade negotiations to peace processes.

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A human rights based approach reinforces the transformative aspect of a feminist approach by addressing the root causes of inequality, poverty and conflict, and by tackling and deconstructing power relations.

In the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: "... human rights are not sappy notions, but sound policy choices, which build strong, economically healthy societies where there is peace. Nations thrive when they build institutions that empower their people and enable them to develop to their full potential. That broad inclusion immunises society against violent conflict and extremism."<sup>14</sup>

## Recommendations

- 1 Develop internal capacity-building mechanisms and allocate an appropriate level of resources across the ministry to better understand and implement human rights frameworks and a human rights-based approach to foreign policy, including trade, defense, and diplomacy.
- 2 Allocate specific resources to remove obstacles inhibiting the effective and meaningful participation of marginalized groups, including but not limited to women and girls, LGBTI people, people living with disabilities, youth, Indigenous people, racialized people, ethnic and religious minorities, and human rights defenders in negotiations, conversations and processes in trade, defense, aid, diplomacy, peace and security.
- 3 Prioritize efforts to promote and protect a safe and enabling environment for civil society organizations – including human rights defenders - as key actors in the implementation of the feminist foreign policy, as referenced in GAC's Civil Society Partnership Policy, given the important role of civil society in development, peace and security and given the increasingly difficult context in which they operate.
- 4 Cultivate and encourage continuous learning by sharing good practices and lessons in implementing a human rights based approach in a feminist foreign policy. Develop a community of practice with the few other countries that have feminist foreign policies, have championed gender equality in practice or have integrated a human rights based approach to diplomacy, trade or other foreign policy objectives, in collaboration with civil society expertise.
- 5 Recognise and address inconsistencies between domestic and international policy and practice and strive for coherence within government departments and ministries.

*For additional information, please contact Odette McCarthy [omccarthy@equitas.org](mailto:omccarthy@equitas.org).*

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<sup>14</sup> UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, Human Rights in a Turbulent World, May 2016, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19978&LangID=E>.

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

Beth Woroniuk **Equality Fund**

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.<sup>15</sup>

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 themselves. 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.

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The key drivers of feminist change are feminist activists and movements themselves.

In order to fulfill its potential, Canada's feminist foreign policy requires a clear strategy in order to link with, learn from, dialogue with, and engage feminist and gender justice activists in Canada and around the world. Here are some of the ways this can be done:

- 1 Build transformational objectives into Canada's feminist foreign policy. A feminist foreign policy challenges structures and institutions that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Our feminist foreign policy should be ambitious and bold, clearly outlining Canada's support for gender equality, the rights of women, girls and non-binary gender people in all their diversity, and LGBTI rights.
- 2 Develop consultation mechanisms to learn from and dialogue with feminist activists in Canada and around the world. Ensure that these are meaningful conversations with an openness to learn. These discussions will cover the full range of foreign policy issues (defence, security, trade, diplomacy, immigration, etc.) supporting the principle of policy coherence.
- 3 Strengthen feminist funding practices, increasing the flow of resources to feminist activists and movements, and improving the 'quality' of these resources (core, flexible, multi-year funding).

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<sup>15</sup> Sonia Correa, David Patternotte, Roman Kuhar, "The Globalization of Anti-Gender Campaigns," *International Politics and Society*, 2018. <https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/human-rights/the-globalisation-of-anti-gender-campaigns-2761/>.

- 4 Develop innovative strategies to protect the space for civil society organizations (including women human rights defenders and LGBTI rights defenders) and movements around the world, by building alliances with like-minded governments and following the lead of civil society organizations.
- 5 Enable partnerships between Canadian organizations and feminist activists around the world, supporting mutual learning and exchange.
- 6 Amplify diverse feminist voices in global dialogues and discussions, with particular attention to youth voices and voices that are not always heard in these forums. Create the spaces for activists to speak for themselves.
- 7 Be accountable to feminist activists. Provide regular public reporting on progress on policy implementation. This could include an annual public briefing at the ministerial level, jointly with civil society on the progress achieved in the previous year as well as lessons learned. Fund independent monitoring of policy implementation by civil society.
- 8 Ensure that global discussions on the rights of women, girls and non-binary people, as well as LGBTI rights, never result in weaker language. The focus should be on advancing progressive language and commitments.
- 9 Work with other governments, encouraging them to adopt and implement meaningful feminist foreign policies (with or without the 'feminist' label). Advance meaningful change on gender equality in international processes such as the G7, COVID-19 recovery planning, and United Nations strengthening. Provide public follow-up on the commitments made in these discussions and how they are implemented.
- 10 Invest in capacity-building for government departments to support their implementation of the feminist foreign policy. This requires sustained and ongoing investments and a constant upgrading of skills, tools, processes, and mechanisms.

For more detailed discussion, see our full [submission](#).

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# The Importance of Policy Coherence in Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Sarah Hedges-Chou **Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights**

Promoting and protecting individuals' rights to health, bodily autonomy, and the full enjoyment of their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is inherently feminist and must be a central tenant of Canada's feminist foreign policy. Advancing SRHR is also a stated priority of the government of Canada, as articulated in its Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). While Canada has made some progress, without alignment and coherence across its full foreign policy, government departments, and domestic policy, this commitment risks becoming a short-lived political project.

## **Recommendation 1: Prioritize sexual and reproductive rights in Canada's feminist foreign policy**

As sexual and reproductive rights continue to be targeted and attacked around the world, Canada must champion sexual and reproductive rights for all as a clear component of its foreign policy. It must do so through the articulation of a *Canadian global SRHR* policy that would help safeguard support for SRHR across Canada's domestic policy, development assistance and foreign policy. A policy would provide direction, clarity, and targets for Canadian diplomats across all foreign policy spaces, including bilateral, multilateral, and intergovernmental spaces, to advance SRHR and defend against attempts to roll-back gains. A global SRHR policy would ensure SRHR remains a priority for future governments, supporting continuity of programming and strengthening Canadian impact.

## **Recommendation 2: Champion multilateralism and challenge anti-rights agendas on the world stage**

With external threats to sexual and reproductive rights, including rising conservatism, populist attacks on women's and LGBTI rights, and increasing inequality felt around the globe (and exacerbated by COVID-19), Canada must do more to safeguard health and rights globally. This means defending and supporting SRHR in intergovernmental, donor-led, and diplomatic spaces, speaking out publicly and in bilateral and multilateral relations against human rights violations and discriminatory laws and policies, and supporting strong multilateral systems. As seen with the reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule under the Trump presidency, the safeguarding of SRHR progress and resources requires leadership and multilateral cooperation. In addition, a feminist foreign policy requires meaningful engagement of and with those most affected. Canada must support the safe and meaningful participation of SRHR activists to engage in national, regional, and global decision-making spaces.

### **Recommendation 3: Prioritize domestic adherence to international human rights laws and standards**

A feminist foreign policy that is consistent with the full range of international human rights norms and principles must include strong domestic implementation that ensures that all people in Canada have equal access to SRHR. While Canada is often considered a global leader on human rights and SRHR, its failure to meet human rights standards at home weakens its credibility and ability to promote both human rights and multilateralism. A rights-based approach to foreign policy requires alignment through full domestic implementation of human rights standards and participation in international human rights accountability frameworks (e.g. treaty monitoring bodies). Domestic coherence includes improving access to the full suite of sexual and reproductive health services including abortion, contraceptives, and sexuality education for all people regardless of legal status, race, class, or indigeneity; the adoption of a comprehensive pharmacare strategy; and the creation of National Action Plans on Gender-Based Violence and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's 231 calls for justice.

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A rights-based approach to foreign policy requires alignment through full domestic implementation of human rights standards and participation in international human rights accountability frameworks.

### **Recommendation 4: Bring an intersectional lens to SRHR within the FIAP**

While a strong policy, Canada's FIAP has room for improvement. Central to this is the need for an intersectional approach that includes stronger integration of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics. Gender goes beyond women and girls and must include LGBTI rights. In its implementation, the FIAP should adopt feminist funding practices to increase its efficacy. This includes flexible and long-term support, funding organizations and movements led by women and gender diverse people, and support for the advocacy work that is critical to sustainable progress driven by rights-holders. Implementation also requires a transparent accountability framework with clear targets for investments in the most neglected and underfunded areas of SRHR (e.g. safe abortion and adolescent SRHR).

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## Globalization, Trade and Investment

Laura Macdonald **Carleton University** & Karyn Keenan **Above Ground**

Any truly feminist foreign policy must address the uneven effects of the global economy on citizens both in Canada and abroad, especially the gendered effects of globalization.

The liberalization of trade and investment has led to economic growth. The benefits of that growth, however, have been unevenly distributed. Women and men are incorporated in different ways into the global economy, and racialized women in particular have been incorporated into labour markets in a way that increases rather than diminishes inequalities. Trade and investment are not gender neutral and it is essential to recognize the gendered nature of the international economy in order to develop trade and investment policies and practices that benefit everyone.

Canada has played a leading role in developing new tools to incorporate gender considerations into trade policy, through its inclusive approach to trade, as have other international actors, like the World Trade Organization. Feminists have, however, pointed out the weaknesses of such efforts and their failure to address the structural causes of gender inequalities, as well as how those inequalities intersect with other forms of inequality such as race, ethnicity, class, age, ability, sexual orientation and sexual identity.

A further priority concerns addressing the potentially harmful impacts of investment on women. Canadian overseas investment in the extractive sector, including mining, oil and gas, is particularly damaging. Women are especially vulnerable to the risks posed by extractive activity, including in areas such as food security, health and personal security. Women involved in the production of goods imported into Canada, such as apparel, are also at risk, often working in precarious and dangerous conditions. Canada lacks effective accountability mechanisms to prevent harm caused by Canadian multinational companies overseas or to provide access to remedy for those who suffer harm associated with this corporate activity. Canada also lacks transparency and accountability mechanisms regarding the many domestic state agencies that facilitate corporate activity abroad via financing, equity ownership, political backing and logistical support.

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Trade and investment are not gender neutral and it is essential to recognize the gendered nature of the international economy in order to develop trade and investment policies and practices that benefit everyone.

We recommend the following actions to develop a more holistic and effective approach:

## Recommendation 1

Move beyond a focus on the needs of women entrepreneurs who represent a small fraction of the population, and who are usually not among the most disadvantaged groups. Instead, trade policy should address the potential adverse effects of international economic policy on diverse groups of women including women workers, caregivers, women in the informal sector, subsistence farmers, etc. Canadian trade policy should address the needs of Canadian women, but also women in the broader global economy, particularly women working in global supply chains who have been disproportionately adversely affected by the COVID crisis.

## Recommendation 2

Tools for evaluating the impact of trade policy should adopt qualitative as well as quantitative methods and should place human rights front and centre. Evaluation should occur both before and after trade agreements are introduced, and there should be extensive and substantial consultation with feminist organizations, Indigenous groups, trade unions, and other interested parties before agreements are signed. Evaluation methods should examine broader social and environmental impact, and not focus exclusively on growth and employment.

## Recommendation 3

Evaluation should pay special attention to the potential impact of trade agreements on governments' ability to enact policies and regulate in the public interest. Such an approach would require the elimination of Investor State Dispute Settlement mechanisms from Canadian trade agreements.

## Recommendation 4

Adopt measures to prevent and remedy harm caused overseas by Canadian companies and their affiliates. Priority objectives include granting the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise the powers needed to undertake independent investigations; and holding Canadian parent companies legally responsible for the harms they cause overseas through mandatory human rights due diligence obligations.

## Recommendation 5

Adopt binding accountability measures to ensure that Canadian state agencies do not provide financial, political or technical support to companies associated with human rights risks and/or *violations*.

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# Economic Justice must be at the Heart of Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy

Diana Sarosi & Siham Rayale **Oxfam Canada**

At a time of unprecedented global inequality, Canada's feminist foreign policy must prioritize economic justice in order to tackle the root causes of poverty and uplift the most vulnerable and marginalized communities. This year has laid bare and aggravated the multiple layers of inequality that continue to determine who has access to dignified work and can live their economic rights. Moreover, the pandemic has rolled back decades of progress towards women's economic equality as women have lost their jobs and livelihoods at alarming rates, much more frequently than men. At the same time, colonial legacies continue to buttress an economic system that works to the advantage of settlers and colonizers, and to the detriment of formerly colonized nations. The global tax, finance and trade systems continue to undermine progress towards an inclusive and sustainable economy that benefits all people. An intersectional feminist approach to foreign policy is needed that places gender, racial, economic and climate justice at its heart, prioritizes decolonization and puts the voices of those who have historically been least represented, and are often most impacted, at the centre of policy making.

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## Recommendation 1

**Canada must concretely outline how it defines and uses intersectionality as a framework for its feminist foreign policy and outline the ways it seeks to be a part of decolonization efforts globally and locally.**

It is no coincidence that women who belong to Black, Indigenous and racialized communities, (im)migrants and refugees, young women, women living with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ communities have borne the brunt of the pandemic as they fill the ranks of the lowest paid and least valued jobs in the economy. Progressive economic justice needs to take an intersectional, gender-just perspective. Recognizing the experience of diverse groups of women is critical to advancing gender and racial justice. Providing for an inclusive and enabling environment that asserts women's agency in shaping the policies that impact them is foundational for advancing a feminist foreign policy that prioritizes decolonization. Framing economic justice using an intersectional and decolonized approach in Canada's feminist foreign policy can ensure that policies reflect the reality of the poorest and most marginalized women in Canada and globally.

## Recommendation 2

**Canada's feminist foreign policy should tackle extreme inequality by supporting efforts towards a more just global tax and finance system, championing debt cancellation for low income countries and advancing trade policies that support gender equality.**

Developing countries need resources to invest in critical public services and social protection yet they are robbed of billions of dollars every year through unjust economic systems that benefit rich nations, corporations and individuals. Canada's feminist foreign policy must support the development of a more equitable international tax framework that applies to all nations on an equal basis and must champion debt cancellation globally in multilateral spaces. Debt repayments stand in the way of the most marginalized receiving vital social protections. Canada must also work with like-minded governments to advance a global, gender-just trade agenda. This would require developing robust, meaningful and binding provisions on gender equality in all trade agreements, policies and programs, while working to mainstream gender equality in trade policy more generally.

## Recommendation 3

**Canada's feminist foreign policy must recognize the role of unpaid and underpaid care in stifling progress towards racial and gender justice, and advocate for more investments in the care economy to advance women's economic equality.**

Unpaid and underpaid care is one of the biggest barriers to women's economic security and equality, yet governments continue to underinvest in the care economy and care rarely factors into economic policy-making. A feminist foreign policy recognizes the importance of care for society and economies, and invests in the care economy with a focus on the 5R's: recognizing, redistributing and reducing women's unpaid care work, as well as rewarding and representing the rights of care workers. This requires investments in public services, social and physical infrastructure and social protection. Canada should also ensure its international development agenda has a strong focus on care through stand-alone programming and by mainstreaming a care analysis through all programs.

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## Feminist Foreign Policy outside of Global Affairs Canada

Nadia Abu-Zahra, Joint Chair in Women's Studies **Carleton University & University of Ottawa**

Canada's feminist foreign policy will require the involvement of multiple government departments. Global Affairs Canada needs to work with a variety of departments and agencies including National Defence; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; Natural Resources Canada; Women and Gender Equality Canada; and Export Development Canada. Including Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in Canada's feminist foreign policy is very important.

Policies around migration, refugees, and immigration are currently connected to income (through guarantors' notices of assessment and so on) without taking into account the non-remunerated labour predominantly done by women, such as childcare, senior care, other home care, and many of the services we have recently come to recognize as absolutely essential. A feminist foreign policy should ensure that immigration policy recognizes the value of care work. Policy around the movement of people (migration, refugees, immigration, and so on) can benefit greatly from a feminist approach that recognizes the vital contributions of unpaid, mostly women, workers.

A feminist foreign policy prioritizes public goods over profits. All countries have witnessed the violent consequences of prioritising private-sector profits over public benefits such as health, safety, democracy, peace, and justice. From resource extraction to the arms trade to privatized public services (like water, health, and others), the costs are clear and heavy. A feminist foreign policy must prioritize healthy relations — respectful of human rights and justice — in all aspects of diplomacy, preservation of just societies, and peace and inclusive security.

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A feminist foreign policy must prioritize healthy relations in all aspects of diplomacy, preservation of just societies, and peace and inclusive security.

Canada has supported human rights defenders around the world and this is something to be lauded and continued in future policy and practice. What has found less support to date is the situation of human rights defenders who have sought refuge in Canada. Human rights defenders differ from other immigrants to Canada because they are in danger. This was sadly illustrated with the recent deaths of two human rights defenders living in Canada. Further, the Canadian government and public are aware of plans by other countries to harm or kill other human rights defenders in Canada.

At minimum, Canada must be conscious of the safety concerns of human rights defenders and must offer them residency status in Canada. At best, Canada would support and protect human rights defenders in Canada, thus strengthening its foreign policy and commitment to human rights globally. Human rights defenders have immense knowledge and vision to offer Canada and they have change-making ideas and initiatives to advance human rights and social justice here and abroad. Their contributions cover a remarkable range of sectors including, but not limited to, international law and accountability, postsecondary education, human rights advocacy, mental health supports and enhancements, and international policy and practice.

These innovative and courageous individuals have a diversity of talents and, for some, their greatest wish is to share their important analyses and lived experiences with Canadian experts and policymakers. What they have in common is a hope to continue serving others, despite their own often-worsened situations. A feminist foreign policy would recognise their sacrifices and tremendous accomplishments, be cognizant of their safety and security concerns, assure them of their status in Canada, and appreciate and support the contributions they can, do, and will make to Canada, Canadian society, and the world.

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# Addressing Climate Change through Feminist Foreign Policy

## Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group<sup>16</sup>

Canada's feminist foreign policy must include concrete actions to address sustainable development and climate change and ensure Canada is committed to addressing climate change around the world. Gender equality considerations are listed as key components of Canada's climate finance approach but a feminist foreign policy requires more. The exploitation of the environment is often seen as an extension of patriarchal structures. The warming climate poses risks to us all but the most marginalized people often face the harshest impacts. Up to 300 million people are projected to be displaced due to climate change by 2050.<sup>17</sup> Evidence indicates that women are disproportionately affected by violence linked to environmental and climate pressure.<sup>18</sup>

A feminist foreign policy requires a deep commitment to addressing the climate catastrophe and promoting sustainable development. This commitment should be demonstrated through support to women's organizations and feminist groups who are working to protect the environment and combat climate change.<sup>19</sup> The support should be financial, with climate financing programs aligned with feminist processes to ensure that funding reaches grassroots organizations and movements.

Human rights defenders advocating for environmental protection and in support of their rights to territory, land, and water- often in the face of intensive resource development projects - face increasing criminalization, threats, and violence around the world. Women, Indigenous women and LGBTI peoples who defend land and water are disproportionately targeted. Climate financing initiatives must recognize the threats to these activists and must include direct support to them. Canada's actions in support of human rights defenders must address the increasing risks to territory, land, and water defenders in Canada and around the world, the human rights abuses committed by Canadian companies, and must include concrete measures, including funding, to enable these courageous activists to carry out their work in safety and dignity.

A feminist foreign policy includes political and diplomatic support for the participation of women's organizations and feminist groups in decision-making regarding the environment, climate change, and sustainable development. From the local to the global level, decision-making needs to include those most impacted, and must value the expertise and leadership of Indigenous women and LGBTI people in these processes.

<sup>16</sup> This section was collectively submitted by the Working Group since climate change and sustainable development are cross-cutting issues that have an impact on every one of our areas of expertise.

<sup>17</sup> Gulrez Shah Azhar, "Climate change could displace up to 300 million people by 2050," Business Insider, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/300-million-climate-refugees-by-2050-2017-12>.

<sup>18</sup> Castañeda Camey, I., Sabater, L., Owren, C. and Boyer, A.E., 2020, "Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality" Wen, J. (ed.) [https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2020\\_USAID\\_IUCN\\_Gender-based-violence-and-environment-linkages.pdf](https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2020_USAID_IUCN_Gender-based-violence-and-environment-linkages.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Equality Fund and Nobel Women's Initiative, "Supporting Women's Organizations and Movements: A Strategic Approach to Climate Action" 2020, <https://equalityfund.ca/news/climate-report-2020>.

Recognition that structural change is needed to keep global warming at or below 1.5°C is key to a feminist foreign policy. A feminist approach to international trade and investment includes investment in technologies that respect the environment and comply with human rights standards. Likewise, Canada's feminist foreign policy can examine ways to reduce the carbon footprint of the Canadian Armed Forces, at home and during operations abroad, as the environmental impact of militaries are often overlooked. Canada should be a leader in ongoing efforts to strengthen international protections for the environment during armed conflict.<sup>20</sup>

Canada's feminist foreign policy requires efforts to reduce climate change and to protect the environment. Without a healthy environment, it will be impossible to reach the other goals of Canada's feminist foreign policy.

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Recognition that structural change is needed to keep global warming at or below 1.5°C is key to a feminist foreign policy.

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<sup>20</sup> Conflict and Environment Observatory, "Report: Canada's practice on the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts," 2021, <https://ceobs.org/canadas-practice-on-the-protection-of-the-environment-in-relation-to-armed-conflicts/>.

# Conclusion

Canada's forthcoming statement on feminist foreign policy provides an opportunity to outline a bold vision- a vision that is much needed in the world today and fully consistent with international human rights. Canada's policy statement should be aspirational with an ambitious vision. It should also contain measures to ensure that this vision is realized across all dimensions of Canada's international relations.

The Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group's purpose is to support a strong, coherent, intersectional Canadian feminist foreign policy. The diverse recommendations presented in this submission are grounded in a commitment to the transformational potential of a feminist approach to foreign policy.

Despite the diversity of opinion among our members, there are many common threads throughout this document. Canada's feminist foreign policy must be people-centred and guided by feminist analyses. Putting people at the centre of Canada's feminist foreign policy will take many forms, as is evident through the dozens of recommendations contained in this document. Human rights and those who defend them must be protected. Decisions must be made through the lens of human security and humanitarian disarmament. The impact of trade and investment on people from all walks of life must be a key consideration in trade negotiations. The value of people's work, whether paid or unpaid, must be recognized.

Also woven into these recommendations is the recognition that it is not enough for Global Affairs Canada to implement Canada's feminist foreign policy. A whole of government approach is required. Too often, feminist analysis is only applied to select areas of foreign policy, however, development, trade, security and defence, human rights, environmental protection, disarmament, migration, health, and innovation must all be considered in the implementation of a feminist foreign policy. This policy must extend to all sectors of international affairs, recognizing the interconnectedness of these issues.

Finally, policy coherence is emphasized through all the recommendations (as it was in the virtual civil society discussions that were hosted by the Working Group). A feminist foreign policy requires clear articulation and strong investments to support implementation. Existing processes, procedures, and decisions need to be re-evaluated in light of the feminist foreign policy and our organizations, as well as those who took part in the virtual discussions, have identified a number of areas where Canada's actions must change to ensure domestic coherence with the feminist foreign policy. We recognize the scope and challenges of adopting a feminist foreign policy but encourage Canada to be brave and transformative in its approach.

As this document demonstrates, the Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group is committed to a strong, coherent, intersectional Canadian feminist foreign policy. We look forward to continuing the discussion on what should be included in this policy and how it can be implemented alongside feminist activists around the world, civil society, policy-makers, government officials, and Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

To those drafting Canada's feminist foreign policy - be brave, be bold.