

Group of 78 submission to GAC Consultation on a Feminist Foreign Policy

Since its origins in 1981, the Group of 78 has promoted dialogue about a progressive Canadian foreign policy, based on the principles of sustainable *peace* through common security; *justice* in prosperity, equity and inclusion with diversity; and *survival* of our planet in the face of modern human activity. We welcome the opportunity to provide input into this consultation and our brief will address issues which we believe merit particular attention in formulating a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP): i) conceptual understanding; ii) conflict prevention; iii) disarmament; iv) peacekeeping and peacebuilding; v) social justice and gender inequality; vi) the climate crisis and gender inequality.

Conceptual Understanding:

It is important that a FFP is situated in a broader context of an approach to peace and security defined by the concepts of sustainability and commonality. This in turn is rooted in active commitments to a rules-based international system, the peaceful settlement of disputes, global cooperation, respect for human rights and a security concept that places the security of humans at its core. **A FFP should progress beyond the focus on increasing the participation of women in conflict resolution and peace operations, to devise *policies and structural changes* that promote sustainable peace and common security.** In this way the threats to women and girls as well as humans generally can be mitigated or eliminated.

This brief echoes the submissions made separately by the Canadian Pugwash Group and the Rideau Institute. In addition, the Group of 78 draws attention to the October 2020 report by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom on "**UNSCR 1325 AT 20 YEARS: PERSPECTIVES FROM FEMINIST PEACE ACTIVISTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY**" and endorses the concluding sections of the report, which can be found here:

https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WILPF_UNSCR-1325-at-20-Years_Web.pdf

Conflict Prevention:

An effective FFP must prioritize conflict prevention over conflict management by focusing on diplomatic efforts that encourage, and enable, competing interests in potential conflict zones to achieve sustainable compromises to minimize the risk of future violence. Government funding should prioritize support for diplomatic and civil society conflict prevention over military expenditure. Greater investment needs to be made in developing effective responses to indicators of imminent violence. Faced with indicators of imminent violence, such a foreign policy would, above all, seek to avoid deepening the roots of those potential conflicts by lending overt, or covert, support to any one faction through unilateral sanctions, arms sales or attempts to manipulate or distort domestic political processes; instead, **a FFP would focus on**

strengthening robust mediation capacities that promote sustainable and peaceful dispute settlements in full accordance with international law.

Disarmament:

Disarmament as a domain of action for a FFP has been absent to date from the Government's statements. The *Scene Setting* document prepared for this consultation has acknowledged "arms control" and "non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction" as possible new areas of attention, but actual "disarmament" needs also to figure amongst the objectives of a FFP. Especially in light of the differential impact on women and girls of violence perpetrated by weapons, increased diplomatic engagement by Canada to control and eliminate problematic weapon systems is needed. It is not simply the risk of WMD-proliferation that is a threat, but the very existence of these weapons. **A FFP should include Canada's accession to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, after taking the action nationally and within NATO to enable this action.**

A FFP will require a much higher degree of policy coherence. For instance, continuing to permit the sale of armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia is incompatible with advocating for women's rights. The Saudi regime uses Canadian-manufactured assets to repress its own population, conducts a brutal war in the region where innocent civilians are the main casualties, and continues its egregious discrimination against women. **An FFP should include a robust system of limiting arms sales to regimes known for human rights abuses.**

Peacekeeping:

Restore Canada's past high-level support for UN peacekeeping by increasing military, police and civilian contributions including offering mission commanders. Not a single general has been offered as a UN force commander since the 1990s. From a high of 3,300 person contribution in the 1990s we are currently contributing only 34 uniformed peacekeepers. This situation does not accord with the Government's promise to re-engage in UN peacekeeping.

Although Canada has already undertaken several contributions to increasing the role of women in peace operations, such as via the *Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations*, a greater effort is needed in terms of Canada's own contribution of female personnel to UN missions (currently only 8 uniformed women are deployed). It has been shown that missions with a significant contingent of women can better connect with local communities and acquire critical information and intelligence. Canada should nominate a woman general for UN service as a Force Commander or Deputy Commander. A revival of realist training for Canadian participation in UN multidimensional peace operation is needed, as the Canadian Forces provide only half the peacekeeping training that it did 15 years ago. Besides augmented participation there needs to be a greater focus on the policy context in which peace operations occur. In particular more attention should be placed on devising mandates and mission mechanisms for the effective protection of civilians during operations, especially given the

disproportionate gendered-impact of violence against civilians. **As part of a comprehensive FFP effort to render UN peacekeeping more efficient and effective, Canada could lead in promoting the use of technological aids by missions and the development of rapid response mechanisms to promptly counter threats to peace operations.**

The most effective protection of civilians is a durable peace. The “value added” of UN peacekeeping is the centrality of the peace process. **There is a need to renew efforts, at all levels, from the Security Council to individual UN member states including potential troop contributors like Canada, to support and enhance efforts to place a political solution, and the UN’s pre-eminent role in facilitating it, at the heart of all of the work of a peace operation.**

Peacebuilding:

A FFP must include the role of women in peace negotiations. In successive authoritative documents the UN and other multilateral organizations have recognized that peacebuilding, including institution and capacity-building, is essential to sustaining peace. Such activities, as part of the peace continuum, must also address the causes and drivers of conflict, with particular attention to political inclusion as a core principle. Negotiations on the future of a country needs the substantive and meaningful participation of women for any agreement to hold.

As current co-chair of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, Canada co-leads efforts to strengthen the UN’s peacebuilding architecture – notably by coordinating UN and international financial institutions’ work on economic policies for inclusive peace. **Accordingly, Canada should better align its own policies to give primacy to political inclusion over support for privileged elites.**

In our view, a FFP to constitute effective and credible guidance for action will require incorporating some of the elements flagged above. The FFP should also allow for regular monitoring and evaluation as to the effectiveness of its intended actions in order to provide an empirical basis for adjustments in the future and as an accountability tool.

Social Justice and Gender Inequality

Growing inequality in wealth and income, including gender inequality, has resulted from the deregulation and liberalization of markets, particularly internationalized financial markets, over the last four decades. These systemic policy shifts have also led to frequent economic crises and growing job insecurity. A FFP would include capital controls, greater financial regulation, and a tax code that penalizes speculation. The bargaining power of workers and unions should be strengthened, with better employment standards including in precarious occupations. The social contract should also be strengthened, with equal access to health care and education, particularly for girls and women.

Canada's FFP should work collaboratively with poorer countries to reduce social and economic inequalities, *inter alia* through bringing about higher wages and safe working conditions for workers; by addressing structural barriers to gender equality by supporting women's reproductive rights and security from violence; and by providing universal primary education and health care since they mitigate the worst impacts of inequality. A small wealth levy of 1.5% on the world's billionaires would yield significant income with which to support primary education and health in all the world's poorest countries.

The Climate Crisis and Gender Inequality

Climate change is already wreaking devastation in every area of the world and we can expect further damaging impacts because of past emissions, which magnify existing inequalities within societies and particularly for women. But the number of fatalities and extent of damage in the poorest developing countries—the countries least responsible for climate change— are far higher. There is accordingly a moral obligation by the countries that have done the most to precipitate climate change, including Canada, to help the poorest developing countries build their resilience against extreme events such as droughts, floods and massive storms. Women and girls are among the most vulnerable members of the population and deserve particular support in a FFP. Actions should include building leadership capacity of women at local and national levels, and access to productive resources including land, that can unleash energy for creative solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation. In Africa, for instance, a focus on women's land rights would reap significant rewards for food security in face of the climate threat.

Submitted on behalf of the Group of 78 by its Chair, Roy Culpeper.

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