



# Global Affairs Canada: Feminist Foreign Policy Dialogue

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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

## Self Identification:

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Please indicate if you are submitting this contribution:

- ☒ As an individual
- ☐ On behalf of an organization
- ☐ On behalf of a group of organizations or individuals

Please indicate the areas covered in your contribution:

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

## Written Contribution:

I am grateful to the Government of Canada for adopting a feminist foreign policy, and for the opportunity to contribute dialogue in its creation.

I work as a Victim Service Worker and contribute to a Committee in British Columbia as a consultant and coordinator. This Committee was founded in 1992, shortly after the province of British Columbia rolled out community coordination initiatives in response to violence against women. The Committee works collaboratively across sectors and service areas to help provide an effective, coordinated response to those who have experienced gender-based and sexual violence.

My work is guided by my belief, supported by agency mandates, in equal rights for all sexes. I conduct my work with an intersectional feminist lens because in Canada, gender-based violence disproportionately impacts women, girls, and marginalized populations. I understand that marginalized populations, such as Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ2S+ people (particularly transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary individuals), those living in northern, rural and remote communities, people with disabilities, refugees and newcomers, children and youth, and seniors are at an increased risk of gender-based or sexual violence.

As such, I believe that a feminist approach to foreign policy must be intersectional at its core. Worldwide, Indigenous Peoples are at an increased risk of sexual and family violence — a consequence of historical trauma and colonization (Power et al., 2020). In Canada, Inuit, Métis, and First Nations women are almost 3 times more likely to experience gender-based violence than non-Indigenous women (Klingspohn, 2018 as cited in Power et al., 2020). We have seen limited action by the Canadian government in addressing the 231 recommendations put forth by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry report. In order for our feminist

foreign policy to be successful, we must first address the gender inequalities that exist within our own Indigenous communities.

Secondly, feminist policy must be trauma-focused and informed. Pre-existing stress and trauma are triggered during crises, causing an increase in unhealthy coping behaviours (e.g. alcohol and drug use), as well as, gender-based violence (Peterman et al., 2020). There must be policies in place to address the sudden rise in emotional, physical, and economic pressures that lead to gender-based and sexual violence -- in addition to reduced access to support services -- that occur during crises. Emphasis should be placed particularly on supporting marginalized communities such as: LGBTQ2S+ individuals, Black and Ethnic minorities, and Indigenous Peoples as they are at a greater likelihood of having compound traumas (e.g. intergenerational trauma, target of hate crimes). Further, sexual violence that is conflict-related should be appropriately defined as a war crime, as crimes of this nature are specifically linked with the expression of power and dominance.

Canada's Defence Policy, "Strong, Secure, Engaged", which focuses on gender equality and diversity within the Canadian Armed Forces, is a good start for the promotion of equal rights. Unfortunately, I am painfully aware in my line of work that too often womxn are the victims of sexual and domestic violence by members of the Armed Forces or while they are active members themselves. Increasing the proportion of women employed by the Armed Forces has the potential to redistribute power dynamics present in the military, however; more work needs to be done to promote gender equality within its ranks. In order to have effective feminist foreign policy, the Canadian Armed Forces must actively adopt principles of intersectional feminism within their own daily work, promote a positive and inclusive culture, and commit to removing barriers to reporting gender-based or sexual violence.

Thirdly, research has shown during crises (like the COVID-19 global pandemic) there typically is an increase in sexual assault and violence (Peterman et al., 2020). As Peterman et al. (2020)

discuss in their paper, there are nine pathways (both indirect and direct) that link pandemics with violence against women and children:

1. Economic insecurity and poverty-related stress;
2. Quarantines and social isolation;
3. Disaster and conflict-related unrest and instability;
4. Exposure to exploitative relationships due to changing demographics;
5. Reduced health service availability and access to first responders;
6. Inability of women to temporarily escape abusive partners;
7. Virus-specific sources of violence;
  - Perpetrators of gender-based violence may utilize individual fears, or misinformation of the nature of the virus to create an environment which justifies the use of isolating, controlling and coercive behaviours (National Domestic Violence Hotline, 2020).
8. Exposure to violence and coercion in response efforts;
9. Violence perpetrated against health care workers.

All of these factors must be acknowledged and addressed appropriately when creating policy that supports vulnerable womxn and girls during times of societal unrest and instability. Planning for pandemics and conflict should be proactive, with clear procedures in place to address gender-based and sexual violence risk factors.

Fourthly, it is estimated that worldwide there are 12.3 million victims of human trafficking per year (United States Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, 2000). Shockingly, approximately only 0.01% of all human trafficking crimes are reported or discovered, and 35% of all cases are prosecuted successfully (Mehlman-Orozco, 2017). This indicates that while human trafficking is a global and prevalent issue, there are insufficient successful criminal justice interventions and policies in place to address this (Kohler, 2019).

Like domestic abusers, human traffickers systematically isolate their victims from friends and family members making it difficult for them to leave; while also using emotionally abusive techniques, like encouraging feelings of isolation and guilt, to impact the individual's sense of self (Hopper & Hidalgo, 2006). These methods of recruitment are extremely effective in coercing victim compliance, forming trauma bonds between the victim and the trafficker, and ensuring that cooperation with criminal justice practitioners will be minimal (Mehlman-Orzoco, 2017).

The majority of victims of sex trafficking are female-identifying, and like victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) these womxn are captives due to psychological, economic, and social coercive reasons (Hopper & Hidalgo, 2006). In both situations of IPV and sex trafficking, the cycle of abuse starts with intense affection and gift giving and eventually disintegrates into isolation, alternating kindness, gaslighting, and establishing an environment that leads to learned helplessness (Hopper & Hidalgo, 2006).

Foreign feminist policy should be concerned with how traffickers recruit their victims, particularly examining immigration routes from countries in conflict, as womxn seeking asylum may be more likely to accept travel from smugglers if there is no other option.

By integrating the above recommendations into the Government of Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy, we believe we can create a positive and equitable future for those affected by gender-based and sexual violence.

## References

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