



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
- 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 Trade; demilitarization and peacebuilding; climate; development projects

Written Contribution: * Please respect the **five (5)-page limit**

High-level/overarching principles and guidelines for a Feminist Foreign Policy:

For Mennonite Central Committee Canada, our faith calls us to dismantle oppression, practice nonviolence and seek a just peace. A feminist foreign policy can be a tool to help achieve those objectives, but it must be centered on dismantling structures and addressing root causes that limit decision making and full participation by women, men, girls and boys, and on creating alternatives together. A feminist foreign policy uses gender based intersectional analysis as a tool to ensure that all decisions and policy frameworks start from an understanding of the differentiated impacts of those decisions on gendered identities, especially those marginalized. It includes the clear goal of ensuring the wellbeing of marginalized and vulnerable peoples through supporting the conditions that allow women and men together to decide how they wish to live their lives and contribute freely to the flourishing of their societies.

Critically, the understanding of the language of feminism varies by context, history, and the daily realities of inequality that exists in different spaces around the world. Inclusion of feminist language does not automatically translate into effective development or diplomacy work. Rather, feminist language without context and relationship runs the significant risk of development actors and institutions failing to understand the true intentions of communities and organizations and can result in the instrumentalization rather than the empowerment of women and girls. We encourage the government to especially consider women and men in religious and faith-based setting, who may not use feminist language, as actors that facilitate change, provide insight into their communities and context and hold important relationships and knowledge. Women in religious contexts should not be seen as objects of discrimination but as key agents for change in their local contexts.

From MCC partners around the world, we hear the call for a broadening of our imagination of how we work and live together, of solidarity, and of Canadians policies that contributes to a world where all can live lives of dignity through support for peace, nonviolence and human rights. The combined impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the alarming rise of gender-based violence, and the increasing devastation caused by a changing climate present a moment to strengthen policies that allow everyone to participate in a global recovery. In our work, we have seen many strong examples of alternative possibilities, highlighted throughout this document and in our [Spring 2019 issue of Intersections, MCC's theory and practice quarterly featuring articles from MCC's learnings on listening to local voices on gender.](#)

What emerging policy areas with implications for gender equality should we be concentrating on?

Policy coherence and collaboration, with a focus on learning, within and across departments and internationally and domestically. Within Global Affairs Canada, work together to ensure that all policies across trade, development and foreign affairs fit within a framework of upholding human rights. Work with IRCC to broaden understandings of forced displacement and Canada's response to root causes in an integrated and localized approach. We encourage the government to integrate a conflict sensitivity lens across all programming to ensure government, NGO, and private sector actions do not inadvertently exacerbate conflict dynamics or exacerbate socio-economic inequalities.

Foreign policy must be echoed in domestic policy. We also encourage implementation of recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice.

Trade policies and practices must consider contextual gendered impacts and contain clear human rights accountability mechanisms.

Canada companies acting abroad must be accountable for their actions that violate human rights, including the rights of women and girls. The Minister for International Trade's office has recently disclosed that the office will renege on a promise made in 2018 to establish a human rights Ombudsperson with the power to hold businesses accountable for human rights violations in commercial operations overseas. Canadian law and policy reform is needed to ensure that: impacted communities can access remedy in Canada; Canadian companies respect human rights in their global operations; and, if companies are involved in overseas abuses, they face real consequences in Canada. Without independent investigatory powers, the CORE is unfit for purpose. Impartial investigation is essential to the resolution of conflict, the identification of appropriate remedy and the prevention of harm. It can begin to address the acute power imbalance between communities and multinational companies, including the severe impacts felt by women in these communities. Key information that is crucial to such investigations is often held exclusively by companies. In order to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of investigations, the CORE must be given the powers to access this essential information.

Alternative possibility: In Guatemala MCC partner, Pastoral de la Tierra, works with Indigenous communities at risk of displacement due to a combination of factors including climate change, economic conditions, and extractive projects, especially large-scale gold mining by the Marlin Mine, formally owned by Canadian company Goldcorp. Using permaculture and traditional Indigenous practices, the project brings together groups from different communities, including women's group to learn from each other and develop alternative economic strategies. At the same time, community leadership and organization is strengthened as the communities come together to advocate for environmental protections and free, informed and prior consent.

Canada Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA): Long-standing official Canadian policy clearly states that Israeli control over Palestinian territories, including settlements, is illegal under the Geneva Conventions. However, when Canada renewed its Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA) with Israel in 2019, there was no clause to distinguish between Israeli products grown or manufactured in Israel-proper and the Occupied Territories, including Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Under CIFTA companies operating or sourcing material from settlements and/or the Occupied Palestinian Territories in general, are unregulated. When CIFTA was renewed in 2019, the revised version included a on clause on gender equality, as well as environmental protection and corporate social responsibility. However, CIFTA does not consider the impacts of settlements and ongoing occupation on Palestinian self-determination along with the specific impacts on Palestinian women and girls of home demolitions, night raids, and restrictions on right to movement that accompany settlement expansion, not to mention the gendered impacts on Israel military personnel charged with security duties in the Occupied Territories.

By not including this distinction around settlements in CIFTA, Canadian trade practices turn a blind eye to this expansion and to our own official policies. The government of Canada can act to ensure that our trade and other policies and practices contribute to a just peace for all, including Palestinian women and girls, by differentiating between products made in legal Israeli territory from those produced in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, much like the European Union has done, and by incorporating a human rights clause into CIFTA to measure and investigate possible human rights impacts of CIFTA

Demilitarization and Increase in Localized Grassroots Peacebuilding, alongside Humanitarian and Development support.

A key role for Canada is examining and addressing the root causes of violence and insecurity and responding to conflict with alternative methods that do not rely on military participation. Nonviolent practices centred around community care and social cohesion are viable ways of reducing conflict in ways that do less harm. A feminist foreign policy moves away from using violence or force as a tool to maintain peace to the active promotion of diplomacy, collaboration, and substantial financial support for community-based peacebuilding, mediation and conflict prevention work. While we appreciate the emphasis within the WPS Agenda on gender mainstreaming in the military, and on ending impunity for sexual and gender based violence perpetrated in conflict, a greater emphasis should be placed on dismantling the power structures that promote militarization and military participation as a solution to conflict. Canada can continue to invest instead in diplomacy and grassroots peace organizations, especially those lead by women.

COVID-19 has caused an increase in violence, and specifically gender based violence, layered on top of already existing armed conflicts, displacement, femicide and economic inequality. We hear from partners about the gendered impacts of the pandemic, including a lack of access to health systems, loss of financial security, increased challenges sending children to school, reduced education for girls, often resulting early marriage, lack of access to public authorities due to lockdown, and inability to escape domestic violence.

A re-commitment to the localization principles of the Grand Bargain is desperately needed, especially for grassroots and local peacebuilding organizations. [Four out of five of local peacebuilders](#) have experienced a reduction in their funding for peacebuilding following the onset of the pandemic, leading to program suspensions. Yet, in the face of pressing challenges, local organizations and faith communities continue to be the best positioned to respond with immediate humanitarian relief, long term-development work and continued human rights advocacy and peacebuilding work needed for recovery.

This also means specifically re-evaluating our military operations including Operation IMPACT in Iraq, slated to end in March 2021, unless it is renewed for a fifth time. According to MCC's local partners in Iraq, the situation in Iraq concerning state-sponsored violence against civilians was very concerning long before COVID-19 escalated growing concerns. ISIS has lost control over its formally held territories, but deep societal fragmentation persists. The influence of ISIS only scratches the surface of the root causes of conflict and forced displacement in the region, not least of which include the destructive impacts of past foreign military interventions. Such past interventions helped create power vacuums,

fueled sectarian divides, and exacerbated social and political exclusion, all creating challenges for the full participation of women in Iraq.

MCC is deeply concerned by the continued presence of Canada's military efforts and defence resources, as Iraq's complex protracted conflict will not be solved in the long term through foreign military interventions. This is a key moment to reassess Canada's role and we urge the Government of Canada to end its military assistance to the region and play a greater role in building a peaceful, stable and democratic Iraq, through transferring military funding and expanding investments in local and grassroots organizations working to rebuild society through humanitarian initiatives, long-term development, land dispute resolution, equitable access to resources, and inter-religious and sectarian peacebuilding, especially when done using a gender analysis and focused on grassroots and women-led projects.

Alternative Possibility: [The Yezidi people](#), an ethnic and religious minority from Northern Iraq, have suffered throughout the conflict in Iraq. MCC partner [Yezidi/Azidi Solidarity and Fraternity League](#) (ASFL) provides material and psycho-social relief to survivors but also sends out teams of volunteers to help in the reconstruction and beautification of Bashiqa. These reconstruction teams specifically reach out to neighbourhoods with people of different religions and ethnicities – Muslims, Christians, Arabs and Kurds – to promote reconciliation and a portrayal of Yezidis as not only victims of conflict but agents of change.

Where should Canada focus its efforts on climate?

Climate change has a disproportionate impact on women because of their unequal access to resources and assets, limited mobility, and greater caregiving responsibilities. Forced migration and displacement, which can be exacerbated by climate change, increases gender-based violence. Climate change and other environmental issues such as large-scale resource extraction are tied to colonial and patriarchal systems that further violence against women and Indigenous peoples. Inequality can be reinforced by poorly thought out climate change adaptation strategies that entrench existing gender roles or lead to protection risks.

Canada can take a multi-dimensional approach to addressing climate change impacts, including integrating climate change interventions with efforts to transform gender dynamics, address and prevent violence against women, and advocate for women's and Indigenous human rights, including free, prior and informed consent. Climate change adaptation should focus on strategies that are most impactful for women, based on their identified priorities, and led by local grassroots and women-led organizations. This includes supporting climate resilient and appropriate food systems that empower women within extension systems, agriculture value chains, and enable access to markets and capital. Women can be centered as essential adaptation actors, with their knowledge leveraged through networking and learning opportunities, and participatory research.

Alternative possibility: [Myanmar](#). Women in Rakhine are disproportionately vulnerable to complex disasters, natural hazards and climate change impacts due to cultural beliefs, traditional practices and socio-economic conditions. Women are more likely than men to experience increased loss of livelihoods and gender-based violence. MCC partner Women for the World (WFW), a Yangon-based Myanmar non-governmental organization (NGO), partners with the Indigenous Women's Coalition for Peace (IWCP) in Rakhine to reduce risk and increase resilience. The integration of Rakhine Indigenous

women's local knowledge and their practices in disaster mitigation, preparation and response efforts are essential for reducing risk and increasing resilience.

How effective are Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) tools as a means of integrating gender equality, intersectionality, and human rights considerations in our international engagement?

The GBA+ tools together with the FIAP framework have had a significant influence on the focus that is put on gender equality in MCC programming. MCC now includes a more comprehensive gender analysis for project design, activities and outcomes. More projects are implementing program level governance structures that include gender balanced numbers, we are planning more training on gender equity and GBV, and project activities are designed with women's preferences front of mind as a result of a more intentional approach to analyzing the impact of interventions on all genders. However, the FIAP is largely focused on women and girls. Engagement of men and boys is stated as critical but referenced very seldom. Similarly, the full diversity of identity factors and intersectionality is not adequately addressed in the policy framework and implementation. The best examples of truly gender transformative programming integrate this analysis by addressing the different needs of women, girls, boys and men and working to address the underlying norms and deeply held attitudes and beliefs that marginalize individuals on the basis of gender. A transformative approach must take into consideration the local context and existing norms around gender. Application of FIAP tools needs to be flexible to the context to ensure interventions do not cause harm.

How can we better mobilize partners and build alliances in multilateral and regional forums to work towards achieving transformative change for gender equality and inclusion?

Include more voices from the local level, where programming is being implemented to better understand the daily challenges of achieving transformation that benefits the most marginalized. Draw on the expertise of Canadian NGOs supporting local partners in these contexts, even if these projects are not directly funded by the Canadian government.

What lessons can we draw from existing policies to improve the application of Canada's overall feminist approach internationally?

There is a breakdown in the application of FIAP at the local level. There needs to be additional consultation, regionally or locally, to better translate the overall goals of FIAP to local actors to and build understanding with local implementing agencies. There needs to be a stronger focus on intersectionality, context, and the inclusion of men and boys needs to be emphasized.

A feminist approach to MEA for the Feminist Foreign Policy implementation?

GBA+ tools can be used to strengthen understanding of how a policy or intervention affects the lives of women/girls by examining decision making power, control over resources, and access to education, among others. A feminist approach to MEA would include full consultation of participant populations in choosing indicators that are relevant to their lives within their specific context. There needs to be a clear understanding of the contextual factors that influence gender at the local level, and a transnational gender lens that is employed by those who are designing and implementing the MEA plans. There also needs to be clearly defined accountability mechanisms with clear directions around accountability. Is the project accountable to the FIAP or to local participants?