

Submission to Global Affairs Canada on the International Assistance Policy Review

Submitted by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada

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I. Introduction and summary

Given our nearly 100 years of experience serving vulnerable populations around the world through disaster relief, community development, and peacebuilding, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to Global Affairs Canada (GAC) on the International Assistance Review.

MCC is a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. While our work began in 1920 with the distribution of aid to Mennonites facing famine in Ukraine, today MCC supports programming in roughly 60 countries, caring for the lives and futures of uprooted and other vulnerable people; providing water, food and shelter in times of hunger, disaster and conflict, as well as education and income generation opportunities; and working with communities to prevent violence and promote sustainable peace. We are grateful for the financial contributions we have received from Global Affairs Canada over the years to support this work.

While much of our programming is focused on international relief, development, and peacebuilding, MCC— together with our provincial counterparts—also works with local partners across Canada on a wide range of domestic programming related to helping refugees resettle, walking with Indigenous Peoples, engaging with victims and offenders in the criminal justice system, and working with people living in poverty.

MCC is grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in several in-person consultations with GAC staff and civil society colleagues, sharing insight we have gained working with partners around the world in health, education, food security and sustainable livelihoods, migration and resettlement, humanitarian relief and disaster recovery, and peacebuilding. With this written submission, we will focus more specifically on several recommendations relating to humanitarian response, peace and security, funding and partnerships, and policy coherence within the department. Each of these overarching recommendations will be articulated in more detail in the pages that follow.

To enhance Canada’s international assistance policy, MCC recommends that Global Affairs Canada:

1. Integrate disaster risk reduction more effectively into programming and funding mechanisms across all branches in order to reduce risk of disaster and promote poverty alleviation;
2. Increase investments in conflict prevention initiatives, strengthen support for interreligious peacebuilding and psychosocial interventions, and champion the women, peace, and security agenda;
3. Provide long-term, predictable, and flexible funding suitable to Canadian INGOs working with local grassroots organizations, and commit to growing Canada’s international assistance envelope with a clear timetable for reaching 0.7% of GNI;
4. Ensure policy coherence across development, trade, and foreign affairs agendas serves to strengthen— rather than temper—Canada’s commitment to the interests of developing countries;
5. Generate a white paper that clearly articulates Canada’s priorities for the next five years as well as corresponding strategies, policies, and action plans it will develop to implement that framework.

II. Analysis and recommendations

MCC welcomes many of the principles and strategic orientations put forward by Global Affairs Canada in the International Assistance Review Discussion Paper. We are pleased to see an unequivocal commitment to putting gender and human rights at the core of Canada’s development efforts; a strong reference to frameworks such as Agenda 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, as well as the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act; and a recognition of the importance of working with all development actors and civil society organizations. The review must now give clearer shape as to how these general principles and global agendas will translate into concrete policies, tools, and programs.

Given that our submission will concentrate on a few overarching policy areas, MCC would also like to affirm the key messages put forward by coalition partners such as the Canadian Council for International

Cooperation (CCIC), Canadian Coalition on Climate Change and Development (C4D), Food Security Policy Group (FSPG), and Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB). In particular, as MCC works with vulnerable communities to build resilience and reduce the risk of climate change-related disasters, we echo our partners' recommendations that Canada's international assistance policy should place more emphasis on supporting agriculture (particularly smallholder farmers) and assisting countries in climate change adaptation. Please see their submissions for further analysis and recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Integrate disaster risk reduction more effectively into programming and funding mechanisms across all branches in order to reduce risk of disaster and promote poverty alleviation

MCC is pleased to see the International Assistance Review Discussion Paper place a strong focus on responding to humanitarian crises and the challenges faced by displaced populations. Working with refugees and displaced peoples has been, and continues to be, a vital part of MCC's programming both at home and around the world. As the first organization to become a Sponsorship Agreement Holder in 1979, MCC has an over thirty-five year history helping refugees rebuild their lives in Canada through the Private Sponsorship Program. Internationally, much of our relief, development, and peace work aims to create alternatives to migration, enabling people to remain at home by building communities of peace, justice, and well-being.

As Global Affairs strives to carry out more comprehensive, coordinated, and timely responses to vulnerable populations in crisis, MCC believes **Canada's international assistance policy must create more space for supporting disaster risk reduction**. While some humanitarian funds have been used for specific, short-term disaster risk reduction activities, GAC's humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding work continues to be managed through administrative silos. Reducing peoples' exposure to hazards, lessening vulnerability, and improving preparedness are the most effective ways to deal with crises and build long-term resilience. We know from experience that chronic poverty makes populations more susceptible to shocks, and seasonal hunger is often a precursor to famine. Chronic problems must be dealt with *before* they become acute.

To strengthen humanitarian programming, MCC recommends that Global Affairs Canada:

- Provide space for the integration of disaster risk reduction—early warning systems, disaster mitigation, and preparedness—across all branches of Global Affairs (i.e. Bilateral, Partnerships, and International Humanitarian Assistance [IHA]) in order to reduce disaster risk and promote poverty alleviation. This should include reevaluating the narrow mandate of IHA;
- Support communities in developing early warning systems—for food security, community-based adaptation, and disaster risk reduction systems—to address vulnerability *before* crises are officially declared. Invest in establishing community committees that can engage in local hazard mapping, vulnerability and capacity assessments, and training in risk management;
- Strengthen investment in disaster mitigation strategies by building on Canada's contribution to social protection initiatives such as the Productive Safety Net Program in Ethiopia. Invest in seasonal safety net projects in communities facing chronic and seasonal hunger, as they are proven to reduce risk of acute hunger, protect household assets, and improve agricultural production;
- Promote policies that protect the environment, such as integrating soil and water conservation in humanitarian response, particularly in areas facing chronic, seasonal hunger, and land degradation;
- Expand livelihood programming in IHA to support not only the restoration and protection of livelihoods but also the development of new livelihood opportunities in chronic situations;
- Emphasize holistic approaches to building resilience in protracted situations such as strengthening access to education for children, building sustainable employment opportunities, and investing in mental health and psychosocial support, particularly in contexts of mass displacement and conflict;
- Ensure gender sensitivity is privileged over administrative and programmatic preferences towards particular modalities. Cash assistance, for example, while flexible and cost-effective, can disempower

women in certain contexts (i.e. women MCC works with in Lebanon, India, and Nepal prefer restricted vouchers or in-kind support due to concerns over male-headed households misusing cash).

To strengthen funding for humanitarian situations, MCC recommends that Global Affairs Canada:

- Ensure timely and predictable funding for chronic crises as well as post-crisis recovery;
- Prioritize partnerships with local organizations with knowledge and relationships in the communities they serve—these organizations understand the social, cultural, economic, and development needs of their contexts (as well as constraints and opportunities), and have tremendous capacity to deliver humanitarian relief to populations most in need due to strong relationships on the ground;
- Restore core funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to support the work civil society organizations are doing in Gaza Strip as well as in refugee host countries such as Lebanon;
- Enhance the transparency and efficacy of IHA’s funding process by providing more criteria on priorities in calls for proposals, including funding availability and country/sector foci. Priorities should be determined by the annual UN appeal process and build on the knowledge and capacity of Canadian INGOs;
- Shift the annual funding process for IHA to the beginning of the fiscal year (currently in November, with funding decisions made in March with year-end funding allocations) so that funding envelopes and objectives can be set in accordance with regional and country-specific humanitarian response plans, and allow ample time to for humanitarian responses to include winter-specific interventions;
- Ensure scalability and administrative ease do not dominate IHA’s funding decisions. Reducing administrative burden by consolidating programming with one or two partners or sectors, for instance, inadvertently penalizes those organizations proposing multi-sectoral approaches, and prices out organizations working with grassroots organizations unable to lead whole-of-country responses.

Recommendation 2: Increase investments in conflict prevention initiatives (2.1), strengthen support for interreligious peacebuilding and psychosocial interventions (2.2), and champion the women, peace, and security agenda (2.3)

Given MCC’s commitment to peacebuilding and our experience working in conflict zones around the world, we strongly affirm Global Affairs’ prioritization of peace as a stand-alone, strategic orientation for Canada’s international assistance programming. We also encourage the government to integrate a conflict sensitivity lens across all of Canada’s development strategies, regardless of the sector.

Throughout the 1990s, Canada was a champion of the human security agenda, making substantial investments in addressing the causes and consequences of violent conflict. Global Affairs’ programming again needs to be informed by a holistic definition of peace and security—one that understands the complex and interconnected causes of violence, and clearly recognizes that conflict cannot be separated from development, governance, health, education, and other causes of vulnerability. As the ten-year review of the UN’s peacebuilding architecture recently concluded, the global community’s over-reliance on costly, short-term, militarized responses for dealing with violence and extremism has addressed symptoms of insecurity rather than actual causes. Beyond the devastating human costs (death, injury, and displacement), violent conflict has far-reaching economic, social, and political costs. In this way, MCC believes peacebuilding must be moved from the margins to the center of Canada’s international assistance policy.

2.1 Increase investments in conflict prevention initiatives

MCC strongly encourages Global Affairs to **invest in conflict prevention initiatives that seek to resolve, manage, or contain disputes before they become violent.** In the same way that long-term commitment to strengthening disaster risk reduction can build resilience and strengthen peoples’ capacity to deal with unexpected shocks, early intervention is the most effective way to prevent violent conflict from erupting. Effective conflict analysis can help predict patterns of violence and windows of vulnerability; identify those

people with the means and motivation to instigate violence, those most at risk of being pulled into violence, and those uniquely-placed to prevent violence from spreading; and determine what interventions might curtail violence before it occurs. When mapping drivers of conflict, it is also crucial to identify the strengths and capacities that already exist at a local level (even in fragile contexts) and can be leveraged to build sustainable peace.

To strengthen peacebuilding interventions, MCC recommends that Global Affairs Canada:

- Engage in a systematic global mapping exercise to determine where Canada is uniquely-positioned—based on our political, cultural, and linguistic capacities—to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts;
- Analyze global successes and failures in peacebuilding and state-building in the last 10-15 years, and support knowledge-generation and information-sharing on non-military responses to conflict;
- Ensure conflict analysis methods actively integrate the perspectives of conflict-affected communities, include strong gender analysis, and contain a solid assessment of *existing* local peacebuilding capacities, processes, and networks that can be enhanced and supported;
- Integrate a conflict sensitivity lens (i.e. “do no harm”) across *all* humanitarian and development programming to ensure government, NGO, and private sector actions do not inadvertently exacerbate conflict dynamics;
- Engage in partnerships with diverse actors (i.e. civil society, NGOs, research groups, academics, practitioners, youth networks, etc.) at all stages of program planning and implementation, with a particular focus on supporting grassroots partners, enhancing local solidarity networks, and promoting mechanisms for cooperation between actors on different levels;
- Strengthen investments in community-based violence prevention initiatives in at-risk communities, including peace education, civic engagement, nonviolent dispute resolution training, and supporting networks of key local leaders who can build trust across conflict lines. Encourage youth engagement by supporting peer-to-peer mediation training and peace curriculum in primary and secondary schools;
- Reinvest federal funding (i.e. Global Peace and Security Fund) in long-term conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives with multi-year funding windows;
- Evaluate success using longer timeframes (at least 5-10 years) and focusing on outcomes, as peacebuilding evades easy metrics and change unfolds more slowly than policy cycles. While goals and approaches can be specified up front, allow flexibility for readjusting programming as circumstances shift and employ continuous monitoring and evaluation (including qualitative) methods.

In Nigeria MCC supports the Emergency Preparedness and Response Teams (EPRT)—an interfaith, grassroots network engaged in preventing conflict and serving as an early warning system for disaster across Plateau State. The EPRT’s work is carried out by 15-member volunteer teams—each consisting of Muslims and Christians, women and men, who are trained in emergency response, conflict prevention, mediation, and civic education—in all 17 local government areas. In total, 270 skilled peacebuilders are stretched across Plateau State, working to proactively detect conflict by gathering information through text and phone messages to build a picture of the conflict situation, defuse early warning signs of tension (dispelling rumours that spark conflict), and anticipate natural disasters. They collaborate with traditional religious leaders, youth networks, local government authorities, police, and military. When elections in 2011 were widely anticipated to spiral into violence, EPRT members monitored polling stations across the state, successfully encouraging people to vote peacefully.

2.2 Strengthen support for interreligious peacebuilding and psychosocial interventions

MCC encourages **greater support for civil society groups and religious and community leaders seeking to address ethnic and religious divisions through innovative peacebuilding and conflict transformation programs.** In regions of ongoing violence, conflict and upheaval can exacerbate ethnic and religious tensions not only within states, but in and between neighbouring countries. Instead of waiting to address conflict until it becomes violent, it is critical that local communities have strategies to resolve and prevent ethno-religious conflicts *before* they lead to sectarian violence. To this end, MCC believes initiatives for mitigating and

resolving interreligious conflict and increasing social cohesion are vital for countering violent extremism and fostering long-term peace.

MCC also encourages greater investment in initiatives that provide access to **safe education and psychosocial support for children and families traumatized by violence, displacement and social upheaval**. As our partners in Syria and Iraq have told us, for instance, armed groups seeking to recruit members for their cause often target vulnerable individuals. More psychosocial assistance and formal and non-formal education interventions are needed to build resilience and ensure that people dealing with trauma are not at risk of being drawn into further cycles of violence. In places such as eastern DRC—where the physical and psychological wounds of violence have caused significant trauma and generated mistrust and suspicion among communities—MCC has also seen how strategic psychosocial interventions not only address peoples’ mental health and support personal healing, but can bring divided communities together, fostering social cohesion and serving as a stepping stone towards reconciliation.

MCC is grateful for the support provided by the former Office of Religious Freedom for peace education work that we—together with our partners in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria—engaged in alongside students, civil society groups, and religious leaders to advance respect for diversity and promote bridge-building in the Middle East. This project implemented complementary activities in each context, including collaborating with Iraq’s Ministry of Education to pilot a civics curriculum for supporting interfaith peacebuilding; training teachers and civil society leaders in Lebanon to promote interreligious dialogue; and holding a regional peacebuilding conference for religious and community leaders and high-level stakeholders. Results from the program demonstrated enhanced knowledge and adoption of peacebuilding strategies and greater interreligious cooperation and dialogue.

To foster interreligious peacebuilding and conflict resilience, MCC recommends that Global Affairs Canada:

- Invest in community-based initiatives focused on mitigating and resolving ethnic and interreligious conflict—such as peace education, inclusive civic engagement, and inter-community dialogue processes—particularly in contexts experiencing sectarian violence;
- Strengthen funding for interreligious peacebuilding through channels such as the new Office of Human Rights, Freedoms, and Inclusion;
- Support organizations providing technical peacebuilding training for youth, community, and religious leaders; those raising awareness and understanding of religious diversity; and those engaging the public in community-based recreational activities that foster pluralism and peaceful coexistence;
- Allocate resources for psychosocial assistance (including for female-headed households) and formal and non-formal education—particularly in situations of protracted crisis—to ensure people dealing with trauma are not vulnerable to being drawn into violence.

2.3 Champion the women, peace, and security agenda

Lastly, MCC encourages Global Affairs to **champion the women, peace, and security agenda**. As is widely-recognized, while women and children are the minority of combatants in conflict they are disproportionately impacted by war—targeted by armed actors; facing sexual violence, inequality, and gender-based discrimination; and having fewer resources than men to protect themselves. Yet they are regularly excluded from peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Understanding the gender dimensions of armed conflict and peacebuilding is essential because of the demonstrable impacts that women’s meaningful participation in peace processes has on the successful implementation of agreements at the community level. As the [2015 Global Review of UNSCR 1325](#) noted, while much progress has been made on the overall normative framework, there is still a significant implementation gap.

To support the women, peace, and security agenda, MCC recommends that Global Affairs Canada:

- Revitalize Canada’s National Action Plan (C-NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security through broad consultations with women’s peace organizations, development and humanitarian agencies, diaspora networks, academics, and conflict-affected communities. Provide robust funding to a renewed C-NAP and broaden indicators of success (qualitative and quantitative) to include gender-sensitive outcomes;

- Mobilize high-level political champions to bring women, peace, and security issues into the mainstream of policy formulation within and beyond the department;
- Strengthen analytical capacity for assessing the gender dimensions of armed conflict, and integrate such analysis into strategic investments in targeted programming (i.e. dealing with conflict-related sexual violence, women’s participation in post-conflict economic recovery initiatives, etc.);
- Support new and existing women’s peace and human rights agencies—particularly grassroots organizations and networks—so that they are consistently funded, resourced, and included in decision-making.

Recommendation 3: Provide long-term, predictable, and flexible funding suitable to Canadian INGOs working with local grassroots organizations, and commit to growing Canada’s international assistance envelope with a clear timetable for reaching 0.7% of GNI

While the International Assistance Review Discussion Paper acknowledges that the government will need to create new programming and financing mechanisms to implement its development agenda, it is largely silent on the particulars of the funding framework and contains little discussion on other sources of financing for development. Further, MCC believes the review’s potential for change is undermined by the open reluctance to consider any significant and much-needed increases to Canadian ODA.

As many MCC partners and civil society organizations have noted, development partnerships require sustained focus and investment. Sustainable development and peace can only occur when local organizations responding to their society’s own social, economic, and political needs are supported and empowered. In this way, civil society organizations are a key strategic partners for the Government of Canada.

To support long-term, integrated development approaches, MCC recommends that Global Affairs Canada:

- Create a clear, time-bound plan for gradual and sustained increases to ODA with the aim of reaching the internationally-agreed upon target of 0.7% GNI;
- Promote an enabling environment for civil society organizations in Canada and abroad by fully implementing and making public the International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Civil Society Partnership Policy (2015);
- Provide long-term, predictable, and flexible funding to diverse types of civil society organizations, including multilateral organizations, and NGOs involved in program implementation, policy and advocacy, research, monitoring and evaluation, learning, and knowledge-sharing. Work towards longer planning cycles and more formal means by which developing country perspectives can be built into program planning. Ensure all thematic and geographical priorities have a well-focused set of plans that allow for sufficient flexibility and implementation with long horizons;
- Prioritize support for local civil society organizations with knowledge and relationships in the communities they serve. Broaden perspectives of success to focus on long-term outcomes and ensure accountability is not donor-led, defined, and measured but allows for flexibility and closer collaboration with local partners. Support local organizations to manage the risks and other costs inherent to the nature of work done in partnership, while supporting the sector’s capacity to innovate.

Recommendation 4: Ensure policy coherence across development, trade (4.1), and foreign affairs (4.2) agendas serves to strengthen—rather than temper—Canada’s commitment to the interests of developing countries

The International Assistance Review Discussion Paper briefly acknowledges the need for policy coherence across Global Affairs between development, foreign affairs, and trade. Indeed, policy coherence should be given sufficient weight in decision-making. To this end, MCC strongly encourages the government to ensure that policy coherence within the department always serve to strengthen—rather than temper—Canada’s commitment to the interests of developing countries and the poor and marginalized around the world.

Realizing this vision will require that the development, gender, and human rights impacts (both potential and actual) of Canada's actions be systematically considered within all existing and new policies across development, trade, and foreign affairs agendas. The work of advancing peace, gender equality, and human rights will also involve collaboration with other departments across the federal government.

To strengthen the building blocks for policy coherence, MCC recommends that Global Affairs Canada:

- Develop and make public a strategic policy framework that outlines how development, trade, and foreign affairs objectives will be managed and coordinated. Strengthen the capacity for monitoring, analyzing, and reporting on policy coherence for development;
- Ensure proper mechanisms are in place to resolve conflicts or inconsistencies between different departmental agendas (particularly in areas that are especially challenging for coherence, such as extractive sector activities, trade agreements, foreign direct investment, etc.) and maximize synergies;
- Integrate a “do no harm” policy across programs and practices to ensure all actions by government officials, NGOs, and private sector actors prevent harm and do not exacerbate conflict dynamics.

4.1 Ensure Canadian commercial interests do not undermine development

In the past, overarching policy frameworks such as the Global Markets Action Plan—which stressed that *all* diplomatic assets and part of the foreign aid budget would be leveraged to advance Canada's commercial interests—imposed a lopsided approach to Canada's foreign and development priorities. MCC strongly believes **there should be no confusion between development objectives and the promotion of commercial interests**. While trade is a legitimate interest of the Canadian government, it should be pursued outside of the ODA envelope, and always in a manner that prevents harm to local communities and upholds human rights. In particular times and places, this might require constraining our commercial interests in favour of protecting the rights and priorities of vulnerable peoples in partner countries.

To ensure development objectives are not subordinated to commercial interests, MCC recommends that Global Affairs Canada:

- Develop a strategy to ensure that Canada's commercial interests do not violate the spirit and letter of the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act—give clear rationale for engagement with the private sector, and outline strategic objectives and transparent procedures for partnership;
- Uphold the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in development. Prioritize the prevention of harm and the rights of communities in determining their own development strategies;
- Strengthen the oversight and regulation of Canadian extractive companies operating abroad by revitalizing a corporate accountability strategy that addresses human rights violations, environmental degradation, social damage, and corruption through non-judicial (i.e. ombudsperson, EITI, etc.) and judicial (i.e. access to courts) mechanisms. As resource extraction often results in “development deficits,” strategies must address corporate accountability in international assistance programming.

4.2 Strengthen a foreign affairs agenda for peace

Going forward, as the government works to revitalize Canada's foreign affairs policy, MCC encourages Global Affairs to build the department's capacity for responding creatively to the full array of complex international issues facing our world today. Building upon the peacebuilding policies and practices of the department's humanitarian and development programming, Canada's foreign affairs agenda should focus on resourcing non-military means of addressing insecurity around the globe. Indeed, we believe Canada has a valuable role to play in promoting and implementing policies that build sustainable peace.

To foster a holistic approach to peace and security, MCC recommends that Global Affairs Canada:

- Increase diplomatic efforts around conflict prevention and strengthen non-violent alternatives to use of force. Work with Department of National Defence to ensure all avenues for diplomacy and local peacebuilding have been exhausted before considering military intervention to address insecurity;

- Strengthen mediation and negotiation capacity, investing human and financial resources in United Nations’ mediation, conflict prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives as well as other multilateral peace efforts, with a particular focus to ensuring women’s meaningful participation;
- Reinvest in disarmament and arms control. As the widespread accessibility of cheap weapons is a key factor in exacerbating violence and displacement, Canada must rapidly become a state party to the Arms Trade Treaty;
- Renew support for a wide range of mine action projects—landmine and cluster bomb clearance, risk education, and victim assistance—to protect the lives and livelihoods of people in countries heavily-contaminated with unexploded ordinances, which stand as lethal barriers to development;
- Work with Department of National Defence to ensure military intervention, when used, always remains clearly separated from humanitarian assistance efforts, which must be independent, neutral, and impartial. When humanitarian efforts are too closely aligned with military objectives, aid is politicized in ways that are harmful to humanitarian workers and conflict-affected people alike.

III. Looking forward

Once again, MCC welcomes the opportunity to provide input into Canada’s International Assistance Review. As we make our recommendations, MCC is mindful of the challenging task before Global Affairs Canada to take careful consideration of ideas put forward by civil society organizations and citizens and to envision the most effective path forward.

Recommendation 5: Generate a white paper that clearly articulates Canada’s priorities for the next five years as well as corresponding strategies, policies, and action plans it will develop to implement that framework

While there has been some indication that a five-year action plan is likely to emerge from this consultation process, we strongly encourage Global Affairs Canada to develop a public white paper or policy framework on development cooperation that will not only clearly articulate Canada’s vision and priorities over the next five years but also identify corresponding strategies, policies, and action plans the government will create to implement that framework.

Finally, MCC encourages the government to complement this review with ongoing, iterative, and structured dialogue around the implementation of any new International Assistance Policy framework.