



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

_____ Militarism_____

Written Contribution:

* Please respect the **five (5)-page limit**

A feminist foreign policy is a great responsibility for a government to undertake, in particular because there is a risk that if the policy does not actually reinforce feminist processes, spirit, and objectives, it could undermine feminism, making it a hollow term. With that in mind, it's important to hold throughout the development and implementation of a feminist foreign policy the fundamental curiosity and courage at the heart of feminist theory and praxis.

Feminism is reflective, it's imaginative, it's always looking for why things are the way things are and challenging the answers. For a feminist approach, nothing is set in stone—the “way things are” is imposed by a patriarchal society and is our job as feminists to do things differently.

Militarism

This is particularly true when it comes to militarism. A feminist foreign policy should promote nonviolence as a core principle. Adding women to the military or increasing military budgets to ostensibly achieve “feminist” goals—i.e. “protection of women” or women’s rights or “empowerment”—is not feminist. Making space for women, gender non-conforming, or LGBTQ+ people to participate in violent institutions is not feminist. This may be about gender “equality,” but itself is not feminist, and it in fact *reinforces structures that undermine equality*. It perpetuates patriarchal approaches to difference and conflict—violent approaches—rather than investing in systems, structures, philosophies, and approaches that could actually enhance equality, like education and care, conflict prevention tools, transformative justice, reconciliation, etc.

Applying a feminist approach to foreign policy and to militarism gives us key insights about gender *norms* that are imperative to understanding weapon proliferation and possession and use—to understand why our world is so militarised. Without a feminist analysis, it's easy to miss how norms around masculinity—put simply, what it is to be “a real man”—are based on ideas such as violence = strength, weapons = power. We've inherited a patriarchal system that organises international relations and domestic budgets around the idea that strength and security can best be secured through violence. Feminism helps us unpack this for what it is and opens space then to consider what we actually need in order to achieve peace, equality, justice, and safety for the most people possible.

Militarism in fact accelerates, facilitates, and exacerbates all of the threats identified in the government’s paper on feminist foreign policy, including armed conflict, displacement, attacks on human rights, and the questioning of multilateralism and international law. A feminist foreign policy should not promote women in militaries but instead should promote the dismantling of militaries, the redirection of military spending, and a direct confrontation to the gendered norms like violent masculinities that promote militarism

Otherwise, we're not pursuing a feminist foreign policy, but at best a “gender-sensitive policy,” in that it recognises people are impacted differently on the basis of sex and gender but does not attempt to change the underlying factors that have created this situation. Feminism is not just about experiences based on one’s gender, it’s about the ways in which we operate in the world to account for these different experiences, and also to confront and challenge the systems and structures that perpetuate the harms that are experienced—the patriarchal systems, the ideologies of violent masculinity, etc. *Feminism requires us to actively dismantle those systems, not to add women to them.*

Keeping in mind the above, a feminist foreign policy would:

- Reduce military spending and redirect that money toward prevention of harm to all people, focusing on investments in education, housing, health, human rights, environmental protection and preservation, decolonisation, care, etc.
- Promote alternatives to militarism and violence, such as human security and nonviolent solutions to conflict. Actively frame militarism as patriarchal and promote dialogue and cooperation.
- End arms transfers and production that lead to human rights and international humanitarian law violations, in keeping with obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty, and further, not pursue or seek to develop arms production and export as a “jobs creator” or industrial investment, but instead invest in technologies and processes for a Green New Deal and a degrowth economy in order to mitigate climate change and facilitate regeneration and healing from environmental destruction.
- Sign and ratify the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and work for global nuclear disarmament. A feminist foreign policy would not support the continuation of a “nuclear deterrence” policy by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation or support the possible use of nuclear weapons, recognising that nuclear weapons are tools of patriarchy.¹ Instead, a feminist government would support the TPNW, which is the only feminist international law we have on nuclear weapons.²
- Help develop a prohibition on autonomous weapon systems and commit to not developing or using such weapons. Weapon systems that can operate without meaningful human control, especially those used to kill human beings based on sensors and software, are extremely patriarchal. Their algorithms can be programmed with racial and gender bias and they will perpetuate projects of processing, controlling, and killing human beings as objects.³
- Support, sign, and implement the political declaration against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) currently under development under the leadership of the government of Ireland, and commit to undertaking action to end the use of EWIPA. Explosive weapon use in towns and cities has gendered impacts, causes incredible civilian suffering, and reverberating effects that last long after a conflict has ended. Preventing such harm must be part of any credible feminist foreign policy, including because of the ways in which sexual and other gender-based violence is exacerbated by destruction of populated areas and displacement.⁴

¹ Nuclear weapons are tools of patriarchal power, promoting massive violence as well as oppressive threats. They are treated with reverence and bestowed with magical powers such as deterrence, when really they are about destroying entire cities and killing hundreds of thousands of civilians in a single moment. Nuclear weapon possessors use patriarchal techniques such as gaslighting and victim blaming to defend their arsenals. All of this impedes the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and gender equality, undermines true global cooperation, threatens peace and security, perpetuates militarisation and violence as essential to security, etc. For more, please see [Critical Studies on Security, Signs, TEDx](#), or contact for more details.

² The TPNW is feminist in its provisions and the process through which it was negotiated. In relation to its provisions, the Treaty recognises the gendered impacts of nuclear weapons, it promotes women’s participation in nuclear disarmament discussions and initiatives, it recognises the impacts of nuclear weapon activities on Indigenous communities, and it includes victim assistance and environmental remediation obligations. In relation to process, the Treaty was not rendered beholden to a few heavily militarised countries, but instead gave equitable space to all countries of the world on the basis of feminist principles of equality. It was inclusive and transparent and involved activists, survivors, academics, and international organisations along with states.

³ For more information, please see these [papers](#) on autonomous weapons in relation to patriarchy and gender-based violence. See the [Campaign to Stop Killer Robots](#) for more details about these weapon systems.

⁴ For more information, please see a paper on [women and explosive weapons](#), the [gendered impacts of military operations in Mosul](#), and the [impacts of the use of EWIPA on human rights](#). Also see [information](#) on the political declaration process.

Diplomacy

Under the current government, Canada is good at advancing language around gender and women's rights in as many spaces as possible – such as in disarmament resolutions at the UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament and International Security, for example. This is great and needs to be continued. But this needs to be made consistent. A foreign policy isn't feminist just because it supports women's rights or gender equality; it's feminist if it advances peace, equality, and justice for all, if it supports the efforts of the least powerful to advance norms and rules and laws that don't protect those engaged in brutalities and bullying.

The “rules-based international order” is important in so far as it is about protecting people and planet from war and violence. Where the rules facilitate harm or are manipulated to do so, they must be changed. To protect what is useful about this order and transform what is not, Canadian diplomats must work with the majority of states, not just reflexively supporting the United States or NATO allies. Real change will only occur if countries concerned with justice and equality actually fight for it, and not provide cover or tacit support for those using the rules to their own advantage or outright violating the rules.

Emerging vulnerabilities; migration and refugees

Canada's approach to climate action must be feminist: which means it must acknowledge the way in which the government as a colonial settler state is treating the Indigenous nations whose land it operates upon within Canada and abroad. Feminist foreign policy requires a different relationship with land, water, plants, animals, and people. Canada is an extractivist state; this must change. Decolonisation in relation to First Nations as well as the planet is imperative to pursue a Green New Deal, Red Deal, and degrowth economy leading to environmental protection, climate change mitigation, and economic justice.

In addition, Canada should approach issues of migration within an understanding of colonial, capitalist, and militarist history and current realities, and should recognise that freedom of movement of human beings is essential. Concepts like asylum, refugees, and migration are rooted in our shared humanity and are integral to a feminist foreign policy. Such a policy must understand and recognise how harms have been perpetuated around the world, why people are on the move because of these harms, and the responsibilities and obligations of Canada in this regard.