

#WPSAdvice: Our advice to the incoming government on women, peace and security

Originally published between September 17 and December 9, 2019



#WPSAdvice: Welcome to Our Blog Series
September 17 2019

By Beth Woroniuk, Coordinator, WPSN-C Follow her on twitter [@bethottawa](https://twitter.com/bethottawa)

The elections are here. For the next few weeks, we'll be bombarded by ads, polls, speeches, digital campaigns, news coverage, robo calls, gaffs and debates. Candidates knock on doors. Organizations work hard to get attention for their issues. Pundits predict. Political operatives spin...

The members of the Women, Peace and Security Network – Canada are following the campaign with great interest. Many members are [asking](#) candidates their views and looking for [commitments](#) on specific actions. There is an active coalition [Up for Debate](#) pushing for greater attention to women's rights throughout the campaign.

We're also looking ahead to the dust settling, the formation of the incoming government and its legislative agenda. And we have some advice on how Canada can move forward on our 'Women, Peace and Security' commitments.

In the following weeks, we'll hear from WPSN-C members with their advice to the incoming government – regardless of the outcome - on how to make concrete

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progress on the WPS agenda. There are thoughtful and concrete recommendations on gender-based violence in conflict, disarmament, the Saudi arms deal, protecting and supporting women human rights defenders, peacekeeping, and more.

What is the Women, Peace and Security Agenda?

We often use ‘women, peace and security’ as short-hand for an ambitious agenda for change. Although it is rooted in Resolutions passed by the United Nations Security Council, feminist peacemakers around the world have pushed for a broad interpretation. We want to see the links among and between militarism, patriarchy, environmental catastrophe, inequalities, failed economic models, racism, & toxic masculinities made clear. This will help to develop solutions to build a more just, equal, and sustainable world.

In 2017, when the Government of Canada was preparing for the relaunch of its WPS National Action Plan, members of our Network held [many discussions](#) and developed recommendations. We wanted to see Canada include a [broad range of issues](#) in its NAP and adopt a coherent approach across all of government.

Our key [recommendations](#) were:

1. **Support women peacebuilders through feminist and women’s rights organizations.** The importance of women activists and women’s organizations in building peace is well recognized. Canada can be a global leader in supporting these organizations at the grassroots, at national and regional levels, and at the international level (networking, learning and influencing global trends). This requires long-term, stable and predictable funding, as well as diplomatic support.
2. **Address the inter-related nature of domestic and international WPS issues.** Global realities consistently highlight the growing interconnectedness of states. Issues such as conflict-related migration (especially refugees), violent extremism, illegal flows of weapons, human trafficking, and epidemics have both domestic and international dimensions. Thus, the C-NAP cannot only be an externally facing document.
3. **Include investments in conflict prevention that address root causes.** The WPS Agenda is about building peace and peaceful options to support conflict resolution. This requires a focus on building non-military alternatives to armed

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conflict and resolving conflicts before they become deadly. It also requires investments in nuclear disarmament, countering violent extremism, reducing the arms trade, promoting the conditions for inclusive growth, and developing alternatives to militarization based on an intersectional gender perspective.

4. **Include steps to transform the internal culture of Canadian security institutions (primarily the Canadian Armed Forces and RCMP) as they relate to attitudes towards women, sexual abuse/violence, homophobia, and other diversity issues.** If Canada supports training of other militaries and police forces, it is essential that our own institutions be world leaders in this area. This also includes robust attention to sexual abuse and exploitation by peacekeepers and other deployed security forces.
5. **A strong mandate to include a feminist approach (inclusive of a gender perspective) and actions to implement the WPS agenda across all areas of Canada's foreign, defence and development policies, programmes and initiatives.** The commitment to use GBA+ (with clear guidance on intersectional analysis) across all policy areas should be restated and resourced within the CNAP. As well, there should be a clear imperative not just to do an analysis, but also develop proactive measures on the WPS agenda even when this is not the official focus of discussion. To name just a few areas, Canada can bring gender perspectives (and analysis of gender hierarchies), as well as WPS priorities into discussions on peace operations, nuclear disarmament, humanitarian assistance, countering violent extremism, conflict resolution in specific contexts, post-conflict recovery and the conflict/climate change nexus (leading by example).

Canada's Commitments

In November 2017, Canada [launched](#) its [second National Action Plan](#) on WPS.

The objectives of the Plan are:

1. Increase the meaningful participation of women, women's organizations and networks in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict statebuilding.
2. Prevent, respond to and end impunity for sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated in conflict and sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers and other international personnel, including humanitarian and development staff.

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3. Promote and protect women's and girls' human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in fragile, conflict and post-conflict settings.
4. Meet the specific needs of women and girls in humanitarian settings, including the upholding of their sexual rights and access to sexual and reproductive health services.
5. Strengthen the capacity of peace operations to advance the WPS agenda, including by deploying more women and fully embedding the WPS agenda into CAF operations and police deployments.

Network members [applauded](#) the new plan for its ambition and detail, but also raised questions, urged greater investments and cited the importance of more coherent approaches to an overall feminist foreign policy.

We've seen one [progress report](#) and look forward to the tabling of the second progress report once Parliament resumes sitting after the election. This progress report presented an optimistic outlook, noting that the GoC was 'on track' or 'mostly on track' to achieve the Action Plan's objectives.

Global Progress

This year, the United Nations will host WPS week starting October 28th. The Security Council will host an open debate on WPS issues on October 29th. Next year will mark the [20th anniversary](#) of the first Security Council Resolution on WPS – known by its number: 1325.

While there has been some progress, there is frustration on the slow progress on the implementation of national and global commitments. Women continue to be left out of peace negotiations. Financial [investments lag behind](#) global rhetoric. Sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers continues.

Much remains to be done.

Your inputs into these discussions are welcome. What do you think the incoming government should do to support Canada's implementation of the WPS agenda? Write to us at wpsncanada@gmail.com. Follow us on twitter: [@WPSNCanada](#). Use the hashtags: [#elxn43](#) [#WPSAdvice](#). Watch our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/wpsncanada>

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#WPSAdvice: Support your allies, Canada: Women on the frontlines of crisis
September 19 2019

By Shaughn McArthur, Policy and Influence Lead, CARE Canada

I first met Angelina Nyajima Simon Jial at a humanitarian conference in Geneva in 2016.

She was gentle and soft-spoken, and I wondered how she would fare among the caffeine-fueled delegations from international organizations, vying for influence and visibility.

Sitting in the vast plenary hall on the last day of the conference, my doubts were cast aside when Angelina's image suddenly appeared on the jumbotron.

The light on her microphone turned green. As Angelina began to speak, delegates looked up from their Twitter feeds. The hall fell silent.

Her voice was soft, her words measured. But Angelina's message was the most powerful any of us had heard in days.

Angelina spoke of her experiences and challenges as head of Hope Restoration South Sudan, the small organization she established in 2010. Its mission is to help women in a country with some of the world's highest rates of gender-based violence (GBV).

READ MORE

Hope Restoration has struggled for adequate and sustainable finance for years. Angelina spoke about how she had recently been forced to close a safe space dedicated to helping GBV survivors. Just six months after its opening, the centre's funding had been redirected to other "priorities."

Why?

Angelina offered some answers:

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Because women's rights and agency are still not central to humanitarian planning and decision-making.

Because our compliance systems privilege established organizations.

Because too many powerful humanitarian actors remain unwilling to cede power to local women's rights actors.

Because protecting and helping women recover from even the most egregious violations of personal security is still considered optional, or less important than the right to water, shelter and food.

Months later, Angelina would carry her message to the United Nations Security Council.

She spoke as clearly then, to the leaders of the world's most powerful countries, as she had in that conference hall in Geneva:

"How do you tell someone who has been subjected to horrific acts of sexual violence that you can no longer help them?"

Angelina's question should serve as guidance to whomever oversees international assistance policy under the next Government of Canada.

Conflict-related gender-based violence on the rise

The facts speak for themselves: In an era of multiple protracted crises, sexual and gender-based violence continues to be used with impunity in conflict and emergency settings around the world.

Just last month, a UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar concluded that the country's soldiers "routinely and systematically employed rape, gang rape and other violent and forced sexual acts against women, girls, boys, men and transgender people."

Today, mothers of the children born of this violence nurse in limbo, stigmatized and ostracized, in refugee camps along the Bangladeshi side of the border.

In 2018, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) documented 1,049 cases of conflict-related

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sexual violence against 605 women, 436 girls, 4 men and 4 boys in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A 2018 report by the International Federation for Human Rights documents ISIL fighters' systematic enslavement and sexual violence against the Yazidi minority in Iraq.

Worldwide, more than 70% of women in conflict and emergency situations have experienced gender-based violence.

A Canadian priority

Canadians can be proud that successive Cabinets have emphasized women's rights to protection from GBV in their foreign policies.

In 1994, Canada facilitated the creation of the position of UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women.

In 2012, Canada helped establish the annual resolution on violence against women at the UN Human Rights Council.

In 2013, Canada pledged \$5 million to G8 efforts targeting sexual violence in conflict zones.

Just last year, Canada's G7 Presidency saw the adoption of the Whistler declaration on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian action.

Parliamentarians from around the world later made separate commitments to tackle gender inequality and GBV in a landmark Ottawa Statement of Commitment.

Canada has strong foundations for continued leadership on GBV in emergencies. The major task for Canada's next Minister of International Development will be to translate these commitments into tangible support for women like Angelina.

A blueprint

The concept of supporting women's participation in the design and implementation of humanitarian responses is written into the Government's new Feminist Humanitarian Policy.

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The question now is how Canada will go about implementing that policy in a way that more consistently upholds women's and girls' rights and agency on the ground.

Earlier this year, CARE, along with more than 40 organizations around the world, released a blueprint entitled "Women and girls' rights and agency in humanitarian action: A life-saving priority."

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It is based on months of consultation – with humanitarian organizations, networks, advocacy groups, and the countless partners like Angelina, with whom we work every day.

The position covers five broad areas:

Women's and girls' voice and leadership;
Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights;
Gender-Based Violence;
Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse; and
Women's Economic Empowerment.

These are understood to be non-optional and mutually reinforcing – take one away, and the others will fail.

But its call to action can be summarized in three key points:

Ensure meaningful participation of women and girls - both at high-level roundtables in Geneva and New York, as well as at cluster meetings in crisis-affected countries like South Sudan.

Hold humanitarian agencies accountable to work with women's and girls' rights actors – including through quantitative and qualitative reporting.

Mobilize long-term, predictable funding for local women and girls' rights actors – because these organizations alone are capable of putting women at centre of conversation before the response even begins. And they will still be there when everyone else has left.

Turning point

There is no longer any question of women being passive victims waiting for help.

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They are volunteers, activists, and first responders. They are risking their lives to help and speak up for others. To ignore this reality leads to less effective and efficient humanitarian responses. And it puts lives at risk.

A more systematic approach for upholding women's and girls' rights and agency in humanitarian action is within reach.

Canada knows this to be true as much as any other rights-respecting country on earth.

And leaders like Angelina are looking to Canada to lead by example, and to champion measures among governments, humanitarian agencies are willing to cede some of our power to bring about that shift.

As a longstanding proponent of the rights-based international order, the next Government of Canada can demonstrate its forward-looking agenda by leading efforts to uphold women's and girls' rights where they are furthest behind: in conflict and emergency settings.

This begins by working more directly with women on the frontlines – women like Angelina who, with the right kind of support, are ready and capable to be some of Canada's strongest allies in the fight to eradicate gender-based violence in conflicts and emergencies worldwide.

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#WPSAdvice: A WPS Priority: Ending the Saudi Arms Deal
September 27 2019

*By Brittany Lambert, Women's Rights Policy Specialist, Oxfam Canada
([@BrittanyLam](#)) and Christine Martin, Humanitarian Campaigns & Outreach Officer
([@AskHerChristine](#))*



What is *our* Women, Peace and Security advice to the incoming government? To ensure policy coherence across all foreign policy actions. Canada's bold commitments to Women, Peace and Security hold tremendous potential. But this potential will go unrealized if Canada simultaneously fuels wars that harm women.

Case in point: Canada's ongoing arms sales to Saudi Arabia, a country engaged in a devastating war on neighboring Yemen. As the arms industry profits, women in Yemen are paying the price.

Take Soud, for example, who has lost four young children in the war. Her two young daughters (3 and 4 years old) were killed by missiles as they played outside. The attack also left Soud with a physical disability, making it difficult to care for her remaining children. As if such heartbreak was not enough, she later lost her two sons (5 and 6 years old) when they contracted the measles and she was unable to afford a doctor's care and medicine.

Or take Nada, a single mother of four, who fled with her children when armed conflict gripped her city. They now sleep in the hallway of a school-turned-shelter, on a mattress they all share. She shoulders the weight of caring and providing for her family alone. She articulates what so many women in Yemen feel: "We have nothing; we are not part of this. Yet we bear the burden of this war"

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The situation in Yemen is nothing short of horrifying. Violence, rising food prices, the destruction of infrastructure, and a lack of basic services makes daily survival a painful struggle for millions of Yemenis. To date, the war has claimed over 17,000 civilian casualties, forced over 3 million people from their homes, and made 80% of the population reliant on humanitarian aid. It is the world's worst humanitarian crisis - ever.

And, tragically, there's no end in sight. Four and a half years since the start of the conflict, violence continues to wreck the country with indiscriminate airstrikes, shelling, and landmines attacks. All fighting parties, including the Saudi-led coalition, are reportedly violating international humanitarian law (IHL) – hitting civilians through attacks on hospitals, marketplaces and schools. The effects of the war in Yemen are devastating, and there is no doubt that weapons are one of the main causes.

The paradox of weapon sales and feminist foreign policy

Canada has a range of policies that, together, outline a feminist approach to foreign policy. [The National Action Plan on WPS](#), the [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#), [Canada's Inclusive Approach to Trade](#), [Canada's Defense Policy](#), and [Canada's policy on Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action](#) are but a few examples.

Arms exports undermine a feminist agenda in several ways. Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) lays the groundwork for conflict prevention by prioritizing gender equality. This is a smart approach since evidence shows a strong link between gender equality and peace. Indeed, [gender equality is a better predictor of peacefulness than a country's level of democracy, level of wealth or its ethnoreligious makeup](#). But the FIAP's preventative efforts won't be effective if Canada simultaneously sells weapons that fuel wars and harm women.



Wars have detrimental impacts on social and economic development, and gender equality. It is not surprising, then, that the war in Yemen has deepened gender inequality, reversing women's fragile gains in education and the workforce. It is inefficient for Canada to focus its international assistance spending on women's rights in Yemen, while selling

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weapons that result in the suppression of their rights.

Furthermore, there are [strong links between unregulated weapon sales and gender-based violence \(GBV\)](#). For women, the risk of GBV increases with armed conflict due to displacement, the breakdown of social structures, and a collapse of the rule of law. Where weapons are poorly regulated, widely available, and misused, there is almost always an upsurge in gender-based violence. This is certainly the case in Yemen, where GBV has risen by 63% since the conflict broke out in 2015.

Gender and the Arms Trade Treaty

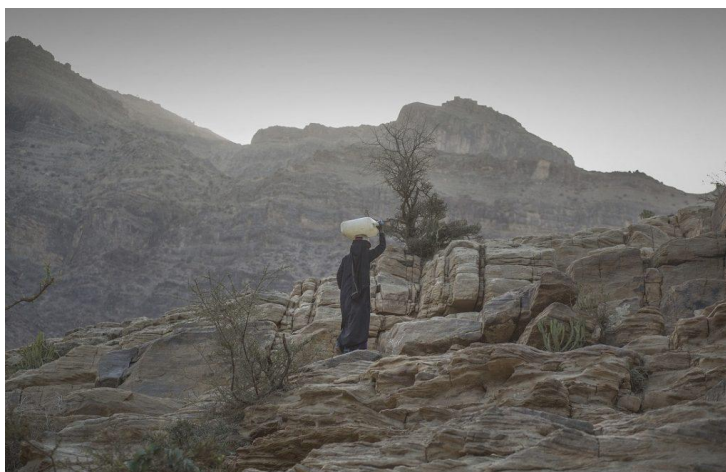
Just last week, Canada formally joined the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) - an international effort to regulate the flow of weapons to countries where they could be used to perpetrate war crimes, genocide and other grave violations of international law.

The ATT even includes a specific article (7.4) requiring countries to consider the risk of arms “being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children.” This is the first legally binding global instrument to recognize and create obligations around the connection between arms transfers and GBV. In this sense, the ATT makes a critical contribution to global efforts to address GBV.

While joining the ATT is an important milestone for Canada, it will regrettably not affect pre-existing arms deals like the one with Saudi Arabia.

Yet, if Canadian arms transfers to Saudi Arabia were assessed according to ATT criteria, the assessment would almost certainly conclude that serious risks exist.

The risk assessment should arguably go beyond examining attacks on women (which in themselves constitute violations of IHL) and look at the wider gendered impact of the use of weapons in Yemen. This is essential to reducing humanitarian harm in conflict, which the ATT was designed to do.



The wider gendered impacts of the armed conflict in Yemen are many; and are obvious in the earlier stories of Soud, Nada, and countless other Yemeni women:

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- Women and children are more likely to become internally displaced;
- Women who are injured by blasts can miscarry, or become unable to care for their children due to disability;
- Destruction of infrastructure means women have to walk further to get water – increasing the risk of GBV. It also means they cannot access vital healthcare services, including pre/post-natal services and medical care for their children;
- Women who are not accompanied by a male relative have difficulties accessing aid;
- 1.1 million pregnant and lactating women are acutely malnourished, leading to high rates of maternal and infant mortality.

The way forward: Linking the Arms Control, Women, Peace and Security (WPS), and Sustainable Development Agendas

It is incoherent for Canada to proceed with weapon sales to Saudi Arabia, especially now that Canada has joined the ATT. The next government of Canada must abide by the spirit of the ATT and stop selling weapons to Saudi Arabia.

Canada should write compliance with the ATT GBV commitments into its WPS National Action Plan, with departmental WPS focal points contributing to the development of risk assessment processes for Article 7.4 of the Treaty.

Beyond this, it is important to tackle other drivers of the conflict in Yemen, including the fact that the current political process does not address Yemeni civilians' priorities, concerns, and grievances. While women-led organizations and youth groups continue to mobilize for sustainable peace and an inclusive political process, their voices remain largely marginalized. Canada should push for an inclusive peace process, and support the meaningful participation of Yemeni women in the process. Evidence shows that when civil society groups - including women's organizations - participate in peace agreements, they are [64% less likely to fail](#).

Canada should provide long-term support for the Yemeni women's movement, to strengthen their advocacy and their ability to help shape their country's future. We know that [countries where women are empowered are vastly more secure](#) and less likely to relapse into violent conflict. Nowhere is this more crucial than in Yemen, where the war has already [pushed development back by 21 years](#), and where recovery will take decades.

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Policy coherence across all of Canada's foreign policy areas is the key to protecting women's rights where they are furthest behind, in Yemen. What could be more important, and more feminist, than that?

Photo credits: Moayed Al-Shaybani, Oxfam; Gabreez, Oxfam

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#WPSAdvice: Raising her voice: KAIROS calls on Canada to include grassroots women's organizations in peace building policies and practise
October 6 2019

By: Kirsten Van Houten, Global Partnerships Coordinator [@Kirsten Explores](#) and Rachel Warden Partnerships Manager, KAIROS Canada [@kairoscanada](#)

A recent visit with our partners in the Philippines highlighted the important roles that grassroots women are playing in defending human rights and supporting peace processes in the Philippines. It also made brutally clear the significant risk and personal cost of this work.



In Manila, we met with women lawyers who play an active role in protecting the rights of the poor amid the Duterte government's War on Drugs. The Philippine government has acknowledged at least 6,600 deaths in the anti-drug campaign since 2016, but human rights groups believe the death toll is much higher.

In fact, the Philippines's Human Rights Commission has estimated the number could exceed 27,000 and pointed out that victims come mostly from urban poor communities. These lawyers and their colleagues play an important role in supporting the families of the deceased through legal and psychosocial support. They also offer legal support to individuals facing trumped-up drug charges arising from rigorous arrest targets set by the regime.

In Baguio in the Cordillera Autonomous Region, we were introduced to women's human rights defenders who, through their defense of land rights, are countering increasing militarization of their territories. They also play an important role in educating members of their communities about human rights and again offer legal and psychosocial support when those rights are violated.

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These women, and their male allies, conduct their work at great personal risk. Over the last year, five of the members of our partner organisation Innabuyog faced arbitrary arrest and detention because of their human rights work. Further, an American citizen and journalist, Brandon Lee, was critically injured in an assassination attempt that was witnessed by his eight-year-old daughter. This assault stemmed directly from his human rights education work with the Ifugao peasants' movement.

In Mindanao we met with members of Lumad (Indigenous) communities who have been displaced by ongoing armed violence and militarization. Even in crowded evacuation camps, women have organized to protect the well-being of their children and communities and are struggling to preserve an education system that is based on Indigenous knowledge and relationship with territory. As Indigenous land and life defenders, they are calling for respect for Indigenous rights, a resumption of all peace processes and an end to Marshal law.

Women-led grassroots organizations are laying the foundations for sustainable peace in the world's most volatile regions. Despite enduring violence in conflict and post-conflict periods as a strategy of war, women and women's organizations play key roles in conflict prevention and resolution, as well as in building and sustaining inclusive and just peace. Yet, they undertake this work at great risk. Women human rights defenders and peacebuilders are criminalized and even killed.



This critical role of women in peacebuilding is increasingly being recognized by the United Nations and more recently in Canadian foreign policy. This has been asserted through the [Canadian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security](#) and its [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#). The important role that women play in truth and reconciliation within Indigenous communities is also

increasingly being recognized in Canada and internationally. Furthermore, Canada

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has re-asserted its commitment to protecting human rights defenders in its recently updated guidelines – [Voices at Risk](#) which now include specific guidelines related to women and Indigenous human rights defenders.

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda has emerged out of a series of United Nations Security Council Resolutions, including UNSCR 1325 (2000), which protect women from sexual and gender-based violence in times of war and recognize the important contributions that they play in building and sustaining an inclusive and just peace.

Peace agreements have a 35 percent greater chance of lasting at least 15 years when women help draft them than when they do not, according to *Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies*. Yet, only five percent of international funds dedicated to peace and security is allocated to equality between women and men or the empowerment of women in these processes.

The participation and inclusion of grassroots women is especially important because they increase the diversity of women's voices that are heard through these processes and are more likely to include the voices of historically marginalized groups. The KAIROS Women of Courage: Women, Peace and Security Program empowers women human rights defenders and women's rights organizations to participate effectively in peacebuilding, reconciliation and human rights processes at all levels in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Philippines, South Sudan and the West Bank.

Canada has taken important steps towards becoming a global leader in supporting gender equality and women's effective participation peacebuilding. There is also increasing recognition of the critical role of Indigenous women in peace and reconciliation processes in the [final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#) and in the [final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and Girls](#).

Yet, Canada must do more to implement these policies.

Based on our recent experiences and testimonies we heard in the Philippines, we present five steps that the Government of Canada can take to promote and protect the inclusion of diverse women's voices in international peacebuilding efforts.

- 1. *Raise Canada's Official Development Assistance to 0.7 percent of our Gross National Income.***

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The next government should seek to build on these gains and take efforts to fully fund and implement its Feminist International Assistance Policy. Canada's official development assistance accounts for only 0.26 percent of the country's gross national income, well below, the 0.7 target set by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1970 and reaffirmed more recently by the United Nations General Assembly.

2. *Ensure that grassroots women peacebuilders are integrated into peacebuilding efforts that are supported under Canada's international assistance policy.*

KAIROS also wants to ensure that efforts to support women's participation in peacebuilding efforts, especially at the grassroots level, are sustainable and fully funded as part of a robust international assistance policy. The next government should be sure to integrate the voices of grassroots women peacebuilders in their policy and practice.

3. *Elevate the voices of Indigenous women in peace and reconciliation in Canada and internationally.*

Our experience in the Philippines highlighted the discrimination and marginalization that Indigenous women face around the world, as well as in Canada. Full integration of Indigenous women into Canada's own Truth and Reconciliation process and their protection from systemic violence remain a challenge. Canada must play a role in elevating the voices of Indigenous women in peace and reconciliation processes in Canada, in the Philippines and internationally. This should be undertaken by working to end systemic violence against Indigenous women, starting with the implementation of all 213 calls for justice in the Final Report of National Inquiry into MMIWG.

4. *Increase core and programme-specific funding to grassroots women's peacebuilding efforts.*

The next government should increase its core and programme-based financial support to grassroots women's peacebuilding organisations such as those engaged in the Women of Courage program. This financing provides integral support to these organisations and facilitates their ability to persist in challenging contexts.

5. *Ensure the consistent and ongoing implementation of Voices at Risk: Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders.*

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Canada must continue to protect the lives and work of women human rights defenders in conflict-affected contexts through the consistent implementation of Voices at Risk: Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders and implementation of the recommendations in [Raising her Voice: Confronting the Unique Challenges Facing Women Human Rights Defenders](#), published by the Sub-Committee on International Human Rights of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons in June 2019. The report calls for the Government of Canada to create a comprehensive action plan to protect women human rights defenders, and to support their work.

Please note that the views in these blog posts are those of the authors and may not represent the views of all members of the WPSN-C.

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#WPSAdvice: How Canada can better address gender equality issues as part of its contribution to international peace and security missions
October 8 2019

By Kristine St-Pierre, Director, The WPS Group and WPSN-C Steering Committee Member. Follow her on twitter [@Kristine_StP](https://twitter.com/Kristine_StP)

In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325. This was a landmark resolution as it recognized that peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men, and that peace is only sustainable if women are fully included ([Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325](#)). The resolution, along with eight subsequent resolutions, form what is known as the 'WPS Agenda.' The agenda covers a wide-range of issues including women's participation in peace processes, the protection of women and girls in conflict, and the integration of gender perspectives into all aspects of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.



To support the implementation of the agenda, Member States are asked to develop National Actions Plans (NAPs). To date, 82 countries have adopted a NAP (42% of all UN Member States). Canada [launched](#) its [second National Action Plan](#) for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security in November 2017. One of the government's commitments is to strengthen the capacity of peace operations to advance the WPS agenda, including by deploying more women and fully embedding the WPS agenda into Canadian Armed Forces operations and police deployments.

While the media over the last two years has in large part focused its attention on total deployment numbers (and how the current government has yet to fulfill its pledge), not much has been said of the activities undertaken on the women, peace

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and security front. (See for example:

<https://www.hilltimes.com/2019/09/02/liberals-un-peacekeeping-re-engagement-promise-left-half-finished/213316>;

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/peacekeeping-mission-200-1.5206364>).



For example:

- Canadian female military and police personnel currently account for 28% of those deployed as part of Canadian peace and security operations. (These operations include military and police deployments as part of UN peacekeeping missions, as well as Canadian police deployments in Ukraine, Iraq and Palestine. They do not, however, include military training missions in Ukraine and Iraq for example. Data used combines information from Walter Dorn and the RCMP.) The percentage of Canadian military women deployed to UN missions is 18% (21 out of 122), while the percentage of women police deployed as part of UN and other international missions (including police contributions to Ukraine, Iraq and Palestine) is at 45% (35 out of 77).
- The government launched the [Elsie Initiative](#), a multilateral initiative that will see a combination of approaches to help overcome barriers to increasing women's meaningful participation in peace operations.
- [The CAF has deployed 8 Gender Advisors \(GENADS\) as part of overseas missions since 2016; two more will be deployed in 2019.](#)
- A female Canadian police officer took on the position of Contingent Commander and Gender Advisor in Iraq, and gender advisors are included as part of the Ukraine, Haiti and Mali missions.
- Canadian police missions, through the work of their gender advisers, have also undertaken important work and initiatives to advance the WPS agenda, including developing education material on gender perspectives, conducting training on sexual and gender-based violence, working specifically with women police officers and supporting the creation of networks among female police officers, and consulting with women civil society groups.

At the same time, however, it is crucial to mention the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against Canadian uniformed personnel while on mission, and

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[Canada's inaction](#) when it comes to conducting investigations and rendering disciplinary measures.

In addition, while the above strides are important, much more work needs to be done to ensure that they are not one-offs, but are part of a systematic approach to international peace and security.

To support this work, I would like to offer three recommendations to the incoming government on how Canada can better address gender equality and women, peace and security issues as part of its contribution to international peace and security missions.

They are:

1. **Prioritize women's voices as part of discussions around Canada's international peace and security commitments**, to ensure a clear understanding of women, peace and security issues and to identify appropriate solutions. This means seeking participation from **civil society, women's rights groups, Indigenous women, and women from diverse communities** (including refugee, diaspora, and immigrant communities) to attend meetings. This means creating a deliberate space for civil society to gather and provide collective input. As such, I recommend that the incoming government sets a new standard for collaboration with civil society – both within Canada and in countries where Canadians are deployed – and specifically commits to supporting the women's movement and women's rights organizations working to advance the WPS agenda.
2. **Prioritize women, peace and security issues** as part of every Canadian peace and security mission objectives. In addition to continuing to deploy a higher percentage of uniformed women, it will be important to better prepare and support officers selected to deploy as gender advisers. Gender advisers cannot and should not act on their own. In order to succeed in their work, they must have the support of their leadership, and of the rest of the team, as well as adequate resources. In addition, a mission shouldn't just rely on its gender adviser to prioritize WPS issues. It should have a plan in place for how it will advance these issues as part of its mandate and make it a public document. Doing so would ensure coherence within the mission in terms of priorities, approach and messaging, and support a more sustainable approach to the peace and security work Canadian uniformed personnel do abroad.

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3. **Fund gender equality and women, peace and security training** that is accessible to military, police and civilian personnel *in Canada*. There is currently no organization in Canada devoted to comprehensive and multidimensional peacekeeping training, and very few working specifically on gender equality and women, peace and security training. This means that Canadians, whether police, military or civilian, in search of both basic and more in-depth training on women, peace and security must look to Europe or other parts of the world. Yet, the knowledge and expertise exists in Canada. As a result, I urge the incoming government to recognize that Canada, through Canadian civil society, academics and practitioners, has the capacity to lead in this area and to invest in multidimensional peace operations training with guaranteed investments in gender equality and women, peace and security.

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#WPSAdvice: Put Canada back in Humanitarian Disarmament
October 10 2019

By Erin Hunt, [@erinlynnhunt](#), Program Manager, Mines Action Canada and Isabelle Jones, [@issjones](#), Campaign Outreach Manager, Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.

There are some things that are just associated with Canada; maple syrup, hockey, Mounties in red serge, toques, peacekeeping, and being polite, eh? One of those examples of Canadiana is disarmament. Canada was the first country who had the materials and the know-how to create our own nuclear weapons program but opted not to. We have a long history of pushing for disarmament that spanned the Cold War. Through the [Ottawa Process](#), Canada led the world to ban anti-personnel landmines because of their humanitarian impact. We created the humanitarian disarmament approach.

Unfortunately, recent Canadian governments have forgotten this aspect of our international identity. Funding to disarmament programs has declined. While Canada is always present in international disarmament fora we seldom champion initiatives.

Our advice to the new government is to embrace our historical leadership role and move forward towards a safer world for us all by stepping up on humanitarian disarmament.

When we talk about humanitarian disarmament we mean an area of work where the humanitarian impact of weapons is the primary concern. It puts people at the centre of security and is characterized by collaboration and substantive partnership between states, international organizations, and civil society. The aims of humanitarian disarmament are quite simple: prevent further civilian casualties, avoid socio-economic devastation, and protect and ensure the rights of victims. All of these goals align with Canadian values and foreign policy objectives. The actions needed to take back Canada's position as a leader on disarmament are simple but the impact will be significant.

Actions to support existing and developing international norms

A [previous blog](#) in this series addressed the Arms Trade Treaty, but there is more that can be done on conventional weapons. The [Ottawa Treaty](#) banning landmines has

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brought the international community close to ending the suffering caused by these insidious weapons. States parties to the Ottawa Treaty have set 2025 as the goal for completing landmine clearance; this ambitious target is achievable with political will and increased funding by states, including Canada. The next government could be the one to finish the job on landmines.

Similarly, the [Convention on Cluster Munitions](#) is making progress towards a world without cluster munitions. Currently, only a small number of states are using cluster munitions but when they are used, research shows that over 90% of the casualties are civilians. Additional diplomatic effort is needed to bring more states onboard the Convention and Canada is well placed to promote such a humanitarian issue.

Funding landmine and cluster munition clearance activities will save lives. It will free up land for agriculture, economic development and tourism while supporting victim assistance activities that strengthen local health care systems and help those injured rebuild their lives so they can contribute to their communities. These mine action activities are crucially important to sustainable development. [A study from Lebanon](#) published earlier this year found that every dollar invested in mine action activities generated a benefit of \$4.15. That is an excellent return on investment.



*Canadian Hiroshima Survivor Setsuko Thurlow addresses the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons while Canadian members of civil society look on
© ICAN/Ralf Schlesener*

Turning to weapons of mass destruction, the new government will face a new international legal framework regarding nuclear weapons. The 2017 [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) (TPNW) is expected to enter into force (become binding international law for its states parties) during the 43rd Parliament. The TPNW, which fills a long standing legal gap by prohibiting nuclear weapons, has already shifted the international conversation about disarmament. The new

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government should review the TPNW to assess the possibility of Canada's signing. During this review, Canada needs to be participating as an observer in all treaty meetings and supporting the implementation of its victim assistance and environmental remediation provisions.

This government will also be confronted with new and emerging disarmament issues. Of urgent concern is the development of [fully autonomous weapons](#), which have been under discussion at the United Nations since 2014. The majority of experts agree that these "killer robots" would increase risk to civilians, and disproportionately impact vulnerable groups due to targeting based on characteristics like gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, and ability. Proliferation of remotely piloted systems (armed drones), cyber warfare, and weaponization of space are other emerging technologies that may deepen inequalities and have specific gendered impacts. With technology developing at a rate far out-pacing the establishment of new regulations and norms, Canada should support the ongoing discussions on drones, cyber, and space within relevant international and regional forums; and support negotiation of a new treaty banning autonomous weapons. It is worth noting that at the time of writing, two of Canada's political parties, the Liberals and the Greens, have released campaign platforms supporting a ban on autonomous weapons.

Women as full and equal partners in disarmament

Like the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, humanitarian disarmament looks to ensure the inclusion of those who are often overlooked in international security. There is increasing recognition that weapons affect men, women, girls and boys differently due to biological sex and due to socially-constructed gender roles. Alongside that recognition is the realization that women's participation in disarmament results in better outcomes for all. Those improved outcomes add further weight to most basic reason to include women in disarmament - we are members of our communities with unique experiences and perspectives.

For example, the Arms Trade Treaty requires states to consider whether the arms being sold are at high risk to be used to carry out gender-based violence. It recognizes that there are strong links between the arms trade and gender-based-violence. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons explicitly calls for the participation of women in the treaty's implementation.

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The voices calling for strengthening gender equality through humanitarian disarmament are not just coming from civil society. In his [Agenda for Disarmament](#), United Nations Secretary General António Guterres wrote:

"All States should also incorporate gender perspectives in the development of national legislation and policies on disarmament and arms control, including consideration of the gendered aspects of ownership, use and misuse of arms; the differentiated impacts of weapons on women and men; and the ways in which gender roles can shape arms control and disarmament policies and practices."

Canada: it's time to lead

When it comes to gender equality and humanitarian disarmament, Canada has been more vocal recently. In Canada's [statement](#) to the First Committee of the 73rd session of the United Nations last year they talked the talk, recognizing that, "Advancing international peace and security depends on our collective ability to recognize and account for the gender dimensions of non-proliferation, arms control, and disarmament." We hope that the new government will take this a step further, and walk the walk on gender and disarmament.

There are already tools to do this work: the [National Action Plan on WPS](#) includes specific targets for disarmament and gender mainstreaming; peace and security is an action area in the [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#); and [Strong, Secure, Engaged](#) recognizes the destabilizing impacts of weapons proliferation. But without redoubling efforts on addressing the past and future harm of indiscriminate weapons systems, Canada will not be able to achieve its vision of a feminist foreign policy.

What is needed is political will and courage. It is hard to be a leader but in this case, Canada has the history, the policy and the values to do it. As a leader on humanitarian disarmament Canada has the potential to make lasting and measurable improvement to the lives of people around the world. At a time when global problems seem large and answers are complicated, humanitarian disarmament offers lasting solutions that are achievable. All we need is Canadian leadership.

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#WPSAdvice: Lead by example
October 20 2019

By Karen Breeck CD, MHSc, MD, [Federation of Medical Women of Canada Women, Peace and Security Committee Member](#)

Canada has made bold commitments to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda that we encourage the next government, regardless of party, to continue. The specific advice offered is for Canada to “lead by example”. Canadian women in uniform are still waiting for their government to ensure an equitable (which is not the same as equal) work environment. Leadership in WPS must first be seen at home for Canadian uniformed women, before Canada can hold itself up with integrity as the standard to which other nations should be modelling themselves after.



Members of Task Force-Mali stand easy during the Operation PRESENCE-Mali medals parade at Camp Castor on June 8, 2019. Photo: Corporal François Charest

When women were first integrated into the operational side of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), they were expected to conform to the already existing system that had, of course, been designed by men for men. This male bias can be found in everything from military customs and traditions, to military uniforms and equipment, to expected leadership styles and rewarded behaviours, to research and health care priorities.

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“Add women and stir” is not the recommendation

While many sincere efforts have attempted to rectify the challenges resulting from the “add women and stir approach” to CAF’s gender integration, most efforts have been individual “bottom-up” initiatives. The prevailing norms have required that the exact same woman who experienced the inequity firsthand, is largely left responsible to name the inequity, determine the potential solution for the inequity, and then individually advocate for the systemic changes required to remedy the inequity for her and those following behind her. The emotional labour and burden of advocating for system change from the bottom up often ends up with the unintended consequence of costing these women both their health and wellbeing and their careers. Rarely are “bottom-up” tactical level individual initiatives successfully integrated into the desired permanent “top-down” system changes. Yet it is only with systemic changes that true and lasting organizational improvements in equity can happen.

Other nations have learned from Canada’s initial mistake. They provided strategic level, dedicated funding and support for positions to oversee, coordinate and disseminate lessons learned when first introducing women into all roles in the military, thus providing a “top down” strategic support system. Canadian military women are still waiting for the funds and resources to strategically identify and rectify the many remaining gaps and barriers that continue to hold women back from universally experiencing a gender harmonious military workplace.

The need for pervasive culture change

Many, including parliamentarians of all stripes, have historically endorsed a “gender blind” approach to integration (a soldier is a soldier, whether a man or a woman) which incorrectly assumes that men and women are starting off as “equal” within the military workplace. After over 30 years of attempting to increase the number of women in the military, where is Canada at today? It appears that taxpayers will be on the hook for well over a billion dollars to pay out federal class action lawsuits for LGBTQ, race and sexual misconduct (military and RCMP). Although much progress has been made regarding the integration of women into all workforces, in the end, the crown has failed to lead by example. Federal workplaces, be them military or RCMP or Parliament Hill, are still not free from sexual violence and discrimination.

Barriers to service and deployment

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Effective culture change requires further implementation of Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) at all levels. This will ensure that policies, programs and equipment procurement are funded, designed, implemented and quality assured to enable women to be operationally effective in their jobs, regardless of their physical and physiological differences from men. CAF leadership has fully committed to culture change. OP HONOUR is evidence of that. Effective culture change however, requires strong leadership from within and from outside the organization. Culture change requires subject matter experts to conduct specialized training, individualized mentorships for senior leaders, and independent quality assurance to oversee and monitor progress. These components require dedicated positions, personnel and money from government to achieve the desired federal government workplace culture change.



A member of Operation PRESENCE-Mali stands at ease during the Aviation Battalion's Change of Command Parade at Camp Castor in Gao, Mali on January 21, 2019. Photo: Corporal Ken Beliwicz

WPS evidence strongly supports that the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of military-related conflict resolution, including as uniformed members of peace operations, leads to stronger, more durable peace outcomes. In support of peace, the Canadian government has committed in its National Action Plan to increasing the number of women in the CAF to 25% within the next decade and to 15% women on future UN deployments. Canada has also committed to helping other nations deploy more uniformed women on United Nations peace operations through the [Elsie Initiative](#). Canada must be seen to be leading by example domestically

through its own success stories before it can legitimately stand up to act as mentor for other nations. This is important not only to preserve Canadian reputational credibility but also for the sake of setting up the brave, trailblazing women who are leading the gender integration efforts in their own nations' militaries for success.

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Canada has taken an important first step. Canada has asked the [Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces \(DCAF\)](#) to study and identify any potential barriers to deployment for women in the CAF. Some challenges are already known. Examples include equipment limitations such as ballistic vests that don't fit properly over female breasts and the lack of female specific UN medical care standards and capabilities. In fact, the [UN's Director of Peacekeeping Operations \(DPKO\)](#) has recommended for countries who are deploying troops to ensure they include at least one female physician and obstetric and gynaecological specialists on all medical teams.

The way ahead

Our #WPSadvice for the new government is to continue with Gender-based Analysis (GBA+) across all of Government, but especially in the military where its time to implement it deeper. Military equipment is more likely to need procurement change, redesign, modification or alteration for equitable use by women and that costs money. Women make more health care related visits than men, so more women in the military means more health care provider positions and resources are needed. There are still many gaps in occupational health research knowledge for Canadian women in uniform, particularly in the area of sex-specific operational health including but not limited to reproduction health. Female specific research is commonly more complicated and expensive than male only research. Simply put, women do cost more than men to recruit and retain in the military.

If Canada is serious about supporting WPS objectives, then the Government of Canada needs to provide the oversight and financial resources to ensure servicewomen have workplaces that support and enable their full and equitable participation across the military. Thirty years ago, Canada was considered a world leader in women's participation in the military. With a bit of focused financial help, Canada could be true WPS world leaders once again.

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#WPSAdvice: Why YPS and WPS Synergies are needed for Sustainable Peace
October 24 2019

By Alexandria Kazmerik, @[AKazmerik](#), co-founder, Canadian Council of Young Feminists, @[CCYF_CCJF](#)

The inclusion of young people at all levels of decision-making is instrumental in ensuring the successful implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda both within a Canadian and a global context. Action Area 6 (Peace and Security) of [Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy](#) addresses the sidelining of women in peacebuilding as well as the disproportionate amount of violence women face in conflict zones. Additionally, it highlights the barriers and violence faced by youth and children, and their exclusion in the creation of responses and solutions. However, the physical and psychological needs of young people are not the only thing being overlooked – youth are far too often seen only as victims. Young people's experiences, opinions, and solutions are frequently ignored in conflict prevention, stabilization efforts, and peacebuilding.



Canadian reception at CSW63 with Senator Marilou McPhedran (independent Senator for Manitoba), Senator Donna Dasko (independent Senator for Ontario), Senator Kim Pate (independent Senator for Ontario) and members of the CCYF.

Policies on the WPS agenda, including Canada's [2nd National Action Plan](#) on WPS, cannot be successfully implemented at the local, national or global sphere without

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the meaningful engagement and participation of young people. In December 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security ([UNSCR 2250](#)). This policy framework urges Member States to have inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels. Our [current global youth population](#) is the largest the world has ever seen, and the populations of countries affected by armed conflict are a majority of youth. With young people making up such a large percent of the world's population, their active engagement can have a resounding impact on the creation of sustainable peace. It is important that current world leaders recognize the role of youth leaders and begin to pass the torch onto them.

It is crucial for the Government of Canada to take the implementation of UNSCR 2250 seriously to achieve the objectives set out in the 2nd National Action Plan on WPS. A [partnership between the YPS agenda and the WPS](#) agenda is key. Bridging these two agendas would address the gap in participation of young women in peacebuilding and work cohesively to address the violence and discrimination faced by women and girls globally. It would also highlight the importance of the engagement of men and boys through the inclusion of young men in peacebuilding. With a joint approach between decision-makers, women, and young people, we can strengthen our efforts towards achieving sustainable peace.

The five core action areas of UNSCR 2250 are participation; protection; prevention; partnerships; and disengagement and reintegration. The incoming Government of Canada should address these core areas in order to fully engage young Canadians in peacebuilding efforts on all fronts. Here are some recommendations on how the incoming Government can work to implement these actions:

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Minister Maryam Monsef, Deputy Minister Gina Wilson, CCYF members and Indigenous members of the Canadian Delegation at CSW 63.

Participation – Participation is one of the pillars of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 ([UNSCR 1325](#)) on Women, Peace and Security. The incoming Government should increase the participation of young people from varying walks of life at all levels of decision-making. The participation of young people needs to be more than a seat in the room. Young people need to be provided the space to be heard and considered among recognized leaders locally, nationally, and internationally. This is important to ensure an intersectional approach to peace and policymaking so that our solutions adequately address the different lived experiences and needs of all women and girls. This will create education and participation opportunities for men and boys to be involved in peace work – which has been traditionally seen as women’s work – to ensure its continued growth and eventual success. This can be achieved in many ways, including the facilitation of young people in important spaces such as the United Nations [Commission on the Status of Women](#) and the upcoming [Generation Equality Global Forum](#), where the implementation of the [Beijing Platform for Actions](#) recommendations will continue to be spearheaded by the world’s next generation of leaders.

Protection – Protection is also one of the pillars of UNSCR 1325. The incoming Government needs to address protection issues for women and girls based on their different experiences with sexual and gender-based violence and human rights violations. One of the ways this can be approached is through addressing sexual and

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gender-based violence on educational campuses across the country and the additional impact on Indigenous women and persons with disabilities, as noted:

“In a campus survey of undergraduate students at the University of Alberta, 21 percent of students reported having at least one unwanted sexual experience at some point in their life, with 15 percent after age 14. Of those students, 42 percent said that it took place while being registered at university. Furthermore, over one-third of those who experienced unwanted sexual experiences said that their most serious experience happened while being a student at university, with over one-half reporting that it happened in their first year of studies.” ([Canadian Federation of Students, 2018](#))

[Surveys](#) showed that 60% of male college students would commit sexual assault if they knew they would not be caught. Another survey found that 20% of male college students think sexual assault and rape are allowed if they spent money on a date or if a woman is high or intoxicated. Women and girls should have the right to access secondary and post-secondary education without fear of sexual or gender-based violence. This is relevant to the WPS agenda given the protection of education under the WPS resolutions and its potentially limiting factors for those who are unable to access it.

Prevention – The incoming Government needs to ensure the prevention of violence between and against young people. The Government of Canada [found](#) that youth in minority groups, already facing inequality and social disadvantages, are at a high risk of joining a gang. Youth are actively involved in gangs within small communities and across the country with an estimated 434 youth-based gangs with up to 7000 members. This is relevant to the WPS and YPS synergy as many young women are impacted by gang violence and Canada is seeing increased recruitment of young women into gangs. The prevention of youth recruitment into gangs is vital in the pursuit of peace. Policies to address gang recruitment and violence across the country needs to be done in consultation with previous gang members or those impacted by youth gang recruitment in order to create integrated and evidence-based community solutions.

Partnerships, Disengagement and Reintegration – The incoming Government needs to continue working closely and consulting existing youth organizations and councils in Canada. Additionally, the incoming Government should increase reconciliation efforts and work towards sustainable and positive peace for all Canadians. The Government should work towards the implementation of the

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Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls National Inquiry's Calls to Justice in partnership with Indigenous leaders, with the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous youth.

Young people around the world are working to implement sustainable solutions in their communities and in our global community at large. Young people are invested and committed to change because it is our generation who will carry the burden of failed approaches to peace and security. The inclusion of young people, through the synergy with the YPS agenda, is fundamental for the successful implementation of the WPS agenda at home and abroad.

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#WPSAdvice on Women Human Rights Defenders
October 28 2019

by Rachel Vincent and Jackie Hansen

Rachel Vincent is the Director of Advocacy and Media at the Nobel Women's Initiative. Follow her [@Rachel_NWI](#). Jackie Hansen is the Gender Rights Campaigner at Amnesty International Canada. Follow her [@AI_WomenRights](#)

Iran may be one of the world's most dangerous places to be a woman human rights defender, and no one knows that better than Nasrin Sotoudeh. The country's most prominent women human rights defender has spent her life speaking truth to power, at enormous personal cost.

A 2010 conviction of "conspiring against state security" put her in [prison for three years](#), most of them in [solitary confinement](#), and she endured two life-threatening protest hunger strikes. Then, earlier this year, Nasrin, now 56, was again jailed and convicted in absentia of national security offences—including stoking "corruption and prostitution," for her defense of women [arrested for peacefully protesting against an Iranian law which compels women to wear hijab \(headscarf\) and loose clothing](#). Nasrin has been jailed for defending the right of women to choose whether or not they wear hijab.

Nasrin is a lawyer—and brings legal skills to her work as a defender of human rights. But women human rights defenders come from all walks of life, and also include peacebuilders, journalists, doctors, farmers, politicians, and leaders of social movements. What they all have in common is that they face heightened risks because of their gender, along with other aspects of their identity such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity and/or expression. They are also not afraid of taking on the status quo—the very social fabric of society that permits using someone's gender or identity as a basis for discrimination.

Around the world, women human rights defenders are proving to be effective leaders in challenging populist and authoritarian forces that seek to undermine democracy and global progress on ensuring basic rights. Most recently in **Sudan**, women played a leading role in the recent protests against the military dictatorship,

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and were specifically targeted for their activism by security forces that violently attacked the demonstrations and detained hundreds of people.

This kind of targeting is part of a worrying global trend.

In March 2019, the [UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders](#) reported “a worrying rise in misogynistic, sexist and homophobic speech by prominent political leaders in recent years, normalizing violence against women and gender non-conforming persons” and that women human rights defenders have reported “increased repression, violence and impunity.” In May 2019, the [UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) expressed alarm at the number of human rights defenders, including women, community leaders, Afro-Colombians, Indigenous peoples, environmentalists, and journalists, killed in **Colombia** – 51 activists in four months.

It is abundantly clear that threats to women human rights defenders undermine global efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace. The lack of recognition for the legitimate work of all human rights defenders—including women—creates a context that enables all kinds of attacks, including physical, legislative, judicial and digital, to take place.

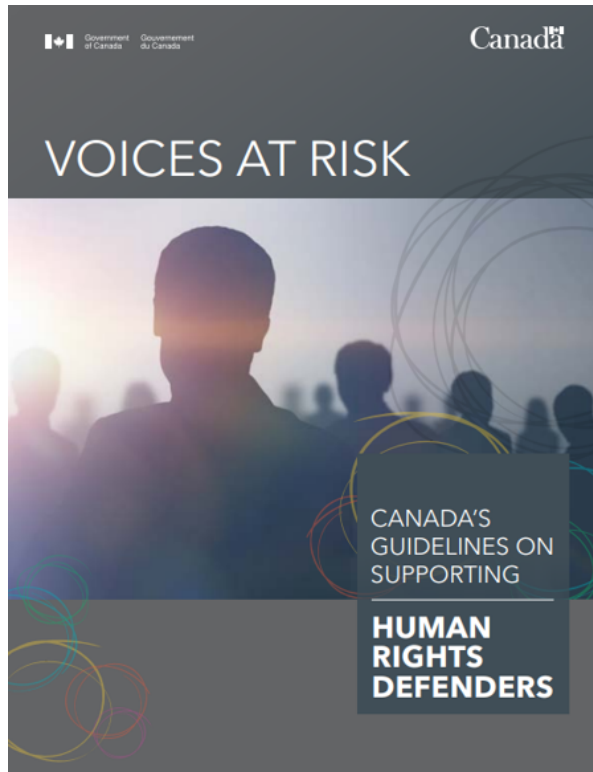
Women human rights defenders around the world are being targeted, smeared, stigmatized, harassed, marginalized in movements and communities, assaulted, and killed because of who they are and because of the rights they are peacefully defending. These rights violations must stop, and Canada, with its Feminist Foreign Policy, Feminist International Assistance Policy, and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, must consistently advocate for laws, policies and practices which lead to women human rights defenders being targeted and criminalized to be changed; must support women human rights defenders to conduct their advocacy in a safe and enabling environment; and must support women human rights defenders who must temporarily or permanently relocated outside their home country because of threats against them.

Recognizing the profound and increasing threats to women human rights defenders the world over, in 2019, a [Parliamentary Committee](#) conducted a study on women human rights defenders. Its final report includes four recommendations to the government of Canada to take urgent action in support of women human rights defenders. Canada’s 43rd Parliament would do well to take these recommendations as a starting point for action on this issue.

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Here is our #WPSAdvice to the new government on how it can be a *powerful* and *effective* champion of women human rights defenders:



- Ensure that a whole-of-government approach for protecting and promoting the work of women human rights defenders is integrated into Canada's National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security.

- Implement the [recommendations of the 2019 Parliamentary Committee study](#) on women human rights defenders.

- Recognize the collective rights of the movements that support women human rights defenders—including peace, labour, environmental, Indigenous, feminist and LGBTI rights movements. These movements are under threat, and need Canada's support.

- Ensure effective and transparent *across-the-department* (trade, diplomacy and international development) implementation of Voices at Risk,

Canada's guidelines to support human rights defenders.

- Develop and provide ample funding for a rapid response protocol and re-location mechanism that builds upon the new [Voices at Risk guidelines](#), and ensures its implementation really meets the needs of women human rights defenders when they are most at risk.
- Engage with women human rights defenders through the movements and civil society organizations that support them, and include their participation in advisory committees. Put their voices at the centre of our efforts to support them.

Please note that the views in these blog posts are those of the authors and may not represent the views of all members of the WPSN-C.

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#WPSAdvice: Time to Act: Meeting Canada's Commitments on Sexual Violence in
Conflict
November 9 2019

By Annie Bodmer-Roy, Head of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns, Save the Children Canada

It was in northern Mali in 2013 that I met Aissatou. She was 14 years old and at the end of her pregnancy when she had been forced to flee her home after the rebels entered her town. She later gave birth to her son while on the run.

“The rebels went into the village and took girls. They were 15, 16, 17. They said they needed the girls to go prepare food for them. They took them into their cars and brought them into the bush. They left them in the bush after they were done raping them – but they beat them before leaving.”

Aissatou tells me how the girls were threatened with weapons and raped. “There were 20 men but only 16 girls – so some of the men shared the same girl between them.” One of Aissatou’s friends “was lucky; there was only one man who took her. Afterwards though, he hit her five times with a long rod before she managed to escape.”

Aissatou fled her town soon after – but the impact of these attacks, months later, in a different part of the country – has stayed with her. “Even now, even if I’m here, I can’t forget what happened. My head is full of these things – what happened to my friends, my family. “It’s not peaceful in my head.”



Aissatou

Aissatou’s story is far from unique. Adolescent girls in conflict face enormous risks of sexual and gender-based violence. Yet they often lack dedicated services such as prevention, mitigation and response to gender-based violence, and sexual and

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reproductive health care, such as emergency obstetrics.

Through Canada's [National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security](#), Canada has committed to addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) in humanitarian settings. These are welcome commitments and must be implemented in practice – including through adequate funding for programming that tackles gender-based violence faced by girls.

In Canada's [recent statement](#) at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, Ambassador Jacqueline O'Neill emphasized the importance of inclusion and of funding in advancing the WPS agenda. "Where are the young people?", she asked, while also highlighting Canada's funding commitments for GBV and SRH.

Both points are critical. Girls and young women are essential to the successful implementation of the WPS agenda – and as such must be supported, including through efforts to ensure their safe and equal participation in humanitarian

response and peace negotiations. Support must also include adequate funding to ensure their specific needs are met in conflict and fragility. Yet according to [recent research](#) from Save the Children in collaboration with the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility, a mere 0.12% of all humanitarian aid goes to GBV against girls and boys – despite the fact that in some cases, up to 80% of those affected by GBV are children.



UNPROTECTED:
crisis in humanitarian funding
for child protection

So, our first piece of WPS advice to the new government? In following through on their platform commitment to increase Overseas Development Assistance, the new government must **commit adequate and consistent funding to support a survivor-centered, gender-responsive and age appropriate**

approach to addressing SGBV, while also working at local level to prevent sexual

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violence in conflict. This would be a critical component of Canada's gender-responsive humanitarian assistance policy, and must include providing redress and protection for survivors of sexual violence, access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, and access to justice, including for often neglected groups such as adolescent and very young adolescent girls.

Secondly, one measure to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict is accountability – a core component of the WPS agenda. In fulfilling its commitments under the National Action Plan, Canada must build on efforts to push for accountability for sexual violence – ensuring these efforts are both gender and age sensitive. Specifically, **Canada must support efforts to ensure that legal and judicial investigators and prosecutions are fully equipped with both gender-sensitive and child-specific expertise, as well as training for gathering data and working with survivors and witnesses of sexual violence.** To ensure inclusivity, this includes ensuring dedicated training and funding to help build the necessary knowledge, technical expertise, resources and confidence to support national and international justice systems to more systematically investigate and prosecute sexual violence crimes against or otherwise involving both girls and women, ensuring girls are not left out because of their age.

Finally, and in line with the ambitions set forth in Canada's [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#), **Canada must support local and international actors to design and advocate for gender transformative interventions to empower women and girls, along with other marginalized communities, and respond to the root causes of sexual violence, including power imbalances resulting from gender inequality.** This must be done in peace time as well as conflict in order to reduce the impact of gender inequalities that will inexorably worsen in conflict situations – including sexual violence. It must also be done in conjunction with organisations using a transformative approach, including local women's rights organizations, LGBT rights organizations, disability rights organizations and others. Such an approach explicitly recognizes a truth we must never forget: the root cause of sexual violence is gender inequality. If we want to end sexual violence in conflict, we must keep our focus on shifting harmful gender norms, in peace and in conflict.

If Canada is to follow through on its commitments, the time to act is now.

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#WPSAdvice: Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and the MMIWG Report
November 20 2019

By Margaret Jenkins and Monique Cuillerier

Margaret Jenkins is an academic and consultant who has been a Visiting Professor at the School of Public Policy at Central European University and held research fellowships at Harvard's Women and Public Policy Programme and at the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace & Security. Monique Cuillerier is the Membership and Communications Director for the World Federalist Movement - Canada ([@WFMCANADA](https://twitter.com/WFMCANADA)).



At international meetings focused on women, peace and security, Canada is often heralded as a leader given its Feminist Foreign Policy and the commitments espoused in the [Canadian National Action Plan \(2017-2022\) for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security](#).

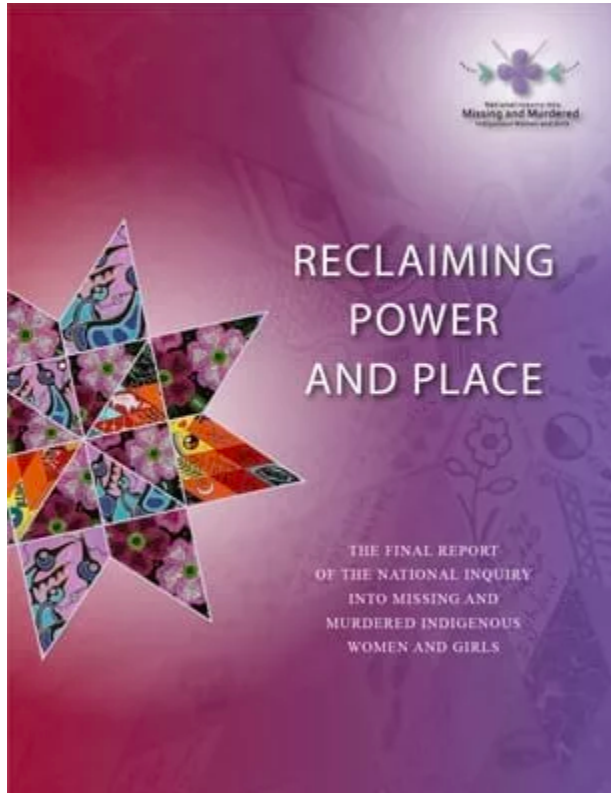
This conception of Canada is difficult to reconcile with the [findings](#) of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). After nearly 3 years of activity across Canada, the Inquiry came “to the conclusion that violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people amounts to genocide.” It also suggested that Canada may have committed crimes against humanity and that its behaviour is in

“breach of Canada's international obligations, triggering its responsibility under international law.”

The National Inquiry was mandated by the government in September 2016 to report on “all forms of violence” against Indigenous women and girls in Canada. The Inquiry

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interpreted this broadly, investigating “sexual violence, family violence, institutional racism in health care, child welfare, policing and the justice system, and other forms of violence, such as negligence, accidents or suicide” involving Indigenous women and girls. The Commissioners also chose to include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit gender-diverse and non-binary people, represented by the acronym 2SLGBTQIA (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual as part of the inquiry.

The Inquiry faced many challenges. Some Commissioners complained of [government influence](#) frustrating its efforts and effectiveness. Many top officials and lawyers resigned. The Inquiry’s decision to label the violence

“genocide” was [controversial](#) among some human rights lawyers and others sympathetic to the Inquiry’s objectives and findings. Although the two volume report included more than 1000 pages and 231 Calls for Justice, the “genocide” label has dominated the national discussion and [international media attention](#) since the report’s launch in June 2019.

For those of us who work on gender, peace and security issues abroad, and who monitor Canada’s fulfillment of commitments spelled out in its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (CNAP), the MMIWG Report begs the question: How should Canada’s efforts to implement its NAP and be a global leader on women, peace and security be affected by charges that it was complicit in genocide against women and girls within its own borders?

First, connections between MMIWG and CNAP should be institutionalized to facilitate the sharing of best practices and innovative policy and programmatic ideas related to gender, violence and security. Silos between those who work on MMIWG-related issues domestically and those who focus on the “women, peace and

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security agenda” abroad should be breached so that we can learn from each other’s work and identify and harness synergies that can bolster progress related to both MMIWG and CNAP objectives.

One way to do this is to encourage [CNAP Advisory Group](#) members to discuss the MMIWG Report and MMIWG-related work at [CNAP meetings](#). The RCMP, which is one of the lead implementing partners of the CNAP, as well as supporting partners, such as Status of Women Canada (SWC), the Department of Justice, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) are key institutions for responding to the findings and calls from the MMIWG Inquiry. As these institutions articulate their response to the MMIWG Report, implement relevant initiatives, and report on progress, this information should be shared with CNAP stakeholders. The idea is to identify and harness opportunities for CNAP work and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) expertise to speak to, and make progress on MMIWG, and vice versa.

Opening these channels is important because in many respects, MMIWG and CNAP are two sides of the same coin, and have shared objectives. Both the MMIWG and CNAP, for example, call for increasing the meaningful and equal participation of those often on the sidelines of governance and decision-making. The MMIWG Inquiry calls “upon all governments to equitably support and promote the role of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in governance and leadership” (1.4). One of the key objectives of the CNAP is to “increase the meaningful participation of women, women’s organizations and networks in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict statebuilding.” Those working on these issues would benefit from learning from each other about concrete initiatives and best practices related to inclusion.

Although this may come across as adding to the workload of CNAP reporting, the aim is instead to recognize the interdependence between domestic and foreign policies related to gender, peace and security. Canada’s interest in supporting feminist policies and programs at a global level can only be strengthened (and may only be possible) by building more just, effective and feminist domestic policies. Although the CNAP is primarily a foreign policy document, this reveals more a limitation and problem with the current CNAP than a legitimate curtailing of scope. There are many *domestic* changes that need to be made to ensure progress on CNAP objectives, and strong linkages with the Calls for Justice outlined in the MMIWG report. For example, the MMIWG Inquiry calls on Police Services to provide for the “training and education of all staff and officers so that they understand and

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implement culturally appropriate and trauma-informed practices, especially when dealing with families of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.” Gender and other biases outlined by the MMIWG Inquiry with respect to security services do not disappear when uniformed personnel are deployed abroad. Peacekeepers are rarely career peacekeepers--they work within domestic police forces and in national militaries. Thousands of Canadian police officers have been deployed abroad to serve on UN and other missions. The training called for by the MMIWG Inquiry would also build police capacity to sensitively respond to gender and cultural issues, as well as trauma while deployed abroad.

Second, although the synergies between CNAP and MMIWG should be identified and harnessed, the incoming government will need to implement policies and programs beyond the CNAP to make progress on the issues identified by the MMIWG. CNAP should not be the lead (or only) policy document guiding MMIWG response. The CNAP, inspired by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent WPS resolutions, focuses on Canada’s role in promoting gender equality and addressing women’s rights in “countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence.” It concentrates on gender issues pertaining to conflict resolution, conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and post-conflict state-building abroad. While it is tempting perhaps to expand the CNAP objectives to cover all domestic issues related to gender, violence and security (including domestic violence in Canada), this may lead to a bulky document, with implementation plans that are too unwieldy and numerous to monitor effectively. Recommendations from MMIWG include a National Action Plan focused on addressing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and the establishment of an Indigenous Human Rights Tribunal and a National Indigenous and Human Rights Ombudsperson as well as other measures.

Third, as these proposals are being considered, emphasis should be on evidence-based policy making and program development. It is up to all Canadians to make sure that what looks good politically is aligned with policies and programs make real progress in addressing the challenges faced by Indigenous girls and women and 2SLGBTQQIA people in their daily lives. Research, monitoring and evaluation that draws on rigorous qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis is needed to ensure next steps deliver. We need to know whether fewer Indigenous women and girls go missing and are murdered, and whether the political and economic opportunities and security of Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people improve as a result of program and policy interventions. If

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not, this learning needs to urgently inform innovation and change in order to achieve results. This interest echoes sentiments raised by those monitoring CNAP implementation.

Finally, the incoming government should continue to show the world that acknowledging domestic injustices is the right thing to do, and model how a country moves forward. When Prime Minister Trudeau, at the opening of the UN General Assembly in 2017, called the "failure of successive Canadian governments to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada...our great shame" many were surprised that a country would use the UN pulpit to draw attention to deficiencies in its own human rights record. This is rarely done. Yet, all countries have injustices in their history that underlie current practices and policies. These often involve women, Indigenous peoples and minorities. Canada should aim to be a model of how a country actively responds to both domestic and international injustice--by listening to those affected most, and achieving results. In this regard, the MMIWG Inquiry provides an invaluable contribution.

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#WPSAdvice: Women, Peace and Security: Beyond A Vulnerability Lens
December 2 2019

By Rebecca Tiessen

Rebecca Tiessen is a Professor in the School of International Development and Global Studies at the University of Ottawa. You can read more about her work on her [website](#) or follow her commentaries on Twitter @rebeccatiessen

Each year I have the opportunity to participate on a panel and talk to members of Canadian and other national military officers about ‘vulnerable groups’. The panel focuses on a range of issues that affect people in vulnerable situations including child soldiers, women and girls, etc. I always start this presentation by stating that I do not consider women a vulnerable group, nor do I use the language of ‘vulnerable groups’, preferring instead the language of ‘people in (temporary) situations of vulnerability’. Women – like all people – have diverse experiences, depending on a range of societal, cultural, economic and political factors and these experiences change over time. Categorizing women as ‘a vulnerable group’ is both inaccurate and potentially harmful.

The problem with categorizing ‘women as vulnerable group’ is explained well by [Charli Carpenter](#) who critically examines how “women make better symbolic victims, especially in wartime, precisely because they—either as bystanders or as mothers of helpless children—can be seen as innocent.”

The symbolism of vulnerability serves a particular purpose for media representations of conflicts. Three common images pervade the widespread media focus on the impact of conflict and war: the destruction of infrastructure, soldiers in action, and the ‘vulnerable women and children’. The latter images are often of groups of women and children walking long distances seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, or large groups of women and children waiting for donor assistance (food, medical treatment, etc.) These images perpetuate stereotypes of women’s passivity and helplessness, denying them agency and power in the processes of change.

One of the practical implications of this pervasive imagery is that it can undermine efforts to protect men and boys, failing to show the different kinds of vulnerability they experience (including, for example, kidnappings and forced combat roles).

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Stereotyping and generalizing about experiences in conflict can also lead to inadequate policy and programming, or to insufficient – or inappropriate - action.

Resolution 1325 – the United Nation’s commitment to recognize and address women’s specific conflict-related vulnerability and the importance of women’s participation in peace processes – underscores how women “are most vulnerable to conflict-related sexual violence” and experience other vulnerabilities. Identifying these vulnerabilities can be a good starting point when they are part of a gender analysis of power relations and when they do not overshadow other roles and experiences women have/can have in conflict and peace processes. The emphasis on women’s vulnerability, as well as assumptions of the impact of increased women’s participation in peace processes, as outlined in Resolution 1325, can have other unintended gender consequences (as Haastrap examines [here](#)).

Some of Canada’s previous policies and guiding documents on peace and security have also employed a highly essentialist language with regular use of the language of programs targeted at “vulnerable groups such as women and children”, critiques that are elaborated [here](#).

Targeted efforts to support people in vulnerable situations are central to our defence, security, development and humanitarian work. The challenge is to strike the right balance between understanding causes and consequences of vulnerability without labeling entire groups as vulnerable. Without consideration of the diverse gendered experiences of people living through – and rebuilding after – conflict, programs will continue to target different groups in insufficient ways.

Several strategies to enhance our work on women, peace and security - and to ensure we address vulnerability through an intersectional gender lens - are possible. Actions for future consideration include:

1. **Maintain a simultaneous focus on the needs, interests and voices of people experiencing vulnerability and the complex systems of inequality that perpetuate experiences of vulnerability.** To do this, we must explicitly state the structural barriers to women’s safety and security, emphasizing the patriarchal norms and practices that cause inequality and vulnerability. Emma Swan and I elaborate on this [here](#) with additional insights available from feminist scholarship.
2. **Connect with women’s rights organizations who understand the local context and the avenues for tackling the structural barriers to gender**

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equality. Putting women's voices and knowledge at the centre of our commitments is crucial and the reasons for doing so are elaborated here.

3. **Learn with and from the human rights defenders who have knowledge about the risks and opportunities for peacebuilding in their local contexts.** You can find more information [here](#).
4. **Collaborate with – and support - Canada's civil society organizations,** such as those actively engaged in the Women, Peace and Security Network Canada (WPSN-C), who have built strong relationships with local women's rights organizations, and who can inform the policies and programs because of their immense knowledge on peace and security.
5. **Be more intentional and deliberate in the language we use to describe our work to promote gender equality in women, peace and security.** Framing women as a 'vulnerable group' denies women their agency, and minimizes or erases their important roles as change agents in their own societies.

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#WPSAdvice: How Canada can advance peace on the Korean peninsula
December 9 2019

By Liz Bernstein

*Liz Bernstein is Co-Executive Director, Nobel Women's Initiative and Co-Coordinator of **Korea Peace Now! Women Mobilizing to End the War**, a global campaign to educate, organize and advocate for a Korea peace agreement by 2020. Women Cross DMZ, Nobel Women's Initiative, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the Korean Women's Movement for Peace officially launched the campaign in March 2019.*



Almost 19 years ago, Canada first established formal diplomatic relations with North Korea. Canada chose to do so in support of South Korea's then-president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Kim Dae-jung's policy of engagement with North Korea around issues of food security, human rights, denuclearization and regional stability.

It was the right thing to do. Canada participated in the Korean War, and many Canadians have family ties to both North and South Korea. Equally important, Canada's strength on the global stage is the ability to foster respectful dialogue.

Unfortunately, these days Canada has had no diplomatic relations with North Korea. Since 2010, our engagement with North Korea has been mostly limited to condemning North Korea's nuclear weapons' testing and participating in a punishing sanctions regime that is having a devastating impact on ordinary North Koreans.

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Indeed, a new report commissioned by the *Korea Peace Now!* campaign shows that



sanctions imposed on North Korea are having adverse consequences on humanitarian aid and economic development in the country, with a disproportionate impact on women. The report estimates [that 3,968 people](#) — the majority of them children under age 5 — may have died last year as a result of sanctions-related delays and funding shortfalls affecting U.N. agencies. The

actual number of preventable deaths due to the full impact of the sanctions is likely much higher.

Right now, an [estimated 11 million people](#) — more than 40% of the population — in North Korea lack sufficient nutritious food, clean drinking water or access to basic services like health and sanitation. And while humanitarian organizations are doing their best to get basic aid into North Korea, the sanctions make it almost impossible.

It's clear that Canada's policies on North Korea are contributing to deepening the suffering of the North Korean people—and are failing to advance peace on the Korean peninsula.

So what would work?

The **Korea Peace Now! Women Mobilizing to End the War**, a growing global movement of civil society organizations working for an end to war and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula, offers the following recommendations for how the Canadian government can more effectively contribute to peace on the Korean peninsula:

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- **Re-establish diplomatic relations.** It's time for Canada to re-engage diplomatically by re-activating bilateral relations with Pyongyang. Mandate Canada's ambassador to Seoul to seek cross-accreditation in Pyongyang. Canada should also be prepared to accept the credentials of a North Korea's nominee for ambassador to Canada, and allow a North Korean Embassy to be established in Ottawa, should North Korea want one.

- **Repeal the Canadian autonomous sanctions, those above and beyond the UN Security Council sanctions.** This can be in stages, starting with making it easier for humanitarian organizations to get exemptions to the current sanctions, and then move towards repealing the special economic measures act related to North Korea of 2011.
- **Support a peace-building process.** It's 70 years since the Korean War ended, and there has never been an official end to the war. Canada could be working with its allies to promote a peace-building process that includes a formal ending of the war, through a treaty.
- **Ensure the inclusion of women in the Korean peace process.** Canada has a robust National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, and should apply it to advance inclusive peace in Korea. We know that when women are included in peace processes, not only is agreement more likely, it is far more durable.



Last year, Canada showed signs that it was seeking to re-establish its credibility and expertise on North Korean issues. In January 2018, then Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland co-hosted the Vancouver Foreign Ministers'

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Meeting on Security and Stability on Korean Peninsula. It was a good start. But Canada now needs to do so much more to get serious about peace on the Korean peninsula.

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