

<https://wpsn-canada.org/2017/06/29/canadas-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-an-update/>

Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security: An Update

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This month has seen a flurry of foreign policy announcements. First, Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland outlined the government's vision of Canada's role in the world in her speech in the House of Commons. This was followed by the new Defence Policy, which featured a massive increase in defence spending. And then there was the Feminist International Assistance Policy, with its promising framework (but many questions about the Department's ability to put it into practice).

Now we're waiting for the launch of the new National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security or C-NAP. This is a 'test case' of how far the Government is willing to go in putting feminist principles into action. The C-NAP provides the Government with an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that they are moving towards a coherent feminist approach to foreign policy beyond international assistance.

The global Women, Peace and Security Agenda has many elements. At its core, however, it is about the recognition that women's security and participation are inexorably bound up with state security. That the meaningful participation of women (in particular women's organizations and movements) in all stages of peacebuilding and conflict resolution will strengthen peace and security for all. That understanding gender dynamics (militarized masculinities, inequalities, gender stereotypes, etc.) will help us better understand conflict itself. And that these insights belong at the centre of our understanding of peace, security and conflict resolution – as well as all dimensions of foreign policy.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and international Development recognized this when it recommended that "The Government of Canada should make women, peace and security a priority of its foreign policy agenda."

The previous C-NAP expired over a year ago. During its lifetime, members of the WPSN-C noted its achievements but were – on the whole – critical of the initial plan and the progress reports. Our members raised many questions regarding the Government's claim to international leadership on this issue.

Discussions on the new C-NAP have been going on for over a year. WPSN-C members testified before the House Foreign Affairs and International Development Committee, participated in the International Assistance and Defence reviews, submitted briefs, attended consultations and urged more serious attention to WPS issues.

In April, Global Affairs Canada hosted a consultation on the new C-NAP, co-chaired by the WPSN-C. Over a hundred people (both government officials and civil society representatives) looked at the lessons from the previous C-NAP and explored options for the future. The discussions were lively and the exchanges positive. We were inspired by international lessons and experiences from GAPS-UK, GNWP and Inclusive Security.

Following the consultations and at the request of GAC, the WPSN-C synthesized our recommendations into a short two-pronged list:

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Key Themes for the C-NAP to address:

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. 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.

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 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.

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.

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).

Essential Elements for the C-NAP:

The C-NAP must be rooted in a feminist approach to foreign, defence and development assistance policy.² While there are many definitions of feminism, we look forward to progress on an intersectional feminist approach that addresses the root causes of gender inequalities (including militarized masculinities) and armed conflict. Efforts to build peace should be based on an understanding of the inter-linkages between armed conflict and gender inequality and support efforts to tackle persistent and institutionalized gender inequalities.

The C-NAP must include explicit mechanisms to ensure that it is a high-level policy statement, as well including strong accountability mechanisms. Ideally, in addition to timely public reporting,

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there will be an annual event that includes ministerial participation to present achievements for that year and discussions with civil society. A clear monitoring and evaluation framework should be part of the C-NAP with indicators, targets and baselines. There should be explicit links made to other reporting processes including CEDAW (General Recommendation 30) and the SDGs. There must be a dedicated budget and sufficient resources (financial and human) to ensure the implementation of the C-NAP. This includes resources for programming and dedicated resources for C-NAP implementation (consultations, evaluation, dialogues with civil society, documenting lessons learned, research, etc.).

There should be a formalization of the government-civil society relationship. This could strengthen implementation and support the monitoring and implementation of the C-NAP. This requires dedicated resources.

The C-NAP should focus on results and impact. This should include an attempt to monitor and report on advances and changes (not just activities carried out). Tracking mechanisms to monitor expenditures should be built into the C-NAP. Investments in training and capacity building should include measures to track how new skills and knowledge are being used and with what impact.

As we wait for the new C-NAP, we are encouraged by the ambition of the new Feminist International Assistance Policy and its recognition of the importance of women's organizations and movements. However, this enthusiasm is tempered by the absence of new money to support this vision, especially when the Government did find room in the federal budget for massive increases in defence spending.

This government has stressed repeatedly that it believes in consultation. We invested countless hours in this process, writing briefs and participating in formal and informal conversations. Were we heard? The new C-NAP will tell.