

Submission to the Foreign Policy White Paper:

Practical and effective integration of a gender equality perspective and Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

About the Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security ('the Coalition') is a non-partisan and independent coalition of civil society organisations, networks and individuals working to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in Australia, the Asia Pacific region and globally. The Coalition works to progress the implementation and scope of the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018, and by working constructively and collaboratively with the Australian Government towards the realisation of the goals set forth in the UN Security Council Resolutions on WPS. Coalition members have practice and policy expertise ranging from women's participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding¹, the gendered impacts of armed conflict, to gendered humanitarian and development support in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Introduction

Australia needs a transformational foreign policy², particularly on issues of peace and security, if we want to "deal with the world as it is"³ and influence the way the world responds to tension and all forms of violent conflict. The advancement of women's right, the achievement of gender equality and ensuring the participation of women in conflict prevention and all peace and post-conflict processes will bring about a more balanced approach to addressing and preventing recurring conflicts, as well as peacebuilding efforts.

The Australian Government has taken a global leadership role on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and in 2012 launched the inaugural Australian *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 2012 - 2018* ('NAP').⁴ Australian foreign policy must be aligned to the agreed and binding principles of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda under international law, including the suite of eight United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) on WPS⁵ and should prioritise an approach which reframes peace and security from a focus on defence to a focus on conflict prevention and human security (including the economic and social dimensions of security).

This submission recommends the Australia government to identify WPS as a foreign policy priority and that it fully incorporates the pillars of the WPS agenda into the strategic planning of Australia's foreign policy. These pillars are: prevention, participation, protection, relief and recovery, and mainstreaming.

Prevention

The global challenges of climate change, extreme poverty and inequality, armed conflict and widespread human rights violations require global solutions. This necessitates Australian foreign policy to reframe peace and security from a focus on defence to a focus on the long-term prevention of conflict and violence.

Research indicates that the best indicator of conflict is not the degree of democracy, religious identity or other socio-cultural indicators – instead, the best indicator of conflict is the way a country treats its women.⁶ The United Nations has also affirmed the necessity of gender equality for achieving sustainable peace (UNSCR 2122). Effective early intervention efforts to prevent conflict must embrace the first-hand knowledge of women on the frontlines of the struggle for peace and security, and address the harmful social norms and discriminatory attitudes and practices which reinforce and condone gender inequality.

The latest WPS resolution, UNSCR 2242, requires that policies and programs for stabilisation, countering terrorism and countering violent extremism do not impinge on women's human rights. This requires supporting international, national and community-based women's rights organisations who are working towards women's empowerment, addressing gender inequality, promoting peace and stability and who are countering terrorism and violent extremism.

Participation

When women are included in a peace process, the resulting agreement is 35 percent more likely to last longer than 15 years.⁷ Thus, investing in women's participation can directly influence the longevity and stability of the outcome. Further, as a question of justice women have the right to participate in decisions which affect their lives. While Australia takes a strong stance on women's empowerment in the aid program⁸, more needs to be done to mainstream women's participation in conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution and recovery from conflict and instability across Australia's approach to foreign policy. This level of participation is also enshrined in the Beijing Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Goal 16, which has a target to "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels" as well as Goal 5, which among other things calls for ensuring "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life".

In practice, Australia's approach to WPS has been to focus primarily on the protection of women in conflict or the recruitment of women to defence forces. Yet we know women's leadership and substantive participation is essential for sustainable peace. A reframing of the current approach towards resourcing and expanding the leadership of women in peace building and conflict mediation is critical. The WPS resolutions oblige Member States to increase women's participation in the prevention, mitigation, resolution and recovery from conflict. This obligation covers both Australian women employed in peace and security, as well as local women's substantive participation in processes within their own communities and diaspora women's organisations. In this regard, Australia should lead by example and provide the necessary resources to international, national and community-based women's organisations. Australia should participate in regional efforts to increase the effectiveness of all such actions. The next iteration of Australia's NAP in 2019 presents a critical opportunity to adopt a more inclusive and robust monitoring and evaluation framework⁹ so as to extend the approach from a focus on protection to the prioritisation of the participation of women in the maintenance of peace and security.

Protection

Over half of the WPS resolutions reiterate the need to protect women and children from conflict related sexual violence. In the face of the changing nature of conflict and crises, women will continue to be disproportionately affected by displacement, poverty, and high levels of sexual violence. Internationally, there has been an observed increase in violence perpetrated against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) people during conflict and displacement. The Coalition urges the Australian government to adopt the recommendations emerging from the *Australian Dialogue on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict*¹⁰ and by doing so take proactive steps to shape Australia's work to eliminate sexual violence in conflict situations.

Further, despite increased global recognition in law and policy of the particular risks refugee and displaced women face, insufficient resources and a lack of political-will continue to impede progress in recognising the fulfilment of their rights in the Australian policy context. On this issue, we urge the Australian Government to support the inclusion of strong measures to protect refugee and migrant women and girls in the two Global Compacts being drafted for acceptance by United Nations General Assembly in 2018.

Relief and recovery

In accordance with UNSCR 2122, Australia has an obligation to fund and provide the full range of medical, legal, psychosocial and livelihood services to women affected by armed conflict and post-conflict situations. This includes access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services, including pregnancies resulting from rape, without discrimination. In the context of recent international policies changes and debates on this issue, we urge Australia to join other like-minded countries and increase support for sexual and reproductive health assistance. Such assistance would also support the achievement of SDG Goal 5, which includes a target to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

Internationally, less than 2% of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to fragile and conflict-affected states for peace and security prioritises gender equality.¹¹ We call on the government to champion gender equality in peace and security assistance with other key donors and to ensure the next iteration of the Australian NAP on WPS is fully resourced with specific budget lines against each identified action.

Practical and effective integration of a gender equality perspective across Australia's foreign policy

Integrating a gender perspective throughout Australia's foreign policy (not just a focus on aid and development) is important to achieving the four pillars of the WPS agenda. This means that addressing human insecurity must be prioritised across Australia's foreign policy. All of Australia's actions and positions in the domestic and international spheres should advance women's leadership and participation in peace and security, and create spaces for marginalised voices to be included in a substantive manner – particularly the voices of young women and girls, the LGBTIQ community, women with disabilities and indigenous women.

The Coalition urges the government to ensure that our foreign policy, multilateral and bilateral actions and policy positions effectively and practically promote gender equality and the WPS Agenda in Australia and on the global stage.

This submission recommends that the Australian government identify WPS as a foreign policy priority and to fully integrate the WPS agenda into the strategic planning of Australia's foreign affairs policy, to promote sustainable peace and gender equality.

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¹ <http://wpscoalition.org>

² Allan Behm "A transformational foreign policy is targeted, preferring principle to pragmatism, direction to simple responsiveness, enduring benefits to activity for its own sake", Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 8 September 2016.

Accessed from <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/time-transformational-foreign-policy/>.

³ Minister Julie Bishop National Press Club Debate on Foreign Policy June 21, 2016

⁴ Available at: <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/publications-articles/government-international/australian-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-2012-2018>

⁵ UN Security Council Resolutions on Women Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122 (and future commitments)

⁶ Valrie M Hudson et al (2012) *Sex & World Peace*, New York, Columbia University Press.

⁷ [Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325](#)

⁸ DFAT, *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment strategy*, February 2016.

⁹ [Independent Interim Review of the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018](#)

¹⁰ [Australian Dialogue On Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict](#)

¹¹ [Financing UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Aid in support of gender equality and women's rights in fragile contexts](#)