



Submission on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Inquiry into Australia's New Development Policy – November 2022

Introduction

In the current critical geo-political context, the world faces, *for the first time on record*, a staggering milestone of 100 million people forced to flee conflict, violence, human rights violations and persecution. This is at the same time as we continue to grapple with a global health pandemic and where the growing consequences of climate change are all impacting the security of women and girls, including in our own Asia-Pacific region. Internal and protracted conflicts (e.g. Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo) as well as sudden regime change in both Afghanistan and Myanmar have highlighted the fragility of women's rights in insecure contexts. In addition, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has displaced millions of people bringing with it very real threats to global peace and stability and once again highlighting the continued use of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war. As a result of conflict, Covid-19 and climate change, half a billion women are now living in extreme poverty and gender equality is expected to take another 300 years at current rates of progress. This critical context serves as a wake-up call for genuine and sustained action around the Women, Peace and Security agenda - to prevent conflict, promote peace and to address the safety and security of women and girls. As the Australian Government defines its new development policy, this is an opportunity to drive more ambitious action on gender equality using a Women, Peace and Security lens.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda was established in 2000 by the UN Security Council through the adoption of UNSCR 1325 and a suite of subsequent resolutions. This landmark resolution recognises women as active agents in peace and security decision-making processes, not just victims in need of protection. The WPS agenda is a key framework for advancing the rights of women and girls during conflict and crisis and outlines the importance of gender perspectives being integrated into conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding, as well as in disaster and crisis response. Its four pillars are: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.

This submission is made by the **Australian Civil Society Coalition for Women, Peace and Security** (the Coalition) which is a non-partisan and independent coalition of civil society organisations, networks and individuals working to advance the WPS agenda in Australia, the Asia and Pacific region, and globally.¹ Members of the Coalition advance the WPS agenda through their daily work including building evidence and practice, raising awareness, facilitating dialogue and supporting women's rights partners in Australia and through their networks across Asia and the Pacific and

¹ Details of the Australian Civil Society Coalition for WPS work including Dialogue Reports, Issues Papers and Submissions can be found at <https://www.wpscoalition.org>

globally. The Coalition currently partners with both the Australian Civil Military Centre and DFAT in advancing Australia's second National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (2021-2031).

Priorities for Australia's new development policy

a) Embedding a WPS lens systematically and ensuring policy coherence

The Coalition strongly encourages DFAT to ensure coherent policy and practice that advances the WPS agenda across development, diplomacy and defence with an increased focus on human security alongside national security. The United Nations General Assembly resolution 66/290 highlights that "human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people." It calls for "people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people."

At a practical level, the Coalition believes that both a human security and WPS lens should be applied systematically in Australia's responses to emerging conflicts, humanitarian crises and climate change. These present clear opportunities to drive gender-transformative development and humanitarian outcomes by systematically considering opportunities to strengthen women's participation, prevent gender-based violence, protect vulnerable communities and drive gender inclusive relief and recovery.

Research commissioned by Coalition member, ActionAid (2019) found that while disasters, protracted crises and conflicts disproportionately affect women, women and their organisations are significantly underrepresented in humanitarian response. While the evidence shows that engaging with national actors is critical for successful humanitarian work, especially in gender equality and Gender Based Violence (GBV) as these programmes challenge prevailing cultural norms, local women's organisations receive a small fraction of the funding available. This severely curtails women's opportunities to lead protection work in communities or to actively engage with systemic issues and influence decision-making or resource allocations. Despite pledges and increased attention to GBV in conflict and emergencies by donor governments, little data exists to evidence a shift in donor priorities to ensure that women and girls are not only protected, but are in the driving seat of change in crisis settings.

As ActionAid argues, 'emergencies can be a catalyst for transformational change in overcoming longstanding inequality, violence and discrimination towards women and girls', however this requires DFAT through its development policy to systemically look at ways to operationalise this agenda. This can be achieved through the adoption of a Feminist Foreign Policy to guide the development program and through active efforts to tackle the transformation of power-structured relationships that marginalise and exclude women in peace and security. As Coalition member, IWDA, argues 'peacebuilding offers a significant site of transformative potential and needs to be resourced and invested in. This is not just about the inclusion of women peace and security but thinking about how security and peace are gendered'.

Recommendation 1: DFAT to systematically embed the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and a broader human security lens in its prevention work and response to emerging conflicts, humanitarian crises and climate change in order to drive gender transformative change

b) Investment in Prevention of Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Conflict

The Coalition strongly maintains that the prevention of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) must be elevated in DFAT's new development policy given that one in three women worldwide experience physical and sexual violence (UN Women, 2022) and that there continues to be persistent use of sexual violence and rape as weapons of war. WPS Coalition Co-Chair, Dr Ludmilla Kwitko, reported that this call to action was strongly endorsed by survivors of SGBV, civil society, multilateral organisations and governments across the globe, at the UK Government organised Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict International Conference (28-29 November 2022), also attended by DFAT.

The 2019 UNSC Resolution (Res 2467) specifically calls for the importance of looking at SGBV during and post-conflict, as well as prevention measures being more systematically integrated and resourced. Coalition member, Professor Sara Davies from Griffith University has highlighted that ceasefire agreements since 2018 have not included a provision on the prohibition of sexual violence. A condition for Australia's support of ceasefire agreements - as well as arms supply agreements - should demand the prohibition of sexual violence.

There are clear opportunities to invest in local women's organisations in responding to SGBV including the provision of training in sexual violence documentation and reporting and service delivery. The 2021 UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence Against Children (UN SRSG SVAC) recommendation specifically calls for local women's groups to have access to technology to safely assist with data collection and communication of events. This is particularly important given that the recent UN Secretary General's 2022 WPS report (S/2022/740) has noted more violations (sexual, abduction, maiming, killing) against girls in conflict and humanitarian situations. Coalition members have also highlighted concerns about state-sanctioned violence in Afghanistan and Myanmar.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are fundamental to freedom of choice and the ability of women and girls to contribute to peace and security; fulfilling these rights requires greater prioritisation and resourcing in Australia's development program. Lesson learned from the pandemic and increasing climate disasters is that violence increases not decreases and is often accompanied by reproductive and financial coercion. Increased SGBV directly affects the achievement of the WPS agenda. Through the new development policy, there is an opportunity to resource and co-design programs, research, training, and build evidence with partners, both government and civil society.

In elaborating a more comprehensive approach to the prevention of SGBV in conflict, DFAT can also consider investment in other areas that have gained international support, such as:

- Development of gender-sensitive early warning indicators for conflict prevention early warning systems with specific training and support to human rights organisations, civil society organisations, women protection advisors, activists and journalists; with attention to intersectional diversity and representation. (UNSRSG SVAC Framework for the Prevention of CRSV 2022).
- Specific support to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to investigate situations in which crimes of sexual violence, as defined in its Statute, appear to have been committed (2021 UNSRSG SVAC recommendation)
- Prioritise in Australian involvement in peacekeeping and stabilisation missions the integration of addressing conflict-related sexual violence and gender-responsive analysis, and inclusion of expertise, from pre-deployment to duration of mission (2021 UNSRSG SVAC recommendation)

- Investment in a survivor centred support fund (2021 UNSRSG SVAC recommendation).

RECOMMENDATION 2: DFAT is encouraged to develop and resource a comprehensive response to the prevention of SGBV in conflict under its new development policy

c) The role of technology access in driving the WPS agenda

Humanitarian emergencies rely on technologies that are not distributed evenly across populations or genders. There was a heavy reliance on technology during the Covid-19 pandemic for example, which contributed to uneven gender participation and access to resources and information. From civic registration to risk communication to digital diplomacy, women are at a distinct disadvantage if they are in rural or remote communities and have minimal funds to access technologies. There is the potential to Australia to enhance access to technology in driving forward the WPS agenda across the four pillars. This will also require consideration of how to facilitate safe and sustainable access.

RECOMMENDATION 3: DFAT is encouraged to invest in increasing access to technology among women and other marginalised groups as a key mechanism for driving forward the WPS agenda, including in the documentation and reporting of SGBV in conflict

Partnerships

As DFAT defines its strategic partnerships under the new development policy, including an overarching civil society engagement strategy, it is encouraged to have an explicit commitment to working with and resourcing feminist civil society, particularly in conflict and crisis affected countries. The Coalition believes it is vital to support feminist civil society organising in conflict affected countries to drive greater attention to and accountability for the WPS agenda. This requires funding mechanisms including flexible, core support as well as creating an enabling safe and secure environment for direct engagement with policy and decision makers at all levels.

The Coalition notes that in emerging contexts – Afghanistan, Myanmar, Syria and Ukraine – we are seeing new ways of organising among feminist civil society, including emergence of underground movements and engagement of women from the diaspora and refugees in peace processes. This calls for new and innovative ways of resourcing these movements, possibly through feminist intermediaries, and strengthening their capacity to engage in the WPS agenda. There are significant opportunities to create domestic and global linkages in this area to advance Australia's National Action Plan on WPS.

Through its new development policy, DFAT is encouraged to establish formal and systematic mechanisms to engage civil society in prevention of and in emerging crises, both in Australia and partner countries to advise and contribute to Australia's response. This would ensure more systematic engagement around the WPS agenda and bring in lived experience, including from diaspora and refugee communities.

RECOMMENDATION 4: DFAT is encouraged to establish formal and systematic mechanisms for the engagement of civil society in prevention of and in emerging conflicts, humanitarian crises and climate change, including engagement with feminist civil society in Australia and overseas and representatives from diaspora and refugee communities from affected countries

Performance

In light of the new development policy and the changing context externally, DFAT is encouraged to recommend a refresh of Australia's Second National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security and its accompanying Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework. It is an opportunity to set a more coherent, coordinated and ambitious agenda across the whole of government as well as to strengthen transparency and accountability around the resourcing, implementation and reporting on the NAP.

RECOMMENDATION 5: DFAT is encouraged to advocate for a review of Australia's Second NAP on Women, Peace and Security in light of the new development policy and changing external context

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on WPS appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into Australia's new development policy, including participation in hybrid consultation held with members on 21 November 2022. We believe this is a tremendous opportunity to drive greater ambition and elevate the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Australia's responses to emerging conflicts, humanitarian crises and climate change.

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