

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY AN OVERVIEW

Authored by IWDA for the Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition

WHAT IS FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY?

Feminist foreign policy is an approach which places gender equality as the central goal of foreign policy, in recognition that gender equality is a predictor of peaceful and flourishing societies.

Human security is the fundamental unit of national security – if people have their basic needs met, societies become more stable. And human security is gendered, meaning that people experience insecurity differently because of the roles they play in society. The pandemic has made this abundantly clear, that times of crisis exacerbate the pre-existing inequalities in our societies. A human security lens enables us to connect individual level security to national and international security. In this way of thinking, embedding gender equality as the central purpose and key goal of foreign policy commitments can ensure that our collective human security needs are met.

Feminist foreign policy is often described as being about women's leadership or gender mainstreaming. Whilst both of these are important elements of a feminist foreign policy, they are just this – elements.

Equal representation of women in all areas of foreign policy is critical to diversify the voices contributing

their lived reality to foreign policy analysis, providing a more accurate assessment of the world. But representation and leadership of women on its own is not enough to guarantee a feminist approach. Similarly, gender mainstreaming is an important tool to integrate a gender perspective across different areas of work. Feminist approaches strengthen this by bringing a dedicated focus to gender equality as a central goal, and by going beyond individual empowerment and aiming to transform the systems of power which lead to inequality and marginalisation – for individuals, communities and nations. An evolving definition of feminist foreign policy is below.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IN THE WORLD?

Since Sweden declared the world's first explicitly feminist foreign policy in 2014, interest has grown steadily in feminist approaches to foreign policy.

There are now 8 countries which have formally adopted feminist foreign policy: Sweden, France, Canada, Luxembourg, Mexico, Spain and Libya. The Euro-pean Union and the Scottish National Party have also expressed interest in the approach, there is increasing debate and discussion about Asian approaches to feminist foreign policy, and a Global

“FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IS THE POLICY OF A STATE THAT DEFINES ITS INTER-ACTIONS WITH OTHER STATES, AS WELL AS MOVEMENTS AND OTHER NON-STATE ACTORS, IN A MANNER THAT PRIORITIZES PEACE, GENDER EQUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTEGRITY; ENSHRINES, PROMOTES, AND PROTECTS THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL; SEEKS TO DISRUPT COLONIAL, RACIST, PATRIARCHAL AND MALE-DOMINATED POWER STRUCTURES; AND ALLOCATES SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES, INCLUDING RESEARCH, TO ACHIEVE THAT VISION. FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IS COHERENT IN ITS APPROACH ACROSS ALL OF ITS LEVERS OF INFLUENCE, ANCHORED BY THE EXERCISE OF THOSE VALUES AT HOME AND CO-CREATED WITH FEMINIST ACTIVISTS, GROUPS AND MOVEMENTS, AT HOME AND ABROAD”.
(THOMPSON, PATEL, KRIPKE, O'DONNELL, 2020).

Coalition for Feminist Foreign Policy has been established to advocate for increased uptake of the approach.

Research conducted by IWDA in 2020 demonstrates common factors that have enabled these declarations. Announcements of feminist foreign policy tend to come early in the tenure of a new government, directed to an international audience by a values-aligned political leader. Declarations then provide a strong mandate to kick off a policy development process. This is supported by civil society creating an enabling environment for feminist foreign policy announcements, and engaging with policy development processes to ensure it can be institutionalised, supported by key allies within the foreign policy bureaucracy.

Similarities across feminist foreign policy commitments declared to date include:

- Underpinned by principles of human rights, women's rights, gender justice, and intersectionality
- Specific reference to the Sustainable Development Goals and other international human rights commitments and treaties.
- Thematic areas of focus including preventing violence against women and girls, women peace and security, women's political participation, women's economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights and climate change.
- Priority on internal processes such as ensuring gender parity within the Foreign Service.
- External facing commitment such as financial targets for Official Development Assistance (ODA), and performance and spending targets for gender equality activities, the most ambitious being Canada's commitment that 95% of its ODA will target gender equality as a principal or significant objective.

WHAT WOULD A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY FOR AUSTRALIA LOOK LIKE?

Australia's current foreign policy framework aims to create a more "stable and prosperous" region, and identifies gender equality as a shared Australian value.

However, Australia's approach to foreign policy has traditionally treated gender equality as a secondary consideration, primarily addressed through international development. Our interest in a peaceful and flourishing region cannot be met without consideration of the gendered implications of trade, defence, diplomacy and international cooperation. This hides issues of importance to Australia's bilateral and regional relationships, and represents a missed opportunity to work towards a more equal world.

Under a feminist foreign policy approach, gender equality and human security become the central objective of foreign policy, not just a consideration. Applying this lens, we can see Australia's national interests in different – but more holistic – ways, laying the groundwork for a reframing of national security towards a collective set of interests which are of benefit to Australia and to others.

An Australian feminist foreign policy would place gender equality as the goal of foreign policy, and commit to intersectional gender and human rights analysis across all aspects of foreign policy and international development cooperation. It would be appropriately resourced, backed by targets and accountability measures, and be inclusive of feminist leadership from the Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

The Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition, convened by IWDA, includes supporters of feminist foreign policy working across foreign policy, women's rights, international development, defence, security and other related sectors. It includes a core group driving the agenda in Australia, as well as a broader membership of allied organisations and individuals.

For more information about feminist foreign policy, and the work of the Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition, please contact Alice Ridge, Senior Research, Policy and Advocacy Advisor at IWDA through our website (www.iwda.org.au/australian-feminist-foreign-policy-coalition)