

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY AN OVERVIEW

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Authored by IWDA for the Australian Coalition for Feminist Foreign Policy

WHAT IS FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY?

The Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition (AFFPC) advocates for feminist foreign policy as a framework to understand and transform the global systems of power which uphold and perpetuate inequality – including patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, racism and others – in order to create a peaceful and flourishing societies.

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 all areas of foreign policy. This is critical, because gender equality is a predictor of peaceful and flourishing societies. 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 marginalization – 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.

Eleven additional countries have committed to feminist foreign policy: France, Canada, Luxembourg, Mexico, Spain, Libya, Chile, Germany, the Netherlands, Liberia and Colombia. Finland, the European Union and the Scottish National Party have also endorsed the approach, and there is increasing debate and discussion about approaches to feminist foreign policy in Asia and other parts of the Majority World¹. The Global Partner Network for Feminist Foreign Policy has been established to promote the articulation and implementation of feminist foreign policies worldwide, deepening analysis, understanding and impact.

“FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IS THE POLICY OF A STATE THAT DEFINES ITS INTERACTIONS 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).

While each country has defined their approach to feminist foreign policy in contextually relevant ways, there are some common core principles across these commitments, which include:

- Principles of human rights, women's rights, gender justice and intersectionality;
- Driving new and additional resources to thematic areas of focus like 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;
- Funding women's rights organisations and feminist movements as the most effective agents of change on gender equality outcomes;
- Prioritising internal processes to achieve gender equality, such as ensuring gender parity within the foreign affairs departments and amongst Ambassadors.

You can read more about the pathways to adopting feminist foreign policy globally in our recent research [From Seeds to Roots: Trajectories towards feminist foreign policy](#)

1 Consistent with decolonial approaches, Majority World is IWDA's preferred descriptor for what is elsewhere called the developing world or the Global South. As discussed by Dr Salmah Eva Lina Lawrence [here](#).

WHAT WOULD A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY FOR AUSTRALIA LOOK LIKE?

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

In 2022, the Australian Government committed to a First Nations foreign policy approach embedding Indigenous perspectives, experiences and interests into Australia's foreign policy.

For a settler-colonial country like Australia, a First Nations foreign policy is a necessary element of a feminist approach. The exclusion of First Nations individuals, world views and expertise in Australia's foreign policy has persisted due to the operation of power structures that have also acted to exclude women, trans- and non-binary people. In this way, a First Nations and feminist approach to foreign policy can be mutually supporting, offering tools and frameworks for understanding and transforming systems of power that perpetuate inequalities. Such an approach would recognise all forms of power—from systems of power that govern inter-personal relationships to those that governs state interactions at the global-level. It would be grounded in First Nations expertise and worldviews, institutionalised across government and informed by, and accountable to, civil society, women's rights organisations, and First Peoples' of Australia, the Pacific and Asia.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

The Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition (AFFPC) is a network of more than 150 individuals and organisations committed to advancing intersectional feminist foreign policy in Australia. It is convened by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and includes supporters of feminist foreign policy working across diplomacy, defence, peacebuilding, women's rights, international development 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, visit our website (www.iwda.org.au/australian-feminist-foreign-policy-coalition) or contact Alice Ridge, Senior Research Policy and Advocacy Advisor at IWDA (aridge@iwda.org.au).