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10 reasons why we need feminist foreign policy

We asked 10 leading thinkers, policymakers, journalists and activists what feminist foreign policy means to them. They each support the idea — here's how they see it working.

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What does feminist leadership look like? If feminist foreign policy is here to stay, how should it be defined and what does and should it look like in practice?

Ten women — from New Zealand leader Jacinda Ardern to Nigerian human rights activist Osai Ojigho to co-chair of Argentina's W20 Andrea Grobocopatel — reflect on the idea of a feminist foreign policy, why it matters and where this concept needs to go next.

Our contributors

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Jacinda Ardern, prime minister of New Zealand

There is no room for complacency.

I count myself lucky to live in a country like New Zealand where we have a proud history of speaking out on gender issues and equality for women both at home and internationally. This year we are celebrating 125 years of women's suffrage (http://women.govt.nz/about/new-zealand-women/history/suffrage-125#_blank) after becoming the first country to give women the vote in 1893.

But what does that achievement mean today? It means advocating strongly for women in international forums and working hard to meet our obligations in relation to the status of women. These include the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/#_blank) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/beijingdeclaration.html#_blank), which sets goals for the global advancement of women.

New Zealand consistently ranks highly in respect of gender equality. We are placed 9th out of 144 countries in the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Index 2016* (http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/rankings/#_blank). There are 46 women in the current parliament, 38.4 percent of the total 120 MPs, which is the highest representation in our history.

But there is no room for complacency. Women's over representation in statistics on violence and low wages is still too high. We continue to work on closing the gender pay gap, reducing domestic violence, supporting more girls in education and training, removing barriers to women contributing to a fair and sustainable economy, encouraging and developing women leaders, and ensuring women and girls are free from violence.

This work will continue until we have equality.

Jacinda Ardern is the prime minister of New Zealand.

[BACK TO TOP \(#TOC\)](#)

Elin Liss, Swedish activist and political scientist

A feminist foreign policy challenges power.

Feminism *always* investigates power with the goal of transforming it.

A feminist foreign policy views conflict through a gendered lens and sees how patriarchal structures fuel violence and conflicts, especially in societies where masculinity is militarized. Therefore, a feminist foreign policy should be anti-militaristic and put human security at the centre. It recognizes the gendered impacts of weapon proliferation, where unequal power structures, both in the home and in society, become even stronger when men are armed. It chooses diplomacy over the use of force, preventing violent conflict instead of waging war.

The main challenge for implementing a feminist foreign policy is lack of consistency. There is a clear conflict between Sweden's strong standpoint for women's rights and democracy and its weapons export to dictatorships like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Thailand. And why did the Swedish government buy helicopters that are too expensive to fly, while women are being forced to give birth in cars because the closest hospital has been shut down? The failure lies in the lack of political will, as well as not putting your money where your mouth is. A feminist foreign policy does not allow other interests, such as economic ones, to override women's irreversible human rights.

This also ties in to who are seen as legitimate actors. You often find women in civil society, partly because of exclusion from official power. Listening only to officials will lead to signs of conflict being ignored, misdirected investments in aid programs, and to peace agreements that cement inequality. This will uphold, instead of breaking down, existing power structures. A feminist foreign policy listens to a wide range of local and national women's movements, recognizes them as actors in all policy areas, and creates platforms for them to act. And yes, it provides resources for women to organize.

Feminist policy is about walking the walk and not just talking the talk.

Elin Liss is the communications manager at the Swedish section of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, WILPF. She holds a degree in political science. WILPF is an international feminist peace organization working on conflict prevention, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, and disarmament.

[BACK TO TOP \(#TOC\)](#)

Sally Armstrong, Canadian journalist, activist and author

Examples of feminist leadership are already all around us.

The earth has shifted under the status of women. Economist Jeffrey Sachs said it first: "The status of women and the economy are directly related; where one is flourishing so is the other, where one's in the ditch, so is the other."

It's a wise government that responds to the vast challenges for women and directs its foreign policy accordingly. Announcing to the world that the federal cabinet would be 50 percent women "because it's 2015" was one step. But it was another giant leap to dedicate a \$650 million fund (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-women-reproductive-rights-1.4014841>) to assist women around the world immediately after Donald Trump used his woe-begotten power to undermine women's health with the 'global gag rule' that stripped health care to women and cut services for infant and child health.

"Feminist leadership looks like...Chile relaxing its abortion law, India banning Islamic instant divorce and Iceland making equal pay the law."

The president of the United States stands with crackpots like the Taliban, ISIS and Boko Haram on hateful policies toward women. The rest of the world has installed foreign policy that addresses the fact that women are propelling changes so immense they are altering intractable files such as poverty, conflict and violence — files that can turn the economy around. Feminist leadership looks like Lebanon repealing the law that gives a rapist impunity if he marries the victim, Chile relaxing its abortion law, India banning Islamic instant divorce and Iceland making equal pay the law.

The Canadian government has even weighed into internecine battles by providing funds for women as change makers, such as Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, who are getting Afghan girls to school so they can learn to think for themselves, and to Journalists for Human Rights, who are training women journalists in South Sudan to take on injustices and alter the status quo along with the direction of the civil war.

That's feminist foreign policy. That's what feminist leadership looks like. Rewards are sure to follow.

*Sally Armstrong is the author of several books including *Ascent of Women: A New Age is Dawning for Every Mother's Daughter*.*

[BACK TO TOP \(#TOC\)](#)

Osai Ojigho, human rights lawyer and director of Amnesty International Nigeria

Feminist leadership is the responsible and accountable use of power to empower others.

A feminist foreign policy is a policy that transcends the general notion of inclusion of women and aims to transform all spaces for an integrated world.

It is deliberate, positive and direct in providing a robust intervention in societies' affairs that addresses not only deep-rooted historical and structural issues that hinder inclusion and equality but promotes, in both design and application, a transformative approach to development. It is an emerging area of public policy that can be radical but also innovative.

Power as we know it, whether political or positional, is vested in traditional institutions such as government and corporations. To restore equilibrium in society and create meaningful participatory engagement in the evolving global world, a feminist foreign policy draws attention to people, not structures. Where decision-making is skewed towards a few to the detriment of the majority, or fostered by a majority to the almost obliteration of a minority or alternative narratives, it creates one perspective as 'the' perspective, which is equally limiting as it is inherently false. When it concerns status and gender relations between men and women, patriarchal values elevate the status of men to the detriment of women. A feminist foreign policy must therefore direct attention to areas that enhance the active participation of all people, especially women.

A feminist leader is one that is responsive to the needs of others. It is not about people-pleasing but rather listening to, affirming and finding ways to capture each person's contribution and viewing it in relation to others to arrive at a decision. A feminist leader is accountable by example and deals with wrongs fairly, in a non-judgmental way. A feminist leader recognizes and acknowledges strengths in differences but also celebrates diversity. Feminist leadership, in my opinion, is the responsible and accountable use of power to empower others while fostering an environment of mutual respect and gender equality.

Osai Ojigho is a human rights lawyer and director of Amnesty International Nigeria.

[BACK TO TOP \(#TOC\)](#)

Mona Küppers, co-chair of 2017 Women20 in Germany

The Women20 shows us how male-dominated organizations can change.

The G20 had once been representative of what we perceived as male-dominated economic governance. The establishment of Women20 (W20) as an independent engagement group in 2015 was thus essential to counter the structural gender imbalances inherent in G20 deliberation. Still, when we were asked to chair the W20 in 2017 (<http://www.w20-germany.org/>) as representatives of the National Council of German Women's Organisations

and the Association of German Women Entrepreneurs, we were doubtful whether W20 would be able to go above and beyond its symbolic role of “adding” female representatives to G20 discussions.

The outcome of last year’s G20 communiqué proved the opposite. Thanks to the important groundwork of our predecessors involved with W20 Turkey and W20 China, the W20 has managed to commit the G20 to concrete action to achieve labour market, financial and digital inclusion of women. For the first time in the G20’s history, the leaders’ communiqué (<http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2017/2017-G20-leaders-declaration.pdf>) contained an entire section dedicated to women’s empowerment, which elaborated on three specific initiatives related to gender equality: the #eSkills4Girls initiative, the Women Entrepreneurs Financing Initiative (We-Fi) and the establishment of a business women leaders’ task force in close cooperation with the W20 and Business20.

Chairing the W20, we aimed to offer a different, gender-sensitive perspective to G20 deliberations. The W20 is not a group meant to bring some colour into the negotiations. It is a strong and diverse network bringing together women representing all parts of society. Together they are pressing the heads of states and government to change perspectives, to tackle stereotypes, to end discrimination and to integrate “women’s empowerment” as a cross-cutting issue to finally achieve gender equality in the G20 and beyond. We will continue down that road, thanks to Argentina (<http://w20argentina.com/>)’s strong leadership in 2018.

Mona Küppers is the co-chair of Women20 2017 and president of the National Council of German Women’s Associations. Find W20 Germany (@WomenTwenty_Ger (https://twitter.com/WomenTwenty_Ger)) & W20 Argentina (@W20_Argentina (https://twitter.com/W20_Argentina)) on Twitter: #W20.

BACK TO TOP (#TOC)

Marie-Claude Bibeau, Canada’s minister of international development

This is a first step in a longer journey.

Canada has adopted a feminist approach because we believe that women and girls have the ability to achieve real change in terms of sustainable development and peace. For decades, women around the world have led the struggle for gender equality. Local women’s organizations that advance women’s rights, particularly at the grassroots level, play an important role in raising social awareness and mobilizing communities to change laws, attitudes, social norms and practices.

"Local women's organizations that advance women's rights play an important role."

That is why I have launched the Women Voice and Leadership initiative as part of our new Feminist International Assistance Policy, to support the crucial work of these local women's group in the Global-South.

As we implement this new policy, I will continue to engage with all Canadians and our stakeholders, because the launch of this policy is not the end of the process but rather a first step in a longer journey to achieving the best international assistance results. We cannot reach those results if we leave half of the population behind and that is why we need a feminist approach to reach the sustainable development goals by 2030.

Marie-Claude Bibeau is Canada's minister of international development.

[BACK TO TOP \(#TOC\)](#)

Melanne Verveer, executive director, Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace & Security

No country can get ahead without the full participation of women.

A feminist foreign policy recognizes that democracy, peace, prosperity and social progress need the full participation of women. No country can get ahead if it leaves half its people behind.

When Margot Wallström took office as Sweden's foreign minister in 2014, she adopted the world's first explicitly 'feminist' foreign policy. For her, this meant three Rs: rights; representation in decision-making; and resources fairly allocated to women.

Wallström gave a name to the approach of Hillary Clinton. When she became secretary of state in 2009, Clinton proclaimed the rights of women and girls as a cornerstone of the United States' foreign policy and vital to American national security interests. To ensure the institutionalization of gender into US foreign policy, President Barack Obama created the position of ambassador-at-large for global women's issues — a position which I was honoured to hold.

Now, Canada's government has joined a small but growing number of nations in elevating women's rights to the core of its foreign policy.

Advancing equal rights is a moral imperative — but it's strategic too. There is a wealth of research and data to show that investing in women is critical for economic, social and political progress. A foreign policy that puts women at its core — whether explicitly called feminist or not — helps tackle the most pressing global challenges.

Melanne Verveer is the executive director of Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace & Security. Ambassador Verveer served as the first US Ambassador for Global Women's Issues, a position to which she was nominated by President Barack Obama in 2009. President Obama also appointed her to serve as the US representative to the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

BACK TO TOP (#TOC)

J. Ann Tickner, US-based political scientist

The inclusion of women is at once strategic and just.

In 2017, Canada, like Sweden before it in 2014, announced it was pursuing certain aspects of a feminist foreign policy, emphasizing international assistance to women's rights organizations and supplying more women soldiers to UN peacekeeping operations. An important dimension of any feminist foreign policy should be decreasing arms sales, particularly sales of the types of weapons that kill civilians, the majority of whom are women and children.

To pursue a feminist foreign policy, states should implement the provisions of the UN's Women, Peace and Security agenda, outlined in UNSC resolution 1325 (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>) and seven subsequent resolutions. These include the participation of women in security sector institutions and in peace building; the protection of the human rights of women and girls with a particular emphasis on eliminating gender-based violence; and the inclusion of women as agents in relief and recovery operations.

The inclusion of women in diplomacy and peace building relies on two types of arguments: a rights-based approach, which claims that women deserve to be included, and an instrumental approach, which argues women bring something valuable to peace building, and that development goals more generally are more likely to be met if women's development is prioritized.

In 2010, then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton proclaimed: "The subjugation of women is a threat to the common security of our world and to the national security of our country." Clearly, then, a feminist foreign policy is a smart foreign policy. It is one that can be pursued

by both female and male leaders, and it involves taking women's (as well as men's) security seriously.

J. Ann Tickner is a distinguished scholar in residence at American University and professor of international relations with Monash University's Gender, Peace and Security Centre.


BACK TO TOP (#TOC)

Jayne Stoyles, executive director, Amnesty International Canada (English branch)

A feminist policy can guide all policymaking.

Canada's prime minister and government are openly feminist, and 'feminist foreign policy' is the new buzz phrase on Parliament Hill. Is a feminist foreign policy what Canada most needs?

The answer is absolutely yes — one centred on addressing the historical and structural gender power imbalances at the root of gender inequality, and their intersection with race, ethnicity, and other identity factors. This implicitly involves alleviating symptoms of inequality such as violence, early and forced marriage, lack of access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, and barriers to participating in politics, peace processes, and the labour force.



"Canada must be held to the same rigorous standards as other countries to address the root causes of persistent gender inequality here at home."

Collecting disaggregated data on gender inequality and using it to guide gender-sensitive programming and policy-making is part of implementing a feminist foreign policy. But implementation also involves upholding international human rights laws and standards for all people, being inclusive of gender-diverse individuals, maintaining strong partnerships with rights holders and civil society organizations, and transparent decision-making.

A feminist foreign policy is the lawful thing to do to uphold international human rights standards. It is the smart thing to do to promote global peace and security, given that research shows peace processes are more lasting when women are involved. It is the prudent financial thing to do to address root causes, rather than perpetual band-aid solutions that address only the symptoms of inequality.

Equally, Canada must be held to the same rigorous standards as other countries to address the root causes of persistent gender inequality here at home. To quote American poet Emma Lazarus: “Until we are all free, we are none of us free.” Canada certainly does need a feminist foreign policy. But what it needs more is a feminist policy to guide *all* of its policy-making and programming, to end gender inequality both in Canada and abroad.

Jayne Stoyles is the executive director of Amnesty International Canada (English branch).

BACK TO TOP (#TOC)

Andrea Grobocopatel, co-chair of the 2018 W20 in Argentina

Choosing the evolution of society requires all of us as the driving force for change.

In order to face a volatile and complex world, with rapid changes, marginalization, greed and environmental damage, both innovation and creativity are needed. This will be possible only if there are different points of view and more diversity in decision-making, which is why we need to incorporate women’s voices.

We need women to stand up and to be examples for others, and for more of them leading in every level, sector, industry and organization.

We also require men who are aware of the importance of sharing housework and the care of children and older adults, willing to go hand in hand with women who surround them, letting them grow and develop just as men are able to do. There won’t be an equal world until productive and reproductive tasks are shared by every person, no matter their gender.

We need all people, of all genders, of every organization, in order to change paradigms and beliefs.

This is not only an issue of rights but also an opportunity for the world, for every country, every business, every human being...this is progress for everyone.

The future of our businesses, institutions, organizations, and of each nation is up to us. Nothing is going to evolve if we do not modify our attitudes and our minds. Choosing the evolution of society as a whole in pursuit of a better future requires all of us as the driving force for change.

As co-chair of W20 Argentina, I want to tell you that I am more than happy to have this role and the enormous responsibility. I believe we can challenge statistics working with civil, public and private organizations, as we are doing now. We are all behind a common objective — inclusion and equal opportunity for everyone — because we deserve to choose

what we want for our lives. To have such liberty, the W20 bases its work around the necessity of women being economically independent, being capable of having their own income and living the lives they have chosen on their own.

Andrea Grobocopatel is the co-chair of the 2018 W20 and president of FLOR, the foundation for leadership and responsible organizations in Argentina.

[BACK TO TOP \(#TOC\)](#)



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