

Women Make Amazing Peacekeepers, and We Need More of Them

With Canada's defence policy review, we can make it a priority.

By Mobina Jaffer

Civilians in conflict zones face horrifying experiences of violence — particularly women and girls who become targets of gender-based attacks and abuse.

To create a safer world for them, more women must be involved in peacekeeping processes.

The Department of National Defense's current [Defense Policy Review](#) is an opportunity to make this a priority for Canada. The timing couldn't be better — as we resume our participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations around the world, we can show how women are essential to successful peace processes.

The UN itself pushed for gender-based analyses of conflict situations and the inclusion of women at all levels of the peace process when it passed [Resolution 1325](#). And since its ratification in 2000, Canada has signed off on seven additional treaties that recognize the importance of women in peace and security processes.

Canada can now live up to its international commitments and act as a leader in improving the lives of women and children affected by conflict by having more women participate on the ground.

With forced marriage, systematic sexual and gender-based crimes, restrictions on education, poor access to health care and restrictions on participation in public life, the number of gender-based threats to global security require women to help to defuse them.

In the words of Hervé Ladsous, head of UN Peacekeeping Operations: “Women can and must play a leading role in political participation, conflict resolution and transition from conflict to peace.”

When women are included in peace processes, progress is more resilient. Many UN peacekeeping experts have [stated](#) that women are a vital and irreplaceable resource when interacting with local communities during peace missions by virtue of their ability to reach out to women and children with more success than their male peers.

Since women and children are the primary victims of violence and abuse, female personnel have achieved higher rates of success at approaching these victims, who would otherwise be largely silent.

When women take on leadership roles, the missions they lead are [more likely](#) to include a focus on gender-responsive peacekeeping styles, the prevention of sexual violence and the handling of child soldiers.

And women on the ground during peace operations foster greater trust in the communities in which they serve, leading to an increased reliability in intelligence and opportunities for capacity building.

In short, involving more women in peace processes give UN missions higher chances of success.

At home, Canada can take pride in the great steps it has recently taken to improve the status of women through its military policy.

With [Op Honour](#), the Canadian Armed Forces have made a firm commitment to prevent sexual misconduct and harassment within its ranks.

Canada is also ahead of many nations worldwide in employing female soldiers despite its failure to meet the DND target of 25 per cent.

Against this background, Canada is well positioned to contribute to peace efforts on a global scale.

The Defense Policy Review represents an opportunity to make the well-being of women and girls a priority for Canada. By adopting a strategy to place women on the ground and in high-level positions across peace operations, Canada can play a major role in addressing the unique challenges faced by women and girls in conflict zones.

For the sake of these women and global security, we must seize this opportunity.