



**The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600**

**Cc: Hon Kelly O'Dwyer, Minister for Women
Hon Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade
Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Defence
Dr Sharman Stone, Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls**

Dear Prime Minister,

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security expresses deep concern and disappointment at the Australian Government's announcement of its global Defence Export Strategy and intention to become one of the world's biggest arms manufacturers and exporters over the next decade. The Coalition is a non-partisan and independent coalition of civil society organisations, networks and individuals working to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in Australia, Asia, the Pacific region, and globally. We have been working collaboratively with the Australian Government since 2012 to provide expert advice on and support the implementation of the Australian National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (2012-2019).

Instead of investing in expanding arms export capacity, to promote greater security and peace the Australian Government should:

- Revisit the strategy to expand arms export as it is contrary to Australia's commitments to women, peace and security;
- Invest in and support women's peacebuilding efforts in conflict countries, and in particular Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Myanmar;
- Pass legislation prohibiting the export of arms to countries where civilians are being harmed and mandate a gender impact analysis to be undertaken before arms trade agreements are signed.

Increasing investment in and the availability of arms is in direct contradiction to Australia's commitment in the Foreign Policy White Paper to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Foreign Policy White Paper recognizes that, "Australia has an abiding interest in working towards the ultimate goal of a world without WMD...Chemical weapons are again being used, as seen recently in Syria. Proliferation networks, including for missile technology and small arms, threaten the security of the Indo-Pacific (pg.83)." Conflicts in the Middle East persist in part because they are fueled by export in arms from the world's biggest arms-exporting countries. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute notes that "arms imports to the Middle East increased by 86 per cent between 2007–2011 and 2012–16. It is likely that arms imports have contributed to the instability, violent conflict and human rights violations in the region." The effectiveness of Australia's investments in recovery and stabilization efforts in conflict-affected countries (such as DFAT's investment of another \$100 million from 2018-20 in Iraq) are blunted by the simultaneous promotion of a militarised approach to the resolution of conflict, underwritten by increasing export of arms.

Further, Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2019) and Australia's international commitments under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions require us to promote and contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding and the

protection of the human rights of women and girls. **The recent announcement of the Australian Government to increase defence exports, directly contributes to a proliferation of arms and a move towards increased militarisation. This is inconsistent with the Australian Government's commitment to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda** which recognises that militarisation and weaponisation are simultaneously a root cause and an outcome of conflict. It also stands in opposition to Australia's strong advocacy, during its term on the UN Security Council, for the inclusion of clauses in the Arms Trade Treaty prohibiting export of arms in cases where they are being used to perpetrate human rights abuses, including gender-based violence.

In addition, as a member of the Human Rights Council, Australia has committed to advancing the rights of women and girls. Yet we know the proliferation, use and impact of small arms and light weapons are heavily gendered and have differentiated impacts on women and men. Women are more often victims than perpetrators of fire-arm related incidents and are particularly at risk in a domestic context, from their intimate partners. The high number of women murdered with firearms reflects the high lethality of firearms in the context of domestic violence.

It is also difficult to reconcile how Australia will fulfill its obligations as Chair of the UN Disarmament Committee which recognises that "...in all parts of the world, the ready availability of weapons and ammunition has led to human suffering, political repression and terror among civilian populations" (UN Office for Disarmament Affairs). Data from conflict ridden countries in the Middle East is evidence enough to show how arms are used on a daily basis contributing to violations of human rights, especially the rights of women and girls.

The Australian Government is sending inconsistent and mixed messages to the Australian people and the international community. **The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security is therefore calling on the Australian Government to provide policy coherence by prioritising a foreign policy and security strategy centred on conflict prevention and women's leadership and participation in conflict resolution and post-conflict processes.** We strongly encourage that the Australian Government aspire and commit to being in the top 10 in advocating (and living up to) the reduction of global military spending and supporting women-led initiatives in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and particularly women's leadership for disarmament.

Yours sincerely,

Steering Group of the Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security

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