

Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security



SUBMISSION TO AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INTERNATIONAL GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY

Introduction

The Australian Civil Society Coalition for Women, Peace and Security (the Coalition) is a non-partisan and independent alliance of civil society organisations, networks, and individuals working to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Gender, Peace and Security (GPS) agenda. Members build evidence and understanding of best practice, raise awareness, facilitate dialogue, and support women's rights partners in Australia and globally.

The Gender Snapshot 2023 provides a deeply concerning context, warning that if current trends in gender equality continue - approximately 8% of the world's female population (over 340 million women and girls) will live in extreme poverty by 2030; close to one in four women will experience moderate or severe food insecurity; and that under a worst-case climate scenario, climate change may push up to 158.3 million more women and girls into poverty (16 million more than the total number of men and boys). Armed conflicts are escalating, and a shocking 614 million women and girls lived in conflict-affected contexts in 2022, 50% higher than in 2017. Women and girls in such settings face acute poverty, food insecurity, displacement and an elevated risk of violence, including domestic violence, with serious multi-generational consequences. **The Gender Snapshot 2023** calls for urgent action to accelerate progress towards gender equality by 2030, including integrated, targeted policy and collaborative actions, with sustained funding across stakeholders, to address gender inequities¹.

Australia's International Development Policy calls for the advancement of gender equality and peaceful, stable and prosperous development over the coming decade. Gender inequality exacerbates, and is exacerbated by, the impact of conflict, disasters and climate change on women and girls. Prioritising **gender, peace and security** strategies, actions, and investments will not only contribute to advancing gender equality and the WPS agenda domestically and internationally, but also address climate risk and promote increased human security, stability, and prosperity globally.

The **International Gender Equality Strategy** provides a crucial opportunity for Australia to center a **gender, peace and security** approach at the heart of the strategy, reinforcing existing commitments and scaling up impact and ambition on gender equality, within a context of increasing conflict and climate impacts. Significant action is imperative, with the potential to drive gender transformative change that enables women, girls and non-binary people to realise their rights, and to contribute to a safer, equitable, and more inclusive world.

Prioritising Gender, Peace & Security (GPS) in the New Strategy

The Coalition encourages DFAT to *centre a gender, peace and security approach* within the new strategy, which includes aligning Australia's current policy objectives with innovative and integrated strategies to promote gender equality, human security and peace building, and address climate risk and conflict prevention. Specific recommendations include:

1. **Delivering against existing GPS commitments while significantly increasing Australia's level of ambition:** While Australia has made ambitious national commitments to end domestic violence in a generation, international commitments are less ambitious when compared to those of our strategic security partners. For example, existing actions in Australia's Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security are fragmented and under-resourced, and there is a need for significant investment to prevent and respond to the human security needs of diverse women and girls.
2. **Ensuring First Nations gender justice:** The strategy should align with DFAT's First Nations Foreign Policy and is an opportunity to promote the rights of First Nations women, their indigenous knowledge and their priorities for peace and security. This should include promoting the genuine participation and engagement of First Nations women, as well as embedding feminist principles to reshape Australia's global practice and image as a peacemaker and advocate for human security.
3. **Catalysing diverse women's leadership:** Gender transformative change is not possible without prioritising the agency and leadership of diverse women and girls in peacebuilding, negotiations and security efforts. Providing sustainable and unrestricted funding to women's organisations, coalitions and networks in high-risk contexts can ensure that GPS moves beyond portraying women as victims and acknowledges their active role in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.
4. **Prioritising human security:** Embedding the WPS Agenda within a broader human security lens can offer a more holistic approach to promoting stability and security. This includes funding and prioritisation of gender responsive actions to prevent and respond to emerging conflicts, humanitarian crises and climate change, as well as addressing the risks to human security.
5. **Prevention:** Building capacity to respond, detect and prevent future conflicts is a critical priority for reducing the gendered impacts of conflict. This includes a greater emphasis on understanding the relationship between gender equality, human rights and sustainable development, as well as the drivers of conflict; as well as scaled up investment in women-led prevention and conflict resolution.

Effective Approaches for Advancing GPS through the new Strategy

1. **Localisation and Partnerships:** Practical efforts could include: a) targeting support to women's organisations and feminist civil society in countries affected by conflict and crisis as well as groups representing diverse women, including LGBTQI+ communities and women with disabilities; b) developing frameworks to advance both gender equality and locally-led development across all humanitarian and conflict prevention initiatives; and c) creating grant mechanisms to prioritise gender responsive peacebuilding, climate change adaptation, and inclusive crisis response.

2. **Coordination and Accountability:** Links between insecurity and crises need to be recognised and addressed at all levels (national, regional and global), and by ensuring greater alignment across programs. There are clear opportunities to strengthen the combined impact of investments working to address climate risk, economic empowerment, conflict prevention, sexual and gender-based violence, and gender equality, across domestic and international policy and practice.
3. **Intersectionality and intergenerationality:** The new strategy should recognise diverse women's different experiences of insecurity and how these are impacted by intersecting and overlapping forms of oppression. Resourcing targeted responses to these experiences could ensure that those most impacted by insecurity have the space and resources to lead responses.
4. **Embedding WPS principles and practice:** Systematically embedding the WPS agenda and a broader human security lens from the outset in the funding of and response to emerging conflicts, humanitarian crises and climate change can support gender transformative change.
5. **Investment in Research:** Funding research that applies a feminist and WPS lens to foreign policy, defence, and security concerns, across government and civil society is important in driving this agenda. This can promote evidence-based findings in advancing gender equality, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention, across humanitarian, disaster and fragile contexts.

Advancing the GPS Agenda Internationally under the New Strategy

1. **Resourcing implementation of Australia's Second National Action Plan on WPS:** Australia is encouraged to commit a dedicated budget for the implementation of Australia's Second WPS NAP; strengthen the rationalisation of domestic and international dimensions of peace and security; incorporate a human security framework; improve coordination across agencies; strengthen monitoring, evaluation and accountability; and support civil society. Further resourcing for WPS NAPs of regional partners such as ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum, and bilateral partners can make an important contribution to advancing WPS internationally.
2. **Dedicated Funding for Women's and LGBTQI+ Civil Society:** Set a target for a minimum of 5% of bilateral Overseas Development Assistance to be directed to frontline women's rights organisations and networks representing diverse constituencies of women and girls.
3. **Financial Commitment and Resource Allocation:** Contribute to global efforts with dedicated funding to projects and initiatives that further the WPS agenda, including ensuring that all humanitarian programs contribute to WPS goals and support local level development. This could be achieved through targeted indicators and outcomes. Australia should also publicly commit to ensuring that WPS principles and priorities guide Australian trade, security, humanitarian and military deployments and responses in Australia and internationally.
4. **Multilateral Engagement and Advocacy:** Leverage Australia's influence in international multilateral fora to champion the WPS agenda (e.g. CEDAW, UNSC, CSW, UNHCR) and engage in consultations with feminist civil society and diaspora communities to ensure their priorities are advanced in these spaces. The Government should also advocate for and ratify key international instruments that align with WPS commitments, such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

5. **Support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Support and fund implementation of the SDGs, and particularly Goal 5: Gender Equality and Goal 16: Peace and Justice. Specifically, Australia can advocate for GPS priorities to be integrated across the SDGs as noted in the Gender Snapshot 2023 Report and ensure the systematic collection of data for Australia's reporting on the SDGs domestically and globally.
6. **Policy Alignment:** Ensure that Australia's foreign policy decisions, trade agreements, and security partnerships integrate GPS indicators, in line with the principles of the WPS agenda. Australia should also conduct comprehensive assessments of potential impacts on women's rights and insecurity in international agreements, such as arms export policy and AUKUS security pact.
7. **Representation:** Across diplomatic and foreign policy engagements, commit to ensuring gender parity, and specifically the inclusion of diverse women in peace negotiations. Setting targets for women's participation and leadership in prevention and peacebuilding efforts is also important and supporting the participation of local women peacebuilders in all peace negotiations to which Australia is a party to or to which Australia lends its support.
8. **Promote Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights:** Ensure women in crisis and conflict-affected countries have access to the full range of SRHR services, including support for victim-survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.
9. **VAWG:** Provide multi-sector investment in training, resources, and evidence-based evaluations that support the prevention, protection, and prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence; with dedicated investment in survivor-centred programs. Australia should also support the ICC commitments to SGBV, the Murad Code and CRSV Sanctions as well as initiatives that challenge impunity for violence against women and gender diverse people in conflict and crises.
10. **Climate Finance:** Recognise Australia's international obligations to climate finance as integral to addressing the gendered impacts of climate change and this should include significant funding to women's locally-led solutions to addressing climate impacts both domestically and overseas.

Proposed large scale investments in the WPS agenda

The Coalition recommends a targeted investment of A\$100 million as a dedicated budget to prioritise gender equality, human security, peace and conflict prevention. This amount of funding could enable substantive progress on the WPS agenda, as well as build increased opportunities for integrated policy and collaborative practice across gender equality, humanitarian, climate change and civil society priorities in Australia's International Development policy. Such an approach could also make a critical contribution to accelerating progress towards global gender equality by 2030, taking seriously the Gender Snapshot 2023 warning that *"failure to prioritise gender equality now could jeopardise the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."*

The Coalition proposes prioritising the following initiatives across the Indo-Pacific region:

1. Women, Peace and Security Peacebuilders Fund

- Establish a substantive, dedicated budget to support and promote peacebuilding efforts led by diverse women in the Indo-Pacific region and globally. This budget could facilitate training, capacity

building, advocacy and awareness raising to promote diverse women's sustained leadership and participation in advancing gender equality and peace building across the conflict, climate and humanitarian nexus. This fund could support locally led initiatives and promote partnerships with diaspora communities in Australia.

- Funding could be open to organisations, networks and coalitions representing diverse women including LGBTQI+ communities, and organisations with a track record of delivery against the pillars of the WPS agenda: participation, protection, prevention, and inclusive relief and recovery. Any funding should be accessible, flexible, and include core and multi-year grant funding.

2. Gender and Climate Change

- The climate crisis is not gender neutral, with diverse women and girls experiencing the greatest impacts of climate change, which exacerbates existing gender inequalities and poses unique threats to livelihoods, health, and safety. Around the world, women depend more on, yet have less access to, natural resources and often bear a disproportionate responsibility for securing food, water, and fuel.
- Climate change acts as a 'threat multiplier', escalating social, political and economic tensions in fragile and conflict-affected settings. As climate change drives conflict across the world, women and girls face increased vulnerabilities to all forms of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, human trafficking, child marriage, and other forms of violence.
- When disasters strike, women are less likely to survive and more likely to be injured than men due to long standing gender inequalities that have created disparities in information, mobility, decision-making, and access to resources and training. In the aftermath, diverse women and girls are less able to access relief and assistance, further threatening their livelihoods, wellbeing and recovery, and creating a vicious cycle of vulnerability to future disasters.
- Grant funding could be targeted to flexible, multi-year programs focused on supporting gender transformative approaches to climate change with a focus on supporting diverse women's leadership and countries at high risk of disaster or conflict.

3. Conflict related Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Fund

- Targeted SGBV attacks are increasing, and protracted conflicts, political tensions, climate disasters, are increasing the risk of SGBV on and offline. Australia could work to become a world leader in conflict related violence prevention and support targeted humanitarian assistance and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, with specific focus on victim-survivors of violence across our region.
- Resources for a comprehensive response could include: a) multi-sectoral/multi-level training to support prevention, protection and prosecution of SGBV; b) dedicated investment in survivor-centred programs; c) specific investment in regional civil society and human rights defenders to strengthen the capacity to educate, detect, report, and respond to specific conflict and humanitarian related SGBV; and d) promotion of international standards on protection and prevention of conflict and humanitarian related SGBV at all forums on peace and security, including humanitarian and disaster training, and joint military exercises.

For further information please contact:

Michelle Higelin and Ludmilla Kwitko, Co-Chairs

Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security at wpscoalition@gmail.com

ⁱⁱ unstats.un.org/sdgs/gender-snapshot/2023/