



**Response of the Women, Peace and Security
Network-Canada (WPSN-C)
to the Report of the Standing Committee on
Foreign Affairs and International Development:
*An Opportunity for Global Leadership: Canada and
the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*
(October 2016)**

On October 6, 2016, after months of meetings, hearing expert testimony, and analyzing a variety of documents, The House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (the Committee) released its report: *An Opportunity for Global Leadership: Canada and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*.

Comprehensive and aspirational, the report outlines the transformative potential of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. Further, it does not shy away from acknowledging the “crippling gaps” that exist in the current global and Canadian implementation of this agenda. Clearly, the Committee listened to the recommendations presented by the expert witnesses and the evidence they presented.

Specifically, the Committee highlighted that the WPS agenda is not a niche area of policy, or a topic of interest to a few special interest groups. Rather, the report makes clear that the WPS agenda touches all areas of peace and security programming and policy should thus be considered a core foreign policy priority.

The critical roles that grassroots women’s rights organizations play were also recognized in the report. The Committee’s statement that “one of the most important steps that Canada could take to advance women’s empowerment and gender equality would be to provide multi-year and core funding...particularly at the grassroots level” is reflective of the expert testimony heard throughout the study. It is also a key priority for Canadian civil society organizations.

With the renewal of Canada’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (C-NAP) and the political aspirations of the current Government, Canada is well positioned to establish, what the Committee, calls a “bold and ambitious global role” in the WPS agenda. The report thus acts as a call to action for the Canadian government. It is clear that the status quo is insufficient.

It is in this spirit that we respectfully submit our response to the Committee’s report. While the analysis and text of the report show strength, the recommendations do not go far enough. We therefore urge the Government and the Committee to ensure that future actions be bold. As an example we offer these reflections on a selection of the recommendations.

Recommendation	Comments
<i>Recommendation 1: The Government of Canada should make women, peace and security a priority of its foreign policy.</i>	While this was an overarching request of many of the witnesses appearing before the Committee (including members of the WPSN-C), this formulation lacks precision and ‘teeth.’ It is all too easy for the Government to say that it is already a priority. In fact, past progress reports constantly

argue that Canada is a leader on this issue.

We would like to see Canada make this a core and robust priority – practice, not just rhetoric. This means dedicating resources, strengthening national capacities, championing WPS issues across all peace and security policy issues, and committing diplomatic capital. The Government of Canada today faces an opportunity to take specific and concerted actions commensurate with its ambitions and reputation for defending human rights and championing women and girls' agency worldwide.

Recommendation 12: The Government of Canada should consider contributing to the Global Acceleration Instrument for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action

The Global Acceleration Instrument has the potential to garner evidence of the effectiveness and impact of women's work on the ground in building peace. A stronger evidence base could motivate other donors to invest in local women's organizations.

A handful of donors are currently contributing to the GAI, with Australia being the largest with a contribution of \$4 million. With a comparable investment, Canada could significantly increase the longevity, reach and effectiveness of the GAI.

Canada should contribute to the GAI. However it is essential that this be accompanied by other significant financial investments across the WPS agenda. It cannot be Canada's only (or even most important) WPS investment. Furthermore, steps must be taken to ensure that the majority of funds do reach women's organizations at the base and that the GAI does not get tangled up in multilateral funding restrictions.

Recommendation 13: The Government of Canada should provide development assistance on a multi-year basis and for core operations to civil society organizations – including at the grassroots level – that are working to implement the women, peace and security agenda in conflict-affected and fragile states.

This is an excellent recommendation. A new innovative funding mechanism (with significant resources) that ensures core, sustainable and predictable funding reaches grassroots women's organizations would mark Canada as a leader on this issue.

Currently members of the WPSN-C are leading discussions on what this type of funding mechanism could look like. We urge the Government to work them in order to draw on the lessons of past funds and ensure that Canada's funding mechanism can be a catalytic resource.

Recommendation 14: The Government of Canada should

This recommendation should go beyond 'considering.' The Government should allocate at least 15% of all peace and

consider allocating at least 15% of the international assistance it provides for peace and security programming to projects that have gender equality and women's empowerment as their primary objective.

security international assistance to this type of programming.

This should include funding from the Peace and Stabilization Operations Program, as well as bilateral country funding/programs for conflict-affected countries.

Furthermore, this commitment should also be accompanied by measures to ensure that internal tracking definitions and procedures accurately monitor these investments.

Recommendation 15: The Government of Canada should engage in comprehensive consultations with parliamentarians and civil society organizations to develop a new, ambitious and well-resourced national action plan on women, peace and security.

The essential role of civil society both globally and nationally in the shaping, implementation and advancement of the WPS agenda is recognized throughout the report. The role of civil society must extend beyond just participating in consultations.

Mirroring the report, which recognizes the expertise and experience that exists within Canadian civil society, it is imperative to ensure the involvement of civil society actors in all aspects and stages of the WPS agenda. This would involve a deeper commitment from the government moving from consultation to active engagement with civil society actors in the design, monitoring and accountability processes of the national action plan.

Recommendation 16: Each Canadian government department and agency with responsibilities under the action plan on women, peace and security should identify a high-level champion who would be responsible for developing and overseeing a directive that would be specific to that department or agency's role in the implementation of the action plan, and which would, among other requirements, identify needed financial and human resources, as well as time bound objectives.

This recommendation covers many of the crucial pre-requisites for a successful NAP: specific resources (financial and human), time-bound objectives and high-level champions.

Members of the WPSN-C have recommended in the past that the new C-NAP cover the full range of WPSN-C issues (protection, prevention, participation, and relief and recovery), although it is not necessary to structure the new C-NAP using these pillars.

We also recommend that the government partners in the C-NAP be expanded to include Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; Status of Women Canada; and Public Safety.

Finally we would like to mention a missing issue in the report. While the report touches on many important aspects of the WPS agenda, it remains silent on the vital issue of migration. Given the increasing numbers of displaced people - women in particular -- the gendered nature of forced migration is an area that begs for more recognition. Making an explicit commitment to including

migration as a specific area of focus in the WPS agenda would be a good start. This would include dedicated programming and resources focused on women migrants, in addition to sexual and gender based violence programming, covering areas such as: 1) sexual, reproductive and mental health support, social protection, employment and training opportunities and access to basic services including education, food and shelter; 2) support to local and community – based groups working with women in refugee and internally displaced person camps; and 3) training for Canadian officials on female forced migration in conflict, and other related gender issues such as appropriate mechanisms for dealing with LGBTI asylum seekers.

In conclusion, the WPSN-C commends the Committee for its thoughtful analysis of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. It is a complex, but critical issue. It is our hope to continue to work together to ensure that the aspirations of the report (not just the letter of the recommendations) provide guidance for a bold new agenda of the Government of Canada.

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