

**Statement Submitted to
House of Commons of Canada
Standing Committee on National Defence
by Jacqueline O’Neill, Canadian Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security**

Thank you to members of the Committee for prioritizing the crucial issue of women, peace, and security.

It speaks volumes to your commitment that during the time of an international pandemic and significant global instability, Parliament has not sidelined attention to this topic. Instead, you have elevated it. And for good reason: issues of women, peace and security not only highlight the particular and serious challenges that manifest during pandemics and instability. They also hold potential solutions to guide our responses. In short, awareness of the dynamics we are discussing today is a critical lens that we need now and in the future to strengthen our responses.

Perspectives on the 20th Anniversary

It is especially significant that we meet today. This week marks the 20th Anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – the foundation of the women, peace and security agenda. Its unanimous adoption was the first time that the highest security-focused, international body acknowledged that women are not only victims of conflict, but powerful agents of change. It called for their voices to be included directly in formal processes to prevent, end, and rebuild after war.

Resolution 1325 itself has been translated into more languages and dialects than any other Security Council resolution. It has been brought to life, often by civil society at community levels, who use it to hold their own governments accountable. There are now 10 related Security Council resolutions. Eighty-five countries have national action plans, and most multilateral organizations have dedicated policies or plans, including NATO, the OSCE, and the African Union.

Yet, progress on implementation of this framework has been inconsistent. For example, Afghan women are still fighting for significant, direct representation in peace talks. Two weeks ago, Mali, a country in crisis, announced a transitional government including only four women (comprising 16%), despite having a quota in law, requiring at least 30%. The representation of military women peacekeepers is only about 6%, and some within that remarkable group still experience unacceptable working conditions. In 2019, global military expenditure reached USD \$1.9 trillion, following the largest annual increase in a decade, while civilian women peacebuilders remain chronically under-resourced.

What's more, much of the progress we have achieved is in peril. There are increasing attacks against defenders of the human rights of women and LGBTQ2S persons. China, which has increased its influence with many countries, often through military support and development aid, has done so without conditioning it on democratic governance and respect for human rights – both of which have been entry points for gender-equality advocates.

Globally, some long-standing champions of women, peace and security are faltering in their support, and opponents are exploiting this disunity. And, authoritarian responses to COVID-19 and diminished funding sources represent existential threats for many women peacebuilders and local organizations working at community levels.

Canadian Commitments

Seeing these challenges, I am as proud as ever that Canada has demonstrated sustained commitment, spanning multiple governments and leaders, towards achieving gender equality and advancing women, peace and security.

No country is perfect. There is always much Canada can improve.

We are mid-way through our second national action plan, which now counts eight departments and the RCMP as implementing partners. (There are three lead partners: Global Affairs Canada; the Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces; and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Six other implementing partner departments join them: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs; Justice; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; Indigenous Services; Public Safety; and Women and Gender Equality.)

Canada also has an engaged parliament and civil society. Prior to assuming this role, I spent nearly 15 years working on these issues from within a non-profit organization.. I saw that without exception, governments were dramatically more likely to implement bold national action plans when parliamentarians and civil society play a consistent, active role.

Mandate of the Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security

Just over a year ago, I was appointed Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security for a three-year term, through an Order in Council. My primary charge is to provide “confidential assessments and advice” to ministers engaged in the National Action Plan on its implementation, and on how Canada can continue to demonstrate global leadership. My office is housed in Global Affairs Canada, but the mandate spans all implementing partners.

I see my role as a force multiplier for the government's efforts. I focus on:

- 1) Strengthening and expanding the network of Canada's nine National Action Plan implementing partners, with the goal of greater policy cohesion, better informed and equipped internal advocates, and more efficiently used resources;

- 2) Supporting the creation of customized tools, resources, and guidance, with the goal of ensuring Canadian personnel have the specialized expertise needed to deliver on Canada's women, peace and security commitments; and
- 3) Bolstering ambitious Canadian initiatives, with the goal of supporting Canada to lead – and continually learn from – our efforts with governments, multilateral organizations, and civil society partners around the world.

I take great care not to duplicate work, but rather to support and connect the efforts of many great leaders within our institutions. That includes the work of the Canadian Armed Forces' leadership and their designated Champion on women, peace, and security, Brigadier General Lise Bourgon. BGen Bourgon is joining us today to provide additional depth and perspectives, and to help ensure that we respond to your questions as thoroughly as possible.

Working with the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces

From the moment I assumed this role, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces have been supportive. At their initiation, on my second week on the job, I had a series of briefings, including with the Deputy Minister and Chief of the Defence Staff, as well as a conversation with the Minister. They offered their full support, including in the form of two secondees – one from DND and one from the CAF, to work directly in my office.

These personnel, as well many others within DND/CAF, have enabled me to engage in a range of areas. They include the following.

- **Contributing to Canadian leadership of**
 - The Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations
 - The Women, Peace and Security Chief of Defence Staffs Network (a group of CHODs, currently led by Canada, who commit to promote the integration of gender perspectives into armed forces and peacekeeping operations)
 - The Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network (comprising officials from 80 countries and regional organisations, currently co-led by Canada and Uruguay)
- **Strengthening implementation of our National Action Plan through**
 - Facilitating connections with and among Canadian civil society, including academics
 - Contributing to WPS research and curricula development with the Dallaire Centre of Excellence for Peace and Security
 - Convening meetings of National Action Plan focal points across the nine implementing partners
 - Providing input to work at NATO, including the drafting and implementing of various plans related to women, peace and security

- **Elevating the importance of women, peace and security in missions by supporting and engaging directly with CAF troops on the ground, including**
 - CAF soldiers working on Joint Task Force Impact and their Lebanese counterparts
 - CAF soldiers and the members of the Jordanian Armed Forces they are training and mentoring to be the first group of women trained in combat-related soldiering skills
 - Senegalese soldiers and gendarmes using Canadian support through the Elsie Initiative to assess barriers to women's full inclusion within their own security forces

- **Amplifying and connecting the wide variety of specialists working across government on issues related to the gendered dimensions of issues such as**
 - Child soldiers
 - Cyber security
 - Veterans' health

Sustaining Momentum

As I noted at the outset, there is both excellent work underway, and always a need to listen, reflect humbly, and improve.

I believe that we are in a potentially transformative moment. The pandemic is exposing the extent of inequalities in our communities, particularly in Indigenous communities. It has galvanized recognition of, and action to address, systemic racism in institutions around the world. It is a timely reminder that we need to take an intersectional approach to the WPS agenda. To do so effectively, we have to recognize the value of gender and race disaggregated data, and use it in expanding our understanding of what is required to make people secure. There are windows for positive change, and the challenge is upon all of us to seize them.

I am grateful that this committee is sustaining a focus on women, peace and security. It is particularly helpful to those of us working inside government when you ask that data be disaggregated by gender, as well as other intersecting identities including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, and more. It is helpful when you review and interrogate the annual progress reports submitted to parliament. It is helpful when you invite testimony from civil society representatives and academics. And, it is particularly helpful when you ask every person who appears before this committee about the results of the Gender-Based Analysis Plus assessment they undertook related to the issue being discussed, and how they are working to reduce barriers to the full and meaningful inclusion of women at all levels of DND and the CAF.

In closing, I am extremely proud to work with colleagues across DND and the CAF, Global Affairs, and beyond. I spent most of my career working with security forces around the world – often at the Pentagon, and at several US Combatant Commands. That perspective allows me to say, without a doubt, that Canada is setting a global standard on this work. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss it.