



## CANADA'S RISING MILITARY SPENDING UNDERMINES WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

by Ellen Woodsworth and Tamara Lorincz

When women's organizations came together over twenty-five years ago to lay the groundwork for the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), they called for disarmament and a reduction of military spending. They appealed to governments to financially support women's participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Though Resolution 1325 does not explicitly mention a reduction in military spending, it does affirm the principles of the UN Charter. Article 26 of the Charter requires UN members to maintain "international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources."

However, since the adoption of Resolution 1325 in 2000, Western governments, including Canada, have dramatically increased their military budgets to record levels, which defies their commitment to WPS. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's 2024 report, global military expenditures have increased to over \$2.7 trillion USD.

In 2015, UN Women released a comprehensive global study entitled "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace" to assess the implementation of Resolution 1325. The report expressed concern that there was insufficient progress and re-articulated the urgent need to reduce and re-allocate military expenditures to the WPS agenda.

However, in the past decade, Canadian military spending has increased by over 100% from \$20 billion in 2014 to \$44 billion in 2024, which accounts for 1.4% of gross domestic product (GDP), according to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Defence Expenditures report. At our current level of military spending, Canada ranks seventh highest on a cash basis among NATO allies and 16th highest globally.

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In June 2025, at the NATO summit in The Hague, allies, including Canada, agreed to the NATO Defence Investment Pledge, which aims to boost military spending annually to 5% of GDP by 2035. Of that amount, 3.5% will be to enhance defence capabilities and buy new weapons systems.

Prime Minister Mark Carney announced that Canada would meet the NATO pledge and make further investments in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), upgrade military equipment and technology, and ramp up Canadian defence production.

Yet, the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) estimated that to reach the 2% GDP target, it would mean a doubling of military spending to \$81 billion annually. The PBO also warned that this huge increase would risk higher deficits and more debt.

To achieve NATO's 5% GDP target, Prime Minister Carney admitted that it will mean a rise in military spending to \$150 billion annually. An additional \$106 billion per year on the CAF will be funded by severe cuts to federal services, including social and environmental programs, as the Prime Minister promised that there would be no tax increases. NATO's Secretary General Mark Rutte also revealed that allies would have to cut pensions and other welfare programs to fund higher military spending.

All of this new spending is to recruit more soldiers and manufacture additional weapons for a patriarchal institution that is premised on the threat and use of force. The federal government's 2024 Statement and Impacts Report on Gender, Diversity, and Inclusion acknowledged that investments in the military disproportionately benefit men over women, according to its gender-based analysis. The report further explained that the "CAF are predominantly White men" (p. 120-125).

Gender inequality is also exemplified in the 2024 Public Accounts that showed that the budget for the Department of National Defence, including CAF, was \$33 billion, whereas the Department for Women, Gender and Youth (WAGE) was only \$71 million (Table 2a, p. 19).

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Moreover, UN Women commissioned research in 2022 on the impacts of military spending on WPS. One of its reports, “The Impact of Militarization on Gender Inequality,” found that “militarization leads to gender inequality, which in turn affects economic growth. Higher military spending reduces the productive capacity of the economy in the long run, by exacerbating gender inequality” (p. 3). The report also explained that military spending “comes at the expense of investments in social spending programs,” which leads to greater poverty (p. 5).

The government has already announced cuts of 15% to most federal departments except National Defence and a reduction of 80% to WAGE’s meagre budget, which will be devastating to women and youth as well as to related 2SLGBTQIA+ and Indigenous programs. At the same time, \$15 billion in public funding is desperately needed to address the housing crisis, and \$1 billion is required to alleviate homelessness.

Furthermore, the Government of Canada has never met its pledge to spend 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) on overseas development assistance (ODA). Despite its Feminist International Assistance Policy launched in 2017, Canada’s current ODA is \$7 billion or a mere 0.38% of GNI.

Thus, military spending represents a serious trade-off and opportunity cost for other federal spending. More money on soldiers and weapons means less for foreign aid and development, health care, education, environmental protection, and climate action, which will make women and girls more insecure.

Under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Government of Canada committed to improve the lives of women, children, 2SLGBTQIA+, First Nations, seniors, and people living with disabilities in this country.

WILPF Canada has appealed to the Prime Minister, then Minister of Finance François-Philippe Champagne, and Members of Parliament to prioritize investments that uplift

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these vulnerable people in the country who are at risk of greater poverty and violence, as described in the [Building understanding: The first report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty](#), over meeting NATO's arbitrary GDP target.

WILPF Canada has also called on the federal government to fulfill the recommendations of the Commission for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' (MMIWG) [Calls for Justice](#) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's [Calls to Action](#), which require substantial federal funding.

Military spending also comes at a severe cost to the climate and the environment. The Canadian government is procuring new fossil fuel-powered fighter jets, attack helicopters, armed drones, missile launchers, and armoured vehicles that release [excessive carbon emissions and air pollutants](#). WILPF Canada's 2024 [research](#) shows that military expenditures and emissions are hindering the federal government from rapidly decarbonizing and achieving the Paris Agreement targets.

In September 2025, the UN's Secretary General released an important report, "[The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future](#)." It raised alarms about ever-rising military expenditures and urged states to reconceive security based on human needs, not militarism. It stressed that the climate change targets and sustainable development goals are not on track because of inadequate financial resources. It called on all countries to address the underlying causes of growing military expenditures and instead prioritize diplomacy, peace, and international cooperation.

As well, the UN Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt, Attiya Waris, also issued a report entitled, [Financing Peace and Financing War](#), to the UN Secretary General. She wrote: "Redirecting military spending towards peacebuilding and development is a complex and challenging process, but also a necessary one for all States."

To achieve the aspirations of the WPS agenda, WILPF Canada and other feminist organizations urge the federal government to take action on the UN recommendations and reduce and redirect military spending to a green, care-based economy.

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