

# 10 Feminist Approaches to Foreign Policy to advance Peace and Security

RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS FROM FEMINIST PEACE AND SECURITY PRACTITIONERS AND RESEARCHERS<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Aim for a foreign policy 2.0

Gender equality is critical to achieving sustainable peace and security. A truly *feminist* foreign policy is more than a gender mainstreaming policy and should aim to systemically change unjust global hierarchies. A real FFP is a foreign policy 2.0: which creates a new approach towards visioning, in which power inequalities, privileges, positionality and access to resources are questioned in every aspect of states' relations to other states, and reflected in domestic policies.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

*Add the "R" of Reimagination to the "Swedish list of Rs" (Rights, Representation, Resources and Reality Check) that shape FFPs – this to signal a new policy and to prioritize reflection and debate on the core principles of an FFP (i.e. facilitate inclusive exchanges on what a more ambitious feminist foreign policy looks like)*

## 2. Prioritize and promote human security, through non-violent and demilitarized foreign policy responses

Feminists have long challenged state-centric notions of security, sought to be accomplished and maintained through the use of national armed forces and increased militarization. While people may need to be able to defend themselves against military aggression, it is important to question whether more money for the defense industry actually secures peace. States tend to overestimate the efficacy of armed violence and undercount its costs, which feminists have linked to how hegemonic masculinities associate military means with strength. All the while there is under-investment in peacebuilding. Feminists have also pointed to the gendered impacts of arms trade. Yet many FFP+ countries remain invested in arms export and militarization, spending only fractions in comparison on non-violent conflict prevention and transformation.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

*Divest from harm, and invest in demilitarization and non-violent peacebuilding. Human rights standards should be leading. Interrogate how security concepts, practices and spaces are shaped by dominant gender norms and their assumed effectiveness, including long-term effectiveness of UN-led and regional security operations.*

## 3. Prioritize human rights

Feminist lines of inquiry - like "where are the women?" and "what is currently in- or excluded?" – have long called for people-centered approaches, with structural attention for the social and economic wellbeing of historically excluded individuals/communities and future generations, including ecological health. Despite commitments to the promotion of human rights, state security considerations and short-term national economic interests continue to dominate foreign policy thinking and design. Human rights standards should be protected and held high.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

*Ensure human rights are a cornerstone of foreign policy, recognising that this ultimately yields stronger outcomes for national economic and security interests over the long term*

## 4. Ensure thorough gender analysis, including of gender norms as possible drivers of conflict

Gender shapes the distribution of power. FFP should aim to understand and address the role gender plays in causing inequalities, insecurities and injustices, while also recognizing gendered opportunities for peace. Context-specific gender analysis rarely goes beyond the question "what is the impact of our policies on women?". Staff will benefit from more know-how and time to apply gender analysis and a masculinities lens to their work. A system-based approach to gender analysis allows a clearer view on how gender norms, roles and structures contribute to and are affected by armed conflict.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

*Ensure context- and topic-specific gender analyses are made mandatory and integrated in policy and programming cycles, with adequate training provided to staff including on gender-sensitive conflict analysis*

## 5. Approach violence as a continuum

It is important to rethink the concepts of security, peace and violence. Security issues as multi-layered within states, communities and families. Violence as more than the use of force and physical injury; peace as more than the absence of armed conflict. Interconnected and multi-layered structural and individual systems of violence present in society need to be transformed. This process can be supported through the use of a positive peace approach, fostering the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

*Strategically partner and invest in research and pilots to develop and implement feminist approaches to peace and security analyses, diplomacy, policies and programmes*

## 6. Ensure that women's and minorities agency is fully acknowledged, supported and observed in building peace

A feminist approach to foreign policy recognizes women and diverse gender's manifold and critical contributions to peace and security writ large. Real FFPs ensure substantial and inclusive core funding for peacebuilders representing historically excluded groups; and guarantee meaningful involvement of people to influence policies they are directly affected by.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

*Reduce barriers and facilitate regular and meaningful involvement by historically excluded women and gender minorities representing civil society/communities, AND fund women flexibly and in the long-term working towards inclusive and sustainable peace and security, including as activists and at community level*

## 7. Recognize threats to gender equality as security threats

Anti-feminist rhetoric, policies and repression are at the heart of a coupled rise in authoritarianism and patriarchal backlash. This is connected to well-resourced and coordinated transnational networks seeking to subvert human rights protections in order to gain political power. Anti-gender movements need to be recognized as a serious security risk and risk to democracy.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

*Adopt anti-feminism as an early warning indicator of conflict and human security crises and eroding democracy in foreign policy analysis, and in violence and atrocity prevention frameworks*

## 8. Take a truly intersectional approach

FFP needs to take an intersectional approach. Such an approach makes visible "the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other". Explorations of those interacting power systems – for example of gender, race, class, sexuality or ability – need to be put at the center of FFP.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

*Ensure strategic analysis and policies explore and address how intersecting systems of power underpin inequalities, including the impact of past, current and future foreign policies*

## 9. Ensure a whole-of-government approach

A real FFP entails a whole-of-government approach, in which domestic and foreign policies are coherent. Its implementation needs to be ensured in all areas (particularly trade, high level diplomacy and defense). This, in turn, requires leadership from the highest level. Implementation should be monitored closely, with clear lines of responsibility. Across government, there is a need for commitment and capacity strengthening of civil servants on FFP to ensure a holistic approach to strategy and policy implementation.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

*Adopt feminist approaches across government lead by the most senior level, involving all relevant ministries in FFP development and implementation, and ensuring coherence with domestic policies*

## 10. Practice what is preached

The legitimacy of an FFP - and that of the implementing country - is based upon the degree to what the state in question practices what is preached. This does warrant adherence to the 'R's mentioned before, but also to work towards the promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion within government and in national level policies as well.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

*Take a feminist approach in monitoring and assessing the implementation of FFP, including internal and national level policies and practices, building in accountability feedback loops to understand impacts*

1. This paper was developed by PAX, a Dutch peace organization, based on exchanges with feminist peace and security thinkers from across the world. In June 2023, EPLO and PAX co-organized a CSDN exchange on feminist approaches to peace and security with over 50 leading practitioners and researchers in Brussels. Subsequently, PAX involved inputs from representatives of the Dutch gender platform WO=MEN, partners of PAX, and other critical thinkers – including from different contexts affected by armed conflict. In September 2023 the Manifesto was published for sign-on, and presented during the Shaping FFP Conference in The Hague (1/2 Nov).