

## Ministerial Gender Equality Roundtable: Civil society briefing note

### Introduction

Members of Canada's international cooperation sector welcome the Minister's ongoing commitment to dialogue with the sector. Canada's ambitious Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) continues to have unwavering support from the international cooperation sector and features prominently in the Minister's mandate letter. As the FIAP moves into its sixth year of implementation, we look forward to working with the Minister to safeguard and enhance Canada's feminist global leadership. This briefing note outlines two sector priorities, notably reaffirming Canada's commitment to the FIAP through policy coherence and addressing existing gaps; and action on specific challenges to Canada's ability to support feminist partnerships and effective delivery of official development assistance.

### Successes of the FIAP

The FIAP's success is rooted in efforts to place gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as an outcome in and of itself and as a pathway to optimizing outcomes across thematic and sector outcomes. This resulted in dedicated funding for feminist programming in neglected areas including sexual health and reproductive rights, paid and unpaid care work, education for girls in crisis and funding for women's rights organizations, and more recently, advancing women's rights and climate adaptation. Canada has been successful in creating funding mechanisms for areas neglected by the donor community. The FIAP has also impacted Canada's partners. [Civil society organizations have worked towards increased capacity](#) vis-à-vis gender equality, feminist and human rights-based approaches, many prompted by the FIAP and its clear policy signal towards feminist international cooperation. Finally, Canada's efforts around safeguarding have also supported the sector to make progress.

### Global context

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that gains in gender equality are fragile; the pandemic has disproportionately impacted women and gender diverse people. Documented gender impacts of the pandemic intersect across the economy, education, health, society (including in the rise of gender-based violence and increased burden of unpaid care work) and in the collision of the pandemic, conflict and the climate crisis. In addition to the devastating impact on the people of Ukraine and surrounding countries, Russia's military aggressions are already having ripple effects throughout the world. The resurgence of retrogressive and misogynist and LGBTQ2I+phobic forces at social and political levels is deeply concerning with space for civil society closing in many places around the world. The re-entrenchment of gender inequality and deepening disadvantages of women, girls and gender diverse people across civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights presents a particular challenge.

### Priority Area 1. Recommitting to Feminist Global Leadership: Enhanced FIAP implementation through policy coherence

While Canada's commitment to feminist global leadership is exemplified in the FIAP and the second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, civil society remains concerned with the absence of a documented Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) given the inherent interlinkage between and need for coherence in development assistance, trade, defence, peace and security, and diplomacy as a continuum. Civil society welcomed the consultations on Canada's FFP in 2020 and 2021, however progress appears to be stalled on moving from dialogue to concrete articulation of priorities and action. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security ends in 2022, the same year that the FIAP turns five. In this context, civil society would like to see the Minister take leadership to:

- Reaffirm Canada's commitment to the FIAP through more ambitious FIAP implementation that addresses gaps and is informed by inputs from partners. The sector wants to see the next tranche of FIAP implementation respond to the new global context, address omissions in the current policy

framework and maintain (and demonstrate) continuity in Canada's leadership on feminist international assistance.

- Work with the Minister of Foreign Affairs to develop, adopt and implement the Feminist Foreign Policy based on consultations and collaboration with foreign policy, feminist, human rights and international cooperation stakeholders that ensures policy coherence with the FIAP, the National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security (existing and forthcoming), immigration/refugee policy, defence policy, climate action, and our sustainable trade agenda.
- Ensure a collaborative and coherent approach to the creation and adoption of the Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, consistent with Canada's commitments to civil society engagement, the FIAP and feminist global leadership.
- Champion the extension of the mandate of Canada's Women, Peace and Security Ambassador's Office to support the implementation of the Third National Action Plan.

The sector recommends that policy coherence and continuity underpin the Minister's mandate, matched with greater ambition. This is an area where the Minister can show progress. Bold ambitions also require increased, predictable, long-term and flexible resourcing. The Minister's mandate to increase ODA annually in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda is welcome and the sector looks forward to seeing the timetable and allocations to realize this commitment.

### **Priority Area 2. Feminist partnership and effective delivery of official development assistance**

As noted in the FIAP, the policy "requires more efficient and effective funding mechanisms and approaches. [The government] need[s] to be willing to take responsible risks, with decisions based on evidence and learning." Indeed, the Minister has been mandated to support women leaders and feminist groups and to increase funding to grassroots women's rights organizations. Yet, civil society organizations continue to express concerns with the department's ability to embrace truly feminist principles as a partner and donor. Increased risk aversion, obligations and controls, funding windows and proposal processes, and more burdensome reporting and accounting obligations undermine the structural and systemic change envisioned by the FIAP. Existing GAC consultations tables have led to some progress on longstanding issues, but not enough.

Bold reforms and initiatives are necessary to ensure that Canada's FIAP translates into feminist partnership and effective delivery of official development assistance. Opportunities for the Minister include:

- Establish flexible, responsive, long-term (5-10 years) and predictable funding windows for Canadian organizations and directly to local partners, with a special focus on trust and support to women's rights organizations, youth-led organizations, LGBTQ2I+ organizations, human rights defenders and social movements. Making greater use of grants over contribution agreements is an important avenue to providing greater flexibility to partners.
- Review of departmental contracting, risk management processes, project management and reporting, guided by feminist principles and with partners to identify meaningful and reasonable reforms that ensure results and financial accountability while delivering on commitments to feminism, human rights, localization and decolonial international assistance.
- Support adoption of Bill S-216, working with caucus and across party lines as necessary.

### **Our commitment to feminist partnership**

Canada's international cooperation sector is ready to support the Minister and the department in efforts to strengthen Canada's feminist global leadership through improved policy coherence and continuity, systems and process strengthening, and by sharing our expertise and experiences on what works, how to address gaps and opportunities to accelerate progress on gender equality. We look forward to discussing how to action the recommendations in this brief.