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## **Reviewing Canada's New Feminist International Assistance Policy**

*August 2017*

### **Introduction**

Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) was [released](#) by Minister of International Development and La Francophonie Marie-Claude Bibeau on June 9, 2017, a year after [extensive consultations](#) with Canadians, including Canadian civil society organizations (CSOs). The Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), Canada's national coalition of CSOs working globally to achieve sustainable human development, was actively involved in these consultations – organizing or participating in nearly 30 consultations, and preparing over 20 summary and analysis documents, as well as a [formal submission](#).

The new policy includes numerous positive commitments by the Government of Canada towards an ambitious international assistance policy framework. It refocuses Canada's global development and humanitarian efforts on advancing gender equality and the rights and empowerment of women and girls – an encouraging and positive shift forward in a journey towards gender transformative change.

This policy paper provides a short overview of the key elements in the new FIAP; it situates the policy within the broader context of the foreign policy statement and the new defense policy; and it analyses the new FIAP, including against CCIC's [formal submission](#), the [What We Heard](#) summary of the consultations released by Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and [In Our Own Words](#), CCIC's assessment of 80 CSO submissions to the International Assistance Review (IAR). While applauding the important commitments contained in the new policy, this paper notes continued challenges in terms of substance, process, and funding that will need to be addressed as the new policy is implemented and to realize the policy's full potential.

Delivering on the government's intentions will require more than just a bold new vision and policy. It will require new programs and partnerships, including with CSOs, guided by aid and development effectiveness principles, core humanitarian principles and the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness. This will need to be backed by opportunities for generating new knowledge and shared learning around human rights- and feminist-based approaches, among other areas. It will require forging stronger, more effective capacity among both government and its partners to deliver on these agendas in support of peoples' efforts to achieve their own development and claim their rights. Finally, Canada's commitment must extend beyond good policy and practice to include predictable, ambitious, new and additional human and financial resources for global development and humanitarian assistance.

### **Quick Facts**

1. The policy marks a clear shift in vision and focus, with a strong new emphasis on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls – returning to what was a historical area of focus for Canada. This has the potential to substantially advance Canadian leadership globally on Sustainable Development Goal 5 ([SDG 5](#)).

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2. With this new policy, Canada joins countries like Australia, Sweden, and Norway, who have explicit feminist foreign policies and/or strong gendered policies and plans for international development. Yet no other donor so clearly focuses its development and humanitarian funding on gender equality.
3. To complement this feminist frame, the new policy adopts a human rights-based approach (HRBA). Other bilateral donors, including Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom and Denmark, currently also pursue such an approach (to varying degrees of rigour).
4. The new policy also aspires to be highly inclusive – focusing on all people “regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, nationality or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, migrant or refugee status, or any other aspects of identity.”
5. The feminist focus entails a stand-alone core focus on gender equality (combatting sexual and gender-based violence; supporting local women’s rights organizations and movements; improving public sector institutional capacity to deliver programs and policies that support gender equality; and targeting investments in research, data collection and evaluation around gender equality). It envisages boys and men playing an important role in challenging gender stereotypes and changing gender roles and relations.
6. In addition to this core focus, a gender lens cuts across five other pillars:
  - a) Human dignity (health and nutrition, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; education; and humanitarian assistance).
  - b) Inclusive growth (economic leadership; access to economic opportunities, particularly in agriculture; decent work and property rights; financial inclusion; technical and vocational training; social protection and the burden of care).
  - c) Environment and climate change (gender-responsive climate plans and leadership; renewable energy).
  - d) Inclusive governance (women’s leadership and governance; strengthening legal systems; improving access to justice; supporting women human rights defenders; more responsive public services).
  - e) Peace and security (supporting women’s rights organizations’ engagement in peace processes; advancing women’s rights in post-conflict state building; addressing sexual violence in conflict zones).
7. The policy comes with “aggressive” funding targets for gender equality and women’s empowerment. Fifteen “[15] percent of all bilateral international development assistance” will have gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a principal target, and “80 percent of bilateral international development assistance through [GAC]” will integrate a focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Accordingly, Canada pledges that within five years “95 percent of Canada’s bilateral international development assistance” budget will contribute to closing gender equality gaps.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CCIC has been informed that the term “bilateral international development assistance” in the FIAP refers to all ODA provided through GAC, excluding core contributions to multilateral organizations.

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8. In addition to this mainstreaming of gender equality funding, the government also announced the establishment of a new \$150m (over five years) local fund for women's rights organizations (WROs) that will put Canada among the top donors in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to such organizations.
9. The policy also commits to various measures to improve Canada's effectiveness. These include new funding mechanisms to help leverage more private capital, a more integrated and coherent approach within and between departments, more responsive and timely funding mechanisms, and a focus on innovation and research and on building effective partnerships. Among other things, the policy commits GAC to the following: implement multi-year humanitarian funding; establish a \$100 million fund dedicated to Small and Medium-sized Organizations (SMOs); dedicate no less than 50 percent of Canada's bilateral assistance to sub-Saharan Africa;<sup>2</sup> eliminate the countries of focus model for Canada's international assistance; update the International Development and Humanitarian Assistance CSO Partnership Policy; and disclose Canada's international assistance envelope (IAE) on an annual basis. Of these, the multi-year humanitarian funding and SMO fund were already announced; the CSO Partnership Policy has yet to be implemented, and the timing around the disclosure of the annual IAE (and therefore the usefulness) remains unclear.
10. The new policy comes with very marginal (if any) new funding (CCIC has heard informally that the anticipated IAE will increase to \$5.1 billion<sup>3</sup> in 2017-18 from \$4.75 billion, but this has not been formally announced), rather than major new funding commitments or a costed funding framework to help implement the new vision. The original mandate letter called on the Minister to establish a funding framework, yet neither Budget 2017 nor the FIAP reflect this.

Many of these commitments were core asks in CCIC's submission to the IAR and in the *What We Heard* summary.

### The broader context

The release of the long-awaited FIAP came at the end of a busy week of foreign policy announcements.

On June 6, Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland [addressed](#) the House of Commons. In a major [foreign policy statement](#), she spoke about the need for a strong and sustained Canadian commitment to a rules-based multilateral international order – a core contributor to modern-day peace and prosperity. As Minister Freeland noted, these rules include respect for core notions of territorial integrity, human rights, democracy, respect for the rule of law, and free trade, as well as multilateralism – in an age of global challenges, it can't be "Canada first."

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<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1 above.

<sup>3</sup> The \$5.1 billion includes the \$128 million increase in 2017-18 announced in Budget 2016 (\$128 million above the pre-2016 baseline of \$4.62 billion in each of 2016-17 and 2017-18). It also includes the \$200 million allocated annually to the Crisis Pool, a reserve within the IAE allowing the Government to respond to major crises in developing countries, which has not been included in CCIC's past IAE projections due to its discretionary nature. Beyond those two items, and based on the informal anticipated level noted above, there appears to be approximately \$150 million in new funding in the IAE for 2017-18.

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These are welcome words that sit in stark contrast to the isolationist tendencies of “Brexit” and Trump, and the growing populism of Europe and elsewhere. In this same vein, Minister Freeland declared that the government’s goal is to build a better, safer, more just, more prosperous and sustainable world. This language reflects the five Ps of Agenda 2030 – planet, people, peace, prosperity and partnership. But, the Minister continued, this can only come with domestic policy that shares the benefits of growth with all citizens – an implicit reference to growing global inequality, and perhaps Agenda 2030’s notion of leaving no one behind. On the latter note, Minister Freeland also signaled that the government “strongly support[s] the global 2030 Goals for Sustainable Development,” including the universal nature of the goals, observing that “the world abroad and the world at home are not two solitudes. They are connected.”

However, while the speech signaled the value that Canada places in global cooperation broadly speaking, it was also clear that defence and diplomacy play a more significant role in the government’s overall foreign policy framework than development. Whereas Minister Freeland highlighted the government’s substantial new investment in the military as an essential part of Canada’s foreign policy agenda, there was no suggestion of increased financial investments in development. In fact, on international development, she said very little – noting only that Canada would work to help the fastest growing countries enter the global middle class, and to defend basic rights, including and especially women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The next day, Minister of National Defence Harjit Sajjan presented a substantive new Canadian [Defence Policy](#). The policy emphasizes three key points: a strong domestic defence capacity, contributions to North American security, and engagement in broader foreign policy to build a more stable and peaceful world. Whereas the first two elements are likely in part a response to strong criticism by US President Trump of the lack of investment in defence by many of the allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO), the third reaffirms the importance of multilateral engagement in preventing and containing conflict. Like Minister Freeland, Minister Sajjan [noted](#) that the military is an “indispensable tool” of Canada’s foreign policy. “If we are serious about Canada’s role in the world, then we have to be serious about funding our military.” Accordingly, the government signaled its intent to get 15 advanced warships, 88 new fighter jets, armed drones for surveillance and combat, replace its surveillance planes and modernize its submarines, and support more cyber operators (Canada will, however, not join the U.S. ballistic missile defence program.) The defence budget will grow by 70 percent over the next decade to \$32.7 billion, bringing Canada’s defence investments to 1.4 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2026-2027 – close to two-thirds of the NATO-set target of two percent of GDP. (Canada is now at 0.98 percent.)

The new funding announced for defence stands in stark contrast with the lack of new funding for Canada’s development and humanitarian efforts. While Canada was already at half of the NATO target for defence prior to the new policy, its current investment of 0.26 percent of GNI in Official Development Assistance (ODA) represents little over a third of the Canadian-inspired and internationally-agreed target of 0.7 percent of Gross National Income (GNI) for ODA. The latter target is eminently achievable – as the new investments in defence demonstrate. The 1.4 percent of GDP that will be allocated to defence by 2025 is roughly double the amount that is required to reach the ODA target; if just the new defence funding were invested in ODA, Canada would reach 0.66 percent within a decade.

Furthermore, the new funding for defence, coupled with the lack of new investment in ODA, will aggravate an

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existing imbalance between these two core elements of Canada's foreign policy. Currently, Canada spends just under four dollars on defence for every dollar on development. By contrast, comparable countries such as Norway, Germany and Sweden have ratios between 1:1 and 1.6:1 (defence:development). With the new commitments for defence, and assuming no new development money, by 2026-27 Canada will have a defence-development ratio of at least 6:1. By contrast, if Canada were to meet the NATO commitment of two percent of GDP for defence and the UN commitment of 0.7 percent of GNI for development, the approximate ratio would be 2.86:1.

### Analysis of the FIAP

#### Structure and focus – some positive developments

Overall, the FIAP reflects a number of key CSO demands made during the IAR. Notably, the policy commits to a feminist approach with gender as both a stand-alone and cross-cutting theme across all areas and action, as [recommended](#) by CCIC and [others](#). The policy does a much better job than the original [discussion paper](#), which launched the IAR, of maintaining a gendered focus throughout the whole policy. The policy's strong support for gender equality as a central, standalone, and cross-cutting theme is very welcome, and in line with input from CCIC and the broader sector, which heavily referenced "women's rights" and "feminism" in their submissions. It is also supported by important investments to help make this happen: an ambitious commitment to ensure 15 percent of government bilateral assistance explicitly targets gender equality and the rights of women and girls (up from two percent now), and that 95 percent of Canada's bilateral assistance supports these objectives; and a significant pledge to supporting local women's rights organizations through a \$150-million fund over five years (up from roughly \$4 million per year). All of this should be applauded.

However, although the FIAP is gender-focused, it is not necessarily gender-transformative – there is little discussion of how to combat structural and systemic inequalities, multiple and interconnected forms of discrimination, and traditional gendered roles and gender relations, all of which underpin gender inequity and inequality. Nor is the FIAP a clear and comprehensive policy directive; much of the document makes an excellent case for investing in gender-focused programming (i.e. mainstreaming gender equality throughout programming) without establishing a clear action plan for what the new programming will look like, how it will roll out, and how the different themes are inter-connected and reinforcing. Details of how the aggressive gender funding targets (particularly the 15 percent goal for targeted assistance) will be imposed and implemented remain unclear (see more on this below).

In addition to its feminist frame, the FIAP incorporates several other core elements of CSO input. These include a strong commitment to human rights-based approaches (with language throughout the FIAP that is consistent with human rights principles). HRBA is complementary to the core feminist frame, and to the FIAP's commitments to building local capacity and to supporting Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) especially. Human rights and human rights-based approaches were prominent in CSO submissions to the IAR, as documented in *In Our Own Words* and acknowledged in Main Highlight #3 in GAC's *What We Heard* summary.

The move away from a countries of focus model for delivering international assistance towards a type of country approach is also welcome. That said, the government should ensure that Canada's overarching emphasis remains

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focused on reducing poverty and inequality, on supporting the poorest and most marginalized, and most importantly on people – on their needs, rights, assets, abilities, and priorities, as determined at a local level. This localized, people-focused approach was affirmed in both CCIC's submission and across all CSO submissions, as noted in *In Our Own Words* and referenced in Main Highlights #4 and #7 in the *What We Heard* summary. Furthermore, while the move to more responsive programming can make Canadian assistance more adaptable and targeted, it must still support long-term investments (key for achieving longer-term outcomes, instead of just short-term results), as well as predictability of funding for partners.

The renewed commitment to multi-year funding for humanitarian crises is also welcome. This model – encouraged in a multi-organizational, CCIC-coordinated [submission](#) to GAC last year – has been used to strong effect in Canada's response to crises in Iraq and Syria and the Lake Chad Basin, and will hopefully be expanded in the coming months and years. However, while humanitarian assistance did (positively) move out of the IAR discussion paper theme of peace and security (a dangerous conflation in the humanitarian context), the FIAP has now subsumed it under the broader heading of *human dignity*. With humanitarian assistance representing a [growing](#) proportion of Canadian ODA in response to rising global humanitarian need, this issue merits specific attention.

### Structure and focus – some areas of concern

Some elements of Canada's international assistance that were more central in recent years seem to have lost their place in the FIAP. References to children and youth and child protection, food security and agriculture, and sanitation and hygiene are all quite absent from the policy. It is unclear how these will be addressed (or not) going forward. It will be important to ensure that the strong record and expertise of Canadian officials and organizations in these areas is not jeopardized or lost as assistance is refocused through a gendered lens. However, in the context of a flatlined international assistance envelope, and with numerous commitments already made for the years to come, it is painfully clear that many existing programs in certain areas of focus will simply not continue.

The policy makes several references and connections to Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, an improvement over the discussion paper that was recommended by CSOs during the IAR (as noted by both the *What We Heard* summary and *In Our Own Words*). However, references to the SDGs feel more like add-ons bookmarking specific issues (e.g. on education, reference SDG 4) rather than marking a major shift in approach to a much more integrated agenda between goals.

In what may be one of the policy's biggest flaws, the FIAP is almost completely silent on Canada's aid and development effectiveness commitments made in [Paris](#), [Accra](#), [Busan](#), [Mexico](#), and [Nairobi](#). Although the policy touches upon elements of predictability, local ownership, transparency, accountability, and results, it is not rooted in a clear recognition of Canada's commitment under these agreements to support democratic, multi-stakeholder, country-led ownership of development and development priorities. Canada has not had an Aid and Development Effectiveness Action Plan since 2012, and even that plan had its shortcomings. Strengthened engagement on the aid and development effectiveness agenda was an important recommendation in CCIC's submission to the IAR.

Furthermore, the policy is similarly vague on how the new agenda will be implemented in accordance with the principles of Canada's [Official Development Assistance Accountability Act](#) – including taking into account the perspectives of the poor, and complying with international human rights standards.

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### Implications of implementing the policy – is GAC (and its partners) fit for purpose?

Many Canadian CSOs were concerned by delays in project approvals and implementation while the IAR was underway. With the FIAP presenting a substantial shift in how Canada funds and delivers its international assistance, the government needs to take steps to avert risks of further delays – either to existing or upcoming programming as the new policy is implemented, or to the implementation of the policy as current projects are completed. This will require a period of transition: projects that have been in the pipeline since the start of the IAR should be approved immediately; projects that were submitted during the process should be approved, with supplementary gender or HRBA elements built in, to the extent possible, gradually and retroactively; and GAC should establish a process for phasing in the new gender requirements and piloting HRBA in new projects.

This bold new policy – while incorporating input from departmental officials, CSOs, and other stakeholders – has ultimately been defined and directed at the political level. The details of how the policy – including core elements like the HRBA and the feminist frame – will be implemented by the department, and what this will mean in practice for different programmatic wings of GAC, are still unclear. Since the 2012 Budget, Global Affairs Canada's staff and technical experts have been cut dramatically, significantly paring back the capacity of GAC's gender (and climate) experts. While GAC has historical experience in governance and human rights, successful implementation of HRBA will require drawing on the expertise of other bilateral donors, CSOs and UN agencies. Substantial investments are needed in building the capacity of GAC staff and their partners to implement the new policy.

As the FIAP itself recognizes, the government will not be able to implement the new policy alone. While the government may be able to fulfill its gender equality targets by directing more funding to relevant multilateral agencies (e.g. UN Women), a true shift in Canada's policy – as promised by Minister Bibeau when she unveiled the FIAP – will require a more comprehensive, integrated, and multi-stakeholder approach, including establishing strong long-term partnerships with CSOs. Canadian civil society has decades of experience to contribute in collaborating with the government to implement this bold new agenda – including by engaging in service delivery, advocacy and policy engagement, public engagement, research and evidence gathering.

Moving forward, the government should clearly signal a shift from consultation to meaningful collaboration and engagement with CSOs as independent development actors in their own right, in line with the [International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Civil Society Partnership Policy](#). This should include investments in training and capacity development for CSOs to adopt human-rights-based and feminist approaches. These will also present tremendous learning opportunities. With the launch of a new policy and vision, GAC has an incredible opportunity to set a similarly bold research agenda as the policy gets put into practice – working with partners, including civil society and academia, to gather evidence and lessons to inform and shape future iterations of the policy and prospective programming. Indicators linked to the policy – a key part of implementation that will demonstrate impact – should be developed in collaboration with CSOs. Implementation of the policy should also include the establishment of more flexible, responsive, diverse, and predictable funding and delivery mechanism to enhance Canada's collective development impact. In this vein, the government's [new fund](#) for small and medium-sized organizations is a welcome start.

### Policy Coherence – identifying and addressing tensions in a whole-of-government approach

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In the inclusive spirit of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, and in line with the cross-cutting nature of the new policy, the HRBA and feminist frame at the core of the FIAP should be aligned and reinforced with Canada's other foreign policy activities.

Going forward, the government should establish ongoing dialogue and integrated structures to ensure comprehensive application of the principles and premises of the FIAP within all three parts of GAC (diplomacy, trade, and development), as well as coherence with the relevant work of other departments such as National Defence and Environment Canada. The FIAP doesn't resolve any of these tensions, and in fact glosses over many of them. For example, while the FIAP positively advocates for changes to discriminatory laws and policies, it ignores how current bilateral trade agreements and investment treaties can freeze or narrow much of the policy space that both Canadian and foreign governments have to do this. Similarly, the FIAP underscores the important role that different private sectors can play in promoting sustainable development, while ignoring the continued absence of a Corporate Accountability Ombudsman in Canada. The establishment of a new Bureau within GAC to implement the FIAP is a positive step in this regard. Considering recent statements by Minister Freeland and the Prime Minister that feminism and human rights will be central to the government's overall foreign policy, the new Bureau should work closely with the interdepartmental working group on the SDGs, the Privy Council Office, and other relevant bodies to ensure this coherence.

In advancing a feminist international assistance policy coherent with other policy agendas, the government should take special care to avoid conflating security, sustainable development and humanitarian efforts. While the FIAP must be coherent with defence and trade policy priorities, and with effective development principles, humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law must never be subsumed or undermined by supposedly comprehensive responses (e.g. the former triple D agenda of development, diplomacy and defense). The integration of security with humanitarian initiatives jeopardizes both the safety and the effectiveness of humanitarian workers – who must always be (and be perceived to be) neutral and impartial. And as the policy acknowledges, while trade can have positive development impacts, its effect may be unequal. Indeed, trade can in some cases undermine effective development by weakening local economic structures, increasing dependence on global supply chains, and aggravating inequality. The government must therefore approach issues of integration across the conflict, development, diplomacy, trade, and humanitarian realms with extreme care.

### *Funding – An ambitious agenda needs ambitious investment*

The strong financial commitment in the FIAP to supporting women's rights organizations and programming that targets women's rights and gender equality is commendable, making real the government's long-expressed commitment to supporting the rights of women and girls. However, while Canada can enhance its impact through the greater focus, alignment and responsiveness in the FIAP, achieving meaningful results ultimately requires meaningful investments. As the ambition of Canada's development and humanitarian agenda grows, so too should the ambition of its financial commitment. Increased investment in global development and humanitarian assistance was a key recommendation by CSOs during the IAR. As documented in *In Our Own Words*, funding was more prominent in CSO submissions than in GAC's discussion paper – so much so, in fact, that it became one of the key takeaways (Main Highlight #8) that GAC acknowledged in its *What We Heard* summary. It is therefore regrettable that – just as was true for the [\\$650m for sexual and reproductive health and rights](#) announced earlier



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this year – the \$150m fund for women’s rights organizations will not be additional to the existing International Assistance Envelope.

As noted above, the absence of any new funding for international development and humanitarian assistance was juxtaposed with the announcement two days earlier of nearly \$14 billion in new money for defence. Minister Freeland said in her speech to the House of Commons that the government’s foreign policy goal is a “better, safer, more just, more prosperous, and sustainable world.” Every day, Canada’s investments in development and humanitarian assistance contribute towards tackling poverty, inequality, and climate change, protecting and promoting human rights and gender equality; and mitigating some of the root causes of conflicts that could otherwise require (far costlier) defence investments. Yet relative to Canada’s Gross National Income, the current Liberal government is on track to having the worst record on aid of any Canadian government in half a century. To paraphrase Minister Sajjan, if Canada is to be serious about enhancing its role in the world, then it must get serious about funding international development and humanitarian assistance.

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Despite its shortfalls, Canada’s new Feminist International Assistance Policy marks an important and exciting shift forward. CCIC and its members remain committed to work in collaboration with Global Affairs Canada as partners to ensure the FIAP’s successful implementation. Together, we can catalyze global and national progress towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as a landmark Canadian contribution to building a fairer, more sustainable, and safer world.