

## Submission to the New International Gender Equality Strategy

### OVERVIEW

A stable and peaceful region is at the heart of the security and prosperity of both Australia and its neighbours. Advancing gender equality, fostering women's leadership and addressing gender-based violence is a vital driver of regional flourishing.

The ambition of the new International Gender Strategy aligns with AP4D's focus on more coherent and coordinated statecraft from Australia. To achieve this, Australia must improve coherence across all areas of foreign policy with the integration of gender equality across all major investments. This includes sectors that have historically suffered from gender exclusions such as infrastructure, transport, trade negotiations and technology.

Successive foreign ministers have made greater gender equality a foreign policy priority. There is no doubt in terms of statements, speeches, events and awards that gender issues have been brought into the diplomatic mainstream. Despite this, many interlocutors doubt the follow-through, seeing more opportunities to unlock women's economic participation – and foster more sustainable growth – through its incorporation in trade agreements and mainstream economic policy programs. Likewise, security discourse might be deepened and made more effective by more thorough consideration of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

While Australia and Pacific Island countries agree on a focus on human security, more attention is needed to put this approach into action, working to provide safety at the individual level through to the country level and across the wider region. Social inclusion programs, responding to the gendered drivers of insecurity and supporting Pacific women's leadership of peace and security initiatives can translate rhetoric into action. More investment in peacebuilding is needed and the meaningful inclusion of women in peacebuilding efforts must be prioritised.

Despite the significant efforts of individual departments and agencies in terms of participation of women, currently much of the valuable work being done in the WPS space is siloed. There is a need for greater coordination and policy coherence across the development, diplomacy and defence communities, with a WPS lens applied to all of Australia's investments and responses in the region. A genuine whole-of-government approach to WPS that includes clear leadership and embedded governance structures would maximise the use of resources, leverage synergies, reduce duplication and support accountability.

In addition to clear leadership, dedicated resourcing is required to implement a collaborative and cohesive approach that applies a WPS lens consistently and systematically across all stages of all interventions. Unless priority is given to resourcing coordination and integration, it is unlikely to be successful over the long term. Coordinated messaging and goals across development, diplomacy and defence is needed to ensure that women's role in peace and security remains at the centre of discussion.

Drawing on input from more than 50 experts consulted by the Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue (AP4D), this submission offers recommendations for how Australia can be a global leader on gender equality.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. What are international gender equality priorities?

**The new International Gender Equality Strategy should focus on transforming systems of inequality across all arms of statecraft.**

Closer cooperation between different aspects of statecraft, including analysis of the gendered development impacts of Australia's foreign policy choices, is critical to ensuring that efforts in one space are not undermined by another. Coordination and integration of gender equality across development, diplomacy, defence and civil society must be seen as a priority and resourced accordingly. This includes sectors that have historically suffered from gender exclusions such as infrastructure, transport, trade negotiations and emerging technologies.

**Recognising that state and human security, and especially development, are underpinned by gender equality, Australia should work with both Southeast Asia and the Pacific region to co-create a feminist foreign policy agenda that identifies common goals and priorities that are relevant to the region.**

This would align with and complement the work being done by Australia to implement a First Nations Foreign Policy, and there are opportunities to coordinate with other partner countries on this, for example, with France's feminist foreign policy. These efforts should centre on indigenous peoples, approaches and worldviews, and recognise the gendered drives of insecurity and apply locally owned solutions. As well as extend and deepen the focus on transforming systems of inequality across all arms of statecraft.

**Gender equality must be a central pillar of Australia's action on climate change.**

Australia should seek deeper understanding of gendered impacts of climate change, including understanding the disproportionate way in which climate change affects women, and gender implications for climate related loss and damage. In responding to the climate crisis, Australia must consider women's empowerment, safety and political voices in all its work, viewing women's individual security as essential to national security. While climate change poses threats, adaptation can be gender sensitive and even transformative if adequate attention is paid to gender in analysis and planning.

### 2. What are the most effective approaches for achieving gender equality globally?

**Support to increase women's political participation and representation is critical to enabling good governance and democracy in the Pacific.**

This must be accompanied by holistic efforts to achieve gender equality and inclusion through changes to norms and institutions.

**A focus on men and masculinities should be an important element of any gender equality strategy.**

Men's respect for women, and an understanding of how female advancement assists with prosperity and human flourishing, is essential for overall national health.

### 3. How can Australia best support efforts to achieve gender equality internationally?

**While support may come in different forms, priority should be given to targeted, systemic, long-term investment that promotes opportunities for diverse women to define and drive their own agenda for development, peace and security in the region.**

Primacy should be given to ways of working that resource and support the work of women and their organisations. Explicitly feminist funding models should be considered to do this.

**Australia should implement an interlinked domestic and international focus on WPS by providing complementarity and policy coherence across portfolios.**

Moving to a more cohesive approach to policy and practice, with dedicated leadership and resourcing, would help ensure that the WPS agenda is consistently and systematically applied to all interventions and is integrated across development, diplomacy, defence and civil society. This should include addressing the barriers and needs women have in relation to the four pillars of the WPS agenda: participation, prevention, protection and relief and recovery, as well as understanding, recognising and resourcing the valuable peace and security work women do within and beyond formal security institutions.

**4. What should the government/ DFAT consider when developing the new international gender equality strategy?**

**In seeking to transform systems of inequality across all arms of statecraft, due consideration must be given to the gendered impacts of Australia's foreign policy choices to avoid tensions between its different arms of statecraft.**

For example, development cooperation programs need to engage with systemic drivers of inequality to be effective in the long term – which may include global economic systems and trade arrangements.

**Cultural and contextual knowledge should be genuinely valued, and sufficient time allowed at the front-end of initiatives and interventions to undertake in-depth analysis of local norms, situations and systems.**

This deep contextual knowledge includes recognition of the gendered nature of security and the need to ensure women's participation and leadership in security spaces. For example, a distinctive feature of Pacific contexts is the predominance of informal actors such as chiefs, churches, women and youth leaders in prevention and resolution of conflict, and adaptation and recovery from disasters and the effects of climate change. Women's organisations, leaders and networks are the lifeblood of efforts to protect women and girls against violence. In light of this, Australian policymakers and practitioners need to genuinely understand the local contexts of Pacific Island countries including the role traditional village systems and women play in promoting peace and security.

**Further efforts are needed to strengthen visibility, monitoring and evaluation of WPS activities across government.**

This includes allocating targeted funding and resources to allow for joint planning, better coordination and increased collaboration.

**Opportunities for increasing intra-government engagement need to be identified and pursued.**

Australia's institutions must continue to improve on the way they operate WPS commitments, including ensuring security service personnel and those they interact with are safe from harassment, violence, and discrimination. All Australian and regional staff sent to the Pacific for assistance in disaster relief and security incidents need to be trained in WPS principles and held accountable for the impact of their work on WPS. A key part of this accountability should be Pacific-led reviews of assistance that prioritise women's experiences.

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