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United Nations Peacekeeping and Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

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In the more than fifteen years since the first United Nations Security Council resolution (1325) to specifically address the women, peace and security agenda, sixty-three countries have developed National Action Plans (NAPs) — and sixteen new ones are in progress. National Action Plans act as implementation frameworks for a government's work in women, peace, and security. There is no specific template for countries to follow in developing a national action plan and their details reflect national interests and priorities.

Canada's first national action plan (C-NAP) covered the period from 2010 to 2016, expiring at the end of March of that year. A new C-NAP has been in process since then and is scheduled to be released shortly.

The C-NAP includes participation by numerous government departments and other bodies who are involved in work related to the women, peace and security agenda. This, of course, includes those government bodies involved in peacekeeping: Global Affairs Canada, the Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces (DND/CAF), and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The first C-NAP was based on the four pillars of the women, peace and security agenda: prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery. Amongst others, Canada made peacekeeping-related commitments such as increasing the meaningful participation of women in peace operations; increasing the effectiveness of peace operations including the protection and promotion of the rights and safety of women and girls; and improving the Canadian capacity to address violence and protect human rights of women and girls within the context of peace operations

These broad goals were backed up by 28 actions and 24 indicators, divided amongst the four pillars and with reporting commitments assigned to the relevant government bodies.

There are various ways of considering issues related to women and peacekeeping. One approach, that was prevalent, if not dominant, in the first C-NAP was the use of quantitative indicators. Examples of relevant peacekeeping indicators that DND/CAF and the RCMP were responsible for include the percentage of pre-deployment courses that address the differential impact of armed conflict on women and girls; the number and percentage of personnel deployed to peace operations that have received such training; and the number and percentage of female Canadian Forces personnel, police officers, and civilians deployed to peace operations.

While such indicators are not a problem, there were identified issues in the first C-NAP with a lack of baselines and targets attached to them. In the final progress report of the first C-NAP for 2015-2016, released in June 2017, Global Affairs Canada says that their intention is that “the renewed C-NAP have a strong baseline and realistic targets with a limited number of actions which are clearly focused on moving from one to the other and for which performance can be measured through appropriate indicators.”

Reporting commitments that realistically acknowledge the current situation and move Canada towards feminist foreign, defence, and international assistance policies, as the federal government has indicated they want to do, will ensure a Canadian peacekeeping contribution that incorporates a gender perspective. But they alone are insufficient. So long as the C-NAP acts primarily as a reporting framework and not as a call to further action, there is a danger it will merely be a bureaucratic tool.

There are also issues related to the women, peace and security agenda and peacekeeping that are not so easy to measure quantitatively. Conflict-related sexual violence, for example, is an acknowledged problem. And although details can be counted — the number of complaints, for example — the problem itself requires a change in the fundamental attitudes and behaviour of peacekeepers. This change will take time and patience, along with a supportive C-NAP that encourages the federal government to take the challenges of the women, peace and security agenda seriously.

The new C-NAP is also intended to be bi-structural, having both an overarching framework and individual departmental reporting, according to their own goals and plans. The overarching aspect will, ideally, bring together an overall strategic objective for implementing the women, peace and security agenda across the relevant parts of the federal government.

Clearly, if the new C-NAP is going to contribute positively to Canada’s peacekeeping efforts moving forward, it needs to address the challenges of fully integrating the women, peace and security agenda into the workings of DND/CAF and the RCMP, while also meaningfully measuring the integration of a gender perspective in peace operations and related areas.

Links to documents from WPSN-C and Global Affairs Canada at <https://wpsn-canada.org>.