

Celebrating Women in Diplomacy

Panel Discussion: What does a feminist foreign policy mean?

Wednesday, October 25, 2017

The French Residence

42 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Canada

**Presented by the Carleton Initiative for Parliamentary and Diplomatic Engagement
and the Embassy of France to Canada**

Panelists

The Right Honourable Kim Campbell, Former Prime Minister of Canada

H.E. Susan le Jeune d'Allegeershecque, British High Commissioner to Canada

H.E. Kareen Rispal, Ambassador of France to Canada

Dr. Fiona Robinson, Professor of Political Science, Carleton University

H.E. Sabine Sparwasser, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Canada

Moderator

Maureen Boyd, Director, Carleton Initiative for Parliamentary and Diplomatic Engagement

Closing remarks

Diane Jacovella, Deputy Minister of International Development

Dr. André Plourde, Dean, Faculty of Public Affairs

Rapporteur

Dana Hatherly, Master of Journalism student, Carleton University

Maureen Boyd provided opening remarks:

- Welcomed distinguished guests, diplomats, and senior officials
- Thanked the Embassy of France for providing the venue and spoke about the privilege of hosting this type of discussion to add to dialogue and continue to build relationships between countries
- Introduced and thanked Pamela Goldsmith-Jones, parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, for her help in inviting Members of Parliament
- Turned the microphone to Fiona Robinson to open the discussion on feminist foreign policy and define the terms

Dr. Fiona Robinson introduced the topic:

- Stated the importance of this kind of discussion
 - To set the stage for the world, with a focus on Sweden and Canada
 - To address the thorny issue of what feminism means

- To highlight potential pitfalls when thinking about how feminism can guide foreign policy
- In 2015, Sweden became the first nation to adopt feminist foreign policy, in systematic and holistic ways, on the basis of gender equality and rights
 - Sweden's policy based on the three R's: rights, representation, and resources
 - Covers human rights to sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Many other countries feature gender equality prominently
- Looked at Canada's renewed commitment to women, peace, and security in accordance to United Nations resolutions
 - This commitment affirms the participation of women, addresses concerns regarding substantive equality of men and women and calls for special consideration on differential impact on women and girls
 - Led to open debate about peace and security at the United Nations
 - Review Canada's contribution to ensure women and girls are empowered to reach their full potential, not only to benefit families but for economic growth
 - Dismal federal funding for international aid raises questions of Canada's ability to effect substantive change
 - Some positive changes in the promises made on behalf of Canada's federal government, such as provision of safe, legal abortion
 - Concerns remain about top-down feminism, as opposed to grassroots feminism, in the context of development and its ability to contribute to meaningful change
- Addressed confusion about what feminism means in general and in the context of foreign policy
 - Feminism is not monolithic
 - Feminism sometimes exists amidst tension
 - Feminism is important from an academic and a policy perspective – different types of feminism exist – for example, consider liberal rights-based feminism that works within existing structures and institutions, compared to radical feminism that challenges structures such as militarism and capitalism
- Those involved in discussions need to agree on what is meant by feminism when it comes to feminist foreign policy
- Must recognize that it is not about just women, but about gender
 - Defined gender as a social meaning tied to our bodies that involves masculinity and femininity
 - Attention to gender is necessary to understand oppression
 - In a global context, it means understanding the meaning of intersectionality – in other words, look at race, class, religion, indigeneity, age, and sexual orientation through an intersectional lens, and recognize that feminism opposes all forms of oppression and seeks to build solidarity
- Each country must take responsibility and look at the structural reasons for women's exclusion and marginalization in development, as well as security and trade, and how these systems reproduce violence against and oppression of women

- What role do our own countries play in maintaining problematic structures and institutions?
- We should aim for truly transnational feminist solidarity
- We must avoid culture-blaming and using feminist foreign policy to challenge other nations or call out other cultures when we lack historical and contemporary understanding

Maureen Boyd introduced the three diplomats:

- All are women, career diplomats with long established careers who each had opportunities to make differences for women
- Tricky debate because when it comes to feminist foreign policy, there are different meanings that mean different things to different people
- What feminist foreign policy means to the diplomats

Maureen Boyd directed the first question to H.E. Kareen Rispal:

- Does France feel pressured to adopt a feminist foreign policy?

H.E. Kareen Rispal responded:

- On the international level, we have been slow to recognize the need to adopt foreign policy based on gender
- On the domestic level, we have a new president who leads a new political party
- With the election of President Emmanuel Macron in the last general election, women now make 39% of France's parliament compared to 26% in the last parliament

Maureen Boyd asked H.E. Susan le Jeune d'Allegeershecque to explain:

- The United Kingdom continues to actively promote gender equality at home and abroad but fails to label their work as feminist.

H.E. Susan le Jeune d'Allegeershecque responded:

- If feminism is the radical notion that women are people, and if that's what feminist foreign policy is, then the British are doing it
- One of the most shocking issues is the pay gap between male and female colleagues
- International foreign policy should meet three objectives:
 - Economic development for women
 - Women as part of peace building and reconciliation
 - Women as victims of unacceptable practices

Maureen Boyd directed next question to H.E. Sabine Sparwasser:

- Germany does not identify as feminist. Please explain the German position.

H.E. Sabine Sparwasser responded:

- In Germany, the term feminist has a negative connotation; it is seen as divisive and viewed as political activism

- Endorsed the Canadian and Swedish approaches for three reasons:
 - Target women in developing countries in ways that improve sustainability
 - Measurable targets proven
 - Set the standard in international law
- Germany hesitates to identify with the definition of feminism based on substance, but ultimately agrees with its premises

Maureen Boyd posed a question for Dr. Fiona Robinson:

- How do people and countries avoid culture shaming and culture blaming?

Dr. Fiona Robinson responded:

- Countries need to look inward – this is not something that is done for the less-enlightened or the poor, but for our wider relationships in the world
 - both historically, in terms of colonialism and neo-colonialism, and more contemporary times
- Culture moves and shifts – those involved must become more aware of cultural differences and understand the meaning of policy measures on the ground

H.E. Kareen Rispal spoke:

- Commented on struggles of being a woman who has worked in male-dominated environments
- Did not previously like the idea of having quotas to require women's participation in leadership positions but now feels that action needs to be taken and quotas might actually help address the gender gap

Maureen Boyd asked:

- How to reconcile feminist policy when it comes to international partnerships?

H.E. Susan le Jeune d'Allegeershecque replied:

- Values-based diplomacy sometimes means difficult conversations arise
- Domestic violence is not acceptable, rape as weapon of war is not acceptable – whereas, in other areas, there is room for debate
 - Look to Saudi Arabia where women were recently permitted to drive cars due to international pressure – these kinds of conversations are uncomfortable but important

H.E. Sabine Sparwasser responded:

- We need to make our point when it comes to abuse, but these are delicate questions that can be difficult to approach
- Easier to approach these subjects with women as women, but some people may not be willing to openly discuss all subjects
- Feminism needs to be entered into sustained dialogue with patience

First question from an audience member:

- From some speakers' experiences, people influence change by example, so how can domestic policy drive and support feminist foreign policy, and how nations can be helped at home?

H.E. Susan le Jeune d'Allegeershecque said:

- Some things we tackled at home influenced foreign policy, and vice versa
- For example, forced marriage and so-called honour killings were huge issues that straddled international and domestic borders between India and its subcontinents and the United Kingdom
 - Domestic policy can have positive effect across borders – doesn't mean everyone in a community has these practices, but it is important to acknowledge where it does exist
- Trade agreements should include provisions for gender

H.E. Sabine Sparwasser responded:

- Most obvious intersection: the number of refugees coming into Germany
 - How to empower women who are newcomers to help them integrate and become members of German society
- Results of latest election saw a decrease in number of women elected to parliament from 36 to 30 per cent

Maureen Boyd: Welcomed Hon. Kim Campbell to the room

Second question from the audience:

- When it comes to sexual harassment, why aren't men speaking about this? If there are so many women who have encountered this, then why are none of the men who are behind the issue speaking up?

H.E. Kareen Rispal replied:

- Women who experience sexual assault are typically expected to report incidents to men working in male-dominated environments
- Recent hashtag campaign in France has led many people to post their own stories on social media, where almost every woman had a story to tell
 - Most men did not speak up, but I imagine that men had witnessed this
- The ways to protect and empower women do not require the same subject and tools in response, unlike what feminist foreign policy may suggest

Maureen Boyd asked for comment:

- A 2015 study by the UN found that, globally, only 15% of ambassadors are women
- International institutions and organizations are failing to have women in senior diplomatic positions

H.E. Susan le Jeune d'Allegeershecque:

- Today we have 50 heads of mission out of 267, which is not great, but it's a lot more from when she started
 - In past, women had to resign from top positions when they got married
- Women should encourage and mentor other women
 - There are no institutional barriers, the only thing holding women back are women themselves

H.E. Sabine Sparwasser agreed:

- Her main takeaway was about women mentoring women to be in top positions
- At the higher levels, women drop out because the jobs are demanding, not family-centric, so women choose to stay at home, which leads to disproportionate numbers but still does not account for such slow progress

H.E. Kareen Rispal also agreed:

- Women need to ask for the highest jobs
- Need to fight against stereotypes about women
- There is a new generation of young women who are empowered and who are setting examples

Maureen Boyd spoke:

- Gave a brief review of discussion before asking Hon. Kim Campbell to give a few thoughts on gender equality and feminist foreign policy

Hon. Kim Campbell spoke:

- When we talk about feminist foreign policy, the empowerment of women in diplomatic services is very important
 - Particularly when part of a culture that allows you to speak in your own voice
 - Women are often invisible in peace and security issues
 - Women must be part of post-conflict discussions
- Feminist foreign policy means that my country goes to other countries and sees everybody
 - We seek out women to include them around the table
 - We need more active women in top positions
- Call it feminist foreign policy or call it foreign policy that recognizes that over half of the people in the world are women

Diane Jacovella, Deputy Minister of International Development, presented closing remarks:

- We learned we need to be clear in our definitions and results
- Women and girls are still held back from getting same benefits as men around the world
- Canadian government set clear objectives for safer and more inclusive world with a focus on gender equality of women and girls

- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made this point when he appointed gender-parity in Canada's parliament
- Federal budget outlines that the government is moving in this direction
- House of Commons outlined a feminist international agenda which seeks to make men and women have equal voice, equal rights, equal access to safety and security, and equal representation in policies and priorities

Dr. André Plourde, Dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs, offered his closing remarks:

- Today's main takeaway: empowerment of women
- Local concept of empowerment means building a more solid foundation for our government to act with regards to feminist foreign policy
 - Make local changes that have global impacts