

Thank-you. Before I begin I would also like to thank Maureen Boyd and Her Excellency Madame Rispal for organizing this event and for inviting me to participate in this panel. I am very honoured to be in such auspicious company to discuss this important topic.

I would like to do three things. First, I would like to set the stage a little, focusing specifically on Sweden and Canada. Second, I will address the thorny issue of what exactly the ‘feminist’ in feminist foreign policy might mean. Third, I would like to highlight some potential pitfalls that should be uppermost in our minds as we are thinking about how feminism could guide foreign policy.

We must begin with Sweden, since, in 2015, Sweden became the first nation-state ever to adopt, publicly and explicitly, a feminist foreign policy. According to Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström, Sweden’s feminist foreign policy is about systematically and holistically implementing policies that contribute to gender equality and the full enjoyment of human rights for all women and girls. This is achieved through a focus on the so-called three ‘Rs’ – rights, representation and resources -- and six substantive areas: Human rights, Freedom from violence, Participation in peace efforts, Political participation, Economic empowerment, and Sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In some important respects, this move has been a success for Sweden on the world stage. The European Council on Foreign Relations rated Sweden, along with the UK, as having the second largest influence on shaping European Union foreign policy in 2015, with only Germany listed as more influential. In June of this year, Sweden was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the 2017-2018 term.

While Sweden is the only country to have adopted a feminist foreign policy, in many other countries – including the countries represented here, gender equality features prominently in their foreign policy. Canada is also emerging as a leader here. In February of this year Canada renewed its commitment to women, peace and security by releasing its new action plan for the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. These includes Resolution 1325, passed in 2000, which affirms that women’s participation and the inclusion of concerns regarding the substantive equality of men and women at all stages of peace operations are integral to the development of stable states built on a

foundation of human rights and the rule of law. The Resolution calls for special consideration, during and after conflict, of the differential impact of conflict on women and girls. Later this week, the annual United Nations Security Council open debate on Women, Peace and Security will take place at the UN headquarters in New York.

Most notable, however, is Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy, announced on June 9, 2017. This followed an extensive public review and consultations on the renewal of Canada's international assistance policy and funding framework. A statement released on the launch day stated that 'we need to make sure that women and girls are empowered to reach their full potential so they can earn their own livelihoods, which will benefit families as well as the economic growth of their communities and countries'. Taking a human rights-based approach, the government has pledged that, by 2022, 95% of our international assistance budget will be directed towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

While the policy has generally been welcomed by Canada's development community, a number of questions have been posed about what this will mean in practice. Many of these questions were motivated by the announcement that there would be marginal (if any) new funding allocated to this policy. For many, this was particularly difficult to accept, given that Canada continues to fall below the UN recommendation of 0.7% of GDP for foreign aid, and given the announcement, just two days earlier, of a 70% increase in defense spending. And while there have been some promising moves on behalf of the government regarding funding for local women's groups and programs promoting reproductive rights and access to family planning, including safe, legal abortion, there are still concerns about the ultimate effectiveness of top-down feminism in the context of development, and its ability to engender real change.

I think it is safe to say that there are mixed opinions about feminist foreign policy generally. There remains confusion over what feminism actually means – both in general, and in the context of foreign policy. The first thing to note about feminism is that it is not a single, monolithic theory or approach. Feminism is a family of theories, the ideas and aims of which often coincide and overlap, but sometimes exist in tension. This is important in practical, policy terms, because different understandings of feminism will lead to different policy goals, as well as different indicators of success. For example, a liberal, rights-based feminism will focus on the achievement of rights for

women within existing social, economic and political structures; so-called 'difference' feminism will favour policies and programs that may challenge the structures themselves – structures like militarism and certain forms of, or features of, capitalism – that they see as inherently oppressive and exploitative of women. So considering and agreeing on what we mean by feminism is of great importance right from the outset.

I would suggest some common ground that might provide a starting point for dialogue on the strategies and aims of feminism for foreign policy. First, we need to recognize that feminism is not just about women, but about gender.

Gender, as we all know, is not about women and men; gender is the social meaning attached to the shape of our bodies, including the socially-constructed norms, identities, and practices of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' which shape or structure the world in which we live. Attention to gender is necessary if we wish to expose and address the multiple ways in which both women and men are oppressed by gendered relations of power.

Another key idea that is crucial when thinking about feminism in a global context is intersectionality. This means that we recognize that gender is an axis of difference that intersects with many others – race, class, religion, indigeneity, disability, age and sexual orientation – and that all of these are important factors in determining the ways that gender relations will function, and the effects that they will have on the lives of women and men. Through an intersectional lens, feminism opposes all forms of oppression and domination, and seeks to build solidarity.

An approach to feminist foreign policy focused on gendered power relations, rather than only on women's rights or gender equality, allows us to think not just about individual women and men, but the wider institutional and structural reasons for women's oppression and exclusion. That means looking at the way in which key structures and institutions – in the worlds of security, development, and trade – produce and reproduce conditions that marginalize or lead to violence against women. And before we look abroad, we should take a look at ourselves, and consider what role our own countries might play in perpetuating these structures and institutions, as well as looking at the state of gender relations in our own countries. It will be a grave mistake to conduct foreign policy with a hubris that assumes that our role is simply to educate, protect or punish others on their performance in the area of gender equality, and that we have nothing to learn, or develop, in this area.

If Canada were to aim to follow a feminist approach in all aspects of its foreign policy, we would need to be extremely careful to avoid the familiar but very real traps of cultural and neo-imperialism. Indeed, it will be crucial to explicitly avoid using the discourse of feminist foreign policy as a means of challenging the practices of other states – especially in the global south -- on the basis of narrowly-understood ‘culture’. This kind of ‘culture-blaming’ depoliticizes socio-political problems – including gender oppressions -- and diverts attention away from the ways in which these practices may supported and sustained by historical and contemporary inequalities in the global economy – what we sometimes call ‘neo-colonialism’. To imagine ‘culture’ as an isolated realm, separate from other kinds of social relations, is to reproduce the dichotomies of ‘us’ and ‘them’, and to hinder our ability to work towards the achievement of a truly transnational feminist solidarity.