

The Scottish Women's Convention's  
response to the Scottish Government's  
consultation on:

# Feminist Approach to Foreign Policy



January 2023

### **Premise**

The SNP manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament election included a commitment to develop foreign policy in a feminist way for Scotland. This change would make Scotland the first in the UK to adopt feminist foreign policy, joining a small number of countries globally. Feminist foreign policy looks to advocate for social equality for women, and priorities peace, human rights, and environmental issues.

This consultation asks individuals to consider what a feminist foreign policy would look like in Scotland. And also, how the Scottish Government can implement this despite foreign affairs, defence, immigration and trade remaining non-devolved issues.

After the Scottish Government have received consultation responses, they shall consider alterations that are required and rectify their plan accordingly – incorporating suggestions made.



### **The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)**

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK, and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

## Our Response

### **What should the core principles of a feminist approach to Scotland's international activity be?**

The core principles of feminist working should be radical, progressive, empowering, and anti-colonial. It is key that the Scottish Government instils these concepts into future foreign policy, in order to properly commit to feminist ways of working. Feminists also believe in encapsulating all experience, focusing on a standpoint approach, which considers the intersectional dynamics at play throughout human discourse.

### **Where should the Scottish Government focus its efforts to ensure our actions have most impact?**

Despite foreign policy remaining under the management of Westminster, it is highly recommended that the Scottish Government seek to advocate on the world stage, where possible, for feminist approaches to be adopted. By working with the UK and devolved governments, the Scottish Government can encourage similar approaches be taken, particularly in the development of human rights-based policy. Feminist styles of working are inherently human rights-based, and as such should become commonplace amongst wide-reaching governmental influence.

### **What does it mean in practice to look at international work through a feminist lens?**

The fundamental principle of a feminist lens is inquiry: with a particular focus on understanding how large-scale institutions denigrate and dominate marginalised groups of people. As such, when looking at a feminist approach to foreign policy, considerations must be made which look to dismantle patriarchal, colonialist ideologies that underpin our well-established institutions. This can be done through new collaborative ways of working which utilise lived experience in recognition that those with first-hand knowledge are experts, despite a potential lack of formal qualification. Women have regularly expressed frustration that they feel powerless and disenfranchised due to a lack of consultation, and that their personal experiences have given them the ability to understand complex systems in dynamic ways. As such, the Scottish Government must work with women to fully incorporate feminist mechanisms into foreign policy, and beyond.

- “Unless people have lived experience, they don't know what it's like. I would love for some of the politicians to come and live in my shoes for a week, so they could understand how difficult it is.”
- “It would be great if they actually worked with women to create person-led policy which focused on lived experience.”

Feminist work has also, always been based around grassroots campaigning and organisation. This form of work has continuously highlighted flaws in systems, as well

as changes that are necessary for everyday women. However, due to major budget cuts, the third and grassroots sectors are struggling to meet increasing demand. This financial insecurity has only worsened as a result of Brexit, with previous funding commitments being withdrawn. Therefore, in order to incorporate feminist workings into foreign policy, it is important that the Scottish Government consider how they can fully support these organisations, and perhaps, learn from them through novel ways of working.

- “For me being in the third sector, one thing that has been visibly noticeable has been the reduction in European funding, which is affecting many organisations across Scotland, and who we are able to access.
- “I think the Scottish Government has a great opportunity. The networks are there, the people on the ground are there, so give them the resources...We can't do it on small pots of money, because you spend your whole time trying to find funding that enables posts to continue.”

### **Which policies or programmes that Scotland is already delivering domestically or internationally should we build on?**

The Scottish Government's recent legislation to reduce period poverty across the country, creates a good opportunity to further this concept on the world stage. This particular policy is the first of its kind, and as such is one which other countries may hope to emulate. It is, therefore, vital that the Scottish Government continue to develop, and carry out further research to understand barriers which exist that prevent some from accessing this scheme. This could then facilitate adoption on a wider-scale, elevating Scotland's status, while also providing further period safety for women and girls across the world.

A further key piece of legislation within Scotland, is the creation of the Women's Health Plan. This particular plan is ground-breaking and puts Scotland at the forefront of tackling social inequalities that are prevalent across healthcare settings. As with the legislation on period poverty, it is vital that the Scottish Government continue to speak with different groups of women, to understand how intersectional experience has impacted their ability to engage with healthcare in Scotland. Women have been very positive about the proposed plans, but state that it needs continual refreshing and that some groups of women have been missed in initial planning: for example, young women. By continuing to develop and change the proposals, the Scottish Government can bring their knowledge to the world-stage.

- “I love the fact we have a Women's Health Plan; I think it's fantastic...But I was really sad to see that domestic abuse isn't sitting in there.”
- “More teenagers should have been consulted in the Women's Health Plan.”

### **Should Scotland take a feminist approach to international development? If so, what would this look like?**

To properly implement feminist approaches into Scottish foreign policy, it is vital that anti-colonialism is the underpinning principle. Scotland did play an integral role in the development of the British Empire, and the associating colonial mind-set which dictated British international approaches for decades. In order to effectively make change, the Scottish Government should incorporate anti-colonial teachings across primary and high schools, while working with media outlets to ensure the full impacts of colonialism are being brought to the general public's attention. Women in Scotland have told us that they would like to see Scotland's role in colonialism taught more in school, and that this will work to prevent a rise in racist and xenophobic behaviour, while also celebrating other cultures.

- “I believe we skirt over ‘sticky’ issues, such as Scotland’s involvement in the slave trade...More of a variety of Scottish culture should be celebrated and explored in schools.”
- “To be honest, I feel that the education system is becoming a bit insular. We should be teaching children about Scotland, but at the same time we should not be forgetting about other countries.”

Furthermore, the Scottish Government should work with migrants and asylum seekers in Scotland to understand their experience, and how they can be better supported in Scotland, but also to know why they, perhaps, chose Scotland as their new country of residence. By speaking to those with direct experience, the government can incorporate their views into international policy, guaranteeing that minority voices are part of the development process. This procedure will ensure that a feminist approach is being taken, with those directly impacted being consulted and empowered to make change. It is also vital that there is work carried out afterwards with these groups, to help support and provide education for women.

### **How can Scotland ensure that human rights are at the core of its approach and that we play our part in building international capacity to advance human rights?**

A human rights-based approach should be fully incorporated into all Scottish policy as standard, and as such future international policy is no difference. Recent developments being made to include a human rights charter into Scottish Government is highly commended, and through increased consultation with minority groups, they can continue to improve and alter this work as needed. Human rights can also be further ingrained by fully accepting intersectional thought-processes across government, as this can work to combat prejudices and social disadvantage.

### **What is the one action you want the Scottish Government to take as part of its approach?**

The one action we, at the SWC, would like to see taken forward as part of a new feminist foreign policy approach, would be commitments to reduce violence against women and

girls (VAWG) globally. Women and girls currently face harassment and violence throughout their lives, whether that is within their home and/or workplace, within their communities and online. This has caused the deaths and suffering of a countless number of women, and as such is a global health issue. We have made calls to incorporate VAWG into the Scottish Women's Health Plan, believing that this should be widened to international forums as it is of the utmost importance.

Women have spoken of their own experiences of VAWG, either as survivors or as part of the support network available for those suffering, and they have explained that rapid intervention is required to reduce VAWG. It has also been highlighted that this issue spans borders, with some young women being taken from Scotland to go through the process of FGM. This act is illegal within Scotland; however, women have explained that this does not effectively safeguard all women and girls in Scotland, and that more must be done on an international stage to regulate this practice.

- “...the women and children we're supporting, just to say that of the 1300, nearly all are FGM survivors. There are so many children at risk”
- “Just about FGM and girls at risk... girls are at risk. Even though these girls have been born here, their parents take them on holidays to different countries and practice it on them. So, that means they're not safe.”

### **How can our approach be monitored and evaluated effectively? How do we know that our policies are having the desired impact?**

A helpful tool to monitor and evaluate foreign policy approaches is the implementation of qualitative engagement processes. By speaking with women across countries, we can begin to understand the impact Scottish work has had upon their communities: both negative and positive. This would be particularly useful when considering anti-colonial methodologies, as those directly impacted by historical colonial activity can be effectively consulted and involved in new, dynamic practice. It is also vital, that women in Scotland are spoken with, to understand the domestic impacts of international work.

### **What should the future role of stakeholders be as Scotland's feminist approach to foreign policy is being implemented?**

The key role of stakeholders should be accountability in future feminist approaches to foreign policy. Only through proper consultation and feedback exercises can the Scottish Government understand the impact their work is having, and how they must alter their practice. The Scottish Government have many stakeholder groups who directly influence policy, and as such it is our recommendation that a group of interested parties should be created to monitor Scottish foreign policy goals.

## Conclusion

Having listened to women, our three key recommendations on this topic are:

- Ensure anti-colonial attitudes are well-engrained throughout Scottish Government commitments, while working with effected communities to make lasting change.
- Work with grassroots and third-sector organisations to maintain an on-the-ground approach to foreign policy.
- Commit to the removal of VAWG globally, and work to limit it's detrimental impacts on women and girls lives.

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on **Feminist Approach to Foreign Policy**. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

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