



Advocating for peace, justice & equality



Women Foreign Ministers' Meeting a First in Two Ways

Feminist activists share issues and priorities with the first-ever meeting of Women Foreign Ministers

(OTTAWA, September 26, 2018) A coalition of Canadian civil society organizations welcome the successful conclusion of a fruitful exchange between participants in the first-ever women Foreign Ministers meeting and women's rights activists.

The exchange was held during a working breakfast that was part of the official agenda of the Women Foreign Ministers Meeting co-hosted by The Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada) and High Representative Federica Mogherini (European Union). The meeting was held in Montreal, September 21 and 22, 2018.

Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Beatrice Fihn, Executive Director of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons addressed the ministers gathered from 16 countries. Informal roundtable discussions followed.

"It was important that the discussion was part of the official programme. This type of exchange is all too rare," said Theo Sowa, CEO of African Women's Development Fund. "The mood in the room was constructive. The sharing of information, ideas and strategies will help both the foreign ministers and the civil society organisations present to push for more inclusive security and development agendas."

Sowa was one of ten activists representing diverse feminist movements from around the globe. They raised concerns about the safety of women human rights defenders and violence against women. They urged a redefinition of security that puts the needs of people (especially women and girls) first. Discussions also focused on increasing women's participation in peace processes, including in South Sudan; strengthening the voices of feminist activists in foreign policy discussions; and priorities for feminist foreign policy.

Razia Sultana, founder of Rohingya Women Welfare, shared her experiences of documenting sexual violence and working with Rohingya women and girls in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. "I congratulated Minister Freeland on the recent Canadian recognition of the crimes against my people as genocide. I urged the other women ministers to follow Canada's example. This is the first step towards ending the violence and ensuring justice."

At the closing press conference Minister Freeland announced that Canada would create an Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security. "This is an exciting new development, one that we hope will accelerate the implementation of Canada's ambitious Women, Peace and Security

commitments and increase Canada’s support of grassroots women peace builders,” said Beth Woroniuk, coordinator of Women, Peace and Security Network-Canada.

The Minister also announced \$25 million for women, peace and security initiatives, including funding for several women’s rights organizations. Specific funding for these organizations has been a long-time policy ask of Canadian civil society organizations.

Over 200 organizations from around the world urged the ministers to recognize, protect and support women human rights defenders, noting that these activists face grave and numerous threats. “We will be monitoring the response to this [statement](#). We are optimistic that future meetings of women foreign ministers will build on the productive relationships established here in Montreal,” said Anne Delorme, Gender Equality Programme Manager, AQOCI.

An informal coalition organized a series of side events around this historic Women Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, including a public panel on Feminist Foreign Policy and a civil society dialogue. Coalition members are: Amnesty International Canada (English), Amnistie internationale Canada francophone, Association Québécoise d’Organismes Cooperation Internationale (AQOCI), Canadian Foodgrains Bank, CARE Canada, Mines Action Canada, Nobel Women’s Initiative, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Québec, The MATCH International Women’s Fund, World Federalist Movement Canada.

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The Nobel Women’s Initiative brings together six women Nobel peace laureates—Shirin Ebadi (Iran), Tawakkol Karman (Yemen), Mairead Maguire (Northern Ireland), Jody Williams (U.S.), Leymah Gbowee (Liberia) and Rigoberta Menchu Tum (Guatemala)—to amplify the voices and analysis of women human rights defenders around the globe. [@NobelWomen](#)

The MATCH International Women’s Fund is Canada’s only global fund for women, girls, and trans* people. Working at the intersection of women’s rights and innovation, The MATCH Fund provides direct financial support to grassroots women’s rights organizations in the global South. We fund creative and courageous women to dismantle barriers, challenge perceptions, and change the world for women and girls. [@MATCHIntFund](#)

MEDIA CONTACTS

Catherine Fortin LeFaivre
cfortin@matchinternational.org
613-979-8683

Ketty Nivyabandi
knivyabandi@nobelwomensinitiative.org
613 501 3021