

Feminist Foreign Policy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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The realization of gender equality across the world can only be achieved if sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are guaranteed to everyone everywhere. Any efforts to advance gender equality, peace and security through a Feminist Foreign Policy must involve a robust commitment to prioritize and politically and financially support SRHR.

To be truly feminist, any Feminist Foreign Policy must aim to benefit all women and girls in all their diversity and advance respect for the full panoply of their human rights, including SRHR. Initiatives presented as a Feminist Foreign Policy that do not center issues of bodily autonomy, reproductive justice, and intersectionality, are counterproductive and will ultimately fail to make a meaningful contribution to advancing gender equality, peace and security.

It is critical that SRHR be explicitly integrated as a key priority into any Feminist Foreign Policy.

Here are 12 concrete recommendations for commitments and actions on SRHR that should form part of any meaningful Feminist Foreign Policy.

12 Key Recommendations to Integrate SRHR into Feminist Foreign Policy

- To be truly feminist, Feminist Foreign Policy must prioritize the full realization of SRHR, including through addressing social and other determinants of health.* The goals of Feminist Foreign Policy, including a peaceful world where discrimination and inequality no longer exist, can only be achieved if SRHR are respected, protected and fulfilled for everyone, everywhere.
- Human rights standards must guide any Feminist Foreign Policy.* Feminist Foreign Policy should promote global compliance with, and implementation of, regional and international human rights obligations and commitments regarding SRHR. It should seek to advance these standards and refrain from settling for the lowest common denominator. Feminist Foreign Policy must also promote respect for, and compliance with, obligations under international humanitarian law and international criminal law.
- Affected communities and women human rights defenders* (WHRDs) must inform any Feminist Foreign Policy.* Feminist Foreign Policy should center and ground itself in the asks of local civil society and WHRDs who are leading the struggle to advance SRHR across the world. Feminist Foreign Policy must acknowledge and involve action to integrate the diverse voices and perspectives of WHRDs, in particular those who are the most marginalized in their national and regional contexts. Feminist Foreign Policy must guarantee meaningful participation of women in all their diversity in policy development, implementation and decision making. Only through real dialogue with them about their needs and lived experiences can a Feminist Foreign Policy be effective and achieve gender equality.

* Women human rights defenders are all women and girls working on any human rights issue, and people of all genders who work to promote women's rights and rights related to gender equality. It also includes any civil society actors who may not self-identify as human rights defenders or those who work on non-traditional human rights fields (journalists, health workers, environmental activists, peacebuilders, private actors, development and humanitarian actors, etc.). It includes lesbian, gay, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) activists, as issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity are part of achieving gender equality.

4.

Feminist Foreign Policy requires support for the critical work of WHRDs to advance SRHR and gender equality. Feminist Foreign Policy must ensure provision of financial and political support to WHRDs and feminist, SRHR and women's rights organizations, with a particular focus on grassroots organizations and individuals who are most isolated and most at risk. They are on the frontlines of the struggle to advance gender equality and strengthen protections for SRHR. In many instances they are at grave risk and work in precarious and difficult environments where they face intimidation, smear campaigns, harassment, threats and violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.

5.

Feminist Foreign Policy starts at home. As governments seek to advance a Feminist Foreign Policy in their external engagement, it is critical that they also look to their own internal context and ensure that they are simultaneously taking actions to respect, protect and fulfil SRHR at home without discrimination. This must include measures to address the social and other determinants of health, including structural racism, and discrimination based on legal and migration status and socio-economic inequalities.

6.

Feminist Foreign Policy should be used to provide political and financial support to feminist movements nationally, regionally and globally. Sustainable changes in the lives of women and girls often result from years of mobilization, resources, energy and advocacy from feminist organizations, platforms and networks. Feminist Foreign Policy should prioritize efforts to reinforce feminist movements as the key drivers for change, by allocating necessary resources. Financial support should be flexible enough that it is accessible for the most marginalized organizations, and political support should be mobilized to sustain the growth of feminist movements.

7.

Feminist Foreign Policy must recognize the diversity of women and marginalized groups. Intersectional approaches are needed to address the multilayered and intersectional forms of discrimination and disadvantage that prevent the realization of gender equality and SRHR. In particular, Feminist Foreign Policy must acknowledge and recognize the rich and varied perspectives and visions of feminist movements in different contexts. Only by truly responding to the specific needs and perspectives of affected groups can these efforts be meaningful, appropriate and lasting.

8.

Feminist Foreign Policy requires a fundamental shift in power dynamics. The realization of gender equality necessitates addressing systemic inequalities in power relations and the structural and root causes of inequality, including those connected with gender, race, (neo-) colonialism, age, sexual orientation and gender identity and disability, among other things. In particular, Feminist Foreign Policy must include a clear commitment to undoing harm caused by colonization and imperialism and must address the resulting inaccurate and stigmatizing narratives that undermine human rights and SRHR and perpetuate human rights violations. Feminist Foreign Policy must be accompanied by a shift in power dynamics in international development assistance and donor priorities and advance decolonization of development and foreign policy.

9.

Feminist Foreign Policy requires governments to stand up and be counted when it comes to SRHR. While many governments have made strong commitments to defending and advancing SRHR, sometimes they are reluctant to invest the political capital that is required to visibly stand up for SRHR. Sometimes they selectively support specific aspects of SRHR. Feminist Foreign Policy. Feminist Foreign Policy requires robust and bold support for all of the human rights that protect SRHR, even in situations where this may not be politically advantageous. Feminist Foreign Policy must not be selective. It must apply to all geographies – including in engagement with strategic allies – and to all groups and issues.

10.

Feminist Foreign Policy requires meaningful mobilization and coordination to take robust action against regression and backlash on SRHR. Addressing the influence of anti-rights movements and groups in some contexts and the accompanying threats of backlash against hard-fought gains on gender equality and SRHR must be a priority for any Feminist Foreign Policy. All retrogressive attempts to restrict or remove existing protections for SRHR should be promptly denounced and rejected in the strongest terms. Human rights law is unequivocal that retrogression on rights protections is not acceptable. WHRDs working on gender equality and SRHR who are affected by backlash against SRHR and have been targeted, must be protected and supported in their work.

11.

Feminist Foreign Policy requires SRHR to be prioritized in all humanitarian contexts. Feminist Foreign Policy means that the Women, Peace and Security agenda must not be limited to a focus on sexual and gender-based violence but must also prioritize ensuring comprehensive SRHR for all women affected by conflict, using an intersectional lens. Robust action must also be taken to guarantee accountability for any violations of SRHR in humanitarian settings as an integral part of effective and transformative remedies and reparations.

12.

Feminist Foreign Policy requires robust plans, implementation frameworks, indicators and accountability. Planning and implementation of Feminist Foreign Policy should integrate a comprehensive framework of specific, measurable, and time-bound indicators and results to ensure meaningful progress in advancing SRHR and gender equality. Regular public reporting on progress should be a fundamental component of Feminist Foreign Policy. Affected groups must be meaningfully involved in the formulation of indicators, monitoring systems and reporting to ensure that assessments are meaningful and actionable and pursue the results they deem truly essential.