

Statement by

**H.E. Minister Maryam Monsef, Minister of International Development
and Minister for Women and Gender Equality**

at the IDPS Side Event, 12th March 2019

on

**“The Centrality of Gender Equality to National Cohesion and Sustainable
Peacebuilding”**

Thanks for the kind introductions and to all of you for being here. Bonjour, as-salaam alaykum, many thanks also to the team here at the permanent mission for bringing us together. I know that there's a lot of hustling and bustling happening so I hope that you will take advantage of the nourishment they have provided so that you can continue to stay energized on this path to equality through gender equality.

My name is Maryam Monsef. I am a member of parliament from a beautiful riding called Peterborough-Kawartha in southeastern Ontario, in Canada. I am here on behalf of Prime Minister Trudeau and the Government of Canada to thank all of you for your ongoing hard work, for your advocacy, for bringing us to this moment in time when partnerships are happening, when gender equality is seemingly the right thing to do but also the business case for gender equality is beginning to be recognized more and more. And I am looking forward to taking part in this conversation, to discussing the road ahead for the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS).

As a daughter of Afghanistan I know that the realities of war and conflict don't just affect people who experience it in the moment but they change the trajectory for generations to come. I know that I am one of the few, the luck one per cent of refugees who have opportunities to do well in the place they move to. We know that not everyone finds as welcoming and safe a haven as my family and I did so this issue is particularly important to me.

We all know that there can be no development without peace and no lasting peace without involving women. I know this even though it's my first week on this new job as Minister for International Development. I know, as you all do, that gender equality is central to the national cohesion and peacebuilding efforts of everyone involved. That's why the IDPS has identified gender equality and Women, Peace and Security as one of the priority themes that the IDPS will work towards over the next two years.

We believe in Canada that the IDPS gives us the opportunity to deepen the dialogue about how to achieve gender equality in fragile and conflict situations and how to work even better with civil society organizations who have the connections on the ground, who know the solutions, know the short cuts, who have the

magical ability to stretch every dollar to the max. We also know that there are opportunities here to work here more closely with our multilateral partners to mobilize political action. The IDPS brings together the international network on conflict and fragility, g7+ and civil society partners to drive change. It encourages mutual accountability and shares best practices so that we don't reinvent existing wheels.

Canada is proud to be associated with this privileged forum. Although I have only recently have taken on the role of co-chair from my honourable colleague Minister Bibeau I know that we are poised for success. I have just met with my formidable co-chair, Minister Tunis of Sierra Leone, and I am excited to be working with such a dynamic leader, with a good sense of humour. I look forward to working together.

As co-chairs of the IDPS, Canada and Sierra Leone have worked with our members to identify three thematic priorities spelled out in the new IDPS Vision. They are: gender equality and Women, Peace and Security; national cohesion; and a peace-promoting private sector. The Vision will build on our successes and the successes of those who have come before us. Together we will address priority peacebuilding and statebuilding challenges as we accelerate progress towards our goal of building peace, justice and strong institutions, familiar to all of you in this room as Sustainable Development Goal 16. For all of those goals we have eleven years left.

The g7+, the membership, civil society partners, our vibrant communities in their own right, this is an asset we all have - when we join forces we will be in an even better position to advance gender equality and build national cohesion and *that* is the foundation for enduring peace. We know that women and girls are powerful agents of change. We see them in our own families, we see them in our communities. We heard from them earlier today in the General Assembly, leaders who are making a world of difference as heads of state. We know at the same time that these voices aren't always included. Women are seen as honest brokers by negotiating parties because they are often excluded from power structures. At the same time, women's groups have organized more mass action campaigns in support of peace than any other social group. Women have the right to a political voice. We know that. They must be able to help governments to understand the root causes of conflict and to find solutions that protect the interests of everyone.

When the Geneva Institute looked at 40 peace processes since the Cold War - because there are lessons in our history that help us to avoid making mistakes and also to learn from best practice - it found that when women were included, agreements were 20 per cent more likely to last at least two years and 35 per cent more likely to last fifteen years. What could be accomplished with two years of peace? What could be accomplished with fifteen years of peace? Yet in the last quarter century women were two per cent of mediators, eight per cent of negotiators, and five per cent of witnesses and signatories in all major peace processes. You don't have to be a statistics major to realize that that could very well be a rallying call.

So why is their participation, our participation, so abysmally low? Last October the UN Secretary General cited institutionalized gender bias and discrimination, the continued high prevalence of sexual and gender based violence and women's lack of economic, social and cultural rights as the main reasons. By and large, we know what the barriers are and we have some ideas of how to change this but progress has been slow.

Gender equality is central to Canada's feminist international assistance policy and its goal of eradicating poverty and building a more peaceful and sustainable world. Our National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security emphasizes the increased participation of women and girls in peace and security efforts and protecting their human rights, including from sexual and gender-based violence. We consider women's full and equal participation in decision-making as laying a foundation for lasting peace. We know that civil society plays a key role.

We've stepped up our support for local women's groups and movements since 2017. For example through our 150 million dollar (CAD) Women's Voice and Leadership Program, launched in 2017 as a part of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, we've supported women's local civic society organisations and movements. We know that their work is critical in turning advocacy into action. As part of the G7 framework for Women, Peace and Security Partnership Initiative adopted by foreign ministers in April our honourable Chrystia Freeland of Canada has a bilateral partnership with the Ivory Coast to help advance women's peace and security there. Our partnership with Uruguay will involve co-hosting the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network in 2020, which also marks the twentieth anniversary of landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the foundation for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

We also know that peacekeepers play a complex and pivotal role in how we move from conflict to peace in-country. My colleague Harjit Sajjan, our defence minister, reminded me of that on our very first call after I got this job. As peacekeepers, humanitarian and development workers, their engagement has to be complementary to the work that defence leaders do. That's why in 2017 Canada launched the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations with the aim of increasing the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations, and specifically uniformed police and women in military roles. We know that when women and girls have the safety and security they need, they are better able to take part in the social, political and economic lives of their communities and everyone benefits.

I say all this as a proud Canadian of Afghan descent with the recognition that in Canada we still have a lot of work to do in our own backyard, that we are still working to get our own house in order. Every 2.5 days a woman is killed in Canada; every six days a woman dies at the hands of her intimate partner. The tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls is a reality that we have yet to reconcile. And we also know that only five per cent of those who experience cases of sexual and gender-based violence actually come forward. Forty per cent of them are coming from post-secondary institutions, from our colleges,

CEGEPs (Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel) and universities. I say this because with all the leadership that we are committed to in advancing this work with our colleagues in Sierra Leone, we also come to this work with a lot of humility, knowing that none of us has achieved true equality at home and that this binds us together, with a strong commitment.

I looking forward to the dialogue and I'll hand the microphone back now.