

IPI Head of WPS Phoebe Donnelly Delivers Remarks at the Third Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy in Mexico City

Through a partnership with the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Phoebe Donnelly, Head of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) at the International Peace Institute (IPI), spoke at the Third Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy in Mexico City on July 2, 2024, the theme of which was “Solutions for a Better Tomorrow.”

Phoebe was one of two civil society representatives on a panel on “Securing Equality: Exploring Feminist Foreign Policy and Gender Dynamics in International Peace and Security.” The other panelists included Arlene Beth Tickner, Deputy Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations; Carlos Ruiz Massieu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia; Signe Grur Gilen, Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway; Peter-Derrek Hof, Ambassador for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, representative of the Netherlands; Gesa Bräutigam, Special Envoy of Feminist Foreign Policy of Germany; Jackie O’Halloran, Director of Human Rights, Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland; Stephanie Copus-Campbell, Ambassador for Gender Equity of Australia; and Lina Abou Habib, Director of Asafari Institute.

The remarks have been edited for clarity.

My name is Phoebe Donnelly, and I lead the women, peace, and security program at the International Peace Institute. IPI is an independent think tank based in New York, so given our position in New York, my remarks will focus specifically on feminist foreign policies and multilateralism within the UN. I want to address three key points about the potential of feminist foreign policies to transform our multilateral system through (1) coalitions among member states promoting feminist principles, (2) partnerships between member states and civil society organizations, and (3) mainstreaming feminist foreign policy inside governments.

As we approach the Summit of the Future, I see the growth of feminist foreign policies and the promotion of feminist principles as tools to transform the multilateral system. We cannot forget the call in the New Agenda for Peace to dismantle patriarchal power structures, and feminist foreign policies can be tools to help us at least examine those structures. There are three main areas where feminist foreign policies can contribute to this transformation.

The first is by fostering **coalitions among member states promoting feminist principles**. From the UN context in New York, we are seeing a united and strong anti-gender movement. Therefore, there is an opportunity for member states with feminist foreign policies to come together and align on feminist positions in multilateral spaces. We can already see this happening in the “Feminist Foreign Policy Plus Group” where 18 UN member states with feminist foreign policies, or interest in feminist foreign policies, meet regularly. This group is energetic and innovative, and it has a system where member states join in Global South–Global North pairs. There is power also in regional coordination, including among Latin American states like Chile, Colombia, and Mexico that have been leading on feminist foreign policies.

Such coordination is key to UN negotiations, particularly as anti-gender movements are taking ownership of the concept of “family” and using it to signify a narrow



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understanding of kinship—one that is heterosexual and patriarchal and that limits women’s roles to the household. States with feminist foreign policies can engage as a coalition in these dialogues and promote more inclusive and feminist visions of family. This also fits into the focus on the care economy we are seeing from member states with feminist foreign policies. These anti-gender movements are using gender as a front, but they are trying to block progress on a wide range of issues and, in general, to discredit the UN system.

Second, feminist foreign policies can promote **partnerships between member states and civil society organizations**. This is something we see anti-gender groups doing very well by funding civil society groups with anti-gender ideologies and relying on them for capacity building, support in negotiations, and connections to member states aligned with these anti-gender movements. However, civil society can also be a key resource for member states with feminist foreign policies, not only in supporting their aspirational goals but also in holding them accountable in implementing their feminist foreign policies. In other words, civil society can support member states’ coalition building.

Third, member states can **mainstream feminist foreign policy throughout their government**. At missions in New York, we have diplomats, who often are not trained in feminist principles, negotiating different multilateral agreements. All these negotiations are relevant to feminist foreign policies and require diplomats to be aware of the principles of their own nation’s feminist foreign policy. Diplomats may need capacity building and training in CEDAW, the WPS agenda, and how to apply a gender analysis before entering multilateral spaces like New York. In addition, diplomatic academies can train future diplomats in feminist foreign policy. We can also share this knowledge across governments, such as by training the ministries of defense in feminist foreign policy. Local civil society can support this type of capacity building as well. As part of this mainstreaming, we should also be discussing masculinities and how they shape foreign policies.

I want to end with a call to be aspirational and ambitious and understand that member states with feminist foreign policies have an obligation and opportunity. So often, language around gender is the “negotiating chip” that gets sacrificed, but states with feminist foreign policies, or those that espouse feminist principles, have to keep feminist principles as a priority.

Recently, the Doha III negotiations on Afghanistan occurred. Afghan women were excluded, and human rights were not on the agenda in the negotiations with the Taliban. After so much progress in the almost 25 years since the launch of the WPS agenda and the rise of member states with feminist foreign policies, it is almost unconceivable that this blatant violation of the principles of the WPS agenda occurred. Member states with feminist foreign policies must work together to prevent this from happening in the future.

If pursued through a coalition with civil society and with a whole-of government approach, feminist foreign policies can bring hope to a struggling multilateral system, but this will take commitment, focus, and courage from those here today.

IPI Senior Fellow and Head of Women, Peace, and Security Phoebe Donnelly (far right) at the Third Annual Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy in Mexico City in July.



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