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Women, peace and security update: Appointment of an Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security

by Monique Cuillerier

In June 2019, the federal government appointed Jacqueline O'Neill as Canada's first Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security.

Liberal Member of Parliament Borys Wrzesnewskij had introduced a private members' motion calling on the government to appoint such an ambassador in 2018 and held initial consultations across the country on the idea.

The mandate for Ambassador O'Neill makes clear that she is to take a central role in reinforcing Canada's efforts "to ensure more inclusive, gender equal and peaceful societies around the globe through the participation of women in conflict prevention, stabilization and peacebuilding" along with advising on the ongoing implementation of the National Action Plan on women, peace and security. She is particularly tasked with providing advice to the ministers of Crown-Indigenous Affairs; Foreign Affairs; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; Indigenous Services; International Development; Justice; National Defence; Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness; and Women and Gender Equality.

Ambassador O'Neill has a master's degree in public policy from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. She has worked in the development of national strategies and policy with more than 30 countries and numerous multilateral organizations, including the United Nations and NATO. She is particularly experienced in the women, peace and security field and has previously advised the Canadian government on both national action plans and the mid-term review of the first national action plan.

Prior to her appointment as ambassador, she was a Global Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center's Canada Institute, an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University, and a member of the board of directors of the Canadian International Council.

Since beginning work in August, Ambassador O'Neill has met with members of the Women, Peace and Security Network – Canada (WPSN-C), including WFMC, to discuss the expectations of civil society, who have long advocated for the appointment of a high-level champion for women, peace and security issues in Canada. In a longer meeting in October, the Ambassador consulted with WPSN-C on priorities for her three-year term.

National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security progress report

Annual progress reports on the National Action Plan are intended to be tabled in the House of Commons by the end of September each year ahead of being publicly released. However, as a result of the timing of the recently completed federal election, the progress report, which covers the year from April 1 2018 to March 31 2019, has been delayed.

An exact date for the report's release will be set later. As a result, the next meeting of the WPS Advisory Group, composed of government and civil society representatives, will also be delayed so that the report can be discussed.

#WPSAdvice for the next federal government

In the period during and immediately after the recent federal election, the Women, Peace and Security Network - Canada published a series of blog posts on different areas of the women, peace and security agenda that the new Liberal minority government should attend to, including women in the military, humanitarian disarmament, and arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The series can be found on the website of WPSN-C: wpsn-canada.org. New WPS resolution passed at the UN Security Council At this year's annual open debate on women, peace and security at the UN Security Council in October a new resolution, 2493, was unanimously adopted. This resolution, in part, calls on Member States to fully implement all the other resolutions and commit to the WPS agenda more broadly, facilitate women's full participation in peace talks and peacebuilding efforts, and promote women's civil, political, and economic rights.