

# Inquiry into Gender Equality as a National Security and Economic Security Imperative

## *Executive Summary*

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security is pleased to make this submission to the inquiry into Gender Equality as a National Security and Economic Security Imperative. This submission argues that gender equality is fundamental to Australia's national and economic security and makes a crucial contribution to conflict prevention and community cohesion domestically, regionally and globally. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda provides a proven framework for demonstrating how the integration of gender equality across the breadth of foreign policy supports this objective. The leadership of feminist and women's rights organisations, which are resourced and supported within Australia, the region and globally is essential to sustainable security outcomes. Australia has played a critical role in promoting gender equality and the WPS agenda over the last 25 years, although needs to elevate this leadership in a challenging geo-political environment where women's rights are under attack and progress on gender equality globally is stagnating. The current global context provides an urgency and key opportunity to commit to strengthening implementation of gender equality and WPS across the domestic – international continuum in partnership with civil society, and ensure coherence across foreign policy, defence, and national security objectives.

This submission has five key recommendations:

1. Strengthen implementation of Australia's Second WPS National Action Plan
2. Embed gender equality across national security and foreign policy and resource implementation of the International Gender Equality Strategy
3. Increase investment in locally led feminist leadership and peacebuilding
4. Formalise civil society engagement in security decision-making
5. Improve monitoring, evaluation and accountability of WPS Implementation and resourcing

## *Introduction*

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security ('the Coalition') is a non-partisan and independent coalition of civil society organisations, networks and individuals working to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in Australia, regionally and globally.

We bring together activists, feminists, practitioners, humanitarian actors and those with first-hand experience working on the frontlines of issues relating to WPS. Coalition members have wide ranging expertise in gender, peace and security.

The Coalition welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into gender equality as a national and economic security imperative. From a WPS perspective, gender equality is not a peripheral social objective; it is a core pillar of sustainable peace and conflict prevention and based on a broader understanding of human security and economic security. Societies that support women's leadership and uphold women's rights are better able to prevent conflict, respond effectively to crises, and sustain peace and economic stability.

This submission draws on the Coalition's research to demonstrate the national security and economic implications of gender inequality, the value of locally led leadership, and the importance of civil society engagement in informing evidence-based security strategies.

## *Gender Equality as a National and Economic Security Imperative*

Gender equality is the number one predictor of peace, more so than a state's wealth, level of democracy, or religious identity.<sup>1</sup> Gender inequality is also a strong predictor of civil war onset.<sup>2</sup>

Gender equality is fundamental to Australia's national security and economic resilience. Evidence demonstrates that women's leadership strengthens community cohesion and enhances conflict prevention capacity, producing measurable security and economic benefits. The Coalition has documented a number of locally led initiatives in Papua New Guinea, the Pacific, and Southeast Asia that deliver early-warning, humanitarian coordination, and peacebuilding outcomes, effectively mitigating broader security risks.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this, women remain underrepresented in decision-making globally, holding only around 27% of national parliament seats and 35% of local government positions globally, even less in the Pacific region.<sup>4</sup> These persistent gaps undermine social cohesion and limit the effectiveness of efforts to ensure national and global security. Integrating the WPS agenda across foreign policy, defence, national security, and economic policy, including through mechanisms such as structured civil society engagement and formal consultation with women's rights organisations, can strengthen Australia's strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific, promote regional stability, and enhance domestic security.

Excluding women from decision-making carries tangible risks for national security. Lessons from the United States show that gender equality frameworks can fail without consistent monitoring, evaluation, oversight, and resourcing. Such failures weaken early-warning systems, reduce conflict prevention capacity, and limit the ability to respond to crises at home and abroad.<sup>5</sup> Gender inequality in fragile states also has knock-on effects for Australia's regional security and strategic interests, underscoring the importance of sustained investment in locally led, feminist peacebuilding initiatives.

The Coalition has undertaken broad consultations to understand "*What Do(es) Peace and Security mean to diverse women in Australia.*"<sup>6</sup> Through this process, five key priorities were clearly identified: enabling all Australians to achieve peace, security, and their inalienable rights; repositioning Australia as a global and regional peacemaker rather than a strategic military partner; rebalancing priorities and restructuring departments and processes to enable Australia to become a world leader in global diplomacy, peacebuilding, and mediation; enhancing and amplifying the agency of diverse women, girls, and gender diverse people, and enabling those most impacted to lead; and positioning Australia at the forefront of global efforts to address climate change and insecurity.

In addition, on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (2025) of the WPS Agenda (and UN Security Council Resolution 1325) the Coalition convened an important Indo-Pacific discussion with over 60 civil society representatives from 18 countries to assess Twenty-five years on: Reigniting the WPS Agenda in Response to Growing Conflict and Climate Crisis.<sup>7</sup> From this discussion, key recommendations emerged for prioritisation in advancing the WPS Agenda forward, including the need to institutionalise and resource WPS commitments; advance an inclusive and intersectional WPS Agenda; elevate First Nations feminist peacebuilding; connect climate-gender-justice with WPS; build bridges between domestic and global agendas; strengthen regional and cross-movement collaboration among women's peace movements; re-centre feminist peace and de-militarisation; and invest in intergenerational and local leadership.

The message is consistent across the Australian domestic and regional Indo-Pacific consultations: gender equality and WPS are critical to peace, security and economic stability at the national level, and within the broader human security context.

## *Role of Locally Led Leadership and Decision-Making in Advancing Gender Equality and WPS*

Women's local leadership and civil society engagement are central to effective conflict prevention, resilience, and long-term stability. Gender equality is not a peripheral social objective but a core pillar of security. When women and grassroots organisations participate meaningfully in decision-making, communities are better able to manage social, economic, and political stressors that might otherwise escalate into insecurity. This reinforces the importance of embedding gender equality across national security and foreign policy and ensuring that gender inequality is recognised as a driver of instability and economic risk.

Civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations, function as crucial early-warning systems, identifying rising gender-based violence, shrinking civic space, and exclusion from decision-making well before these threats are visible to external parties. In the Indo-Pacific, locally led action is producing tangible outcomes. Initiatives such as the Shifting the Power Coalition are empowering women to lead early-warning systems that reach some of the most vulnerable populations, as well as driving inclusive humanitarian response, and community recovery across Samoa, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. The Pacific Women Mediators Network also facilitates mediation, dialogue, and conflict resolution in Bougainville, Solomon Islands, and other Pacific contexts.<sup>8</sup>

Climate change further reinforces the need for women's local leadership, particularly in contexts where environmental pressures intersect with economic and food insecurity. Evidence from climate and food systems research highlights that climate-induced loss of livelihoods and agricultural productivity disproportionately affects women, increasing food insecurity, economic instability, and risks of sexual and gender-based violence. Women often have less access to climate information and alternative livelihood opportunities, limiting their ability to respond to environmental stressors that can escalate social instability.<sup>9</sup>

In conflict affected and fragile contexts, like Myanmar, feminist civil society is also playing an important role in documenting human rights abuses, coordinating humanitarian support, and providing safe spaces for displaced people, sustaining community resilience even under repressive conditions.<sup>10</sup>

These initiatives strengthen leadership, build networks, enhance social cohesion and prevent conflict escalation. They also underscore the importance of increasing and sustained investment in locally led feminist leadership and peacebuilding.

According to the 2025 WPS Index, countries in the Indo-Pacific with lower women's participation in peace and governance face higher rates of conflict relapse and social instability, highlighting the security benefits of supporting locally led feminist initiatives.<sup>11</sup> Strengthening mechanisms for inclusion and formal consultation with women's organisations, frontline practitioners, and conflict-affected communities ensures that policies and programs are grounded in lived experience. This highlights the importance of formalising civil society engagement in security decision-making and recognising the value addition this brings in Australia's response to conflict and insecurity.

Despite clear evidence of their impact, women's organisations remain underfunded and under-represented in formal decision-making spaces. Investing in women is not only about equality but is also vital for political

stability and economic development.<sup>12</sup> Sustained investment and structured engagement not only advance gender equality but also enhance conflict prevention, social cohesion, and political and economic security.

## *Implementing Women, Peace and Security: Australia's Role and Responsibilities*

Investing in women's leadership and rights is therefore both a preventative and strategic measure, delivering returns for security, social cohesion, and economic stability. Strengthening the implementation of Australia's Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, embedding gender equality across security and foreign policy and resourcing this work, as well as improving evidence-based accountability mechanisms are critical to ensuring these outcomes.

Australia has made significant progress in integrating gender equality across foreign policy, defence, and development programs, including through its implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP) and adoption of the International Gender Equality Strategy. Coalition members have highlighted that supporting locally led WPS initiatives and establishing formal consultation mechanisms strengthens both the policy and practical impact. Continued investment in flexible, long-term funding and partnerships with civil society is essential to translate these commitments into tangible security and development outcomes

The WPS agenda provides a practical and internationally recognised framework to advance human security, conflict prevention, and gender equality simultaneously. Importantly, WPS should be understood as a core preventive framework, not only a post-conflict or crisis response tool. By embedding women's leadership and gender perspectives early, WPS strengthens resilience, mitigates emerging risks, and reduces the likelihood of conflict before it escalates. It also advances gender equality.

Global experience shows that WPS commitments only deliver security outcomes when backed by consistent implementation, resourcing, and accountability. Weak implementation increases instability in fragile contexts, directly affecting Australia's national and economic security through our Indo-Pacific interests.<sup>13</sup> Where accountability lapses, funding is restricted or civil society engagement is limited, conflict prevention is likely to fail.

Grounded in UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, the WPS agenda is fundamentally a human security framework. WPS shifts security thinking away from narrow, state-centric responses towards people-centred, preventative approaches that prioritise dignity, safety, and participation. Evidence consistently shows that threats to women's rights, including their exclusion from decision-making, gender-based violence, and economic marginalisation, are early indicators of broader instability and conflict escalation.

From this perspective, gender equality strengthens social cohesion, enhances early warning, and reduces the likelihood of conflict. For Australia, embedding WPS as a core human security framework across foreign policy, defence, and national security enables earlier, more effective responses to emerging crises and strengthens Australia's credibility as a country committed to stability and prevention.

## *Recommendations*

1. **Strengthen implementation of Australia's Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security**, ensuring coherence across foreign policy, defence, national security and economic policy.

2. **Embed gender equality across national security and foreign policy**, recognising gender inequality as a driver of instability and economic insecurity and appropriately resourcing Australia's new International Gender Equality Strategy.
3. **Increase investment in locally led feminist leadership and peacebuilding**, including sustained support for women-led organisations and coalitions contributing to social cohesion, resilience and conflict prevention.
4. **Formalise civil society engagement in security decision-making**, including structured consultation with women's organisations, frontline practitioners and conflict-affected communities.
5. **Improve monitoring, evaluation and accountability of WPS implementation**, using evidence-based indicators to inform policy, strengthen transparency and support continuous learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, *Does Gender Equality Lead to Peace? Fact Sheet: Building on the Global Study on Security Council Resolution 1325*, WILPF,

2015, <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet%20Gender%20Equality.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Krause, J., Krause, W. and Bränfors, P., *Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace*, *International Interactions*, vol. 44, no. 6, 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386>

<sup>3</sup> Australian Civil Society Coalition for Women, Peace and Security, *Climate, Women, Peace and Security*, ACSC WPS, 2025, [https://17b3688d-ea3c-4192-80cd-ae98dad749bf.filesusr.com/ugd/62fd28\\_5a6272858f4c44d4bb1599bfa8daaa9d.pdf](https://17b3688d-ea3c-4192-80cd-ae98dad749bf.filesusr.com/ugd/62fd28_5a6272858f4c44d4bb1599bfa8daaa9d.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025*, UN Women, 2025, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2025>.

<sup>5</sup> Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 Shadow Report, 2025, *Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace & Security*, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Q5TtPbDJnsFdPvOUNUd9wCkznpjmC4Vi/view>

<sup>6</sup> Australian Civil Society Coalition for Women, Peace and Security, *What Do Women, Peace and Security Mean to Diverse Women in Australia?*, ACSC WPS, 2023, [https://17b3688d-ea3c-4192-80cd-ae98dad749bf.filesusr.com/ugd/62fd28\\_19db1558543745219986af027fa88276.pdf](https://17b3688d-ea3c-4192-80cd-ae98dad749bf.filesusr.com/ugd/62fd28_19db1558543745219986af027fa88276.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Australian Civil Society Coalition for Women, Peace and Security, *WPS Regional Convening Summary Report*, ACSC WPS, 2025, [https://www.wpscoalition.org/files/ugd/fc0472\\_adde28317d2e4d22ada992c9feff035a.pdf](https://www.wpscoalition.org/files/ugd/fc0472_adde28317d2e4d22ada992c9feff035a.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Australian Civil Society Coalition for Women, Peace and Security, *Climate, Women, Peace and Security*, ACSC WPS, 2025, [https://17b3688d-ea3c-4192-80cd-ae98dad749bf.filesusr.com/ugd/62fd28\\_5a6272858f4c44d4bb1599bfa8daaa9d.pdf](https://17b3688d-ea3c-4192-80cd-ae98dad749bf.filesusr.com/ugd/62fd28_5a6272858f4c44d4bb1599bfa8daaa9d.pdf)

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<sup>9</sup> *The Gender Climate Security Nexus, Conceptual Framework, CGIAR Portfolio Review, & Recommendations towards an Agenda for One CGIAR* Giulia Caroli, Katie Tavenner, Sophia Huyer, Carolina Sarzana, Anna Belli, Marlène Elias, Grazia Pacillo and Peter Läderach, 2022, <https://hdl.handle.net/10568/117590>

<sup>10</sup> Australian Civil Society Coalition for Women, Peace and Security, *Discussion Summary: 25 Years of WPS – Resistance and Resilience among Myanmar Women*, ACSC WPS, 2025, [https://www.wpscoalition.org/\\_files/ugd/fc0472\\_6e87ed5ca4a24157b1af6b41297a0c35](https://www.wpscoalition.org/_files/ugd/fc0472_6e87ed5ca4a24157b1af6b41297a0c35)

<sup>11</sup> Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, *Women, Peace and Security Index 2025–26*, GIWPS, 2025, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/WPS-Index-2025-Report.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, *Why Women, Peace and Security Matters*, GIWPS, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/making-the-case-for-wps/>.

<sup>13</sup> Atlantic Council, *Twenty-Five Years On: Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda Is More Urgent Than Ever*, New Atlanticist, October 2025, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/advancing-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-is-more-urgent-than-ever/>