

Delegation from Canada
Position Paper for the General Assembly Third Committee

1. Protecting the Freedom of Religion or Belief

While firmly upholding its commitment to human rights, Canada fully supports freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental right, enshrined in the United Nations Charter and protected under domestic law. Additionally, as a multicultural and pluralistic country, Canada is acutely aware that violations of religious freedom occur worldwide, affecting nearly two-thirds of the global population and often going largely unpunished. However, Canada also recognizes the importance of protecting its own religious and non-religious communities, ensuring that individuals can freely practice their beliefs while maintaining public order and equality under the law. While these interests sometimes require careful balancing, Canada is committed to upholding both individual freedoms and societal cohesion, emphasizing that collaborative engagement with religious communities, adherence to international human rights norms and international cooperation, are essential to achieving this vital goal of protecting fundamental human rights for all individuals globally.

Canada fully recognizes the importance of international legal instruments that form the foundation of global protection of freedom of religion or belief, including General Assembly resolution A/RES/78/212, which reaffirms this freedom as a fundamental human right and calls upon States to actively combat discrimination, violence, and intolerance through education, dialogue, and the rule of law. Canada further highlights the Rabat Plan of Action as a valuable and practical framework for addressing advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence, while safeguarding freedom of expression and belief. Canada firmly believes that the protection of individuals and religious groups at risk must begin at the national level through robust legislation and comprehensive legal frameworks aligned with international human rights standards.

In this regard, Canada emphasizes that states bear the primary responsibility to ensure equal access to justice, prevent discrimination, and protect vulnerable populations from violence and persecution within a strong rule-of-law system. Domestically, Canada has drawn upon these principles through its Action Plan on Combatting Hate, which focuses on prevention, education, community engagement, and institutional cooperation to protect human rights and social cohesion. While acknowledging the existence of legal frameworks, Canada recognizes that legislation alone is insufficient to address deeply rooted intolerance and the rapid spread of online hate, and warns that failure to act risks further polarization, radicalization, and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions.

Canada emphasizes that freedom of religion or belief is universal, indivisible, and must be respected for all, while firmly rejecting any association between terrorism or extremism and religious identity. However, Canada clearly opposes hate speech, intolerance, discrimination, or violence against any religious group, and insists that any legal limitations on freedom of religion must be necessary, proportionate, and non-discriminatory. Canada recognizes that responsibility for promoting tolerance and protecting freedom of religion is shared among the government, law enforcement, civil society, religious communities, media, and international partners. In this regard, Canada commends collaborative efforts and encourages continued engagement to ensure that both individual freedoms and community cohesion are upheld worldwide. Domestically, Canada has implemented measures such as the Office of Religious Freedom, proposed for re-establishment in 2021, to address challenges including the forced conversion of minority girls in Pakistan, providing experience and frameworks that Canada can contribute to international efforts to protect freedom of religion.

Canada encourages the United Nations to support initiatives that promote education, awareness, and community engagement to prevent intolerance and protect freedom of religion or belief. Canada emphasizes the importance of cooperation with civil society, religious groups, and international partners to share best practices and strengthen protections worldwide. Financial and technical support for such initiatives can help ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. Canada further highlights the role of responsible governance, including online and institutional frameworks, to address hate and promote understanding. Through these efforts, Canada envisions a world in which all individuals and religious communities can live freely, peacefully, and with dignity, fully enjoying their fundamental rights, freedoms, and protections in every aspect of their daily lives.

2. Promoting the Rights of Women and Girls in the Aftermath of Conflict

Canada recognises that today's conflicts place women and girls at the centre of violence, displacement, and breakdown, with serious impacts on recovery and peace prospects. Canada, therefore, stresses that international post-conflict responses must account for the diverse and intersectional ways in which conflict affects women and girls. In 2024, UN Women reported that about 676 million women and girls lived near conflict zones, representing nearly 17% of the global female population. Moreover, in that year, there were 123.2 million people forcibly displaced globally, among them over 60 million women and girls. The UN also verified more than 4,600 instances of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), marking an 87% increase since 2022. These figures show conflict continues to expose women and girls to systematic harm. Meanwhile, women remain largely excluded from decision-making, making up only 5% of negotiators, 9% of mediators, and 19% of signatories to peace agreements. Canada sees these trends as incompatible with lasting peace and believes existing international efforts are insufficient to protect women and girls transitioning from conflict to recovery.

Canada therefore supports a post-conflict approach firmly anchored in existing international frameworks, notably the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 2030 Agenda, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. While the international community has developed an extensive normative framework, Canada considers the core challenge to lie not only in a lack of commitments but in uneven implementation, weak accountability and insufficient gender integration in post-conflict governance. SDG Index assessments highlight ongoing concerns: progress on SDG 5 remains slow and uneven, while SDG 16 is experiencing widespread setbacks, especially in institutional capacity and access to justice. Canada emphasises that peacebuilding and reconstruction are fundamentally political processes, during which institutions can weaken, gender equality might stagnate or decline, and the risk of renewed instability grows. In this context, Canada supports international efforts to further develop the WPS agenda through more inclusive and intersectional approaches in post-conflict governance.

Canada further emphasises that women's participation must extend to international peace operations. Despite longstanding WPS commitments, women account for only around 10% of uniformed UN peacekeeping personnel and under 9% in military contingents. In this context, Canada notes that this gap, which persists despite repeated UN commitments on gender parity, reflects structural barriers rather than a lack of qualified candidates. Operational experience demonstrates that women peacekeepers enhance mission effectiveness, community engagement and reporting of CRSV. Canada considers the limited involvement of women in peacekeeping a barrier to international stabilisation efforts and emphasises the need to continually advocate for translating parity commitments into actual deployment outcomes.

Canada is also concerned that pressures on official development assistance (ODA) and humanitarian funding may reverse fragile gains for women and girls in post-conflict areas. This is worsened by a gap between aid and gender-responsive delivery, especially in humanitarian programs. In 2024, 1,647 attacks on healthcare facilities were recorded, leaving many women without reproductive health services, and 10.9 million pregnant and breastfeeding women faced severe malnutrition, mostly in conflict zones. Furthermore, Canada emphasises the need for predictable funding to integrate gender into recovery plans, to meet targets for women's participation in governance, and to support funding mechanisms that provide direct, sustained support to women-led, locally rooted organisations in post-conflict contexts.

Canada urges the Third Committee and Member States to enhance the implementation of the WPS agenda in post-conflict settings by promoting meaningful women's participation in peace processes, transitional governance, and recovery efforts. This includes backing evidence-based actions, such as legislated or voluntary quotas, to boost women's political roles, and ensuring that gender-responsive peacebuilding and recovery are integrated into policies, budgets, and accountability tools. Canada also advocates for a stronger role for existing UN bodies to improve coordination, oversight, and follow-up on gender commitments after conflicts. Additionally, Canada emphasises that access to justice, protection against gender-based violence, and the restoration of critical health services should be viewed as essential elements of recovery and lasting peace, not just social issues.

Disclosure

During the preparation of this work, our delegates used Grammarly to assist with grammar, spelling, and stylistic consistency. After using this tool, our delegates reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of their position papers. This statement applies to all applications of AI, including basic tools for checking grammar, spelling, and clarity (e.g., Grammarly).