

Ambassador Kelly's Closing remarks: Webinar on Feminist Assessment on the ASEAN Response of the COVID-19 Pandemic

21 April 2020 at 2-4 PM (Jakarta time)

-Please Check Against Delivery-

Thank you Forum Asia for inviting Canada to join this discussion today. We recognise and appreciate how well you are already adapting to how we can come together and effectively collaborate in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 situation. It is so important that we embrace technology and new ideas to enable us to continue to engage and advance issues of importance, such as a feminist approach within the pandemic response, and more broadly how we maintain a focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls throughout crisis response.

Please let me extend my gratitude to all of the panelists for their thoughtful insights and contributions, to everyone online for their active participation, and to for their shared commitment to uphold and advance women's and children's rights.

Today's discussion was necessary, and timely as we find ourselves navigating an extraordinary pandemic situation, with world leaders taking unprecedented measures to slow the spread of COVID-19.

In times of crisis there is the desire to act quickly, to save lives and alleviate suffering. We must remember to maintain the human dignity of populations throughout our actions. There are two key ideas, we feel, that can help keep human dignity central to a response *[which many of you have spoken to today]*:

One - that populations are not homogeneous, but made up of individuals with different needs, priorities and capacities, and

Two – that human rights must always be protected, and not jeopardized under the guise of saving lives.

Looking at this first idea, when we don't sufficiently consider how different segments of the population are affected, and what their individual needs and priorities are, the effectiveness and impact of a response diminishes and often triggers unwanted consequences.

It can even be detrimental to the very people we are trying to help by exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities – which often are experienced by women and girls.

CARE International and the International Rescue Committee released their Global Rapid Gender Analysis for COVID-19 at the beginning of April and identified a number of specific risks, including:

- The care-giving burden: Women perform the vast majority of unpaid care work—more than three times as much as men. This labour will often involve taking care of sick family members, and in the case of school closures, looking after children.
- Female health workers face a double caregiving burden: one at work, and one at home. In the workplace, women are, on average, paid

less than their male counterparts. They also risk stigmatisation due to caring for COVID-19 patients.

These warnings have been echoed by UN Women's Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, who indicated that even before the COVID-19 crisis, women and girls across ASEAN carried a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work. For example, in Malaysia, they spent more than three times as much time in this work than men and boys; in Cambodia, 10 times as much. With schools now closed across the region and healthcare systems stretched by the pandemic, women are now bearing an even greater responsibility at home, caring for children, ill family members and the elderly.

Another key risk is that all forms of gender-based violence will increase during the COVID-19 pandemic. While many countries – including Canada – are telling its populations to stay inside, there is a recognition that domestic violence may rise as people are isolated, alongside their abusers. The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres recently warned of a “horrifying global surge in domestic violence” linked to lockdowns imposed by governments. He has called on governments to put women's safety first in the pandemic response.

Canada believes it is possible to support women's safety as well as public safety, and has allocated funds domestically to support women's shelters, sexual assault centres, and emergency shelters to support Indigenous women and children fleeing violence.

We are applying the same feminist lens to our international assistance. On April 5, 2020, Canada's Minister of International Development announced \$159.5 million in funding to support international efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Canada's actions are supporting partners on the front lines who are working to prevent, detect and respond to COVID-19. Our support answers the calls for global and bilateral requests for urgent assistance, including for vaccine development, and global health-security capacity building. It is also helping international partners maintain their services for vulnerable populations, including addressing gender-based violence and supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights. These latter elements respond to the reality that where health service are overwhelmed, combined with reduced mobility (due to lockdown situations), women's and girls' access to health services will be significantly hampered.

Alongside the need to ensure a response to this pandemic – or to any emergency – is needs-based and gender-responsive, is the need to ensure that human rights are respected.

The risks of discrimination, of excessive use of force and violations of fundamental rights and freedoms are all heightened during implementation of lockdowns and mandatory isolation.

And, as one of the first major pandemics of the digital age, we are seeing both positive and negative effects of digital technology on human rights and inclusion.

While surveillance technology is helping track (and therefore contain) the virus' spread, it may also infringe on human rights, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of movement.

Fears of the impact of online COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation has led some governments to unduly limit media freedom and freedom of opinion and expression.

Digital tools have amplified xenophobic and hateful discourse against vulnerable groups, and the pandemic has magnified digital divides and inequalities both within and across societies.

While the need to protect public health is vital, it is imperative to ensure that these measures are not used to undermine the fundamental civil liberties and human rights of all people.

As our Minister of Foreign Affairs, François-Philippe Champagne, and our Minister of International Development, Karina Gould stated last week - promoting and protecting these essential liberties and rights is, and will remain, a priority for the Government of Canada.

Throughout the crisis, the Government of Canada will work to ensure that vulnerable and marginalized communities, including refugees, internally displaced people and migrants, indigenous, LGBTQ2I, and religious and ethnic minority communities, are not victimized under the cover of public health.

In addition, it is important we all remember that those vulnerable and marginalized populations – while disproportionately affected by crises –

have the ability to contribute to the immediate humanitarian response, and to the rebuilding of lives and communities. There is an opportunity to shift social norms and power imbalances, to integrate diversity into decision-making processes and recognise the value that women, that refugees, that displaced, indigenous, LGBTQ2I, religious and ethnic minorities have as being agents of change who can contribute to a better future for all.

Canada believes that changes create greater impacts when we work together. Through Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), Canada looks forward to support projects that will help local efforts to prepare for, respond to, and recover from the COVID-19 crisis. My team and I will be happy to explain more about how your organisations can apply for this year's CFLI, but in the meantime, you can look out for updates on our social media channels (Facebook: Mission of Canada to ASEAN – Twitter/Instagram: @canadaasean)

As many have said before, COVID-19 knows no borders and is a menace to all, irrespective of nationality, race or gender. We are all in this together – to learn together, to act together, to save lives together. I hope that these conversations will continue to help ensure we respond with compassion, inclusivity and respect for the fundamental rights of everyone.

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