

Written submission for the pre-budget consultations in advance of the upcoming Federal Budget



By: Sandra Wiens, Government Relations Representative

QuakerService.ca

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Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

- 1.a) Urgently reinvest in diplomatic capacity and strengthen Canadian institutions to achieve foreign policy coherence.
- 1.b) Reframe and redefine national security to include social, human, and environmental security, keeping in mind that NATO explicitly permits peacekeeping and humanitarian expenditures as part of defence commitments.
- 1.c) Redirect Canadian Armed Forces spending to expand disaster relief capacity—focusing on prevention, wildfire management, flooding, and critical infrastructure repair.
- 1.d) Invest \$25 million in Indigenous-led fire mitigation strategies—proven, cost-effective methods that prevent and manage wildfires nationwide.
- 1.e) Establish a non-partisan training program for MPs in compassionate communication and conflict resolution, drawing on proven UK and US models and delivered by Canadian organizations.

Recommendation 2

- 2.a) Increase funding (over 2024 levels) for advancing rights-based discussions with rights-holders to ensure Indigenous Peoples can fully participate in negotiation processes, especially in light of nation-building legislation. Meeting “consultation and cooperation” requires greater investments and would allow for enhanced participation, aligning with the minimum standard of free, prior, and informed consent, as affirmed in the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (the *UN Declaration*).
- 2.b) Establish an independent and permanent Indigenous Peoples’ human rights monitoring mechanism that is properly funded and Indigenous-led in fulfillment of shared priorities action item 19 of the *UN Declaration Act National Action Plan*.
- 2.c) Ensure sustained funding for Indigenous Services Canada as an essential service provider for Indigenous Peoples.
- 2.d) Plan and develop a strategy, in consultation with provincial and territorial counterparts and with cooperation from Indigenous Peoples, for the adoption and full implementation of the *UN Declaration* across all the jurisdictions in Canada.

Recommendation 3

- 3.a) Fund a federal-provincial demonstration project in Prince Edward Island that will test a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI) outcome in Canada at the provincial level. Adopt legislation that is currently before the Senate on a GLBI (Bill S-206).
- 3.b) Recommit sustainable and long-term funding to the Department of Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE). There are unique factors that cause women and gender diverse people to live in poverty. It remains important to identify and report on these inequalities and WAGE is the correct department to do so.

3.d) Reallocate or match a minimum of 5% of justice spending to social supports such as youth programs, family services, community justice programs, and mental health. According to research by Irvin Waller, this would reduce violent crime by up to 50%.

3.e) Sufficiently allocate funding and the supporting structures needed for the effective implementation of the Federal Framework to Reduce Recidivism (FFRR), which can reduce repeat offenses and incarceration costs, freeing resources for more productive social investments.

3.f) Invest in Indigenous-led justice approaches and restorative justice, which have shown high satisfaction rates and effective outcomes such as reduced recidivism.

Introduction

Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) is the peace and social justice agency of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). For centuries, Quakers have been exploring the tough question of how to respond effectively to violence, in all its forms: interpersonal, nation-to-nation, systemic, and institutional. In trying to address the underlying causes of violence—particularly in Canada—CFSC focuses its work on peace, Indigenous Peoples’ human rights, and transformative justice.

Now is a critical moment for Canada to reaffirm its identity as a leader in peace and justice. Through smart, evidence-based policies and close collaboration between government and civil society, Canada can promote both domestic wellbeing and global peace. These priorities are not in conflict with fiscal responsibility—they are pathways to smarter, more cost-effective governance. Our expectation of the Fall Budget is a respect for public dollars that seizes on the opportunity to find solutions for all people in Canada, rather than maintaining the status quo.

Peace

Canada was once recognized for global leadership in peacekeeping, diplomacy, and commitment to international law and human rights. In recent years, however, this role has diminished: the closure of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, reduced foreign service capacity, and weakened engagement in UN fora illustrate this decline. Canada has lacked a renewed, strategic foreign policy, with its last review conducted 20 years ago.

Diplomacy, development, and the military are all instruments of foreign policy. With military spending rising exponentially, the others must also grow proportionally so Canada can develop coherent strategies, collaborate with partners, and address conflicts as they arise¹. Currently, Canada ranks poorly among G20 and G7 nations in the number and scale of its diplomatic missions,² with its foreign service lagging in both regional and thematic expertise. A foreign policy review, paired with strengthened policy capacity at Global Affairs Canada (GAC), could bring coherence and help prioritize key areas such as climate change, human rights, AI, nuclear disarmament, and Arctic diplomacy—where Canada could lead in strengthening institutions like the Arctic Council.

Security is more than weapons, military responses, and perceived threats. It is about people, peace, safety, and human rights in Canada and globally. Given the changing geopolitical landscape and domestic challenges from the climate crisis, Canada must redefine security and defence. The government has indicated massive increases to military spending—including reaching NATO’s 2% GDP target this fiscal year. Plans to raise military spending to 5% of GDP over the next decade would require an additional \$280 billion in revenue—or cuts of \$253 billion elsewhere—leading inevitably to austerity, not prosperity.

¹ Manuluk, M., Axworthy, L., and Rock, A. (2025, Jun 27). *Canada’s foreign policy must catch up to its military spending*. The Globe and Mail. Accessed: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-canada-defence-spending-foreign-policy-mark-carney-nato/>

² Lowy Institute, *Global diplomacy index*. Accessed: <https://globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org/>

While improving the effectiveness of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is broadly supported by the public and across party lines, there are ways such spending can be smart, effective and fiscally responsible. The budget should consider funding aimed at conflict prevention. A UN study showed that investing in prevention costs only a fraction of what is spent on responding to crises or rebuilding in their aftermath—yet it delivers far greater long-term value³. NATO’s definition of eligible spending explicitly includes peacekeeping, humanitarian operations, and weapons destruction—providing scope for Canada to prioritize peace-focused investments within its commitments. As the Rideau Institute states, “human rights protection, truce reinforcement, and peace-building capacity through United Nations peace operations can help people in war-torn regions.”⁴ These strategies can have measurably greater impact for common global security.

The government has also expressed the need to reduce reliance on U.S. military infrastructure and build alternatives with Canada’s allies. To that end, the purchase of F-35 fighter jets should be cancelled. Similarly, joining the Golden Dome missile defence architecture should not be pursued, as it risks binding Canada more closely to US strategies and undermining efforts to redefine security in a distinctly Canadian way.

We acknowledge that there is broad public support for increased military funding to improve pay, benefits, and equipment for CAF members. Substantial new funding also presents an opportunity to expand training for disaster management through a civilian or volunteer force. Hurricanes, floods, and wildfires are good examples: presently, CAF disaster-response deployments have nearly doubled every five years since 2010, with four requests already in 2025. This does not include the 118 requests for assistance received by the CAF in response to the pandemic.⁵

Another innovative approach is funding Indigenous-led wildfire solutions. Indigenous Fire Guardians are a proven, cost-effective model that benefits communities disproportionately affected by wildfires while protecting wider Canadian society and even U.S. states. These experts work year-round on land stewardship, cultural burning, fire prevention, emergency response, and recovery. Their practices restore biodiversity and reduce the risk of high-intensity fires. At roughly \$350,000 per program, 70 community-based initiatives would cost \$25 million.⁶

³ The World Bank and United Nation. (2017). *Pathways to Peace: Inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict*. Accessed: <https://www.undp.org/publications/pathways-peace-inclusive-approaches-preventing-violent-conflict>

⁴ Collins, R. (2025, July 3) *Canada needs to reject demands for further increases in military spending*. The Rideau Institute. Accessed: <https://rideauinstitute.ca/2025/07/03/canada-and-the-world-need-prudent-not-excessive-military-spending/>

⁵ Department of National Defense. *Operation LENTUS*. Government of Canada. Accessed: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-lentus.html>

⁶ Christianson, A., Sewepagaham, C., and Brown, F. (2025, Aug 13). *When will Canada embrace Indigenous-led wildfire solutions that we know work?* The Hill Times. Accessed: <https://www.hilltimes.com/story/2025/08/13/when-will-canada-embrace-indigenous-led-wildfire-solutions-that-we-know-work/470082/>

Increasing disaster management training and investing in Indigenous wildfire solutions would also demonstrate to U.S. border states that Canada is acting on wildfire management, addressing concerns about smoke impacts,⁷ while reassuring Canadians their health and safety are a priority. Security must now include climate-driven emergencies, which are increasing year after year, and pose a direct threat to our population, infrastructure, and economy.

Amid rising polarization in politics and media, MPs need stronger cross-party communication and conflict resolution skills. Canadians expect collaboration as well as constructive disagreements and this requires our MPs to possess stronger compassionate conflict skills. Pilot programs such as the Mindfulness Initiative⁸ in the United Kingdom and the US Field Fellowship (led by Jacinda Ardern) show that such training improves political engagement. Similar initiatives in Canada could help restore our reputation for diplomacy and peacebuilding, beginning with how MPs engage with each other and the public.

Global military spending has reached an all time high of \$2.7 trillion annually. With NATO members committing 5% of GDP and multiple violent conflicts ongoing (Ukraine, Sudan, Gaza, Congo, etc.),⁹ this trend shows no sign of slowing. Yet despite record spending, greater peace and security have not followed.

Canada now has an opportunity to pursue a smarter, more sustainable approach to defence and security. We can:

- **Increase sustainable development assistance.**
- **Reinvest in diplomacy and multilateral engagement.**
- **Expand CAF disaster management capacity.**
- **Invest in Indigenous-led wildfire mitigation.**

These steps will strengthen Canada's global reputation, improve domestic safety, and deliver a more balanced, fiscally responsible approach to security.

Sound policymaking requires robust parliamentary scrutiny. Fast-tracking legislation risks costly legal and financial consequences, including charter challenges. To ensure effective, accountable governance we urge you to uphold legislative due process with expert input from civil society and public service professionals.

Indigenous Peoples' human rights

We welcome the government's commitment, as stated in the Cabinet mandate letter, to work in true partnership with Indigenous Peoples and the promise that the Government will always

⁷ Milman, O. (2025, July 15) *Republicans complain to Canada over wildfire smoke despite supporting planet-heating bill*. The Guardian. Accessed: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jul/15/republicans-canada-wildfire-complaint-letter>

⁸ See <https://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org>

⁹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (2024, April 22) *Global military spending surges amid war, rising tensions, and insecurity*. Accessed: <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2024/global-military-spending-surges-amid-war-rising-tensions-and-insecurity>

be firmly guided by the minimum standard of free, prior, and informed consent when considering nation-building projects.

With some concern we noted the passage of *Bill C-5* in June. We are especially concerned for how this legislation will impact Indigenous Peoples' ability to exercise the right to free, prior, and informed consent. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* helps address these concerns. It is meant to uphold the minimum standards set out in the *UN Declaration* and lays out the clear legislative requirements for the full and effective implementation of these rights in Canada.

The Senate study of implementation of the *Declaration Act* revealed a profound gap in understanding of the standards required for consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples. This became apparent in the controversy that *Bill C-5* engendered. Importantly, the combined term of "consultation and cooperation" requires a significantly higher degree of participation than merely having Indigenous Peoples at the table. Any decision-making process must build capacity for, and accommodate the effective and meaningful participation of, Indigenous Peoples, consistent with their inherent right to self-determination, as articulated in the *UN Declaration*. This would include, "mutually agreed timelines, effective information sharing, and transparency about how the views of Indigenous Peoples will be incorporated into the final decision, including a mutually agreed upon understanding of how free, prior, and informed consent will be operationalized."¹⁰

To advance rights-based discussions and nation-building enterprises, more than the \$96.4 million over two years pledge from the 2024 Budget is required. There is a tremendous need for adequate funding to ensure true consultation and cooperation practices are possible. This spend also helps prevent the need for Government spending on *Charter* challenges and litigation.

Necessary structures to support implementation of the *Declaration Act* are urgently needed, namely, measures related to monitoring, oversight, and recourse, remedy, or other accountability measures for effective implementation. Such structures are indispensable to ensure accountability.

In being fiscally prudent, the Government has chosen to implement across-the-board cuts of 15% over three years. It has rightly chosen not to apply these cuts to provincial transfer payments which facilitate essential public service delivery to all Canadians. However, applying these cuts to Indigenous Services Canada signal a double standard and a move away from reconciliation.¹¹ We recommend that the Government reconsider cuts and funding decisions that would amount to cuts to Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations.

Lastly, an important component for implementation and reconciliation is the legislative adoption of the *UN Declaration* in every province and territory across Canada. As this is

¹⁰ Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples. (2024, May 8). *Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Indigenous Peoples: Study to examine the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, 2021 by Canada and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples*.

¹¹ Levesque, Anne. (2025, July 22). *Carney government cuts unfairly hit First Nations*. Policy Options. Accessed: <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/july-2025/budget-cuts-first-nations/>

federal legislation, it is incumbent on the government to plan and develop a strategy, in consultation with provincial and territorial counterparts and with Indigenous Peoples, for the adoption of the *UN Declaration* in all jurisdictions in Canada.

Transformative justice

Quakers have a long-standing commitment to transformative justice. CFSC advocates for approaches that reduce harm and improve outcomes, especially for those affected by the legal system. Poverty is the strongest predictor of incarceration, and re-entry into society is often obstructed by systemic barriers such as lack of income and housing. The current carceral system and “tough on crime” policies have proven costly and ineffective. We need to invest in prevention.

We encourage the government to renew and expand its support of the Federal-Provincial Working Group—established between the previous government and the PEI department of Social Development and Seniors. This support should facilitate data-sharing, technical collaboration, and governance to implement a cost-shared Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) demonstration project in PEI. Additionally, the federal budget should allocate federal funds to launch and evaluate the proposed five to seven year GBI demonstration project in PEI, co-designed with the provincial government and based on the 2023, *A proposal for a Guaranteed Basic Income benefit in PEI*¹² report. This project would allow for the tangible demonstration of how a GLBI would work in Canada, especially, what the results and opportunity-costs would be of such a program in addressing poverty.

A GLBI would be a transformational approach to preventing incarceration in the first place and would also constitute a solution for those exiting the carceral system since income and housing are often barriers to successful reintegration. Data shows that 85.5% of those who were homeless before being incarcerated anticipate being homeless again upon discharge.¹³

In Canada, 10% of women live on low incomes, 23% of women with disabilities live in low incomes, and 8.2% of women (versus 7.1% of men) live in unaffordable and/or poor housing.¹⁴ The risks of victimisation increase when one is poor. Those in poverty, and people who are otherwise marginalised, are often forced into homelessness, or forced to remain in abusive relationships. For two in five women in Canada, leaving an abusive partner would mean becoming homeless; this means that women and gender-diverse people tend to remain in precarious situations.¹⁵

When staying in situations of abuse, there is a greater risk of further victimisation and criminalisation when victims respond with force in self-defence or in defence of their children. According to Senator Kim Pate, “Of the women in federal prisons, 9 out of 10 have

¹² PEI basic income report. Accessed: <https://www.gbireport.ca/>

¹³ Government of Canada. (2021, November 5). *Ex-prisoner Helps Forge New Path for Others at Risk of Homelessness*. National Housing Strategy. Accessed: <https://www.placetocallhome.ca/stories/083-from-prison-to-homelessness-ending-a-perilous-trajectory>

¹⁴ Canadian Women’s Foundation. (2022, April 6). *The facts about women and poverty in Canada*. Accessed: <https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/womens-poverty/>

¹⁵ HomelessHub. *Women, girls, and gender-diverse peoples*. Accessed: <https://homelesshub.ca/collection/population-groups/women-girls-and-gender-diverse-peoples/>

histories of physical or sexual abuse, nearly always in a context where they lacked the financial resources to escape and had no safe place to go.”¹⁶ Further, Dr Evelyn Forget states that, “80% of the women who are in prison are there for poverty-related crimes.”¹⁷ 50% of federally incarcerated women are Indigenous, and this statistic is rapidly rising. Senator Pate goes on to say, “confronted with these realities, we cannot ignore the backdrop of poverty, inequality and violence against women, systemic violence and colonial violence.”¹⁸

The Department of Women and Gender Equity (WAGE) directly support women’s rights, gender equity, the *National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence* in Canada, and the programs and research that combat these alarming trends. It is of great concern that planned departmental spending for WAGE is predicted to drop by 80% in three years (from \$407 million this fiscal year to \$ 76 million in 2027-28¹⁹). The government has been clear, its primary aim is nation-building—defending our communities, growing our economy, and strengthening Canadian unity. It is therefore counterproductive to ignore 50% of the population by cutting the backbone for women’s rights and gender justice.²⁰ Importantly, an area of convergence for these issues can be found in *Call for justice 4.5* of the National Inquiry for MMIWG, which concretely asks for a, “guaranteed annual liveable income for all Canadians, including Indigenous Peoples, to meet all their social and economic needs.”

In the recent mandate letter, the Prime Minister was clear that there would now be a strong focus on “results over spending.” For civil society, this is exciting news, and for the justice sector in particular, a welcome focus. There has long been debate over the effectiveness of prisons, and now there is an opportunity to bring this discussion into the open—specifically, the claim that the carceral system aims to enhance public safety and rehabilitate or deter individuals from engaging in crime. Incarceration has not created safer communities or rehabilitated/deterred people from crime. Prisons are getting fuller, and, due to violent crime statistics, Canada has fallen to 14th place (from 11th) on the Global Peace Index 2025.²¹ And this is despite annual expenditures of \$23 billion and yearly increases to police forces, the RCMP, the courts, and Correctional Services Canada (CSC).

The carceral system is exceptionally expensive. The John Howard Society of Canada found that one day in custody awaiting trial costs \$326. With cases taking an average of 105 days to complete, the average cost of detaining each of the accused is more than \$34,000 (the

¹⁶ Pate, Kim. (2025, June 4). *Intervention in the Senate on the National Framework for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income Bill*. Senate of Canada. Accessed: <https://sencanada.ca/en/senators/pate-kim/interventions/665291/30#hID>

¹⁷ Forget, Dr Evelyn. (2021, June). *Basic income fosters healthy communities*. TED Talk. Accessed: https://www.ted.com/talks/evelyn_forget_basic_income_fosters_healthy_communities/transcript

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Government of Canada. (2025, June 17). *Women and Gender Equality Canada's 2025-26 departmental plan*. Retrieved: <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/transparency/departmental-plans/2025-2026.html>

²⁰ Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. (2025, July 28). *Statement on WAGE’s budget*. Accessed: <https://www.criaw-icref.ca/statements/statement-on-wages-budget/>

²¹ Institute for Economics and Peace. (2025, July). *Global peace index 2025*. Accessed: <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/global-peace-index/>

average yearly cost for a federally incarcerated individual is \$ 150,505²² (approximately \$200,000 for women, and more for those in maximum security or structured intervention units). Further studies showed that 29% of those detained prior to trial, “had *a*ll their charges stayed, withdrawn or dismissed.”²³ That is an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars.

Irvin Waller, criminology professor at the University of Ottawa asserts that the best way to end violent crime is through prevention and investing in people. Waller’s research suggests that a 5% reduction in spending on the criminal justice system would, if re-invested in targeted social programs, such as outreach to at-risk groups, family services, youth recreation programs, and community justice programs could reduce violence by as much as 50%.²⁴ This would constitute efficient government spending that gets results.

The Federal Framework to Reduce Recidivism (FFRR) could present a complementary approach to public safety by reducing the number of people returning to federal prisons, thereby creating safer communities. The Framework, which was launched in 2021, and had its implementation plan released in November 2023, remains without funds to support the structures and organisations needed to make the strategy effective in its principal objective—the reduction of recidivism. The FFRR, through its five pillars, is a logical mechanism for violence prevention through investing in people.

Lastly, there need to be greater investments in expanding Indigenous-led justice and restorative justice pathways as an alternative to the legal system. Alternatives to prisons efficiently address the root causes of crime and the conditions that lead people to criminalised behaviour. These pathways have proven positive to both the individual who committed the harm, and the person harmed by their actions. It is shown to reduce recidivism and, in Atlantic Canada, restorative justice programs for youth proved to reduce recidivism and youth incarceration, and increased positive community outcomes.²⁵

Efficiency, results, and safety is what people are looking for. It is time for smart policies that deliver on that promise. The benefits can only flow in a positive direction from such measures being adopted.

²² Statista (2024, September). *Average daily inmate expenditures for adult federal, provincial and territorial correctional services in Canada in fiscal years 2001 to 2022*. Accessed:

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/563028/average-annual-inmate-federal-correctional-services-canada/>

²³ Doob, Anthony N., and Sprott, Jane B. (2025, June 16). *Using money wisely to reduce crime*. John Howard Society of Canada. Accessed: <https://johnhoward.ca/blog/better-options-exist-to-expensive-and-ineffective-tough-on-crime-policies/>

²⁴ Waller, Irvin. (2019). *Science and secrets of ending violent crime*. The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc. Maryland, USA.

²⁵ Canadian Friends Service Committee. (2029). *Alternative to prisons factsheet*. Accessed: <https://QuakerService.ca/AlternativesToPrison>