QUAKERS
Canadian Friends Service Committee

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Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), the peace and justice agency of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) welcomes the opportunity provided by Global Affairs Canada to offer input to its foreign policy review and expresses gratitude to the Ontario Council for International Cooperation for facilitating this process for its membership.

According to media reports, government messaging and the on-going Comprehensive Expenditure Review (CER), the Government of Canada is currently operating under a resource constrained environment. These constraints are especially evident in the wording of this consultation. However, CFSC would like to point out that this reality comes at a time when Canada is making record-setting expenditures on the military while many areas of the public sector continue to face significant cuts. The cuts to critical diplomatic and development infrastructure, international and humanitarian aid, and peace and security architecture are deeply concerning, making this consultation timely.

Prime Minister Carney's speech in Davos condensed several foreign policy points that resonated with many Canadians and the international community alike; the emphasis on building a strategic economy, reducing reliance on the US, and uniting middle powers was well received and we believe well intentioned. Several months on, though, the disconnect between these messages and actual budget decisions reveals a troubling reorientation—from a foreign policy focus on peace, development, and cooperation to transactional trade and military power.

Diplomacy, development, and military spending are connected foreign policy instruments and should therefore grow proportionally[1]. In this foreign policy review, we hope that this balance is fully understood and restored. In fact, the increasing emphasis on transactional relations reflects changing geopolitical realities and fiscal pressures. The US presents a clear example of what transactional policies lead to. With their unilateral focus on tariffs and trade deficits/surpluses, the US has removed the balance that diplomacy, development assistance, and relationship building brought to their foreign policy—a trusted ally takes time to build but is quick to destroy. The US is now viewed more as a threat than a friend by many Canadians and others in the international community.

It is clear that Canada should refrain from making economic benefits the primary criterion for international development cooperation as it would likely undermine both Canada's long-term foreign policy influence and many of its domestic interests, especially as a middle power. A balanced approach, where economic objectives are integrated with sustainable development, human rights principles, and strategic diplomacy, is better suited to advancing Canada's interests over the coming decade. Such an approach recognizes that development cooperation is not merely a cost or an act of charity, but an investment in a more stable, prosperous, and secure international environment that ultimately benefits Canada itself.

In order to maximise international development cooperation as a core facet of foreign policy, Canada should:

- **Build capacity**: Ensuring capacity building and training for its foreign service personnel, ensuring capacity building for Indigenous Peoples in partner countries, and fostering and resourcing peace and peacebuilding expertise both within Canada and abroad

[1] For further details on CFSC's position on the increase in military spending, please refer to our prebudget submission from May 2026: https://quakerservice.ca/news/our-priorities-for-canadas-budget/

- **Align with domestic priorities**: Explicitly connecting development cooperation to Canada's economic interests through an integrated strategy that combines: poverty reduction and inclusive growth, economic diversification, climate resilience and environmental sustainability, democratic governance and human rights, gender equality and education, Indigenous Peoples' rights and self-determination, and peacebuilding and conflict prevention
- **Prioritize partnership quality**: Building deeper, longterm relationships rather than transaction-by-transaction engagements i.e. reestablish the 'honest broker' role that Canada formerly occupied
- **Leverage for systemic change**: Using development cooperation to maintain and foster international norms, standards, and institutions in ways that benefit Canada's interests and values simultaneously. Canada and Canadians played pivotal roles in the drafting of the Declaration of Human Rights, global peacekeeping and training infrastructure, establishment of the International Criminal Court, experience with a feminist foreign policy framework i.e. Women, Peace, and Security agenda, and development and adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In upholding international development cooperation, a specific area for Canada to prioritise is peace and peacebuilding. The impact of violence is most often acutely felt at the local level and where efforts should be smartly targeted. When innovative solutions to conflict are being utilized, shared, and scaled-up—communities create resiliency that ultimately become more effective, stable, and less costly than war. Canada should invest in nonviolent peacebuilding efforts that emerge from within communities and grassroots organizing in conflict-affected areas. These would include:

- Women-led initiatives for conflict prevention and resolution
- Civilian-led/community-based conflict intervention strategies, e.g. 'unarmed civilian protection'
- Indigenous-led solutions and alternative intervention strategies identified through full consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples

Alternative actions[2] to war exist and thrive at varying levels, examples are relentless peace diplomacy (at the local, national, and international levels), smart sanctions on the flow of weapons, civil resistance and/or disobedience, etc. At present, very little investment goes into alternatives to war, and directly or indirectly, we all feel the consequences of war—the rise in fuel prices impacting much of the world due to the war in Iran is a current example. Like Canada, global military spending is ballooning, having reached $334[3] per person alive today, with the World Bank (WB)[4] estimating the economic cost of violent conflicts to be much greater at $1,988 a year for each of us. This same WB report found that putting more effort and money into war prevention would actually save hundreds of millions of dollars just for countries *not directly* involved in wars. With this statistic in mind, the creation of a well- respected government body/institution with a focus on strategic and coordinated actions to *prevent war* as a compliment to the highly coordinated and well-trained military would make economic sense.

In the previous parliament, the Office of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) was established and presented a starting point for engagement between Canada and the private sector on effective and responsible actions abroad, including accountability for serious human rights and environmental abuses where Canadian companies were present. CORE was highly critiqued for being toothless[5] and lacked effective

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[2] Canadian Friends Service Committee. March 2026. *This fact causes support for war to plummet*. Accessed: https://quakerservice.ca/news/this-fact-causes-support-for-war-to-plummet/

[3] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. April 2024. *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2024*. Accessed: https://www.sipri.org/publications/2025/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2024

[4] United Nations; World Bank. 2018. *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. Accessed: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/4c36fca6-c7e0-5927-b171-468b0b236b59

[5] Canadian Network for Corporate Responsibility. 2022. *Model legislation for a Real Watchdog on Canadian Corporate Abuse.* Accessed: https://cnca-rcrce.ca/model-legislation-core-ombudsperson/

power to meaningfully address concerns brought to it by impacted communities. However, the elimination of CORE announced in June was a shocking development and a definitive step backwards. In order for the government to best work with the private sector to effectively and responsibly advance development outcomes, an effective corporate accountability mechanism needs to be put in place, one that aligns with Canada's international human rights obligations. If that is not done, the human rights risks faced by workers, women, Indigenous Peoples, and land and environmental defenders negatively impacted by Canadian business operations abroad will increase.

Canadians, civil society, and impacted communities expect Canada to fulfil its commitments with regards to corporate accountability both domestically and abroad, with the expectation that colonial and/or imperial approaches are to be avoided. Effective relationship building comes with adherence to full consultation and cooperation, the right to free, prior, and informed consent and respect for the decisions made by Indigenous Peoples through their right to self-determination.

A good example of how Canada strengthened the social licence for Indigenous Peoples' human rights, immigration, universal health, and other social supports was to steadfastly defend the government's policy and legislative choices around those issues. For a more recent example, Canada's transition from voting against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to becoming the first country to adopt national legislation and an Action Plan for its implementation represents an important step in demonstrating a commitment to reconciliation. This came on the heels of centering Indigenous voices and experiences with the MMIWG Calls to Justice and the TRC Calls to Action. Featuring consistent and coherent messaging directly from Indigenous Peoples at all levels of government—municipal, provincial and federal—and incorporating educational material in schools and businesses assisted the public to better understand and participate in reconciliation efforts individually, and more broadly to support it in the community.

While a work in progress, the support shown by government and leaders on the issue of reconciliation are reflected through broad public support for reconciliation. However, recently in BC where provincial leaders have wavered in their messaging, polarization and misinformation has led to confusion and a perceived decrease in support for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Provinces and territories are obliged to support Canada's international obligations. Clear, consistent communication campaigns and educational materials/curriculum in schools and in the community are essential for effectively establishing community support for issues like development cooperation. It is incumbent on leaders and government at all levels to present consistent and coherent messaging for public uptake and support.

The UN has three foundational pillars: peace and security, development, and human rights. None can exist successfully without the others. In this foreign policy review, Canada should look towards integrating those basic and foundational pillars. By doing so, Canada can promote both domestic wellbeing and global peace. Focusing on the priorities of development, peace, and human rights will create coherence with both the economic and values-based arguments circulating today, bridging the divide between pragmatism and principle.