



29 June 2017

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
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Dear Minister,

I am writing to express profound concern with your speech on Canadian Foreign Policy, which you gave in the House of Commons on Tuesday 6 June 2017, and on which Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau further elaborated on 9 June. In it, you equated women's rights with the right to abortion and "sexual reproductive rights" and said "[t]hese rights are at the core of Canadian foreign policy." You went on to say that these were also human rights and that they would set Canada's current and future foreign policy agenda. While the Catholic Bishops of Canada share your concern for advancing the respect and dignity of women – an issue to which the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholics give great importance – we feel the need to point out, with all due respect, that your statement above is erroneous, confusing, and misguided.

First, to state that abortion, *inter alia*, is "at the core" of Canadian foreign policy is simply not the case. There is no precedent to support such a claim *in fact*. Indeed, you yourself offered many examples in your speech of a tradition of Canadian foreign policy marked by the goals of international peace, just order, free trade, foreign aid and global stability. There are, of course, many women's issues that actually ought to have been raised as legitimate points of international engagement, but these were passed over in silence. They include Canada's economic partnerships with countries in which female infants are murdered for not being male; those in which women earn less than men for the same job or where they do not enjoy the same privileges under the law, including the right to education or protection from rape, physical violence, and other forms of abuse. Canadians recognize these as grave violations of human rights – indeed, as heinous crimes in certain instances – far more readily and unanimously than opposition to abortion and artificial contraception. If we add to all of the above the fact that abortion and certain kinds of contraceptive technologies carry profound risks for women, including psychological and emotional harm, sterility, and even death itself, it is difficult to comprehend how the policy agenda you have advanced truly represents the interests of women, particularly those that are already at risk.

Second, to state that abortion, *inter alia*, is a Canadian value, is also incorrect *in principle*. How could such a statement be made in Parliament when the Supreme Court of Canada itself held in *R. v Morgentaler* (1988) that there was no constitutional basis in the *Charter* for the right to abortion on demand? An examination of the ruling by former PEI Supreme Court Justice Gerard Mitchell in his 2014 letter published in Charlottetown's newspaper *The Guardian* pointed out, contrary to the popular belief, that in actual fact *all seven judges of the Supreme Court of Canada acknowledged that the state has a legitimate interest in protecting the unborn!*¹

The attempt to insinuate abortion advocacy in Canadian foreign policy, predicating it on a very particular understanding of feminism, also runs against the thrust of your overall argument. It contradicts the very idea, as you yourself stated, that "it is clearly not our role to impose our values around the world. No one appointed us the world's policemen." Such a desire cannot be easily reconciled with the rationale you offered for Canada's pursuit of a two-year term on the UN Security Council, namely our "wish to be heard" and to "lead" by imparting our "broadly held national values" on others. What ever happened to Canada's longstanding tradition of respect for cultures, values, and histories, including different religious and moral traditions? What happened to the acute understanding that in confronting global challenges listening is just as important as being heard? How is this consequent to your own words that "the path we choose must be one that serves the interests of all Canadians and upholds our broadly held national values"? More specifically, with respect to a foreign policy based on abortion advocacy and "sexual reproductive rights," has Canada forgotten that for a considerable population (both within Canada and abroad) the unborn child is regarded as a human being created by God and worthy of life and love? This moral position can be found among Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Orthodox Christians, a number of Protestant Christians, Roman and Eastern Catholics, in addition to many other people of good will, including non-believers. We question whether it was wise or responsible to claim abortion advocacy and "sexual reproductive rights" as the core of Canadian foreign policy – as national values with which to enlighten others – knowing full well that they are not only legally contentious but completely contrary to the deeply held convictions of many both within and beyond Canada's borders.

In these uncertain times, when Canada's voice and leadership do matter on everything from climate change to global peace, political ideology cannot be allowed to dictate foreign policy and to override common sense and our humanitarian responsibilities to those in dire need. We saw this last March when the Prime Minister used his personal commitment to feminism to justify a public pledge of \$650-million to facilitate abortion advocacy and sexual reproductive rights on a global scale. This amount contrasts sharply with his government's response to the severe food shortages in South Sudan, Yemen, northeast Nigeria and Somalia, for which it had only pledged \$119.25-million – a difference of \$530.75-million. The UN, meanwhile, was already calling the situation in these regions the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II, with 20 million people at risk of starvation. Should this unfolding disaster not have prompted the Prime Minister to prioritize relief and aid over politicking at the lavish expense of hardworking taxpayers in Canada? Unfortunately, even the Government's recent announcement to match

¹ "Clarifying facts on Canada's abortion law, or lack of" in *The Guardian* (22 May 2014) <http://www.theguardian.pe.ca/opinion/letter-to-the-editor/2014/5/22/clarifying-facts-on-canadas-abortion-la-3734432.html>. Accessed June 21, 2017.

private donations 1:1 is too modest in light of what is really needed and of what Canada is capable of delivering both in terms of humanitarian aid and example.

The Catholic Bishops of Canada would agree with your statement that “seventy years ago Canada played a pivotal role in forming the postwar international order.” There can be no question that a new century presents us with new challenges and that the “unique experience, expertise, geography, diversity, and values” gleaned in recent times can help us in confronting them. But whatever our efforts, they will be deeply compromised if we neglect the obvious reality that moral traditions shape people’s perspectives, that perspectives therefore differ, and that it is not a failure of the other person if her or his views do not map onto your understanding of “Canadian values.” The idea that everyone can somehow just agree that abortion and contraception are universal human rights is neither convincing nor credible. Indeed, even here at home, where we live side by side with peoples of so many different backgrounds, moral and religious traditions, the belief that there is universal agreement on a single set of Canadian values is itself contrived.

If Canada’s foreign policy needs a stable ground it cannot possibly be abortion advocacy and “sexual reproductive rights.” And if the dignity of women is to have a universal moral foundation it cannot be based on principles that override the rights of the unborn child.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas Crosby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI
Bishop of Hamilton and
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops