

Minister  
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Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

March 18, 2024

Mr. John Williamson  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Public Accounts  
House of Commons  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Williamson:

I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Government of Canada to the recommendations made in the Thirty-Third Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts entitled “*International Assistance in Support of Gender Equality*” in November 2023.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work carried out by the members of the Standing Committee in developing the above-referenced report. Both the report of the Standing Committee and the report of the Office of the Auditor General that preceded it highlighted the importance of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, but also noted the urgent need for Global Affairs Canada to improve its monitoring and reporting on the results of Canada's international assistance.

Canada's international assistance is making a tangible contribution to improving the lives of women and girls. For example, as indicated in the Report to Parliament on the Government of Canada's International Assistance 2021-2022, Canada contributed to the following development outcomes: Almost 4,000 schools created welcoming spaces that respond to the specific needs of girls; more than 15,000 women are now trained in demand-driven technical and vocational fields; over 780,000 women and girls were enrolled in formal or non-formal education; and, through the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, over 65,000 women and girls were able to use specialist support services to end and prevent sexual and gender-based violence and over 19,000 women and girls were able to access free legal aid related to sexual and gender-based violence. The Government has acknowledged the need to better communicate results such as these to show progress towards Feminist International Assistance Policy objectives.

There is also recognition of the need for Global Affairs Canada to improve its information management and strengthen the consideration of intersectionality in the tools and training supporting Global Affairs Canada's international assistance programming.

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Accordingly, the Government agrees with the three recommendations of the Thirty-Third Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and will address the recommendations as Global Affairs Canada continues to modernize the way it manages and delivers its international assistance, making it more responsive, efficient, transparent and accountable. The Government agrees and takes note that the implementation of the Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative is vital and is working to stay on track and ensure its success.

The enclosed Government Response provides progress updates as requested in the Committee's Recommendations 1 and 3 on the use of a new Project Documents Database, on the review of training taken by employees working in international assistance, and on adjustments to guidance, tools, training and processes to enhance the consideration of identity factors beyond age in project-level gender equality assessments.

As requested in Recommendation 1, a progress update on the development of the new grants and contributions management system will be provided by 31 December 2024. To note, Global Affairs Canada was informed by the Committee Clerk and the Library of Parliament Analyst on 14 December 2023 that an error occurred in the tabled report. The timeline of 30 April 2024 is incorrect for the two reports under Recommendation 1, Item 3, that is (i) the update the development of GAC's employee training plan in support of implementing the new grants and contributions management system and (ii) the second progress report on the development of this new system. The Committee Clerk has indicated that this section of the report will be amended when Parliament resumes sitting in 2024. We look forward to receiving the revised timeline.

And as requested in Recommendation 2, a progress update on its review of performance indicators and results reporting more generally will be provided by 31 March 2024, given that, in the Management Response appended to the OAG audit, Global Affairs Canada committed to providing the Deputy Minister of International Development with options related to performance indicators by 31 March 2024, and did not commit to developing new performance indicators.

The Government of Canada takes this opportunity to thank the members of the Committee for their work on this report. I look forward to continuing the Government of Canada's important work in international assistance that contributes to advancing gender equality, and empowering women and girls in all their diversity.



The Honourable Ahmed Hussien, P.C., M.P.

Enclosures

**Government Response to the Thirty-Third Report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts, entitled “International Assistance In Support Of Gender Equality”**

**Recommendation 1: Global Affairs Canada (GAC) must present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with: 1) a progress report on the use of the new Project Documents Database; 2) a report on the review of training taken by employees working in international assistance and an initial progress report on the development of the new grants and contributions management system; and 3) a report indicating whether the department is still on track to develop its employee training plan in support of implementing the new grants and contributions management system as planned, and a second progress report on the development of this new system. The Committee also strongly encourages GAC to expedite implementation of its grants and contributions management system.**

GAC agrees with the recommendation and recognizes the importance of documenting key project files in a Project Documents Database. On 29 May 2023, in response to the findings and recommendations of the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) Report, GAC implemented a centralized Project Documents Database and requested project officers to upload all mandatory project documents into the database, in addition to the information management systems used previously. GAC delivered information sessions to hundreds of employees working on international assistance to support compliance and support to staff is ongoing. Key documents for newly approved projects are now being saved in the Project Documents Database immediately following project approvals. Documents for previously approved projects are being progressively added to the Project Documents Database through a phased approach. Progress is being tracked and updates shared periodically with senior management. As of 10 October 2023, more than 8,200 documents had been uploaded into the Project Documents Database.

The review of training taken by employees working in international assistance has been completed as of mid-January 2024 and a revised list of required training is being made available. The review updated the “learning roadmap” for international assistance officers and identified courses that require updating or that are no longer needed, and any new training that should be developed. Examples include revised and updated training on Results-Based Management and risk management, which will have new approaches and tools resulting from the Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative, as well as targeted training further to the OAG audit findings, such as information management for project officers.

GAC agrees with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts’ (PACP) recognition of the importance of the new grants and contributions management system. This major transformation project will allow GAC to automate and streamline its business processes and systems to provide better information for decision-making and improve the impact of Canada's international assistance. Initial work has focused on exploring innovative arrangements to design the new project management system and to enhance adaptability in the long-term. Work so far has and will continue to involve both GAC employees and international assistance programming partners in the design of the system, running tests with users, and making improvements based on user feedback.

In line with the actions identified in the Management Action Plan in response to the report of the OAG, GAC will revise its international assistance training curriculum and develop training to support employees implementing the new grants and contributions management system as the new processes and systems

are finalized. This work is on track and information sessions are being held with GAC employees as the development of the system continues.

Extensive involvement of and consultations with Canadian non-governmental organizations have been a fundamental aspect of the process thus far, including a Partner Advisory Group launched in February 2023, the first Partner Forum held in May 2023, a Risk Appetite Hackathon in June 2023, and using the interchange program to bring Canadian non-governmental organization practitioners in-house to GAC to work on the initiative. Integral to the initiative is completion of internal Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative awareness and information sessions throughout fall 2023 for all employees, including employees at missions overseas.

As requested, GAC will provide a progress update on the development of the new grants and contributions management system by 31 December 2024.

To note, GAC was informed by the Committee Clerk and the Library of Parliament Analyst on 14 December 2023 that an error occurred in its tabled report. The timeline of 30 April 2024 is incorrect for two reports under Recommendation 1, specifically (i) the update the development of GAC's employee training plan in support of implementing the new grants and contributions management system and (ii) the second progress report on the development of this new system. The Committee Clerk has indicated that this section of the report will be amended (very likely to be extended) by the PACP when Parliament resumes sitting in 2024.

**Recommendation 2: GAC must present the Committee with a report on its new international assistance performance indicators; these indicators should measure not only outputs, but also outcomes.**

GAC recognizes the importance of performance indicators which measure not only outputs, but also outcomes, in particular those that can measure progress at the level of policy implementation. As indicated in GAC's Management Action Plan responding to the OAG report, performance indicators are only one of the ways through which GAC collects data and information on the outcomes of its programming. GAC is progressing well toward developing options as committed to in the Management Action Plan to better communicate policy-level results, and has held a series of consultations with GAC staff and management between July and November 2023.

Through the Feminist International Assistance Policy, the Department committed to track and communicate the implementation and results of the policy to Canadians, using a suite of twenty-four Key Performance Indicators derived from language found in the Feminist International Assistance Policy. The Department has reported to Parliament and Canadians using Key Performance Indicator data to provide an illustrative snapshot of GAC's international assistance. It was made evident through the OAG's findings that these Key Performance Indicators do not reflect the entire breadth of programming nor policy-level outcomes. Instead, they are focused on project-level output information (i.e. "activities completed"), which is generally easier to aggregate to higher organizational levels.

At the project level, GAC has a robust results methodology, extensive guidance and training, and strong project management capacity. However, improvements are needed to better report on results at the program and departmental levels (which better reflect policy implementation), where aggregated data and accompanying analysis are needed.

To make these improvements, GAC is currently examining its Action Area Results Frameworks, which operationalize the Feminist International Assistance Action Area Policies into outcomes, and will be examining the use of performance indicators to measure progress on those outcomes. In addition, GAC is examining how to better report on the outcomes of its programs and portfolios by effectively aggregating information up beyond the project level, considering best practices from the international community. To support the effective implementation of GAC's Management Action Plan commitments, GAC is engaging with the OAG to share progress and obtain feedback.

As requested, GAC will provide a progress report to the PACP by 31 March 2024 detailing its work to address the OAG recommendation related to performance indicators.

**Recommendation 3: GAC must present the Committee with a report on the adjustments of existing guidance, tools, training, and processes to enhance the consideration of identity factors beyond age in project-level assessments.**

GAC is committed to ensuring intersectionality is taken into consideration in its project-level gender equality assessments in line with Canada's feminist approach to international assistance. As per GAC's 2019 "Feminist Approach Guidance Note", GAC initiatives must demonstrate they were informed by two distinct but complementary intersectional analyses: (i) a gender-based analysis plus and (ii) a human rights analysis, with the aim of analyzing and eliminating systemic discrimination on the basis of sex and gender identity and expression, as well as on the basis of intersecting aspects of identity such as age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and religion. In addition to these analyses, international assistance project proposals must describe who will benefit from the project, directly and indirectly, disaggregated by sex and/or gender identity and expression, age, and other relevant identity factors, such as economic status or language.

Central to the assessment process is GAC's gender equality assessment form. The main purpose of this form is to ensure that projects are designed to deliver gender equality results. The gender equality assessment form is not strictly the gender-based analysis plus, but rather seeks to ensure the project has explicit gender equality outcomes in its results framework, is informed by gender-based analysis plus, is measured by relevant indicators and is supported by financial and human resources. This distinction is important. All gender equality assessment forms are reviewed and approved by a GAC Gender Equality Specialist whose expertise is notably required to assess whether intersecting identity factors that may exacerbate or hide gender inequalities have been properly considered.

In 2020, changes were made to the gender equality assessment form and related guidance to be more explicit about diversity and intersecting identity factors in line with the Feminist Approach Guidance Note. Since then, intersectionality has been embedded in information sessions, guidance, training and tools to better support the consideration of identity factors beyond age in project-level gender equality assessments. For example, in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, GAC Gender Equality Specialists developed a reference guide for programming staff on how to integrate gender equality and ensure an intersectional lens in COVID-19 response efforts. Another example is the increased emphasis on gender-based analysis plus and intersectionality through their inclusion in funding proposal templates for humanitarian assistance partners.

More recently, following the OAG Report, GAC conducted a review of external and internal best practices in considering intersecting identity factors in the delivery of gender equality results. This

included contributing to and learning from the forthcoming policy paper from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee's Community of Practice on Gender Equality focused on inequalities that intersect with gender equality. New best practices and/or learnings arising from this policy paper will be incorporated into GAC practices. GAC also reviewed a sample of recent project-level gender equality assessment forms to assess current internal practices and challenges. The review revealed that practices had improved significantly since 2020 with changes made at that time to the guidance and tools. For example, intersecting identity factors such as ethnicity, family status, location, and disability are now consistently integrated in project-level gender equality assessment forms.

Informed by the above review and findings, GAC developed a concept document for internal use to clarify what is meant by considering intersectionality in the context of advancing gender equality results. GAC also adjusted its main guidance document (Gender Equality Toolkit for Projects) and gender equality assessment form to further inform consideration of identity factors beyond age. These changes include explanations and prompts about how certain programming elements address intersecting identity factors in the guidance, and adding standalone questions on intersecting identity factors in the gender equality assessment form, including for the disaggregation of data. GAC also ensured revised instructions are reflected in the related process guidance for project management, as well as in gender equality information sessions and training.

In regards to training, GAC previously developed online asynchronous training on gender equality available to all programming staff, which includes a focus on addressing intersecting identities. Gender Equality Specialists have also recently collaborated with the Canadian Foreign Service Institute to ensure that gender-based analysis plus training includes a focus on international assistance delivery. GAC Gender Equality Specialists are also working with the Canadian Foreign Service Institute to update the in-person gender equality training offering, including ensuring a strong focus on addressing women and girls in all their diversity, with attention to intersecting identity considerations.

GAC will continue to regularly monitor the impact of these improvements through ongoing engagement with staff and gender equality specialists, and further adjustments to tools and training will be made as required.

With the above review and numerous adjustments, GAC has completed its work related to this recommendation.