

August 17, 2026

The Right Honourable Mark Carney

Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Re: Concerns regarding proposed federal defence spending

Dear Prime Minister,

The National Council of Women of Canada recognizes the complexity of defence budgeting and the importance of ensuring Canada's security. At the same time, it expresses serious concern regarding aspects of the proposed increase in defence spending, particularly any pathway toward allocating 5 percent of GDP to defence and the very large increase in public expenditure that such a target would require.

Support for Canada's active and reserve members of the Canadian Armed Forces, their families, and veterans remains unequivocal. Their service—whether in defence of Canada, in international missions and peacekeeping efforts, or in responding to natural disasters and domestic emergencies—must be met with appropriate care, resources, and long-term support.

However, military expansion alone does not create lasting peace. The world is facing a profound crisis marked by armed conflict, democratic erosion, violations of international law, displacement, and accelerating environmental destruction, and these challenges will not be resolved through militarization alone. Canada has an important role to play as a peacebuilder, a diplomatic actor, and a country committed to multilateral solutions that reduce violence rather than deepen it.

Women around the world continue to call for peaceful and diplomatic resolutions to conflict. Canada's commitments under the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including its current National Action Plan, recognize both the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and the importance of women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and recovery.

For this reason, the National Council of Women of Canada is deeply concerned by any approach that would commit Canada to extraordinary new defence expenditures—potentially as much as \$150 billion annually by 2035 under a 5 percent target—without equal or greater attention to peace, diplomacy, human security, climate action, and social well-being. Security must not be defined so narrowly that it privileges military spending over the conditions that actually sustain peace and stability.

First, this level of expenditure will inevitably shape Canada's broader fiscal, industrial, environmental, and social policy. It cannot be considered in isolation.

Second, defence must be understood within a comprehensive national security framework. That framework should include cybersecurity, the protection of critical infrastructure, Arctic sovereignty, disaster readiness, and climate security. It should also align with Canada's climate obligations and recognize that investments in Northern infrastructure and clean energy can simultaneously advance sovereignty, reconciliation, climate adaptation, and community resilience.

Third, increased defence spending must not come at the expense of essential social programs. Full and sustained funding for Women and Gender Equality Canada, affordable housing, supports for persons with disabilities, health care, childcare, and the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls must remain foundational. Women and Gender Equality Canada continue to fund work that advances equality for women and supports related equity-seeking communities through its federal programming.

In particular, any significant cuts to Women and Gender Equality Canada would have serious consequences not only for women and girls, but also for 2SLGBTQI+ communities and Indigenous communities and organizations that benefit from federal support tied to equality, safety, violence prevention, and community capacity. A clear commitment is needed that Women and Gender Equality Canada will be funded on a stable, long-term basis and will not be weakened in order to accommodate defence increases.

Fourth, Canada's international commitments to women's equality must remain central to foreign and security policy. Canada's Women, Peace and Security framework is directly tied to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, and that agenda should not be sidelined by a defence posture that expands military commitments while diminishing resources for peacebuilding, gender equality, and civilian protection.

Fifth, climate and security objectives must be integrated. War worsens the environmental crisis, and any credible national security policy must strengthen climate resilience rather than intensify ecological damage. This includes Arctic surveillance combined with climate monitoring, lower-emission and more resilient infrastructure, and stronger disaster-response capacity.

Sixth, if defence spending is increased, it must be tied to a transparent and accountable industrial strategy that supports domestic capacity, strengthens resilient supply chains, and builds partnerships with Indigenous communities. Even then, defence policy must remain subordinate to a broader vision of peace, justice, environmental stewardship, and social stability.

To sustain legitimate security needs alongside social and environmental obligations, Canada will require a balanced and forward-looking fiscal approach, including:

- New revenue measures, such as targeted taxation, resource royalties linked to the energy transition, and closing tax avoidance gaps.
- Strategic long-term financing for major public investments.

- A clear economic growth strategy focused on clean technology, digital industries, critical minerals, and affordable housing.

Approaches that rely on reductions to social programs, disproportionately harm women and families, weaken support for 2SLGBTQI+ and Indigenous communities, or treat defence as separate from economic and climate policy risk undermining Canada's long-term stability.

A sustainable path forward requires that defence spending be embedded within a broader commitment to peacebuilding, diplomacy, women's rights, reconciliation, climate action, affordable housing, and social well-being. These are not competing priorities; they are mutually reinforcing and essential to Canada's future.

The National Council of Women of Canada therefore urges the Government of Canada to:

- Reject any defence spending framework that undermines peacebuilding, social equity, and climate responsibility.
- Affirm Canada's role as a credible advocate for diplomacy, peacekeeping, and multilateral solutions.
- Protect and strengthen long-term funding for Women and Gender Equality Canada.
- Ensure that affordable housing, climate action, reconciliation, and international commitments under the Women, Peace and Security agenda remain central national priorities.
- Provide transparency on how any proposed defence increases will be defined, financed, and measured against Canada's social, environmental, and international obligations.

Sincerely,

Penny Rankin

President

National Council of Women of Canada

cc: The Honourable David J. McGuinty, Minister of National Defence; The Honourable Anita Anand, Minister of Foreign Affairs; The Honourable Rechie Valdez, Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism); The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Finance and National Revenue; The Honourable Shafqat Ali, President of the Treasury Board.

Mission Statement:

To empower all women to work together towards improving the quality of life for women, families, and society through a forum of member organizations and individuals.