

## Articles

# Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy and the 2030 Sustainability Agenda

## *La política exterior feminista de México y la agenda de la sostenibilidad 2030*

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### Abstract:

The main objective of this article is to explain, as succinctly as possible, how Mexico's feminist foreign policy—presented a few months ago—fits in with the social sustainability agenda. It argues that the agenda for the protection of women and girls needs to cut across all the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and all spheres of government and society. Hence, Mexico has revised its foreign policy from a feminist perspective, which implies organizational, institutional and legal reforms and government commitments on a national level and a shift in multilateral and diplomatic principles and positions on an international level.



### Resumen:

El objetivo principal de este artículo es explicar, de manera sucinta, cómo la política exterior feminista de México se inserta en la agenda de la sostenibilidad social. El argumento principal es que la agenda de protección a las niñas y las mujeres requiere ser tratada transversalmente en todos los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible (ODS), y en todos los ámbitos de gobierno y la sociedad. Por esto, México ha transformado su política exterior con un giro integralmente feminista, en el que están implicadas transformaciones organizacionales, institucionales, legales y de compromisos públicos nacionales y, en el exterior, principios y posiciones multilaterales y diplomáticas.



### Key Words:

2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, feminist foreign policy, gender equality.



### Palabras clave:

Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible, política exterior feminista, igualdad de género.

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## Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) form the roadmap humanity has designed to assert the laudable precept of “leaving no one behind”. This roadmap toward the equality of all human beings branches off into several areas that are interconnected by the key concept of *sustainability*, which demands that all components of a system and its points of interconnection be strengthened so as to foster its development in the long term. It is a concept that initially emerged in relation to the environment, but whose meaning has since expanded to the point where we can now talk about social and economic sustainability. The premise is that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, reason why all sectors, especially historically vulnerable ones, need to be strengthened and included in social systems.

Mexico is firmly committed to the goal of sustainability and the 2030 Agenda, as evidenced by the feminist foreign policy it presented a few months ago. In this paper, I will attempt to explain, as succinctly as possible, how this policy fits in with the social sustainability agenda. In this regard, it should be remembered that the 2030 Agenda not only has a SDG on gender equality (SDG 5), but that this is one of its three main pillars.

## Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy

In his speech at the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019, Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard promised Mexico would adopt a feminist foreign policy. In January 2020, at the Meeting of Ambassadors and Consuls, he made good on that promise with the introduction of a foreign policy strategy that emphasizes gender equality.

This decision turned Mexico into the first Latin-American country to adopt a foreign policy of this nature and one of just a handful in the world—France, Canada, Norway and Sweden—that take a feminist approach to the design of their foreign policy. Specifically, Mexico aims to incorporate the main principles of feminism into the design of its foreign policy, such as substantive equality, freedom of choice, the elimination of structural inequalities and the eradication of discrimination, with an accent on human, individual and social rights. Mexico has taken a cross-cutting, intersectional and multi-sectorial approach to the adoption of these principles, with view to building a fairer society in Mexico and contributing to gender equality worldwide.

Mexico's feminist foreign policy has internal implications—for Mexican society and the structure of the Mexican government—and international ones—that influence the direction of its foreign policy vis-à-vis the multilateral agenda and diplomatic relations with other countries.

In terms of internal policy, the goal is to achieve gender equality within the ranks of the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (SRE), which is working with the Senate on legal reforms to achieve gender equality in the foreign service.

Specifically, this policy has five pillars:

- A foreign policy with a gender perspective and a feminist agenda in which Mexico takes the lead on issues on the multilateral agenda and in regional and bilateral foreign policy, with a view to promoting substantive gender equality.
- Job equality and organizational reforms aimed at achieving professional equality.
- A Secretariat that encourages collective actions to create a working environment free of gender-related harassment and violence.
- A spotlight on female leaders and the contribution of women to foreign policy.

- An intersectional approach in all foreign policy stances, strategies and actions.

As regards the international aspects of this foreign policy, Mexico has already demonstrated its commitment to gender equality. Mexico and France co-host the Generation Equality Forum, a global gathering to assess where the gender equality agenda is at 25 years after the emblematic Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

Mexico spearheaded the negotiation of the new Gender Action Plan under the Lima Work Programme on Gender and Climate Change. Also, during the 25th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change, held on December 2019, the Mexican delegation's proposal that the aforementioned Gender Action Plan be included was accepted on the grounds that women and girls are more vulnerable to the devastating effects of the global environmental crisis. For example, they are more likely to die as a result of natural disasters or be displaced due to environmental damage. This is why a foreign policy committed to gender equality should take into account all aspects, because the gender balance can be impacted by other factors, as is the case with climate change.

In May 2019, the Mexican government, the European Union and the UN joined forces to launch the Spotlight Initiative, a partnership that seeks to invest in improvements in the design of public spaces to guarantee our right to the city and make these spaces more inclusive, especially for women and girls. In Mexico, femicide, the most extreme form of violence women experience on a daily basis, is a painful and unacceptable reality that continues to weigh heavily on the conscience of society. The Spotlight Initiative was specifically designed to change urban environments with a view to putting an end to gender violence in public spaces. During its first phase, the initiative, which has funding of 500 million euros, will be implemented in some of the municipalities in Mexico that are the most dangerous for women and in selected others in Latin America.

Additionally, Mexico has deposited instruments of international law against discrimination with the Inter-American Convention Against Racism and All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance, which are treaties that have been adopted within the framework of the Organization

of American States (OAS). These are legally binding instruments that apply to all OAS members as of the time of their deposit by Mexico.

The basic building blocks of Mexico's feminist foreign policy are consistent with the steps the country is currently taking to protect our most vulnerable communities. One strong reason for adopting a feminist foreign policy is to expose structural inequalities rooted in historic and contextual vulnerabilities.

Gender violence is another major challenge and needs to be nipped in the bud in all its forms, from language and restricted job opportunities to more violent manifestations like sexual harassment and domestic violence. In foreign policy, the key approach to addressing this issue will be to work toward the realization of individual and social rights via multilateralism, cooperation and solidarity between nations.

The world has made considerable progress on the human rights front, but these rights hang in a fragile state of balance and therefore require permanent oversight. Our feminist foreign policy accepts that it is the responsibility of the State to provide the framework and the legal, institutional, financial and human resources to shore up basic freedoms and rights.

We call our foreign policy feminist because we believe that the feminist battle for equality has been a pioneering one in the quest for the social emancipation of historically vulnerable populations. The structural inequalities that lie at the heart of gender inequality demand a radical solution, i.e. the problem needs to be addressed at its roots, which run deep and cannot be weeded out with legislative reforms alone; what is needed is the participation of society at large. The transformation the Mexican government is working on begins with acknowledging the social rights of our most marginalized groups, empowering women by promoting them as leaders in both the public and private spheres, and providing the vast array of tools required to achieve this goal, which implies sweeping social change.

It is still too early to predict the regional impact of the announcement of Mexico's feminist foreign policy, but what we can say is that, as the first country in the region to adopt such a policy, we are eager to learn from others with more experience and to share that knowledge with the rest of the world. We are especially eager to lead regional change, in keeping with Mexico's diplomatic tradition, and will seek to promote our feminist foreign policy at multilateral forums in an attempt to persuade other countries

to join the coalition of nations with such policies. Recently, at the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place in January 2020 in Chile, I had the opportunity to present Mexico's feminist foreign policy and received a very positive response. We know that, following this announcement, at least one other country in the region is working on its own feminist foreign policy.

## Conclusions

By adopting a feminist foreign policy, Mexico is sending out a message as to how it plans on addressing some of the greatest challenges facing humanity. The country is undergoing a far-reaching social transformation designed to improve the wellbeing of its inhabitants, with particular emphasis on its more vulnerable communities. We firmly believe that the principles of feminism can help us achieve this goal, given its proven capacity to bring about radical social change that paves the way for emancipation and the building of fairer societies. These are the guiding principles of our public decisions and policies, specifically our foreign policy. Mexico aims to honor its commitment to the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda by strengthening the most vulnerable sectors of its society with the precepts of feminism, among other measures. To be effective, in addition to SDG 5 on gender equality, the agenda for the protection of women and girls needs to cut across all the SDGs and all spheres of government and society, reason why Mexico has revised its foreign policy from a feminist perspective, which implies organizational, institutional and legal reforms and government commitments on a national level and a shift in multilateral and diplomatic principles and positions on an international level.

Along with the nations of the world, Mexico is jointly responsible for combating the greatest problems afflicting the world. Our feminist foreign policy gives us a leading role on the international arena, in a way that is consistent with our transformation as a nation and the highest ideals of humanity laid out in the 2030 Agenda and to which we aspire as a nation in the making.