

Canada Engaged: An Initial Vision Statement for Canada's International Policy

Statement of Purpose

This vision statement proposes a set of core elements to sustain and build the Government of Canada's global engagement amidst significant challenges and accelerated change.

Interests and institutions that became increasingly universal over the last 75 years – economic liberalism, state sovereignty, human rights, collective security, and multilateral organizations – can no longer be taken for granted. Uncertainties are being heightened by emerging rivalry between the United States and China.

Isolation is impossible – from threats of climate change and terrorism to flows of trade and refugees, the world's issues reach Canada. Global engagement is essential for Canada's prosperity: Canada succeeds when the world succeeds. Canada's national interest depends on its ability to engage with diverse partners in a multi-polarized world to address global challenges before they become crises.

Through an ambitious strategic commitment to cooperation and leadership based on comparative advantages, Canada can do its fair share to help build a better world: one in which international cooperation is strengthened and Canadians thrive because all people do.

Agenda for Action: Seven Core Elements for Canada's International Policy

1. *Canada should build on existing relationships and broaden beyond them.*

In today's complex environment, effective global engagement will require strong ties with a wide range of actors and allies. Canada's ties with the United States remain Canada's single most important relationship. These must be strengthened even as Canada responsibly diversifies its economic, social, and political connections in a dynamic interconnected world.

2. *Canada should foster problem-solving partnerships.*

Canada has a clear ability to build coalitions and alliances to achieve specific common goals – from enhancing regional security to ending acid rain and from banning landmines to ensuring education for children in crises. In a context of global instability and complex threats, Canada will have to be dynamic and flexible in convening and mobilizing – drawing on shared interests and/or values as appropriate. Canada should support diverse participation in international institutions, including from the Global South, and government should partner with the private sector and civil society toward common goals. Canada can thus improve the likelihood that collaboration rather than competition will define relationships in the emerging geopolitical system.

3. *Canada should focus on its comparative advantages.*

Canada cannot lead everywhere and on everything. Even as it engages broadly, Canada should not seek a seat at every table but rather prioritize discussions where it can add value and impact by leading directly or by leveraging the contributions of others. See Annex for examples of how Canada could exploit a comparative advantage.

4. Canada should promote a rules-based international order.

Canada has benefited from and contributed to the development of current institutions and norms. As this global framework is challenged, Canada should aim to refine and reassert a robust rules-based international order that all countries uphold – helping to build strong institutions for the future. See Annex for examples of how Canada could help support and build an equitable international order.

5. Canada should support peaceful dissent.

Populism, nationalism, and isolationism are growing in both democratic and authoritarian states. To counter this trend, it will be important to enable people to express legitimate disappointment with existing political and economic systems while upholding principles and institutions of democracy and inclusion. Canada should be an advocate for structured and safeguarded dissent. Canada should highlight how peaceful disagreement – and its toleration – is key for democratic discourse and multiculturalism domestically as well as in underpinning a constructive international multilateral order. In doing so, Canada would draw on its long and multi-partisan record of supporting human rights defenders, women's rights and gender equality, independent media, inclusive governance, and democratic development.

6. Canada should invest in addressing root causes and durable solutions.

Effective global engagement requires a capacity for risk-tolerant decisions and a willingness to stand by them and see them through – accompanied by adequate sustained resources. Canada should emphasize ambitious impact above visibility, as important work may not get done quickly and may not draw attention. See Annex for examples of how Canada could have impact through a longer-term approach.

7. Canada should do at home as it does abroad.

Canada's global ambitions and reputation are shaped by its domestic behaviour: a country must do both well and good at home to be taken seriously internationally. As Canada moves to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across environmental, economic, and social spheres, it should aim to ensure that its domestic actions reinforce its international efforts and posture. A key example of aligning domestic behaviour with global position is committing to a robust agenda of inclusion and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Measuring Success

Canada's foreign policy should be evaluated based on outcomes. Canada succeeds as a global policy actor if and when Canadian initiatives create substantial change in line with this country's vision. Canada has a strong and consistent record of impact – from supporting the reconstruction and development of post-conflict states, to combating racial discrimination and championing gender equality, to normative innovations like peacekeeping and human security, to an important role in the eradication of smallpox and near-eradication of polio.

Looking forward, Canada's international ambitions should be high and focused. Its global engagement – including staff and programs across international diplomacy, trade, security and development – should be reviewed, targeted, and resourced in line with this ambition. We hope the priorities and principles in this vision statement and the emphasis on impact that underpins them may be embraced by a government of any party. If so, they may form a basis for long-term stability in Canadian foreign policy that fuels the results we seek for the planet and for Canadians.