

## OUR TIME

# Sexism

## Series: Taking a stand Exploring the Army's International Positional Statements

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Members of the International Moral and Social Issues Council (IMASIC) reflect on The Salvation Army's International Positional Statements.

### STATEMENT OF POSITION

Sexism is discrimination based on sex or gender, most often against women and girls and is increasingly understood as a fundamental human rights issue.

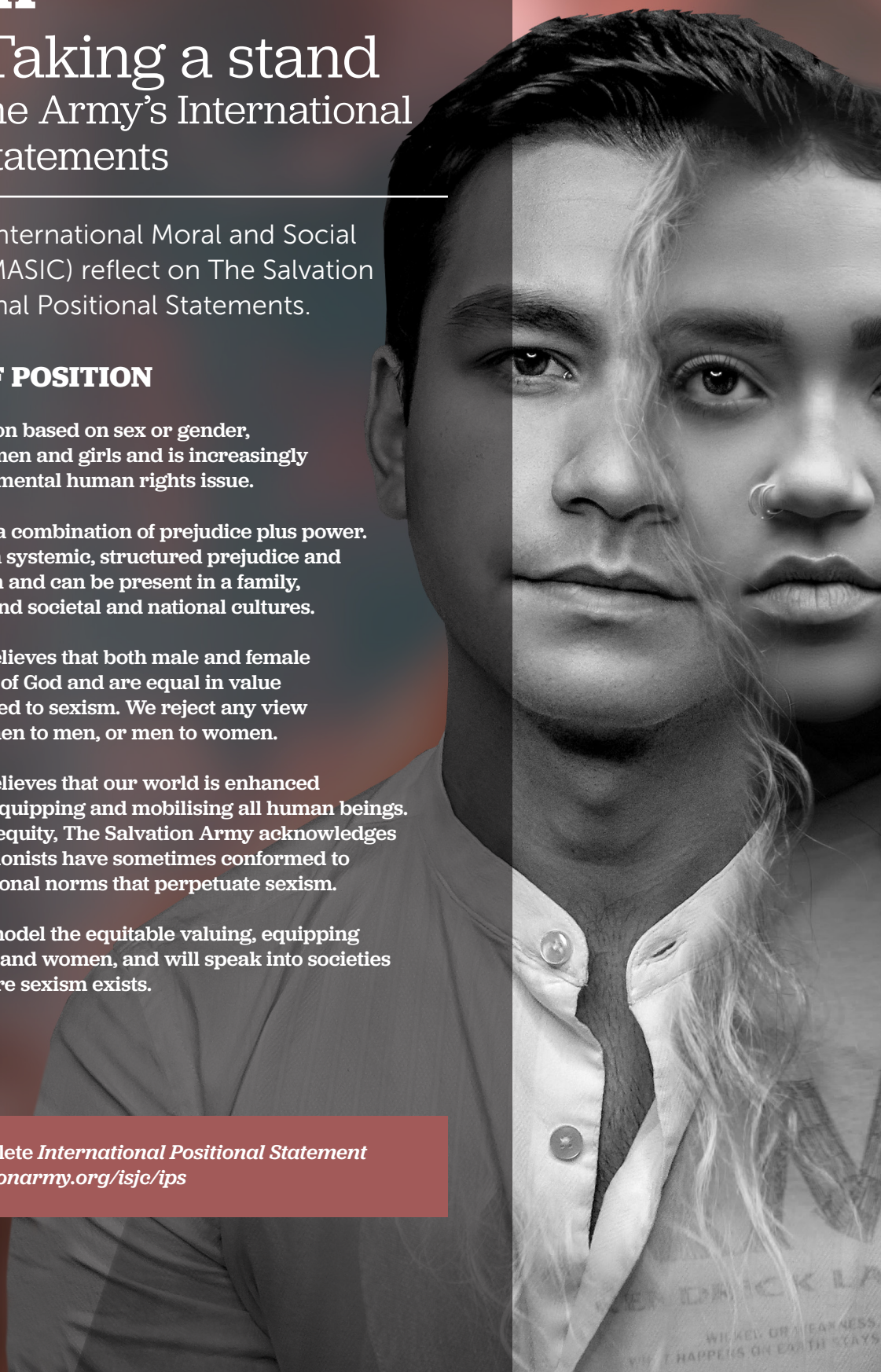
Sexism often includes a combination of prejudice plus power. It is expressed through systemic, structured prejudice and cultural discrimination and can be present in a family, communities of faith, and societal and national cultures.

The Salvation Army believes that both male and female are made in the image of God and are equal in value and therefore is opposed to sexism. We reject any view that subordinates women to men, or men to women.

The Salvation Army believes that our world is enhanced by equitably valuing, equipping and mobilising all human beings. While valuing gender equity, The Salvation Army acknowledges with regret that Salvationists have sometimes conformed to societal and organisational norms that perpetuate sexism.

We are committed to model the equitable valuing, equipping and mobilising of men and women, and will speak into societies around the world where sexism exists.

Download the complete *International Positional Statement on Sexism* at [salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips](http://salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips)



## FOR REFLECTION

- \* In what way do you see sexism where you are, in your culture?
- \* Have you spoken out against sexist behaviour in The Salvation Army?
- \* Are you part of a group where sexist jokes are accepted?
- \* Dare you teach and preach against the prevailing culture in your society where women and girls are not seen as equal to men?

Looking at examples of sexism from different parts of the world, it is striking how wide the span is. From the risk of being put to death after birth because the baby is a girl, to minding our language and not belittling a man or a woman just because of their gender.

Sexism can be visible by denying a girl hospital treatment because she is considered a future financial burden to the family who has to pay dowry for her when she marries. It can be a culture where men are expected to be macho and flirty, while women shall be subdued and please the men.

Although sexism can be easy to describe and identify, we are sometimes blind to it because it becomes part of the culture we live in and of the jargon we use. The #MeToo movement around the world has been a welcome wake-up call. It has enabled many people to speak openly about sexual harassment and violence that has developed into a silently accepted norm in workplaces, performing arts, schools and sports.

The Salvation Army has an important role in using practical ways of countering all forms of sexual discrimination. We educate girls as well as boys. We make toilets and water available at schools so teenage girls can keep up good hygiene. At first sight, this may not seem a fight against sexism, but it impacts the foundation of societies and systems in ways that prevent discrimination against girls.

*The International Positional Statement on Sexism* is clear both about our role in opposing sexism and honouring God by practising equity. When we identify and act against male domination or other forms of sexism in society, we are indeed instruments of righteousness. At the same time, we need to learn from our own history and detect sexism within our own structures.

The practical responses of the International Positional Statement (IPS) begin with the example set by our Founder. In *Orders and Regulations for Salvation Army Staff Officers* from 1895, William Booth writes: 'Women must be treated as equal with men in all the intellectual and social relationships in life.' While we

salute the pioneers, we shall be honest and confess that this has not always worked in practice. Generations of leaders that followed the Founder often practised systematic discrimination of women, particularly if they were married.

There was a time when women who played a brass instrument were not allowed to be members of some Salvation Army bands just because they were women. What are the challenges now? As leaders, we should not be afraid to look at our own Army culture and structures to see if we, by habit or convenience, uphold sexist behaviour. The structure of Women's Ministries around the world empowers women and gives them leadership experience as well as a platform to reach their local communities with the whole gospel for the whole person. But we also need to be honest about when this structure isolates women from bringing their talent into areas where they serve alongside men, equal in their contribution to leadership, learning about administration and having the opportunity to influence how finances are spent.

The IPS gives a solid biblical background to the God-given equal dignity between men and women; it shares examples of how Jesus interacted with women and reminds us that the Holy Spirit filled all believers at Pentecost and continues to do so.

We should be encouraged by the power of the Kingdom of God, illustrated by the parables of Jesus about the mustard seed or the yeast (Matthew 13:31-33). Jesus' words describe expectations of influence that are beyond human experience. Still, he means what he is saying. When we apply this to the influence we can have, led by the Holy Spirit, when we fight all kinds of injustice, including sexism, we shall take this encouragement to heart and begin the fermenting, permeating process of the Kingdom where we are.





**MAJOR  
DIANA MACDONALD**  
Divisional Commander  
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### PERSONAL REFLECTION

With more than 225 million people, Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in world, with 51 per cent of its population being male, 48.76 per cent female and 0.24 per cent transgender. Despite the fact that the male-female ratio is almost equal, there is no doubt that sexism exists in Pakistani society and that it is a challenge. However, *knowing* that the issue exists isn't enough. Seeing how people in authority and the wider population tackle the social stigma is equally necessary.

In Pakistan the situation for women is reduced to the words of 'duty' and 'respect' and ensuring she 'knows her place'. Women are expected to take care of the house and to improve their expertise in household chores rather than to seek a brilliant career in the business world. Hence, generally speaking, working women are not respected as much as housewives.

In an average family, boys are given larger portions of the meal than their sisters and more career choices, implying that a daughter does not have to be well-educated for a professional career as she will soon be going to another house (referring to marriage) and being schooled for a career could negatively impact the choosing of her life partner.

It may puzzle many as to why women holding the same position as men are seen as inferior, even if they have the same experience and qualification. The answer is that in this modern age, where in urban centres there is more pressure to let women stand equally with men, it is merely based on the need for women to provide financially for the family and not for the betterment of their career or identity.

In the working environment, my achievements as a woman became a mystifying point in my life. I was unsure whether to be happy about what I had achieved or to be sad or scared to share the news with my family.

Generally, holding a position above the spouse (as in my case) is a challenge for women. Even if the husband is happy, sadly the society will still look down on the couple. While not all may listen to or join the criticism, the influence is enough to create a negative vibe and risks breaking up the family.

Sadly, it is the thinking of the whole nation that needs to change. Change is necessary, yet difficult. It is my utmost desire to see change - as an individual, as a couple, as a family and at all levels - in the workplace and in the community.



**COMMISSIONER  
MARIE WILLERMARK**  
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### PERSONAL REFLECTION

I remember travelling on a bus in the mid-60s with the first female bus driver. There was talk among passengers about this female driver. Some commented on her just because she was a woman. That was sexism. Most of us commented because she was a bad driver (she soon had a couple of accidents and lost her job). That was fair criticism. Perhaps there was also hidden sexism behind it all. Did the company willingly put a bad female driver on a bus for her to fail and then have an excuse to keep women out of the workforce?

I grew up in a society where boys and girls went to mixed classes in school, at the corps male and female youth were together and Sweden, along with many other countries, promoted equal opportunities for men and women. Sexist behaviour naturally existed but was not often obvious to me, apart from stereotypical gender roles in films and on TV.

Even when I became an officer, I felt I was treated equally to male colleagues. I had good role models of single officers. The sexist behaviour in The Salvation Army 40 years ago wasn't so much against women as such. What I became aware of was the systemic discrimination of married female officers. Shared ministry in a corps worked fine, but headquarters appointments became a male-dominated ministry, when the ordained married female officer received no personal appointment

and had to find something to do by herself. We are all glad that this kind of situation has changed – at least where I am – but we constantly need to watch out for our blind spots of sexism.

While we are now used to seeing many women in previously male-dominated professions (for example bus and lorry drivers) as well as men where women have been dominant (nurses and primary school teachers), there is a new brutal sexism thriving, hiding behind the anonymity of social media. It is visible by the fact that women journalists get comments on their looks, not on the content of their article, and female athletes are expected to wear sexy clothes. Algorithms feed sexist behaviour as they feed people with more content of the same kind.

While I have seen open sexism decrease, I fear that hidden sexism shared online is thriving. I know that my influence in this area is limited but being aware of the situation is also the first step to act when possible.



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RICHARD MUNN**

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### PERSONAL REFLECTION

I have been committed to egalitarian values and principles since before my commissioning, more than 30 years ago. My family of origin, national culture, understanding of Scripture and The Salvation Army all combined to fashion this. And yet, even with this conviction, I would be naive to think that a sexist disposition is eradicated or does not periodically surface.

So, where do I fall short of my best and highest aspirations to embody and live out an authentically egalitarian, mutually honouring and serving interrelationship with women?

Here is my inventory:

#### Mansplaining

Described as ‘the practice of a man explaining something to a woman in a way that shows he thinks he knows and understands more than she does’, by all accounts the behaviour is ubiquitous.

Verdict: Guilty, despite my best intentions. Maybe especially as an underdeveloped young man overly ambitious to establish credibility and assert a pecking order. Hand in hand with this would be conversational interruptions with a woman, inattentive listening and only partial credence to problem-solving or creative initiatives.

#### Gaslighting

Here, in order to gain more power, a person makes another constantly question their sanity. The unique phrase comes from the 1944 movie *Gaslight*, where a man manipulates his wife to the point where she thinks she is losing her mind. Everyday examples include, ‘You are imagining things’, ‘Stop overreacting’, or ‘I don’t know what you are talking about’.

Verdict: Guilty, despite my inner revulsion at the thought. Most occurrent when the emotional truth of a conversation comes too close to home, my defence mechanism might be to respond, ‘I’m only kidding.’

#### Toxic Masculinity

This is an evolving phrase used to describe the glorification and expectation of exaggerated masculine traits. Thus, ‘manliness’ is based on physical strength, emotional detachment, self-reliance, dominance and sexual prowess. Accordingly, a man who does not display such qualities is not ‘a real man’.

Verdict: Guilty, despite rejecting the traits above. Here’s the problem, cultural values for masculinity, even though caricatured, still exert their influence. They must be consciously countered.

#### Conclusion

As with so much else, the model is Jesus, who consistently relates to women with grace and dignity. He embodies meekness, strength under control (2 Corinthians 10:1) and the fruit of the Spirit, ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control’ (Galatians 5:22-23 *ISV*). We might say, ‘truly and properly man.’

So, brothers, how is your sexism inventory?