

DOLLS FOR CHANGE

WILPF

In Goteborg, Sweden, International WILPF member Harriet Johansson Otterloo has started collecting dolls from all over the world. Not just any dolls, but dolls with important messages to the leaders of the world. She calls the project Dolls For Change. The idea came to Johansson Otterloo in December 2016, and she encourages people from every country to make a doll and write a message on its ribbon.

The Doll Project: Bringing people together

Even though demonstrations and protests are happening around the world, Johansson Otterloo thinks that many people find it overwhelming to participate in political demonstrations, rallies or gatherings. This is why she finds the Dolls For Change project relevant, because it is about inflicting the change you want to see in the world, and sharing important messages with a larger audience, without necessarily grabbing a megaphone and joining a demonstration to make your voice heard. You can do it by something as simple as making a doll.



The Doll Project is about bringing people together and make them feel they can make a difference in the world, tells Johansson Otterloo. Her goal is to make people meet and talk about the important issues, while at the same time making the dolls. Her hope is that the initiative will make people feel inspired to join one of the civil society organisations working for peace and equality, and thereby bring new energy to the social movement.

“Alone we might not make a big difference, but together our voices are strong,” she says.

The message on the ribbon

The most important aspect of the Doll Project is the message on the ribbon attached to every doll. This is the platform where people can share what they think is the most important message for world leaders and what changes they believe are needed to make the world more peaceful and equal. People can write whatever they want, as long as it is not hateful or discriminatory in any way. So far, the messages on the ribbons have a very global scope and there is a lot about the UN, climate change and human rights.

This broad spectrum of messages is exactly what Johansson Otterloo had hoped for. Because people have so many dreams and visions for the world, each doll becomes a specific voice. A voice for peace. A voice for human rights. A voice for clean water. Or a voice for gender equality. “Nobody makes a doll for no reason. You only make a doll, if you have something on your mind that you wish to share with the world,” Johansson Otterloo explains.

The main goal of the project is to make people put their thoughts into words. Thoughts they would normally not articulate. Dolls For Change is about collecting the many different voices and show world leaders that people actually care. Every message will be collected in a book and shared with people at the UN and other international institutions. “Everyone at the UN must read the messages from the people,” Johansson Otterloo argues.

Bridging the generations

Johansson Otterloo herself has been an activist since 1969 and has always been very politically active. She believes that today we are witnessing a paradox, where people seem to be very aware of the current political issues and complexity of global conflicts, but at the same time seem to lack a venue to inflict the much needed change. According to Johansson Otterloo, many people have lost faith in the political institutions and no longer believe that their voices matter. This is something she has noticed happening among the younger generations, where only a few young people engage in political parties because they do not think they have any real influence on the political processes. Johansson Otterloo understands this loss of faith, because the political parties today are not working the way they ought to. But the question is, if you don’t support the current system, what do you do instead?

Johansson Otterloo does not think the younger generations are lost. On the very contrary, she sees a lot of parallels to the 1970s. “This energy from the 70s is what we see again now. I think the young people today experience what we experienced back then. We had the win with us, because everybody believed in something; world peace, women’s liberation, human rights,” she argues. For Johansson Otterloo, there is no doubt, that the young people today also believes in a better and more equal world, and that they are willing to work for it to become a reality. The massive Women’s

<http://wilpf.org/dolls-for-change/>

Marches in the US and globally earlier this year illuminated this. And as she states: "It is the women who fight for a better life, for a better world. Again. Just like in the 1970s."

Johansson Otterloo emphasises that the older generations need to listen to young people. They need to give them a space and accept that there are different ways to understand the world and to solve the problems of today. "We don't have to agree with everything the young people say, but we need to hear their needs and wishes for the world we live in." This is why Johansson Otterloo hopes that more young people will send in dolls with statements on how they want the world to be.

The project moving forward

Johansson Otterloo has received more than 150 dolls from around Sweden. Last week, she received 300 dolls from Skt. Petersburg, and dolls are currently being made in Zimbabwe, Japan, South Africa and many other countries around the world. Johansson Otterloo hopes that people from more countries will join the project, so that the number of voices represented will be even more diverse than it already is.

"I'm surprised almost everyday about the amazing dolls and pictures people send me," says Johansson Otterloo

From 19 December 2017 to 6 January 2018 the dolls will be exhibited at the National Museum of World Culture in Sweden.

The goal is to exhibit the dolls at the UN in the beginning of 2018.

After the exhibition, the dolls will be sent to children in refugee camps around the world.

Do you want to join the project and make a doll? Send an email to: talamindocka@gmail.com

The deadline for sending dolls is 1 December 2017.

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