

# CONFERENCE SUMMARY



WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR  
**PEACE & FREEDOM**



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## It's Time for Women's Power to Stop War

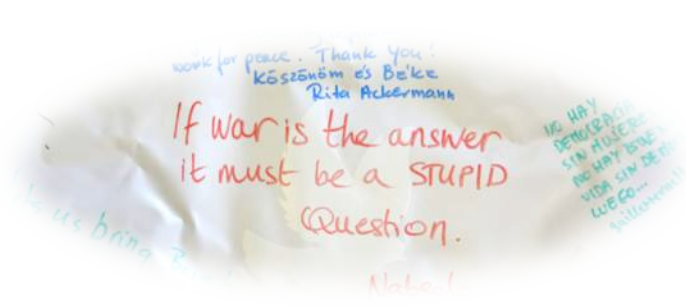
100 years after the first WILPF Congress, 1000 peacemakers—women and men—from over 82 countries gathered to reorganise and reenergise a social movement for equitable peace and freedom. We met as the world faces unprecedented conflicts, cultures of violence, and injustices. We met at a time of urgency for the planet and all peoples.

The three-day conference included five plenary sessions 48 breakout sessions, a manifestation, a marketplace, an anniversary festival, as well as a number of exhibitions, all telling and showing the history of WILPF. Elements from all of these discussions are captured in this overall outcome document, which is organised into two main sections to reflect some of the broad themes covered by the conference. The first explores and challenges root causes of conflict and gendered power in the world, including patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and militarism. The second focuses on strengthening the social movement for peace through concrete commitments for action.



*Pledges of Commitment to the Movement made by Participants at the Conference*

The outcomes of the conference are important for taking our movement forward. There is an ongoing need for honest reflection and discussion of how and why we are engaged in the peace movement, and how we can build new constituencies and strengthen our relationships with one another. Participants made pledges for their work going forward, whether that is on reclaiming the streets or working within the UN system.



More people want peace than war. But we must walk into spaces of hegemonic power and dismantle the structures of power that are the roots of war and violence. We need to create new norms, laws, and institutions. We need to change or progress our ways of working in order to build a movement for peace and justice. We need to work together as human beings recognising our varied identities, interests, and intersectionalities but coming together through our shared quest for active peace.



## **CHALLENGING THE SYSTEMS OF POWER: PATRIARCHY, CAPITALISM, RACISM, MILITARISM**



Power is constituted through mutually reinforcing structures of patriarchy, capitalism, and racism and ideology. All rely on violence and together produce militarism, war, and other forms of violence. As the WILPF Manifesto says, “Male dominance is tightly intersected with the class inequalities of capitalism and the racist domination of some nations and ethnic groups by others. Together they perpetuate war.” Patriarchy and violent masculinities predispose societies to militarism, war, and violence. Racism creates fear of “the other,” which helps create a “need” for militarism. Capitalism generates inequality, fostering violence and conflict.

Armed conflict, armed violence, arms production and trade; poverty, inequality, social injustice; forced migration and displacement; climate change; financial crises—these are all consequences of the political and economic choices made by those in power. Meanwhile we have seen the gradual demise of the multilateral, collective security system between states. We have institutions for peace—UN, world courts, conferences on women, resolutions—but still no peace. Human rights and international law have largely been subordinated to war and violence.

At the conference, we protested the structures of power and focused on how they can and must be dismantled in order to build the world we want. A world in which we reject the bomb and the bullet. In which we say no to all forms violence. In which we affirm our rights to life and peace and our responsibility to uphold those rights for all.

To do so, we investigated and exposed the connections between these elements of power.

### ***Patriarchy***

The systems of war benefit greatly from gender inequality rooted in patriarchy—a system and culture of gender inequality that privileges a certain type of masculinity over all other identities and ways of being in the world. This particular masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity. It projects men as strong, rational, competent, powerful, sexually virulent, and above all, capable of great violence. It socialises men to believe that violence is not a choice but a necessity. Some women accept this projection of masculinity, accepting that they need men for “protection”.

Violent masculinities infest our institutions and our intimate lives. They deform men. They are toxic for women. They are easy to mobilise in times of conflict or to proliferate weapons. They make men more expendable in conflict. They reinforce the notion of women as weak and passive. They lead to many public health and human rights problems.

But participants at the Conference recognised that while men are part of the problem, they must be part of the solution. While patriarchal norms privilege all men over all others within their “station” (e.g. of race or class), it does not provide men with security or peace. Showing a different kind of masculinity—one that is nonviolent, respectful of women and others, upholding of human rights and dignity, opposed to traditional concepts of what it is to be male—helps men understand that there are alternatives to the toxic hegemonic masculinity. Changing our socialisation processes so that is no longer the default, is critical. MenEngage made a pledge at the end of the conference to continue their work engaging with men and women to confront and overcome hegemonic masculinities.

People use and control women’s sexuality in order to prevent women from organising against patriarchy. Similarly homophobia is used as a way to police dominant perceptions of manhood and negative masculinities.

Sexual violence—inside and outside of conflict—is a form of gender-based violence. It is an expression of power and control exercised at home and echoed in military strategy. It must be recognised, reported, penalised, and prosecuted. The voices of the victims and survivors of armed conflict and armed violence,

including sexual violence, must be heard, their participation facilitated, and their rights upheld. The silence around their experiences and their demands for justice and peace must be broken.

We can challenge and overcome patriarchy through the transformation of social and cultural norms in relation to masculinities and femininities. We need structural and cultural changes in order to end hegemonic masculinities within all of our contexts. We need to undercut the gender hierarchies and essentialisms that reinforce patriarchy and negative masculinities and femininities. To do so, we must:

- Offer alternatives to hegemonic masculinities and femininities, including through breaking down gender binaries, hierarchies, and essentialisms;
- Confront gender-based violence, in particular by removing stigma and seeing survivors as having agency and rights rather than as passive victims; and
- Refuse the unacceptable construction of men as violent militants, expendable and targetable during conflict, naturally violent, and protectors of women and other “vulnerable groups”.

### **Capitalism**

The capitalist economic system is an expression of violence. The exploitation of labour and resources of the many by the few has harmed people and the environment, generating conglomerates of global reach and unaccountable power. Democracy has been subverted as corporate interests buy, sell, and market the politicians we are supposed to elect. In whose interest do they run our countries? With 1% of the population now controlling 48% of the wealth and this disparity increasing exponentially, we face an unparalleled crisis of inequality.

We must confront the economic system’s support for militarism by:

- Challenging the role of multinational corporations and finance in armed conflict, noting that such conflicts, whether between or within states, are linked to economic interests;
- Highlighting how other governments fuel these conflicts on the basis of economic and geopolitical interests;
- Preventing the adoption of trade agreements that governments are pushing through now, agreements that represent the seeds of tomorrow’s wars; and
- Challenging and preventing the devastation of the environment in pursuit of profits, which will exacerbate conflict, forced migration, refugee flows, exploitation, injustice, and suffering.



### **Racism**

Social systems of racist supremacy, cultural domination, and religious hierarchy are also productive of violence and war. Division between people is often sustained by those in power in order to retain that power. Thus our conference explored ways to challenge racism and construction of “the other” by:

- Breaking down the way in which identities are created that allows us to see the other as different from ourselves;
- Exposing and challenging the methods for constructing otherness, including political discourse, the centralised and commercialised media embedded in the structures of the political elite, and lack of free movement of people; and
- Demanding independent and comprehensive investigations of any use of force and documentation of its consequences in order to help us challenge the idea that it is somehow acceptable to bomb people in another country but not those in communities to which we feel accountable.

## **Militarism**

We cannot promote empowerment of women and men and peaceful, progressive societies while producing weapons, waging wars, and sustaining warlords. Violence begets violence. The idea that we can overcome violence through even more violence is why we are stuck in a cycle of endless war, death, rape, and destruction.

Violence and weapons are disempowering. We need to take power back. We must reject the implicit consent that governments have assumed about our support for militarism, war, and violence. Our governments have decided to spend over 1.7 trillion US dollars on arms each year. This is our money. They do not have our consent for that.

In 1915 the women gathered in The Hague saw “in the private profits accruing from the great armament factories a powerful hindrance to the abolition of war.” 100 years later we can see that as long as war is profitable, the killing will continue. Those profiting from the production of arms maintain the system of war. They have turned militarism into a way of thinking about, responding to, and investing in the world. The default response to challenges has become military intervention. International law has been subordinated and the UN marginalised.



*Conference Participants symbolically 'Moving the Money' from military to social spending*

The only solution is disarmament and demilitarisation. We identified many ways to effectively challenge militarism and the war system, including through:

- Demanding that our governments slash their military budgets and redirect that money towards social goods—both nationally and collectively through international mechanisms;
- Demanding the development of a transparent and democratic overview of military spending;
- Challenging the idea that the military industry is about protecting jobs—these are not good jobs; a job has to have meaning, not just a pay check;
- Prohibiting and eliminating nuclear weapons—not waiting for the nuclear-armed states to get on board in order to take that first step;
- Ending the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to prevent humanitarian harm from the pervasive, devastating practice of bombing and shelling of towns and cities;
- Eliminating the production and trade in weapons and ending arms trafficking;
- Banning armed drones, which are used with impunity to kill people inside and outside of armed conflict, have lowered the threshold for the use of force, and have turned whole families into suspects;
- Preventing the development of new violent technologies such as autonomous weapons, which threaten fundamental aspects of human morality and ethics;



- Preventing the use of cyber space for war;
- Preventing the weaponisation of outer space;
- Ending the militarisation of domestic policing by rejecting the application of military means to problems that should be dealt with through law enforcement and also not using military means and equipment in law enforcement;
- Ending the subcontracting of military and police functions to private companies; and
- Dismantling military alliances and networks of foreign military bases.



Participants also highlighted campaigns and coalitions of civil society groups working on some of these issues. WILPF encouraged other groups to join them in the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), and the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. One participant made a pledge to campaign against military spending, which was also the focus of the public manifestation during the conference.

War is glorified, but it is not heroic. Participants echoed WILPF's belief that masculinity must be disarmed and the heroism taken out of violence. Banning weapons is heroic. Promoting the principles and practices of human rights is heroic. Unarmed civilians coming together to change the world is heroic. We identified the need to reclaim nonviolence, because those who thrive on violence have no response for nonviolence. Real security lies in equality and the realisation of human rights. One year's military expenditure would realize the Millennium Development Goals many times over with a permanent and sustainable dividend.

## CHANGING OUR THINKING, BUILDING OUR MOVEMENT

Dynamic and honest discussions took place about the women's peace movement and how essential a strong but diverse and transformative movement is to create fundamental changes in society for sustainable, active peace. This will require both internal and external actions.

### Internal reflections: There is no unity without diversity



There are different feminisms developing from many places and perspectives. This must not divide us but rather should bring us together and make us stronger. We must do away with the language of separation and find language that recognises the diversity of feminisms while focusing on our common quest for peace, freedom, and justice. Unity does not mean everyone is the same. Unity is about how we come to a common place from multitude of different places. Unity comes from learning from each other and what we share in our opposition to patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and militarism.

Human rights are not a product or the property of the West. They belong to all peoples. When we are confronted with ideologies of hatred and discrimination we will respond with ideologies of hope and tolerance, understanding and human rights.

During the conference, participants worked creatively in solidarity across hemispheres, national borders, cultural groups, localities, classes, generations, sexes, sexualities, and gender identities. We called for a new discourse demanding peace and opposing conflict and violence. Such a discourse requires ending the idea of the centre and the periphery; ending the duality between men and women; ending the duality between north and south, and between young and old.

A youth representative stated to the plenary, "You can never be too young or too old. On the contrary, having a young mind equals being the future. And the beautiful thing about young minds, I think, is that they're open and malleable to the world, still unsure of how things are 'supposed to be'. We need to help them be more open to what the world could be".

Participants identified the need to pursue the development of partnerships, coalitions, and affiliate movements, developing links between and among organisations and movements in order to foster a feminist movement against violence and war that has expression at every level and in every location of our complex society.

The importance of local work and local organising was underlined. For example, participants shared how indigenous women are meeting the global domination of states and transnational companies with local resistance, localising solutions on the ground, asserting energy sovereignty and food security. These are things we need to localise back into our communities, things that this capitalist system has taken away from us.

Environmental devastation more broadly is a key issue for movement alliances. The destruction of the environment is both a consequence and driver of conflict. A feminist peace analysis into the climate justice movement and vice versa was identified as critical.

Participants were reminded be vigilant against the militarisation of scholarship and academia. Some university programmes and research institutes are financed by "defence" ministries or others that might have militaristic interests. It is important for researchers and scholars to be aware of how their work impacts policy, practice, and behaviour and who their work benefits. Similarly, we have to guard against privatisation and corporatisation of education, which makes learning accessible only to some and skews what is learned toward particular ends that do not necessarily fit with the critical analysis the peace movement requires.



### **External focus: We will not be silenced**

Strengthening our movement also means ensuring our actions and choices effectively work towards change in the world around us.

### **Multilateral UN system**

The multilateral UN system was examined and discussed in multiple sessions. Participants acknowledged the gains; a charter, a declaration of human rights, treaties and conventions. We've had four world conferences on women, we have the women, peace and security agenda, and world courts. But the conference exposed how this so-called "international multilateral system" is not working effectively against the structures of power that prevent peace. It has failed. It has silenced our voices. When international law allows states to exploit each other, it cannot protect local people.

Participants debated engagement with the system. Overall, there was a sense of the need for civil society to continue working for reform, but engaging with conditions. It is often civil society actors that actually utilise these mechanisms for change—treaty bodies, discussion forums, negotiating conferences, etc.—and hold our governments and international institutions accountable. The UN Charter states "We the people," not "I, the hegemonic nation state".

When international law is subverted so as to allow states to exploit the resources of other states or to use military force to protect those interests, often with the connivance of elite leaders, it fails, absolutely, in its obligations to hold states accountable for protecting the rights of the people. Thus it is civil society that must reform and rebuild and insist on transparency and accountability for governments, institutions, and corporations. Among other things this requires:

- Breaking down silos that exist and agitating for the inclusion of gender analysis into UN debates and initiatives on disarmament, peace, and security while inserting discussions on disarmament, militarism, war, and violence into debates on gender, women, or human rights;
- Changing the language we use, including calling crimes what they are instead of using language that allows culprits to deflect prosecution;
- Calling for independent monitoring of mechanisms, bodies, and treaties compliance; and
- Demanding accountability to overcome impunity.

### **Organising before, during and after conflicts**

Participants acknowledged the complexities and nuances of each crisis and conflict context. Some speakers and sessions discussed their local context specifically, with over 26 conflict countries represented. Together, these tactics and strategies show how women peacemakers are actively working to end war and prevent armed conflict and violence.

The focus on organising during conflict included:

- Examining gender diversity in participation in peace processes and during transitional periods;
- Learning about and promoting ways to bring nonviolent voices into policy making processes to achieve security without militarisation in the interests of peace, justice, and equality;
- Improving processes and mechanisms for mediation and nonviolent conflict resolution;
- Designing nonviolent ways to confront new challenges, e.g. population displacement, noting that migration flows driven by violence, poverty, marginalisation, and environmental destruction are used as a pretext to militarise borders; and
- Connecting resource groups across borders and building networks to defend the human rights of migrants and trafficked people.



We need more women's participation in all types of processes. But it is not just about counting women—rather, it is about making women count, whether this is in parliament, peace processes, or the development of new law. Thus we have to:

- Ensure an effective voice for women in conflict-affected communities to define what they need and what they consider to be security;
- Strengthen ties between those working on women, peace and security and those addressing humanitarian relief; and
- Conditioning aid on the basis of women's leadership and participation in peace and reconstruction efforts.



*Amy Goodman on independent media*

### **Economic powers**

We also need to find new ways to reject and resist existing economic relations and practices, to invent new forms of control over extraction of value, and equalise distribution and consumption. We need to work for a new international order free from neocolonialism and economic injustice, in which income, resources, and opportunities are fairly distributed within and between countries. To this end, we need to:

- Review national budgets from a gender equality perspective, noting that gender equality is a crucial conflict prevention tool, but national action plans are often neither costed nor budgeted and only 2% of peace and security funds go to gender equality projects;
- Insist on divestment from violent used in armed conflict and armed violence and companies that devastate the environment;
- Demand that the military sector presents a full overview of its resource use and emissions, arguing that the armed forces should be held to the same environmental standards as other government agencies.

### **Governments**

We need to promote feminist foreign policies that seek to uphold human rights at home and abroad by integrating foreign policy with trade and arms export policies. Such policies would:

- Put human rights first; and
- Employ a feminist analysis when making all policy decisions.

### **Media**

For all of this to work, we need independent media. Media can be the greatest force for peace but is used as a weapon of war. We must help develop and engage with media that is not brought to us by arms manufacturers, oil companies, or pharmaceutical companies. In the opening session, Amy Goodman of Democracy Now! demanded, "We need media that covers power but that does not cover for power". We must:

- Insist upon and support independent media; and
- Challenge corporate media's content and choice of coverage.

## CONCLUSION



This conference has been important. It has shown that it's not just what we do but why we do it which matters: it brought women and men from over 82 countries together to seek new ways of working together to achieve a common goal; sustainable peace. In so doing we have recognised the size and complexity of the task we are engaged in. Each person has a role to play, and what we can do is bring our pieces of the puzzle to combine with others and make the picture that we want, not the one that has been imposed on us. It starts with the individual and how we conduct our lives, how we participate and engage and the necessity of resisting co-option into default positions: nationalisms, religious intolerance, sexism... the othering which is used to divide humanity.



We recognised that we should not be afraid of being ridiculed and worse for our beliefs, and to embrace our multiple and different feminisms, our different genders, ages and overall diversity; that this is our strength not our weakness.

We insisted that human rights be at the centre of local, national, and international laws and actions and that we should design and implement feminist policies throughout all aspects of our systems of governance. Our budgets must reflect human rights—"we must invest in books, not bombs and bullets". We must reclaim democracy, resist the purchase of our governments by the very rich, and change laws which are used to divide people. We should use the multi lateral system, making our arguments heard in all the fora of the United Nations and the regional bodies.

In so doing we have committed to making our multilateral system, based on international law, more effective and accountable, and that we will not give credibility by engaging in processes which are mere chimeras without real commitment or outcome. In so doing we must change the culture of hegemonic masculinity which is pervasive in the UN system and which prioritises budgetary allocation to its "military wing" rather than to the work it must do on prevention of conflict: development, human rights especially in social and economic rights and equality, and peace.

In the diversity of the participants, in the quality of the discussions and in the strength of our commitment, we recognised that women do have Power to Stop War, and that indeed, the movement has started and we believe absolutely, that peace is possible.



The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) with National Sections covering every continent, an International Secretariat based in Geneva, and a New York office focused on the work of the United Nations (UN).

Since our establishment in 1915, we have brought together women from around the world who are united in working for peace by non-violent means and promoting political, economic and social justice for all.

Our approach is always non-violent, and we use existing international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace and security.

Our strength lies in our ability to link the international and local levels. We are very proud to be one of the first organisations to gain consultative status (category B) with the United Nations, and the only women's anti-war organisation so recognised.



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