

Wonder Woman announced as UN ambassador amid staff protest

The Guardian

Decision to make the DC superhero an honorary ambassador for the empowerment of women led to a petition and silent protest by employees

“This is the most fun the UN has had, I’m pretty sure right?” Diane Nelson, president of DC Entertainment said at a ceremony appointing Wonder Woman as the United Nations’ honorary ambassador for the empowerment of women and girls. The ceremony was meant to honor the fight for gender equality and the 75th anniversary of the character.

Not all agreed with her sentiment, as UN staff members protested against the appointment both inside the event and in the lobby of the building.

It was announced that Wonder Woman would [become an honorary ambassador](#) earlier this month, in support of the UN’s sustainable development goal number five – “to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. The sustainable development goals were adopted by the UN in 2015 and hope to fulfill their agenda by 2030.

The news was met with both praise and criticism, and [a petition was created by “Concerned United Nations staff members”](#) asking the UN secretary general to reconsider. It mentioned concerns over her “overtly sexualized image” that is not “culturally encompassing or sensitive”.

“The bottom line appears to be that the United Nations was unable to find a real-life woman that would be able to champion the rights of ALL women on the issue of gender equality and the fight for their empowerment. The [United Nations](#) has decided that Wonder Woman is the role model that women and girls all around the world should look up to,” the petition read.

The petition, which had over 1,180 signatures by Friday afternoon, announced the plan for the “silent but non-disruptive” protest inside the Ecosoc chamber where the official ceremony took place.

Protesters entered the chamber at the start of the event, and stood with their backs turned and their fists raised. They walked out of the event about halfway through, but three women stood outside for a few minutes to speak about their actions.

Though they didn’t intend to speak about their protest to the media, one, who was asked if the Guardian could mention her remarks anonymously, said she wished a real person had been chosen for the role of ambassador.

“For something that is this important, you need a woman or a man who can speak, somebody who can travel, somebody who can champion these rights, somebody who is able to have an opinion, somebody that can be interviewed,

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somebody that can stand up in front of 192 member states and say this is what we would like you to do,” she said.

Another woman who agreed to be quoted said the choice of character sent a toxic message about strong women and that the UN should be countering such representations of body image, not reinforcing it. “On every imaginable level, we think she is a poor choice,” she said. Wonder Woman’s American flag costume, she said, was akin to “pop culture imperialism”.

Other protesters gathered in the visitor’s lobby of the UN. According to [CBS News](#), about 100 staff members demonstrated holding signs reading “I am not a mascot” or “Let’s get real”.

“There are enough credible living models. We don’t need a mascot or a cartoon,” Shazia Rafi, former secretary general of the Parliamentarians for Global Action, told CBS of Wonder Woman’s new role.

The UN also recently faced backlash for its choice of [Antonio Guterres](#), the former Portuguese prime minister, as the next secretary general, [instead of a female candidate](#).

The ceremony on Friday featured famous guests, actors Lynda Carter and Gal Gadot who have both brought the character to life on screen, Patty Jenkins, the director of the forthcoming Wonder Woman film, and Diane Nelson, president of DC Entertainment, which owns the character. The audience was full of Girl Scouts and young women and men, all in Wonder Woman T-shirts given out at the event. Jim Lee, co-publisher of [DC Comics](#), and Phil Jimenez, a comic artist who has drawn Wonder Woman, were also there.

Cristina Gallach, UN under secretary general for communications and public information, attended on behalf of the secretary general, Ban Ki-moon. She seemed to explain the choice of Wonder Woman in her remarks. “I don’t need to tell you Wonder Woman is an icon,” she said. “She has been known for justice, peace and equality and we are very pleased that this character will help us reach new audiences with essential messages about empowerment and equality.”

Nelson, who spoke next, commemorated the character’s long history in the DC Comics universe. Wonder Woman made her first appearance in All-Star Comics #8 back in 1941. The character soon got her own series and has been constantly transformed during her long history, with her origin story and costume specifics tweaked over the years.

As part of the yearlong campaign, DC Comics is developing a Wonder Woman comic that “tells the story of empowerment, peace, justice and equality” that will be available worldwide and in multiple languages, Nelson said.

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Wonder Woman's image will also be available for the UN's use in the campaign. At the event, guests posed for photos in front of a giant poster of the superhero. She was pictured from the waist up with a cape around her shoulders covering her chest. The words "Think of all the wonders we can do" were superimposed over her image.

The choice of Wonder Woman was not the first time a fictional honorary ambassador was chosen to represent the UN. Previously, Winnie the Pooh was an ambassador for International Day of Friendship, and a character from Angry Birds was chosen for International Day of Happiness, [according to NPR](#). Tinker Bell was made "honorary ambassador of green" [in 2009](#).

- This article was amended on 23 October 2016 to accurately reflect Shazia Rafi's role in the protest.