

# Women's Advocacy for PEACE AND DISARMAMENT

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note

## Women mobilizing for peace and disarmament: a long history

For more than a century women and women's organizations and movements have mobilized in support of peace and disarmament. In addition to participating in organizations alongside men, many women have found it more effective to organize separately.

There are numerous examples of national, regional and international women's organizations and movements with a primary focus on peace or disarmament. For example, during World War I, nearly 1,200 women from warring and neutral countries came together to protest the conflict. They eventually formed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). The organization continues today and advocates internationally for a range of issues from nuclear disarmament to human rights.

### Women's Forum 2000: Away with Nuclear Weapons

*On opening the door of the 21st century, we the women of Japan make a sincere appeal for women and peoples around the world to unite in efforts to abolish nuclear weapons to save the human race from destruction.*

On 5 August 2000 more than 1800 women met in Hiroshima to call for the abolition of nuclear weapons. They heard testimonies from women around the world on the implications of the use and testing of nuclear weapons.

The campaign called for all member States of the United Nations to take the courageous decision to eliminate nuclear weapons.

During the cold war, women lobbied against the stockpiling and possible use of nuclear weapons. In 1959 the newly formed European Women Against Nuclear Armament organized a conference on the responsibility of women in the atomic age in Brunate, Italy, bringing together women from both east and west. In the 1980s a global Women's Peace Movement spread across Europe, the US, Canada and Australia, with women's peace camps, modelled on the Greenham experience, in at least 11 countries (Roseneil, 2000 and 1995). The women's peace movement was also strong in German Democratic Republic and contributed to the fall of the Berlin wall.

Although women's peace organizations in Europe and North America have received most of the publicity, there are organizations in all parts of the world. For example, in the Pacific women have organized against nuclear testing and Japanese women set up a peace camp at the base of Mount Fuji. Women's groups in Africa have been actively involved in advocating for peace and reconstruction, for example, in Angola, Burundi, Somalia and Niger.

In the last decade, a women's peace petition gained over 150 organizational sponsors and hundreds of thousands of signatures (mostly from the south). This petition called for governments to transfer a minimum of five percent of their military budgets over the next five years to health, education, employment and peace education programmes. The petition also called for the de-legitimization of war as an acceptable form of social behaviour, in the same way that slavery, colonialism and apartheid have been de-legitimized.

Recently, organizations and campaigns have been developed to promote women's equitable participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. Women's groups and networks are also advocating for the development of a culture of peace.

### Why have women mobilized around disarmament and peace?

Why do so many women believe that it is important to organize specifically as women in support of disarmament and peace?

Numerous organizations have built on women's roles as mothers. Women have often organized to protect their children as in the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo protesting the "disappearance" of their children in Argentina. Another example is the *Russian Committee of Soldiers' Mothers*.

During the war in Chechnya, this organization urged an end to hostilities, demanded that their sons be sent home, and called for a seat on their country's security and defense councils.

There is, however, no consensus on the assertion sometimes made that women are "by nature" more peaceful than men. Just as many men have organized for peace, there are numerous examples of women supporting arms build-ups and actively participating in wars.

A more promising entry point to understanding why women have organized in favour of disarmament is the link many women have made between gender equality and peace. For example, the 1915 meeting of women in The Hague saw that a “permanent peace could be built only on the basis of equal rights, including equal rights between women and men, of justice within and between nationals, of national independence and of freedom.” (Karl, 1995)

Women’s organizations have often argued that peace is more than the absence of war. They have sketched out a continuum of violence, linking violations of human rights, violence against women and structural violence in economic disparities to the violence seen during wars.

Some women have worked to establish cross-conflict ties with other women, finding common cause despite tensions, cultural divides and different nationalities. A good example is the *Coalition of Women for a Just Peace* which brings together Israeli and Palestinian women. Another example from Liberia is contained in the following box.

Whatever the motivation of their founders and members, these women’s organizations and movements have been, and continue to be, an important international force.

### **UN conferences, women and peace**

At the **first UN Conference on Women, held in Mexico City** in 1975, the three inter-linked goals of equality, development and peace were established. Disarmament was part of the focus on peace. The **third UN Conference on Women in Nairobi** (1985) reaffirmed the commitment to disarmament issues by highlighting the key role women can play, including in nuclear disarmament, and calling for greater support of women’s efforts.

In 1995 at the **Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing**, governments agreed to Strategic Objective E.2: *Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments*. Women’s organizations found it important to link disarmament and the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons with women’s empowerment. They made the case that expenditures on arms divert resources from education, health and other initiatives that could improve women’s lives.

The discussions at the **twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on Follow-up to the Platform for Action** (June 2000) also reaffirmed the links between peace, disarmament and gender equality. The outcome document (A/S-23/10/Rev.1) identified “actions to be taken”, including to:

*98 (k) Strengthen efforts toward general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control, based on the priorities established by the United Nations in the field of disarmament, so that the released resources could be used for, inter alia, social and economic programmes which benefit women and girls.*

*98 (l) Explore new ways of generating new public and private financial resources, inter alia, through the appropriate reduction of excessive military expenditures and the arms trade and investment for arms production and acquisition, including global military expenditures, taking into consideration national security requirements, so as to permit the possible allocation of additional funds for social and economic development, inter alia, for the advancement of women.*

**Security Council Resolution 1325** on women, peace and security, adopted in October 2000, specifically mentions the need to incorporate gender perspectives in all areas of peace support operations, including in disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation initiatives (para 13).

#### ***Liberian Women's Initiative***

In 1993, in the midst of the war in Liberia, Mary Brownell found it intolerable to watch people suffer as regional peace talks went nowhere. The retired schoolteacher was particularly struck by women's silence. "For five years the war was going on, but there was nothing being done in terms of speaking out, making our voices heard. We had women's organizations, but they were largely concerned about relief." Brownell discussed the idea of a women's pressure group to speak out against the war with several friends.

The group ran an advertisement on national radio appealing to women to attend a public meeting in Monrovia's city hall. From there, the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) was formed in January 1994. The movement was open to all women, regardless of ethnic, social, religious or political background.

They adopted the strategy of taking a unified stance on issues that affected everyone and chose “disarmament before elections” as their primary advocacy point. The LWI targeted all parties involved in the peace talks and started a programme to assist in the collection of small arms. Their aim was to attend the regional peace talks and advocate grass roots perspectives directly to the faction leaders. Although they were never official participants in the peace talks, they proved to be influential consultants during the process and also acted as monitors to ensure that promises were kept.

Adapted from Anderlini (2000).

**Alva Myrdal** was a significant influence on the disarmament debate of her time, was instrumental in founding the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1982. As Member of Parliament and part of the Cabinet of the Government of Sweden in 1967, she was entrusted the task of promoting disarmament and became familiar with the scientific and technical aspects of the arms race. She was a highly respected figure in the Geneva negotiating committee on disarmament where she emerged as a leader of the non-aligned countries. She summed up her experience in the field in the acclaimed book "The Game of Disarmament".

## Concrete implications

- **Making alliances with women's organizations:** International networking on disarmament can benefit through an explicit strategy to seek out the participation of women's organizations and movements—both those specifically focused on peace issues and those with a general mandate. It may be useful to share information with women's organizations or target them in communications strategies. Women's organizations with a specific focus on disarmament and peace provide opportunities to reach the broader women's movement. For example, WILPF played an active role in bringing disarmament issues to the 1995 Beijing Conference. They lobbied to ensure that disarmament issues were part of the *Beijing Platform for Action (PFA)*. The inclusion of Strategic Objective E.2 (*Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments*) in the PFA makes an explicit link between disarmament and gender equality and points out the relevance of disarmament issues for women's organizations and gender equality advocates around the world. The international women's movement is vibrant and diverse. Greater involvement of this important constituency could facilitate development of more effective disarmament strategies.
- **Supporting women's involvement and meaningful participation in discussions on disarmament:** In addition to involving women's organizations, it is also important to promote the participation of individual women in disarmament discussions - as technical experts, as representatives of civil society, as spokespeople, as decision-makers. Furthermore it may also be possible to support improved training and education (such as, specific scholarships, support for educational institutions, access to fellowship programmes) for women so that they are well positioned to assume these roles, especially the positions requiring technical expertise.
- **Supporting greater participation of women in peace negotiations:** The *Beijing Platform for Action (1995)* emphasizes the participation of women in conflict resolution decision-making (Strategic Objective E.1). Experience has shown, however, that increasing women's access to these discussions and opening the negotiations so that they encompass broad social concerns requires clear goals and concerted efforts.
- **Striving to achieve equal numbers of women and men on bodies working on disarmament issues and at conferences (both as participants and experts):** The development of a roster of women working on specific issues, or in appropriate sub-fields, would greatly facilitate the identification of relevant experts, speakers, decision-makers, and participants. Member States can be specifically encouraged to consider gender perspectives in making nominations.
- **Facilitating women's organizing around peace and disarmament issues:** In attempts to organize around disarmament and peace issues, women often face numerous obstacles. Efforts to provide legitimacy, information and resources to these organizations could contribute to their effectiveness and thus eventually to the broad goals and aims of peace and disarmament. Women's roles in peace education should be actively encouraged and supported.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and its Coordinator, **Jody Williams**, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996. The Nobel Committee thus recognized the achievement of the Campaign and its chief strategist and spokesperson in seizing the public conscience and building political pressure about the scourge of landmines. Within five years, the international community came together in a unique and unprecedented fashion to adopt the 1997 treaty banning the development, production, stockpiling and use of anti-personnel landmines and the destruction of existing stocks.

## Resources

### Publications

- Anderlini, S. N. (2000). **Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference**. New York: UNIFEM.
- Bryden, M. (2000) **Somalia Between War and Peace: Somali Women on the Eve of the 21st Century**, Nairobi: UNIFEM. African Women for Peace Series.
- Breines, I. et al. (eds.) (1999). **Towards a Women's Agenda for a Culture of Peace**. Paris: UNESCO
- Karl, M. (1995). **Women and Empowerment**. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Mazurana, D. E. and S. R. McKay (1999). **Women and Peacebuilding**. Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.
- Meyer, M. K. (1999). "The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: Organizing Women for Peace in the War System," in M. K. Meyer and E. Prhgl (eds.) **Gender Politics in Global Governance**. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Roseneil, Sasha. (2000). **Common Women, Uncommon Practices: The Queer Feminisms of Greenham**, London: Cassell.
- Roseneil, Sasha. (1995). **Disarming Patriarchy: Feminism and Political Action at Greenham**. London: Open University Press.
- Vickers, J. (1993). **Women and War**. London: Zed Books Ltd.

### Campaigns and Organizations

**International Alert** has launched a campaign entitled *From the Village Council to the Negotiating Table*. "The aim of the campaign is to engage as many women's groups and organizations as possible in a process aimed at enhancing their voices, sharing experiences and promoting more effective dialogue between women and governments."

**Website:** <http://www.international-alert.org/women/default.html>

**May 24th: International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament.** Spearheaded by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the International

Peace Bureau, this day focuses attention on peace and disarmament. Recent actions include radio broadcasts about women's contributions to peace, fundraising for landmine victims, petitions for the abolition of nuclear weapons and street action against militarism.  
**Website:** <http://www.ifor.org/wpp/index.htm#>

**Organizing Committee of the Women's Forum 2000 - Away with Nuclear Weapons.** In mid-2000, this forum, headquartered in Japan, called for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. They launched a campaign to "urge the United Nations, the nuclear weapons states and national governments to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons".

**Email:** [njwa@mb.infoweb.or.jp](mailto:njwa@mb.infoweb.or.jp)

**WILPF.** Founded in 1915 to protest the war then raging in Europe, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom aims to bring together women of different political and philosophical conviction, united in their determination to study and make known and help abolish the political, social, economic and psychological causes of war and to work for a constructive peace. WILPF is a coordinator of the *Reaching Critical Will campaign*.

**Website:** <http://www.wilpf.int.ch/~wilpf/>

**Women Lead the Way to Peace Initiative.** Linked to the Hague Agenda for Peace, this initiative released a statement, Women's Global Actions for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence, on the occasion of the Hague Appeal for Peace Conference, 11–15 May 1999

**Website:** <http://www.ifor.org/wpp/hague.htm>

**Women Waging Peace.** Women Waging Peace is a multi-year collaborative venture of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government that connects women addressing conflicts worldwide. The initiative breaks new ground by recognizing the essential role and contribution of women in preventing violent conflict, stopping war, reconstructing ravaged societies, and sustaining peace in fragile areas around the world.

**Website:** <http://names.emc.com/>

For more information on the organization *Russian Committee on Soldiers' Mothers*, see <http://www.ipb.org/women/russia2.htm#prizes>

