

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Ligue internationale des femmes pour la paix et la liberté
Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad
Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit

Consultative Status with United Nations ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO

Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO and UNICEF

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12 August 2008

Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP
Minister for Defence
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

We are writing on behalf of the Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) concerning the Defence White Paper community consultation process.

WILPF was founded during the First World War by women from both sides of the conflict whose aim was to try to find alternatives to war in order to settle disputes between nation states. WILPF continues today to work for these aims. WILPF has branches throughout Australia and at international level has consultative status with the United Nations.

WILPF has a keen interest in the defence policy review and WILPF members have attended the community consultations in several states. We also intend to make a written submission.

WILPF is very concerned that former Senator Stephen Loosely, who chairs the consultation process, was appointed in March 2008 as a Director to the Board of Thales,

one of Australia's largest arms manufacturing companies. While Mr Loosely may be eminently qualified to occupy this position on the Thales Board, it does raise the question of a conflict of interest between his work in this position and his work as chair of a community consultation process that will influence government decisions regarding defence policy and spending.

As one of our members at the consultation in Canberra raised this question of conflict of interest with Mr Loosely himself, we are aware that Mr Loosely raised this same question with you when you initially invited him to lead the consultation process. However, we are still not convinced that the process is not seriously compromised by the clear conflict of interest.

Since his appointment to the Thales Board does indeed imply that Mr Loosely will have an interest in the promotion of arms sales, in spite of any recommendations which might emerge from these consultations, WILPF considers it inappropriate for Mr Loosely to continue to act as chair of the consultation process as his conflict of interest may serve to undermine any decisions coming out of the consultations.

Although our members will continue to attend consultation meetings in the various states in good faith, we urge you to reconsider the question of Mr Loosely's position as chairman. We respectfully seek from you an explanation as to why his position is not seen as constituting a serious conflict of interest.

We thank you for your kind attention and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Picone and Ruth Russell
Joint National Coordinators