

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

International Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland
Australian Section Office, Adelaide
PO Box 345 Rundle Mall, 5000
(08) 8232 6334 Email: wilpfaustralia@wilpf.org.au



31 January 2008

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

Dear Minister,

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is an international non-government organisation in existence since 1915. Our Australian Section works with many related NGOs to campaign on disarmament, resolution of conflict by non-violent means, sustainable environment and women's rights.

We are writing now on behalf of the Australian Section to congratulate you on the election result of November last year and also to congratulate you on your own appointment as Minister for Defence.

It is our hope that you might consider a gender perspective on defence issues, and, in particular, on defence spending.

WILPF deplored Australia's involvement in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as a partner in the Coalition of the Willing. We were especially alarmed that the Howard Government was willing to participate in such an invasion without a mandate from the UN Security Council.

We welcome your government's recent decision to withdraw Australian troops from Iraq.

WILPF has observed that, during the eleven years of the Howard Government, much has been lost in Australia. We believe that during the Howard years, Australia has moved towards becoming a less community-oriented, less caring and less egalitarian society. We have seen a far greater focus on militarism through increased annual joint training exercises and interoperability with the US and other nations, especially at Shoalwater Bay in Queensland. At the same time, there has been a noticeable increase in the 'glorification of war' through a changed attitude to the commemoration of Anzac Day and other war memorial events with a recent call for community groups to receive Commonwealth grants promoting Anzac Day. WILPF would like to see an equal emphasis given to the commemoration of Australia's excellent role in peacekeeping.

We have also observed that Federal budgets over the time of the Howard Government significantly increased defence expenditure. We noted that expenditure on defence compared with spending on education, health and welfare greatly increased during that time. We consider that this increased expenditure on defence has been disproportionate. In addition, the increased expenditure did not bring added security for Australians.

We hope that the new Labor government will be able to ensure a more balanced Federal budget, one that will restore expenditure on education, health and welfare support. Such a budget will better serve women's needs and interests, and those of their families.

In some cases, the Howard Government's spending on Defence was downright wasteful. We noted, for instance, the former Minister's decision to purchase 24 Super Hornet fighters from Boeing and some 100 Joint Strike Fighters from Lockheed Martin. It has been widely reported that the purchase of these aircraft is scheduled to cost \$22 billion over the next decade. Since many analysts have questioned the appropriateness and adequacy of these particular aircraft for our defence needs, we regard this contract as wasteful. Indeed, it is our sincere hope that you will be able to renegotiate the contract.

We look forward to progress on these important issues over the coming year.

Once again, our best wishes for your appointment as Minister for Defence.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Picone and Ruth Russell
Joint National Coordinators