



WILPF (Australian Section) Annual Report 2008

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This report covers the WILPF year from January to December 2008. In this year, WILPF (Australia) had another year of solid gains, team-building and good campaign work.

We continue with five robust branches in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), New South Wales (NSW), South Australia (SA), Queensland (Qld) and Tasmania (Tas). In Western Australia (WA) and Victoria, efforts have continued during this year to rebuild branches. In WA, Felicity Hill organised an inaugural meeting on 21st June. In most of our branches, regular general meetings are held, usually on a monthly basis. The Blue Mountains group continues as sub-branch of the NSW branch.

Our organisation is staffed both at the national level and at the state branch level entirely by volunteers. During this period, we had no paid staff. Thanks to all the generous women who have devoted much of their time on a volunteer basis to ensure that the work of WILPF can continue.

The national office continued with a postal address in Adelaide where both the National Coordinators were located. Because members of our Section Executive Committee (SEC) live in cities dotted around the country, electronic means of communication continue to be vital. Thus far, teleconference meetings and email are the main forms of communication. The SEC held teleconference meetings at three-monthly intervals throughout the year. We begin our meetings with an opening go-round and an acknowledgement of the traditional owners. Since this was not a year when the three-yearly National Section Meeting was scheduled, the Annual General Meeting was also held by telephone with the SEC members attending.

Since the members of the SEC are elected for a three-year term, the same members served on the SEC this year as last. They were Cathy Picone and Ruth Russell (National Coordinators), Margaret Wood (Treasurer), Mary Ziesak (International Board Delegate), Chris Henderson (Editor of "Peace and Freedom"), Stella Boyages (Assistant Coordinator), and branch delegates: Lyn Lane (ACT), Stefania Siedlecky (NSW), Kate

Parsons (SA), Margot Roe (Tas), and Dragana Zivancevic (Qld). Thanks once again to all the SEC members for your work – much appreciated!

We continued to maintain the WILPF Section members' email list and the Section Executive Committee email list at the website of the Australian Virtual Centre for Women and the Law. In addition, Cathy continued as list-keeper for Pamela's List, an email list for representatives of national women's organisations.

Many thanks once again to our web-keeper, Spiderlily Redgold who has overseen our online communications with characteristic generosity. Spiderlily has continued to keep our website up to date with WILPF publications, letters and submissions. She also presented a Communications Strategy which was accepted by the SEC.

Many thanks to Del Cuddihy for her generous work as Section archivist. Together with Hellen Cooke of the WILPF group in Victoria, Del is a reliable source of information on WILPF history.

In November of the preceding year, a new Australian Government had been elected. After more than a decade of conservative government under John Howard, we were greatly relieved to welcome the election the Rudd Labor Government. Letters of welcome and congratulation were sent to many of the new Cabinet Ministers, and to Senator Claire Moore in Queensland.

Early in this year, Ruth Russell participated in the national nuclear-free strategy meeting in Victoria where she represented WILPF.

Throughout this year, the statements prepared by the International Executive team have been a great boost to WILPF's public profile. We distributed them widely. We also distributed a statement of our own on Survival Day 2008.

Over the past year, we wrote numerous letters to the Australian Government and/or embassies on a variety of topics, for instance: US Missile Defence program; various aspects of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament; UNSCR resolution 1325 about women, peace and security; Aboriginal legal aid funding; changes to the mandatory detention regime for refugees; calling for the promised review of the Federal Government's Intervention in Indigenous Communities in the Northern Territory; the budgetary allocations to climate change; the 13-week suspension of family welfare payments for truancy for Indigenous students; public consultations on any proposal for the siting of a nuclear waste dump; an inquiry concerning the machinery for human rights protection in Australia; arrest and ongoing detention of Baha'i leaders in Iran; and, thanks to Stefania Siedlecky's drafting, two letters on the AusAID Guidelines for Australian assistance for family planning activities. We also sent a letter of solidarity to the Hyogo Council Against A & H Bombs on the thirty-third anniversary of the Kobe Formula, a letter to Quentin Bryce congratulating her on her appointment as Australia's first woman Governor General of Australia, and a letter of solidarity to people on the Peace Boat. These were some of our many letters.

We also wrote a number of submissions to parliamentary enquiries:

- Treasurer's Community Consultation on the 2008 Federal Budget;
- Review Team for the Northern Territory Intervention;
- Defence White Paper;
- Sale of Australian uranium to Russia;
- Accession by the Australian Government to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
- Australian Citizenship Test Review; and the
- Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management (Repeal and Consequential Amendment) Bill 2008.

Following the International Congress in Bolivia, we wrote to the international office and to the Sri Lankan Section with a proposal for a WILPF delegation to visit Sri Lanka. However, in view of the escalating conflict in Sri Lanka, this proposal had to be abandoned.

Two issues of "Peace and Freedom" were prepared by our editorial team: Chris Henderson (Editor), Ruth Russell and Maureen Arnott. Chris, Ruth and Maureen continue to be a great team. Their excellent work on the journal is once again greatly appreciated. In addition, Queensland, NSW, Victoria and South Australia continued to publish branch bulletins. Sincere appreciations and thanks to all the newsletter editors.

In Tasmania since 1983, a group of WILPFers has been producing issues of the newsletter "Peace Priorities"; Carol Mclean (a WILPF member since 1963), Doreen Shenman and Margaret Wood are the mainstay with Joy Gough being a recent past contributor.

During this year, Qld WILPF member Chris Henderson and her colleague, Sue Howard were guest editors for the Volume 17 (number 1) issue of "Redress", the journal of the Association of Women Educators. That issue was devoted to 'peace+women+gender+education' and articles appeared in the issue by WILPF members: Ruth Russell, Mary Ziesak, Margaret Reynolds, Lynne Alice, Winnifred Louis and Rhondda Kelly. Copies of the issue were purchased by the national office and distributed to branches.

Since early 2003, WILPF (Australia) has coordinated a national tour of the "Children of the Gulf War" in response to requests from Australian communities. The exhibition consists of a powerful documentary photographic exhibition consisting of 78 large-format black and white photographs by Hiroshima photojournalist, Takashi Morizumi. During 2008, selections from the collection were displayed by WILPF members or loaned to other peace groups to support a range of events including Hiroshima Day, Palm Sunday, a meeting of local Indigenous peace activists with the Chamoru people from Guam (Guahan), and other smaller events in south-east Queensland.

During this year, we received a grant from the Federal Government through the Women's Leadership and Development Programme to undertake research and produce a discussion paper on the next possible steps for an Australian National Action Plan (NAP) to implement United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325. Subsequently we will organise consultations with a range of non-government organisations and individuals in order to provide practical information, advice and ideas that will inform the government's thinking about the next possible steps for a NAP. Thanks to Felicity Hill for writing our grant application, and to Ruth Russell, Mary Ziesak, Lyn Lane and the other members of the WILPF (Australia) 1325 Taskforce for all their dedicated work on this project.

On October 31st, the ACT branch marked the 8th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325 with the Inaugural ACT 1325 Anniversary Lecture. Approximately 60 people attended to hear Felicity Hill deliver a challenging lecture entitled: "1325: What Would Jane Do?"¹

In April, we celebrated our 93rd birthday with a number of events around the country. On behalf of the Section, the Queensland branch hosted a celebration with over 50 women attending. The ACT branch, thanks to the sponsorship of MLA Mary Porter AM, held a splendid evening's celebration in the ACT Legislative Assembly of which Lyn Lane wrote: "There was general agreement that the atmosphere and spirit of the evening and the attendance were splendid". Three speakers, Janette Condon, Felicity Hill and Dr Glenda Cloughley, addressed the 93rd birthday gathering in Canberra and the Chorus of Women sang.

On 31st May, Eve Masterman's 101st birthday, the Tasmanian branch inaugurated the Eve Masterman Peace Poetry Prize. It was awarded to Kathryn Lomer, a poet of longstanding in Hobart. A photograph of Eve and Kathryn was published in *The Hobart Mercury* with an accompanying article on Eve's achievements over her long life.

Once again this year, WILPF (Australia) presented the prize for the most outstanding student in International Law at Flinders University Law School. This year's prize was awarded to Poppy Rogers-Ross. At the award ceremony, WILPF was represented by SA branch member and Lecturer in Law at Flinders University, Mary Heath.

We were represented at WomenSpeak face-to-face meetings by Lyn Lane and Ruth Russell. We are represented on the WomenSpeak email list by Lyn Lane, Hellen Cooke, Ruth Russell and Cathy Picone.

The Internship Program has once more this year proved to be very successful. With thanks to Margaret Grace, Mary Ziesak and Chris Henderson of our Queensland branch, four interns undertook the program this year, three in partnership with the University of Queensland: Kate Allison, Margaret Freyne and Tanya Negerevich. These young women wrote reports on the WILPF campaign on Economic and Social Justice; UNSCR 1325;

¹ A reference to Jane Addams, founding President of WILPF International.

and WILPF Queensland history. The fourth intern, Sakina Ramic from Sweden, compiled a questionnaire for WILPF Queensland members.

In early March, WILPF branches around the country once again participated in the International Women's Day (IWD) events by carrying our banners in the marches, holding stalls and distributing our membership forms. The invitation from international WILPF for the IWD seminar in Geneva was widely distributed in Australia by the national office. Many members also attended the UNIFEM IWD Breakfasts. In South Australia, the branch held a public workshop entitled "Women Building Bridges: Our Cultures for Peace" where every woman had time to reflect on her "cultural story." One of the Aboriginal women attending the workshop later wrote (in part): "... the feeling in the room was electric and, as one of only two Aboriginal women to attend, I thoroughly enjoyed meeting other women who share the same beliefs."

A number of our branches continued to be centrally involved in Women in Black (WiB). In Tasmania, WiB meets twice monthly in a city park and the very regular attendees are all members of WILPF. In South Australia, most of the attendees are WILPFers. Likewise, in the ACT and Victoria, WILPFers are centrally involved in WiB. This year, through our South Australian branch, we made a donation to the WiB international website of \$100.

In NSW and ACT, WILPF members continue to be active in the Chorus of Women.

With assistance from Anna Yen, the Queensland branch continued their street theatre group, Performers for Peace. The group performed at the IWD Rally in Brisbane, at the United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) National Conference in August, at the Hiroshima Day Commemoration in August and the Just Peace AGM in October. Thanks to all members of the group, but in particular to Anna Yen and to Del Cuddihy for her work as co-ordinator.

At the 2020 Summit in Canberra in April, International Vice President Felicity Hill was a delegate in the section on "Australia's Future Security and Prosperity in a rapidly changing region and world", Qld WILPF member, Mary Graham in the section on "Options for the future of Indigenous Australia", and ACT branch member Janet Hunt in the Governance section. In addition, one of the Section's interns, Kate Allison participated in the Youth Summit. Eight members of the ACT branch and three members of the Qld branch made written submissions relating to issues such as: UNSCR 1325; Australia's future security and prosperity; policy on refugees; the environment, global warming, water, population sustainability; education; and "Creative Industries: A Role for AUSAid and Support for Women in the Global South". WILPFers who made these written submissions were: Margaret Bearlin, Zahira Madeleine Bullock, Ruth Corrigan, Regina McKenzie, Lois McRae, Bobi Meyer, Barbara O'Dwyer, Heather Williams, Kathy Devine and Melody Kemp.

Thanks to Ruth Corrigan and Felicity Hill who generously represented us at the NGO consultation of April 7th with DFAT in the lead-up to the 2008 NPT Preparatory

Committee 28 April - 9 May in Geneva. The national office prepared a written statement for this consultation.

During this year, WILPF members around the country participated in the gatherings “How Non-Aboriginal Women Can Stand in Solidarity with Aboriginal Women and Communities”. These events were organised by the WomenSpeak consortium of which WILPF is a member. The program and presenters were excellent, encouraging women not to feel guilty about racism but to focus on issues. The workshops were well received by all who attended. In June, branches participated in the Reconciliation Week events around the country.

Starting in July and continuing around the country for a couple of months, many WILPF members in our branches participated in the community consultations for the Defence White Paper. Five WILPF women attended the consultation in NSW and Stefania Siedlecky and Margot Pearson spoke; six WILPF women attended in Queensland including Dragana Zivancevic, Joan Shears and Kathy Devine, and asked a number of questions; Hellen Cooke, May Kentish and Alix Nissen spoke in Melbourne; Cathy Picone made a presentation on behalf of the Section in Adelaide; and in Hobart, six WILPFers attended including Past President Bronwen Meredith who “received applause for her diplomatic approach when suggesting that men needed to change their thinking”. In Canberra, five WILPF members spoke: Regina McKenzie, Lulu Respass-Turner, Barbara O’Dwyer, Bobi Meyer and Margaret Bearlin. Many of us asked questions at these consultations on issues related to WILPF’s aims such as: disproportionate government expenditure on Defence; nuclear concerns; UNSCR 1325; global warming as a threat to our security; the environmental footprint of war; humanitarian aid; the build-up of military in the Pacific/Guam; a Department of Peace; the male ethos of the military; the contribution of women to the peace process in Bougainville; Palestine/Gaza; and adequate training for peace keeping missions and the need to adapt defence policies to the new threats to our security. In addition, we wrote to the Minister for Defence about the inappropriateness of his appointment of Stephen Loosley as chair of the process considering Senator Loosley’s well-known links with the arms manufacturing company, Thales.

Thanks to Margaret Bearlin (ACT) and Margot Pearson (NSW), we made a substantial written submission to the Defence White Paper review. We also made extensive efforts to encourage many other individuals and groups to make written submissions to the community consultation process. As one indication of our success in this endeavour, Hellen Cooke estimated that in Victoria alone, forty people made submissions who would otherwise have not.

In August, branches once more marked Hiroshima Day and Nagasaki Day. We also participated in Labor Day marches and rallies, and some of our branches also marked Anzac Day in various ways; for instance, the ACT branch hosted a gathering at the Peace Memorial near the National Library where 13 women attended a time of reflection. Tasmanian branch members also joined with Mines Victims and Clearance Trust to mark Global Day of Action to Ban Cluster Bombs.

On September 21st, we marked International Day of Peace.

At their October meetings, the Queensland and South Australian branches held presentations to mark *Keep Space for Peace Week* (October 4th-12). Through WILPF, Women in Black in Adelaide also wrote their leaflet for September's vigil on the same topic.

In August/ September, WILPF joined with many other peace, faith and community groups in preparing for the protests against the Asia Pacific Defence and Security Exhibition (APDSE), originally scheduled for November 11th, Remembrance Day at the Adelaide Convention Centre. We wrote to *The Adelaide Advertiser* to condemn the insensitivity in the arms consortium's choice of opening day.

Over the months of work on planning the protests against APDSE, Ruth Russell and Cathy Picone participated in many face-to-face meetings of the *Stop the War Fair Coalition* as representatives of WILPF, and in many telephone link-up meetings as well.

WILPF's contributions to the protest activities were singing protest workshops as well as non-violence training workshops. Thanks to SA WILPF member, Mary Heath and to her colleague Vicki Bennett for their generosity in leading the singing protest workshops, and to Mary for her offer of leading the non-violence training workshops.

Peace activists were relieved and jubilant when the Asia Pacific Defence and Security Exhibition was eventually cancelled. *The Southern Cross*, Catholic Church newspaper interviewed Cathy Picone and printed a front page feature concerning - "Cancellation of the Expo". Because SA Deputy Premier Kevin Foley had insulted peace activists by referring to us as "feral-low-life", our SA branch also sent a letter to the Premier's Department about Mr Foley's offensive comments. In addition, the SA branch wrote to the SA Premier about his Government's increasing encouragement of South Australians to become what the Premier calls the "Defence State".

SA WILPF member, Sue Gilbey was the key organiser of the Peace and Remembrance Festival in Adelaide's Elder Park on November 9th. The Festival was a great success. Sue also addressed that gathering.

Many thanks to Margaret Bearlin of the ACT branch, who invested in copies of the DVD, "Scarred Lands, Wounded Lives: the Environmental Footprint of War". After Margaret generously sent copies of the DVD's to the branches, a number of screenings were arranged in the capitals, and others are still happening at the time of writing.

At the WILPF International Board (IB) Meeting in Geneva 20th-24th November, Australia was represented by Mary Ziesak (International Board Delegate), Lyn Lane and Felicity Hill (International Vice President). 86 women from 28 countries attended. Assisted by Audley Green (US Section), Adelia Caravaca (Costa Rica), Noriko Tada (Japan), Martha Jean Baker (UK), Ghazala Anwar (Aotearoa) and Lyn Lane, Mary presented a workshop

on “Racism, Diversity and Conflict Resolution” at the IB Meeting.² Mary also participated in the Resolutions Committee. A day of outstanding seminars was held at the UN Palais de Nation, Geneva. The keynote speech by Cynthia Cockburn, along with the seminar and panel session organised by Felicity Hill at the Palais de Nations, were described by Mary as “awe inspiring”. The resolutions that Mary took to the IB Meeting from our Section were all passed. As part of her work as IB Delegate, Mary distributed regular international updates and other material from the Geneva Office, and participated in many IB internet discussions.

Once more this year, we continued our association with the Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan (SAWA). Through our South Australian branch, we made a donation to SAWA of \$500.

We also made a donation of \$100 towards the Australian Friends of Palestine Association’s newspaper advertisement concerning the Israeli invasion of Gaza.

As usual, WILPFers participated in a large number of marches, protests, rallies, carnivals, public meetings and other events organised by or in conjunction with other groups.³

We warmly congratulate NSW WILPF member, Margaret Holmes, who during this year marked her 100th birthday. Margaret was one of the founding members of the NSW branch and served both as Section and Branch President as well as Australian Section delegate to International Congress.

We were very appreciative of the bequest from the estate of Fleur Finnie, long-time member in the Victorian branch who made a bequest to WILPF in her will. During this year, the SA branch celebrated Fleur’s life with a presentation at their October meeting on Fleur’s book “Don’t Stand on the Grass” about her life, her involvement in WILPF and her professional development as a nurse, nurse educator, and environmentalist.

² Earlier Mary had run a day workshop in Brisbane as a “trial run” for the workshop she presented in Geneva.

³ Groups such as: WomenSpeak, International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Women in Black, Quakers, PANAC, Queensland Nuclear Free Alliance, Alternatives to Violence Project, Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition, Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan, Australian Friends of Palestine, United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) and UNAA Status of Women Committees, NoWar (SA), Palm Sunday Peace rallies and marches, Women in Black, Graham F. Smith Peace Trust, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, Campaign for International Co-operation and Disarmament, Australian Peace Committee, Australian Federation of University Women, Medical Association for the Prevention of War, Medact. Peace Coalition in Tasmania, The Peace Trust of Tasmania, National Council of Women, Union of Australian Women, International Campaign against Nuclear Weapons, Melbourne Peace Convergence Collective, Mornington Peninsular Human Rights Group, Oxfam, Campaign for International Co-operation and Disarmament, Just Peace, Rally for Peace, Multi Faith Centre, Unitarian Church, Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (UQ), Soroptimists International, Redland Greens, International Day of Peace Alliance, Association of Women Educators, Amnesty International, Children by Choice, Older Women’s Network, Social Action Office Brisbane and Believing Women for a Culture of Peace.

With each issue of “Peace and Freedom”, the donation form “Make Your Money Work for World Peace!” continued to be distributed to members. Other fundraising activities continue at the branch level. In Tasmania, Margaret Wood, Audrey Moore and Peg Walter continue to make the Charities Card Shop a great success. Most branches hold stalls at various public events. In South Australia thanks to the work of Cynthia James and others, stalls were held at a large number of events. In Victoria, thanks to Hellen Cooke, funds continue to be raised through the sale of the colourful onya bags as part of the fundraising effort to support the reprinting of *The Quest for Peace* by Eleanor Moore, a founding member of WILPF Australia.⁴ The Tasmanian branch also ran many stalls at a number of public events “to spread the good word on WILPF”. The Queensland branch has also held a number of successful raffles.

Sadly this year we lost a very dear WILPF member. Secretary of the Australian Section during the 1970’s, Lesley Alcorso was a dedicated activist. Many of Lesley’s close friends from WILPF attended the memorial service held at Moorilla Estate, Lesley’s former residence where Lesley’s friend and colleague, Past President Bronwen Meredith, addressed the large gathering both as a friend and representative of WILPF. As a memorial for Lesley, the Tasmanian Branch decided to establish an award for a first-year female student at the Conservatorium of Music.

*Cathy Picone and Ruth Russell
Joint National Coordinators
May 2009*

⁴ Eleanor Moore’s book tells of Australian and world WILPF in context from 1915 to 1948.