

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Australia



Submission by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Australia to the Foreign Policy White Paper Consultations

About WILPF

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), established in 1915, is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) with [National Sections](#) in every continent, an [International Secretariat](#) based in Geneva, and a New York office focused on the work of the United Nations (UN) where we have consultative status (category B). WILPF brings together women from around the world who are united in working for peace and security by non-violent means using existing international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace and security.

As WILPF's Australian Section we have a particular focus on three campaigns: Women Peace and Security, Human Rights, and Disarmament, and on the integration of critical issues across those campaigns as we work with colleagues in the Asia-Pacific region.

Introduction

What is the strategic objective of Australia's foreign policy? What position do we want Australia to hold, particularly in our own region? Do we want Australia to take a leadership position on particular issues? Do we want a transformative foreign policy or do we simply want to reflect the way the world is? What resources do we consider necessary to achieve Australia's objectives?

In a changing world, Australia and WILPF share mutual concerns and objectives. Global cooperation is under pressure at various levels with the isolationist, nationalist attitudes gathering leverage and influence. For example of particular concern to WILPF are the following issues:

- How can we do better in promoting and protecting national interests and values consistent with international and regional responsibilities and commitments?
- How can we work together more effectively to engage and shape global security and development trends?
- How can we strengthen and support our respective priorities as committed players in regional and international organisations?
- How should our international engagement be enhanced to shape effectively and influence transnational challenges, risks and opportunities?

- How can the Australian government work more effectively with NGO sectors, especially on the " PREVENTATIVE" front?

WILPF has experience, expertise and strong commitment across these key issues. In particular two issues of major concern to WILPF, and which Australia could – and should – play a leadership role are the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (in which there are greatly underutilised human resources available) and Disarmament – so that we can truly contribute to a peaceful and stable region.

Women, Peace and Security

In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Behind its adoption lies more than 100 years of women working around the globe for sustainable peace. In 1915, some 1300 women from Europe and North America came together in a Congress of Women to protest the killing and destruction of the First World War. WILPF issued resolutions which remain a relevant and valid platform for creating sustainable peace: preventing war by addressing its root causes, empowering negotiation not violence, and creating peace through equality for all.

Many initiatives have continued throughout history, often on a smaller scale but with the same concerns, the same demands and the same analysis. But the Security Council's formal recognition of the importance of a gender perspective in security policy has not translated into sufficient action over the past 16 years. Women around the world are still advocating, and creating positive change through largely informal processes at their own initiative. It is predominantly civil society that has used SCR 1325 as a tool to organise and take action, to analyse and make recommendations. Civil society has insisted that the participation of women, and the absolute requirement to address all forms of discrimination, is a fundamental part of security. But civil society organisations are not – and should not be -alone in this endeavour.

The Australia Government already plays a significant role in contributing towards the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and the seven more subsequent resolutions which now make up the Women Peace and Security Agenda, with Australia's National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security 2012-2018 (NAP). The NAP consists of four main strategies focusing on Prevention, Participation, Protection, Relief and Recovery.

To date, the Australian Government's approach to WPS has primarily focused on the protection of women in conflict environments and the recruitment and position of women in the Australian Defence Force. WILPF is concerned that the significant role that women can – and do – play in conflict prevention is receiving insufficient attention. Women around the globe are already united in their efforts to prevent violent conflict. WILPF has Sections in 42 countries. In our own region there are organisations such as FemLINKPACIFIC which operates in support of SCR 1325 in Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Bougainville and the

Asia Pacific Women's Alliance for Peace with members in a large number of countries including Philippines, Timor Leste, Myanmar, Indonesia, Nepal, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Australia.

Australia's foreign policy should acknowledge the role these and many other women are playing in resolving and preventing conflict, and in its reoccurrence and in relief and recovery programs and should ensure that their expertise and knowledge are fully utilized and included in all peace processes at all levels. This will ensure a more balanced approach to conflict prevention and reduce the likelihood of the reoccurrence of any conflicts that do arise.

Civil society's equal participation in peace processes, and in particular the implementation of the WPS Agenda, is crucial. The High Level Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 conducted in 2015 noted that civil society was the prime mover behind the original WPS agenda and remains the main driver of this issue at the national, regional and international level and that it is important that these organisations receive adequate funding and support.¹ In Australia, WILPF was the driving force instigating the development of the NAP and one of the key recommendations of the Interim Review on the implementation of the NAP was that support should be provided to Australian and international civil society organisations to promote the roles and address the needs of women in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict².

Disarmament

WILPF believes that disarmament and arms control must always be approached as an imperative for human rights and human security, and for economic, environmental, and social justice. We also apply a gender perspective to our work on weapons and war in order to guarantee security for all and to highlight the full effects arms have on individuals, communities, and societies. WILPF works for disarmament and arms control of many different weapon systems, the reduction of global military spending and militarism, and the investigation of gendered aspects of the impact of weapons and of disarmament processes.

It is a concern to WILPF Australia that Australia's approach to security is viewed heavily through the prism of maintaining and extending military power. The *2016 Defence White Paper*³ argues that this is not to protect us from likely imminent attack, but as part of our interest in supporting the critical role of the US as our most important partner in underpinning security in the region (*2016 Defence White Paper*, p.13, p.15) The problematic

¹ A Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, UN Women, 2015, p395

² Interim Review of the Implementation of Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, 2016, p33

³ Defence Department *2016 Defence White Paper*, Commonwealth of Australia.

outcome of this strategic policy is an increase in our investment in military hardware, and in our military forces, that are designed to be ‘interoperable’ with the US military. In addition, the *2016 Defence White Paper* commits to investing in the expansion of the defence industry in Australia, i.e. arms manufacturing, which will lead to further militarization of our industrial base in peacetime. In all, Australia is joining in a regional arms race over which we will have limited control, if any, and which is most likely to escalate conflict.

At the same time it is of even greater concern that despite Australia’s participation in previous years in multilateral disarmament processes, e.g. the ban on cluster bombs, general support for UN disarmament efforts in the past, including financing the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, such participation is no longer necessarily to be relied on. Over the past few years Australia has opposed a humanitarian-based effort by a majority of UN member states to prohibit all nuclear weapons. We are extremely disappointed that Australia will not participate in negotiations taking place this year to negotiate such a ban. In such a currently volatile international environment we think any initiative to reduce the potential for harm must be supported. Especially this is true for nuclear weapons, which have the potential for catastrophic damage that will be impossible to reverse.

We call on our government to rethink its strategic policy reliance on the US alliance, US military power, and on the accompanying nuclear deterrent. Working cooperatively with all our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region, and taking any opportunities that arise to mediate conflicting interests, is in our best interest.

Conclusion

At WILPF, we believe that the compartmentalisation of human rights, women’s participation, disarmament, justice and development as isolated factors furthers a militaristic approach to international security that leads too often to violence becoming the preferred means of conflict resolution.

WILPF would like to see a reduction in arms generally and a ban on nuclear weapons specifically. We would like to see women playing a greater role in all peace processes. We would like to see Australia play a leading role in all these areas with the ultimate goal of achieving a peaceful and prosperous world.

Contacts:

Barbara O’Dwyer
President
WILPF Australia
bodwyer@tpg.com.au

0404 018 315

Margot Pearson
Vice President
WILPF Australia
margotmp@ozemail.com.au

0410 122 981