What can one woman do to bring about a sustainable global peace?

Stories from Australian women who have a passion for being part of the solution.
Personal actions for peace and freedom in today’s world.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to those past, present and future.
These are stories from women who have a passion for being part of the solution in bringing about peace; women who find a common bond in response to the question they ask of themselves:

**What can I do to help bring about a sustainable peace in the world?**

In many ways this collection and the diversity of the women’s experiences reflects the story of women through the decades since the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was formed in Australia and internationally over one hundred years ago.

Their diverse stories reveal their shared passion and commitment to a feminist peace, and their belief that WILPF provides a means for helping to realise that.

Chris Henderson
President
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Australia
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Susan Harris Rimmer

What would you say to women who want be part of the solution for peace?

The first step for me was feeling empowered by knowledge, learning some history about Greenham Common women, the suffrage vote in Australia, the resistance of First Australian women. People power works.

The second step was doing something small, attending an event, signing a petition, writing to the Minister.

I do feel overwhelmed sometimes, about climate change, reconciliation, consumerism.

Being part of WILPF gives me that feeling of over 100 years of collective courage gently pushing forward.

How did you discover WILPF?

I first found out about WILPF at a Women in Black vigil in Garema Place in Canberra when I was studying at the ANU.

I met wonderful women like Margaret Bearlin and Barb O'Dwyer who inspired me then and now.*

I respect the long history and collective bravery of WILPF, and also the sophistication of the policy positions.
I do feel overwhelmed sometimes, about climate change, reconciliation, consumerism.

Being part of WILPF gives me that feeling of over 100 years of collective courage gently pushing forward.

Tell us a little about yourself.
I live in Brisbane but my home town is Coonabarabran NSW. My age is 47. My career area/area of expertise is as an academic – I am in Griffith Law School, and I am interested in international human rights law, feminist approaches to international law and transitional justice.

Background
Professor Susan Harris Rimmer, an expert in women's rights and international law, is the Director of the Griffith University Policy Innovation Hub. She was involved with the creation of the position of the Global Ambassador for Women and Girls; and supported the creation of the W20 summit in Turkey, and the C20 in Australia (civil society grouping giving policy advice to the G20). She was Australia’s representative to the W20 in Turkey 2015, China 2016 and Germany 2017.

*Margaret Bearlin and Barb O’Dwyer are long-time members of WILPF ACT Branch. Barb O’Dwyer is a current board member and former President of WILPF Australia.
Fiona McAlpine

Finding WILPF (and Young WILPF)

My grandma and mum are both WILPF members, so I grew up in a house where it was assumed that women were strong, equal, and had things to say.

I helped to established YWILPF (Young WILPF) in Australia while I was at university, through which I met some lifelong friends, travel mates, house mates and colleagues. As a representative of YWILPF I got to travel to Sweden and the Netherlands and now have a network of amazing young women doing feminist work around the world.

Opening doors and influencing career

WILPF has opened a lot of doors for me - I have worked as an intern at the UN in New York with...
Pretty much every turn of my career (and social life if we’re being honest) has seen tough and tenacious WILPF women leading the way, speaking truth to power, encouraging me to find mine.

PeaceWomen, and through this work I met WILPF India member Bina Nepram, who I ended up working for in New Delhi for 2 years.

In 2014, me and another young WILPFer from Melbourne launched a startup ethical fashion label in Northeast India working with conflict-affected silk weavers.

This has taken my career in a whole different direction, and I love chatting with younger women about the links between the clothing they choose to wear and their feminist ideals, and how their choices can create real change for women rebuilding communities after armed conflict.

Who has been a main influence when it comes to your peace work?

A massive influence for my peace work would be Binalakshmi Nepram*.

About

Fiona McAlpine, 32. From Melbourne. I’m currently working on projects in Borneo.

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*Binalakshmi Nepram is a WILPF partner and founder of the Manipur Women Gun Survivor Network (MWGSN); a writer whose work is focused on making women, peace and security an issue that is meaningful to people’s lives.
Rebecca Buttenshaw

**What would you say to women who want to be part of the solution for peace?**

Looking at the news and the sad tragic stories we hear every day across the world makes it hard to find peace as we live our lives.

It’s very easy to switch off and focus on our little bubbles that protect us from the sadness outside.

However, it’s still hard to find peace knowing what we do about atrocities and injustices happening around us, yet knowing we’re doing nothing about it.

To find peace, I must do something to act. And when not knowing how to act, you start to look around you to all those already doing something, you talk to them, and find a place for you to begin.

**How did you discover WILPF?**

I first knew of WILPF a few years ago as it’s a big name in the area of women, peace and security.

Quite a few people that were around me in the space of peace and security were involved in WILPF so I knew it had a good reputation and they were working on some interesting issues.

I was fully drawn in when I attended a Brisbane conference and got to meet all the lovely members.

While there, ICAN were there too and they’d brought their Nobel Peace Prize with them and it...
To find peace, I must do something to act.

Look around you to all those already doing something.
Finding WILPF

I first noticed WILPF when we lived in Hobart in the early 90’s. It appeared a well-intentioned and respected club for older ladies, not necessarily something that appealed to me at that time. Fast forward to Adelaide, Tampa and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and things had changed; so when I picked up a WILPF flyer at a no-war rally I was ready to sign up.

Since then I have come to admire the incredible work of WILPF’s founders, as well as the amazing women who have continued their work for peace and social justice down the years.

I love that WILPF is run by women, inviting each of us to find our voice and know we will be heard.

My dream is for the whole world to live in peace and harmony, but until that happens then I will do what little I can to make it a better place.

About

I live in Adelaide, I’m 70 plus, retired with administrative skills and work experience.

“\n\nI love that WILPF is run by women, inviting each of us to find our voice and know we will be heard.\n
\n\n"
When I was a first-year university student, I found out about WILPF by attending a lecture on feminist international relations theory.

I was instantly captured by its work and quickly joined the organisation, pursuing the idea of engaging women working together to create a better future.

As a young person, it’s often overwhelming to think of what our possible future could look like. But WILPF showed me that our understandings of power and security need to include the voices of women – for our collective good.

While I’m still navigating my place in the world, WILPF has given me a supportive network of women I can always turn to – to help me and other girls aspire high and use their voice.

About
I am 21 years old, from Melbourne.

WILPF has given me a **supportive network of women** I can always turn to – to help me and other girls **aspire high** and use their voice.
Through the wonderful world of WILPF I’ve had the opportunity to work with many incredible women, and I’ve done things I would have never thought possible as a small town kid from country Australia.

I followed a strange internet thread one day and ended up co-founding Young WILPF in Australia, interning at PeaceWomen in New York, was a delegate at the Commission on the Status of Women and spoke on gender and small arms at the Human Rights Council in Geneva - just to name a few.

I went on to co-found the Fabric Social, a social enterprise working with women weavers in post conflict North East India. It’s purpose is to encourage feminist-centred supply chains.

Working alongside WILPF women has informed who I am today and I couldn't be more grateful for stumbling across WILPF when I did.

About

I’m 35 years old, from rural Victoria. Currently a student at RMIT studying fashion design and technology.

"Through the wonderful world of WILPF I’ve done things I would have never thought possible as a small town kid from country Australia."
What would you say to women who want to be part of the solution for peace?

For me, it would be to remember the spirit of the suffragettes.

As the suffragette Emma Miller said:

*The world will be what we make it. A fuller, happier and more abundant world is possible for all of us if we are united in efforts.*

The first time I addressed Parliament as a Senator for Queensland I recalled the list of women suffragettes’ concerns. The issues that concerned women and their supporters in the early 20th century are still as real and relevant.

Emma Miller is my own personal hero. She arrived in Brisbane in 1878, and became a key activist of her time who devoted her life to the labour movement. She did not believe that all problems would be solved by women simply accessing the vote. Her legacy was the reminder of the need to fight on.

The women of the suffragette campaigns provided an awesome legacy for all of us, women and men, because we now have the responsibility to maintain a genuine democracy.
The enthusiasm and commitment generated by Emma Miller and her sisters must be reflected in our citizenship and our participation in government.

**How did you discover WILPF?**

I met with WILPF during the Beijing Women’s Conference and I am honoured to be a member.

**Tell us a little about yourself.**

My whole life, the status and pay of carers, the rights of women and everyday Australians, and the battle against poverty and disadvantage were and are core heart issues.

I’ve always been inspired and interested in women’s history and women making history, and the wonderful action of women from across the world bravely working to meet together to speak out for peace.

Historically, the agenda for suffragettes was triggered by the injustice of limited access to the democratic process, and social issues such as working hours, immigration, equal pay, and the impact of change on family values. Many of the suffragettes, including Emma Miller, were deeply involved in the peace movement and the divisive debate about conscription during World War I.

The Daily Standard (a reputable paper of the day, I trust) said of Emma Miller:

*Her enthusiasm and devotion for its ideals were inexhaustible and unquenchable — she truly believed the presence of injustices should have no place in any enlightened community.*

There is a legacy for all of us, **women** and **men**, because now have the **responsibility to maintain a genuine democracy.**

*Claire Moore: a lifelong passionate community advocate.*
These women realised that the opportunities for involvement needed to be seized, and that far from passively waiting for the offer of the gift of political participation, progress could only be achieved by political action.

These lessons of history are real and exceedingly useful.

I always hope to play a part in the spirit of the suffragettes, and this spirit in the women of WILPF.

I’ve always been inspired by the wonderful action of women from across the world bravely working to meet together to speak out for peace.

About

Before entering Federal Parliament:
• Public servant 1980-94.
• State Secretary, Community and Public Sector Union (Qld) 1994-2001.

Born in Toowoomba, Queensland.

While a Labor Senator for Queensland from 2002–2019, Claire represented Australia at many international forums.

Commemorating Hiroshima Day.
Kim Abbey

What would you say to women who want to be part of the solution for peace?

Learn about what you fear most. Understand it so you can navigate it better.

If peace is a journey, then WILPF is the carriage through time.

If you don’t know where to start...

Contact WILPF if you are interested in what we do. WILPF gives you the opportunity to be part of the peace movement, using your unique skills and interests, flexible to your own capability.

Finding WILPF

What prompted me to join WILPF was an open and honest conversation with a WILPF member at a networking event at Government House in Brisbane, that initial warm encounter flourished over time into respect and friendship.

During meetings it is good to feel like “one of the team” regardless the age, race or socio-economic status, I really feel that all people are welcome to join and everyone works hard to encourage one another, to get the best from each other.

At meetings, differing approaches and nuanced perspectives to current political problems are always interesting to hear!
Learn about what you fear most. Understand it so you can navigate it better.

Benefits? A positive moment?

I remember being asked if I would like to attend a WILPF conference in West Africa on only my first or second meeting, this was in stark contrast to other groups I had been a part of whereby these opportunities to participate were just not available.

This positive moment was when I saw proof that I was not just contributing to something, but I was seen as a valued member, someone to be invested in and heard from also.

I love the shared community, opportunity to contribute and longevity of knowledge.

And that’s just some of the benefits I enjoy as a member of WILPF.

Ps: It was great stopping for a moment to reflect on my WILPF journey!

About

From Brisbane. I’m 41. I am a gender specialist currently taking time out to upgrade my skills in evaluation.
This is my story.

I am Somayeh, 36 years old.

I am from Iran and live in Brisbane.

I came to Australia 6 years ago to follow my childhood passion for peace and do my PhD on Peace Education.

In the academic world, I always felt something was missing. I needed connection with real world and real people who take actual steps toward peace building.

In WILPF I found a group of like-minded women who were genuinely concerned about our planet.

I felt like I was back home with them and realised that it does not matter where we are from, what language we speak or what religious or spiritual belief we follow.

We are all women with a common goal building a more peaceful world for all creatures.

“\n
I needed connection with real world and real people who take actual steps toward peace building. I found it in WILPF.”
Irene Gale

Finding WILPF

I have always been very impressed by the thoughtful and dedicated way that WILPF have worked for women’s and people’s rights and for peace, lobbying governments and educating people about how to achieve a decent world for all who live in it.

Besides that, they are a very friendly, caring group – always great to be among.

My story? You might have to cut it to size. 86 years = lots of events!

Here goes:

I grew up, youngest of 8 in a Melbourne family which was politically active.

My grandmother and mother had both been Suffragists in England and my grandfather very actively working for workers’ rights.

*Irene discovered this WILPF USA slogan, and arranged to bring it back to Australia over 40 years ago.*
They came to Australia in the first decade of the 20th century “so that their 7 children could grow up free of the Royal family” and continued their activism here.

Besides worker’s rights, they were active in peace and justice issues.

Before starting school I went with my mother to various women’s meetings: Housewives’ Association, Mother’s Club, Union of Australian Women, etc.

I remember crawling along seats as the 100 or so women argued and discussed various issues.

At one stage it was illegal to hold demonstrations. So the women wore huge aprons with messages painted on them, and walked 6 feet apart.

That way they were NOT a demonstration as they made their way through the city crowds.

Being very shy, I was terrified that I would have to walk 6 feet away from my mother and relieved when I was allowed to walk next to her.

At age 16, I was very proud when asked to carry the flag to lead the enormous Eureka Day parade through Melbourne.

Working in clothing factories saw me very involved in union campaigns for better conditions. My wage for 42 hours a week was 1 pound ($2), and even though prices were much lower than today’s, that was a pittance.

"At one stage it was illegal to hold demonstrations. So the women wore huge aprons with messages painted on them, and walked 6 feet apart.

That way they were NOT a demonstration as they made their way through the city crowds."
New Zealand

At 18, I went to New Zealand, married and had 5 children. As well as worker’s, women’s and children’s issues, I was active in Maori rights actions. This led into anti-Apartheid campaigns.

Adelaide

When we moved to Adelaide in 1971 I joined in the same activities here. I went to a wide range of women’s meetings, since massive campaigns for equality were taking place.

This included some WILPF meetings, though I didn’t join at that stage.

All the different women’s groups worked together on so many issues, we were all friends together. I had joined the Union of Australian Women again.

WILPF California

In 1977 we went to Chicago for 6 months and whilst there we visited a school. In the art department were posters hanging from the rafters which said: “It will be a great day when the air force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber”.

I saw that it was produced by WILPF California, so I wrote to them and ordered 20 copies.

I then sent one to every appropriate women’s group in Australia and New Zealand, suggesting they make copies – but that they’d need to change the wording to say “hold a cake stall” for easier understanding.

It thrills me when I see the tea towels that WILPF sells, based on that poster, still being sold 40 years later.

When we returned to Adelaide in 1978 I joined WILPF and am still a member.
I joined WILPF Australia in 2014 while I was living in Brisbane. WILPF was a way for me to try to act on the links between my feminism and my academic and professional interests in privatised security, militarism, and disarmament (I was writing a PhD at the time).

At the UN

In March 2019, I was fortunate to be supported by WILPF Australia to attend the 63rd Committee on the Status of Women, held at the United Nations in New York.

WILPF advancing feminist peace

I had joined WILPF because of WILPF’s work to address the intersecting oppressions of patriarchy, militarism, and neo-liberalism, so to be able to see WILPF’s efforts to advance a feminist peace at this level was an inspiring opportunity.

The priority theme of CSW 63 was Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Within this, WILPF’s specific focus was Women’s empowerment through advancing political economies of peace and
the rights of women in conflict, which was linked to WILPF’s campaign to #MoveTheMoney from war to gender equality and peace.

**Feminist activism at an international level**

I attended events held within the UN Headquarters as well as civil society discussions held across New York, including at Church Centre, which is where WILPF’s UN office is based. At the UN, I participated in NGO daily briefings, and panels on a range of themes organised by State delegations and members of civil society. I was fortunate to attend the town hall-style meeting with the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, which was moderated by the head of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. As well, I feel privileged to have been chosen to participate in the high-level intergenerational dialogue, where we heard from amazing young people from all over the world.

Outside of the UN Headquarters, civil society actors, including WILPF, arranged events on various topics around the theme. Among many others, I attended WILPF’s launch of the ‘Korea Peace Treaty Now! Women Mobilizing to End the Korean War’, as well as a panel discussion on ‘Masculinity, Militarism, and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda’.

**Connections from around the world**

CSW 63 was an amazing opportunity to participate in feminist activism at the international level, for which I will always be grateful.

“I feel privileged to have been chosen to participate in the high-level intergenerational dialogue, where we heard from amazing young people from all over the world.”
I am inspired by WILPF’s rigorous, thoughtful critique of the intersections between patriarchy, militarism, and neoliberalism.

I feel so lucky to have spent time with other WILPF members from all over the world, some I’d met at the International Congress in Ghana, others for the first time in New York.

These connections, as well as WILPF members’ collective efforts to work towards a sustainable, feminist peace, make me proud to be a member of WILPF and a part of its rich feminist history.

About

I’m an Australian currently living in Manchester, UK, where I work as a researcher for a charity, focusing on human rights, disarmament, and torture prevention.

Background

Board member of WILPF Australia (currently on leave). Formerly researcher and lecturer at the University of Queensland, Australia.
What would you say to women who want to be part of the solution for peace?

Try not to be overwhelmed by it all – just breathe.

No one person can do everything, but we also can’t do nothing, so try and think about it as ‘what is something I can do’, here and now.

And rather than thinking about issues as competing with one another, try to take a step back and consider how it’s all connected.

That’s why small actions can really lead to big impact and vice versa.

Try to break it down and find ‘your people’, those that care about you and the issues, and can have fun whilst doing something that works towards progressive change.

I came across WILPF when I was doing research about feminist activism related to international security, after that I joined Young WILPF.

(pictured above) When you meet your hero you don’t expect her to say: Let’s take a selfie. Lisa Carson with Cynthia Enloe.
...take a step back and consider how it’s all connected.”

To begin it was great to meet face to face with other enthusiastic and fun young people and to feel a sense of solidarity and hope that there are other people out there with similar concerns who want to do something tangible about really important issues- from big to small actions.

I’ve learnt a lot, am continually inspired by what extraordinary women can and are doing when we put our minds to it.

I’ve met people I would have otherwise never crossed paths with.

I’ve learnt an immense amount (and still am) about the art of activism and a genuine sense of solidarity built around a cause across race, age, gender, religion.

What is a positive moment that tells the story of you and WILPF?

Running a campaign to support women fleeing violence in Marawi in the Philippines.

Doing research on young anti-nuclear activists and having the chance to build lifelong connections with them from around the world, all united on eliminating nuclear weapons.

Meeting Cynthia Enloe* and discussing with her how important the work that WILPF does is, after which she asked to take a selfie!

Scheduled to attend the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York (March 2020). Now participating in online events.

Research

My research and activism focuses on social change and the complexities of translating policy into practice at local, national and international levels and better connecting theory with practice.

It crosses boundaries of policy analysis, feminist and gender studies, public management, political science, international relations, institutionalist theory and sociology among others.

About

I’m 31. I joined WILPF when I was 21-22.

I’ve voluntarily co-ordinated Young WILPF for last 4-5 years or more (I can’t remember exactly and would love it to be taken over by someone genuinely younger in their teens).

I live in Melbourne but I’m originally from regional Victoria (King Valley).

*Cynthia Enloe is a well-known feminist writer and theorist best known for her work on gender and militarism.
For me, WILPF provides a unique space where activists across Australia can link together.

I value the way we work together in a caring and collective way, always willing to collaborate and jump into organising!

WILPF brings a much-needed feminist lens to advocacy against militarism and nuclear weapons in Australia.

This is an organisation that presents an uncompromising vision for a more peaceful world.

One of my favourite moments was seeing a WILPF-organised busload of people from Sydney arrive in Canberra for a march urging Australia to join the nuclear weapon ban treaty in September 2018.

For me, WILPF provides a unique space where activists across Australia can link together.
WILPF brings a much-needed feminist lens to advocacy against militarism and nuclear weapons in Australia.

What’s been the impact of winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017?*

Since the wild treaty-negotiating, Nobel Peace Prize-winning ride of 2017, the nuclear disarmament terrain has indelibly changed.

ICAN activists worldwide set to work with a newfound respect and legitimacy, which we used to relentlessly swing the spotlight back to the treaty.

About Gem


WILPF NSW member.

Australian Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) (Australia).

www.icanw.org.au

* In 2017, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons in recognition of our role to achieve the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. WILPF, as an active member of the International Steering Group, worked as part of this movement to ban nuclear weapons.
WILPF's vision is to realise a world free from violence and armed conflict, in which human rights are protected, and women and men are equally empowered at the local, national and international levels.

We invite you to join with us to help achieve this and create the future you want.

WILPF Australia

www.wilpf.org.au

“We address the root causes of violence through a feminist lens”
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