

Voices of African Women



Panelists Mawete Vo Teka Sala (Angola), Khadiga Hussein (Sudan), Katrina Gass (UK), Alice Ukoko (Nigeria), Annie Matundu-Mbambi (D.R.Congo).

In November 2008, women from Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Nigeria and Sudan came together in London with activists and supporters of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, diaspora organisations and other groups to raise their concerns about Africa. The following declaration was drafted by these women.

Support the voices of these African women and enable Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to raise their demands with decision makers, including the international community, national governments and non-governmental agencies. On 28 April 2009, WILPF presented this declaration to the Prime Minister of the UK, and later to the UK Department for International Development, African embassies and other stakeholders. Signatures are still welcome at www.wilpf.plushost.co.uk; click on Voices of African Women in menu.

Petition:

We women of Africa from Angola, DR Congo, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe, together with activists and supporters from UK WILPF and diaspora organisations, aware of the negative consequences of neo-colonisation in Africa, have gathered in London in November 2008 to voice our concerns. We take this opportunity to ask the general public for their support and to raise our demands to decision-makers including the international community, national governments and non-governmental agencies.

We demand:

1. Stop the support of oppressive regimes and call for effective governance from African governments by ending interference from multinational corporations and foreign governments.
2. Free and fully participatory elections, accountability and the imposition of sanctions against governments elected by fraudulent means.
3. The role of foreign electoral observers should not be used to legitimise authoritarian regimes in Africa
4. An effective and transparent process to monitor and expose the role of international financial institutions and governments in promoting and facilitating corruption in Africa.
5. End the proliferation of small arms and foreign military bases on Africa's soil.
6. Security, safety and basic human rights for all women, especially Articles 3, 17, 18, 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to be fully implemented by African governments.
7. A UN special fund for the implementation of women's rights and empowerment of civil society.

8. A mechanism that ensures resources are made available to civil society women's organisations by national governments.

9. National consultations with civil society women's organisations before any national law affecting women is passed.

10. The African Union establish effective monitoring and participatory instruments to be duplicated in each African country overseeing the implementation of regional and international legal frameworks protecting women's rights.

11. The immediate release of African women political prisoners and activists and an end to the unlawful and false imprisonment of African women across the continent.

12. Stronger punishment for the crimes of rape and other forms of violence against women, particularly in situations of conflict and call for African governments and other agents to invoke UN SCR 1820.

13. Food security be made a matter of national security and the recognition of the fundamental role played by African women in agriculture.

14. The participation of African women in conflict prevention, mediation during conflict and post-conflict peace-building as stated in UN SCR 1325 and during constitution drafting.

15. The end of the privatisation of public services including health, education, water and transportation and to make it the responsibility of national governments.

16. An end to the illegal exploitation of African resources by multinational corporations and foreign governments and the role they play in the destruction of our environment and ecosystems. We call for better health and safety regulations in Africa.

Migrant workers in Costa Rica

WILPF/LIMPAL provides a forum

Adilia Caravaca, Costa Rica

As part of its ongoing effort to assist migrants, WILPF-Costa Rica sponsored a meeting in September 2008 to provide a safe space for migrant women to discuss their concerns. The meeting, which drew individual migrants as well as researchers in anthropology and sociology, offered a great opportunity for the women to exchange experiences, to strengthen their capacity to deal with difficulties surrounding their legal status and to confront discrimination.



Laura Paniagua from the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales

Speakers from WILPF and academic institutes sparked enthusiastic response from the 38 participants, mostly Nicaraguans and Colombians. All joined in discussions, theater work and painting. Grupo Mandinga's lively samba and salsa rhythms set the mood for dancing. A highlight was a video reflecting research on the indigenous groups migrating between Panama and Costa Rica. The documentary depicted migrants' lives on the coffee-picking plantations, calling attention to the degree of exploitation they suffer and the need to expand solidarity work.

Presentations and discussions touched on the difficulties faced by migrants trying to legalize their status due to the high cost of legal services and the requirement for certain documents from their country of origin, which are often difficult to obtain.

Lacking legal status makes them vulnerable to workplace exploitation, and so far the labor unions have failed to show solidarity by responding to

migrants' needs. Connecting with International Labor Organisation resources is seen as a window of hope. Participants, who included representatives of migrant women's organizations, agreed on the importance of following up in the areas of legalization of migratory status and strengthening their organizations to confront discrimination in the workplace. WILPF-Costa Rica is most willing to continue its support.



Germano and Jano from the group, Mandinga

Our WILPF Section hosted, along with the Friends Peace Center, the Latin American Conference Against the Use of Depleted Uranium. This event in early March 2009 drew media attention and helped spread the word about remediation and prevention efforts around the world and at the United Nations. For more on this international effort with a presence in 24 countries, see www.reachingcriticalwill.org.



Participants placed emphasis on legalisation of migratory status and confronting workplace discrimination.

Y-WILPF, the international network for new and younger members of WILPF initiated at the 2005 International Board meeting, was very much in evidence at the November 2008 IB meeting in Geneva. After focusing on WILPF history and culture in the opening day's Gertrude Baer seminar, the women took part in the discussions and presentations of the International Board sessions. They also met separately to share experiences and develop plans for action, and afterwards did some socialising.

They reported at the closing day's business meeting that they see themselves as very much a part of the overall organisation. Following up on their action plan proposed in 2006, they set goals for building Y-WILPF and WILPF.

The international board had suggested actions to empower young women inside and outside WILPF to participate at all levels of the organisation. Developing leadership for the future is a priority for Y-WILPF. Ella Page, who attended the 2006 IB meeting in London, came onto the UK executive committee to represent Y-WILPF that year. In March 2009 she became a UK vice president, turning over the Y-WILPF organizing in the UK to Talyn Rahman.

Following the November 2008 IB meeting in Geneva, Robin Rose returned to the U.S. to an internship in the Boston office and participated in the national congress. She presented a work plan for Y-WILPF in the form of a pyramid, the lower levels showing steps to organizing and taking action. At the top of the pyramid – World Peace.

Internships have provided a path to participation in WILPF and also to later jobs with NGOs, academic think tanks, intergovernmental agencies and governments. Internships in the Geneva office are open to young women who wish to learn more about the work of our organisation. Information about the internships is on www.wilpf.int.ch/interns/index.htm.

The 2009 annual intern in the Geneva headquarters is Ilse Wermink. Short term interns throughout the year include: Sofia Ek, Maria Jomaa, Esra Ekip, Mira von Greback, Tove Ivergard, Dagmar Holscher, Elin Hagberg, Ilana Harkin, Katherin Machalek, Linda Machata and Hadil Zainal.

WILPF's UN office in New York City also accepts interns, at present Kristina Mader, Stephanie Thogerson, Clara Donadello and Lacy Orme. [See www.peacewomen.org/frame/internship.html or www.reachingcriticalwill.org/action/internsummer.html].

For more general work in the UN Office, email to [wilpfun\[at\]jgc.org](mailto:wilpfun[at]jgc.org) using the subject heading UNO Internships.

In the several years that it has been in operation, the Swedish internship program has allowed for two young women at a time to work for WILPF in the Stockholm, Geneva or New York office for six-month periods.

Former interns organised a campaign against cluster munitions, working with Katherine Harrison, a former international WILPF intern now representing Landmine Action in Geneva. They obtained a foundation grant of \$1,000 to print their resulting 16-page report and presented their information in a seminar. Theresa Höghammar, Josefine Karlsson, Amila Konjhodzic, Jenny Senemgen, Hedvig Feltelius, Julia Eriksson, Caroline Teir, Camilla Riesenfeld, Helena Hermansson, Pamela Mora Quevedo, Elin Hedqvist, Alexandra Sundberg and Sofia Ek took part. Now they are planning an empowerment event to talk about peace and security politics.

Y-WILPF has contact people in Lebanon, Albania, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sri Lanka, the UK, Italy, Germany, Canada and the United States.

Information from Josefine Karlsson, Robin Rose, Talyn Rahman, Jessica Bombassaro-Brady



Gathered in Geneva for the November 2008 meeting: Back row, from left to right, Anissa Abouzaki (Lebanon), Saba Nowzari (Sweden), Nouria Ali-Tani (Germany), Ingabire Siliacus (Rwanda), Ella Page (UK), Robin Rose (U.S.) and Joy Onyesoh (Nigeria). Front row left to right, Monika Kinkel (U.S.), Emma Rosengren (Sweden), Josefin Lind (Sweden) and Sasha Jespersen (UK).

Travel fund for young WILPFers

WILPF's board has asked national sections to commit to prioritise funding for young women to attend international WILPF meetings – to ensure that 30% of the participants in all international meetings be under the age of 30. Kay Camp, a former international president, left a bequest to the Jane Addams Peace Association to encourage young WILPF women to attend international WILPF meetings or meetings sponsored by WILPF. For details, contact [japa\(at\)jgc.org](mailto:japa(at)jgc.org).

Peace, yes please!

An information project

Pia Johansson

In 2008 the Swedish section of WILPF (IKFF, Internationella Kvinnoförbundet för Fred och Frihet) began a long-term project to help high school students gain a deeper understanding of armed conflicts around the globe. We are working with 600 students in three high schools in the Stockholm area.

Together we look into the underlying causes of conflict, initiatives to prevent or resolve these conflicts, peace agreements and the issue of sustainable peace. Recent examples of armed conflicts in the world help to illustrate and clarify the complex picture we aim to provide. We use film clips, slide shows, guest speakers and visits to organizations working in the field of peace and development. These have included the United Nations Association and an accompaniment program working in Hebron.

One of the exercises we use to stimulate discussion is the 'hot seat'. Students sit in chairs in a large circle. A discussion leader reads aloud statements on peace and conflict. [Conflicts in other parts of the world don't concern me, My opinions matter, My work for peace will have an impact, I feel safe ... and so on.] If students agree with the statement they swap chairs. This will usually get the discussion started.

In a role-playing exercise, each student gets a note describing a character (for instance, a Palestinian girl in Gaza, or a UN soldier in Afghanistan) and then moves forward or back in response to statements on sense of security.

Our program grew out of a previous project in which we learned that young people seemed to lack general knowledge about armed conflict and security issues. A key reason for this is the media's failure to present armed conflicts in an analytical way that young people can relate to and understand. Instead, the conflicts are typically presented as irrational and isolated events, erupting suddenly out of nowhere.

But we who work with the peace issue on a daily basis know that the outbreak of conflict is often preceded by a lengthy sequence of events and complex underlying causes. This is important to IKFF, in our focus on prevention of armed conflicts. We believe that space must be given for in-depth study of causation.

Moreover, public reporting from communities on the brink of war, armed conflicts, and post-conflict situations often lack adequate gender perspective. Usually, it is the men's story that is told. Women, when mentioned, are not uncommonly presented as passive victims rather than as subjects and actors. IKFF has always acted to highlight the unique and important experiences women have of armed conflicts, and how these can and should be used to create conditions for sustainable peace.

When an armed conflict draws to a close, when the peace agreements are negotiated and structures



Photo and artwork by Lovisa Elwerdotter, with layout by Emma Rosengren and Pia Johansson

created for the post-conflict society to function, the media often ceases reporting. This is unfortunate. When a country signs a peace treaty this does not of course automatically mean that all people live in peace and security. It is necessary to rebuild communities and trust among the people.

The consequences of representing conflicts as inexplicable outbreaks without a prelude or an end can be devastating. The lack of deeper conflict analysis spreads ignorance on how to respond appropriately to a conflict. Even worse, it could also spread an unwillingness to act to prevent a conflict – given the impression that it occurs suddenly with no special reason. We present the importance of developing a functional civil society for stability.

The need to adopt a gender perspective when discussing peace, security and conflict in high schools, is extremely important. We have so far, among the students we visited, found that the gender issue does not seem to have high priority in education. Though most questions on why we are focusing on women come from boys, they have also come from teachers. There is a thin line to walk, not to end up in a situation where the discussion focuses on women as victims only and not as active actors. It is obvious that working for peace must go hand in hand with the implementation of gender awareness. But we have a long way to go, since there seems to be a backlash concerning gender issues today.

Students do understand what increased militarization might lead to, and express appreciation over the work IKFF does through this information project. But this does not mean that the question is fully implemented. There is still a clash between those who consider peace missions to be a solely military task, and those who consider peace building as a long-term job to be done by the civil society.

In the long run I am hopeful, and I think that Peace, yes please! is contributing to a wider understanding and perspective on peace and security.

Pia Johansson is the information officer for IKFF.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is the oldest women's peace organization in the world. It was founded in April 1915, in the Hague, the Netherlands, by some 1,300 women from Europe and North America, from countries at war against each other and neutral ones, who came together in a Congress of Women to protest the killing and destruction of the war then raging in Europe. WILPF is an international non governmental organization (NGO) with National Sections in 37 countries, covering all continents. Its International Secretariat is based in Geneva and maintains a New York UN office. Its aims and principles are:

- to bring together women of different political beliefs and philosophies who are united in their determination to study, make known and help abolish the causes and the legitimization of war;
- to work toward world peace; total and universal disarmament; the abolition of violence and coercion in the settlement of conflict and its replacement in every case by negotiation and conciliation;
- to support the civil society to democratize the United Nations system;
- to support the continuous development and implementation of international and humanitarian law;
- to promote political and social equality and economic equity;
- to contribute toward co-operation among all people;
- to enhance environmentally sustainable development.

