

Statement on the Killing of Osama bin Laden

As a women's peace organization, WILPF deplores the killing of civilians and violation of rights (particularly women's rights) by bin Laden and his followers: inter alia, attacks in Africa, Pakistan, Indonesia, the UK, and of course the 9/11 attack on the USA. It is crucial that non-state actors should be held accountable for crimes against humanity and that all States uphold this principle.

WILPF does, however, condemn the way in which so called Justice has been meted out in the killing of Osama bin Laden.

What is "Justice"? It's a concept that has been used broadly and means many things to different people. It contains within it the principles of equity, equality, and inclusiveness. International law in its various forms is a tool to enable Justice to be effected. The idea of the State being responsible for the administration of Justice was, in part, to take emotive responses out of the reckoning and to replace it with law, to be objectively and impartially applied. The development of international law, including the laws of war, international humanitarian law, and human rights law, has the aim of ensuring that States and their governments are subject to the same restraints and to ensure that there are controls, even, and especially, in times of conflict.

Since 9/11, and now with the killing of Bin Laden and the apparent attempts by NATO to kill Gadafi, Justice has been reverted to negative reciprocity, including revenge, retaliation, and punishment. It was the justification by President Bush for waging war in Afghanistan and Iraq: to bring the enemy to justice. On Sunday, [President Obama termed the killing of bin Laden](#) as a moment of justice and therefore of "healing."

As a matter of law, the US is not entitled to carry out what is in effect an extra judicial killing. There are circumstances when the death of a person resisting capture can be legal but the onus should have been on capture, not killing. Most unfortunate is that there wasn't even an attempt to argue that point. The decision had been made that he should die and so he did, and according to the US government, that is Justice. This notion of Justice is to pervert it. As Karin Greenberg wrote in the Guardian:

Under the rubric of fighting terror, the United States rolled back its hallowed notions of civil liberties, its embrace of modernity, and even its reliance on its own courts. We delved into medieval-style [torture](#), we reneged on our courts as a viable option for trying terrorists, and we blindly took aim at a religion, rather than its disaffected hijackers.

Furthermore, this event will not change the reality of people in war torn Afghanistan or Pakistan. It will, however, affect political and diplomatic relations with these countries. It should prompt a rethinking of the foreign troops in these territories and a change in the discourse and language on the global war on terror.

WILPF has argued before that the wars on terror, on Libya, and in Afghanistan, which are causing the deaths and impoverishment of thousands of people, are bringing our international legal framework into disrepute. Without law, the best armed, the richest, and the most ruthless will be omnipotent and in the end, the arms industry will be the only beneficiary.

If the United Nations is to mean anything then it must not stay silent in the face of its increasing marginalization. The UN is its Member States—all of them, not just the members of the Security Council. Many of these States are concerned at the demise of legal frameworks. And so are the people of the world. As WILPF's US Section noted in their statement on the killing of bin Laden:

WILPF works to end ALL forms of violence, and to establish those political, social, and psychological conditions which assure peace, freedom, and justice for all, including those whose acts we deplore. As peace women we loudly proclaim that any effort to overcome evil with evil is the unequivocal path towards perpetuating human suffering, and we question how the extrajudicial killing of any person benefits democracy or is good for the cause of advancing peace and freedom.

Over the years, the international community has created many robust legal frameworks, and there is consistent interest in strengthening these. There are monitoring mechanisms, courts on human rights, courts on international criminal law, and there is the ballot box. Stopping States from refusing to comply with their legal obligations involves everyone using what we have at our disposal to bring us back to a rule of law and justice. Democracies elect governments that spend tax payers' money. When they become militarized and belligerent, it takes financing away from health care, education, and so on. Women are disproportionately affected by such policies.

We should care when civilians in other countries are killed in our name. There are many who have rejoiced at the death of bin Laden, but as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so convincingly put it, "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."