

A Climate of fear: Issues for women across Europe

Spring of 2016

A summary of deliberations: WILPF representatives from 11 European Countries

3rd – 5th March 2016. Brussels

A small group of WILPF members from 11 countries met informally to consider the political and practical impact of the wars in Syria and Iraq on refugees and European hosts. We were joined by sisters from Lebanon and Bosnia. We here present a summary of our deliberations for WILPF members in other parts of the world, as a women's perspective and to safeguard us against media manipulation and partial presentation of the facts.

Background to WILPF campaigning in Europe. Between 1914 and 1945, Europeans were plagued by wars and displacement. Refugees were driven across Europe by warring states. Since the end of the Second World War, the creation of the European Union has created a forum to resolve differences and prevent wars. We developed principles of the Free Movement of Labour. We had moved towards protection of all civilians through the implementation of International Law. We know that other women have had similar experiences in other parts of the world and that we require solidarity from all women's groups, including WILPF, to ensure that the United Nations retains a role in Peace Keeping and agreed International legal principles.

We offer these impressions of the European situation for women:

- The situation now has to be seen in the context of Climate Change and scarce natural resources.
- The impact of the civil war in Syria and introduction of new European border controls has created an unacceptable humanitarian outrage, where people fleeing from war are humiliated and blocked from reaching safety. . They are being denied protection
- The States across Europe are developing closed border militarised responses
- The Arms Trade is being further expanded and militias and private, unaccountable "Security Guards" are receiving arms from outside the EU as well as from national governments. The funders need to be identified

- International Protective Regulation is being challenged by States and weakened or replaced by “Voluntary adoption of standards” called “The Ruggie Principles”, which are not binding, simply “Soft “ European agreements
- The financial and labour (jobs) crisis is driving fear of “The Other”, national protectionism. This is being encouraged by the media as a Culture of Fear
- The politics of fear is driving New Right alliances, with resulting xenophobia, and racism evident locally and nationally. This is impacting on women’s rights.
- Climate Justice is not taken seriously by many states, so there seems to be inadequate planning for Climate Refugees as crops fail and there are water shortages and or floods
- The Sustainable Development Goals seem to be being ignored in the face of immediate examples of inequality from the impact of the conflicts in the Middle East
- There is confusion about ethical and legal liability for “extra-territorial” traders – including the extractive and arms industries, with multi-national companies refusing responsibility for the impact of their product on any one population outside the nation of product origin.
- Women suffer from disregard of their human rights in these workplace situations and as refugees seeking safe asylum

Request to WILPF women worldwide:

We ask that you:

Discuss the implications of this situation in Europe within your Sections and groups.

1. Promote global solidarity with Global international Refugee Pledges
2. Collaborate on demanding a strong legal framework on extraterritorial responsibility – corporate and inter- state social responsibilities- a Treaty of Transnational Corporations
3. Promote the ideal of Women Without Borders as part of gender mainstreaming of all policies
4. Challenge the Climate of Fear and move towards a Culture of Hope.

Lydia Meryll , For the working group of European Women WILPF Brussels March 2016