Stories of Feminist Peace 2019
Sometimes people mistakenly think that we, as a women’s organisation, are solely advocating for women’s rights. But that is not the case. At Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, we are working for a just peace – what we call a feminist peace – that serves everyone, no matter how we identify or where we are born.

In 2019, WILPF members around the world made strides in the global movement for change – a movement that is working to build feminist peace for all and a brighter future for the next generation, and the next.

In this year’s unique annual report, we are proud to highlight the impact WILPF members created in 2019 by sharing some of their powerful stories of change.

I deeply appreciate all sisters participating in and leading WILPF Sections around the world, who are working committedly on the Women, Peace and Security agenda. I recognise the fact that some of us are working under difficult and life-threatening circumstances, and that we have kept the WILPF spirit alive despite the challenges we face.

Sustaining peace requires consistent and committed political will to move out of our comfort zone and challenge dominant narratives on gender, conflict analysis and power. In doing this work, you, my sisters, are all heroines of peace.

More than ever, I am so proud to be part of this amazing global movement of women pushing boundaries on peace building and taking a formidable stand on ensuring that feminist peace is entrenched as a framework for a just and inclusive world.

For over a century, we have consistently shown the difference feminist peace makes in the world. We have reflected, sacrificed and compromised to ensure we are each living the values we uphold, and we have worked hard to move forward as a united team despite the distances between us. The challenges we have faced in 2020 with the escalation of COVID-19 have underscored more than ever the fact that we are all interdependent – as an organisation, and as people – and the need to keep pushing for our collective interests.

From east to west and from north to south, our message rings loud and clear: we are focused on shifting realities and entrenching a new normal which recognises that equality matters and is central to sustainable peace. We are creating bridges and spaces for discussion so that women can play their rightful role in decision-making and help shape the responses that affect their communities and lives.

As we continue to pursue change in a changed world, we are committed to using our core strengths – feminist analysis and advocacy promoted by a feminist community – to tackle issues of patriarchy, militarism and neoliberalism.

The task ahead is daunting, but we know that we have consistently risen to challenges and pushed through barriers that seemed insurmountable. Thank you for your dedication, your compassion and your commitment to our mission as we continue to keep the WILPF spirit alive in pursuit of a better world.

Joy Ada Onyesoh, Ph.D
International President, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
2019 was marked by a constant daily struggle for peace, to build movements and to demand participation and justice. And we made progress – some. But still we are not at peace. Not within communities, states, internationally or within ourselves. Nor are we at peace with our planet. The structures we have created and which dominate our interactions on all levels are still those of patriarchy.

Until that is changed, peace will be impossible to achieve.

Fundamental change – change built on the feminist principles of peace and justice, which permeate the very essence of how we organise our interactions – is the principle aim of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. At the very core of feminist peace are a commitment to care and a shared belief in our common humanity – both of which are needed now more than ever.

On these pages, we look back on the progress that was made in 2019 and how different strands of feminist peace were built through WILPF stories from around the world. These stories are snapshots of the realities that WILPF members and partners address in seeking change on a daily basis.

From Syria to Colombia, the Korean Peninsula to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in 2019 WILPF members were part of a movement for change: on climate, against violence, against militarism and for peace, standing with one another in solidarity as a powerful, global movement.

As I write this in mid-2020, we have found ourselves living in a different world in so many ways. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic will have differentiated effects on women, and long-lasting effects on society, peace and security. The crisis has exposed the fault lines that WILPF has been uncovering throughout our history. Our political economy work has underlined how capitalism and the ideology of neoliberalism have devastated the structures which should ensure cooperation and solidarity.

We have shown how militarisation as a way of thought has diverted resources away from crucial areas where they should have been directed, and the inevitable impact that this has had on the world’s ability to address the crisis.

"NONE OF THIS WORK WOULD BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT OUR WORLDWIDE COMMUNITY OF PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS."

We know that activism works to create change. And we know that any emergency presents an opportunity to pursue that change. As we move forward, we plan to redouble our efforts, resolute in our transformative vision.

Slowly, we will keep making progress. In 2019, that progress was achieved by building capacity through experience and knowledge sharing between countries, increasing linkages and networks with like-minded groups and the academic community and creating spaces for women to engage at the national and international levels.

None of this work would be possible without our worldwide community of partners and supporters. To each and every champion of WILPF and the vision we share, thank you for being by our side on this journey – demonstrating, advocating, sharing, speaking, donating.

Together, we will change the world.

Madeleine Rees
Secretary-General, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
2019 IN NUMBERS

26,196 followers

34,227 followers

1,522 followers

528 subscribers

9 thematic publications & guides

25 webinar sessions

88 newsletters sent

12,838 newsletter subscribers
WORK AREAS

**Build the Movement**

Women are our greatest strength. We are more than half of the world’s population, we are an enormous global constituency. WILPF maintains and builds this network as a safe and inclusive organisation, using it to advance ideas and create momentum for change.

**Redefine Security**

WILPF rejects the idea that security is synonymous with military strength. We believe that real security can only be achieved through a shift to a different political economy with investment in environmental protection, social and economic rights, moving money from the machinery of war to the foundations of peace.

**Leverage Feminist Perspectives on Peace**

In a patriarchal world, the feminist perspective has been missing from discussions on conflict, sustainability, and more. WILPF develops and amplifies feminist perspectives on root causes and promotes them on the international and national policy agenda. In doing so, we advance the cause of peace.

**Promote Socio-Economic Justice**

Neoliberalism has brought us inequality, exclusion, and environmental destruction. Its very nature makes it an obstacle to peace and justice. WILPF analyses, raises awareness, and advocates for alternatives to neoliberalism. Lasting peace requires fairer economic systems and protection of people and planet.
Speaking Truth to Power

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, women have long fought for inclusion in peace-building efforts and improved social, economic and political participation. Following years of government inaction and inadequate attempts to advance women’s rights and representation, in 2019 WILPF DRC took steps toward positive change by speaking truth to power.

Women living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) face constant threats to their health and well-being and an uphill battle when it comes to achieving equality and inclusion.

High rates of armed violence, sexual violence, child marriage, maternal mortality and human trafficking, as well as the disproportionate impact of HIV prevalence, food insecurity and poverty, are just a few of the factors contributing to profoundly challenging circumstances for women in the country.

Despite the hardships they face, women are dramatically underrepresented in peace-building processes and political institutions in the DRC, comprising just seven per cent of positions at the highest levels of government – a reality that continues to severely compromise women’s progress toward a brighter future.

But in 2019, a new chapter opened up in the fight for justice and equality for Congolese women through the work of WILPF DRC, which has been actively advocating for women’s advancement and social, economic and political participation since 2007.
Playing a critical consultative role in the development of the country’s second National Action Plan (NAP) to drive progress for women and ensure their representation in peace efforts, in 2019 WILPF DRC helped usher in fresh momentum to commitments for women’s inclusion in the nation.

Looking back: A long journey toward progress

In 2010, the DRC developed its first National Action Plan to implement United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) – a landmark resolution that recognises the critical role of women in advancing peace efforts and the importance of their equal participation and representation in all activities related to peace and security.

The plan was years overdue. It came a full decade after the adoption of UNSCR 1325 and seven years after the end of the DRC’s civil war, during which countless women suffered the immediate and long-term impacts of mass rape – which was frequently used as a weapon of war.

And despite the progress that had seemingly been made with the launch of the NAP, little action was taken to implement it. Stalled by a lack of political will and funding, and further held back by the impacts of ongoing insecurity in post-conflict DRC, women’s levels of participation in peace dialogues continued to be low.

Advocating for justice

The first NAP also suffered from several critical oversights.

One key example was its failure to address the flow of small arms and light weapons as a major contributor to the country’s continued insecurity, despite their proliferation being linked to increased violence against women.

Recognising the urgent need for the next NAP to include action on the flow of arms into and within the country, in 2018 – when discussions got underway for the development of a second generation NAP, which is now on track for implementation by 2022 – WILPF DRC’s President, Annie Matundu-Mbambi, brought a gender analysis of arms to the table and succeeded in securing disarmament as one of the key objectives of the renewed plan.

“Nothing is more gratifying than to see a life change, a right be recognised or behaviour harmful to the development of women be banished as a result of our work in the field. Added to this is our passion for peace; the latter to be taken as a state of mind.”

Annie Matundu-Mbambi, WILPF DRC President
The next big hurdle: Advancing awareness and outreach

Although the work itself represents a significant step forward for women’s rights and participation in the DRC, if women themselves are unaware of the policies being enacted then how can they possibly benefit – let alone participate?

To ensure women and women’s rights organisations were aware of and included in the development of recommendations for the second NAP and its implementation on the ground, WILPF DRC brought together representatives from universities, civil society organisations, ministries, the army and the police to engage in conversations about UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plan.

These knowledge sharing sessions were carried out everywhere, from Kinshasa, DRC to Geneva, Switzerland and Yaoundé, Cameroon – impacting women both within and beyond the borders of the DRC.

In Yaoundé, this meant sharing strategies and lessons learned with other WILPF Sections across Africa for advancing peace building and women’s contributions to conflict prevention and resolution. In May 2019, experienced women peace activists gathered for a regional meeting, representing 14 countries across the continent.
In Geneva, members of WILPF DRC, together with the WILPF Human Rights team, discussed the use of different human rights mechanisms for accountability. These lessons were then applied in international spaces like the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the DRC.

**Drawing international attention to local concerns**

WILPF DRC’s submissions to the CEDAW and UPR shed light on failures of the government to uphold existing laws for gender parity, pointing out irregularities in action and funding. They also leveraged gender perspectives to the small arms flow and pointed out the human rights violations against women working in artisanal mines.

Sandra Ngoy Boyoo, WILPF DRC’s youth coordinator, spoke to various representatives in embassies in Geneva and at informal lunch meetings. Thanks to these meetings, both the UPR and CEDAW processes included recommendations and remarks that directly echoed those of WILPF DRC.

For example, due to the CEDAW Committee’s line of questioning, the DRC’s Minister of Human Rights had to publicly acknowledge that the 30% quota for women’s participation in the law on the implementation of women’s rights declared by the Supreme Court of Justice of DRC (at the time) was unconstitutional and discriminatory. WILPF DRC was particularly pleased about this acknowledgement, since it meant that Congolese authorities publicly recognised their own failure to implement legal quotas and advance women’s participation in decision-making bodies.

Drawing widespread attention to women’s rights issues in the DRC also empowered more Congolese women to step forward and raise their voices for change.
“It was a source of pride that through our international advocacy, several thousand Congolese women expressed their concerns and their desire for change.”

Sandra Ngoy Boyoo, WILPF DRC’s youth coordinator

Small victories, big impact

No victory, big or small, comes easily. Insufficient and irregular funding are major barriers in the ability of grassroots organisations to continue their work. A significant amount of effort is required of WILPF DRC’s members, who carry out the majority of their actions on a voluntary basis. With even a five-minute speech to policymakers often requiring months of planning, time is always at a premium.

Despite the uphill struggles they face every day, our fierce peace activists prevail, speaking truth to power and demonstrating that advancing peace and women’s rights are part of an ongoing process – not just a single moment in time.
Learning and Unlearning Violence

WILPF recognises the roles of patriarchy, militarism and capitalist neoliberalism – among other oppressive power structures – in perpetuating gender-based violence. Read more on WILPF Colombia’s journey to empower survivors through a care and community-based approach.

Violence against women exists in a continuum. Explicit acts of aggression are the tip of an iceberg of deeply embedded patriarchal norms, beliefs and actions that too often lead to violence. For this reason, understanding gender-based violence (GBV) requires that we address multiple, interlinked issues.

What ideologies drive violence against women? How do peacetime inequalities inform GBV during armed conflict, and vice versa? How do we work together to cope with violent pasts?

These are questions which WILPF Colombia (also known as LIMPAL Colombia) has worked to address through a nuanced understanding of feminist peace. The group’s work has encouraged hundreds of women and men to consider the roots of violence and to be able to imagine a future beyond its frameworks.

“Everything LIMPAL Colombia does is part of a process linked in time – everything is conceptualised from the perspective of the past, today and tomorrow.”

Diana Salcedo López, President of LIMPAL Colombia
Peace on paper

Despite the signing of a peace agreement by the Colombian government and the guerrilla movement *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC–EP) in 2016, the violence in Colombia continues – and women face unique threats.

There has been a steady increase in the rate of femicides in Colombia, and for Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, rural and LGBTQ+ women, the risk of kidnapping, arbitrary arrests, threats, harassment and direct violence is heightened. This holds especially true when women are leaders or human rights defenders in their communities.

Given that the likelihood of armed conflict is determined by a country’s rate of violence against women, failing to address GBV damages chances of achieving sustainable peace. To strengthen processes and action toward the elimination of GBV in their nation, members of LIMPAL Colombia have been marching, networking and educating since the group was established in 1998.

Feminist Schools of Peacebuilding

In 2019, LIMPAL Colombia set up two Feminist Schools of Peacebuilding as a way to promote feminist perspectives and approaches to peace at the local and national levels. “Building the schools in Meta and Bolivar is our most exciting achievement from 2019,” recalls Diana Salcedo López, the Colombian Section’s President, with pride.

Many of the women attending the schools are survivors of violence. Coming together in a learning environment provides strength and tools for empowerment – for example, through psychological aid or leadership workshops. Diana Salcedo López notes in particular that the schools provide a venue for older and younger women to share their experiences, knowledge and insights as they work together to build awareness, create change and heal from the past.
The schools’ courses start with teachings on feminist theory and movements, and then develop to more complex and context-specific lessons. The lessons are unpacked with open arms, and they often end with women curious to know more. They also lead to action: for example, women who learn about topics such as the Colombian electoral process and modes of political participation are now empowered to take a more active role in local councils, and bring the lessons learned with them.

**Drawing attention to violence against women leaders**

Recognising high rates of violence against women human rights defenders and the implications for communities, LIMPAL Colombia’s members have advocated for resources and policies to address the causes and impacts of violence directed at women leaders. At both the national and international levels, members of LIMPAL Colombia have brought the issue to discussions with government officials and human rights organisations.

In 2019, the group published *Visible Heroines: Women in the dance of life, memory and reconciliation* to explore women’s key roles in coping through and transforming memories of violence. The Section also carried out extensive consultations in 2019 to further understand the topic from the perspective of mental health and how communities are often the basis of women’s psychosocial support.

> “Emotions are shared in smiles, tears, hugs, kisses, gossip and handshakes: transformative actions with meaning and imprint on the body, that also generate a memory of belonging, a collective memory.”

Sintonia corporales: Memoria y resistencia de defensoras, un seguimiento a la Resolución 1325 (LIMPAL Colombia, 2020)
In these consultations, women from various backgrounds spoke on how caring, belonging and fostering trust in their communities are the key ingredients which transform violent relationships into peaceful ones. Equipped with this knowledge, the Section has started initiatives such as self-care groups and dance therapy to help women heal from violence.

Reimagining the path forward

Feminist activism and policies need to be made emotionally, socially and economically sustainable for continuums of violence to be resolved. In creating spaces for care and healing, more women and more nuanced perspectives are empowered to inform the journey to feminist peace.

LIMPAL Colombia’s members have been looking into how structural inequalities in politics, economics and mechanisms of justice create multiple forms of violence against women. The Section has, for instance, advocated for a complex appreciation of the gender dimensions in the reintegration of former FARC members. This includes considering the influences and experiences of women who were themselves perpetrators of violence.

What does an economy of care look like, and how can the approach help women participate in post-conflict Colombia? These are questions we continue to explore and create frameworks for, in the firm belief that unlearning violence is rooted in empathy and community.

All images shown in this story is from the publication Visible Heroines: Women in the dance of life, memory and reconciliation. For more background on the images, please see this powerful publication by LIMPAL Colombia.
Making Room for Feminist Peace Activism

In Syria, the ongoing armed conflict poses immense challenges to peacebuilding efforts and has dramatically reduced safe spaces for civil society activities. Yet even under the harshest of circumstances, Syrian women have held onto the spaces that do exist and created new ones to continue their activism and achieve social justice within their communities.

In 2019, we witnessed a huge mobilisation of women revolutionaries taking the lead in protests and uprisings all over the world. At the same time, women human rights defenders face increasing discrimination and threats to their lives due to authoritarianism and militarised regimes, far-right mobilisation, neo-conservatism and a shrinking space for civil society.

This is largely the case in Syria, where the ongoing armed conflict poses immense challenges to peacebuilding efforts by civil society actors and organisations. All too often, feminist grassroots activists on the frontlines of the resistance bear the brunt of the violence.

Yet even under the harshest of circumstances, Syrian women have pursued their vision with courage and determination, holding onto spaces for change to continue their activism in pursuit of social justice within their communities.
Sisterhood among Syrian women

Peaceful demonstrations against the Syrian regime in 2011 and the regime’s violent response contributed to the birth of a civil society movement in the country. Across political, ideological and religious differences, grassroots feminists started to come together for informal discussions on how to collaboratively bring about change.

These discussions propelled action, leading to meetings and joint campaigns with bonds of trust behind them.

“Having these spaces is essential for women to build a sisterhood,” says Oula Ramadan, the Director of Badael, one of WILPF’s partner organisations in Syria. Badael supports local-level peacebuilding, rights-based campaigning and non-violent activism. “From these safe spaces, we can build solidarity among women and expand our reach outwards.”

Responding to the needs of Syrian organisations

WILPF is committed to prioritising the needs of Syrian women in its support of women-led and feminist organisations in the country. Constant communication between WILPF’s Middle East and North Africa (MENA) team and diverse groups of women ensures a dynamic, participatory and locally informed approach.

Through early consultations held to deepen the understanding of the challenges facing Syrian organisations, funding was identified as one of the key challenge areas. Grants and other forms of financial aid are often short term and project-specific, leaving day-to-day administrative costs unaccounted for. This hinders organisations’ responsiveness as immediate needs arise, and constrains the thinking space required for furthering feminist agendas.
In response, in 2017 WILPF’s MENA team launched the Feminist Movement for Change in Syria project to provide flexible funding, tailored technical support and opportunities for networking and coordination to support Syrian feminist organisations’ independence and agency. In 2019, the project had expanded to support 13 different Syrian partner organisations to further their feminist agendas.

“The funding has allowed us to develop and grow our capacities to determine our priorities and manage our resources ourselves. This has increased our sense of responsibility and our desire to achieve more.”

Anonymous partner based in Syria

Feminists in conversation

Adjusting existing frameworks to address the multitude of challenges faced by women-led grassroots organisations brings us closer to reaching feminist peace.

Over the past year, WILPF took additional steps to address these challenges by facilitating spaces for feminist dialogues, shared learning and coordination across the MENA region and beyond.

In February 2019, this took the form of a meeting in Berlin to explore feminist political economy perspectives on conflict and post-conflict Syria. Syrian activists, along with Bosnian feminist experts, discussed how feminist political economy tools could be leveraged to strategise for peace.

In July 2019, 47 Syrian and Bosnian feminist activists met in Sarajevo for feminist solidarity dialogues. This came five years after the first of these dialogues was held in 2014. Over the course of three days of knowledge sharing, the participants exchanged experiences and spoke on reconstruction, justice and return.
Oula Ramadan attended the meeting last year as well as the one in 2014. She described it as an intensive learning experience, and symbolic of shared struggle and sisterhood.

Despite the attendees coming from many different backgrounds, Oula remarked: “Sharing the experience of struggle on a personal level is the source of our strength.”

**Change is already happening**

Safe spaces for learning and networking between women peace activists are essential for promoting gender-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding and post-conflict transitions. At the same time, strengthening the capacities of Syria’s civil society organisations and actors has meant strengthening the movements that drive change.

There are countless stories to suggest that despite shrinking space for civil society in Syria, women are determined to continue working for peace. Their persistence in making room for feminist peace activism means many more rooms full of strength, resistance and sisterhood.
Linking the Military to Climate Justice

What’s the military got to do with climate justice? In 2019, WILPF Sweden unraveled this question and more in their journey toward a green feminist peace. Uniting together in our concerns for the planet, for peace and for justice is crucial to creating a world we can all live in, free from harm.

States, businesses and politicians are slowly admitting to the truths that Indigenous communities have been advocating for centuries: protection of soil, air and water is absolutely crucial for our collective survival.

But despite the progress that has been made in advancing global awareness and action for the environment, there is still a link that is often missed – that of the impact of militarism on environmental degradation. Military activities are some of the planet’s biggest polluters, but their environmental impact is also the industry’s best kept secret.

In 2019, WILPF Sweden made great strides in bringing these secrets to the forefront of environmental discussions.

Making the link between peace and the environment

WILPF Sweden’s branches in Gothenburg, Växjö, Motala and Jönköping have been focused on organising around a range of local climate issues. At their Congress in April 2019, the Section adopted a formal statement on militarism, climate and the environment, establishing climate concerns as being at the core of their work. The statement requires that WILPF Sweden stand by and advocate for the protection of the environment and people living in it over commercial or military interests.
One particular area of concern for WILPF Sweden and other environmental groups in the country has been the contamination of Vättern, the second largest lake in Sweden and the water source for nearly a quarter of a million people, as a result of military exercises by the Swedish Armed Forces. Despite the risks to local residents created by the military’s polluting activities, in the beginning of 2019 Sweden’s Land and Environment Court gave the Armed Forces the right to fire 69,000 shots and 150 practice rockets in and around Vättern each year.

To strengthen their advocacy efforts around the situation at Vättern and other environmental concerns, last year WILPF Sweden established a working group in charge of collecting and compiling information about conflict, environment and the climate. Driven by a belief that the lack of action on climate justice is caused by ignorance and not by apathy, the group is focused on strategising ways to develop and disseminate information about environmental issues and pursue awareness and advocacy at the political level.

Data in pursuit of justice

Without meaningful data and information to back up concerns and conversations around the environment, it can be difficult to rally political interest or drive true change.

To address this gap, in 2019 Titti Wahlberg and Ingela Mårtensson of WILPF Sweden’s Gothenburg branch accessed support through WILPF’s Environment Grant to begin building a body of data around the relationship between the military and the environment.

Titti and Ingela developed a questionnaire about the military’s level of consideration for environmental concerns, which they submitted to 36 different organisations, authorities and political parties in the Parliament and the Swedish Armed Forces.
Together with Swedish Women for Peace, the Gothenburg branch then compiled the findings from the questionnaire and published a report entitled *The military and the climate* documenting and analysing the data.

The report raised a number of critical questions, such as why the military is not required to publicly state their carbon emissions while other Swedish authorities are. The report has been the star of seminars and conferences across the Nordic region, shedding light on the military's carbon footprint and advancing action toward change.

## Putting the human back into security

A feminist understanding of security is guided by diplomacy, cooperation and common solutions to global problems.

In this spirit, WILPF Sweden has started working in partnership with key environmental organisations in Gothenburg to advance shared efforts to address climate change. Together, these organisations have declared a climate emergency and are delivering a powerful message: it is time for us to put humans – not weapons and imagined threats – back at the heart of security and change our course for the future.

WILPF Sweden is also planning major changes in the way the Section functions. Everything from the food served at their events and the banks they use, to educating themselves about links between climate crises, military and gender power structures will be carefully considered to build a climate-friendly organisation from the ground up.

Uniting together in our concerns for the planet, for peace and for justice is crucial to creating a world we can all live in, free from harm. Instead of building arms to fight for a presumed national defence, it is time to link our arms together in the struggle to defend our climate.
Intergenerational Activism

Feminist visions of peace must be inclusive, locally led and intergenerational if they are to have a chance at succeeding. If we allow ourselves to be guided by the wisdom of our elders and the vigour of our youth, we can be empowered to take on centuries-old systems of oppression.

In this story, we are putting the spotlight on moments from the past year that showcased our ties to the past and brought focus to what lies ahead for the future as we work to build a better tomorrow.

These are just a few of the many stories of brave women coming together to address injustices. Here’s to many more!

A moment for remembrance

It is important not to forget the sisters who walked the feminist peace road with us, and who have sadly left our sides this year. Among many who will be dearly missed, we remember Cynthia Cockburn and Dahabo Ahmed.
An activist-academic, Cynthia Cockburn was an incredible advocate for women's rights and peace and for advancing understanding of the links between the two (and more). She authored the *WILPF 2015 Manifesto* and provided insightful guidance to our work. Cynthia passed away on 12 September 2019.

Dahabo Ahmed led initiatives for women's empowerment for over a decade and was a determined and compassionate activist. Her advocacy focused on women in Somalia and in the Somalian diaspora in the UK, and she had recently launched the WILPF Somalia Group. Sadly, Dahabo Ahmed passed away on 28 October 2019.

We also wish to pay tribute to the hundreds of brave women peace activists whose lives were cut short due to unfathomable violence. Your stories will not be forgotten, and we will continue to seek justice in your names.
Our history re-enacted

2019 marked 100 years since the second WILPF Congress at the Glockenhof-Hotel in Zürich, when our constitution was first written and the world’s first international peace organisation established.

At that meeting, WILPF was officially founded by 137 women who came together after the First World War to ensure that history would not repeat itself, and that women would play a critical role in ongoing global peacebuilding efforts. At that time, the organisation was known as the International Committee of Women for Peace.

In 2019, 170 WILPF members from all over the world gathered once again at the Glockenhof-Hotel in Zürich for a reenactment of the original Congress and to rediscover the courage of the organisation’s foremothers. The event paid tribute to the founders’ commitment to establish the League of Nations, to promote universal disarmament and to advocate for women's participation at all levels of decision-making. The members came dressed for the occasion in early-20th century costumes and discussed strategies for ensuring these founding principles remain relevant, visible and productive today and into the future.

The event was a key highlight of a major project called Women Vote Peace led by WILPF Germany in collaboration with WILPF Sections from all over Europe. Co-funded by the European Commission, Women Vote Peace advanced feminist initiatives in Austria, Hungary and Poland that celebrated the achievement of women’s voting rights and political initiatives toward sustainable peace.

Following the 100th anniversary gathering, WILPF Germany led the creation of the Women Vote Peace book to summarise the day’s re-enacted events and discussions, paying tribute to our history.

Peace activism starts early

To ensure the sustainability of our work, lessons must begin at an early age. This will mean less time spent unlearning the harmful messages of patriarchy, militarism and capitalist neoliberalism, and more time spent spreading the teachings of feminist peace.

Many of our Sections have worked hard to engage the youngest of peacebuilders. WILPF Uganda, for instance, has made important strides forward to involve and build the capacity of youth in the WILPF Uganda Section – including the formation of Peace Youth Clubs in schools and communities.
WILPF Afghanistan is also committed to involving young people in peacebuilding activities, particularly around efforts to reverse environmental destruction created by years of conflict. With support from WILPF's Environment Grant, members of WILPF Afghanistan started a campaign to engage planting trees throughout Kabul in an effort led by local women schoolteachers. Through the A Tree for Green Afghanistan project, 100 teachers, scholars, activists and young people worked together to plant trees across Kabul. Children learned about environmental protection and planted and nurtured trees to sow the seeds of change. The Section has also now developed a manual on the environment, training materials and brochures for distribution to the public.

Meanwhile, members of Young WILPF Cameroon actively promoted the message of peace all year long! In 2018, young members were trained on leadership and non-violent communication, the Youth, Peace and Security framework and participation in peaceful electoral processes. In 2019, these lessons were brought to life. Young WILPF Cameroon members ran awareness-raising campaigns throughout the year and played an important role in supporting WILPF Cameroon’s functions.

**Looking back, moving forward**

It will take a sustained and concerted effort before we find ourselves living in a world free of oppressive structures – a world in which each individual can realise their potential.

But we must not lose sight of how far we have come and the milestones we have reached. We extend our gratitude and support to all of the women paving the way forward to feminist peace.
“It’s time to formally end the Korean War with a peace agreement.”

YouKyoung Ko, WILPF’s consultant for the Korea Peace Now! campaign

In March 2019, WILPF – together with Women Cross DMZ, the Nobel Women’s Initiative and the Korean Women’s Movement for Peace – kickstarted a new campaign called Korea Peace Now! Women Mobilizing to End the War (KPN) to organise, advocate and educate toward a peace agreement for Korea, with a fierce network of feminist peacebuilders leading the way.

The campaign marks a major step toward the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes in Korea – processes from which women have been virtually excluded – and represents significant action toward the resolution of a war that’s brought decades of hardship to Koreans but has been all but forgotten by the international community that instigated it.
Caught in the middle of geopolitics

The end of World War II brought change for Korea, but it did not bring peace. While the defeat of Japan liberated Korea from 35 years of colonial rule, the nation also entered into a new war – one that continues to this day.

In 1948, three years after Japan fell and lost its grip on Korea, the United States and the Soviet Union – the allied forces that defeated the island nation and its stronghold on its neighbouring country – agreed to divide Korea into two separate states after being unable to establish a single government. This marked the creation of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north. It also instigated the three-year-long Korean War, which saw four million deaths, mass displacement and profound destruction.

When the fighting was over, eight million families became separated by the border. With Cold War hostilities preventing contact between the two states to this day, very few of these families have ever received closure.

The Korean War never officially ended. Although DPRK, China and the United States have an armistice agreement that prevents active fighting, the war was never resolved and hostilities remain high. The absence of a peace agreement has led to the ongoing militarisation of the Korean Peninsula, Northeast Asia and beyond. It has also given space for the DPRK’s ongoing acquisition of nuclear weapons, which the nation claims is a response to the lack of a peace agreement and ongoing hostility from the U.S.

Meanwhile, the international community responsible for inciting years of strife in Korea has largely left the country and its people behind to suffer the consequences of being caught in the middle of world politics. As Kozue Akibayashi, WILPF’s Asia Pacific Regional Representative, has said: “One of the major obstacles to bringing an end to this conflict is that the international community has forgotten it.”

Reaction to inaction: Picking up the peace in the Koreas

Spurred on by a lack of progressive action by the international community, in 2019 four women’s organisations decided to launch the Korea Peace Now! campaign to advance the inclusion of women in peace talks, drive steps toward change and radically re-envision world politics through cooperation, understanding and accountability.

Networking to share the stories of Koreans affected by the war has been a crucial part of the KPN campaign’s mission to create change in the grand narratives of complex geopolitics. For example, at the KPN campaign launch in March 2019, Mimi Han, the founder of the Korean Women’s Movement for Peace, spoke on the trauma of Korea’s separation.
Speaking to the plight of Korean civilians – the human impact of separation and the trauma of war – has been at the heart of changing prevailing attitudes and encouraging international cooperation, which has long been preoccupied with policies of isolation rather than reintegration. Along the way, the KPN team has met many groups and individuals eager to listen to these stories and inspired to change the course of history.

YouKyoung Ko, WILPF’s KPN consultant, drives these messages home by bringing her expertise to the lobbying, analysis and educating work done in conversations in and around the UN.

KPN has also contributed to building a women’s network in the Northeast Asia region for peace on the Korean Peninsula. Delegations from KPN have travelled, among other places, to ROK, Mongolia and Japan to have honest discussions about ways to work together.

In addition to these efforts, the campaign is actively advocating for the full denuclearisation of the region – a process that’s only possible through the development of a peace agreement and mutual confidence-building.

Understanding the human impact of so-called non-violent sanctions

In 2019, the KPN campaign commissioned a report from an independent panel of global experts to unravel the harms done by international sanctions on DPRK, which are considered a “non-violent” alternative to war.

In stark contrast to this belief, the report found that in 2018 alone, nearly 4,000 Koreans are estimated to have died due to sanction-related delays and funding shortfalls. In many cases, the delivery of life-saving aid is being prevented and the most vulnerable populations are the most impacted.
The report also highlighted that though women are far less likely to have influence over decision-making in DPRK, they are disproportionately burdened by the sanctions. The economic pressure exacerbates rates of gender-based violence, increases caregiving responsibilities and affects economic livelihoods by destabilising industries with high ratios of female workers.

The report was launched in New York at the 19th anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in October 2019, and later in Geneva during Geneva Peace Week in November 2019. In Geneva, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in DPRK made specific mention of the report when he called on governments to pay attention to its messages.

Its messages are already being shared and repeated. In December, members of the UN Security Council addressed sanctions and humanitarian situations at the briefing on non-proliferation, which was focused on DPRK. And when Reuters reported on the current political situation between DPRK and the United States, it mentioned the report findings and the campaign's message on sanctions.

**KPN is building bridges to peace**

KPN campaign members have been leading tireless efforts to shift global narratives and advance a feminist understanding of security centred on basic human needs.

Instead of thinking about global politics as an individualistic quest for power, the group is building new bridges of understanding with many who share WILPF's conviction for feminist peace – creating big ideas of change from the ground up.

For Korea, that change starts now.
Our Community in 2019

- **33** WILPF SECTIONS across Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the MENA region
- **12** WILPF GROUPS across Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the MENA region
- **+4** NEW GROUPS JOINED WILPF (WILPF Somalia, WILPF Sri Lanka, WILPF Togo, and WILPF Senegal)
- **21** MENA PARTNERS (Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Yemen)

Movement Building in 2019

- **4** LARGE IN-PERSON CONVENINGS were held around the globe with the aim to provide safe spaces for dialogue and share learning among Sections and partners
- **4** REGIONAL MEETINGS were held in Africa, Europe, MENA, and South Asia
- **44** SMALL GRANTS DISTRIBUTED to WILPF Sections, Groups, and Partners

Resourcing Feminist Peace

In 2019, Sections, Groups, and partners were provided more than 2 million Swiss Francs in sub-grants.
Highlights of work from selected Sections and Groups

**WILPF Afghanistan** carried out successful workshops, advocacy meetings, and participation with other CSOs in the peace talks by bringing together Afghan women and delivering a clear message that women’s voices and perspectives need to be ensured in the negotiations.

**WILPF Argentina** focused on solidarity and activism around the unjust detention of Milagro Sala, the “Not One [woman] Less” campaign which has seen mobilisations of more than a million people on the subject of gender violence, and the struggle for legal and free abortion.

**WILPF Australia’s** biggest impact was the key role played with other organisations in advocating for the reshaping of the peace and security dialogue, as well as policy and practice in Australia and the Asia and Pacific region, to move away from an increasingly militarised and securitised approach and towards a transformative women, peace, and security agenda.

**WILPF Burkina Faso** implemented a micro-project for women’s access to land which has attracted attention as a sensitive and even explosive subject in Burkina Faso.

**WILPF Burundi** worked with the Women, Peace and Security platform to create spaces for women in the media for the upcoming electoral process, and contributed to increasing the participation rate of women in decision-making bodies.

**WILPF Cameroon** focused on building a youth movement, strengthening CSOs, increasing public administration collaboration (for instance, WILPF Cameroon has been included in the MINREX CSO register), and the women’s movement for participation in the national dialogue process.

**WILPF Canada** organised the “Lanterns for Peace” ceremony on Hiroshima Day on August 6.

**WILPF Chad** participated in the process of mapping women’s needs and organising a National Consultation for the UNSCR 1325.

**WILPF Costa Rica** reviewed laws and public policies related to inequalities in care activities and the impacts this has had on women’s human rights. This topic was discussed during the celebration of International Human Rights Day on 10 December.

**WILPF Côte d’Ivoire** was inspired by the WILPF Africa regional conference in Cameroon to generate project ideas and submit two proposals for small grants from WILPF, one of which was approved for a project focusing on collaboration with other associations working in the peace field.

**WILPF DRC** worked on the revision of the National Action Plan of UNSCR 1325 2nd generation. WILPF DRC was among the consultants who revised the National Action Plan and carried out advocacy at a high level with a dinner exchanged for parliamentarians in the DRC.

**WILPF Denmark** contributed to a new National Action Plan for the UNSCR 1325, which is to be launched in 2020. The Section has been working on being part of a parliamentary working group on 1325.

**WILPF Finland** sent out questionnaires to all parties on various peace issues during the parliamentary elections in the spring. The answers were published on the website to inform citizens on the parties’ stance on certain peace issues.

**WILPF Germany** focused on the Women Vote Peace project, supported the delegation from Yemen and the tour with Rasha Jarhum to inform civil society around Germany in terms of media and advocacy activities. It was a strong presence in the 1325 Association and conferences and dialogue on UNSCR 1325 in the preparatory phase of new NAP and participated in the work of the disarmament network.
WILPF Ghana’s Girl Child Education programme in Central Ghana witnessed an increase of 40 per cent in enrolment of girls in these communities. WILPF Ghana’s Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) project launched the schools’ Anti VAWG’s code of conduct in Kanda Cluster of Schools.

WILPF Italy participated in the project “Feminist Peace in action”, which included many public conferences, and the project “Tor Cervara” that allowed the organising of two public offices for the working inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees.

WILPF Netherlands created an inventory of points for the European elections especially about militarisation and weapon industry, and later used this to influence members of the European Parliament. They published the results in Peace Magazine.

WILPF Norway undertook a project on militarism and climate as part of a small grant from WILPF, which resulted in a booklet as well as presentations at meetings and articles in national newspapers.

WILPF Pakistan’s member Ayehsa Hassan organised two programmes for women to increase their income during winter. She also worked with local communities to promote the need to increase local government budgets for women and to start income generation programmes for the communities.

WILPF Sierra Leone organised a very successful launch of the Killer Robots campaign.

WILPF Spain signed an agreement with the government of Navarra which meant that the exhibition on the history of WILPF saw great dissemination and was also translated into English. They contributed to the film about WILPF, participated in the activities for the centenary of the Congress in Zürich, and internally held a seminar on the Catalonia-Spain conflict.

WILPF Sri Lanka conducted research on the impact of Small Arms and Gender Based Violence, and participated in a delegation to the Arms Trade Treaty.

WILPF Sweden has continued to be an important, expert voice in the public debate on nuclear weapons and the TPNW. They arranged 19 feminist crash courses on nuclear weapons and disarmament in a total of 14 Swedish cities during 2019. The Section also supported the strengthening of the Africa region through visits and with new and closer relationships with Sections in Sudan and Kenya.

WILPF Switzerland attracted 170 women (and a few men) for the #Zurich19 re-enactment. The National Women’s Strike on 14 June 2019 saw members marching and demanding the Swiss government to go for conversion and stop armament as well as to sign the UN nuclear weapons treaty.

WILPF Uganda worked hard to engage, involve, and build the capacity of youth in the WILPF Uganda Section, who developed plans and formed Peace Youth Clubs in their respective schools and communities.

WILPF UK addressed the issue of the environment during the annual autumn seminar.

WILPF Zimbabwe conducted research on feminist political economy, which included activities in the communities based on the research findings. They also held a successful seminar on Killer Robots with local civil society organisations.

Other WILPF Groups & Sections

Africa: WILPF Central Africa Republic (CAR) Group, WILPF Kenya, WILPF Nigeria, WILPF Niger Group, WILPF Senegal Group, WILPF Somalia Group, WILPF Sudan Group, WILPF Togo Group; Americas: WILPF Colombia, WILPF Mexico, WILPF United States of America; Asia Pacific: WILPF Aotearoa-New Zealand, WILPF Japan, WILPF Polynesia; MENA: WILPF Lebanon, WILPF Palestine; South Asia: WILPF India, WILPF Nepal.

MENA Partners: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Yemen.

WILPF Initiative: Korean Peninsula, Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
We should thank and embrace each other (virtually!). Not one of us can do this work alone. We are a movement in which the like-minded are united for change: activists, champions, donors and international actors, both individual and institutional.

We are now halfway through 2020, and the world looks different than it did just a few months ago. As we move forward, we must continue to support one another and keep each other safe so that we can be brave enough to identify the fault lines and call out those who create them.

This year has shown us the consequences of failures and exposed the truths of WILPF’s analyses. We know exactly what has to be done; now we must do it.

Thank you for being by our side on this journey as we pursue a bold new future, together.
In 2019, Regina Ouattara (WILPF Burkina Faso), Annie Matundu-Mbambi (WILPF DRC), Prathapa Tiranagma and Nadee Gunaratne (WILPF Sri Lanka), and Diana Salcedo López (WILPF Colombia) visited Geneva to take part in an event on gender and GBV as part of the Fifth Conference of States Parties of the Arms Trade Treaty.


Thank you to Annie Matundu-Mbambi and Sandra Ngoy Boyoo (WILPF DRC), Diana Salcedo López and María Camila García (WILPF Colombia), Oula Ramadan (Badael), Ida Arneson (WILPF Sweden), Heidi Meinzolt (WILPF Germany and Women Vote Peace), YouKyoung Ko (WILPF Consultant) and Kozue Akibayashi (WILPF Japan and WILPF’s Asia Pacific Regional Representative) for their help in writing the stories and giving feedback on them.
The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is a worldwide non-governmental organisation with national Sections covering every continent, an international Secretariat based in Geneva, and an office in New York focused on the work of the United Nations.

Since our establishment, we have brought together women from around the world who are united in working for peace. Our approach is always non-violent, and we use existing international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace and security.