

Statement to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW60)

We, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), call for feminist foreign and domestic policy that ensures local action on demilitarization and women's human rights for transformative change. We call for a change in priorities that invest in women's human rights, divest from militarism, and safeguard political economies of gender justice and peace rather than economies of inequality and war. To mark our 100th anniversary, in April 2015, we convened over 1,000 peace activists at The Hague to mobilise for "Women's Power to Stop War" and commit to a new peace agenda. The time is now to stigmatise and eliminate militarisation and to create space for women's participation. We will work together to end cycles of social and armed violence from state military violence to non-state violent extremism including all forms of violence against women and girls.

The war economy and creeping militarism are the main obstacles to realising women's human rights and sustainable peace. We live in a world with strong political and economic incentives for violence: men with guns occupy peace tables where women peace builders do not even have access to it; we still invest trillions in arms but spend only pennies for peace. The impact is clear.

In the Middle East and North Africa region, women have shown how violence is fuelled by increased militarisation and proliferation of arms and will result in extremism. The influx of weapons, coupled with indiscriminate use of weapons against civilians, has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. In Palestine, women have highlighted how women are disproportionately affected by conflict and aggression in Gaza. Despite women's long-term capacity in peace processes and negotiations, they are absent from attempts to resolve the conflict. This is a recipe that has continued to and will continue to fail.

Violence cannot be addressed without tackling its root causes in militarism and gender inequality. To counter the cycles of violence, atrocities must be prevented before, during, and after armed conflicts, by transforming patriarchal, violent, and discriminatory spaces into equitable, inclusive, safe, just, and nourishing communities. This transformation of spaces requires investing in women's local peace work to ensure human rights and build resilient communities. In Cameroon, women are raising awareness of the links between arms proliferation and gender based violence by building strategic collaborations with media houses to sensitise communities to peace issues, including around issues of refugees and host communities. In Nigeria, women are organizing from the community to the national level to strengthen women's engagement in peace building, combat gun violence, create early warning mechanisms, build early response structures to cross community interventions; promote non-violence communications and actions; mobilise diverse stakeholders including engaging men and youth; and sustain local peace architectures.

Today, women are grappling with the impact of the rise in violence from both state and non-state actors, while also facing a shrinking civil society space for action. It is critical to promote justice, prevent impunity, and ensure perpetrators of sexual and gender based violence are held accountable, via dedicated and reliable funding for women led civil society who build capacity for political participation and provide holistic services to survivors. In Colombia, women have

welcomed the inclusion of transitional justice addressing sexual violence as a crime against humanity and war crime. In Mexico, women have demanded changes in the very idea of justice, to promote not retributive but restorative justice to rebuild and sustain local communities. In India, women have called for the rule of nonviolence through women's front-line leadership. They have called for governments, civil society, and other stakeholders to take action to stop gender based violence and fear as a basis for ensuring democratic governance, women's effective access to security and justice, and peace.

It is time for an integrated approach that promotes human security based on women's experiences rather than militarised state security. Human rights violations in one country must be traced to broader gendered political economies of war. In Spain, women have brought attention to how arms transfers to countries with serious situations of gender-based violence would violate the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and undermine commitments to CEDAW. In Australia and elsewhere, women brought attention to the gap between security and development; WILPF activists have demanded the 2030 sustainable development agenda be implemented from a women's human rights perspective that eliminates exploitation of people and planet, including financing UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans and regulating arms that risk gender based violence.

Women's participation is the foundation for preventing all forms of violence. Research has shown that the larger the gender gap, the more likely a state is to be involved in inter- and intra-state conflict, and to use violence first in a conflict. It has also shown that a strong, autonomous feminist movement is the greatest indicator and predictor of government action to redress violence against women. States with the strongest feminist movements are more likely to have more comprehensive policies regarding violence against women.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom makes the following recommendations to the Commission on the Status of Women and the international community:

- Stop subsidising violence: Reduce military spending and promote full implementation of Critical Area E of the Beijing Platform for Action, which links gender equality and the call for the control of excessive arms expenditure, and of Article 26 of the United Nations Charter, which calls for the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources.
- Start investing in peace: Increase funding for feminist movements to prevent all forms of violence and promote peace and freedom for all. Invest in women-led civil society in a long-term manner, including promoting women's political participation, access to justice, and access to legal, health, and psychological services including around issues of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Put women at the table: Demand and provide concrete mechanisms to ensure women's and women led civil society's full and equal participation and rights in all peace negotiations and political processes at every level. Refuse to support any peace negotiations that do not have women's substantive participation and rights integrated into the process.
- Respect, protect, and fulfil women's equal human rights: Ensure effective implementation of all existing mechanisms including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in particular CEDAW General Recommendation 30; address discriminatory social, legal, political, and economic barriers to gender equality and peace within and across borders, including through holding international financial

institutions (including the IMF and World Bank) and transnational corporations (including private military companies) accountable for upholding women's human rights.

- Promote an integrated approach to peace and security across the UN system: Implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) from a women's human rights perspective as a tool to achieve sustainable peace. Invest in national strategies and plans including UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans to implement Goal 16 on stable and peaceful societies. Sign, ratify, and implement the ATT, including stopping arms transfers that pose risks of gender-based violence.
- Mainstream the Women, Peace and Security Agenda throughout all UN discussions and policy processes by investing in the work of civilian women and rejecting redirection of resources to militarised responses including on countering violent extremism and terrorism; ensure the funding, mechanisms, and political will to achieve the UN Strategic Results Framework on Women, Peace and Security.
- Recruit feminist leadership across the UN system: Ensure that the next Secretary-General will prioritise women's equal participation and rights through an integrated approach to human security and peace.

Today, it is up to us to decide whether we will continue to live with the broken war system. The alternative is right in front of us: increased, transparent investment in women's participation, protection, and rights across the conflict spectrum is the only way to uproot the gendered foundations of the war economy – and build a new world of sustainable peace based on gender justice.

With feminist peace activists everywhere, WILPF calls for strengthened alliances among all stakeholders to promote feminist foreign and national policies, ensures local action for women's human rights and peace across the conflict spectrum, and engage every day to invest in economies of peace and gender justice rather than militarism and war.

Together, in solidarity around the world, we will raise our voices and mobilise for sustainable and just peace.

The time is now.