

Statement on the Right to Peace

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom welcomes the work of the intergovernmental working group in charge of drafting a Declaration on the Right to Peace.

However, WILPF regrets that topics such as disarmament, peacekeeping, private military and security companies, social justice and gender equality were left out of the draft declaration. We would like to stress that a declaration on the right to peace will only have meaning if it acknowledges that violence and conflict have their origins in power relations. Thus, peace can only be achieved through a re-conceptualisation of power through a better understanding of how the elements that define power are interlaced, interactive and interdependent and how it is deeply gendered. Peace cannot be understood as the mere state of absence of violence: peace is a composite, and to reach sustainable peace all elements of it need to be carefully achieved.

For these reasons, WILPF would like to identify the following elements as essential for a Declaration on the Right to Peace:

- Disarmament

Although the Human Rights Council is not the right forum to discuss disarmament, we must not forget that 1) the ultimate goal of disarmament is to ensure the well being of humankind by preventing the human rights violations caused by armed conflict and 2) peace cannot be achieved without disarmament.

For these reasons, continued dialogue between the fora on disarmament and the Human Rights Council, subsidiary bodies, treaty bodies and all other human rights bodies is essential to council and inform the disarmament fora so that we move towards disarmament in a way that contributes to the ultimate goal of protecting human rights in the most efficient way possible and is essential for the legitimacy of the race towards disarmament.

Article 3 of the Draft UN Declaration on the Right to Peace mentions that all actors "States [...] should adopt all possible actions with the purpose of implementing, strengthening and elaborating this Declaration". For the sake of clarity and to enable implementation, disarmament must be mentioned as central to such implementation by adding:

"including by eliminating the threat inherent in the arms race as well as efforts towards general and complete disarmament under effective international control as a basic instrument to the maintenance of peace" (streamlined art. 6 of the Declaration on the Preparation of societies for Life in Peace).

- Gender equality

Patriarchal societies and patriarchal distributions of power contribute to the escalation of conflict and may lead to war.

At the risk of generalising, where there is a greater divide in how gender roles are created and assigned and they are accompanied by emphasis on the stereotype of male/female difference, then there is a greater risk that societies will use violence as a means of conflict resolution.

There is considerable research, including by Cynthia Enloe and Cathy Cohen to name but two, which underlines this, though it would seem obvious to those who have ever experienced conflict.

The link between gender equality and peace should be understood in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013); the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and CEDAW Committee General Recommendation n°30.

Gender equality goes beyond the principle of non-discrimination; it implies positive efforts towards the elimination of stereotypes and social barriers. Thus, gender equality must be specifically mentioned within article 3 of the draft Declaration, and its importance in preventing conflict must be acknowledged by adding:

"and to ensure women's and girls empowerment and gender equality, critical to efforts to maintain international peace and security" (streamlined UNSCR 2122 (2013)).

- Women's participation

A crucial element for sustainable peace is an inclusive peace building process. The participation of women in this process, whilst it is linked to gender equality, has deserved specific attention from the UN and its member States because of its importance for international peace and security.

Women's participation is one of the pillars of all Women, Peace and Security resolutions of the Security Council and it should be specifically mentioned under article 3 as an indispensable element to comply with implementation in a successful way by adding:

"and ensuring the full participation of women in decision making, conflict prevention and resolution and any other peace initiative, essential to the realization of lasting peace" (UN 4th World Conference on Women: Beijing Platform for Action para 23, 1995).

- Social justice

Social inequality and social discrimination is the breeding ground for conflict, as was seen in the origin of the 2nd World War and current conflicts. High unemployment rates and economic inequalities create social unrest that is often directed by governments towards an "external" enemy. Social inequality is indeed one of the root causes of war.

Economic difficulties also put a high pressure on men, who might no longer be able to be the breadwinners and fulfil the masculine stereotype, to join militaristic conceptions of masculinities to protect their family in a different way.

Furthermore, military spending and militarism contribute to social inequalities, firstly by diverting expenditures from social allocations to armament, secondly by imposing a culture of militarism based on patriarchy and superiority.

If we are to prevent armed conflict to ultimately protect all human rights, the emphasis must be very much on prevention, and gender must be used as a diagnostic. This would be fed through the various treaty body mechanisms and the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council.

We must monitor arms supplies and access in countries where there are indications of a possible rupture. We must look at the foreign policy priorities of states, their trading and financial policies and analyse these as part of their human rights obligations in their dealings with other states in the multilateral system.

By including these elements within the Declaration on the Right to Peace, we will enable all these necessary steps towards prevention.

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