

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Aotearoa Section Newsletter: December 2018



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Megan Hutching, Aotearoa WILPF president, represented us at the 32nd WILPF Congress in Accra, Ghana, 19-21st August. She chaired the steering committee which organised the Congress and also facilitated the elections session during the Congress.

The picture of the new International Board below features the new international WILPF president, Joy Onyesoh, from Nigeria, elected at the Congress.



*(L to R) **Kozue Akibayashi** (WILPF Japan), IB member for Asia-Pacific region; **Janette McLeod** (WILPF Australia), alternate member for Asia-Pacific region; **Heidi Meinzolt** (WILPF Germany), IB member for Europe region; **Shirine Jurdi** (WILPF Lebanon), candidate for IB member for MENA region; **Sylvie Ndongmo** (WILPF Cameroon), IB member for Africa region; **Lina Hjartstrom** (WILPF Sweden), alternate member for Europe region; **Joy Onyesoh**, international president; **Olivia Oseji** (WILPF Nigeria), alternate member for Africa region; **Melissa Torres** (WILPF USA), vice president; **Margrethe Tingstad** (WILPF Norway) vice president; **Kerry McGovern** (WILPF Australia), treasurer; **Madeleine Rees**, secretary general. (Photo: Chris Henderson)*

Megan reports: The Congress theme was ‘Building a Feminist Peace Movement.’ Held at the University of Ghana from 20-22 August, about 200 people were registered and – as you would expect seeing it was the first Congress to be held in Africa – the African sections and groups were well represented.

Feminist Peace Movement in Africa Forum

This forum, held on Saturday 18 before the Congress began, focused on various WILPF initiatives, and included speakers from other organisations, with workshops in the afternoon. One session was on women’s roles in, and the impact we can have on, peaceful elections, leadership and peace processes. It covered initiatives such as the Women’s Situation Rooms that have been used to great effect in Nigeria and Cameroon. Women monitor elections, and are trained in mediation so that they can intervene if conflict arises, because while elections can help both to avert conflict, they also provide conflict. The speakers noted that it is important to work with the media as media reports can influence people’s perceptions of conflict.

I attended a workshop on Political Economy where we discussed the links between governance, the economy, and social inequalities as factors in the development of conflict. The final session of the day was a panel on the synergies between African and global feminist peace movements, with a focus on mediation and peace processes. Kozue Akibayashi spoke about the Women Cross DMZ activities in Korea [www.womencrossdmz.org], Annie Mbambi spoke about WILPF efforts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rida Altubuly about the activities of Together We Build It [www.togetherwebuildit.org] in Libya.

The Congress

Congress started in earnest on Monday 20 August with an opening filled with song, poetry and dancing. Congress is WILPF’s international ‘business’ meeting and there was plenty to get through. By an overwhelming majority, we agreed to amend the international constitution and by-laws. There is now a new governance structure: an International Board consisting of a president, two vice presidents, a treasurer, and representatives from each of WILPF’s six regions (Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Americas, Europe, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and South Asia), as well as WILPF International’s secretary general.

Elections for the new International Board were held (photo above). Each regional board member has an alternate who represents the region at meetings if the board member cannot attend. Not all regions had held meetings to nominate their International Board members and alternates, so those members will be appointed during the next three months.

Joy Onyesoh from WILPF Nigeria was elected unopposed as international president, as was Kerry McGovern as treasurer. There were four nominees for the two vice president roles, and Margrethe Tingstad and Melissa Torres were elected.

Younger women

It’s good to see some young members on the new Board. In fact, there were many young women at Congress which was very encouraging.

Asia Pacific regional meeting.

There was time for regional meetings. In the Asia-Pacific meeting we discussed what projects and campaigns we could work on as a region, and agreed on nuclear disarmament, supporting an end to the Korean War, and decolonisation. Each section in the region needs to appoint a

liaison person to work with the new regional International Board member and her alternate. We agreed that we would hold regional meetings more often. (Photos below)



Asia-Pacific regional meeting. L to r, Trish (Australia), Barbara (Australia and Academic Network), Rebecca (Y-WILPF Australia), Rebecca (Y-WILPF Australia), Grace (Y-WILPF Australia), Angie (Australia), Stella (Australia), Chris (Australia), Roti (Tahiti Polynesia)



Asia-Pacific regional meeting (looking the other way), l to r, Yuuka (Y-WILPF Japan), Kana (Y-WILPF Japan), Kozue (Japan), Janette (Australia), Lyn (Australia).

In the background, behind Yuuka, is Adwoa Bame, one of the two co-ordinators hired to help organise the Congress. She and Zala Žbogar did a fabulous job.

New Sections

Congress also welcomed five new Sections: WILPF Afghanistan, WILPF Uganda, WILPF Chad, WILPF Zimbabwe and WILPF Kenya, and four new national Groups (being a formal WILPF Group is the first step towards becoming a Section): Argentina, Burkina Faso, Burundi and Central African Republic.

<https://wilpf.org/wilpf-congress-opens-by-welcoming-five-new-sections/>

Interview with Joy Onyesoh

There is an interview with the new president, Joy Onyesoh, here:

<https://wilpf.org/exclusive-interview-new-wilpf-international-president-elected/>

New International Programme

We also adopted the new international programme and two ‘omnibus’ resolutions.

(Let me know if you would like these documents by emailing wilpfaotearoa@gmail.com)

Some personal reflections

Congress was a stimulating, sometimes frustrating, colourful and joyful event. The interpretation was really helpful, and absolutely essential for the French- and Spanish-speaking women. I met and learned from women from Lebanon, Uganda, DRC, the UK, Libya and many more countries, and stood in queues for food and coffee and chatted with many others.

I was able to spend a lot of time with Australian WILPF members and hear about their work and their focus for the next few years. They have committed to increase their numbers – and reduce the age of their members! – by 20 per cent by 2020. I also did some sightseeing with them.

Ghana was a major conduit for people during the slave trade. Further down the coast from Accra, there are a couple of ‘castles’ where slaves were held in inhuman conditions, before being shipped to the Americas.



Jamestown fishing boats

I did not visit there, but did go to the Danish Christiansborg Castle, a complex of buildings which was used for the same purpose. Upstairs and above ground is a beautiful house with glorious views out over the sea; underneath are the tiny, low-ceilinged, dark and hot spaces where the slaves were kept.

It is impossible to understand the thinking that could treat fellow human beings with such cruelty.

It was not all horrible though. We visited some craft markets, the museum

commemorating Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of newly-independent Ghana, and the museum and study centre for W.E.B. du Bois, Nkrumah's mentor. We experienced the 'excitement' of Accra traffic – lots of it, with delicately tooting horns, and seeming chaos, but no accidents that we saw – and the contrasts between life on the streets and the large official buildings. I've included a few more photos below.



Arch to commemorate Ghana's independence from Britain in 1957



Christiansborg Castle, where African slaves were held before being shipped to America

New International Programme

For the next three years the programme is: first, building the movement; second, redefining security; third, leveraging feminist perspectives on peace and, finally, promoting socio-

economic perspectives on justice. This final focus will include: the rights and needs of all people; just economic systems; and inter-connections between climate change and war.

Human Rights Watch challenges New Zealand Superannuation funds invested in Israeli banks

Human Rights Watch has supported The Palestine Solidarity Network's renewed calls for the NZ Super Fund to divest its shareholding in Israeli banks which invest in the illegal construction of Jewish only settlements in the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

Spokesperson for the Palestine Solidarity Network in Auckland, Janfrie Wakim, says the Super Fund divested its stake in three Israeli companies in 2012 because they were building Israeli settlements. "Then the Super Fund appears to have got cold feet and claimed that while building illegal Israeli settlements was wrong, paying for their construction was not objectionable." Human Rights Watch listed a number of Israeli banks which fund construction of settlements that it says are complicit in the occupation of Palestinian land and in breach of international law.

The New Zealand Super Fund invests in four of the banks identified by Human Rights Watch; Bank Hapoalim, Bank Leumi, Mizrahi Tefahot and the First International Bank of Israel. Human Rights Watch says Bank Hapoalim funds construction at the settlements of Efrat and Beitar Illit. The Super Fund's investment in Bank Hapoalim is worth \$2.9 million.

Bank Leumi is banking construction at Alfei Menashi. The Fund investment in Bank Leumi is \$2.6 million. The greatest extent of revealed bank loans for Israeli settlements is with Mizrahi Tefahot, with loans to multiple settlements in all of Ariel, Efrat, Elkana, Ma'aleh Adumin. Mizrahi Tefahot also funds building work at Kiryat Arba. This settlement is one of the oldest and most notorious of Israeli settlements. The Super Fund lists its most recent shareholding in Mizrahi Tefahot at \$934,111.

Wakim says if the Super Fund doesn't act on the Human Rights Watch information, then the New Zealand government must instruct the Super Fund. "The government has powers to give direction to the Super Fund through the Finance Minister. We've just had the massacre of more than 100 Palestinians by Israeli snipers in Gaza and the Israeli Defence Minister has announced a massive speed up of illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank."

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/05/29/bankrolling-abuse/israeli-banks-west-bank-settlements>

<https://www.nzsuperfund.co.nz/publications/annual-equity-listings>

WILPFs Work

WILPF women, Palestinian and Israeli, have worked together for decades. They model this practice to show that it is not only possible, but essential to bring about an end to the conflict.

Book Reviews: *Make Her Praises Heard Afar: New Zealand women overseas in World War One*, written by Jane Tolerton, published in Wellington, NZ, by Booklovers Books.

We have spent years remembering World War One, with significant government funding to facilitate this. Our WILPF perspectives have tried to introduce some more critical analysis into this time, arguing that the staggering amounts of money that bankroll wars would be better spent on meeting people's human needs for healthcare, housing and education along with a myriad other aspects of social justice. While some WILPFers might argue that this war should never have happened, it did, and Jane Tolerton has done us a service by recording experiences of women who went overseas during the war. Those women who are largely left out of other historical narratives are honoured in this collective biography which offers us an opportunity to appreciate their courage and skills as nurses, ambulance drivers and doctors. Her book provides insight in how women's lives have been made invisible in the questionable 'boys own' narratives that pass for a history of this period.

***Remember the Brave*, written by Forrest & Lena Chambers, published by CreateBooks**
<http://createbooks.co.nz/product/remember-the-brave>

"As we near the end of the WWI centenary commemorations, 'Remember the Brave' is about the conscientious objectors Archibald Baxter and Mark Briggs who were sent to France and refused to succumb to the Army's torture. It is told through the eyes of an 'ordinary' kiwi soldier. It is a picture book, intended for young readers, and may be of interest to schools, as it has additional information and focus questions that teachers could use with students.

The book was created to fill a 'gap' in the WWI centenary material, especially children's books. In particular, children's war books have omitted the stories of the conscientious objectors, and in general, have ignored the horror and immoral nature of war.

The narrative around how we commemorate WWI, and wars in general, could be described as becoming more sentimental, portraying war as 'noble', as we move further in time from the actual events. The way we talk about war today has a direct bearing on how willing we are to go to war now or in the future. This book was written to help us change the way we talk about war, to see it for the horror it is, with the hope that we will all be less willing to go to war, and find alternatives." *From PMA media release*

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And see us on Facebook www.facebook.com/wilpfaotearoa.newzealand

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