



There are more of us who want peace than want the killing to continue

MARION BOWMAN 28 April 2015

The 'utopian' slur against peacemakers is defeatist propaganda for pro-war, pro-militarisation and securitisation interests and the military-industrial complex. Marion Bowman reports from WILPF's [Centenary Conference](#) in the Hague.

'Until the day that war is not profitable, the killing will continue,' said Iranian Nobel peace laureate Dr. Shirin Ebadi at the opening of WILPF's [global women's peace conference](#) in The Hague, Netherlands, yesterday (April 27 2015).

'I want to ask the governments of the United Nations to reduce their military budgets by 10% and use the funds for the education and welfare of their peoples,' she said. 'I want to ask the US and the West to throw books at people, not bombs, and you will see how to have a better world. If the US had built 4,000 schools in Afghanistan in memory of the people killed on 9/11, we would not now have ISIS.'

Ebadi was speaking at the centenary conference of the [Women's International League for Peace and Freedom](#) (WILPF) attended by 1,000 women from over 80 countries, including Yemen where the humanitarian situation is now [catastrophic](#) after five weeks of bombing by Saudi Arabia. Ebadi was echoed by Madeleine Rees, WILPF's Secretary General. 'Last year, \$1.776 trillion was spent on arms globally,' said Rees. 'We now live in a world where 1% of the world's population controls 48% of the world's wealth. Before long, democracy will be over because the 1% will need the military to defend their wealth. We need to galvanise a new movement.'

The [new movement](#) is the same movement as the one that a hundred years ago to the day, gave birth to the organisation Rees leads. Although there has been a century of conflict since, Rees said a lot had also been achieved through international efforts to fulfil the aims of the 1,336 women who met in The Hague in 1915 to try to stop the first world war. The UN has been set up, international law on human rights has been put in place, there have been treaties and resolutions committing governments everywhere to disarm and advance the cause of women, peace and security.

But, said Rees, it is clear now that this high level legal, policy and diplomatic framework is [not working](#).

That it is not working is not just evidenced by the global spend on arms. The human side to the story is that, besides the numbers being killed by violence, whether in wars, conflicts, and insurgencies or in homes, streets and schools around the world, there are now more than [50 million refugees and internally displaced people](#) worldwide, more than at any time since the second world war. There are nine million displaced Syrians alone as a result of the conflicts in the Middle East.

So the wars, laws and 'security' that we are asked to believe are necessary to keep the world safe are not working, yet women who want peace are called utopian.

'We are told we do not understand reality,' said American Jody Williams, like Shirin Ebadi a Nobel peace laureate and founder of the [Nobel Women's Initiative](#), who also spoke at the opening of the conference. 'We understand reality alright,' she said. 'We understand that people in power do not want to give it up. We understand that bombs do not make security. We understand that the 80% of the world that doesn't want nuclear weapons are being held hostage by the nuclear armed members of the UN Security Council.'

Williams is living proof, like any number of women in the huge auditorium at The Hague's World Forum convention centre, that making the case for and creating peace is not utopian and that the 'utopian' slur is [defeatist propaganda](#) for pro-war, pro-militarisation and securitisation interests and the military-industrial complex. Williams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for her work in banning and clearing anti-personnel landmines and she is now campaigning to [ban killer robots](#). These are 'fully autonomous lethal weapons', the all-too believable use of technology to create weapons that would be able to choose and fire on targets on their own, without any human intervention. Rapid advances in technology are enabling the development of such weapons.

Killer robots are the natural spawn of unmanned armed vehicles and drones, a market estimated to grow to \$4.4 billion by 2025. These weapons were first thought up by an American inventor in 1940. An early model was powered by a lawn mower engine. The US and Israel worked with prototypes through the 1950s and '60s and in the 1980s an armed drone was [used for the first time](#) in war, during the Iran-Iraq conflict. The problem with them, for the arms industry and the governments that use them, is that they are operated, albeit at a distance, sometimes a distance of several oceans and continents, by human beings and even real-life soldiers are humans and we humans are flawed, vulnerable creatures.

The realities of modern warfare mean that many of today's soldiers go back into their families and communities with post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts and self harming problems like alcoholism and drug abuse. That makes them less efficient while in the military and creates political problems within the domestic civilian population. As Leymah Gbowee, another Nobel peace laureate bluntly told the conference: 'Even soldiers experience war fatigue. That is an advantage for us.' Drone operators are not immune from the nightmare psychology of killing as the [story](#) of US Airman Brandon Bryant shows. The answer? Not an end to the anti-human business of war, but robots. Robots would be the perfect answer to the problem of using flawed human beings to wage war and remove Gbowee's perceived advantage at a stroke.

So the work of peace lovers, the need to show that nonviolence, dialogue and negotiation are the only things that work and make the world safe, is becoming ever more urgent.

It is all too easy to say that history shows that war has always been and always will be part of the way humanity operates rather than the way that the small numbers who wield power operate. Peace, the wish of the majority, is much harder to document but the evidence that it can be achieved is there. Leymah Gbowee was one of a group who helped [stop civil war in Liberia](#) in 2003 by organising weeks of mass actions by women, disarming violent men through non-violent direct action.

In 1997, when the [Mine Ban Treaty](#) was signed, Jody Williams said: 'We went

to every single delegation and gave them our action plan to make sure they put into practice every single word.' Patricia Sellers, a Special Adviser at the International Criminal Court, said that peace-makers have ensured that four major wars that could have happened in the past century didn't happen: the war of India's independence from Britain; the war that might have followed Nelson Mandela's release from prison in South Africa; the war in the US that could so easily have ignited during the Civil Rights years and the long drawn out war for women's liberation: 'There have been no increases in the sales of Kalashnikovs to feminists,' she said.

Do women have power to stop war, as the conference asserts? There is a strong belief in The Hague that they do - through everything from sex strikes to picketing peace talks, to movement building to [disrupting arms industry events](#) to using consumer and shareholder power.

Madeleine Rees said: 'There are more of us who want peace than want the killing to continue'.

But as the rallying, inspirational speakers galvanised the confidence of the gathering, other voices also spoke out into the darkness of the hall.

Zahra' Langhi, Director of the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace, bore witness from the experience of Libya and struck a note of caution about enthusiasm for women's empowerment. She said: 'The international community likes women's empowerment, but it keeps empowering the warlords too. Democracy without arms control is hypocrisy. We need to disempower warlords and end impunity.' [Tweet](#)

As Typhoon jets sold by the UK to Saudi Arabia drop bombs on Yemen, as another Bush considers running for the White House next year and as Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström faces a huge backlash for her feminist foreign policy of cancelling arms deals, Edith Ballantyne, WILPF's 93 year old 'ultimate member', warned: 'We don't have so much time. I don't think we have another hundred years.'

Marion Bowman is reporting for 50.50 from WILPF's [Centenary Conference](#) in the Hague on 'Women's Power to Stop War', 27-29 April, and the Nobel Women's Initiative conference: '[Defending the Defenders](#)', 24-26 April. [Read articles by participants and speakers addressing the issues being debated.](#) [Read previous years' coverage.](#)

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