

United Nations High Level Forum on The Culture of Peace

14 September 2012 from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm

UN Headquarters, New York

Panel (3pm) on “*Strengthening the global movement, advancing the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Culture of Peace: the way forward*”



peacewomen
women for peace + peace for women

Remarks by **Maria Butler, PeaceWomen Project Director, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)**

Good afternoon Peace Advocates and Peace Messengers.

On behalf of my organization, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), I am very pleased to be part of this important discussion because we are very much committed to the Culture of Peace. I would like to discuss 2 key aspects that we believe are central to peace and freedom: demilitarization and gender equality.

We have heard today that militarization, defence spending, and the proliferation of arms, violate basic human rights and violate human dignity. This continues to create human insecurity in every region. Fear and violence are not part of the culture of peace we support.

When WILPF, our organization, facilitated dialogues with women activists from eight countries in the Middle East and North Africa this year, we heard their messages about arms on their streets, the proliferation of weapons in their communities and the militarization of their society, and the systematic discrimination they face which continue to affect their work. There are similar messages throughout history and from all corners of the globe.

I would like to share one story that I will never forget –I met Azza Suleiman this year. Last December, Azza was an unarmed peaceful protestor on the street of Cairo Egypt. In Tahrir Square she saw a young woman, it was an iconic picture that flashed around the world, a young woman in a blue bra, her clothes being ripped off her by military personal–Azza did not stand by, she went to her aid and helped this woman, she herself was beaten into a coma. When we meet this year, she had just recovered from her injuries and she was not talking about hate or revenge. Her message was one of justice, the need for acknowledgement that the uncontrolled military power has brutal impacts, and she called for accountability. She herself was from a military family and could not believe the military would turn on its own people for power.

Like Azza, many know the impact of military brutality, whether in Syria today or in Gaza, Palestine. Or those fighting for accountability and justice in Pacific Island, or in Burma or here in the US. Indeed, militarization impacts our environment in many ways and also our economy.

As the Secretary-General said this morning that too much is spent on military. At a global level, world military spending is estimated to be over \$1.7 trillion dollars. This is over 600 years of UN core budget! World military spending amounts to over 3000 years of UN Women budget! This is not the culture of peace we support. The UN Charter itself calls for least divestment to armament in Article 26. Member States have not implemented that article of the Charter.

We as peace advocates must not be silent on this issue of military spending. We must call for a reinvestment in education, development and equality. We must call for a shift in how people value peace, education, development and equality.

Indeed, the spending on nuclear weapons, the “modernization” of nuclear weapons, the billions of dollars spent over the next few years investing in nuclear weapons we do not need, is not investing in the culture of peace, and we need to speak out together on that.

I want to add to the ATT point already raised, because it is important that we are aware of what is happening and what is going on. UN Member States, in this very building, failed to agree a robust Arms Trade Treaty in July 2012. The next steps by the General Assembly or States must aim for a stronger treaty text than the one we saw as the final July draft. Our organization, WILPF, and our disarmament project Reaching Critical Will have said the text of the treaty we saw in July was not good enough. The loopholes in the text allowed countries to contract out of saving lives, it did not have strong enough provisions to prohibit the sales of arms to countries where there are known violations of human rights. It must also include gender provision. Gender-based violence where it exists is a human rights violation, and arms must not be sold to countries that are perpetrating gender-based violence.

This brings me to my second critical point, and this has been a part of the conversation all day, the importance of peace with the condition of equality.

Prioritizing– and prioritizing politically- gender equality is central to Culture of Peace is one of the eight areas of action (outlined in Paragraph 12 of Declaration and Programme of Action for a Culture Peace).

I want to share with you an example of what **is** the culture of peace. This work, this letter here is advancing the culture of peace. A letter from women activists in Colombia last week to their President to call for women’s full and equal participation in the upcoming October Peace Talks, and the inclusion of women’s participation and women’s rights in the process.

These actions like the thousands of others by women’s groups around the world are advancing the values of peace. We saw this in Liberia where women organized, protested, and advocates for No More War. We see it in Afghanistan where groups like the Afghan Women Network continue their work despite the dangers. We see in DR Congo where our WILPF section work to prevent small arms proliferation and challenge the root causes of conflict, like the depletion of natural resources within the country, not only the consequence.

Indeed, the implementation of the commitments already made by our governments, the commitments in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda of Security Council must be implemented by all actors, but must be implemented holistically the aspects of participation, protection and conflict prevention must be seen

as one and interconnected. Member States, would contribute to the Culture of Peace- if the holistic intent of SCR 1325 is taken forward.

We continue to see that despite the words on paper, there remains lack of action. In the nine peace agreements that were signed last year - only 2 (22 per cent) contained women and peace and security provisions. For example, the 14 peace processes that were underway in 2011, only 4 of the negotiating party delegations included a woman delegate.

As peace advocates we must continue to challenge the status quo and how people value gender equality. If we do not change mind-sets and attitudes, behaviours will not change.

Today I have been challenged about how I can incorporate the Programme of Action on the Culture of Peace into my work. I also want to ask each of us how we can, in a practical way, take this forward to advance the cause of peace and equality locally and globally?

- Could it be to write a letter on your Government calling for a robust Arms Trade Treaty that is gendered?
- Could it be to participate in the November 16 days of Activism Campaign “from peace in the home to peace in world- challenging militarization?”
- Could it be to send a message of solidarity to women in MENA?
- Or whether it be joining a global movement like ours, which will be 100 years old in 2015, a movement that has continued to link challenging militarism with equality and investing in peace.

In conclusion, I want to share the words I saw last month on the wall of Gandhi’s Ashrams in Gujarat State in India. I was visiting the region to support women groups...and on the wall were his words... “my life is my message”. These simple and powerful words of Mahatma Gandhi capture the point I am making here, our words and our resolutions mean nothing if they are not backed by our actions. That our actions, our behaviors are what impact the world.

I hope that our messages will be shaped by the Culture of Peace!

Thank you.

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#### ***About WILPF, PeaceWomen and Maria***

*Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is the oldest international women’s peace organization founded in 1915. WILPF has 40 national sections around the world and 2 UN projects: PeaceWomen Project and Reaching Critical Will.*

*Maria Butler is the Director of the PeaceWomen Project of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). PeaceWomen amplifies WILPF’s voice and provide resources on the priority issues of conflict prevention, accountability, gender equality and equal participation at UN. We link global work on Resolution 1325 with national and local actors to promote implementation and to maintain civil society’s role in all areas of implementation and peacemaking.*

***See more information on WILPF and resources:***

***See [www.peacewomen.org](http://www.peacewomen.org) and [www.wilpfinternational.org](http://www.wilpfinternational.org) and [www.reachingcritical.org](http://www.reachingcritical.org)***