

Hiroshima Day Tavistock Square 2015

Today we mark the 70th anniversary of the day when the United States exploded the first atomic bomb in war. We remember the tens of thousands of people who were vaporized in seconds, and those who suffered appalling burns, and radiation which would scar them for the rest of their lives and lead them to early deaths.

Thirty years earlier, and now one hundred years ago, vast numbers of men died, were maimed and mentally scarred for life in the trenches of the First World War.

I am here from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to remind us all that one hundred years ago in 1915 there *were* women who stood up against the jingoism of “king and country” to oppose the violence of war. Women from 12 countries who travelled in war-time to The Hague in neutral Netherlands, to discuss with other women the root causes of war.

They called for “continuous mediation” to bring about a just peace and took their proposals for what we might now call a *negotiated settlement* - to leaders in 14 countries. But no one would give up a perceived war advantage to initiate peace negotiations.

In 1915, in 1945 in 2015 there is no situation for which violence and war is an answer.

The story of “These Dangerous Women” as Winston Churchill called them at the time, did not stop in 1915. The women – who did not then have a vote and so felt that their voices were not being heard - came home and set up branches of an international women's peace organisation in their home countries.

Here in Britain women were immediately campaigning against conscription, and when it was introduced in 1916, they supported the Conscientious Objectors. They continued to campaign for a just peace as well as for universal suffrage.

In 1919 at a second International Congress the WILPF women correctly saw in the Versailles Treaty the roots of another conflict.

Then through the 20s and 30s WILPF organised Peace Pilgrimages, Crusades and petitions in an attempt to stop another war.

After the war in 1949 WILPF passed a Congress resolution calling on the UN to:

"secure the prohibition of the preparation of all means of mass devastation, including atomic and biological weapons, together

with the destruction of all existing stocks" .

So they had the measure of nuclear weapons from the start.

In 2000 WILPF worked with other NGOs to get UN Security Council Resolution 1325 passed. The first SC resolution to address women specifically. It calls for a greater role for women in conflict resolution peace negotiation and has given rise to several later resolutions highlighting VAW and rape as weapons of war

WILPF has a great history of which we can rightly be proud, but we are not just history.

WILPF's relevance today

WILPF still links human rights, women's participation, disarmament, justice and development. We offer an alternative to the current world view that bombing and war is the preferred "answer" to any international issue of conflict.

In April this year we returned to The Hague for our centenary Congress and an open International Peace Conference which attracted 1,000 people. There were women and men from 80 countries including 4 women nobel peace prize winners who shared their wisdom with the Conference. We created a Manifesto for our future campaigning.

WILPF maintains that the creation and storing of the nuclear weapons is illegal, immoral and costs so much that it is sheer nonsense to keep them. Today's weapons dwarf the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and would create much wider and deeper humanitarian effects if used.

So WILPF as part of CIVIL society, plays an active part of the ICAN Network of organisations working to *ban all nuclear weapons*.

In 2015 after 100 years WILPF is still relevant and needed - working as women to hold those with power to account

By: Sheila Triggs, August 2015