



Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

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Consultative
Status with
United Nations
ECOSOC,
UNCTAD and
UNESCO

Special
Consultative
Relations
with FAO,
ILO and
UNICEF

Dear Sadiq Khan

NO to the ExCeL Centre arms fair, now and in the future

WILPF – the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – was founded to stop wars and prevent future wars by dismantling the causes of war and armed conflict. As a women's international peace organisation with over 100 years of experience, WILPF seeks to shift our UK government's local, regional, national and international policy away from aiding and abetting military confrontation and, instead, move towards negotiation and peace.

We are writing to you about the arms fair held every two years at the ExCeL Centre, within plain sight of your office. We are appalled at – and mourn – the suffering, devastation and lives lost in wars and armed conflicts. More weapons will not end wars. Wars cause human misery and climate destruction... and more wars.

26 September 2024

WILPF applauds the public stance you have made in the past against the arms fair, when you stated "The DSEI arms fair has no place in our city. For London to be used as a marketplace for those wishing to trade in weapons to countries that abuse the human rights of their citizens goes completely against our values." However, you are also reported as saying that you are powerless to stop the arms fair.

It is exactly one year since the last arms fair in Newham and, presumably and unfortunately, exactly one year until the next. Having a Labour Prime Minister as well as a Labour London Mayor offers a fantastic collective opportunity for our government to say NO – now and in the future – to London continuing to host arms fairs.

This seems to us a most opportune moment to bring together like minded politicians and decision-makers in Newham to campaign collectively to find a creative solution to reset the moral compass. For this reason we are copying this letter to the following:

- Rokhsana Fiaz OBE, Mayor of Newham
- Councillor Rohima Rahman, Chair, London Borough of Newham
- Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham
- Hina Bokhari, Unmesh Desai, Zoe Garbett, Bassam Mahfouz, Zack Polanski and Caroline Russell, London Assembly members

It would set the peace-building agenda if the ExCeL Centre could voluntarily reach a decision to withdraw and distance itself from DSEI through a process of awareness-raising and persuasion rather than as a result of protest. A welcome side-effect would be the huge savings for City Hall on the cost for policing the event.

Here are 10 reasons why WILPF says NO to the arms fair:

NO to London showcasing weapons and tools for wars and armed violence

NO to the death, destruction, displacement, and violent oppression and repression that these weapons cause

NO to those who profit from war, killing, injustice, corruption and abusing human rights

NO to the UK government actively supporting arms dealers and military personnel from the world's most violent, authoritarian and undemocratic regimes

NO to the ways in which the military and war contribute to the climate crisis, destroying the environment, and forcing people to flee their homes

NO to the disproportionate impact of war and weapons on the world's poorest, particularly women, girls and minority groups

NO to militarism and violent masculinities, and to the consequences of the arms trade that lead directly to increased sexual and gender-based violence and abuse against women in their homes and communities

NO to the social and political inequalities and pressures from the increase in female-headed households when men are killed in armed conflicts

NO to arming and driving wars for territory and to exploit scarce resources

NO to the ExCeL Centre arms fair, now and in the future

We look forward to hearing from you, with news of your plans to cancel and prohibit future arms fairs.

Yours in peace

Fiona McOwan, National Secretary, for WILPF UK Executive Committee

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Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham, Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (via email)

Hina Bokhari, Unmesh Desai, Zoe Garbett, Bassam Mahfouz, Zack Polanski and Caroline Russell, London Assembly members (via email)