MANIFESTO

We mark the 28th day of April 1915 as the founding date of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

It was the sixth day of the Second Battle of Ypres, one of the First World War’s most futile and costly engagements, which would end in stalemate, leaving 105,000 dead and wounded men. On that day, a mere 104 miles to the north of the battlefield, at The Hague, in neutral Netherlands, 1136 peace-seeking women from twelve countries, including nations on both sides in the conflict, sat down together to discuss how to stop the carnage. They did not argue about the relative responsibility of the parties to the conflict - indeed they believed that everyone, no matter where they lived, must shoulder some of the blame. Their aim was rather to find a mechanism of mediation that could end the conflict there and then. In the longer term they were determined to identify and eradicate the causes of war. The four-day conference ended with the despatch of women envoys to heads of state in fourteen countries, urging a peace commission of neutral states.

WILPF did not yet have its present name. At first, the group emerging from The Hague Congress called itself the International Women’s Committee for Permanent Peace. They did not achieve their primary goal of ceasefire. Indeed the USA joined the war, and the bloodletting continued for another three years, until 39 million had died. But following the Armistice, while the statesmen in Paris were devising the terms of ‘peace’, the women assembled again at a second Congress, this time in Zurich. They protested fiercely against the punitive terms the victors were about to impose on Germany and its allies, warning that they were liable to cause a renewal of war. They were right. Twenty years later a second World War would result in the loss of 100 million lives.

In 1919 the women formed a permanent organization. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom took its enduring name, and opened an office in Geneva.
Today, 28 April 2015, is our centenary.

In this Manifesto, we commemorate our foundation. But we cannot celebrate our centenary. We would have wished, by this date, to be looking back on WILPF as a bygone organization, something ‘of its time’, one of the world’s far-sighted 20th century peace movements that succeeded in relegating militarism and warfare to the dustbin of history. Instead, during these hundred years we have seen armed conflict persist, and the threat of mutual annihilation grow with developments in science and technology. WILPF is needed more than ever. What we do celebrate is our survival, our persistence and our undiminished commitment to the ideal that brought us into being - universal and enduring peace with justice and freedom.

We seize this centenary moment, therefore, to re-invoke the principles and purposes of our fore-sisters, as relevant today as ever they were; to set out our current concerns and tasks; and to foresee the work ahead of us in the century to come.

In the aftermath of the 1914-18 War, WILPF called for the demilitarization of all countries, not just of the defeated states. Total, universal and immediate disarmament and an end to military conscription, have been, from the outset, among our key objectives.

Another has been the establishment of a permanent international mechanism to mediate and arbitrate between and among the nation states. For this reason, WILPF was an ardent supporter of the League of Nations, founded in 1919. From its inception we worked hard through our national sections and our international office in Geneva to overcome the shortcomings of the League, as prospects for a sustained peace deteriorated and war returned.

It is important to recall that WILPF was never a humanitarian ‘ngo’. Rather, we have been, from our earliest days, a social movement organization, campaigning for fundamental changes in society with the long-term aim of ending the scourge of war and laying the foundation on which a durable peace can be constructed. Our unique
method has been to mobilize women for this project, to engage women’s power - for
though we are oppressed we are not powerless!

‘…the dangerous peculiarity in the situation is the alliance
between business in pursuit of profit, and nationalist
policies in pursuit of power…the economic alliance
between governments and business, where each hand
washes the other…’

Emily Greene Balch, address to WILPF 4th Congress,
Washington DC, 1924.

The First World War had been fought between rival industrial and imperialist
nations, competing for control of territories and resources, of oil wells and steel
industries. Therefore the papers presented at the 4th WILPF Congress held in
Washington in 1924 did not limit our aim to disarmament, but outlined the economic
aspects of a new international order. World peace, WILPF argued, depended upon an
end to imperialism and colonialism; genuine equality between nations; free movement
of people and goods; financial reforms; international governance of oceans and other
waterways; and a fair allocation of scarce raw materials between peoples. Our
Manifesto of that year included a determination ‘to bring about the organization of
economic life, not for individual or class profit, but for the highest possible
development of every human being’.

To such ends we appealed ‘to the peoples to insist upon controlling their
relations with other peoples’ - democratized diplomacy. And we called ‘in particular to
women that they may build up the civilization upon which their freedom and the good
of their children depends’. Many members of that early WILPF had been active in the
pre-war suffrage movement, and had an unshakeable belief in the need for full and
equal participation of women in every aspect of social, economic and political life,
both as a measure of justice and a prerequisite of peace.

For a hundred years now the Women’s International League for Peace and
Freedom has tirelessly continued its work. In this name thousands of women activists
in scores of countries have organized, campaigned and educated for peace and for
economic, social and political justice. Today, on our centenary, the Women’s
International League for Peace and Freedom renews its pledge to find the way to put
an end to militarism, militarization and war. This Manifesto is an expression of
WILPF’s determination to grow and become more effective, to engage, mobilize and
amplify the energies of women worldwide, to shake the foundations and topple the
structures of patriarchy, along with those of capitalist class relations and racist,
nationalist systems of supremacy, to achieve full social, economic and political
participation as women in all our communities, states and international organizations,
and to liberate

Women’s Power to Stop War

Restating our purposes

Today, we restate WILPF’s intentions. Though they reflect the circumstances
of our particular moment in time, they differ little from the League’s original aims and
objectives. They are:

• To bring together diverse women of a range of political beliefs and
  philosophies united in determination to stop current wars, and to study, make
  known and help abolish the factors that cause and legitimate war.

• To campaign for total and universal disarmament and demilitarization.

• To advocate the out-lawing of the use of coercive force to resolve conflicts of
  interest between and within nations.

• To imagine peace, and work to bring it about by inventing and empowering
  mechanisms of co-operation, sharing, mediation and negotiation between
  individuals, communities and states.

Emphatically we affirm today our determination

• To ensure the full inclusion of women in defining and achieving security, for the
  inseparable purposes of equality and peace.
• To lend our energies to achieving the worldwide hegemony of the principle and practice of human rights, extended to include a right to peace, sustained by a system of international law.

• To work towards a new international order free from imperialism, political tyranny, economic exploitation and financial speculation, in which income, resources and opportunities are justly distributed.

• To end, now and forever, the patriarchal relations of power, control and abuse that have deformed the lives of women, children and men for millennia, and which contribute to violent societies.

• To establish respect and co-operation between people of diverse phenotype and habitat, culture and belief system, ability, age and sexuality, recognizing our diversity as a human wealth, not a cause for hatred, division and conflict.

• To learn, teach and practice non-destructive relations between human beings and the plants and creatures of Earth’s biosphere, in order to ensure the health and habitability of the planet and eliminate environmental causes of conflict.

‘New times demand new deeds and conditions, new work, and perhaps even new principles. We must not forget that history is evolution. Time must find us ready…with the same self-respect and faith in what women have to give to the world as did the women in 1915.’

Lida Gustava Heymann, WILPF International Vice President, 4th Congress, Washington DC, 1924.

**Our current programme of work**

The activities of WILPF at this moment in our history are organized under three broad themes: *Challenge Militarism; Invest in Peace*; and *Strengthen Multilateralism*. Below, as a historic point of reference to which a future WILPF may look back, we briefly summarize the conditions we are experiencing today and note our current activist priorities.
Challenge militarism

[NB: Note please that the various sections in square brackets, below, will be updated closer to our publication date.]

In the first decade [15 years] of the 21st millennium, armed conflicts within and between states were causing [20 - 40,000 deaths] annually worldwide. Global military expenditure grew steadily, so that [by 2011 it stood at $1.7 trillion, or $249] for each woman, man and child on earth. Meanwhile, [an estimated 1.29 billion people] were [at are] living in absolute poverty. The United States military budget accounts for almost half total world arms expenditure. The volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons grew by about one-quarter during the decade. The largest arms exporting country by far was the USA, followed by Russia, Germany, France and the UK. Meanwhile, at the start of 2012, [nine countries together possessed more than 19,000 nuclear weapons, 2,000 of which] are held in a state of high operational alert. Thirty-seven states still have military conscription. This massive militarization is deforming our societies, stifling civil liberties and wrecking the environment. For ever masculinizing our cultures, it diminishes and oppresses women and undermines the values so many of us cherish. We utterly condemn and resist it.

WILPF’s project Reaching Critical Will aims to provide information, evidence and lobbying tools for focused protest against the very concept of military ‘security’. We argue for the reallocation of public funds from military to social provision. We expose the malign links between policy makers, military structures and private capital in the ‘military industrial complex’ that has a vested interest in the perpetuation of war. In the [21 countries] in which WILPF has Sections today, we engage public opinion and lobby governments to slash military budgets; dismantle armed forces; end conscription; cease manufacture, sales, export and trafficking of arms; and eliminate armed violence from among the instruments of foreign or domestic policy. We contribute our unremitting efforts to the current international campaign to rid the world of nuclear weapons, calling for a ban not only on their testing and proliferation, but on their very possession.
To this struggle WILPF brings an explicit feminist analysis that sees gender relations, as we live them today, as significant among the causes of militarism and war. Patriarchy, forever shaping masculinity in domineering and aggressive forms, is tightly intersected with the capitalist economic interests and politico-national ambitions that foster militarization worldwide. The power relations of class, nation and gender together keep war on the boil.

*Invest in Peace*

To pursue our task of ending war we have to be able to imagine peace. Although weaponry and standing armies are an immediate source of danger in themselves, predisposing to an armed response when a conflict of interests arises, the long-term causes of war are more deeply rooted in our social, economic and political systems. Physical violence is often a response to the intolerable ‘structural violence’ of unequal, oppressive and exploitative regimes. The populations of the world are grossly unequal today by several significant measures. At the top of the Human Development Index is [Norway where gross national income per head is $49,000, at the bottom is the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where it is a mere $319. In Norway life expectancy at birth is 81 years, in the Congo only 49 years. A Norwegian child can expect more than twelve years of education, for a Congolese child the mean is 3.5 years of schooling, and many get none at all. Meanwhile the DRC is the site of the world’s deadliest conflict since World War II, with 5.4 million dead since 1998, almost half of them children under five, and a massive incidence of rape.]

Gross inequalities also exist between individuals and households, and worldwide this wealth gap is increasing. Currently [the richest 1% of adults own 40% of global assets.] Class domination and exploitation is therefore a major source of unrest. But ‘structural violence’ is political as well as economic, and another huge disparity is in people’s recourse to human rights, sixty-five years after the Universal Declaration. The only imaginable peaceful world is one where these wrongs have been righted, where human rights, as well as economic justice, prevail. An important component of WILPF’s work today is advocacy and campaigning for transparency and democracy; for the observance of international law; a fair distribution of wealth,
income and resources; the eradication of racism and sexism; and for sustainable development.

A current priority under the theme “invest in peace” is winning acceptance of a fundamental redefinition of the word ‘security’. Traditionally security has meant armament. We believe that dependence on weaponry is a source not of security but perennial insecurity. Thinking as feminists, we understand security to mean the safety of human beings, rather than the defensibility of the state. Women’s condition is a good measure of human security. Do women, as humankind’s reproducers, have the support systems they need? Are they secure in their everyday lives, with adequate housing, sufficient sources of income? Do they have the equality, autonomy and empowerment to act in their own best interests and in the interests of those for whom they care? Are they safe from sexual bullying and violence? Our objective is to lodge such a concept of security in policy-making at all levels with the effect of focusing governance on the wellbeing of populations – and, besides, of liberating women’s energies and skills for peace-building. A current WILPF project is bringing together women of the Middle East and North Africa to help further this ‘women, peace and security’ agenda in the midst of social uprising, political reaction and police repression in their region.

WILPF and partner organizations have been instrumental in obtaining, since the year 2000, a sequence of UN Security Council Resolutions on ‘women, peace and security’ that embody this understanding, and require women’s greater inclusion in peace negotiation and peace missions. Part of our effort is currently directed to getting these resolutions fully implemented at national and international level. To this end we share information through our Peace Women programme and website.

Strengthen and Reform Multilateralism

From its earliest days, WILPF has called for an ‘organization of the society of nations’ to prevent war. We were strong advocates of the United Nations in 1945 as we had been of the League of Nations in 1919. But the UN is betraying its founding principles. Though its many agencies and projects provide valuable services, politically it is failing us. The hierarchy of a few permanent and a majority of rotating members of the Security Council nullifies the equal rights of ‘nations large and small’
guaranteed in the Charter’s Preamble. The Security Council has signally failed to date in its task, under Article 1, of securing disarmament, preventing war and removing threats to peace. In particular it has become immobilized by the lack of co-operation of the USA, on whose funding the UN is dependent. Since the end of the Cold War, in 1991, the US has used its power of veto [fourteen times - in thirteen of them] to prevent censure of Israeli policies that impede peace and justice for Palestinians. Furthermore, to the dismay of the peace movement, in 2008 the Secretaries General of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, an aggressive and nuclear-armed military alliance of the USA and allies, signed a highly questionable Joint Declaration of Co-operation. Thus the essence of the Charter, which lies in observing the wellbeing of all the human family as opposed to the interests of powerful nations, is perverted. [sentence deleted]

Now more than ever a functional multilateral mechanism is needed to guarantee the best aspects of the nation state system, and eliminate its lethal tendencies. WILPF was one of the first NGOs to receive consultative status at the UN through the Economic and Social Council under Article 71 of the Charter, and has continually monitored, informed and lobbied government representatives in New York. Today, from the key location of our New York Office, we work unremittingly in UN fora to educate diplomats and officials in the interests of returning the UN to its original principles, to make it truly a guarantor of world peace with justice. On the one hand we make a priority of inserting a feminist perspective, a gender analysis and women’s concerns into debates and programmes on disarmament, conflict, peace and security. For example we not long ago secured the inclusion of the issue of gender-based violence into provisions of the Arms Trade Treaty, and the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Conversely, we introduce the themes of disarmament, conflict, peace and security into the women’s sphere at the UN - for example at the biennial Conference on the Status of Women, and in our dealings with the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. We engage with UN agencies, actively pressing for the worldwide local implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as enabling women’s genuine political empowerment and thus contributing to social justice and the likelihood of peace.
From the vantage point of our Geneva office we engage with the UN’s Human Rights Council. We enable representatives of our country Sections and partners to make an input to the Council’s process of Universal Periodic Review, thematic debates and special sessions, and to carry back to their own governments an expectation of the full recognition and implementation of human rights, particularly the right of women to respect, equality and inclusion. We engage with the human rights treaty bodies to insert our message into their deliberations.

WILPF’s Organization

In this transnational movement we call the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom a vitally important element is our country Sections. At the height of our activism in 1926 we numbered 50,000 members in 40 countries. Today we are alive and active in [twenty-one countries, and estimate our membership to be ...]. It is at these grassroots in local branches and national Sections that women are drawn to each other in co-operation for action to end war and eradicate the roots of war, place by place. It is here that we awaken and inspire each other, set about monitoring and analysing our local realities, and go on together to educate and influence policy-makers and the people who vote for them.

Country Sections send representatives to WILPF’s International Board, that elects an Executive Committee which in turn reports to the League’s ultimate decision-making body, the triennial Congress. This, with a shifting array of working groups, committees and commissions on different topics, is our governing structure. Servicing the organization is an international secretariat, headed by a Secretary General, based in our office in Geneva. We also maintain a staffed office in New York to monitor the UN and make our position known to diplomats and UN officials there. We value working partnerships with academic women in international relations, war and peace studies, with human rights...
lawyers, and with a wealth of women’s movement and peace movement organizations that share our purposes.

The value of this organizational structure lies in the potential it gives us for integration. It enables us to assemble experience from the grassroots in many localities worldwide, mobilizing it as an international force for change; to integrate our feminist with our antimilitarist analysis; and to work in a coherent and unified way towards our goals of disarmament, justice, and thereby peace.

**Looking ahead: our future tasks**

The hundred year passage of time we mark today has seen change on a scale our fore-sisters could scarcely have imagined. World population has [tripled to 7 billion]. Production has grown even faster: gross world product is [around $80 trillion today, forty times that of 1920.] The 19th century empires have disintegrated, but economic and military domination of some countries by others perpetuates colonialism. Rapacious capitalist conglomerates, banking and financial interests, have gained global reach and, with it, unaccountable power to shape people’s lives and chances on every continent. Scientific knowledge, together with technologies of engineering, extraction, production, information, communication, travel and warfare have advanced far beyond the imagining of those who died in the trenches of the First World War. There have been gains, some for the privileged few, some reaching a wider population. But there have also been massive costs, paid by poorer countries, poorer women, men and children, and by the natural world. As the rate of technological innovation increases, so too does the potential for violence and destruction. Can we imagine WILPF’s work in coming decades?

*Preventing the advance of weaponry*

On the front of disarmament and demilitarization, our first challenge remains the dismantling of the world’s nuclear arsenals. But new military technologies are on the horizon that we must descry in their secret development, and scotch before they
are commissioned and deployed. Drone aircraft are already a visible menace. But we know a diversity of robotic systems of surveillance, invasion and assassination are in the design process. Biological and chemical warfare may have been outlawed, but we have seen the law flouted and the potential for this kind of unseen, intangible weapon is growing. As national economies become more and more dependent on the Internet, cyber threats and aggression will grow. The struggle for privacy against intrusion and surveillance is intensifying. There is an immediate risk of the militarization of space, and a more distant but quite real likelihood that states with the power to do so will seek to use the Moon as a foothold for planetary control.

Responding to politico-national conflicts

It is in the hands of political actors - nation states, alliances of states, non-state militias - that weapons do their deadly work. National ambitions for control of territory, markets and populations will continue to be a serious threat, particularly as in coming decades the USA and the more powerful Western European states see their control assailed by up-coming economies – especially China. Likewise, groups holding state power are liable to continue to strive for control of political machinery, and to repress, and be resisted by, aspirant minorities within and spanning their borders. Tactical partitions such as those of Korea, Ireland, Bosnia and Cyprus will call for negotiating skill if they are not to be a cause of renewed war. There will continue to be major population movements caused by persecution and armed violence, so that people’s right to cross frontiers in search of refuge or asylum will need to be defended and extended. When governments commit atrocities against their own people, the international ‘responsibility to protect’ is liable to be used as a pretext for military intervention. We urgently need international means to support states in fulfilling their human rights obligations and political mechanisms to curb regimes when they turn murderous. State subcontracting of military and police functions to private contractors, a practice fostered by instability, is likely to become more and more common, undermining democratic control of armed forces. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a growing threat, aggressive, expansive and nuclear-armed, aiming to defend Western, and particularly US, interests in an ever-wider spectrum of world geography. Our work to educate for peace, to democratize control of foreign policy, and extend and strengthen multilateral mechanisms for co-operation and conflict-resolution will therefore have even more urgency in the future than it has today.
Inventing people’s democracies

As well as the perennial risk of regional and international conflict that characterizes the nation state system, states can be dangerous to their own citizens. We will have to work hard, within our countries, to neutralize excesses of state power, to assure the practice of human rights, non-corrupt electoral democracy, and responsible media, free from state control and corporate manipulation. Fascism has not gone away, and it threatens violence between xenophobic elements and victimized minorities, especially migrant communities. Conflict between adherents of competing religions and between religious and secular movements, is intensifying. The future will require us to change the way power works, to decentralize democratic governance, to engage and empower people as individuals, as and within families and households, as and within neighbourhoods and local communities. We badly need to rediscover the skills of co-operation and collectivity at all scales of organization. We will have to invent and strengthen practices of social healing, democratic grassroots assemblies, and movements drawing diverse participants from across national and many kinds of internal borders. Such is the practical content of struggle to eradicate the causes of war.

Revolutionizing the mode of production

The productive uses of the capitalist system have always been offset by the exploitative relations and divisive class system it entails. In the current period of global capitalism, the power of the corporations and financiers is a major factor in the persistence of unstable and unjust economic systems. It has far outstripped the power of elected governments to moderate or control it. WILPF has always had the goal of revolutionary change by non-violent means for purposes of social and economic justice. This remains our objective. But the world has learned from the twentieth century experiments in which states, taking control of the means of production with the socialist goal of empowering the people, ended by tyrannizing them.

The challenge for the future therefore is to transform the capitalist system from within, using state and international mechanisms wherever possible to tame the
operations of global banks and corporations, but also mobilizing the potential of people as employees, consumers and users to stake out spaces within the system in which to resist and refuse existing economic relations and practices, to invent new forms of control on investment and extraction of value, to disaggregate ownership, and equalize distribution and consumption – especially to establish food sovereignty. This imagines a creative work of non-dogmatic socialist and feminist solidarity across national borders, cultural groups, localities, classes and genders that is unprecedented. But without it peace will never be within our reach.

Reversing climate change and environmental destruction

The last twenty years have made us aware of a new peril. The appalling implications of run-away global warming due to rising carbon emissions are now well understood, along with the threat to sensitive ecological systems of exploitative development. The threat of armed conflict due to displacement of populations by rising sea levels and desertification will grow. There will be heightened competition in a changing geography, with nation states and corporate interests seeking to control water, fertile land and forests. The survival and wellbeing of indigenous groups, the world's first peoples, will be in yet more peril. There will be increasing conflict for control of oceans and access to marine resources. A dangerous shift towards nuclear power is detectable. It is sold to us as 'the least worst' energy option, but reactors will be vulnerable to accident and held hostage in armed conflict. Notwithstanding the imperative to reduce the burning of fossil fuels, competition for oil and gas resources is intensifying – witness the new practice of ‘fracking’ and the reckless competition to access the melting Arctic. We suspect that Africa, already the location of many wars, will become a continent in ever greater crisis. [The human development index of sub-Saharan Africa in 2012 is the world’s lowest at 0.475 against a world average of 0.694].

‘We identified patriarchal values as the root causes contributing to environmental exploitation. These values which see women, animals and nature as objects to be owned, colonized, consumed and forced to yield and to reproduce, allow for the overall pollution and destruction of the earth and the oppression of people. The introduction of feminist values is essential to the healing of our planet.’

Conversion to sustainable social systems and modes of production therefore will be a growing part of work for peace. The stabilization of global temperatures and protection of ecological systems are obligatory goals of our non-violent revolution. Once again we bring to this transformative work our feminist perspective, which draws on aeons of human history in which women have gained gender-specific experience in the enforced patriarchal sexual division of labour, in which our role has been gathering, subsistence horticulture, cooking, fertility, nurture and the care of humans and animal stock. It is not essentialist romancing but material evidence that suggests many women have a sense of functional bonding with, and responsibility towards, other life forms. We shall need to bring this logic into play increasingly in our work for sustainability and peace.

Transforming gender

In coming decades our work must continue for women’s equality in all spheres of life and for the full and genuine representation of women in elected bodies and positions of authority and influence. It will be a challenge to ensure that women are not co-opted by this process into exploitative relations of ruling and production. We must strive to change the nature and functioning of power as we accede to it. However, although substantial gains have been made for some women in some countries in the last hundred years, there are still many women in the world in societies and subcultures where misogyny rules, where women are not in control of their own fertility, where women’s experience, skills and qualities are under-valued, and where equality of rights, opportunities and achievements is still a distant dream. Sexual violence by men against women has been endemic throughout history, in the home and in public spaces, in all economic classes, at all levels of development, both in everyday life and in war. That it continues, largely unaddressed, in the modern age is a scandal.

The patriarchal sex-gender order that continues to prevail worldwide has damaging effects on society even beyond the subordination and abuse of women. Patriarchy is a power system, shaping and holding individuals and institutions in a vicious hierarchy – a rank ordering between men, and a positioning of men over women. Male supremacy functions day to day, and is sustained from one historical
period to the next, by the social construction of women and men in dichotomous
gender identities. The two sexes, necessarily differentiated biologically, are
needlessly set further apart by the distribution to one and the other of distinctive
qualities, roles and responsibilities with the effect that neither sex is fully human.

In particular, vital to the reproduction of phallocratic rule from one generation to
the next is the constitution of masculinity in a particular form. In most societies and
subcultures, the ‘proper man’ required by the system is someone prepared to exert
authority, competitive, combative, ready to defend honour and impose will, by force if
necessary. Indeed the bodies of boys and men, through childhood, youth and
maturity, are purposefully fed, trained and conditioned to be forces of coercion. Some
males escape this shaping, and a few emerging subcultures discourage it, but the
model persists. The effect of this widespread and dominant form of masculinity is high
levels of violence in most societies, between men, and inflicted by men on women.
Masculinity in this hegemonic form also predisposes society to armed conflict,
whether among internal interest groups or with external ‘enemies’. Patriarchy as a
system of power relations is intricately intersected with systems of economic class
power, and of politico-national power, all three founded on violence. Together they
structure our institutions and shape our lives. Together they condemn us to live in a
continuum of violence that spans home, community, workplace and war zone.

‘Women must cease to admire a man with a gun in his hand and must seek to counteract the destructive
tendencies in the masculine mentality.’

Anita Augsbourg, delegate to WILPF’s 4th Congress,
Washington DC, 1924.

This gender system has to change. It is foundational in feminist thought that
biology is not destiny, that gender difference is to a large extent socially constituted,
culturally produced. We can choose how our boys are reared and educated, how our
young men are socialized, the behaviours for which our adult men are rewarded.
These can and must be the subject of conscious and explicit policy. One aspect of
WILPF’s work for peace, therefore, along with the struggle for a new economic order,
and for responsibility and co-operation in the nation-state system, will be a feminist
struggle for transformation of the sex-gender order.
Strengthening women, listening to women and amplifying their voices, WILPF will work to end the sense of privilege and entitlement that men inherit from each other. We will reclaim the much abused term ‘honour’ and marry it to intelligent compassion. We will strive to assure our young women life choices that offer possibilities besides and beyond, on the one hand, control of their bodies and behaviours by religious authoritarianism, and on the other, commodification and hyper-sexualization by consumer capitalism.

We will encourage in men the more positive qualities associated with masculinity, such as fortitude and courage, and we will indeed claim them for ourselves too. We will emphasize the power women already have as mothers, contingently the first nurturers, educators and carers of infant children, and their significant role in fostering social values. Thus we will seek societal respect and reward for the best qualities associated with femininity, such as empathy and patience, and will encourage boys and men to acquire and practise these as well. Women’s vital contributions to societies must be recognized and valued by men if real equality is ever to be achieved. The progressive transformation of gender from a power relation to one of partnership can only be realized if men wish for it as women do, and work with us to bring it about.

Organizing intelligently

Meeting such future challenges will call for ever more effective organizing. We need a growing membership in local branches, building into more and stronger national sections. We need to be tireless in fund-raising to gather ample resources to support a strong international secretariat. It must be staffed by politically-educated and practically-skilled women, capable of responding creatively to the insights coming from the grassroots, linking and amplifying the Sections’ activities, representing them at international level, and in turn enriching activists with information, resources and political links. We must be at the cutting edge of information technology, so that, as we profit from every new mechanism for outreach and mobilization, the websites and blogs of which we are proud today will seem quaint and old-fashioned in comparison. We must achieve a lively presence on the Net, in the media, in the institutions and on
the street, such that feminist antimilitarism becomes a widely recognized and
respected force for change.

We must urgently develop links among and between women and women’s
organizations, ensuring that we are embedded within, and lend our energies to, a
movement of women against violence and war that has expression at every level and
in every location of a more and more complex world society. We must reach out to
and co-operate with mixed organizations of women and men with similar objectives
and methods, for only by working together will we achieve justice and peace. We
must continually work to gain respect and a hearing from those in positions of
influence and power – who, we are determined and convinced, will increasingly be
women (and doing power differently).

As WILPF grows older, our membership must grow younger. In this moment,
our centenary year 2015, WILPF calls out to you, WILPFers of tomorrow. We imagine
many of you as living in the ‘global south’, or as belonging to minority or
disadvantaged groups in the ‘global north’. We urge you to organize in your schools,
colleges and universities, in your workplaces, in your villages, towns and cities. Bring
the particular knowledge of contemporary conditions that only young women possess.
Bring the privileged foresight only your generation has of the changes on the horizon.
Bring your deftness with new technologies, your vibrancy and hope. Help us make a
reality of

Women’s Power to Stop War

! Let us have no need to celebrate another centenary!