



In recent times, the first time in history, at the International Congress for Women in April 1915 at The Hague in the Netherlands, 1,200 women from warring and neutral countries protested against World War I. This later became the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). It was the beginning of women's organisations and movements in support of peace and disarmament. During the Cold War, women lobbied against arms stockpiling and the possible use of nuclear weapons. In 1959 the European Movement of Women Against Nuclear Disarmament and other women's groups began massive education and petition campaigns. In 1961, WILPF pioneered the US/Soviet women's seminars to help break Cold War barriers. In 1964, Women Strike for Peace was started in America while women from all over the world converged on a NATO conference in the Netherlands to oppose plans to establish a multilateral nuclear force. In 1969, WILPF sponsored an international conference on ending chemical and biological warfare. In the 1980s, the women of Greenham Common in England inspired the world by their opposition to nuclear weapons and bases. As men had always done to leave home to fight wars, these women left their homes to dedicate themselves to peace. In the 1990's, mothers in both Macedonia and Chechnya continued the peace movement. In 1999, the Million Mom March in the USA dedicated itself to the prevention of gun deaths and injuries and supported victims and survivors of gun violence. In May 1982, *Grandmothers for Peace*, a non-profit organization, was formed at the height of the Cold War. The 'grandmother effect' operates among Israeli soldiers who control Palestinian movements. They are part of MACHSOM Watch founded in 2001.<sup>12</sup> In the Pacific region,

*'My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together'.<sup>14</sup>*

women have organised against nuclear testing. In Japan, women set up a peace camp at the base of Mount Fuji. In Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Somalia and Niger women have advocated for peace and reconstruction in their countries, and in Bougainville women were instrumental in bringing the violent conflict to an end. There are many other organisations, such as *Women in Black* and *CodePink*, that also work to prevent violence and struggle for peace and reconciliation.

### **Why women in peacemaking?**

A compelling factor in the mobilisation of women to form their own peace organizations is that of 'mothering'. There is also the fact that their security is also threatened. Women have always organised themselves to protect their children: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina protested the 'disappearances' of their children during the reign of a tyrannical military dictatorship; the Meira Paibis challenged the proliferation of armed conflict in the northeastern region of Manipur in India; the Association of War Affected Women (AWAW) who were directly and indirectly affected by the war where their sons and husbands were either missing/missing in action, killed, or disabled due to the conflict in Sri Lanka.<sup>13</sup>

A key factor is the connection many women have made between gender equality and peace where permanent peace could be built only on the basis of equal rights (including equal rights between women and men), justice within and between national independence and freedom. The

various forms of violence - such as human rights violations, violence against women, and structural violence in economic disparities - have been linked to the violence seen during wars. From this perspective, disarmament relates not only to all forms of violence but also to the creation of a culture of peace, which can be perpetuated just as easily from generation to generation.<sup>15</sup>

The security implications for women are considerable, even though they are not comparable to those faced by men in battle. Wherever weapons exist in communities, and are not removed following a conflict, women risk not only lethal domestic violence, but become more vulnerable as they manage their daily workload and face the burden of caring for the injured and disabled.<sup>16</sup> The link between the gender division of labour and organised violence in non-industrialised societies strongly suggests that there may be a close connection between modern forms of male domination over women and modern war.<sup>17</sup>

According to the United Nations, a culture of peace is 'a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life that rejects violence and prevents conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations'. This is the context in which women as sisters, wives, mothers and transmitters of cultural values, especially children and youth, have played a major role in cultivating a culture of peace.<sup>18</sup>

***'If it's natural to kill, how come men have to go into training to learn how?'*<sup>19</sup>**



**Edmund Rice Centre**

AWARENESS • ADVOCACY • ACTION

15 Henley Road, Homebush West  
(near Flemington Station)

**Phone (02) 8762 4200**

**Fax (02) 8762 4220**

**Email [johns@erc.org.au](mailto:johns@erc.org.au)**

**Web [www.erc.org.au](http://www.erc.org.au)**



Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

179 Albert Rd, Strathfield 2135

**Phone (02) 9739 2100**

**Fax (02) 02 9739 2105**

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