WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE & FREEDOM

WILPF AOTEAROA

WILPF Aotearoa newsletter August 2026

Contents:

- Branch news
- WILPF Congress
- Other news and reports

Branch news:

Te Wai Pounamu

On Sunday 9 August 2026, a large group of around 200 people gathered at the World Peace Bell in the Ōtautahi / Christchurch Botanic Gardens to commemorate the 81st anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which happened in 1945.

Alex Fyfe, the president of UCDisarm, gave a brief speech on behalf of the club, and then also read the words of the late Elsie Locke, the prominent Christchurch peace campaigner, which speak of the Avon River sharing the same waters that flow through to the Pacific Ocean, connecting the city to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Despite the winter chill and the solemn purpose of the gathering, the scene was brightened by pink and white camellia flowers picked by locals from the Red Zone, origami cranes, candles and lanterns. People from all walks of life and political parties stood side-by-side in remembrance.

Photo courtesy Disarmament & Security Centre

The choir was standout - Nikki Barry from the Muse Charitable Trust brought over 50 singers and they sang a Japanese lullaby and John Lennon's *Imagine*.

Photo courtesy Disarmament & Security Centre

The event was a powerful continuation of Christchurch's long-standing tradition of commemorating the atomic bombings. As New Zealand's first nuclear-free city (declared in 1982) and the nation's first Peace City (proclaimed in 2002), Christchurch has a proud legacy of promoting peace and nuclear disarmament. This year's commemoration served as both a remembrance of the victims and a renewed commitment to share the testimonies of the hibakusha, ensuring their lessons endure for future generations.

Lucy Stewart

Photo courtesy Disarmament & Security Centre

Tāmaki Makaurau

Tāmaki Makaurau branch also commemorated the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On 6 August the film *In This Corner of the World* was screened at the Ellen Melville Centre in central Auckland, followed by an engaged discussion about the issues raised.

We had on display one of the Hiroshima Panels created by Iri and Toshi Maruki. Iri and Toshi were eyewitnesses to the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and they began collaborating on their signature work, the Hiroshima Panels.

In 1954, a hydrogen bomb exploded on Bikini atoll. The crew of the Daigo Fukuryu Maru, a fishing boat from the port of Yaizu, was showered with the ashes of death. Six months later, Kuboyama Aikichi died. Three times the Japanese have fallen victim to nuclear weapons. Photo: David Robie, Asia Pacific Report

This particular panel (IX Yaizu) was chosen by us to highlight the link between the 1945 bombs and the testing of atomic and nuclear weapons in the Pacific, and the ongoing effects on Pacific peoples. Also on display were Del Abcede's photographs from Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

WILPF Aotearoa president, Suzanne Loughlin introduced the film and the event and made connections between the genocidal possibilities of nuclear weapons and the genocide currently happening in Gaza.

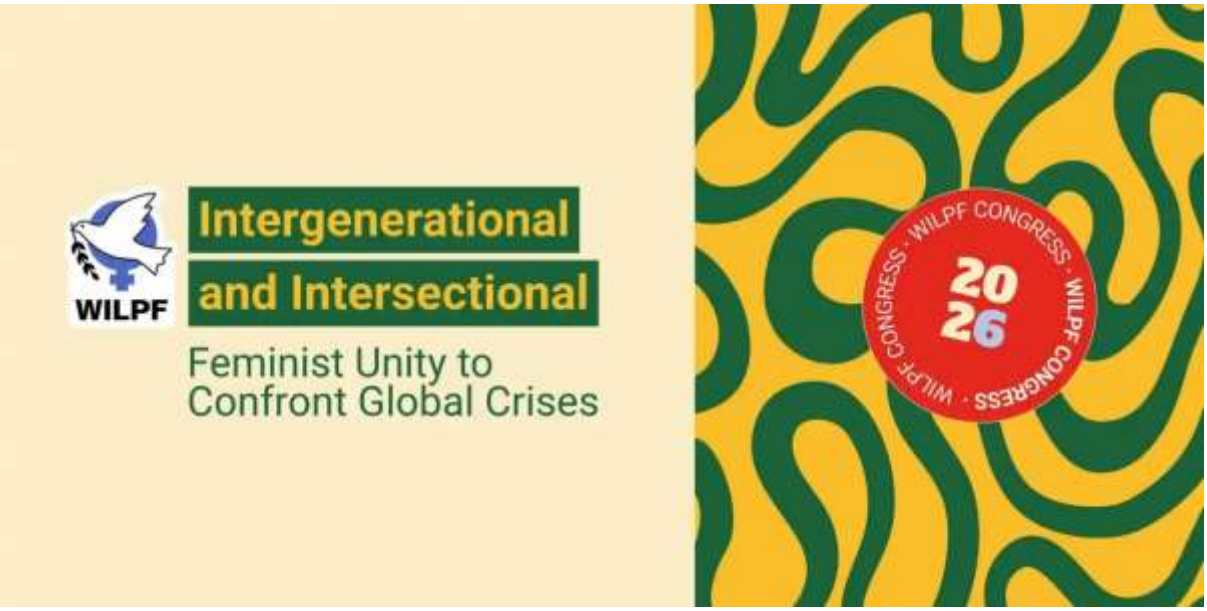
Suzanne Loughlin.
Photo: David Robie, Asia Pacific Report

The branch's conversation with Auckland Museum regarding the focus and lack of nuance in the museum's current war exhibitions is ongoing. We have met with one of the Museum's board members and our letter has been discussed by the Board. We are awaiting a response and in the meantime are planning to raise the issues with community boards.

Branch members continue to help organise the weekly rallies for Gaza in Britomart Place and the branch co-sponsored the season of Palestinian films that were screened at the Ellen Melville Centre. Kathy Ross is representing both PSNA and WILPF Tāmaki Makaurau in presenting to Auckland Council a notice of motion requesting advice on the extent to which the Council's current procurement and investment policies and practices align with the intent of UN Security Council Resolution 2334. This work is also ongoing.

Future work includes a stall at the Parnell Rose Festival in November and reprinting *Winners All* and *Peaceful Games*.

Megan Hutching



WILPF Congress, 17-20 July 2026

WILPF members gathered online in July for the 34th International Congress hosted by WILPF Cameroon.

Congress is the highest decision-making body of WILPF and, especially when online, is mostly a business meeting. There were some workshops and information sharing sessions in the week before Congress started, however, although these weren't at very friendly times for us in Aotearoa.

The main business at Congress is to receive reports on how the organisation is faring – from the International Treasurer, the International President and the Secretary-General – as well as vote on any proposed amendments to the international constitution and to appoint the new International Board. The various committees, working groups and networks also provide reports to Congress.

Unfortunately, the financial situation is looking pretty grim at the moment. International funders which gave grants for the administration involved in running an international organisation such as WILPF, have been changing their priorities and so, in the past months, a number of WILPF women at the International Secretariat in Geneva have had to be made redundant.

In more heartening news, the new International Programme was passed and will be circulated to members after it has been translated into French and Spanish for our French- and Spanish-speaking sisters. Some useful resolutions were also passed at Congress and we will work together to see how Aotearoa Section can help to implement these.

The new International Board was also elected and appointed – the regional representatives are appointed by their regions. You can read about the new Board here.

We are now looking for a new Section representative for the Asia Pacific regional group. If you are interested, please get in touch with me and I can let you know what would be involved. Broadly, it is attending regional WILPF meetings and reporting back to the Section executive committee.

WILPF Aotearoa was entitled to two delegates to Congress and Suzanne Loughlin and I represented you. Having it online meant that we were not able to attend all sessions as some were in the wee small hours of the night. Another disadvantage of an online meeting is that attendees do not get the opportunity to meet and talk to other sisters from around the world. The advantage, however, is that more WILPFers can attend Congress. It is difficult to decide which option is better.

No decision has yet been made about which Section will host the next meeting, but the call for interest is now open. So far, Sections in Lebanon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Palestine and Pakistan have indicated interest.

We will keep you up to date.

Megan Hutching

Other news and reports:

WILPF and the Pacific Peace Network (PPN)

WILPF is working with other organisations and individuals through the Pacific Peace Network to raise awareness of and promote opposition to militarism, nuclearism and support for feminist foreign policy that pursue justice and non-violence over the current beating of war drums.

At the PPN's most recent webinar *Building an Ocean of Peace,* Sharon Baghwan-Rolls who opened proceedings reminded us that the "Pacific must never be reduced to a theatre of strategic competition". Our ocean must not be militarised in the name of security while communities experience the reality of insecurities including climate disasters, gender-based violence, economic injustice, ecological loss and the unresolved legacies of nuclear testing.

For those who missed it you can listen here to speakers from across the region talking about the insecurities that militarism delivers to communities on the ground.

Keep an eye out for our next collective venture at Pacific Peace Network

Suzanne Loughlin

Webinar Series on Women Resisting Militarism & Demanding Feminist Peace and Justice

Facilitated by The Philippines-based Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD).

In 2025, world military expenditure reached $US2.8 trillion, a 2.9 per cent increase from the previous year. In 2025 Asia and the Pacific had its biggest increase in military expenditure. Many parts in Asia and the Pacific continue to reel under the damaging impacts of militarisation especially displacement of indigenous communities,

ravaging the environment, and sexual violence against women.

Our countries continue to direct their national budget towards military expenditures, leaving behind social services, especially services that women and their families need. World hunger could end by 2030 with less than 4 per cent of the 2025 world military budget. Every child around the world could be fully vaccinated using 10 per cent of the annual world military budget. And children from low- and lower-middle-income countries could enjoy 12 years of education using 1.8 years' of the world military expenditure.

In response to this, APWLD is launching a campaign AGAINST militarism and FOR feminist peace and justice called No To Militarism and Imperialist Wars. Feminist Peace and Justice Now!

The campaign is being launched with the webinar series as the campaign's kick-off event that aims to bring forward the voices of women who are reeling under the impacts of militarism in the region, and to hold accountable the imperial and fascist forces.

The webinar series aims to expose militarism and its manifestations for women and their communities in Asia and the Pacific; raise political education and public awareness on themes around militarism viz. rising military budgets, the impacts of military infrastructure/bases on communities, climate justice, and extraction of resources; and finally to strengthen the call for Feminist Peace and Justice among APWLD members, allies, networks and the larger public.

Two of the webinars have already happened, but there are two more scheduled for 3 September and 11 September.

You can register here.

New Documentary on West Papua

"The world should notice this. It's not the Amazon, it's just in our front door, in the Pacific here," said Dandhy Dwi Laksono, director of *Pesta Babi (Pig Feast): Colonialism in our Time*, a new documentary film about the impacts of the deforestation in South Papua, the agri-business schemes behind it and the role Indonesia's military plays in it all.
For a country with a record of large deforestation projects, Indonesia's current activities in the far southeastern corner of the republic, South Papua province, surpass all.

With 2.5 million hectares of land being cleared for sugarcane and rice production for food and biofuel projects, alongside large oil palm concessions, Indonesia's government has created a hugely consequential project right on Papua New Guinea and Australia's doorsteps.
It is transforming the shape of an otherwise forest and swamp-dominated region, as well as the environment, culture and health of local Papuan communities.

Source: Johnny Blades, RNZ Pacific journalist (Asia Pacific Report)

Who benefits from the loss of Aotearoa New Zealand's GEFree status?

Government's plans to loosen regulations on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) risk eliminating Aotearoa New Zealand's GEFree status significantly impacting not only organic producers but also

conventional farmers, given the increasing demand for non-GMO foods. Once gone, it's gone - there is no "whoops'; there is no turning back.

OANZ (Organics Aotearoa NZ) is concerned that, if passed, two Bills - the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines (ACVM) Amendment Bill and the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Amendment Bill - open a back door route to the highly controversial GE Bill that attracted some 15,000 public submissions. The GE Bill is stalled, awaiting its second reading.

In its current stalled form, the Gene Technology Bill proposes to fundamentally change how Aotearoa New Zealand regulates genetic modification - the science of altering the DNA of living organisms - by relaxing current gene technology regulations to allow environmental release of GMOs. In other words, the change reverses the current precautionary approach to GE thereby risking Aotearoa New Zealand's GEFree status. Again, once it's gone, there is no turning back.

WILPF's opposition to the Bills is grounded in concerns that they open pathways for the approval of agricultural compounds involving gene technology, without adequate oversight or transparency. The new gene editing technologies work in such a way that there will be intended and unintended consequences. The risks are such that decisions must not be made in the absence of widely disseminated information and broad public debate. We concluded that the ACVM and HSNO Amendment Bills along with the Gene Technology Bill represented a serious and compounding threat to our GE-free status and urged the Committee to recommend that the Bills did not proceed.

WILPF is also deeply disappointed with the limited and ineffective consultation process, especially but not only the exclusion of organisations like OANZ that have been committed to long term sustainable food production of healthy food and the environment. The failure to consult meaningfully means risks, not only to the organic sector but also the wider primary sector, are not well understood and so lack clear mitigation strategies.

Critically, the combined effects of the ACVM Amendment Bill, the HSNO Amendment Bill, and the Gene Technology Bill must be assessed together, with the results made publicly available, before any of the three bills proceeds further.

Suzanne Loughlin

You can read WILPF Aotearoa's submissions on these two Bills here and here.

WILPF Aotearoa

President
Suzanne Loughlin
Vice presidents
Pauline Tangiora and Celine Kearney
Treasurer
Barry Lee
Section Co-ordinators
Megan Hutching
Edwina Hughes

W: www.wilpf.nz
E: wilpfaotearoa@gmail.com

See us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/wilpfaotearoa.nz

WILPF International, Geneva
www.wilpf.org