

Women's International League for  
Peace and Freedom  
*Aotearoa Section*



WILPF

Newsletter November 2021

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WILPF has embarked on a series of reflections and strategy discussions about the work and the values that bring us together, about the challenges and contexts around us, and the priorities and structures that enable us to work together.

These debates will shape our next International Programme. They may also result in new ideas and proposals for how we function as WILPF. The Future WILPF journey eventually leads to formal decision making at our International Congress 2022, and then continues on as we move from plans and agreements to actions and practice.

Aotearoa WILPF had two Zoom meetings over the past few months, ably facilitated by Megan Hutching. These discussed questions that WILPF Sections all over the world are also discussing. Notes from these meetings were shared in an Asia Pacific Regional Zoom, and then to WILPF International.

*Tāmaki Makaurau WILPFer Lorri Mackness attended one of international Zui held in October, and reports:*

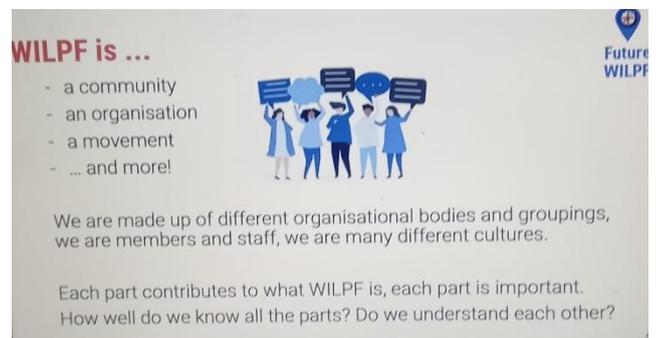
The first half of the meeting focused on looking at the parts that make up the whole and giving women space to appreciate out loud people in roles within the parts.

I have never thought about, known or understood, how WILPF operates from an international level, so it was interesting to watch and listen.

The second part of the Zui involved breakout groups of 3 or 4 women. The questions we were asked to discuss were:

- What part do I play? How do I contribute?
- What makes up the parts?
- Are any parts missing?

You know me. My focus was intersectionality, inclusion and exclusion of traditionally marginalised groups, e.g. the largest in the world at present would be Chinese people. Therefore, a language missing for me for translation is Chinese/Mandarin which in of itself, suggests that part that is missing.



I don't see this as a criticism, rather, an exciting opportunity. And I'm sure, if we look on the demographics of women globally, we will find many, many more exciting opportunities; and, especially in Aotearoa. It is an amazing time to be



## Report from our vice-president, Pauline Tangiora



Pauline Tangiora (photo: Del Abcede)

Pauline continues to campaign, in the face of considerable physical challenges. She has been invited to join a German committee dealing with climate change. One of her granddaughters /mokopuna joins her when possible on the international zoom call.

Pauline has worked for some time to raise awareness about seabed mining, in the wider Pacific context. Aotearoa WILPF recently signed the petition below. Feel free to sign it as an individual.

[Drawing the Pacific Blue Line against Deep Sea Mining - Action Network](#)

*WILPFer, Edwina Hughes, Whanganui a Tara, with Peace Movement Aotearoa, reports on NZ's Pacific nuclear weapons testing legacy. Aotearoa WILPF has been active for at least seven decades opposing nuclear testing:*

The devastating impact of nuclear weapons testing by Britain, France and the US on Pacific peoples, their health and the environment has been a longstanding concern of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement and its supporters throughout the Pacific, including here in Aotearoa, Pacific governments, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), and the Pacific Conference of Churches.

Over the past few years, Peace Movement Aotearoa has focussed again on trying to push New Zealand to act on the issues particularly affecting Maohi Nui (French-occupied Polynesia) and the south Pacific. This has been raised at PACDAC meetings, with MFAT, and with the Minister for Pacific Peoples, and two Ministers for Disarmament and Arms Control.

From our perspective, in addition to the crucial underlying issues around the right of self-determination and independence for Maohi Nui, there are two key areas where New Zealand could act.

First, issues around the ongoing impacts of the nuclear testing on human health and wellbeing, and radioactive contamination of the environment - land and sea. Until the recent release of the independent Moruroa Files study, there was little information about the full extent of the human health impacts on Maohi Nui and surrounding island communities because France has concealed information and lied about this.

*“Leukemia, lymphoma, cancer of the thyroid, lung, breast, stomach ... In Polynesia, the experience of French nuclear tests is written in the flesh and blood of the inhabitants. Strontium has eaten into bones, cesium has eaten away at muscles and genitals, iodine has seeped into the thyroid.”* ( Moruroa Files, <https://moruroa-files.org/en/investigation/moruroa-files> )

There remains an urgent need for pressure on France to release all medical records relating to the nuclear test programme, and to negotiate appropriate reparations - not that any amount of money could fully repay what has been taken from generations past and those yet to come.

While France has announced various compensation packages in the past, the number of Tahitians deemed to be eligible by the French authorities for any payment has been very limited. Similarly, there is an urgent need for pressure on France to release all environmental data relating to the nuclear test programme, including past and present levels of radioactivity.

Related to this, we have asked for New Zealand to call for an independent assessment of the structural integrity of Moruroa and Fangataufa, or - at the very least - full disclosure of all monitoring data by France.

It is known that both atolls have cracks and fissures, and any collapse would trigger a tsunami that would strike Maohi Nui and the Cook Islands (part of New Zealand's “realm”) with little warning, before moving on to other island nations in the south Pacific. In addition, any collapse is likely to lead to increased release of radioactive contaminants currently held within the coral and

underlying volcanic basalt. In recent years, New Zealand has said it would not be appropriate for it to act alone on this, but would instead act in concert with Pacific island nations.

In December 2020, the First Meeting of State Parties to the Treaty of Rarotonga (South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty) was held on the 35th anniversary of the Treaty's adoption, further information about this is available at <http://icanw.org.nz>

As a consequence, there is now a PIF Taskforce on Nuclear Legacy Issues in the Pacific, which may use the 'victim assistance' provisions of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons to strengthen its position on action around this - it is our hope that New Zealand will be fully supportive of all initiatives proposed by the Taskforce.

Last month, on the 25th anniversary of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty's opening for signature, the Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control stated:

*"A formative experience for New Zealand was witnessing the devastating impacts of nuclear testing in the Pacific ... The legacy of these tests is still being felt by the people of the Pacific. The tests forcibly removed them from their lands, dislocated their communities and poisoned their ecosystems.*

*Today New Zealand stands with Pacific governments in demanding justice".* (full speech at <http://icanw.org.nz> ).

Fine words, now let's see some action.

**AUKUS:** In the context of the ongoing nuclear weapons testing legacy issues and nuclear waste dumping throughout the Pacific, last month's announcement of the trilateral "security" pact between Australia, the UK and US, which includes the development of nuclear-powered submarines by Australia, has been received with considerable concern by Pacific island nations, Pacific Islands Forum, and the Pacific Conference of Churches, among others - the last thing anyone in the Pacific wants or need is an addition potential source of nuclear contamination.



*Australia's commitment to the 'Blue Pacific'  
Image: Peace Movement Aotearoa,  
September 2021*

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*Photo and story below reprinted courtesy of Asia Pacific Report: By Evan Schuurman*

Bougainville community leader and MP Theonila Roka Matbob has received the Gwynne Skinner Human Rights Award in recognition of her outstanding work to hold mining giant Rio Tinto to account for the legacy of environmental devastation caused by its former Panguna mine.

Matbob, 31, is a traditional landowner from Makosi, just downstream from the mine. She was one of 156 Bougainville residents, represented by the Human Rights Law Centre, who last year filed a [human rights complaint](#) against the company with the Australian government.

The complaint received global media attention and led to Rio Tinto publicly committing in July to fund an independent human rights and environmental impact assessment of the mine. "I'm deeply honoured to receive this award on behalf of myself and my people," Matbob said.

"We have been living with the disastrous impacts of Panguna for many years and the situation is getting worse. Our communities live surrounded by the vast mounds of waste left over from the mine, which continue to poison our rivers with copper.



*Campaigner and MP Theonila Roka Matbob's legal complaint received global media attention and led to Rio Tinto publicly committing to fund an independent human rights and environmental mine impact assessment.*

*Image: Human Rights Law Centre*

“Kids get sick from the pollution. The farms and villages of communities downstream are being flooded with mine waste. Many people lack basic access to clean water.

### **Years of struggle**

“Now, after many years of struggle, at last we have an agreement with Rio Tinto to fund a proper investigation of these urgent problems to develop solutions.

“I would like to express my thanks to all those who have supported us to reach this point. But now is not the time to rest. Our work will continue until Rio Tinto has fully dealt with the disaster it left behind.”

Human Rights Law Centre legal director Keren Adams said that Matbob had worked tirelessly over the past few years to bring these issues to world attention and compel Rio Tinto to take responsibility for the devastating consequences.

“It is in large part thanks to her leadership and advocacy that the company has now taken the first important step towards addressing this legacy,” she said.

“At the same time as doing all this, Theonila ran for Parliament and was elected one of Bougainville's youngest and only female MPs and subsequently made the Minister for Education. She is an inspirational human rights defender and a thoroughly deserving winner of the award.”

Matbob previously worked with the Human Rights Law Centre to document the stories of the communities affected by the mine, including from many inaccessible villages whose stories had rarely been heard.

This work led to the publication of the report [After The Mine](#).

*Celine Kearney adds:* Rio Tinto has majority ownership of the aluminium smelter at Tiwai Point, Southland. Environment Southland, a government agency, is leading work to identify the degree and impact of potential contamination on land, water and sea at Tiwai Point. The possibility that the smelter would close was discussed recently, but cheaper power from Meridian Energy seems to have ensured it will operate for another three years, till 2024.

WILPF Aotearoa has actively supported women in Bougainville over several decades. In the 1990s some young WILPF members visited to work and network with local women's organisations.

### **West Papuans are under constant attack from Indonesian forces: West Papua students attacked and West Papuans are routinely killed.**

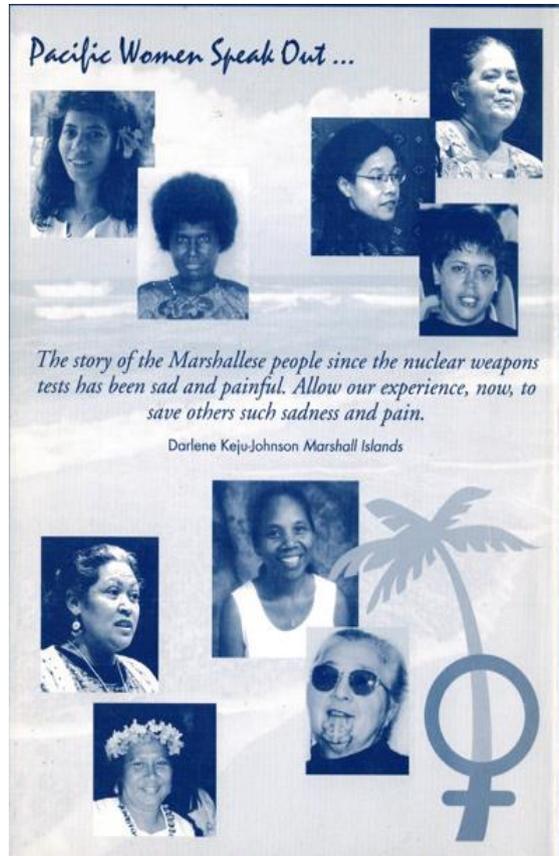
*Yamin Kogoya, an Australia-based West Papuan academic, from the Lani tribe in the Papuan Highlands, currently living in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, reported in The Asia Pacific Report, October 2021.*

Maire Leadbeater, a New Zealand-based human rights activist, wrote an article published in *Green-Left* in May 2021 in which she stated: “Since 2008, New Zealand has exported military aircraft parts to the Indonesian Air Force.” In most years, including 2020, these parts are listed as “P3 Orion, C130 Hercules & CASA Military Aircraft: Engines, Propellers & Components including Casa Hubs and Actuators”.

West Papua will see the use of this military hardware as Indonesia continues to increase its presence in the region in an attempt to crack down on the highlands, which have already suffered massive displacement in the Nduga region. It is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the immense volume of weaponry, skills, and training the Western governments supply to Indonesia. It is important to ask why Western governments aid

Indonesia in eliminating indigenous Papuans. These questions can be answered by looking at what the Māori of New Zealand, the Aboriginals of Australia, and the Native Americans endured.

<http://asiapacificreport.nz/>



*WILPF Asia Pacific Region members met in September to discuss section responses to the questions asked in International WILPF's Future WILPF discussions. Celine Kearney reports:*

Megan Hutching had earlier facilitated two meetings to find out what WILPF means to Aotearoa WILPF members around the country. The record of our ideas was then sent to Janette McLeod, alternate Asia Pacific representative to the International Board. The zoom meeting was facilitated by Kozue Akibayashi, the Asia Pacific Regional representative on the International WILPF board, former International WILPF President, and member of Japanese WILPF, supported by Janette McLeod. Aotearoa WILPF members participated along with WILPF members from Japan, Australia, and Roti Make representing Polynesia. We discussed common issues of interest and concern: these

included nuclear issues: both historical for Polynesia - with French testing - though the consequences of deaths from cancers is current - and more recent with issues surrounding the Japanese Fukushima nuclear power plant, still discharging contaminated water into the ocean. Issues around decolonisation were shared across sections, as were women's rights and climate change. Kozue reminded us of the relevance of the series of interviews published in the late 1990s by the Christchurch Security & Disarmament Centre and WILPF Aotearoa as *Pacific Women Speak Out*.

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*Suzanne Loughlin, another Aotearoa WILPF vice-president, reports on recent developments in Afghanistan and NZ's responsibilities.*

As Taliban forces closed in on Kabul my email traffic stepped up with requests for help to get out of the country. Afghans I had come to know over the years were desperate to bring families to safety.

The New Zealand government must be commended for its efforts, which is not to say that there was not more that could have been done and much more yet to do.

I estimate that Aotearoa New Zealand has granted visas to less than a thousand people, some of whom have not yet made it out of Afghanistan, but efforts are ongoing, which is a drop in the ocean against need.

Moreover, if it was not for major efforts on the part of a few, those who supported Aotearoa New Zealand's governance, education, human rights and health programmes would have been excluded. They are just as vulnerable as those who worked for the NZDF as translators and as cooks and mechanics on the bases.

The strict application of the nuclear family criteria has left many older women who were integral members of families have been left behind, with no means of support. No family should be forced to choose between safety and a parent or parents, or a 26-year-old child who is suddenly "too old". Splitting families like this seems a cruel and unusual punishment. Others who came when New Zealand forces withdrew from Bamyán, primarily translators, were similarly forced to leave loved ones behind and have been struggling since to reunite here in Aotearoa. Covid 19 has created

major difficulties but the evacuation from Kabul shows once again what can be done when the Government decides it will act.

From a distance, and on the whole, Afghan families have been warmly welcomed here in Aotearoa. As their residency documents come through and they move into communities around the country I trust they will receive the same welcome wherever they end up. I am not able to imagine how it must feel to have to pack a small bag, leave home in the middle of the night and spend 8 hours outside an airport waiting hoping that you will be found and taken in. And then to leave homes and businesses and extended families wondering what will happen to them and if you will ever see them or Afghanistan again.

As there is much more to do yet, please take the time to write to the Prime Minister and Ministers of immigration, and foreign affairs appreciating their efforts but asking for more, especially more places for women left behind alone who have never worked outside of the home and have no means of support and for women activists who want to leave.

If you're planning on writing to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Nanaia Mahuta, do point out that given the concerns she herself expressed in Doha recently for women and girls we are hardly walking the talk with regard to Afghanistan.

*WILPF International has also been publishing blogs about Afghanistan here:*

<https://www.wilpf.org/focus-countries/afghanistan/>

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### *FROM MY POINT OF VIEW....*

*This is a new feature for our Aotearoa WILPF newsletter in which WILPF women are invited to reflect on issues that concern them. We hope that this opportunity to share what's on their mind will encourage WILPF women to contribute to this column. Celine Kearney reflects:*

As a teacher of English language and academic skills to adults at a government-funded Institute of Technology (ITP) the border closure, because of Covid, has meant that our student group has changed, from being largely international students, to locals New Zealanders, with migrant or refugee backgrounds.

This group of adult learners bring experience of considerable life challenges with them into the classroom: challenges met largely with courage, ongoing ability to respond to constant change, and determination to build new lives, for themselves and their children.

Government has doubled the number of families and individuals with refugee backgrounds who will be offered re-settlement in Aotearoa each year. It has also increased the number of resettlement centres round the country. These new New Zealanders will have a range of basic needs to be met: a stable home, health services and education, not least of which is to acquire enough English language to be able to live full lives in this country.

Yet with the large numbers of full-fee -paying international students gone, several ITPs have decided it will cost too much to teach only the smaller numbers of New Zealanders with refugee and migrant backgrounds. Teachers have been made redundant, classes closed and departments shut. The consequences of the chronic under-funding of the tertiary education sector and forced reliance on overseas students is now apparent.

Arguably English Language Partners, a national organisation, also funded by government to teach English in community-based classes, can support the language needs of a large number of this group. But for those who wish to continue their education, professionally and academically, their right as New Zealand citizens, they need access to teachers in tertiary institutions who have the skills to support them on their learning journey.

Another one of the stresses in the lives of many of these learners is that many have no long-term stable home. The government allocates them temporary housing, often in motels. Added to this many can neither afford secure internet, nor the device needed to continue their study as Covid locked down the institutions and classes are taught online only.

Last year we published a [Feminist Budget](#), suggesting sounder ways for our government to spend tax money than investing in multi-million, often billion dollar, weapons hardware, ships and planes, with the idea of interoperability with particularly Australian forces, when military conflict might require it.

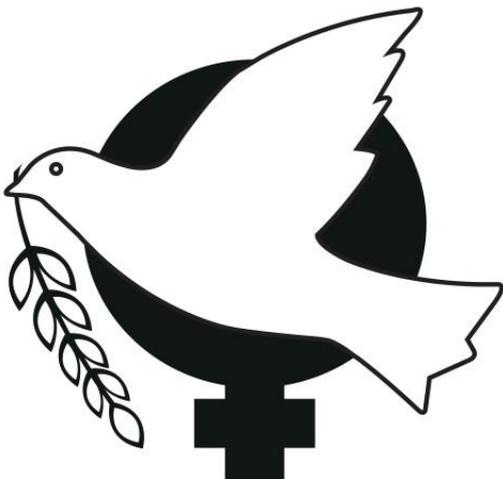
It begs the question then: what does security

mean for us in Aotearoa? For these New Zealanders, many of whom know exactly what military conflict is, having been offered a new home in Aotearoa, they deserve the security of a stable home, appropriate health support, and the same education opportunities as all other New Zealanders.

#### *International WILPF News*

Planning for the WILPF Congress in July 2022 continues. This will be online which means that any WILPF member will be able to attend. There will be a number of webinars before Congress to explain what will happen and, during congress, there will be lots of time for interacting with other WILPF members from around the world in workshops, chats and discussion groups.

*Megan Hutching*



# WILPF

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[www.facebook.com/wilpfaotearoa.nz](https://www.facebook.com/wilpfaotearoa.nz)

Young WILPF – YWILPF

<https://www.wilpf.org/young-wilpf-network/>

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