

WILPF AOTEAROA SECTION President's report for 2024

The 2024/25 year has been a busy one for the WILPF Aotearoa Section. Many thanks to all those who have filled various roles on the Section executive committee and internationally on our behalf: Pauline Tangiora, Megan Hutching, Celine Kearney, Edwina Hughes, Prue Stringer, Barry Lee and Del Abcede. Thanks also to those who have supported branch activities in Tāmaki Makaurau, Poneke, and Ōtautahi.

Since our AGM on 9 March 2024, the Section has written numerous letters condemning the genocide in Gaza and the steep rise in settler violence against the Palestinian people in the occupied West Bank since October 2023. WILPF has also called for a halt to armed violence around the world and for humanitarian assistance for the hundreds of thousands of people, women and children especially, affected by armed conflict. Although our letters are addressed to both Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Winston Peters, we have received very few replies – and none of any substance.

In addition, the Section has responded to the raft of legislative proposals introduced by the coalition government including: the Treaty Principles Bill, the Regulatory Standards Bill; the Oranga Tamariki (Responding to Serious Youth Offending) Amendment Bill which would see the introduction of a military-style academy programme in youth justice residences, the extension of the use of force to third party providers and the use of seclusion, a practice that is tantamount to torture. WILPF opposed the possible changes reducing regulations around gun control and registration (which is based on claims that the current system is too onerous for gun owners). Sound gun regulation has been shown as the most effective means of reducing firearms-related deaths. We advocated for Maori Wards on local Councils, for the status quo re arming New Zealand Police, and against proposed changes to the Crimes (Countering Foreign Interference) Amendment Bill because of the risk it posed to criminalising dissent.

Letters and submissions are circulated and posted on the website, and members encouraged to make personal submissions and/or write to their own member of parliament and ministers, and encourage others to do the same.

In addition to letter writing, many members from across the motu have been very active in protesting the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and the increase in settler violence in the occupied West Bank. Many members demonstrated their support for Toitu Te Tiriti through participation in the hikoi, recognising the links with other peoples' suffering of the ongoing effects of colonisation around the globe.

WILPF members continue to fill valuable coordination roles with other organisations. Megan Hutching National Council for Women NZ, Irene Johnston Gun Control NZ, Edwina Hughes, New Zealand Cluster Munitions Coalition/Campaign Against Landmines, ICAN Aotearoa, Aotearoa NZ Campaign to Stop Killer Robots; Claire and Linley Gregory Peace Movement Aotearoa; Nola Smith Human Rights Network

Auckland; Kate Dewes, Lucy Stewart, Angela Woodward & Prue Stringer the Disarmament & Security Centre. I have followed the agenda for meetings of the Ministry for Women's International Women's Caucus but been remiss in participation. Many thanks to all those who take the time to attend and report back.

Internally, the Board has focused on updating the constitution to meet the requirements of the Incorporated Societies Act, 2022. This has taken extensive time and effort and we owe a huge vote of thanks to Megan. A Special General Meeting was held on 15 February 2025 to look at feedback on a draft circulated in advance to all members. It is anticipated that feedback will be incorporated for consideration at the 2025 Annual General Meeting and a formal decision taken on re-registration.

The three Section Newsletters produced this year were circulated to members and posted on the website.

The website 'refresh' has made joining WILPF easier as is attested by three new members in late 2024. It also streamlines the collection of the membership data that WILPF is required to hold under the new Incorporated Societies Act.

Last year Susan Healy spoke to us about the proposed Treaty Principles Bill and the threat it posed most directly to Māori but also to all of us who call for government to respect Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document. This year we have the pleasure of welcoming Avril Bell who will speak to us about how tangata Tiriti can actively engage in realising that vision.

In the coming year, in the context of ongoing threats to the provision of public services and government's facilitation of private profit-taking, it looks as though even greater efforts will be required. I invite you to join us and to expand our reach by supporting our efforts.

Suzanne Loughlin
President, WILPF Aotearoa Section