

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE & FREEDOM

Aotearoa Section newsletter
September 2023

Hiroshima and Nagasaki commemorations

WILPF Tāmaki Makaurau held the annual commemoration of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 at the Ellen Melville Centre in central Auckland on 6 August.

There was a good-sized gathering of WILPF women and others. For the first time in many years, the Japanese Consul came to the event and spoke personally about his feelings about the bombings. We followed the usual programme of reading Hone Tuwhare's 'No Ordinary Sun', the story of Sadako and the thousand paper cranes and a letter written by Susumu Yoneda, a survivor who visited New Zealand in the 1950s. There was paper crane folding and then candle lighting to end the event.



Folding paper cranes
Photos: Del Abcede

Commemorations were also held in Ōtautahi Christchurch at the Peace Bell in the Botanic Gardens.



Japanese Consul Matsui Shinji speaking at the event



Photo: Lucy Stewart



Photo: Marcus Coll



Photo: Kate Davidson

This year seems an even more significant year to hold the commemorations following the release of the film, 'Oppenheimer', a biography of Robert Oppenheimer, one of the scientists who developed the atomic bomb. Despite being three hours long, the film does not contemplate the effects of these catastrophic weapons on the people who suffered the consequences in Japan, nor the present danger they continue to pose. See Ray Acheson's article on the WILPF

website here:

www.wilpf.org/oppenheimer-unveiling-the-untold-horror/



Aotearoa Section AGM

The Section AGM was held online on 27 May 2023. A financial report was presented (available if you email us) along with reports of the Section and branch activities. Our representatives at various organisation also described their activities from the previous year. All are available here: <https://www.wilpf.nz/news-and-reports.html>

Suzanne Loughlin continues as Section president, Pauline Tangiora and Celine Kearney as vice presidents, Megan Hutching and Edwina Hughes as coordinators and Barry Lee is the new Section treasurer. We thanked Tamsin Kingston for her work as Section treasurer during the past three years.

There is a new Incorporated Societies Act which means we must revise our

constitution. We should have a draft to circulate to you for comment soon.

WILPF Asia Pacific regional meeting

Members from the three Sections in the Asia Pacific region – Japan, Australia and Aotearoa – met online on 22 July. We were lucky to have Jenny Aulin from the membership team at WILPF International join us, too (at a very early hour of the morning for her).

Each Section gave a report on their current areas of work and concern.

Japan Section

Masaka Takasaki spoke about the Section's continuing work monitoring what has happened around the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Thirty thousand people are still displaced as a result of the disaster and the government is taking contaminated soil from the prefecture and reusing it in other parts of the country. Unsurprisingly, there is a local opposition to having this radioactive material dispersed throughout Japan.

Environmental contamination from radioactivity has not improved and the Japanese government and TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) are determined to release contaminated water from the plant into the north Pacific Ocean. While the water has been treated, nobody has previous experience of releasing such water into an ecosystem where ocean currents will spread it all through the Pacific.

Japan Section has made a video about the effects of the Fukushima disaster which you can see here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5W6fDyzv5O8>

Aotearoa Section

Celine Kearney and Del Abcede spoke about Aotearoa's long opposition to nuclear testing and its effects in the Pacific. An exhibition is being developed by a number of groups, including WILPF, and will be on display at Auckland Museum in 2024.

The Section has long been active in publicising the struggle for indigenous rights of West Papua and, through Tāmaki Makaurau branch, has also been supporting West Papuan students who were stranded in New Zealand after their funding was withdrawn. One of the students spoke to the branch recently about the destruction of the indigenous forest which has harmed the livelihood of West Papuans who rely on the forest for food. The forest is being destroyed through the planting of palm oil plantations.

Australia Section

The Section is seriously concerned about the increasing militarisation of Australian society and have set up a demilitarisation Working Group. [LINK TO REPORT ON WEBSITE](#) The group is working on the militarised appropriation of gender equality, the involvement of the arms industry in schools and in research programmes at universities.

The Section is also involved with a Women Peace and Security working Group focused on Australia's second National Action Plan, 2021-31. The Section held focus groups with diverse communities around

Australia on the theme of peace and security which resulted in five areas of work, including making links between domestic and international understandings of peace and security and repositioning Australia as a peacemaker rather than a military partner. And finally, there is AUKUS which, as the Section noted, has effectively outsourced Australia's defence policy to the United States and the United Kingdom.

At the end of the presentations, it was clear that there are some overarching themes for our region:

- Increasing militarisation
- The meaning of peace and security

Both in the context of climate change and the environment.

It was agreed that we would work together to release a statement raising awareness of and condemning the deliberate dumping of water from Fukushima nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean Te Moananui-a-Kiwa.

WILPF International published an open letter on the issue; members were encouraged to write to the Japanese Ambassador in their country and WILPF Aotearoa issued a media release. See: <https://www.wilpf.nz/news-and-reports.html>



Vigils against the war in Ukraine

Sheryn Elborn reports:

On Wednesday 1 March, we held our first rally at the Russian Embassy in Wellington. Few attended at first, then the numbers grew.

The numbers are really not that important, what is important is that we tell Russia we are against the war - or special operations as one person from the Embassy told us - and that we support the Ukrainian community who must be going through hell at the moment.

We have a peaceful kaupapa and mainly sing Māori, English and Ukrainian songs, always starting with 'Prayer for Ukraine' followed by 'Te Aroha'. We chalk on the pavement and leave messages that are peaceful and sometimes poignant. We are committed to staying until the war ends if we can.

Some of us have started going to Parliament on the first Monday of the month between 12noon and 1pm. Once again, a peaceful rally.

We hope with all our might that the war will end and the suffering of the Ukrainian people will end.



Photos courtesy of Sheryn Elborn