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# Feminists Opposing Militarism: Creating Cultures of Life and Connectedness

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by

Gwyn Kirk\*

**Abstract:** The gun lobby, the mass shooting and the cultures of militarism in the United States are deeply connected with the relentless devastation in Ukraine: they are all expressions of an interlocking system of militarism-institutions, investments, practices, and beliefs that take their meaning and value from war. This is the main point of this essay in which the author Gwyn Kirk – thanks to her long trajectory of study and militancy in women’s peace movements – describes this underlying network, how it is embedded, normalized and rendered invisible, but also how a feminist understanding of militarism is necessary to bring to light the deep connections between the different forms of violence and domination.

## Militarism: The System

*Top Gun: Maverick*, the 2022 blockbuster starring Tom Cruise, with jaw-dropping aerial-combat sequences<sup>1</sup>, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on May 21, and was then released in 37 nations<sup>2</sup> across Europe, Asia, and North America. The US release date was Memorial Day weekend, with Memorial Day (May 30) a federal holiday honoring men and women who died serving in the military. This timing coincided with the unfolding horrendous war against Ukraine, which rathe-

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<sup>1</sup> <File:///c:/users/djmoreloveandjoy/dropbox/mac/downloads/jaw-droppingaerial-combatsequences>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1745960/releaseinfo>.

ted up the movie's immediate box-office success. It generated \$291m in North America and \$548.6m globally in its first 10 days<sup>3</sup>. "It's all there," enthused Emma Brookes, "the jump-jets landing on the carrier ... tight white T-shirts, aviator shades ... and the thrill of watching F-18s fight over unnamed enemy territory"<sup>4</sup>.

Also that weekend the National Rifle Association, which consistently opposes any tightening of US gun laws, held its annual conference in Houston (Texas), only days after the massacre of 19 children and two teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde (Texas) where parents were asked to provide DNA samples to help identify their children, murdered beyond recognition with a military-style assault weapon<sup>5</sup>. It was the 27<sup>th</sup> school shooting this year<sup>6</sup>, so far. According to the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions<sup>7</sup>, these horrific mass killings, often by white racists using high-powered weapons purchased legally, account for a mere 1 percent of people killed by guns in the US annually. Some 60 percent are gun suicides, mainly white middle-aged men; 35 percent are gun homicides (with roughly 18,000 victims a year), disproportionately young African American men, and often involving illegal handguns. The remainder include shootings by police and border patrol agents, also disproportionately targeting people of color.

The movie, the gun lobby, the mass shootings, and the relentless devastation in Ukraine are all connected, part of an interlocking system of militarism--institutions, investments, practices, and beliefs that take their meaning and value from war. This underlying network is embedded, normalized, and thus rendered invisible. It sees individual gun ownership as manly and generates wars that are both specific and utterly generic, fed by political attitudes, cultural assumptions, and economic investments on the part of governments and corporations. Further, a feminist understanding of militarism views it as an "extreme variant of patriarchy, a gendered regime characterized by discourses and practices that subordinate and oppress women, as well as non-dominant men, reinforcing hierarchies of class, gender, race and ethnicity, and in some contexts caste, religion and location" (Mama and Okazawa-Rey 2012, p. 100).

In the United States, militarism has long been entangled in popular culture, with connections between Hollywood and the Pentagon dating back to the early 1900s. Military personnel based in Los Angeles study film and TV scripts sent by film producers who hope the Department of Defense (DoD) will help them with their project. The military gets publicity and recruitment advantages, and the film in-

<sup>3</sup>[https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/jun/06/studio-behind-tom-cruise-blockbuster-top-gun-maverick-sued-over-copyright?CMP=share\\_btn\\_link](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/jun/06/studio-behind-tom-cruise-blockbuster-top-gun-maverick-sued-over-copyright?CMP=share_btn_link).

<sup>4</sup> Emma Brookes, *In Need of Light Relief? Top Gun: Maverick is a Reminder that Tom Cruise Has Still Got It*, "The Guardian", June 8, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/08/top-gun-maverick-tom-cruise>.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Levenson, *Parents Were Asked to Give DNA Samples to Help Identify Victims*, "New York Times", May 25, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/us/texas-shooting-parents-dna-victims.html>.

<sup>6</sup><https://choice.npr.org/index.html?origin=https://www.npr.org/2022/05/24/1101050970/2022-school-shootings-so-far>.

<sup>7</sup> The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence (EFGV), *Gun Violence in the United States*, <https://efgv.org/learn/type-of-gun-violence/gun-violence-in-the-united-states/>.

dustry gets access to equipment, locations, and authenticity from this arrangement<sup>8</sup>, in which, according to *Guardian* reporter Steve Rose, “the DoD manages its screen image so carefully”<sup>9</sup> some see it as “an unnamed co-producer on thousands of movies, to the extent that Hollywood is operating as it’s propaganda machine”. Films like *Top Gun: Maverick*, marketed and consumed as entertainment, reinforce the everyday “normality” of militarism.

Similarly, candidates for US president must promote this view to be viable contenders. Psychologist Stephen Ducat (2005) called attention to “the wimp factor” in US politics where the president is also Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Although President Obama and now President Biden have made impassioned pleas for restrictions on gun sales in hopes of reducing mass shootings, presidential candidates invariably present themselves as people who will champion military interventions as building blocks of US foreign policy. They must not be seen to be “soft on defense.” Indeed, according to John Bellamy Foster<sup>10</sup>, since President Biden came into office earlier US military support for the Ukraine skyrocketed. The war against Ukraine is both a war of aggression waged by Russia and part of a larger geopolitical battle between the US, NATO, and Russia, with the US and Europe providing weapons and Ukraine doing the fighting. Leon Panetta, former CIA director and defense secretary under the Obama administration commented in March: “We are engaged in a conflict here. It’s a proxy war with Russia, whether we say so or not”<sup>11</sup>.

Together the United States and Russia possess over 90 percent of all nuclear weapons<sup>12</sup>. Despite worldwide recognition of the dangers these weapons pose, as reflected in support for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons<sup>13</sup> that came into force in January 2021, a new nuclear arms race is underway, especially involving Russia, China, and the United States. Indeed, the United States has a 30-year plan<sup>14</sup> “to build new nuclear-armed bombers, missiles, and submarines and new nuclear warheads to go with them at a cost of up to \$2 trillion”. Together with

<sup>8</sup> Jamie Tarabay, *Hollywood and the Pentagon: A Relationship of Mutual Exploitation*, “Al Jazeera America”, July 29, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/7/29/hollywood-and-the-pentagon-relationship-of-mutual-exploitation.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Rose, *Top Gun for Hire: Why Hollywood is the US Military’s Best Wingman*, “The Guardian”, May 26, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/may/26/top-gun-for-hire-why-hollywood-is-the-us-militarys-best-wingman>.

<sup>10</sup> John Bellamy Foster, *The U.S. Proxy War in Ukraine*, March 31, 2022, <https://cpmaine.org/2022/04/10/the-u-s-proxy-war-in-ukraine-by-john-bellamy-foster/>.

<sup>11</sup> Andre Damon, *Obama Defense Secretary Leon Panetta Says NATO is in a “Proxy War” With Russia*, March 21, 2022, “Monthly Review online”, <https://mronline.org/2022/03/21/obama-defense-secretary-leon-panetta-says-nato-is-in-a-proxy-war-with-russia/>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/global-nuclear-arsenals-are-expected-grow-states-continue-modernize-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>.

<sup>13</sup> SIPRI, *Global Nuclear Arsenals are Expected to Grow as States Continue to Modernize-New SIPRI Yearbook Out Now*, June 13, 2022, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>.

<sup>14</sup> William Hartung, *Why Are We Still Building Nuclear Weapons? Follow the Money*, “Forbes”, Aug 10, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamhartung/2021/08/10/why-are-we-still-building-nuclear-weapons---follow-the-money/?sh=c4ff77b58887>.

other nuclear nations, the United States and virtually all NATO members, have not signed onto the UN Treaty. As in the 1980s, US nuclear weapons will be deployed in Europe. Kate Hudson, General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament reported that USAF Lakenheath in Britain “currently hosts F-15E fighter-bombers with nuclear capability but these are being replaced by the new nuclear-capable F-35A Lightning”<sup>15</sup>. She noted that within the next year US/NATO nuclear bases in Europe “will also receive the new B61-12 guided nuclear bomb which is entering full-scale production in the US,” a major increase in NATO’s capacity to wage nuclear war”<sup>16</sup>. Militarism, including the nuclear arms race, is fueled by nation-states’ desire for domination and corporate desire for the huge profits that militarism generates<sup>17</sup>. The world’s top arms producers<sup>18</sup> are based in the United States: Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and General Dynamics, followed by three Chinese companies<sup>19</sup> – AVIC, NORINCO, CETC – and BAE (UK). Others include Airbus, Fincantieri (Italy), Hanwha (South Korea), Israeli Aerospace Systems (Israel), Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (Japan), Rheinmetall (Germany), Rolls Royce (UK), Safran (France), and EDGE (a UAE-based conglomerate), plus tech companies such as Hewlett Packard and Microsoft, and university-based research projects<sup>20</sup>. The USA, Russia, France, China, Germany, Italy, UK, and South Korea are the top weapons exporters<sup>21</sup>, with arms sales an explicit part of foreign policy.

In 2021, world military spending rose to \$2,113 billion, an all-time high. The United States spent 38 percent of this staggering total<sup>22</sup>. China was second with 14 percent and Russia sixth with 3.1 percent. Much of the rest is accounted for by US allies. In addition to high-tech weapons systems, the global trade in small arms means that guns are bought and sold – using US dollars, British pounds, or euros – by arms brokers on behalf of government agents and paramilitaries. Indeed, earning “hard currency” from weapons sales is one way that poor countries repay foreign debts.

Further, countries of the global North are increasingly militarizing their borders. The US Border Patrol’s budget increased more than ten-fold<sup>23</sup>, from \$263 million in 1990 to nearly \$4.9 billion in 2021. Within the United States, spending on poli-

<sup>15</sup> <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/lf/akenheath-starting-today-we-can-send-nukes-back>.

<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Rae Street, long-time activist in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, for information about the renewed US nuclear presence at USAF Lakenheath, and anti-nuclear protests there.

<sup>17</sup> Hartung, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.statista.com/chart/12221/the-worlds-biggest-arms-companies/>.

<sup>19</sup> Global Defense Corp, *China is the World’s 2nd Biggest Arms Exporter and It’s Closing the Gap with the US*, <https://www.globaldefensecorp.com>.

<sup>20</sup> SIPRI, *The SIPRI Top 100 Arms Producing and Military Services Companies, 2020*, [https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/fs\\_2112\\_top\\_100\\_2020.pdf](https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/fs_2112_top_100_2020.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.statista.com/chart/18417/global-weapons-exports/>.

<sup>22</sup> SIPRI, *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2021*, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/fs\\_2204\\_milex\\_2021\\_0.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/fs_2204_milex_2021_0.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> American Immigration Council, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/the-cost-of-immigration-enforcement-and-border-security>.

cing<sup>24</sup> more than doubled from \$42 billion in 1977 to \$115 billion in 2017. This is less than the military budgets of the US and China, but more than all other nations' military spending.

The culture of gun ownership, held by some as an ultimate individual right, means that rates of gun-carrying and gun violence in the United States are far greater than in other high-income nations due to weak laws, and a lack of resources and political will to regulate the gun industry<sup>25</sup>. Smith & Wesson<sup>26</sup> reported that its sales doubled last fiscal year (2020-21) to \$1.1 billion. The company estimated that at least 10 million people, including growing numbers of white women and people of color, bought guns for the first time since the beginning of 2020. Economic turmoil, political volatility, mass shootings, hate crimes against people of color, and outbreaks of civil unrest, including the Capitol riots of January 6 2021, were among reasons cited for bumper gun sales: pistols, rifles, and semiautomatic assault weapons<sup>27</sup>.

This emphasis on the United States is not intended to let other nations off the hook for their part in perpetuating militarism but because the US is #1 in the world in terms of military spending, overseas military bases, weapons production and sales, and gun violence. War and killing dominate the headlines and the airwaves.

Not often named as such, World War III has been happening since the end of World War II, a dispersed war against many communities with different "fronts" and phases, enmities, and alliances. It includes overt warfare and preparations for war, as well as the persistent extraction of resources, corporate landgrabs, displacement of people from land that used to sustain them, and attacks on progressive politicians, movement leaders, and protesters who oppose these life-threatening systems.

### **Feminists Opposing Militarism**

Militarism is, literally, a dead end. Its central distortion is that organized violence is essential in providing security. On the contrary, feminists, as well as environmentalists and Indigenous people working for sustainability and self-determination, have shown that militarism creates severe insecurities for subjugated peoples, for many within dominant nations, for humankind, and for the planet itself. A fundamental contradiction of militarized security is that nation-states drain their financial, technical, and ecological resources to prepare for war, often to the detriment of their own citizens – especially low-income communities – who live with the in-

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-04/america-s-policing-budget-has-nearly-tripled-to-115-billion#xj4y7vzkg>.

<sup>25</sup> The Gun Industry in America, Report, Aug 6, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/gun-industry-america/>.

<sup>26</sup> Aaron Smith, *Smith & Wesson's Gun Sales Doubled to More Than \$ 1 Billion in Year to May*, "Forbes", June 17, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/aaronsmith/2021/06/17/smith--wesson-says-fy-gun-sales-doubled-to-more-than-1-billion/?sh=28068b0e53bd>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.guns.com/news/2021/01/05/nics-gun-sale-data-for-2020-best-year-ever-over-21-million-sold>.

security of poverty, inadequate health care, violence, and climate disaster – none of which militarism can solve.

In response to this appalling reality with its endless killing and contempt for life, feminists must counter militarism in our analyses and activism. As we stand in solidarity with those suffering in the Ukraine, we must examine and acknowledge our nations' roles in generating this war, as well as the Euro-centered media reporting of it. We watch images of white children clutching their teddy bears; anguished mothers trying to flee to safety; grandmas facing the wreckage of their bombed-out kitchens. They are people not just statistics. Who would not be moved? And where is the same outpouring of sympathy and human-interest stories for those caught up in wars and violent occupations in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine, to mention only a few?

Feminists in the global North must stand up to our own governments, which are disproportionately responsible for sustaining this system of militarism. We must acknowledge and oppose our nations' war mongering and war profiteering, and the devastating histories of imperialism, colonialism, and racism, which underly current violence. We cannot be bullied, flattered, coaxed, ridiculed, embarrassed, or guilt-tripped into supporting this renewed Cold War. We must define another place to stand, not allowing media reporting and mainstream discussion to manipulate or co-opt us. A place to stand that does not render us either unwilling participants or complicit in other people's vulnerability and oppression. In response to the cacophony of war talk we must continue to speak out against the normalization of militarism, as others have done in the past, using a range of strategies, organizational forms, discourses, and theorizing.

Over a century ago, the International Congress of Women, which cut across national enmities, gathered in 1915 in The Hague (Netherlands) despite the difficulties and risks of war time travel. Women assembled "to protest against war and to suggest steps which may lead to warfare becoming an impossibility" (Bussey and Tims 1980, p. 19). In May and June 1915, delegates visited government officials in fourteen countries, calling for a mediation conference hosted by neutral nations to end World War I, and for women's participation in the peace settlement. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom<sup>28</sup> (WILPF), now with international offices in New York and Geneva and 45 national groups worldwide, grew out of that historic event.

Following WWII, the Women's International Democratic Federation<sup>29</sup> (WIDF) promoted peace through the advancement of women and by linking racism and imperialism among the causes of war<sup>30</sup>. The Federation connected leftist women from Europe and North America with African and Asian women engaged in anti-imperial struggles. Feminist historian Elisabeth Armstrong (2016) noted the signi-

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.wilpf.org/>.

<sup>29</sup> Elisabeth Armstrong, *Before Bandung: The Anti-Imperialist Women's Movement in Asia and the Women's International Democratic Federation*, 2016, Study of Women and Gender: Faculty Publications, Smith College, [https://scholarworks.smith.edu/swg\\_facpubs/1](https://scholarworks.smith.edu/swg_facpubs/1).

<sup>30</sup> Thanks to Suzy Kim, feminist historian, and author of *Among Women Across Worlds: North Korea in the Global Cold War* (Cornell University Press), for telling me about this organization.



ficance of international solidarity in WIDF, which involved both “a solidarity of commonality and a solidarity of complicity”.

Its campaign for women’s rights as human rights nurtured a solidarity of commonality... WIDF’s solidarity of complicity emerged in response to the differential power relations between women, power relations that had unequal benefits and incommensurate negative effects. Whether differences of power centered on class or nation, in this solidarity of complicity, women took responsibility for acts of oppression and discrimination committed in their name ... it often meant holding one’s own government accountable for its actions within colonies and former colonies, as well as actions between colonies (p. 311).

A third example is the Greenham Common Women’s Peace movement, which started in 1981 when a group of women, children, and men walked from Cardiff (Wales) to USAF Greenham Common near Newbury, 125 miles away. Their goal was to open a public debate in Britain on NATO’s decision to site nuclear missiles at this base. In towns and villages along the way they spoke about their fears and anger at this escalation of the nuclear arms race. When they arrived, they tried to deliver a letter of protest to the base commander. He refused to accept it. Some women stayed, and others joined a round-the-clock protest<sup>31</sup> outside the base that lasted many years. Dozens of local Greenham groups sprang up across the country and Greenham women’s nonviolent direct action touched women around the world (Cook and Kirk 1983)<sup>32</sup>. Women from Pacific islands whose communities had suffered the devastation of atomic bomb tests by the United States and Britain, challenged Greenham women to develop our own solidarity of complicity (Women Working for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific 1987).

Despite ridicule from mainstream media and opposition from the Thatcher government, Greenham women contributed to shifts in Cold War policy in Europe as Reagan and Gorbachev agreed to reduce intermediate-range weapons like those deployed at Greenham. The missile silos, where women had danced defiantly, were emptied and former common land was finally returned to public use. As women of my generation donate our precious Greenham newsletters, leaflets, photos, and badges to libraries and archives, younger activists continue to be inspired by this movement, with the web a powerful symbol highlighting the connectedness of all life on earth. In 2021, filmmaker Sonia Gonzalez made a powerful film for ARTE TV, “Women Against the Bomb”<sup>33</sup>, to be broadcast in October this year, which remembers this movement, not just in terms of history or nostalgia, but as a source of ideas, beliefs, and creativity that are equally vital in 2022.

Other inspiring examples include the African Women’s Anti-War Coalition<sup>34</sup> and the Mano River Women’s Peace Network<sup>35</sup> in Africa, the International Wo-

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.greenhamwpc.org.uk/>

<sup>32</sup> Alice Cook and I wrote a version of this section in 2021 to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Movement. Thank you to Alice for our thinking and writing together over the years.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.greenhamwpc.org.uk/>.

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Urgent\\_Action/apic\\_11499.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Urgent_Action/apic_11499.html).

<sup>35</sup> <https://issat.dcaf.ch/Share/People-and-Organisations/Organisations/Mano-River-Women-s-Peace-Network2>.

men's Network Against Militarism<sup>36</sup>, and Women in Black<sup>37</sup> that all link feminist voices and activism transnationally. The Women's Pentagon Action<sup>38</sup>, Women's Action for New Directions<sup>39</sup>, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace<sup>40</sup>, and Code Pink<sup>41</sup> are key examples in North America. Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence (Japan)<sup>42</sup> and Women Making Peace (South Korea)<sup>43</sup>, are among those active in Asia. In 2005, Peace Women Across the Globe<sup>44</sup> nominated one thousand women from over 150 countries for the Nobel Peace Prize. Although the group did not win this prestigious award, the documentation of their wide-ranging work for everyday security is an unprecedented resource, and includes the following:

- Promoting gun control.
- Caring for survivors of armed conflicts.
- Promoting conflict resolution and mediation.
- Promoting reconciliation and healing.
- Contributing to peaceful reconstruction and demilitarization of a society.
- Changing priorities in government spending away from military budgets and toward social needs.
- Alleviating poverty.
- Enhancing health and education policies and practices.
- Maintaining a healthy environment.
- Ensuring universal and equitable access to resources, and
- Addressing structural violence and discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity class, sexuality, ability, or culture.

Groups in many countries currently participate in a Global Campaign on Military Spending<sup>45</sup>. And 122 nations, urged on by hundreds of local organizations, supported the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons<sup>46</sup>, a historic legally-

<sup>36</sup> [Http://iwnam.org/](http://iwnam.org/).

<sup>37</sup> [Https://womeninblack.org/](https://womeninblack.org/).

<sup>38</sup> [Http://www.wloe.org/WLOE-en/background/wpastatem.html](http://www.wloe.org/WLOE-en/background/wpastatem.html)

<sup>39</sup> [Https://www.wand.org/](https://www.wand.org/).

<sup>40</sup> [Https://vowpeace.org/](https://vowpeace.org/).

<sup>41</sup> [Https://www.codepink.org/](https://www.codepink.org/).

<sup>42</sup> [Https://u-ryukyu.re.ii.ac.jp/records/2012349](https://u-ryukyu.re.ii.ac.jp/records/2012349).

<sup>43</sup> Kim Jeongsoo, *South Korean Women's Efforts and Activities Towards Peace on the Korean Peninsula: Trust-Building with North Korean Women*, Nov 19, 2019, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)-Northeast Asia, <https://medium.com/perspectives-on-peace-and-security-in-a-changing/south-korean-womens-efforts-and-activities-towards-peace-on-the-korean-peninsula-trust-building-65e98e070b45>.

<sup>44</sup> [Https://www.1000peacewomen.org/](https://www.1000peacewomen.org/).

<sup>45</sup> Global Campaign on Military Spending, GDAMS-Global Days of Action on Military Spending from April 13 to May 12 2022, [https://demilitarize.org/media\\_news/gdams-2022-april-13-to-may-12/](https://demilitarize.org/media_news/gdams-2022-april-13-to-may-12/).

<sup>46</sup> [Https://www.icanw.org/tpnw\\_status](https://www.icanw.org/tpnw_status).



binding international agreement mentioned earlier. The first meeting of states that are party to the treaty is scheduled for June 21-23 this year<sup>47</sup>.

These many efforts provide information and analysis, years of experience, political savvy and creativity, practical projects, sturdy networks of inspiring people, and engaging conversations between individuals and organizations as well as transnationally. Much of what has been done is still both necessary and relevant. Our task is to continue and expand this work.

### **Creating Cultures of Life**

All over the world people are suffering from destruction caused by militarism and war, with women bearing the heaviest burden. Terrified children see their homes destroyed; women and girls are raped by enemy men; forests, farms, pastures, and orchards are ruined; people survive in miserable refugee camps for decades. War and preparations for war are also a form of warfare on many communities as public money, land, and resources are channeled into militarism rather than social needs. In their different ways, military officials, pro-military politicians, corporations, and trigger-happy young men are all holding the world hostage.

The current crises facing humankind such as climate change, pandemics, environmental destruction, severe inequality, poverty, food insecurity, misogyny and sexual violence cannot be resolved by militarism and conflict, militarized policing, or militarized borders. For everyday security, people need affordable housing, guaranteed livelihood, opportunities for learning, health care, clean air and water. Communities need support in caring for children, elders, and people with mental health issues, physical disabilities, and addictions. Young people need meaningful ways to develop their skills and talents and to contribute to the welfare and safety of their communities. We all deserve respect for our humanity, and to be able to express ourselves artistically and spiritually. People's lives and environmental sustainability must be at the center of budgets and policies, not violence, property, and profit-making.

To oppose war and militarism is to oppose business as usual. Detractors may call us naïve, ignorant, or unpatriotic. WILPF's historians noted,

To certain sections of the world's press and public opinion, the aims of the [1915] Congress seemed either laughable or deplorable. The women had been called foolish and naïve, interfering, and ill-informed; irresponsibly feminine, and at the same time boldly unwomanly (Bussey and Tims 1980, pp. 19-20).

The repercussions of speaking out vary considerably, depending on class, race, gender expression, culture, or nation, from ridicule and insults to the risk of losing one's job, to arrest, or death threats. And nations have tightened laws regulating protest and dissent. However, there are many roles to play, some more public and visible than others. Acknowledging these complex inequalities among us, we can work together as feminists, sustaining activist communities and networks to encourage, support, and if necessary, defend each other.

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<sup>47</sup> [https://www.icanw.org/tpnw\\_first\\_meeting\\_of\\_states\\_parties\\_june\\_2022](https://www.icanw.org/tpnw_first_meeting_of_states_parties_june_2022).

The current world situation is beyond heartbreaking; it is enraging, intolerable, and frightening. How can we strengthen transnational feminist alliances as we envision sustainable futures, challenge government and corporate policies, hold elected representatives accountable for their actions, seek to shift prevailing mindsets, create alternative economies, and work on practical projects that increase everyday security? We have the world to lose – and everything to gain<sup>48</sup>.

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