



**Women's International League for Peace and Freedom  
(Australian Section) Inc.**

PO Box 925 Dickson, ACT 2602

**Committee Chair  
IPAN National Inquiry**

**Submission to the IPAN National Inquiry for an Independent & Peaceful  
Australia**

We thank you for the opportunity to put forward our views on this important topic which has implications for everyone living in Australia as well as our regional neighbours and all other nations.

WILPF Australia opposes conflict, violence, and global militarisation. We remain concerned that Australian governments to date have so willingly engaged in wars at the behest of first, the British then latterly the United States governments. In reality, all overseas wars that Australians have been involved in have had little to do with our national security here in Australia. All have been at an unimaginably huge human cost of lives on both sides of conflict, leaving many women war-widows or having invalid husbands to care for, thus being unable to provide adequately for their family's needs.

Some sobering statistics from our Australian War Memorial come to mind to support this statement:

**Boer War – South Africa 1899-1902**

“Around 15,000 Australian men and women served in eight contingents raised in individual Australian colonies during the duration of the Second Boer War in South Africa between October 1899 and May 1902”.

- Over 600 Australians died and were placed in graves in South Africa.

**World War One - 1914-1918**

This was a European-based war which Australia could easily have not been drawn into as our country was not under threat.

- 416,809 Australian men enlisted on which over 60,000 were killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed or taken prisoner.

**World War Two – 1939-1945**

Again, this was a European war which we could have refrained from entering as Australia was under no immediate threat, but ties to the British Empire were very strong.

- Over 27,000 Australians were killed and 23,000 wounded in action during this war. In addition, hundreds more servicemen and women were killed and injured in accidents during the war.”

There was, however, a legitimate war response by the Australian government when “the expanding Japanese empire had reached Australian shores in 1942.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Vietnam War 1950 – 1975**

China helped the Vietnamese against French colonisers in South Vietnam during the First Indo China war, and later helped the North Vietnamese to unite Vietnam by fighting South Vietnam and the United States and Australian forces. Australians were introduced to the “domino theory” that China was planning to expand even further to Australia.

- Approximately 60,000 Australians served in the war; 521 were killed and more than 3,000 wounded.

### **Afghanistan War 2001 – 2021**

- Since 2001, 38 combat deaths and 240 ADF members have been wounded in action in Afghanistan. “More than 39,000 Australians were deployed.” High rates of suicide occurred after soldiers returned home.

### **Iraq War 2003 – 2013**

- While only four Australian soldiers are listed as killed, this war destabilised the whole region which led to huge numbers of Iraqi refugees and displaced people in the region, destabilising Syria where ongoing war deaths and refugees continue to this day.

### **Australian WILPF women’s response to war since 1901**

From the date of federation of Australia in 1901, one of the key versions of WILPF’s founders was that Australia would be a peaceful nation as we had no natural enemies close by. Melbourne woman, Eleanor Moore, wrote in her memoir “*The Quest for Peace as I have known it in Australia*”:

“In the latter years of the nineteenth century few Australians thought of War in reference to their own future. Their schoolbooks had taught them a great deal about war as a subject of history and poetry ... These were memories of past events but neither carried any suggestion that such things might happen again.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The Australian War Memorial website article “ Australia under attack: mobilising the nation”.

<sup>2</sup> P.11 “The Quest for Peace as I have known it in Australia” by Eleanor Moore – printed in Melbourne by Wilke & Co 1949.

This optimism soon proved fallacious as Australians were drawn into international conflicts that had nothing really to do with Australia, but more to support our white friends in other countries – i.e. Great Britain and United States of America

This wanton killing by Australians at the behest of Western leaders needs to stop. There has never been any advantage to Australian families to be involved in such “killing fields”. Ask the many women who had to look after the injured, maimed and wounded who returned, lost partners and breadwinners and therefore lived miserable lives of poverty and despair as the result of war.

Over the last 106 years, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has advocated for universal disarmament and worked to build peace across the globe. It has been evident that for many years it is not enough to just talk about militarisation, but that it must be systematically unpacked to highlight the multi-layered processes, linkages and underlying roots, which underpin its legitimacy, normalisation and mythology, and to understand how and why militarisation gains acceptance and popularity.

The military in Australia has played a significant role in the history, mythology, and narrative of Australia, building on military presence in the colonisation of Australia’s indigenous peoples. Additionally, in the last decade militarisation has increased significantly as evidenced through increasing investments in military budgets, expansion of arms industry and exports, and peaking in 2020 with domestic military operations related to natural disasters, bushfires, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last week WILPF Australia released a research report titled “*Militarisation in Australia: Normalisation and Mythology*”. *The report* analyses the increasing trend towards militarisation in Australia from 2010-2020, the processes of normalisation of military involvement within Australian culture, society, the economy, and government policy. For WILPF, that this trend is being accepted as normal by the Australian public is a growing concern. Normalising militarisation is not contributing to a more peaceful and secure Australia, and we need to find more equitable and just ways to strengthen true human security and to build resilience and capabilities in all our diverse communities across Australia.”<sup>3</sup>

It is time for Australians to respect the human rights of all peoples and engage in mediation to solve any disputes that may arise between nations. At the domestic and civil level, we know that **violence is never the answer**. War is ultimate, random violence, and must not be condoned in any circumstances.

All nations now have the opportunity to negotiate and solve national disputes through the many Courts of International Justice and the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly. Australians are mindful that that United Nations Security Council specifically voted against any Western invasion of Iraq in 2003, but our Prime Minister at the time, John Howard, shamefully joined the United States in invading that country, bringing more deaths and instability to that whole region.

---

<sup>3</sup> “Militarisation in Australia: Normalisation and Mythology” WILPF Australia Board publication, May 2021. [http://bit.ly/WILPF\\_Militarisation\\_in\\_Australia](http://bit.ly/WILPF_Militarisation_in_Australia), www.wilpf.org.au.

Wars are extreme acts of violence that randomly kill many innocent people. All acts of violence are to be abhorred. New ways of solving disputes are available now, e.g. the International Court of Justice and the UN Security Council. These are the places where injustice and aggression can be addressed without resorting to war.

It is heartening to know of the great support, not only from Australians, but that people from many nations have given to insist that the United Nations now ban all nuclear weapons. It is not acceptable that our own government – and indeed our partner in wars, and nuclear-armed state, the United States – continue to resist signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We remain hopeful that they will comply, and that all nuclear weapons will be destroyed forever.

We ask our Australian parliamentarians to heed our cry for international peaceful relations and to use the formal UN structure to solve international disputes so that all citizens can be saved from the scourge of wars in the future.

Further, in order to cease the dangerous practice of Australian governments involving us in wars overseas with no debate whatsoever or approval in our Parliament, WILPF supports war powers reform. Like all Australians, we value democracy. We call for changes to the Defence Act to require parliamentary approval for entering armed conflict overseas. There must be proper debate, scrutiny, and a critical appraisal of such all decisions around committing our nation to war.

Margaret Reynolds  
President, WILPF Australia

31 May 2021