

# A Tool for Women Peace-Builders

## PeaceWomen.org and the 1325 E-Newsletter

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*L'auteure explore le projet du site des femmes pour la paix et en particulier le Bulletin 1325 sur courriel des femmes pour la paix, issu du Bureau de l'ONU pour la Ligue internationale des femmes pour la paix et les libertés. (WILPF) et assure qu'ils sont et peuvent être d'importants outils pour les femmes pacifistes. Cet article examine les objectifs principaux et le contenu de ce site et de ce bulletin tout en incluant des exemples que les femmes activistes de la paix utilisent toujours comme des moyens pour arriver à leurs fins.*

In April 1915, in the midst of World War I, 1,300 women, from both warring and neutral countries, came together at the Hague, the Netherlands, in a Congress of Women, to protest the war. They issued resolutions concerning how to end the immediate conflict, as well as more forward-looking resolutions concerning how to reduce conflict and create the foundations for a lasting peace. During this meeting, they organized for envoys of women to visit belligerent and neutral states to press for peace. In this way, during May and June 1915, small delegations of women visited 14 countries to speak to heads of governments to protest the killing and destruction caused by the war, to actively try and stop the war, and build a lasting culture of peace (Ballantyne).

The pervasive culture of war that existed during World War I is not unlike the culture of war that pervades the United States these days; just as women were struggling to build peace in 1915, so too women are struggling now to prevent a new war in Iraq, and instead build a culture of peace. Women are actively

working for peace not only in the United States, but in many other conflict situations such as in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gujarat in India, Chechnya and the Middle East.

While women's peace-building activities are one of the constants in history, their peace-building efforts have taken diverse forms. In 1915, women gathered at meetings and conferences, like the Congress of Women, issued resolutions, and traveled by ship and train to speak to heads of governments about the benefits of, and need for, peace. Out of the Congress of Women and other conferences and meetings organized by peace women during this period emerged the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).<sup>1</sup>

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is the oldest and largest international women's peace and justice organization in the world. Founded in 1915, today it has national sections in more than 40 countries, the most recent in Burundi, hundreds of local chapters, an international headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and a United Nations (UN) office in New York City. WILPF aims to:

Bring together women of different political, philosophical convictions united in their determination to study and make known and help abolish the causes and the concept of war. WILPF works towards world peace, total and universal disarmament, the abolition of violence and coercion in the settlement of conflicts and the substitution in

each case of negotiation and conciliation. It also seeks to strengthen the United Nations and its family of Specialized Agencies, and the institutions of international law. WILPF strives for political and social equality, economic equity, cooperation among all people and for sustainable development and environmental protection. (PeaceWomen)

Since 1948, WILPF, as a non-governmental organization, has had special consultative status at the UN through the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Special consultative status accords WILPF status as an expert and advisor to the UN and governments on shared issues. In addition, through its special status, WILPF plays an active role in fostering and improving the coop-

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eration between women's NGOs and UN bodies.

To this day, 87 years later, WILPF members ("WILPFers" as we are called), along with many other women's peace organizations, use many of the same tools utilized by women peace activists during World War I in addition to new ones that the women of the 1915 Congress of Women, the early mothers of WILPF, would have probably never imagined possible.

One example of a new peace-build-

ing tool for women is the “1325 PeaceWomen E-Newsletter.” Twice a month, the PeaceWomen Project of the United Nations Office of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom based in New York City, sends this newsletter to over 1,500 readers scattered across the world, from the Balkans to the Great Lakes region in East Africa. It is one example of a modern-day tool for peace-building that can be used by women peace-builders in diverse countries and conflict situations. This article explores how the PeaceWomen project, and the newsletter in particular, are, and can be, important tools for women working to end conflict and build a culture of peace in their communities.

### **PeaceWomen Project**

The PeaceWomen Project is a project of the United Nations office of WILPF. The origins of the PeaceWomen project and the PeaceWomen E-Newsletter in particular, lie in a Security Council Resolution that was adopted two years ago. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2000, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325: Women, Peace and Security. The passage of this resolution marked the first time the Security Council addressed women’s distinct experiences of armed conflict and recognized their crucial, yet under-utilized roles as peace-builders within their communities. Considering the historic importance of this resolution, a strong and active constituency has emerged around it, actively working toward its full implementation.

Through Resolution 1325, the Security Council calls for, among other things: recognition of women’s different experiences of conflict; the establishment of special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence; greater participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes; and greater representation of women in United Nations (UN)

field-based operations, such as peace-keeping operations (PeaceWomen).

The UN Office of WILPF played a critical role in building the momentum that led to the adoption of 1325: they built networks of cooperation and information-sharing with, and between, women’s peace NGOs; organized meetings among UN delegates, in particular Security Council members, UN agencies such as UNIFEM, and women from a variety of conflict regions, in order that Security Council members could benefit from the expertise of these women; and helped mainstream a language of women, peace and security at and around the UN.

The PeaceWomen project is one of numerous projects that was generated after the passage of Resolution 1325. On the first anniversary of 1325, the PeaceWomen project launched the website PeaceWomen.org which seeks to facilitate coordination and information sharing among women peace activists, a “web community,” to provide an accessible, timely and accurate exchange of information, with a focus on the UN. By providing information services to women peace activists, the website is thus providing these women with capacity and technical skills. In addition to providing an information service for women peace activists, the website aims to enhance the visibility of the efforts of women peace activists to the United Nations and international community by prioritizing information about women peace activists. The PeaceWomen website provides:

- Information about the UN system, including extensive information and analysis of Resolution 1325, basic information about how the UN works, particularly from a gender perspective, coverage of, and links to, UN news stories, UN events and UN documents relevant to women, peace and security issues, and how NGOs can work effectively with the UN and within the UN system.

- A vast news section compiling thousands of news articles covering women, peace and security issues.

- A contact database of women’s peace organizations working locally, nationally, sub-regionally, regionally, and internationally, governmental programs specifically on women and peace issues, and UN programs in the field and at UN headquarters, focused on women and peace.

- An extensive list of campaigns, initiated by women’s organizations, listed by country, region and issue, including contact information.

- An extensive resource list of books, UN and NGO reports and studies, and statements by women peace activists on women, peace and security issues.

- An extensive calendar of upcoming events around relevant peace and security issues. (PeaceWomen)<sup>2</sup>

The PeaceWomen email newsletter, initiated in May 2002, is a direct means of maintaining the momentum and visibility of 1325, advocating for the further implementation of the Resolution, and keeping people informed of the scale and range of activity around Resolution 1325. “1325 PeaceWomen E-News” compiles news items, analyses, reports, resources, contacts and calendar events, items also on the PeaceWomen website, but more directly relevant to Resolution 1325, and sends them out in newsletter form by email to over 1,500 readers (between the first and second issues of the newsletter, the number of subscribers more than doubled). Past issues of the newsletter have included an interview with Awut Deng, a southern Sudanese woman peace activist, excerpts of *Activities Reports* from the Office of Gender Affairs of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), and a declaration made

by the Women's Coalition 1325, a coalition established in Azerbaijan, Central Asia to support implementation of 1325. The newsletter is also available on the PeaceWomen website in an html version and a PDF formatted version which can be printed from the website and distributed in hard copy.<sup>3</sup>

According to feedback from our readers through a readership evaluation and personal emails, the newsletter has become an important source of information for women involved in grassroots peace activism. For example:

- Many of our readers use it as a way to keep up-to-date on all of the developments around women, peace and security.
- Women have also used the information to strategize about, and generate ideas for, their own grassroots activism, providing a support network for each other.
- Women draw strength and encouragement from the visibility of other women's peace efforts.
- The extensive contact database facilitates networking among women's organizations.
- Many women use the information for educational outreach in the larger community.

While PeaceWomen is continually receiving encouragement and positive feedback, we are aware how much further PeaceWomen has to go to accomplish all of its goals and realize its visions. Because our funds are limited, PeaceWomen is not yet reaching as many women as we would like; the website and e-newsletter are only available in English and only to those with access to the internet. For PeaceWomen, the next step, pending funding, is the translation of the website and e-newsletter into French and Spanish. In addition, PeaceWomen is planning the creation of a CD-ROM as an alternative service for those without internet access to obtain PeaceWomen resources. These are just a few of the

necessary steps needed for PeaceWomen to expand its outreach and be able to engage a larger audience of women peace activists.

While 1325 is a celebrated document, and October 31st a historic day in the books of women peace activists, and although 1325 has a large and active constituency, implementation remains a continuing challenge. By prioritizing the efforts of women peace activists, by providing them with timely information to help build their capacities as peace women, by providing informed and current analyses of 1325, the PeaceWomen website helps fuel the support and advocacy efforts for further implementation of Resolution 1325.

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<sup>1</sup>For more information about WILPF, visit: <http://www.wilpf.int.ch/>

<sup>2</sup>The PeaceWomen website can be found at: <http://www.peacewomen.org>

<sup>3</sup>To read past issues of, and to subscribe to 1325 PeaceWomen E-News, visit <http://www.peacewomen.org/news/1325News/1325ENewsindex.html>

## References

1325 PeaceWomen E-Newsletter. <http://www.peacewomen.org/news/1325News/1325ENewsindex.html>

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