

**Entry type:** Organisation

**Entry ID:** AWE4909

## Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – ACT Branch

(1982 - )

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**Born** 1 January, 1982

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**Occupation** Peace organisation, Social action organisation

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### Summary

WILPF ACT is a branch of the Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom-the longest-surviving international women's anti-war organisation.

### Details

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was formed in 1915 at the height of the First World War. A congress of 1,200 women was held in The Hague, Holland where women from both sides of the conflict came together to advocate for alternatives to war when settling disputes between nation states.

WILPF is the longest-surviving international women's anti-war organisation and continues today to work for peace, disarmament and human rights. It is committed to emphasising the need for women's equal participation in all aspects of international defence and security decision-making, as well as the essential role of women in conflict prevention and peace building.

WILPF is in consultative status with the United Nations, its Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and has special consultative relations with the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Labour Organization and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

In Australia, there are WILPF branches in four states and the ACT. Internationally, WILPF has national sections in 32 countries, across all continents, and international offices in Geneva and New York.

WILPF's Australian branch has its genesis in the local social justice organisation Sisterhood for International Peace, which formed in Melbourne in 1915. In 1919, some of its members travelled to a WILPF conference in Zurich and on their return reconstituted as WILPF's Australian branch.

The ACT branch of WILPF Australia was founded in 1982 at the height of the Cold War. Its first activity was to send delegate Nancy Shelley to New York, in June 1982, to participate in the million strong anti-nuclear rally in Central Park, held prior to the United Nations Second Special Session on Disarmament. On her return Shelley addressed Palm Sunday Peace Rallies and inspired many community groups with her message of the urgent need for disarmament and the power of people to bring about change.

WILPF ACT women have been involved directly or indirectly in all of WILPF Australia's activities since 1982. These campaigns and events have included:

1988: Joining in opposition to visits of nuclear-armed ships to Australia during the Bicentennial celebrations

1994: Sending a mission to monitor the elections in South Africa

1995: Sponsoring a Peace Train journey from Helsinki to Beijing arriving in time for the UN World Conference of Women

1997: Participating in the Australian Reconciliation Convention

2000: Coordinating Australian participation in the World March of Women

2003: Sponsoring the Children of the Gulf War photographic exhibition, on the effects of depleted uranium on children in Iraq, shown around Australia

2010, 2011 and 2012: Participating in the global *16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence Campaign*, emphasising the

intersections of gender-based violence and militarism.

Other significant activities have included:

1986: Participating in the national organising committee of the International Year of Peace, and recommending construction of a Peace Memorial in Canberra

1989 and 1991: Taking part in national protests against the AIDEX Arms Trade Fairs in Canberra, leading to a ban on such trade fairs in Canberra

1993: Assisting in the development of the Coalition of Australian Participating Organisations of Women (CAPOWI!), a network of national women's organisations, which later coordinated women's participation in the 1995 Beijing UN Women's Conference.

1998: Attending the national Women's Constitutional Convention, drawing attention to the need for a non-belligerency clause similar to that in the Japanese Constitution

2001: Coordinating a Coalition of Women for Peace formed in spontaneous response to Australian participation in the US led invasion of Afghanistan which evolved into a 'women building peace' e-list that still functions today

2005: Celebrating WILPF's 90th anniversary, together with Women in Black and a Chorus of Women, with a week-long Festival of Peace held in the ACT Legislative Assembly. Margaret Bearlin, Hellen Cooke, Barbara Meyer and other members of WILPF ACT published a full report of the event, funded by the ACT Women's Grants Program, copies of which were sent to all schools and libraries in the ACT.

2008: Writing WILPF's national submission in response to the *Defence White Paper* and speaking at the Canberra public consultation

2009: Organising a silent vigil on Anzac Day at the Peace Memorial which has become an annual event and is intended as an opportunity to reflect on the grief, suffering and waste of war.

From 2002 onwards, WILPF ACT has played an important role in the development of Australia's response to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 'Women Peace and Security'. WILPF ACT formed the national WILPF 1325 Working Group who have since organised workshops for women's organisations, locally and nationally, spoken at international conferences within Australia, and launched the *www.1325australia* website, funded by a grant awarded by the Office for the Status of Women.

In August 2012, WILPF ACT members participated in the launch of the *Side by Side* DVD and educational toolkit on UNSC Resolution 1325 at Parliament House in Canberra. At this launch WILPF received a vote of thanks for its leading role in the development of Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018.

WILPF ACT and the Australian branch work closely with related organisations such as the United Nations Association of Australia, the Medical Association for Prevention of War, Women in Black, UN Women, A Chorus of Women and the Equal Rights Alliance. The work of WILPF is funded by members and supporters and is independent of governments.

## Published resources

### Edited Book

A Record of a Festival of Peace: Celebrating 90 years of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: 'Supporting each other in building peace', 17-24 October 2005, Bearlin, Margaret; Cooke, Hellen and Meyer, Barbara, 2007

### Resource Section

Peace and Freedom Journal,

<http://wilpf.org.au/stay-informed/peace-and-freedom-journal/>

Side by Side - Women, Peace and Security, 2012,

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=dzNIBgWnAUg&feature=plcp>

### Site Exhibition

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

### Resource

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom,

<http://wilpfact.wordpress.com/>

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

## Archival resources

### **State Library of Victoria**

[Records of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1973. \[manuscript\].](#)

### **National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection**

[Margaret Bearlin interviewed by Biff Ward \[sound recording\]](#)

### **National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection**

[Records of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Australian Section, 1943-2014 \[manuscript\]](#)

### **Author Details**

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**Created** 20 February 2013

**Last modified** 7 April 2019