

# Gang-gang. Warmongers from Mars peace activists from Venus

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[Read later](#)**Ian Warden**Columnist for *The Canberra Times*[View more articles from Ian Warden](#)[Email Ian](#)[Email article](#)[Print](#)[Reprints & permissions](#)The Hiroshima Day 70th anniversary commemoration ceremony at the base of the statue of Ethos in Civic Square. *Photo: Graham Tidy*

Although one is always half-expecting her to say something (for we know she once spoke to her sculptor, Tom Bass) the statue of Ethos didn't say a word during Thursday's lunchtime Hiroshima Day ceremony held around her big bronze feet in Civic Square.

But one imagines that she approved of the way visitors to the occasion piled flowers around her feet (leaving her up to her big bronze shins in wattle, chrysanthemums, eucalyptus foliage and lilies).

Thursday's occasion, the 70th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima was organised by, inevitably, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and A Chorus of Women. We say "inevitably" because it sometimes seems that they, and especially the Chorus, do almost all of the pro-peace/anti-war heavy lifting in this flibbertigibbet city.

Their idealism does them great credit although, as with almost all idealists everywhere, they could badly do with the services of a pragmatist to help them get their messages across and make an impact. Warmongers are from Mars but female peace activists, invariably polite and self-effacing, are from Venus.

So for example it was sweetly, naively typical of them that they chose as Thursday's venue a place beside a noisily splashing fountain but then didn't employ a single voice-amplifying gadget to help speeches, singing and poetry readings compete with the waters. The cacophonous waters won, easily. Lots of what was said and sung was inaudible, which was a shame because it is hard to imagine a more important point of view than that nuclear weapons should be banned.

On Thursday methought, gloomily, that good souls like these already have a hard enough battle to be heard by those in power (especially those male potentates who love to collect and to brandish their nuclear weapons) without their struggling to make themselves even audible to one another and in a space the size of a tennis court. Thursday's sentiments needed thundering, but only got whispered and lisped.

Proceedings began with the choir singing, to the accompaniment of soft, acoustic guitars, a despairing ditty *Children of Iraq* that ends with the wail "Tell me, how can they do this to children?"

My well-intentioned suggestion that the choir should try to impart some entertaining black jollity to the occasion by singing Tom Lehrer's nuclear

horror ditty *We will all go together when we go/Every Hottentot and Eskimo*, was inexplicably ignored.

Then above the splishing and splashing those of us closest to Dr Sue Wareham of the International Campaign to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons got to hear her say some powerful and persuasive things in favour of a nuclear weapons ban treaty.

She said that it was shameful that Australia was one of those nations that argues against a nuclear weapons ban treaty and argues that there are imaginable circumstances in which it might be necessary to use them. She wanted Australian governments to spell out what they think those circumstances might be.

She wanted possession of nuclear weapons so stigmatised so that it becomes just as implausible for states to brag about having them as it is now that a state will brag about having arsenals of weapons of filthy chemical and biological weapons.

She warned that the world bristles with nuclear weapons on "high alert". When and if any of them are used, she foresaw, quite apart from direct, Hiroshimaesque killings of people (the Hiroshima bomb is thought directly and indirectly to have killed 320,000 souls thus far) debris flung up into the air will blot out the sun and so change our climate that agriculture will be impossible and there will be "a global famine".

Then there was a laying of flowers around Ethos' untwitching feet as the choir sang "Here are gum leaves green and blue, for remembrance of earth and sky."

Then, ahead of a singing of *I am Ethos* the Chorus' Glenda Cloughley came forward to explain that she used to know the sculptor Tom Bass (his Ethos was unveiled in 1961). She told us that late in his life she challenged him, saying that yes of course we all know who Ethos is and what she looks like "But what does Ethos' *think?*"

Bass didn't know at the time but much later he called to tell Cloughley that on the previous night she (Ethos not Cloughley) had come to him in a dream and had dictated to him, her, Ethos' mission statement, *I Am Ethos*. Now it is embossed on a plaque nearby and as well Cloughley has set it to music.

And so it came to pass on Thursday that the choir sang it (to guitar accompaniment) and that, the words having been printed and distributed, everyone there was able to sing from the same songsheet. This columnist watched very carefully to see if our towering bronze companion would join in but she remained what the tabloids would call "tight-lipped".

But here is a little of what she dictated to Tom Bass and of what we sang on Thursday.

I am Ethos  
Though I do not speak with words  
I speak to you in other ways  
I say to you that  
I am the spirit of this place  
and its people  
I am the original spirit  
and the spirit of now  
I rise from the earth  
and reach for the sun  
I bring together  
the old and the new  
In me there is  
no violence or war  
only peace and reconciliation  
I am the love,  
peace and beauty  
of this place  
I give you these things  
every day and always.

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