



1915-2015: Resolutions for a Sustainable Peace — then and now

A conversation to discover and advance the resolutions of the 1915 International Congress of Women

Uniting Church Hall, Yarralumla, 31 July 2014

On 31 July a group of about fifty people braved the elements to gather at Yarralumla Uniting Church Hall to learn more about the 1915 International Congress of Women (ICW) and the far-sighted resolutions developed by those pioneering women.

The Congress and its protagonists are the inspiration for A Chorus of Women's next major musical presentation, an oratorio entitled (and expressing) *A Passion for Peace*, which will have three performances at the Albert Hall from 28 April — 1 May, 2015, immediately after the ANZAC Centenary commemorations, providing an alternative narrative to encourage a community conversation about peace-making. For more information visit

www.chorusofwomen.org/whatsnew.htm - PFP.

After a good supper, meeting other participants and talking, *A Passion for Peace* project manager Janet Salisbury led the group in an information session about the 1915 International Congress of Women, followed by a discussion about the century of evolving ideas that have followed, including its successes and its shortcomings.

Participants at the conversation

In keeping with the topic of the conversation, although not with the intent of the organisers, participants at the conversation were mostly women who came from diverse backgrounds, including several members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which was founded at the 1915 ICW. A few men, both young and older, also joined us.

Introduction

Largely forgotten by history, in late April 1915, some 1200 extraordinary women from warring and neutral nations made their way to the Netherlands to gather at The Hague to work out how to end the First World War and set international standards for a sustainable peace.

Such travel would have been no ordinary feat for unaccompanied women in peacetime. To do so during the largest and deadliest conflict the world had witnessed was extraordinary.

1915 was a time of sickening trench warfare, mustard gas attack, mass troop annihilations; in a world without international law, where democracies were few, only five countries (including New Zealand and Australia) had enfranchised their women and 'human rights' were inconceivable.

The Congress women passed 20 far-sighted resolutions, so adept that they would later appear unacknowledged in US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points (1918) which underpinned the formation of the League of Nations, the Covenant of the League of Nations (1924) and, 30 years later, were reflected in the Articles of the United Nations Charter of 1945, and subsequent declarations and resolutions.

Members of Chorus each read a paragraph from the forthright Preamble to the *Report of the International Congress of Women*.

A quote: ‘...The doctrine that war is inevitable
is both a denial of the sovereignty of reason
and a betrayal of the deepest instincts of the human heart.’

The full text of the preamble and a very condensed summary of the 1915 ICW resolutions are attached.

Speakers from WILPF provided insight into the current women’s peace agenda: UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Oct. 2000) at last provided legal protection against sexual violence; and for the first time moved away from the sole recognition of women as needing ‘protection’ and ‘security’, towards a specific affirmation of the important role of *women as essential and equal participants* in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peace-keeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. This was the first UN address of the root causes of war — domination, territorial conquest, annexation.

In the wake of Res. 1325, National Action Plans have been endorsed by 40 countries. Sadly UN member states, Australia included, have been slow to action the Resolution, and its implementation has been patchy. For example, women were excluded from Syrian peace negotiations held in Geneva earlier this year.

Nonetheless, women’s lobbies involving WILPF, the Australian Coalition of Women, and with nongovernment organisation support, are gaining greater UN Security Council attention.

After this opening information, A Chorus of Women premiered the first piece of music developed for *A Passion for Peace* — Resolution One, the Congress women’s opening cry:

We women, in International Congress assembled,
Protest against the madness and horror of war,
Involving as it does a reckless sacrifice of human life
And the destruction of so much that humanity
Has labored through centuries to build up.
ICW Resolution One, 1915; music by Glenda Cloughley

Small group discussions and first general discussion

What would we need to move forward? (What is holding us back?)

A Chorus participant spoke about the 1915 Resolutions, and subsequent international Charters and laws arising since that time. Chorus sang a chant of major United Nations resolutions since 1945, ‘We the People of the United Nations’, reiterating our national and international commitments to principles of peaceful coexistence.

We the people of the United Nations,
So many voices, this is our song...
Music by Johanna McBride

However, while the world has advanced greatly in terms of democracy and women’s enfranchisement, and the spirit of the 1915 ICW resolutions is re-emergent in the excellent UN Charter — there remains a lamentable history of evasion of signatory commitments. A vast weapons industry stokes perpetual warfare and defense armaments, the great majority sold to developing nations; driven largely by profits to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

The audience divided up into smaller groups to consider what needs to happen to allow the powerful women’s resolutions from 1915, and the subsequent organisation of the UN, with its various charters, resolutions and declarations, to form the basis for a peaceful world order. After

the small group discussions, Chorus sang a simple song of longing, ‘If We only Knew the Ways that Lead to Peace’ as participants reassembled to offer the key points from their group discussions into a general group discussion.

Overall, these discussions revolved around the following key threads:

- *Shifting emphasis from war to peace.* This can occur at local and national levels by promoting institutions dedicated to peace, and by moving away from present public noise on military history and combative parliamentary practice towards conflict resolution, education on principles of peace and conciliatory international obligations.
- *Greater involvement of women and young people.* Connection between generations, to ‘pass on the baton’ in cultural change towards negotiated respectful outcomes; and the necessity of involving women in all conflict negotiations at all levels.
- *‘Connecting the dots’:* Numerous civil society movements and community organisations across generations and gender share the same goals and ideals for community development and peace-making. It is important to connect and strengthen this basis of shared humanity. Although *social media* can be a distraction and divisive, it also provides insistent information, and can broadcast truth-telling and scrutiny of abuses.
- *Recognition of successes:* Some participants stressed the *more positive aspects* of the past 100 years’ transformations — the many ethical and economic equities brought about through major social movements; great-thinking leaders such as Gandhi, King, Mandela, and other peace and human rights activists; the ending of the Vietnam War by public condemnation; the strengthening of UN peace-making engagements in aggressive conflicts; the advancement of human rights for minorities and the powerless in many countries. These success stories give a sense of impetus and value to activism, and counter pessimism amongst many young people. Young people are also creating their own success stories, such as the Oaktree Foundation (young people dedicated to aid development) and the Australian Youth Climate Coalition.
- *Education:* Education was a central issue to the group discussions, as it was to the attendees at the ICW in 1915 (the latter in a way we can barely recall as children at that time were dominated and silenced, and many were industrial slaves). Our own ‘child-centred’ approaches were pioneered by educators of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many of whom were women. Participants thought that more attention is required today, from pre-school age onwards, to deliver knowledge and attitudes that maintain pacific respect for others, including conflict resolution techniques and attention to schoolyard behaviour standards. Ethics and philosophy as alternatives to religious instruction; education to include women’s history and vantage point, in a current culture that militarises our history; the inclusion of peace studies; and nurturing creativity and self-awareness, were also all seen as important steps to building a purposeful peace in our community. Informing the public on our *national obligations under international law* and the specific principles to which our nation is signatory, as part of school and public education, could also strengthen national will to honour our commitments.
- *A new way of thinking:* This open proposition of what is needed led to the second general discussion (see below).

At the end of this first group discussion, Chorus sang a portion of Honey Nelson’s ‘Anzac Hymn’, a parents’ passionate declaration to refuse any further sacrifices to war and destruction:

But we parents cry — No more, no war!
The world's face turning up to the light.
Our love is for people all across Earth,
Our children born for love and future life.

Second general discussion

How do the 1915 Resolutions point us to creative ways toward transformation?

Glenda Cloughley, the composer of *A Passion for Peace*, described the original formation of A Chorus of Women through a public song of lament against war; and their subsequent and continuing expression of community sorrow and feeling, through song, about ethical issues of our society.

Through her work and dealings with people she realised that there was a longing for something other than the memorialising of war and sacrifice. This, and the story of the 1915 ICW inspired her to initiate the Passion for Peace project, including composition of a community choral work to tell the story of the ICW within the bigger context of the nurture of life and commitment to future generations. Through the arts, people can touch the depths of their own hearts and the project has already struck a chord in the community and many have been joining Chorus to sing or help in other ways.

Glenda quoted American suffragette, social reformer and ICW President Jane Addams who said: 'Peace is not merely an absence of war but the nurture of human life.' She also noted that 'mothering peace' is the commitment to the safety and security of the young — of future generations. In the contemporary world, climate change has also become a source of insecurity for future generations, as well as a provocation for future wars and is therefore a central concern to the Passion project.

A young man spoke: *How can we collaborate* to bring together the minds and attitudes of women and men, who share a great deal in common in their cares? A culture of competitiveness confers an advantage for men. And the threats of warfare, of dominion, can make them *fearful* — of failure, loss of power, loss of provision, loss of status — and fiercely reactive.

A woman responded: *Women have not yet 'had a fair go'* in collaborating in peace-making. In Australia (and other western democracies), the adversarial rules of the political arena still reward aggressive players, and few women want to perform in that 'playground'. In the international arena, the UN Security Council have formally recognised women as essential to peace-making — but women are not yet mandated (sometimes not even admitted) to peace conferences. And according to anecdote, men do not wish for their presence because *women will compromise*.

An anecdote was related about the response of a group of men and women teachers in Africa, when asked to guess the priorities of their opposite group: while the women guessed immediately the (mainly self-rewarding) priorities of the men, the men assumed that the women's priorities (actually children's health and safety) were the same as their own!

'*A new way of thinking*': Perhaps our collective ideas came together thus:

- that the unique *understanding of women* is essential to the making and sustaining of peace in the world;
- that *human life is sacrosanct*, in any situation;
- that *nations must be held accountable to their solemn promises* to abide by, and sanction against those who defy, the high principles of International Laws to which they are signatory;
- that the *creative arts* can be a truthful revelation of the deepest human longings;
- that the loving *guardianship of the interests of future generations* is our simple, unimpeachable touchstone for wisdom and propriety in all great decision-making.

At the end of the discussion, Chorus closed the conversation by singing the new setting of Resolution One once more (see above).