

Foreword

This is a very important book because it details the history of Australian women working for peace as members of the oldest international feminist organisation, 'Women's International League for Peace and Freedom' (WILPF), which grew out of women's opposition to World War I.

This global organisation has persisted *with its peace advocacy* against a background of war and conflict in political environments where the majority of decision-makers choose military might rather than rational dialogue to find solutions.

It is women who have created a strong backbone of resistance to government propaganda that tries to convince communities that a so-called just war will bring lasting peace. Yet after decades of modern warfare peace remains as elusive as ever and civilians, mainly women and children, have become disproportionate victims of war.

I was politicised by Australia's entry into the Vietnam War in 1965 when the Australian Government imposed conscription of 19-year-old men as soldiers for that war. I was a young mum with a baby son and could not imagine how I would feel if he were ever to be conscripted. I joined 'Save our Sons', a newly formed organisation established in Melbourne that aimed to overturn conscription policy and support conscientious objectors and others actively working against Australia's participation in the Vietnam War.

Years later, as an Australian Senator, I was able to participate in a range of foreign policy debates that focused on peacebuilding. During the years I was in government, the first Minister for Disarmament was appointed and played a major role negotiating for the development of an International Chemical Weapons Convention. I joined some of my colleagues in campaigning against Australia's involvement in the US MX Missile Defence Program, and Australia's promotion of a Nuclear Free Pacific.

In 1989, as Minister for the Status of Women, I welcomed 300 women from around the world to WILPF's International Congress in Sydney: Women: Building a Common and Secure Future.

This book is a major contribution to the historiography of the Australian peace movement so it should be read widely to influence debate about Australia's future role in international relations.

We can continue to view militarisation as our standard response, or we can become respected negotiators valued for our professionalism in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Margaret Reynolds
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and Freedom Australia.

This text is taken from *Sisters in Peace: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Australia, 1915–2015*, by Kate Laing, published 2023 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.