



PRESS RELEASE
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WILPF, the world's oldest women peace organisation, declines to participate in CSW61

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, one of the first NGOs to be granted consultative status with the United Nations in 1948, will not take part in the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61). WILPF warns that the absence of women from countries affected by the recent US travel ban undermines the basic premise of the CSW as being an inclusive and participatory process and threatens its legitimacy.

The United Nations (UN) has obligations to uphold principles and practices agreed and acted upon over decades and underwritten by human rights law. Clearly, the US travel ban undermines the ability of the UN to uphold these obligations, says Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) today from their headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

WILPF has engaged, supported and participated in the various functions of the UN system since its inception. The organisation brings women from grassroots organisations to participate in the multilateral fora to advocate for human rights, countering militarism, and building peace. This organisation is now sounding an alarm as to the threat to the integrity of the UN, presented by the US travel ban.

"This unilateral action by the US as the host state has had a major impact on the ability of the UN to uphold the principles enunciated in the UN Charter, in human rights law, and indeed in the CSW. Women from the seven countries have either been denied visas or cannot, with any confidence, attend the CSW and have their voices heard and their struggles for equality, freedom and nonviolence shared with fellow activists and decision-makers around the world," says Madeleine Rees, WILPF Secretary General. She points out that whilst women who are able to attend the CSW will be able to protest their absence and denounce the policies, they will never be able to speak on behalf of those forced to be absent.

"The US travel ban is just the latest in a series of obstacles to women's meaningful participation in international fora. We are on a slippery slope, and we need to take immediate measures to change direction. At WILPF we see it as an indispensable requirement that women from all over the world can attend the UN processes, CSW being just one of them. Without women's real experiences being part of the debates, the reality of



WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM

their lives, including during conflict, cannot be accurately be brought to the attention of decision-makers, including policy drafters and Member States,” says Rees and continues:

“We had intended to have events profiling women from Yemen, and other Middle East countries affected by conflict. This is no longer possible. As a matter of principle, therefore, in solidarity with our partners from the excluded countries, we have decided to withdraw our participation from the formal CSW61 process. I will not go there, our planned events are cancelled, and there will be no WILPF International staff speaking on panels. We are instead moving our focus and planned activities to the Human Rights Council in Geneva and other spaces that allow all women irrespective of nationality, race, language or religion to speak from their experience. We will work with NGOs, States, and the UN to convene a major event in Geneva to address the issue of participation, possibly as early as April.”

WILPF has sent a statement to all Member States of the UN asking them to take up the human rights issues, the violation of the Refugee Convention, and the disregard for the UN as an institution by the current US administration. WILPF calls on them to bring back the UN to its Charter and to the peace organisation it was intended to be.

Please find attached:

Fact sheet about CSW61, WILPF and women’s meaningful participation.

Useful links:

WILPF statement: [WILPF Calls on the UN to Uphold International Law and the Charter of the UN](#)

Pictures under the common creative license can be found on [WILPF’s Flickr account](#). Please credit the photographer.
