

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 11TH MAY 2013

RESOLUTIONS

1 NAW AND PEACE

Since its formation the NAW has been committed to peace. In April 2012, we joined sisters in WIDF to consider issues of climate change and sustainability and the possible conflicts that may arise from unbalanced and unfair economic relationships as sea levels rise and food scarcity increases, creating climate change refugees and displaced persons.

Our conference on women, politics and power, held in November 2012 recognised the connections between control of diminishing resources and the production and sale of ever-more-costly military technology. We also recognise the tensions between retaining jobs and handing down a safer world to our children by not taking more risks with shocking indiscriminate armaments including drones and nuclear weapons.

We understand the connections between the nuclear power industry and nuclear weapons, with the same multinational mining and arms shareholders taking power over the media to keep us all fearful of the lights going off and 'enemies' attacking. We recognise that there is a real need for expert nuclear skills in decommissioning existing plant and safe containment and storage of existing nuclear waste.

But we have to remember the original use of nuclear fission was to produce plutonium for weapons. This remains one of the uses. In this context we are alert to the dangers of escalating the nuclear arms race in the Middle East. We are concerned at the Coalition Government's cynical arms-pushing in the Middle East and India and disgusted by the suggestion that aid resources could be shifted over to so-called peace keeping by means of protection of civilians via military sales – armoured vehicles etc.

Just 0.2% of the British workforce is employed on arms exports. All arms industry jobs are heavily subsidised by the taxpayer and military exports get Government support not given to other industries.

In mid March, we learned that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) considers the war in Afghanistan to be "unwinnable" (Independent, 16.03.2013)

We agree with CAAT that it is time to shift priorities. We urgently need to imagine and pursue alternatives to arms trading. Cutting arms trade subsidies and military spending could save youth services, support for disabled people and social housing. Shifting priorities to tackle climate change could secure jobs in renewable for the future and improve human security rather than threaten it (CAAT News, Jan-March 2013)

We therefore restate our:

- commitment to peace;
- opposition to nuclear weapons and nuclear power;
- opposition to the military use of drones;
- opposition to the production and use of depleted uranium;
- determination to oppose the arms trade.

We will work with CAAT, CND and others to build alliances to this end and to promote skills conversion towards socially useful engineering rather than weapons of mass destruction.

2 Violence Against Women

This AGM notes and celebrates with pride the actions of women all over the world on February 14th 2013 as part of the *One Billion Rising* campaign to end violence against women. Ending violence against women and girls is on everyone's mind and citizens have mobilized around the world. For the UK, we also remind ourselves of the long history of fight back against violence and misogyny, typified by such events as *Reclaim the Night*.

On the other side of the coin, UK cuts to support services and specifically to legal aid mean that there will be less protection from male violence for the most vulnerable of women. The Government proclaims that it supports measures to

tackle violence against women. Yet from April 1st it has introduced a £50million cut to family legal aid that will prevent women from taking action against violent partners and will affect more than 230,000 families.

Half of the women who seek asylum in the UK have been raped or trafficked or are fleeing gender-related violence such as female genital mutilation, for themselves or for their daughters. If fleeing for political reasons, they may have been tortured and raped by police and/or soldiers.

NAW has always stood against violence against women; our policy papers and resolutions cover issues such as trafficking of women and children, provision of women's refuges for women fleeing domestic abuse, the need for better sex education and much more

We also note that since the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women, governments worldwide (with one or two dishonourable exceptions) have recognised women's rights as human rights including the right to control our own bodies and reproductive rights. Most recently, in the wake of the horrific gang rape of an Indian student in Delhi, governments have moved to commit to national actions against such violence. From 4 to 15 March, governments and activists came together at the [United Nations Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#) in New York to discuss strategies to end the pandemic. We will monitor the commitments made, recognizing that fine words are easy to speak.

The statistic that 1 billion women will be raped or beaten during their lifetime is profoundly shocking. It indicates a patriarchal epidemic of violence, a global problem.

Conflict and wars affect women in a different way than men. The breakdown in civil society renders women more vulnerable and subject to violence. Rape becomes endemic and is also used systematically as a weapon of war, most recently in Congo. Wherever there are military bases, the corollary is prostitution. In everyday life in some countries, young women are learning the distorted lesson that rape and sex are synonymous. In other contexts, young men have assumed the right to gang rape. These are not personal issues; they are issues of systemic oppression and control. There is no justification for violence against women and it must not be tolerated in the home, the workplace, the community or the wider world.

We therefore resolve to:

- Oppose cuts in funding to organisations that support women who are or have been victims of violence
- Support initiatives that oppose violence against women and raise the public profile of the issue
- Continue to campaign for peace in the knowledge that violence against women increases during wars
- Support the WIDF in its campaign to commit the UN to put pressure on governments to end this epidemic of violence

3 The Government Attack on Women

The Coalition government led by David Cameron and George Osborne are determined to stick to their austerity programme. They have used the media to persuade ordinary working people and their families that the government's economic policy is necessary for the good of the country. Their real intention is to maximise profit in the interests of capitalism.

To achieve this end it is vital to push down wages by structurally embedding unemployment in our economic system forcing workers to accept poor pay, wage freezes and part time work. With the loss of over 250,000 public sector jobs since 2010 (30,000 jobs in the NHS, 71,000 in education) and women constituting 65% of public sector workers we know that women have been severely hit by this strategy as workers, carers and service users. The private sector has also not fared any better with a dramatic drop in manufacturing contributing to an expected triple-dip recession and an estimate that 40% of high street shops will close in the next five years. Policies of unfettered freedom for big business and financial institutions with bail-outs, bankers' bonuses and soaring energy company profits at the same time as ruthless privatisation of all the social aspects of the state like the NHS and no investment in the building and manufacturing industry are creating long term economic chaos. It is also widening the gap between rich and poor in Britain at a disgustingly phenomenal rate, illustrated by 118% rise in sales of £1million houses in the last year while 30% of children live in poverty and ordinary families struggle with rent rises and housing benefit cuts.

But the Cameron-Osborne economic strategy is also underpinned by an ideological attack on working class people in general and women in particular. Our demand for decent affordable childcare is also seen as a refusal to know our place. Despite some tax credit subsidy for working parents, childcare costs are rising at twice the rate of inflation. A part time nursery place now averages £106pw for a child under 2yrs and £104pw for over 2yrs a rise of 4.2% and 6.6% respectively in the last year. With job shortages, low wages and pay freezes this is making it unaffordable for many women to go out to work.

The Tory attitude towards women is also evident in the debate about a woman's right to choose. Recognising that an all-out ban on abortion is not going to get through parliament, many attempts have been made to reduce the time limit for abortion and strip termination providers of their counselling role. David Cameron has said he is sympathetic to these views whilst simultaneously criticising women who have children they can't afford. This has given the green light to the extra-parliamentary campaign of anti-abortion groups like 40 Days for Life to intimidate women outside clinics whilst remaining silent on the tragic death of Savita Halappanavar in Belfast who was denied a life saving abortion.

Of course, this ideological attack is an attempt to divide working class men from women and weaken the opposition to austerity policies. The fundamental problem is that this government and the capitalist class object to our aspirations -equal pay for jobs of equal worth; affordable childcare; decent housing; free health care; reproductive rights; freedom from violence and, horror of all horrors equal representation in the corridors of power. In fact all the demands laid out in The Charter for Women. This is why the trade union and wider labour movement must ensure that these demands are not simply an add-on but become integral to the fight for a progressive and social just society.

The NAW will therefore:

- Continue to oppose the Government's economic policy of austerity
- Support the People's Assembly Against Austerity conference on 22nd June 2013
- Work with other sister organisations in the WIDF to expose the global nature of the capitalist crisis.