

Speech at Anzac Day Reflection 2021

by
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Richardson's Lookout - Marrickville Peace Park
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Women and War - Anzac Day 2021 theme

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

On thinking about what I might say today, I began to think about how the role of women in war has changed since the first ANZAC day as women now take on many more roles in the armed forces. In combat, in humanitarian and in leadership roles. In the past, the role of women often went unrecognised - in the armed forces (often at the front line, in field hospitals), in the land army, filling the roles of those overseas.

How women have been the chattels and spoils of war, as they have always been.

I began thinking about the women who anxiously waited at home for letters from the front, who feared the news reports, the telegram, the phone call, the knock at the door. The women who clung to hope of the missing being found. That knitted and baked fruit cakes. That waited for the birthday numbers to fall for those being conscripted.

The women who took over the roles of enlisted men in factories, farms, offices, intelligence, to raise families alone and then to be sent back to domestic duties.

How today it is women and children who bear the greatest burden of violence, causality, death. Wars that are increasingly fought by armed forces at a far distance and never see their damage or affect. Sometimes by armed forces acting in other parts of the globe.

How women who endure poverty, brave violence and risk their lives to give their children education, who send their children to boarding schools to find them at the mercy of War Lords. Who face the suicide bomber every day to shop at the markets, who say goodbye to husbands and sons everyday as if it may be their last. Whose children play amongst land mines which lay hidden for decades.

How 90% of all war-related casualties today are civilians, with the majority of these being non-combatant women and children.

And most importantly, about the women who stood up and said "No to War", "No to Conscription" and "Yes to Peace". Who tenaciously write letters, hold banners and placards. Who stand in front of police lines. Who lobby politicians and the United Nations. Who do all the grass roots organising.

Wikipedia lists notable pacifist and peace activist women from 42 countries, from Armenia to Yemen, too many to count and to recognise. From the 1915 International Congress of Women, to Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Women For Peace and many, many other groups. Big and small.

To quote Eleanor Roosevelt - *It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it.*