

## Speech to the 2022 World Peace Council by **Annie Raja** (representing the Women's International Democratic Federation)



Annie Raja (left) with British Peace Assembly delegate and NAW EC member Liz Payne at the World Peace Conference in Hanoi

Dear Delegates and Comrades,

On behalf of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), I extend revolutionary greetings to you all and I convey the warmest greetings from Lorena, the President of WIDF.

Comrades, I want to congratulate the Vietnam Peace Council for organising this 22nd Assembly of the WPC in Hanoi, Vietnam – a brave and victorious country, a country that all of us are very proud of for its deep commitment to people all over the world and the defeat imposed on North American

Imperialism in 1975.

As Fanny Edelman, the leader of a five-member delegation of the WIDF wrote after visiting Vietnam: 'The consequences of 30 years of war was beyond imagination. Five million square kilometres of people's homes were destroyed in the north, 4,000 villages were wiped out. 3,000 schools, 1,500 hospitals and dispensaries, every single power station, every single bridge, every single road. In the south, three million unemployed, hundreds of thousands of orphans, nearly a million invalids and cripples, innumerable victims of other social wounds.

From there, you have conquered all the barriers to reach today's position. You are a reference for women and for people around the world.

Since the foundation of WIDF, our struggle for peace has been a daily affair. We are proud of the role of our ancestors in the WIDF, here in Asia, who have devoted their best to support Vietnamese women and our constant support of the struggle of denouncing the "agent orange effects". WIDF came together worldwide, and we raised funds to support the women and people of Vietnam in the reconstruction of maternity provision in Hanoi, destroyed by the USA in the war of 1975.

Comrades,

Delegates from many countries with histories of defeating the imperialist powers are gathered here in this Forum. Among us, brave Cuba which always remains as an inspiration to all of us in our fight against capitalist-corporate exploitation. My greetings to the Cuban people, with their history of struggle and determination to defeat US imperialism

My greetings to brave Vietnam, a country that did everything possible to make their people free and able to raise their children in peace and never submit to imperialist outrages.

The world has changed much since those early decades after the World War. Some historians say that in empirical terms, the period since has been one of the most peaceful eras of human history. But if we probe deeply, wars and conflicts have continued to occur across the world, in all regions, with enormous social and environmental costs.

A war continues even today in Ukraine, with enormous and ever-growing levels of death, disability, displacement, and deprivation. The need for all peace - loving people to speak against masculine militant aggression and even nuclear threats, which pose the danger of mass annihilation every single day, has never been more urgent...

However, as we all know, wars not only exist as periodic conflagrations between countries, they simmer amidst us on an everyday basis, in quiet and eruptive ways. Many of these wars have been with us for centuries.

The war of patriarchy on women continues, in all its heinous and benign forms, in homes and outside, despite progressive laws and covenants. In India, while sections of women make progress in all spheres, figures for violence, denial, and discrimination against women, throughout their life cycle, continues to rise.

Here, women belonging to the lower caste in India suffer the most oppression, especially sexual violence at the hands of upper caste men. As such, the caste system, with its absolute rigid structure of hierarchy, remains one of the most violent systems in India. Much like the other indigenous peoples of the world, the lower castes, including the untouchables, remain thus in a battle zone, always under fear and attack, deprived both of resources and dignity.

In India, during the 30-year period of neoliberal economic policies, inequality has grown colossally, and vast swathes of the Indian masses live on the brink of starvation. During the first Covid lockdown in India – one of the most stringent lockdowns in the world – we saw grim images of millions of poor walking back to

their villages, tired, hungry, and uncertain of their future. That image testifies to the reality of the majority in this country, and starkly contrasts to the hyper-sold picture of the small, Indian elite, as the defining face of the new globalised India.

The war of poverty wages on globally, increasingly aggravated by climate change, and its varying impacts on safe habitats and food security.

A dangerous addition to the grim scenario is the rise of the fascist right in parts of the world, including India, where it has taken the garb of Hindu nationalism, as propagated by the ruling party – the Bhartiya Junta Party – along with its numerous affiliate organisations all over [the country]. The fascist forces not only pose a continuing threat to the minorities of India but seek to undermine all the advances made in Independent India through our progressive Constitution, which enshrined equality, freedom, secularism, socialism, fraternity and democracy as the founding principles. At stake also are the gains made by the women's movement, as we see more and more dehumanizing practices and court judgments against women and an elevated status to conservative scriptures, patriarchal diktats, rapists, and criminals.

As women who believe that 'political is personal' as much as 'personal is political', we need to draw lessons from and build upon the work of our ancestors, the leaders and participants of the global women's movement, to take on the continuing challenges of fascism, racism, casteism, classism and sexism.

Peace, as they understood, and we also understand, is not just absence of war. We don't just need peace on our borders, we want it in every home and in every heart. And this peace comes only if basic living conditions for all women and men are met – of food, health, education, employment; it comes also with a life of equality, dignity, and freedom, and with opportunities for us to expand ourselves creatively and spiritually.

On behalf of WIDF, I wish every success to the 22nd Assembly of the WPC. Let us unite in solidarity for sovereignty, equality, dignity, and peace.

Long live the World Peace Council

Long Live Women's International Democratic Federation

Long Live World Peace