



'Habouba in Gamar Boba' by the talented Sudanese graphic artist and illustrator Rana Jubara. This is Johannes Vermeer's 'Girl with a Pearl Earring' reimagined as a Sudanese lady dressed in her country's traditional attire: a plain white gown (toub) with a crescent moon-shaped golden earring (gamar boba). Habouba means grandmother in Sudanese Arabic. The piece is a tribute to Sudanese matriarchs and womanhood as well as a nod to the countless such portraits of haboubas in their youth. Rana Jubara [@ranajubaraofficial] Instagram

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rebel girl vi gill remembered

ERNEST WALKER REMEMBERS NAW MEMBER VI GILL AS A COMRADE AND TRADE UNION COLLEAGUE. HE MET HER WHEN HE WAS 15 YEARS OLD AND JOINED FIRTH BROWN TOOLS AS A "JUNIOR WORKER"

VI GILL was born on 3 September 1936 and passed away on 7 September 2024, four days after her 88th birthday. She was born in the Pitsmoor area of Sheffield and attended school in the nearby Burngreave district, leaving at the age of 15. As a teenager her father went to the United States where he became involved with the Industrial Workers of the World – the Wobblies. He was subsequently deported for his activities and eventually ended up back in Sheffield. His political views obviously rubbed off on Vi as she joined the Young Communist League (YCL) at the age of 16, there she met Arthur Scargill who became a lifelong friend. She had a number of jobs on leaving school one of which was at the well-known Fletchers Bakery, a company founded by George Fletcher. He was also a founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. His son was a founder member of the YCL. George Fletcher's life story is told by Nellie Connoles in the book *Leaven of Life*.

George had retired by the time Vi went to work there and another son was running the business. However, she had a bad experience at Fletchers. The normal shift pattern was 7-5 but on Fridays the mainly female workforce had to work an extra hour to get bread deliveries ready for the weekend. Vi asked if she could leave early – she had a YCL meeting – her request was refused but she left anyway. Come Monday morning and her cards were waiting for her. Unbeknown to her the Bakers Unions official met with management during that week and nothing was done. Her faith in trade unionism did not waver but she realised that some officials left a lot to be desired. However as one door closed another opened as they say and for Vi it did. In 1954 at the age of 18 she started work at Firth Brown Tools, a major tool making company situated on Carlisle Street East in Sheffield east end. Trade union wise it was a very well organised factory with workers being members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). It also had a functioning Communist Party branch which Vi joined. She became a hand point grinder, which was a skilled job in itself, doing the job for the next 25 years. She soon became a shop steward representing the many women who worked there. In time she was elected as the Women's Shop Stewards rep. to the AEU District Committee and then started to attend the National Women's Conference of the AEU which she did up to 1979. In 1957 she once again faced dismissal. A national engineering strike took place in that year and on returning to work it was



found that a member of management had worked a machine. The worker whose machine had been worked refused to start up and was told to clock out. This led to 15 shop stewards including Vi walking out in support. The company then sacked the 15 shop stewards with the managing director Eric Mensworth in true cold war style, claiming that the company was being singled out by the Communists – some of the shop stewards were party members – accusing them of disruptive influence. However, he didn't reckon with the AEU District Committee – constantly referred to as the "Communist dominated" district committee by the *Sheffield Star* newspaper – which threatened a city-wide strike if the 15 were not reinstated. They eventually were. The 15 had been paid wages in lieu of dismissal and were asked to pay the money back. Vi couldn't as she had spent it, but she offered to pay 2/6d (12.5p in today's money) a week until it was all paid back.

After that Vi became more active within the AEU, but her base was at Firth Brown Tools. In 1974 she led the women there to secure equal pay. She also became the convenor. Her membership of the Communist Party led her to being elected to the Executive Committee of the Party in 1974 and then to its political committee. Her activities were curtailed somewhat in 1979 when she left Firth Brown Tools. This was a momentous part of her life when she gave birth to her daughter Georgina. However, when it became possible she started to attend party branches sometime taking her daughter with her. She was a regular attendee at her now Unite branch. She then embarked on a three-year course at Sheffield University where she obtained a degree in Sociology. Following this she did a 12-

month stint at Chapeltown Community Centre as manager and then moved on to become the development worker for Sheffield Trades Council, a position that she held for nine years. In between those jobs she also had a cleaning job at Sheffield Cathedral, would you believe. Her final employment was at a nursing home which in her own words she "loved it". Her popularity stretched to Belfast which she visited on a few occasions making numerous friends. Ill health took its toll and she passed away in September 2024 after seven decades of trades union and political activity. She is survived by her daughter Georgina, son-in-law Oliver and grandsons, Leo and Robin.

PHOTOS: ABOVE VI GILL IN THE FACTORY

BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT LYNDIA WALKER, MARY DAVIS, VI GILL, SINGING AT FRANK WATTERS' WEDDING



amazon not a pretty fairy tale

AMANDA GEARING, A GMB SENIOR ORGANISER, UPDATES THE AMAZON STORY

THE story I'm about to share isn't one of a great, resounding victory. It doesn't fit neatly into a three-act structure where good triumphs over evil, or where David topples Goliath. There's no fairy tale ending, no moment where the credits roll, and everything is happily ever after. But this is still a story worth telling.

It's the story of 1,184 workers who stood up and said, enough is enough. For the first time in many of their lives they found the courage to challenge the status quo, to say they deserved better, to believe in the possibility of change. And though the result wasn't what we hoped for, their bravery left a mark. This is their story, and I hope we can learn from it. It's a testament to the power of collective strength and the belief that even in defeat, we are stronger together than apart.

After 37 days of industrial action, the Amazon workers in Coventry were ready to take the next step. This wasn't about the picket lines anymore. This was about forming their own union – a chance to claim their rights, improve their working lives, and challenge the system from within.

I'd been part of the GMB union for 17 years and had seen more recognition campaigns than I could count. But this was different. This was Amazon – an enormous corporate giant with a reputation for crushing unions under the weight of its money, power, and influence.

We submitted our application on 4 March 2024. It was my daughter's birthday, and I took it as a good omen. We believed we were close to the critical 50% membership threshold – closer than we'd ever been. When the membership checks came back, the news was devastating. Only 36% of the workforce could be verified due to mismatched translations of workers' names.

Despite this setback, the Central Arbitration Committee accepted our application, and we felt a renewed surge of hope. The fight was on.

Amazon's response was brutal, calculated, and relentless. "Voluntary" information meetings were held with all workers and were anything but voluntary. Workers were plied with sweets, cakes, and fizzy drinks while being bombarded with anti-union propaganda. The message was clear:

- Recognition is bad.
- The union will take two years to negotiate your pay.
- The union will take away your overtime and flexible working.
- The site may even close.

QR codes appeared everywhere – on lunch tables, toilet doors, walls, and screens – encouraging workers to cancel their union memberships with a single scan. For the first time in 13 years of



working with Amazon workers I saw anti-union messaging translated into every language spoken on-site. Yet, no workplace policy had ever received the same treatment, despite over 80% of workers not having English as their first language.

The odds were stacked against us. The process for gaining recognition was gruelling and weighted heavily in Amazon's favour. By the time we were granted access in June – three months after submitting our application – Amazon had already held seven hours of anti-union meetings with every single one of the 3,000 workers.

Our access agreement was tightly controlled, negotiated through lawyers because Amazon refused to speak to us directly. It dictated where we could go, which toilets we could use and even prohibited us from accessing the canteen. We were given one 45-minute session with workers. That was it.

Through all this though, what kept me going, what kept all of us going, was the workers themselves.

Leaders emerged from the group – ordinary people who had never dreamed of standing up to management but now found themselves leading the charge. They volunteered for training, joined strike committees and challenged management lies during meetings. They dismantled misinformation, spoke to their colleagues with courage and conviction and refused to back down.

These leaders inspired me every single day. Despite their diverse backgrounds, cultures, and languages, they stood united as one. Together, they created messaging, recorded videos to answer workers' questions, and strategised tirelessly. When we finally gained access they were there, front and centre, encouraging their colleagues to vote yes.

In May and June, we took two more strike days. This time, instead of picketing, we brought members together at a venue in Coventry. We showed them

what they had achieved – a 17% pay increase, a £500 bonus and, most importantly, the hope and unity they had created.

The harassment from management was relentless. Jobs were shuffled to make it harder for workers to organise. Leaders were targeted and intimidated. But still, they stood tall. They wore T-shirts that read *Ask Me About Voting Yes* and spoke out during meetings, even when it put their jobs at risk.

On ballot day the atmosphere was electric. Inside, leaders rallied support. Outside, we phone-banked and handed out leaflets, rain or shine. The Amazon Workers Support Group stood with us every step of the way.

Then, the agonising wait began. On 17 of July, the vote was cast. Two days later, the results came in.

We lost. By just 28 votes.

If 15 more people had voted yes, we would have made history. The devastation was overwhelming. But so was the hope.

1,184 workers had voted yes. In the face of relentless opposition, manipulation and misinformation, they stood together and believed in something better. Their courage was extraordinary.

Audre Lorde once said, "History is not a one-time event". Change is not instant, and victory is not always immediate. To challenge systems of power, to make the world a fairer place, we must be prepared to fail. But failure is not the end. It's part of the process.

The ripples we create today can turn into tidal waves tomorrow.

This isn't the end of the fight. The 1,184 workers who stood up deserve better, and their courage has laid the foundation for change. We've regrouped, dusted ourselves off, and the fight continues.

Because when workers stand together – even against a giant like Amazon – they are capable of extraordinary things.

This is just the beginning.

violence against women and girls

■ In November 2024 the Women's Budget Group (WBG) published a response to Chancellor Rachel Reeves' autumn budget and its impact on women. The Report noted with disappointment that there was no specific mention of violence against women and girls (VAWG). The specialist VAWG sector has already highlighted their chronic underfunding.

This raises real concerns as the Rape and Sexual Abuse Fund for organisations in England and Wales is due to end in March 2025. A survey conducted by Rape Crisis England and Wales and published in summer reported that 47% of centre managers were expecting a reduction in their funding, half were expecting a reduction in their services and 30% were concerned that their centre would close.

The WBG is calling for sustainable long-term funding if the Government is hoping to meet its pledge of halving VAWG.

In June, the Women's Budget Group produced a Briefing on VAWG funding setting out the problems along with a list of recommendations for the incoming Government. Since the autumn budget made no mention of VAWG the WBG acknowledges that without detailed departmental spending plans it is impossible to see how the Government will invest in these life-changing and life-saving services

funding for Violence Against Women and Girls services – a summary

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) includes physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and financial abuse; stalking; harassment and coercion; forced marriage; so-called honour-based violence and female genital mutilation; child sex abuse; modern slavery; trafficking; pornography; and online abuse.

More than one in four women will experience domestic abuse during their lifetime, and one in four women have experienced rape or sexual assault as an adult.

funding

■ Specialist services to support victims/survivors of VAWG are underfunded. Over 60% of referrals to refuges supporting women in England in 2022-23 were declined. There are 14,000 survivors on the Rape Crisis waiting list.

■ The design of the Home Office's £8.4 million VAWG Support and Specialist Services (VSSS) fund launched in 2023 did not meet the needs of specialist women's organisations. The definitions and criteria enabled generic, non-specialist organisations to access this funding.

■ Importantly, the investment announced for the VAWG sector did not include ringfenced funding for services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women.



investing in prevention measures in schools

■ Despite wide-spread calls within the sector to invest in prevention measures in schools, there has been a failure to invest in tackling the root causes of violence against women and girls in society.

legal aid

■ Legal aid has been cut for family law cases, although there is an exception where there has been domestic violence. However, victims must report the violence to the police or to a health practitioner, something many women are not prepared to do.

■ The Women's Budget Group found that 'domestic violence' is one of the main issues women seek legal help/advice for (48% of survey respondents). 85% of respondents said vulnerable women are unable to access civil legal aid.

rape prosecutions

■ The number of adult rape cases in the Crown Court outstanding caseload increased by 346% between 2019 and 2023.

■ However, in the final quarter of 2023, the average mean time from receipt to the completion for adult rape cases was 366 days compared with 240 for all offences.

■ Despite an increase in cases, the percentage of victims who drop out of the legal process, (particularly at police investigation stage) has continued to rise and now sits at 61%.

no recourse to public funds

■ The 'no recourse to public funds' rule, which prevents survivors accessing certain benefits or services, can be used by an abuser to frighten survivors into staying with them, and make it impossible for survivors to find a refuge space.

■ Leaving can be difficult or impossible if the survivor has no access to benefits. This has been worsened by benefit cuts, including reductions in crisis support from local welfare assistance schemes.

social security

■ The social security system is failing survivors of violence and abuse when they need it most.

■ Poverty resulting from the benefit cap, two-child limit or other social security cuts can leave survivors trapped with an abusive partner.

■ Payment of universal credit (UC) into a single bank account can make women more vulnerable to economic abuse. Survivors may also be sanctioned for not applying for jobs that would put them at risk, such as near the perpetrator's home or workplace

recommendations

■ A commitment to long-term grant funding for specialist women's services, including ringfenced funding for services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors.

■ Ensure all migrant survivors can access protection and support services.

■ More specialist training for police dealing with VAWG cases.

■ Restore women's access to justice through a commitment to clearing court backlogs and increasing legal aid funding and availability.

■ Invest in prevention measures in schools to address the root causes of violence against women and girls.

■ Reform social security (including uprating benefits and scrapping the benefits cap and two-child limit) to ensure women's economic independence and their ability to leave abusive relationships.

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WWW.WBG.ORG.UK

diary alert

Our fantastic NAW seminar is back in 2025 – keep the dates now!

Saturday 14 to Sunday 15 June

at the NASUWT's education centre in Rednal, nr Birmingham.

More information will go out to members as soon as available – and check the website!!

www.sisters.org.uk

edinburgh rape crisis centre

SUSAN GALLOWAY EXAMINES THE KEY FINDINGS OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE EDINBURGH RAPE CRISIS CENTRE

EDINBURGH Rape Crisis Centre (ERCC) failed “to protect women-only spaces,” “did not put survivors first” and “caused damage” to many women seeking its support, an independent review has found. It is a shameful verdict on a service founded in 1978 as a grassroots feminist organisation run for women by women.

The review was commissioned after a damning employment tribunal judgement in May which found that Roz Adams, a support worker, was unlawfully forced out of her job by ERCC on the grounds of her gender-critical beliefs.

The review, commissioned by Rape Crisis Scotland on the back of an excoriating judgement, has now found that ERCC breached core standards by requiring women and girls to specify that they want a service delivered by a biological woman but offering this only if specifically requested. Putting women in this position “does not amount to the provision of protected women-only spaces,” says the review.

Damningly, it concludes that ERCC failed to prioritise the needs of rape survivors, 94 per cent of whom are female and for whom “trauma-informed” means single-sex therapeutic support.

The review found no mention of dedicated women-only services in ERCC’s current strategy or on its website. Despite its primary or major purpose being to support women and girls (according to national standards), ERCC was found not to have a working definition of “woman”, preferring: “survivors of all ‘genders’”.

How could this possibly have happened? According to the employment tribunal, ERCC had become gripped by “extreme gender identity belief”. This was its priority, and the outcome, evidenced by the review, is that biological sex no longer matters, even in a rape crisis centre.

At the centre of this, according to the employment tribunal judgement, was its CEO, Mridul Wadhwa. Wadhwa, who identifies as a transwoman, was appointed in July 2021 to a post advertised as reserved for biological women under Schedule 9 of the Equality Act 2010.

The tribunal concluded that having formed the view that Adams was transphobic, Wadhwa was the “invisible hand” behind a “heresy hunt” conducted against her involving a “completely spurious and mishandled disciplinary process”.

Who will be held accountable for women and girls in Edinburgh and Lothian being denied a single-sex service for “at least 16 months?” In ERCC’s case, both the employment tribunal judgement and independent review highlight Wadhwa’s role.

Wadhwa has now been allowed to

resign without facing consequences. However, as CEO, Wadhwa was enabled not only by a weak trustee board, but by supporters much higher up the political food chain.

Under Nicola Sturgeon, the SNP government was determined to push through the concepts of “gender identity” and “self-ID” both in legislation and policy. These are now embedded in the framework of government policy and funding conditions that form the operating context for services.

Playing an important role in this are third-sector organisations funded by the government to shape public and voluntary sector policies and service delivery. The Stronger Together guidance for women’s sector services produced by LGBT Scotland and Scottish Trans Alliance is one example, littered with misinformation about the 2010 Equality Act.

How deeply gender identity and “self-ID” are now embedded was underlined in other news, when Police Scotland, under mounting pressure, announced a U-turn this week in its recording policies.

In future, the perpetrators of rape or attempted rape offences will be recorded as male, rather than by their chosen gender identity, which is the current established practice.

However, it remains unclear whether this extends to all sexual offences, meaning women may still be officially recorded as responsible for male crimes of sexual and other violence.

The national umbrella body Rape Crisis Scotland (RCS), along with other “mainstream” women’s organisations, has been a key enabler of gender identity and “self-ID” policies.

Its CEO, Sandy Brindley, who commissioned the review, has confessed to incompetence, claiming she “had no idea” what was happening at ERCC despite being a public ally and friend of Wadhwa and despite survivors meeting with her in 2019 to raise these very issues.

In fact, it’s a matter of public record that RCS and Brindley personally have been keen advocates of gender identity ideology and strategically valuable ones at that.

When the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) Act was going through Parliament in 2020, RCS publicly opposed an amendment giving victims the right to choose the sex of their examiner, a move that flew in the face of the evidence given to Parliament by survivors when the Bill was first being considered.

RCS made a conscious decision to prioritise gender identity belief over the expressed needs of female survivors. And again, in 2022, RCS supported the introduction of self-ID of sex into law via the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill.

RCS played a key role in undermining

women’s concerns by arguing that rape crisis services had successfully operated self-ID for years and had experienced no conflict with women’s rights. Less than two years later, that claim has not worn well. No wonder there are calls for Brindley to resign.

Looking at these facts, who can have confidence that RCS is capable of reforming ERCC to meet the needs of biological women and girls? No-one except predictably the minister for Equalities, Kaukab Stewart, who was one of four SNP MSPs photographed beside a “Decapitate Terfs” placard last year.

Questioned in Parliament, Stewart mouthed platitudes to survivors and complacently expressed confidence that ERCC’s Board can work with RCS to make the right changes.

Meanwhile, the radio silence from Scotland’s political parties is telling. Politicians dare not call for accountability and leadership from others lest attention be drawn to their own role.

This is another car crash caused by blind adherence to self-ID. Women have been badly failed by Scotland’s Parliament and almost all the parties within it.

MSPs have uncritically accepted gender identity ideas as “progressive”, either without thinking through the consequences for women or being all too ready to ignore or dismiss what they say is “hysteria”, “exaggeration” or worse.

And what about ERCC’s funders? There has been no statement yet from NHS Lothian and Edinburgh Integrated Joint Board, but they urgently need to agree on a way forward with the City of Edinburgh Council.

They have a duty to ensure that public funds are used for the intended purpose and that organisations contracted to provide public services abide by employment law and the Equality Act, including Section 149, the Public Sector Equality Duty. ERCC’s practices have been found to breach all of these.

Most important of all, for female survivors of sexual assault and abuse to be guaranteed the protected single-sex services they need, the importance of biological sex must be recognised and respected in all the contexts where it matters.

The resignations of one or two individuals from their roles are not sufficient. Systemic change is required. A wider review of practices within RCS and across rape crisis centres is needed.

The harmful impact of “imposing... extreme views of gender identity theory” must be uprooted not only from violence against women services – but everywhere, including schools, prisons and the NHS – and we must begin to talk meaningfully about how to best meet the distinctive needs of different groups.

THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN THE MORNING STAR
WWW.RAPECRISISSCOTLAND.ORG.UK

peace not war...

NAW MEMBER RAE STREET REPORTS FROM
THE NOVEMBER 2024 CND CONFERENCE

THERE can be several interpretations of the word 'peace', but in this article I will stick with the meaning most often associated with the word: a world without war and where conflicts are settled by non-military means.

These questions were all considered at the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) Conference in October. The title was: 'The World We Want: A New Agenda for Peace and Justice'. In the first session several speakers looked at the world we have now. And it was a grim picture. There are wars raging across the world from the Ukraine, Sudan, Yemen, to the Middle East where Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Yes, Hamas incursions and slaughter is to be condemned, but Israel's retaliation is on such a scale that it is a war crime. Back in September 2024, Oxfam reported that more women and children were killed in Gaza by the Israeli military than any other recent conflict in a single year. Oxfam gave conservative figures of 6,000 women and 11,000 children having been killed over 12 months. The figure now is much higher. Oxfam stated that 'throughout 2023 Israel committed serious violations of International Humanitarian Law at a level which may rise to the level of crimes against humanity'. This includes 'a level of destruction observed which is indicative of Israel's disproportionate force in relation to military objectives and a failure to discriminate between military targets and the civilian population'.

It is strange to my mind that on 11 November every year we have nationwide commemorations of the soldiers who died in war with the symbol of the red poppies, but little mention is made of the civilians, especially women and children who died in war, for which a white poppy is worn. In Leuven in Belgium a peace group have had a statue of a woman put up in the main square which marked not only the women killed in war, but the unrecognised vital roles women fulfil in war.

In the following workshops at the conference the following topics were discussed 'How can we end the risk of nuclear war'; How do we break the "nuclear weapons create jobs" myth?; the Mutual Defence Agreement between the UK and the USA – what can we do about the so-called 'special relationship?'; what's new in technologies for war; 'How can we use industrial and economic power to end militarism?'. For the latter we heard about the success of the direct action campaign against Elbit, the Israeli arms manufacturer, which was driven out of Oldham in Lancashire. There was also a workshop on 'Peace and the Planet: inextricably linked'. There is no doubt that humanity faces two exis-



tential threats: the climate crisis and nuclear weapons. The climate crisis and global warming are made worse by war and the manufacture of armaments. The carbon emissions from the military manufacturers are not even counted in the data on carbon emissions in the UK. Then also imagine the carbon emissions from the planes and the bombs dropped in the current wars.

In the closing plenary of the conference, speaker after speaker outlined the world we want to see. The point was emphasised, that we will not see a more peaceful world until we have social and economic justice, until we end poverty. And we need to end the era of colonialism and racism. We need to massively reduce the arms trade; arms fuel wars. We need to see military manufacturers transition to making socially useful products. In 2017, the United Nations negotiated Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) came into force. It now has 94 signatories (a majority of the world's states) and has been ratified by 73 states' parties. But the will of the people is stymied by the nuclear weapon states and NATO, the military alliance which still holds a policy of not only holding nuclear weapons but first use of nuclear weapons. The UK's nuclear armed Trident submarines are integrated into NATO. Trident is often referred to as the UK's 'independent nuclear deterrent'.

Of course, Trident is not 'independent' as the missiles are made by Lockheed Martin, the huge US armaments company, and the crew are trained in the USA. Weapons are targeted by the USA from Menwith Hill in Yorkshire. Money drives the arms trade. War is good business – never mind the danger to the planet. As for 'deterrence' that is a myth. Nuclear weapons have deterred peace and brought about the arms race. People need to learn the truth about NATO which is a military alliance demanding huge spending on armaments and one which is dominated by the USA. NATO has not only expanded across Europe but is making deals across the Indo Pacific region and Latin America, even though that was declared the first Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the world in 1967 with the Treaty of Tlatelolco. We need stronger support for the OSCE, (the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) which is committed to non-military solutions to conflict. And, above all, we need the idea of Common Security to be established. That is an approach to achieving national, regional and international security which takes into account the security of other nations.

As we listened to the speakers speaking of the world we want, we realised what a gap there is between what we aspire to and what is actually happening. But we must keep struggling for a fairer, more just world and one free from militarism and wars. We need all our campaigns to come together in solidarity to create a mass movement for peace. We need government support for the rule of International Humanitarian Law and that the warmongers be brought to account. We need support for a Reformed United Nations, which in its 2030 Agenda wants to prioritise conflict prevention and sustain peace; to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of peace keeping operations and special political missions and move towards a single, peace and security pillar. It is clearly an uphill struggle. But we can all play a part as I know the National Assembly of Women does. We can join campaigning groups; we can lobby; we can show our community we stand for peace not war.



solidarity to sudanese women

**NAW PRESIDENT LIZ PAYNE SENDS
SOLIDARITY TO THE STRUGGLING WOMEN
AND PEOPLE OF SUDAN**

AT the beginning of December 2024, the people of war-torn Sudan marked the sixth anniversary of their Glorious December Revolution of 2018, which was, within a matter of months, to lead to the ousting the Islamist military dictator of 30 years, Omar al Bashir. Under the iron fist of his dictatorship, women's rights across the board – economic, political, social, and legal – were virtually eradicated.

As we reported in *Sisters* at the time, huge country-wide demonstrations, with women at the forefront, were mobilised, initially against the exorbitant price of bread and, more generally, the disastrous economic mismanagement by the dictatorship, which had left the masses of Sudanese people unable to afford even the basics of life. This was the beginning of the Glorious December Revolution.

Millions, including thousands upon thousands of women, the latter described as “astonishing”, “brave” and “resilient” for the incredible part they played, took to the streets, facing live fire, arrest and torture, as economic demands were replaced by political ones. What had started as protest at a lack of basic necessities – bread, fuel, electricity and transport – soon morphed into the revolutionary demand for the dictatorship to end to pave the way for the establishment of a people's democratic government and for equality and justice.

Al-Bashir was overthrown in April 2019 and an interim military-civilian power sharing agreement was reached with a promise of full democracy and elections to follow. This was too much for the rich and powerful minority in the country, who made a coup in October 2021 under army leader, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, to thwart the movement for civilian rule and suppress the revolutionary demands of the people.

Following the 2021 coup, huge tensions concerning the control of power and wealth developed between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF,) under Al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This erupted into the catastrophic civil war which has now raged in Sudan since 15 April 2023 and is rightly known as “The Forgotten War” for the lack of attention accorded to it by the world's mass media.

The profound tragedy is that although the warring sides have some areas of serious rivalry, they both stand accused of perpetuating parasitic capitalism through plunder of the country's resources and the deepening of foreign dependence and are united in the desire to see the mass movement for democracy, justice and progress in Sudan quashed by whatever brutal means necessary. For them, war is the perfect tool.



For the same self-interested reasons, the world's leading imperialist powers are willing to turn a blind eye to the continuance of the conflict, while masking their true stance through occasional soothing “humanitarian” noises. Additionally, according to Sudanese anti-war campaigners, a number of countries in Africa and the Middle East are actively involved in the conflict through provision of sophisticated armaments to both sides, including military drones and state-of-the-art military hardware.

In its 19 months, the war has become, according to the UN Secretary General, “an utter humanitarian catastrophe”. Eleven million people have been displaced within Sudan and over three million have left as refugees, with numbers rising daily. More than half of the displaced are women, says the UN, and about a quarter are children under five years old.

Over half of Sudan's population, 25.6 million people, are facing food insecurity. This number has risen from 17.7 million in the few months since February 2024. Four million very young children are facing “acute malnutrition”, 730,000 of whom are at risk of death from starvation according to UNICEF. The suffering is compounded by the collapse of health-care services, contamination of water sources, lack of sanitation and the general devastation of war.

In mid-November, Clementine Nkweta-Salami, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan, assessed the situation as follows:

“Women, children, and the most vulnerable are bearing the brunt of a conflict that has already taken too many lives. Harm to civilians – including appalling patterns of gender-based violence – must stop. Civilians are not a target.”

The level of gender-based violence is almost unbelievable, with 6.7 million women at risk, especially in war zones,

including in Darfur, where rape is used systematically as a battlefield weapon of choice, and in camps for the displaced and refugees within Sudan and in neighbouring countries. This is documented in detail by the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA).

An immediate priority is to lift all restrictions on humanitarian aid, especially food and medicines, reaching those in need. Pressure must be put on our government to help make this a reality without delay. Emergency support must also be restored, including access to healthcare and services to support women and children who are victims of violence, including provision of specialist help on a mass scale for those who have had their lives torn apart through rape and sexual assault.

At the same time, everything must be done to support the people of Sudan who are building a broad, popular and united front to end the war. But this cannot simply be a cessation of hostilities. On the recent anniversary of the December Revolution, the most progressive voices called loud and clear for a reclamation of the revolutionary path for change, and unity around the Revolution's demands for restoration of civilian government without any vestige of dictatorship, and a permanent peace free from the very possibility of war. They also called for the whole world to show solidarity with the people of Sudan. Without peace and full democracy there can be no equality for women and children and no just and secure future for the millions who have and continue to struggle bravely for change.

**PICTURE ABOVE: SUDAN ON THE FOURTH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOLUTION,
DECEMBER 2022**



**The National Assembly of Women sends
New Year greetings to all members,
affiliates and supporters. Let's continue
the campaign for peace, equality and
social justice in 2025**

above: we were delighted to have a stall in Birmingham at the Unite equalities conferences in October. We spoke to many many members, reps and officers, and to one general secretary! And also distributed loads of information about the NAW of course.

LEFT TO RIGHT: NAW EC MEMBERS ANITA WRIGHT AND CAROLYN SIMPSON, UNITE GEN SEC SHARON GRAHAM, NAW EC MEMEBRS MEGAN DOBNEY AND ALISON SPENCER-SCRAGG, AND JANE STEWART, CHAIR OF UNITE'S WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

what's on...

NAW Executive Committee meetings are open to *all* members. The next ones (both online) will be on 13 January 17.30 and 8 April 17.00. For more information about the meetings please contact the Secretary, Sandra Durkin, on naw@sisters.org.uk or at NAW, 72 Beaconsfield Road Coventry CV2 4AR

join the NAW now!

*I would like to join the NAW. Here is £20 for the annual subscription (£10 unwaged) which includes my subscription to **sisters**, the journal of the NAW.*

Our organisation would like to affiliate to the NAW. Enclosed is:
£20 (local organisation/NAW branch), £45 (regional organisation), £60 (national)

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Send to: Carolyn Simpson, 13 Wren Gardens, Hornchurch RM12 4DT