

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN IN BLACK

Women in Black dates its birth to non-violent civil disobedience actions carried out by women in very difficult circumstances. It is these initiatives that have given character and meaning to the International Network of Women in Black.

We surfaced in 1988 in Jerusalem when fewer than a dozen Jewish women said **NO to the occupation**.

They were the first social collective to demonstrate publicly against the policy of occupation of Palestinian territory on the part of their own government.

Women in Black of Belgrade said **NOT in my name** to the wars initiated by their government. They denounced their militarism and that of the international community, calling for and supporting desertion and conscientious objection. After the accords that put an end to the armed confrontations, they have worked in the post-war period through Transitional Justice to unravel the causes and individual and collective responsibilities that provoked the wars.

During the NATO bombing of Serbia, Cynthia Cockburn of Women in Black of London defended the right to say **NEITHER this nor the other** (neither Milosevic nor NATO). In England as in many other places, part of the leftist opposition *demonstrated against the intervention of NATO* when they bombed Serbia and Montenegro, but did not oppose the war policy of Milosevic, considering him *one of theirs*.

These women have not only said **NO** but have also been offering political alternatives to wars or conflicts in which they lived or are living – alternatives that have as their objective to construct or reconstruct social harmony, working for the rights of all citizens.

The International Network of Women in Black developed around the "Meetings of the Solidarity Network of Women Against War", which were held in Serbia during all the years of the wars in the Balkans. The International Network of WinB has worked and continues working to create bonds with the civilian movements experiencing war or conflict, to be a loudspeaker for their denouncements, and to strengthen a common commitment in the face of injustice and violation of human rights. Since 2003 International Gatherings have continued to take place outside the former Yugoslavia: in Italy, Israel, Spain and Colombia. The XVI International Gathering of the Network of Women in Black will take place in Uruguay in 2013.

The International Network has spread to countries on the five continents.

In Spain groups began to form starting in 1993. In November of 1993, workshops against the wars in the Balkans were organized in Merida, in which

8 Women in Black of Belgrade participated along with various Spanish women from several different places, all opposing the wars and sensitized by the work of the women of Belgrade. In this way, groups and collectives supporting WinB of Belgrade emerged and were the origin of the current groups in Spain.

Women in Black of Madrid Against War:

The wars in the Balkans began in the former Yugoslavia in 1991 and lasted for a decade. In 1992 the MOC (Movement for Conscientious Objection) sought in the former Yugoslavia groups or individuals to support and to work with against the wars. In that way, they came to know the Women in Black Against Wars of Belgrade, feminist women, antimilitarists and pacifists who with their "not in my name" denounced the militarism of their own and that of the international community in the Balkans.

In Madrid a coordinator of mixed groups was formed (Platform for Peace in the Balkans) through which we supported the WinB of Belgrade for several years. At the same time, we were shaping a group of women who participated in the various proposals that were made in Spain in support of the Women in Black of Belgrade. Following years of antimilitarist, feminist and pacifist work against the wars in the Balkans, in 1999 we formed *Women in Black of Madrid Against War*. We were women coming from antimilitarism, Christian groups, feminists or without any activist background.

Since 1999 Women in Black of Madrid has been formed by women who have remained active during these years, others who come and go, and a third group that is the widest circle and who support or participate in the various activities.

As a group, we strive to work inward, deepening the characteristics that we consider special to WinB, interwoven with the challenges that emerge each day, and outwardly by publicly demonstrating our position with regard to topics or problems of our country or anywhere on the planet. In the first years we would go out into the streets occasionally and since 30 January of 2005, we have been going to the Plaza Mayor the last Sunday of the month at 12:00 noon, or on any other occasion that we feel it is necessary. That first convocation was about the *International Day of Nonviolence and Peace*.

We are feminists. Our feminism is pacifist and antimilitarist. This feminism is an alternative to others, renovating and more global. We say NO to the patriarchy because it is a system of power and oppression against women, which also turns against many men as it builds a masculinity based on values such a physical force, warlike heroism, heterosexuality, hierarchy and victory. One cannot analyze the topic of war and militarization without taking into account the perspective of gender; and, likewise, without considering the involvement and collusion between the patriarchal and political power

systems, and nationalisms and fundamentalisms, as they all presuppose an exclusion of the 'other'.

We are **pacifists**. Our work for peace, against war, is a political option. We consider that just as wars are constructed daily, so is peace.

We are **antimilitarists**:

- We say NO to armies, to militarization of daily life, to weapons production and research, to the commerce in arms.
- We reject the idea of the enemy, the other, a hostile alien, dangerous, inferior or fanatic, from whom one must defend oneself, and who can be dealt with only with force.
- We do not believe in just wars. No war happens for the good or the defense of the civil populace, rather for hidden economic or political reasons.
- We do not believe that any army can be a force for pacification.

We say **NO to fundamentalisms**.

Our **proposals, actions and tools** are:

- **Civil disobedience, not collaboration**, to say NO to acts of our government and to call on other citizens to do the same. It is also necessary that society (instead of always blaming those in power) assume its own responsibility for the bellicose policies of the country.
- **Direct non-violent action**.
- **Education for peace and nonviolence**.
- **Group discussions** and international meetings.
- **Street actions**: rallies, performances.

We go out into the street:

- Dressed **in black** as a sign of mourning for all the victims of war.
- In **silence**, as there are no words to satisfactorily express the grief and indignation in the face of war. Also because too frequently political slogans and mottoes become empty and trite; and because we do not want to use language aggressively, with insults and shouts – which doesn't mean that we fail to call things as they are.
- We speak **in our name** in the public plazas and squares with our bodies and through our communiqués, banners, placards, posters and mottoes.

***Let us expel war and violence
from history
and from our lives.***

Madrid, April 2012