

WOMEN SAY 'NO TO NATO': November 20, 2010

Today fourteen purple T-shirts gave London a message: Say No to NATO. Women of antiwar groups spelled out these words in a parade that took them into the pre-Christmas crowds of the capital on the day that Heads of State gathered in Lisbon to endorse a new 'Strategic Concept' for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Londoners took notice, enjoying the performance, reaching for a leaflet, but all too often asking "What's NATO?"

The women were out on the street to increase awareness that NATO, a relic from the Cold War era, is an ever-expanding, aggressive, nuclear-armed alliance of Western states. Its aim is to protect the worldwide economic interests of the USA and other relatively rich countries, isolating and threatening those, like Iran, North Korea and China, who don't do their bidding.

The women's T-shirt action in London was part of a Europe-wide day of protest by feminist antimilitarists. It was mounted by women of the networks Women in Black against War, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp, and Trident Ploughshares. Alongside women in Italy, Germany and other NATO states, they were pointing out that military expenditure steals money from the education, health and housing services badly needed by women, who carry the main burden of domestic life. In war, women suffer displacement, rape, loss, injury and increased responsibilities. In NATO member states its military bases are a source of social stress in neighbourhoods, of toxic pollution, sexual exploitation and violence.

Babs MacGregor, here from Glasgow, was the 'A' in NATO. She says 'NATO is a dinosaur. Security can only be achieved through justice, conflict resolution and ridding ourselves of fear'.

Marie Claire Faray, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, wearing a 'T', says 'Women's voices aren't heard enough. They ought to be part of the decision-making. They ought to set the agenda.'

Angie Zelter's T-shirt bore the letter 'O' converted into a women's symbol. She says 'NATO is part of the military industrial complex that has given us endless war and destruction. I am here to demand a return to our lost humanity and the rule of international law.'

Supporting Stop the War Coalition's rally in Trafalgar Square, the women were calling for NATO's immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan on terms that secure women's safety and well-being. NATO, they say, should be phased out and replaced by non-military cooperation for peace and justice, facilitated by the United Nations, in which women may play a full part.

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For more information on 'Women Say No to NATO' see <www.wloe.org>