

WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES AND COUNCIL FOR WORLD
MISSION
2024 GENDER AND MILITARISATION CONFERENCE
COMMUNIQUE

“Bleeding Women and a Bleeding World: Empowering Faith in a Militarised Context”

From September 24-28, 2024, in Juba, South Sudan, twenty-six participants—church leaders, activists, academics, ecumenical partners, and staff—gathered for the 2024 Gender and Militarisation Conference. The theme, "Women, War, Empire: Faith, Resistance, and Empowerment," shaped their discussions and reflections. The event opened with worship, where participants shared symbols reflecting their communities' struggles and hopes. The keynote addresses and eight sessions that addressed many questions and themes related to the topic stimulated, challenged and invited participants to question how women in faith might respond to the pressing issues of war, militarisation, and empire. Moreover, in the witness and sharing of members from the ‘Women Link’ in the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) were narratives of women peacebuilders. The community was founded by a woman from a grassroots background who drew inspiration from the biblical narrative of the "bleeding women" in Mark 5:25-34. The women shared personal stories of displacement, deprivation, death, detainment, intimidation, and imprisonment amid other struggles. They declared that “Sudan is bleeding,” like the woman who was bleeding for 12 years. Taking inspiration from the woman who sought healing, the women of Sudan too seek to find peace, healing and reconciliation. Through their stories they gave voice to a belief and a hope that women through giving life and prayer can contribute to peace in a military context, which in turn also addresses the global crisis of violence. The participants engaged in deep conversation and introspection regarding the different facets of the military empire, observing that:

Reflections on Military Empire:

- Militarism is a tool of Western domination and colonisation; The hyperpower of military empires, particularly the U.S., is driven and sustained by perpetual wars and a highly militarised foreign policy. Its international influence is sustained by a bloated military budget and a leadership dominated by military and intelligence officials.
- The dual tactics of military hardware and soft diplomacy contribute to a destructive impact on communities—taking lives, destabilising communities, enabling authoritarian regimes, and exploiting resources to sustain the strategic interests of imperial powers.
- Toxic masculinity is key to the nature of a military empire; militarisation lays an untold burden on women who are behind the frontiers of war, forcing upon them conditions and roles which constitute a form of “invisible militarisation” - ignored, rendered invisible and their femininity humiliated.

- Issues of gender justice and human rights have been used to promote a patriarchal and militaristic agenda. Women and feminism have been co-opted into the military-industrial complex.
- The role of women in fostering peace has never been more crucial. Women across the globe—whether in Mexico, Okinawa, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, the Philippines, India, Cameroon, Nigeria, South Sudan, and other regions—play vital roles in resisting militarisation through varied and powerful interventions, through protests against arms, advocacy for peace, diplomacy and sustaining life despite adversity.

Condemning the Militarisation of Faith and Theology:

- We acknowledge the dangers of toxic masculinity, phallogocentrism, and Islamophobia being woven into militaristic ideologies.
- We acknowledge that women's experiences and lives are frequently marginalised and subordinated in the discourse surrounding the peace process.
- The church has often mirrored the empire, reproducing patriarchal gender roles and aligning with military agendas. The Bible has been used to justify militarisation, with certain texts misinterpreted and used to endorse and justify war and segregation.
- The Bible's exploitation by colonial powers to justify violence, land theft, and oppression is a critical issue we reject.

Women's resistance to militarisation:

- Women's resistance to war, militarisation, and empire often goes unnoticed, hidden beneath societal expectations and religious norms that define their roles in societal and faith communities.
- Their stories challenge the accepted norms regarding gender. Theological discourse frequently maintains patriarchal perspectives on women's roles within faith communities, which presents a significant challenge.
- Women in faith communities have consistently risen to meet the challenges of militarisation, particularly when it encroaches upon their lives, even under martial law. They sustain local economies; Along with the earth they nourish life and are foundational for the protection and continuation of life.

Rejecting Imperial Feminism and its Ties to Militarisation:

- Imperial feminism has often been co-opted to serve the empire, as seen in the actions of elite women who benefit from power structures while remaining blind to the exploitation of marginalized women. The narrative of "women's freedom" in some regions comes at the expense of the subjugation of women elsewhere.
- Imperial feminism perpetuates harmful tropes, such as portraying women as victims needing rescue through imperial and often violent intervention. It also isolates women

as individuals rather than recognising them as part of their communities, thus depoliticising their struggles.

- Framing sexual violence solely as bodily harm from imperial feminism can lead to a disregarding of the mind and spirit.
- Its silence on economic and structural violence leads to narrow, predefined solutions that ignore issues like land and environmental justice. It cannot uncover a critical view of the Military Industrial Complex (MIC).

Uplifting Women's Agency and Solidarity in South Sudan:

- Women Link in South Sudan have organised themselves, offering mutual support and resistance to war and militarisation.
- Their resilience and protest embody God's power and love, forging paths to peace through subtle yet powerful acts of resistance.
- Solidarity among women, demonstrated through tears, protests, advocacy, and perseverance, holds transformative potential in bringing about lasting change.

Suggested Actions:

- To publish resources exploring and interpreting scripture through the lens of women affected by war, violence and militarisation.
- To initiate a global movement of women and militarisation, building momentum for a broader coalition of women seeking and fighting for peace in the world.
- To create a network to exchange women's resistance stories and strengthen solidarity.
- To build this issue up in other angles: eco-feminism, interfaith, communion, and missiology.
- To support practically the work of the Women Link in South Sudan