

BAY AREA WOMEN IN BLACK

BAY AREA WOMEN IN BLACK CELEBRATES THE HISTORY OF MOTHER'S DAY

Long before Hallmark, balloons and flowers, Mother's Day in the U.S. was a day of anti-war activism, begun after the Civil War by women who had lost their sons. In 1870, Julia Ward Howe American writer, lecturer, and reformer, wrote the words of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and introduced the idea of Mother's Day. She proclaimed an anti-war Mother's Day message, a timeless reminder of the profound loss and pain war creates for all mothers.

Bay Area Women in Black revives and expands our historic tradition by standing as allies with the mothers of Israel and Palestine, Iraq and the United States, who are losing their children to violence and war.

We realize that we live in a world that does not prioritize or protect our children's well-being and that this will not change without each of us finding the courage and commitment to speak out on their behalf. By mobilizing our potentially transformative political strength, we can ensure the health, education, and safety of every child, not just a privileged few.

We encourage each of you to become active in your communities and take back the power of activist mothering.

"While mother's day is approaching, all children all over the world are busy getting ready to express their gratitude, love, and appreciation to their mothers. However, in Iraq, this beautiful occasion has lost its true meaning, as Iraqi mothers are suffering like most Iraqis from fear and continuous anxiety, uncertainty, insecurity, and loss of loved ones.

We are consoled by knowing that there are people like you, persistent in standing forcefully for peace, and opposing the oppression of the occupation and working relentlessly on ending all wars and all mothers' suffering everywhere and promoting peace and stability throughout the world."

Vivian Salem Matti, Iraqi Mother

Join us at the Grand Lake Theater every Saturday at noon to register your protest and your presence as we continue to demand our elected officials end both these disastrous Occupations.

Bay Area Women in Black are Jews and allies who stand against militaristic and fundamentalist leadership in all countries, including our own. We wear black as a sign of mourning for all the Iraqi, Israeli and Palestinian lives that have been lost as a result of war, militarization and violence. As part of the international movement of Women in Black, we seek to transform women's mourning for the dead into a powerful refusal of the inevitability of war.

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"For me, the enemy is not the Palestinian people. For me the struggle is not between Palestinians and Israelis, nor between Jews and Arabs. The fight is between those who seek peace and those who seek war...Our brothers and sisters in the refugee camps and under occupation, deprived of...all their human rights, should not be forsaken now." Dr. Nurit Peled-Elhanan, Israeli Mother

Dr. Nurit Peled-Elhanan is the mother of Smadar Elhanan, 13 years old when killed by a suicide bomber in Jerusalem in September 1997. Below are excerpts from Nurit's speech made on International Women's Day in Strasbourg earlier this month.

"Thank you for inviting me to this today. It is always an honour and a pleasure to be here, among you (at the European Parliament). However, I must admit I believe you should have invited a Palestinian woman at my stead, because the women who suffer most from violence in my county are the Palestinian women. And I would like to dedicate my speech to Miriam R'aban and her husband Kamal, from Bet Lahiya in the Gaza strip, whose five small children were killed by Israeli soldiers while picking strawberries at the family's strawberry field. No one will ever stand trial for this murder.

I have never experienced the suffering Palestinian women undergo every day, every hour, I don't know the kind of violence that turns a woman's life into constant hell. This daily physical and mental torture of women who are deprived of their basic human rights and needs of privacy and dignity, women whose homes are broken into at any moment of day and night, who are ordered at a gun-point to strip naked in front of strangers and their own children, whose houses are demolished, who are deprived of their livelihood and of any normal family life. This is not part of my personal ordeal. But I am a victim of violence against women insofar as violence against children is actually violence against mothers.

Palestinian, Iraqi, Afghan women are my sisters because we are all at the grip of the same unscrupulous criminals who call themselves leaders of the free enlightened world and in the name of this freedom and enlightenment rob us of our children.

But it is enough for me to remember these women are my sisters, and that they deserve that I should cry for them, and fight for them. And when they lose their children in strawberry fields or on filthy roads by the checkpoints, when their children are shot on their way to school by Israeli children who were educated to believe that love and compassion are race and religion dependent, the only thing I can do is stand by them and their betrayed babies, and ask what Anna Akhmatova--another mother who lived in a regime of violence against women and children--asked:

Why does that streak of blood, rip the petal of your cheek?"