



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2024

PEACE IS UNION BUSINESS

A PAPER FROM THE WELLINGTON REGION



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 That the paper be received.
- 2 That the PPTA produces public communications opposing Crimes Against Humanity as defined by the United Nations.
- 3 That the PPTA seek ties with other education unions, in Aotearoa and internationally, to oppose Crimes Against Humanity as defined by the United Nations.

1. WHY PEACE IS UNION BUSINESS

- 1.1 While international conflicts and warfare is nothing new, in a June report the Secretary General of the United Nations gave the world a 'fail grade' and called for action to end wars from Gaza to Ukraine, Sudan and beyond, 'and to pivot from spending on destruction and war and investing in people and peace'¹. Israel/Palestine, Sudan, DR Congo, New Caledonia, West Papua, Ukraine.
- 1.2 At the time of writing violence in Israel/Palestine has resulted in at least 1,200 Israeli citizens killed on October 7 2023 and at least 37,000 Palestinians killed in the last 8 months. While this outbreak of violence has been one of the most dominant across the media landscape, it is far from the only episode of mass killings in the last year, with military violence also taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, New Caledonia, West Papua, as well as in Ukraine and Sudan as mentioned by the Secretary General.
- 1.3 We must oppose any government action or inaction that creates an increasingly uncertain world for our ākongā. Climate change is one such issue, on which our union has taken a stand. We must oppose government action that contributes to the instability of international relations. Renowned educational theorist Paulo Freire in his groundbreaking work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* wrote: 'This violence as a process, is perpetuated from generation to generation of oppressors, who become its heirs and are shaped by it'². But this does not have to be so, as kaiako we can help to break the cycle for our ākongā and the world they will inherit.
- 1.4 Aotearoa New Zealand is a nation that is founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its obligations to the people - Tangata Whenua - who were here at the time of the arrival of British government officials and then later, settlers. The succession of events that took place after the signing of Te Tiriti is a painful one, that we know did not meet the expectations of the agreement - and that is putting it lightly. Tangata Whenua were subject to violent imperial forces, which for many of us as teachers of Aotearoa Histories, and as tangata whenua who have heard the stories passed down from their tīpuna - are familiar.
- 1.5 The imperial violations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi are now widely acknowledged to have been wrong. War crimes took place on this whenua, an uncomfortable but irrefutable truth. As an association which adheres strongly to Te Tiriti o Waitangi in our constitution, it is therefore incumbent upon us to condemn violent actions of a similar nature wherever we see them - particularly where children are harmed and killed, and where an increasingly unstable world for our rangatahi is reinforced. The implications of global conflict are wide-reaching; in the vast and ancient scale of human history, we only have to look to the last century to see the catastrophic impacts of the two World Wars on people here in Aotearoa. That was not that long ago.
- 1.6 The connections with peace as union business with our 'core business' are many. Working people need welfare not warfare. Investment in the latter can divert funds away from children's education towards military participation that contributes to an uncertain world for those very children's future. This is not just a matter of 'wars in other countries' - the inconvenient truth is that as members of the international community we are all implicated, and as previously mentioned, we do not have to look far back in history to find case studies for this very scenario. The quest for peace should not be

¹ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/world/520872/un-gives-the-world-a-failing-grade#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20warned%20Friday,is%20getting%20a%20failing%20grade.%22>

² Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Bloomsbury Academic. <https://envs.ucsc.edu/internships/internship-readings/freire-pedagogy-of-the-oppressed.pdf> (Original work published 1968)

controversial, and we reject any notion that this movement should divide our union. It would be folly to say it's not political, as unions and the resistance of warfare inherently are. What must be emphasised is that in our movement for peace we do not align with any political party or nation state other than our own. But resisting any system, whether it is one that undervalues students, teachers, and working people, or that maintains violence on an industrial scale - is a political act. We do not take sides, though in calling for an end to violence we bear witness to the plight of the oppressed. We must resist being quashed into silence by any institutions who are invested in warfare, we must use the skills or critical analysis we so keenly want for our students to not fall prey to manufactured consent. As educators, unionists and people of conscience we must be committed to doing all we can to never again see the repetition of some of history's greatest atrocities. 'Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it'. And those who do, must commit not to repeating it, or to use its knowledge as justification for repeated atrocities. Many of us have spent large parts of our teaching career ensuring our ākongā understand the holocaust and how it was enabled. We cannot allow anything even close to it to occur again. Never again, for ANYONE.

- 1.7 The UK's Stop the War coalition writes of brave Rolls Royce workers in East Kilbride who refused to carry out repairs on General Pinochet's war planes. But any such action requires the support not just of the grassroots membership, but leadership from the top.
- 1.8 They continue to tell us how it isn't just about workers in the arms industry. We've seen the magnificent work of health workers for Palestine in not only speaking out for their colleagues on the frontline of Israel's onslaught on both people and their healthcare facilities, but joining them on it too. And teachers and their unions speaking out for the children of Gaza and the West Bank, orphaned, maimed, shot at and slaughtered in their tents on a nightly basis.³ Education workers don't just care for the young people in their classrooms, but around the world.⁴
- 1.9 If you pay a visit to Trades Hall on Vivian Street in Wellington you will learn that unions in Wellington were an important part of the coalition opposing the Springbok Tour, an event that many felt signalled a tone-deaf lack of condemnation of apartheid by the New Zealand government. Union opposition to sporting contact with apartheid South Africa started in 1948. An edition of The Transport Worker in that year argued it was wrong for the All Blacks to tour in South Africa without Māori players, as required by the South Africans.
- 1.10 A voluntary strike was timed to support the first demonstration during the Tour. Thousands of union members took part. Trade Union worker opposition to the Tour was so strong in Wellington it even had the effect of persuading some prominent employer representatives that they too, morally must take part in demonstrations.⁵
- 1.11 We must join artists, councils, and other unions in calling for peace. Some may say this is blue-sky thinking, but what is to be lost from trying? Perhaps a better question to ask is, what is to be lost from not trying? It could be argued that mana, standing, respect is on the line for our association. Standing for education necessitates that we must also stand for peace. It is impossible to have the former, without the latter.

³ [https://www.un.org/unispal/document/unsg-report-children-and-armed-conflict-2023-3jun24/#:~:text=106,the%20Gaza%20Strip%20\(3%2C020\).](https://www.un.org/unispal/document/unsg-report-children-and-armed-conflict-2023-3jun24/#:~:text=106,the%20Gaza%20Strip%20(3%2C020).)

⁴ <https://www.stopwar.org.uk/article/war-peace-palestine-are-trade-union-issues/>

⁵ <https://www.tradeshall.org.nz/history.html>

2. WHAT THE PPTA SHOULD DO?

- 2.1 A Peace Taskforce should be set up in order to clearly enable the PPTA to get on with the Union Business of Peace. Our association is filled with brilliant and passionate members who understand the ability to leverage the power of the union to put pressure on governments to enact sensible and firm foreign policy. The New Zealand government has precedent for this. In 1984 it resisted US pressure and declared its waters Nuclear Free. In 2003 again, pressure from the United States government was resisted and military action in Iraq was not supported by the New Zealand government.
- 2.2 Our stance against warfare, and demand for foreign policy by our government that condemns it should be made clear. The standing of our association would not be political or one that takes sides, it would merely be an anti-war position that opposes Crimes Against Humanity as defined by the United Nations, when committed by any entity.⁶
- 2.3 The PPTA should work closely and comprehensively with other unions in order to promote a cohesive campaign on behalf of the union movement for working people in opposition to acts of mass violence. Links and solidarity should also be built with other organisations such as local councils and NGOs in order to strengthen our messaging as much as possible. Participation in military action that isn't directly related to the national security of Aotearoa New Zealand is costly to the taxpayer and risks diverting funds away from areas that are in more crucial need of funding. Working people need welfare not warfare.

⁶ <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/crimes-against-humanity.shtml>