

Women in Black: In 1988, twenty years after Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinian intifada began. In response, Israeli Jewish women began to stand in weekly silent vigils in busy public places. They wore black. Hecklers abused them in sexual terms ('whores') and political ('traitors'). Their policy was not to shout back but to stand silent and dignified. Women in Black support vigils soon became organized in Canada, Australia, many European countries and many U.S. cities. In Italy a group of women found their own Women in Black, Donne in Nero.

In London, in 1991, women demonstrated as Women Against War in the Gulf in opposition to US-led bombardment of Iraq. Afterwards, some renamed themselves Women in Black. Women in Black vigils are held weekly in Trafalgar Square as well as in many countries and cities around the world. In Serbia, the war between the former Yugoslav republics in 1991 gave birth to Women in Black in Belgrade, Zene u Crnom. Still active today, they oppose aggression and masculine violence with weekly vigils in Belgrade's Republic Square. And, they partner with men who refuse to serve in the military.

Women in Black are in Brussels, Femmes en Noir, and in Flemish-speaking Leuven, Vrouwen in het Zwart. Women in Black in Spain, Mujeres de Negro, are strong and active. In Tokyo, Women in Black often walk silently, single file, through shopping areas. Some visit and support women in war zones.

Women in Black in India began in 1992 when the ancient mosque, Babri Masjid, was torn down by Hindu fundamentalists and violence engulfed India, with women the main victims. WIB hold silent vigils on the streets, in market squares and in Gandhi Peace Park. In the Philippines, Women in Black began in 1995. The Asian Women's Human Rights Council and the Lila Pilipina, former comfort women, dress in black when they gather outside the Japanese Embassy in Manila demanding compensation for the wartime crime of sexual slavery by the Japanese army in World War II.

At the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, over 3,000 WIB held a vigil calling for "a world safer for women," and an end to wars and armed conflicts. Since 1996, Women in Black in Nepal have stood in silent vigils around the issues of trafficking and violence against women in public places in Katmandu. In 1998 and 1999 Women in Black groups demonstrated globally against U.S. military maneuvers, which included continued sanctions and bombing raids against Iraq.

In 2000 the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace formed in Israel where it joins Women in Black with nine other women's peace organizations. Thousands of women participate in mass Women in Black vigils twice a year in Israel. Over 5,000 women in Cape Town, South Africa, demonstrated in 2001 on the eve of the World Court of Women Against War/For Peace. Women in Black in South Africa stood against war and for peace.

Since 2002 WIB groups everywhere have been actively opposing any extension of military action by the USA and allied governments, of attacks on particular states, notably Iraq. In 2003 at the Asia Social Forum in Hyderabad, over 3,000 women dressed in black protested against Israel's Occupation of Palestine, the war on Iraq, and war crimes of the USA.

Locally and internationally, Women in Black have received awards for their work for peace. The worldwide network was awarded the Millennium Women's Peace Prize sponsored by the NGO International Alert and the UN agency UNIFEM, and the year following, the network was a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. Donne in Nero were awarded the Gold Dove of Peace, an Italian prize, in 2002. The Network was honored by Church Women United-USA. Israeli Women in Black won the Aachen Peace Prize (1991); the peace award of the city of San Giovanni d'Asso in Italy (1994); and the Jewish Peace Fellowship's "Peacemaker Award" (2001).

It is estimated there are more than 150 Women in Black groups in at least twenty-four countries. WIB is not an organization but a means of communicating with silent vigils against any evidence of violence, militarism, or war. Void of any constitution, Women in Black is a worldwide momentum without movement of women in black standing still for peace.

Sources: <http://www.womeninblack.org/history.htm>;
<http://www.womeninblack.org/vigils/vigils.html>;
<http://www.womeninblack.org/about.html>.