

National Congress of Women

Day Two

Weaving — How can we work together across difference to restore climate balance?

28 April 2022 (online)

Gathering session

by Janet Salisbury, WCC Founder

Introduction

Good morning – it is great to see you all. I am Janet Salisbury and it is exciting to be here again for Day Two in our National Congress of Women series!

Many thanks to Johanna McBride, Sally Blake and A Chorus of Women for that beautiful video ‘Ubuntu’ which profoundly captures our theme for today.¹

Not long after I first joined A Chorus of Women in 2006, Joahнна introduced me to the African concept of Ubuntu and her song. This simple idea of our interconnected and shared humanity changed me, and put me on a path that has ultimately led us all here today.

I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the lands of First Peoples, whose sovereignty has never been ceded. I pay my deep and heartfelt respects to the Elders past, present and emerging. Please write in the chat the country where you are and whatever other message of introduction you would like to share.

Here in Canberra, I am on Ngambri-Ngunnawal land and we are delighted that Dr Matilda House, a local Elder is shortly going to welcome us.

Dr Matilda House is a Ngambri Elder and Chair of the Ngambri Local Aboriginal Land Council. She has contributed to many other Councils and Committees to seek justice and support for her community. In 2008, Matilda conducted the first Welcome to Country to be held in the Australian Parliament.

¹ Ubuntu is an African philosophy that means “a person is a person through other people.” It has its roots in the idea of community as a building block of society. Ubuntu expresses the concept of a shared common humanity, or living for the common good. But it has a profound deeper meaning that invites deep listening to find our own truths on those of others. One of the main modern proponents of ubuntu philosophy was Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He describes a person with ubuntu as “open and available to others, affirming of others.” South Africa’s post-apartheid truth and reconciliation commission, which was chaired by Tutu, was based on this idea. Later in his life, Desmond Tutu broadened the concept of ubuntu to ‘Eco-ubuntu’ to described the interconnectedness of all life on Earth.

Welcome to Country

Thank you Matilda for your welcome and the ongoing generosity and outreach that you, and all First Nations people always extend – despite all that has happened to your people in the past 250 years. We are who we are because of each other. Ubuntu.

Please use the chat freely and often. We will save it and send it to you afterwards. (make note for privacy). One of the best things about our Day 1 event was the chat – all 40 pages! It captured the energy and inspiration in the room that day, and we used it as the basis to plan today and our other ongoing initiatives. We hope that we will gather further information and insights from you all today. Also, note that since last November we have set up a members intranet called WCC.Connect for ongoing discussion and comment. Please [Join the WCC](#) here and then join WCC.Connect when invited.

And if you are a social media, please post, tweet etc during the day using the hashtags **#WomenRising #NationalCongressofWomen #WomensClimateCongress #CollaborativeGovernance**

The Women's Climate Congress welcomes all women - cis-, trans- and nonbinary who feel called to join us. We also appreciate the support of men and if there are any men on this call – welcome. For the moment we are primarily creating a space for women to discover their voice and build ideas and policy agendas that reflect our lens on the world.

At the heart of the Women's Climate Congress is a vision to restore climate balance by 2030. That is, to be on a path that the scientists agree will keep us within a safe limit of global warming. We assert that women's voices, leadership and full agency, are needed to turn the tide of political culture from polarised discord to collaboration and cooperation, with nurture of life and care for the Earth at the centre of every government decision.

It is easy to say these words, but the doing of them is a huge challenge in the face of centuries old systems, deeply imbued with conflict, winner-take-all, hierarchical and patriarchal systems of governance. And the current events in Ukraine and the rhetoric around Australia preparing for war with China make it hard to hold onto the hope that we can change the deeply flawed systems and relationships that create these ongoing conflicts with each other and with nature. At the moment, there is no peace on Earth or peace with the Earth. I will say some more about that in a moment.

Opening presentation

Those of you who came to the first day of this National Congress last November will remember the video of 'The Singing Hill'. With help from Sally Blake, Danny Pratt and A Chorus of Women, Glenda Cloughley told a 30-year old story about Kurrajong or Capital Hill where Australia's Parliament House stands. Matilda House has told us that the hill is a women's place in FN's culture.

In the late 1980s, the prehistorian and artist Dorothy Cameron — Glenda's friend and mentor - was in a group of Canberra women who met regularly to meditate and hum around the Member's fountain inside PH. Their purpose was to support Senator Jo Vallentine - and all the honorable senators — in the hope that there would be more harmony in the building. After one of these meetings, Dorothy wrote a poem about her experience of hearing the land singing beneath the Parliament. There is a link in the chat to ['The Singing Hill' video](#). You'll love it!

Dr Glenda Cloughley was planning to give a presentation for us today to complete this Gathering session with some stories of the first peoples of Europe - the ancestors of many of us. These stories can help move our present-day narrative from one of conflict, winner-take-all, hierarchical and patriarchal approaches, to one of care and respect for the living Earth. We all belong to a much deeper older heritage of care and respect for Mother Gaia than the shameful traumatic cultural legacies of colonisation.

But a bout of COVID sickness intervened so Glenda is not able to be with us today.

Instead, I will say a little of what I have learnt from Glenda about The Two Stories of World and then a little more about our theme of 'weaving', which Glenda prepared for me.

As Glenda tells it, the two stories reflect findings that from earliest times in Europe there was an Earth-focused culture and organised war was unknown. Like First Nations people in Australia and Indigenous cultures elsewhere, our ancient European ancestors lived peaceably, in harmony with nature. There is plenty of evidence of this in the archeological record — particularly through the work of the Lithuanian-American archaeologist Marija Gimbutas who researched the Neolithic cultures of "Old Europe". This was also the field of Dorothy Cameron's lifework. Dorothy worked closely with Professor Gimbutas, interpreting symbolic patterns and meaning in the art Europeans made for more millennia than the time after.

In their culture, Mother Gaia - the living Earth - was represented in myriad regenerative, sacred symbolic images of women's bodies. According to Professor Gimbutas, the ancient women-centred cultures were peaceful and egalitarian. She contrasted this with the Bronze Age -- when aggressive Indo-Europeans colonised Old Europe, imposing domination by warrior kings and their institutions.

The result is the hybrid kind of society we live in today, where traumatising, uncaring leadership often dominates to the great detriment of balance in our planet's complex systems.

Marija Gimbutas referred to the way most of us live and love and raise families and look after each other in the community as the 'generative substratum'. Glenda calls that The First Story of the World. But overriding that is the second story of the world – the trauma story. So our job of transformation is to bring up the generative ways of being to rebalance our governance and organisational systems. That is a very simple overview.

In the chat, we will put a link to a beautiful [film about the life and work of Marija Gimbutas](#).

Now to say a bit more about weaving as a metaphor for the transformation we seek.

In 2017 Patricia Shields and Joseph Soeters introduced the term 'peaceweaving'.

They were writing about constructive approaches to peacemaking and public administration that have many parallels with our hopes and goals and ways of working together in the Women's Climate Congress.²

Preparing the program for today's Congress, we've found peaceweaving to be a lovely metaphor that opens our imaginations.

Like constructive peacemakers, we're thinking of climate balance as a process of nurturing life – bringing back the balance with nature that has been lost.

Like weavers, we're connecting individual, diverse, maybe fragile strings to make fabric that's useful, beautiful and both flexible and very strong.

Like effective climate action, peaceweaving is a relational process. Especially, it is a community-based and community-building process. It lifts up the First Story of the World. Peaceweaving builds positive relationships by working on practical problems and engaging people widely with sympathetic understanding while recognising that progress is measured by the welfare of the vulnerable.

The Shields and Soeters paper is a study of the methods of Jane Addams, who won a Nobel Peace Prize for leading the 1915 International Congress of Women and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Jane Addams' lifework is a deep, endlessly replenishing ancestral well of inspiration for our Women's Climate Congress, as it has been for Canberra's A Chorus of Women.

² Peaceweaving: Jane Addams, Positive Peace, and Public Administration by Patricia M Shields and Joseph Soeters, American Review of Public Administration 2017, Vol. 47 (3) 323-339

Most of the human rights advances of the past century were set in train as Jane Addams led the 1300 women from 12 warring and neutral nations who gathered in The Hague for the 1915 Congress in the middle of the First World War. Their effectiveness sprang from enacting the view that ‘peace (like climate action) is the nurture of life’.

I invite us all to take a few moments of silence together to reflect on all this in the light of current world events, recent political rhetoric around preparing for war, and the ongoing adversarial resistance to decarbonising the economy, even in the light of an IPCC Code Red warning. After holding our silence for a moment, I will read a quote from Dr Anne Poelina, a Traditional Owner of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, speaking at our Day One event last November:

Silence

“So ... we can dream We must dream, and we must send the dream out. And we must actualize it. ... We cannot afford incrementalism anymore. Mother Earth needs us we must stop the misogyny to Mother Earth, we must stop it now. And we can rise we will rise. We are rising. Let's dream big because we must bring our brothers, our sons, our husbands with us. This is a beautiful nation. We are all standing together. We must rise and save our planet for young people. They are not in the future. They are living now. They have needs now they have points. And I believe the leadership of women is rising across the planet across the nation. And we are doing good work.”

Everyday Climate Crisis Visual Petition (#EverydayClimateCrisis)

Also at our event last November, Hilary Wardhaugh spoke about her project – the [Everyday Climate Crisis Visual Petition](#), which is a visual response to the Australian governments’ climate change policies. The goal was to crowd-source 1000 images from women and non-binary photographers all over Australia and submit them to the government as a petition. Each image submitted presents climate change from a personal and culturally diverse perspective. Some of us took part in the launch of this project in Canberra a couple of months ago and an ABC news item after the event, captured the essence of the project. Here is the ABC video. And Hilary told me yesterday that she has reached her target of 1000 images!