

BROADENING THE FOCUS OF REMEMBRANCE DAY

Annual ceremony commemorating overlooked victims of war sees growing local support.

(VANCOUVER) Since 2016, in a special ceremony held on the afternoon of November 11, participants are invited to come together to reflect on the devastating costs of war and importance of finding more inclusive and diverse ways of remembering.

Held in Vancouver's Seaforth Peace Park (Burrard and 1st Avenue), the ceremony features the laying of handmade wreaths honouring refugees, women and children, the environment, child soldiers, civilian and military PTSD sufferers, Indigenous victims of genocide and many others. Fazineh Keita, a former child soldier from Sierra Leone and co-founder of the Innocence Lost Foundation, is this year's keynote speaker.

The event is the brainchild of Teresa Gagné and Denis Laplante, co-founders of Vancouver Peace Poppies, a group which since 2008 has been distributing white lapel poppies locally and across Canada. The white poppy was first introduced in Britain in 1933, only 12 years after the red poppy, to oppose war as a terrible and ineffectual method for settling international disputes. According to Alexandre Marc, a specialist on conflict and violence at the World Bank, 90 percent of current war casualties are civilians.

"The Vancouver Peace Poppies campaign encourages Canadians to commemorate civilian victims of war, challenge the normalization of militarism in our society and consider war's devastating effects on the environment," Gagné said, adding that growing demand for the white poppies led her and Laplante to organize a peace focussed Remembrance Day ceremony.

"After holding three events, 'Let Peace be Their Memorial' is now a city-sanctioned Remembrance Day tradition," said Laplante.

The Vancouver Parks Board has waived event permit fees and provides a beautiful floral wreath laid by parks commissioners. Then eleven 'Universal Wreaths' are laid to recognize the civilians whose suffering recurs across conflicts, continents and centuries, and finally, community groups are invited to lay wreaths to remember victims of particular conflicts. Last year, 'Community Wreaths' were laid for victims of ongoing conflicts in the Middle East as well as for those in the Nazi and Asian Holocausts of World War Two, victims of the Atomic bomb, the Rwandan genocide and war in South Sudan."

As time passes, fewer Canadians have a direct connection to our military or to Canadian veterans of past wars so Vancouver Peace Poppies sees the ceremony as a way to help keep Remembrance Day relevant, especially to young people and new Canadians, says Gagné.

"We hope that by coming together, ceremony participants will find solace for the despair and loss they have experienced because of war and a chance to honour and remember lost family members and friends," she explained

This year's ceremony will take place from 2:30 pm to 4 pm on Monday November 11. The Multifaith Action Society and BC Humanist Association are co-hosts with Vancouver Peace Poppies. Last year's memorial had over 200 attendees and organizers expect the event will continue to grow.

—30—

Interviews are available with Teresa Gagné, 604-446-4453 and in French with Denis Laplante 778-928-445, email address info@peacepoppies.ca For photos and further information see <https://peacepoppies.ca/>