

First Committee

BRIEFING BOOK / 2020



Reaching Critical Will

Reaching Critical Will, a programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
COVID-19 and humanitarian disarmament	7
Nuclear weapons	9
Biological weapons	12
Chemical weapons	14
Armed drones	17
Fully autonomous weapons	20
Explosive weapons in populated areas	23
Landmines	26
Cluster munitions	28
Depleted uranium weapons	30
Incendiary weapons	33
Small arms and light weapons	35
International arms trade	38
Outer space	41
Cyber peace and security	44
Gender and disarmament	47
Protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts	50
Disarmament and development	54
Disarmament education	57

Introduction

Ray Acheson

As we approach the usual season of activity at the United Nations—the general debate, high-level events, and work of the General Assembly’s six committees—a pandemic-shaped shadow hangs over our work, as it has marred everything for the past several months. It is not even clear at the time of publication of this briefing book what the First Committee will look like this year—if delegates will meet in person or virtually or both, if resolutions will be tabled and negotiated or not, or if the session will be postponed, like so many other intergovernmental activities have been in 2020. What is clear, unfortunately, is that regardless of what happens with the First Committee this year, disarmament diplomacy is continuing to take some serious hits. Our militarised “world order,” such as it is, is more violent for it.

“Law and order” vs. disarmament, peace, and security

Last year, the First Committee also almost didn’t happen. It was delayed multiple times due to concerns about restricted access for some delegations by the host country. When it did eventually stumble into gear, the most militarised governments in the world attacked each other relentlessly for several weeks, accusing each other of undermining the “international security environment,” violating international law, and imperilling our planet with their reckless abandonment of “law and order”.

The theme of “law and order” has also been at the forefront of much of the Black Lives Matter and anti-fascist protests seen within many countries around the world over the last few months. Established by the political and economic elite of states, “law and order” has been put on a pedestal as a tangible object requiring preservation and protection, even though the lived experience of the majority of people within each of these countries has been such that the ordering and implementation of the law has been about repression and criminalisation of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Arab, Asian, Muslim, LGBTQ+ people, of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, of the poor and the dispossessed.

The “law and order” of the so-called international community, is also arguably an order that privileges the militarily powerful over the rest of the world; and that permits the implication of the law (international disarmament law, in relation to the First Committee) in ways that serve this unequal and unjust order. Whether it is discussions about violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or international humanitarian law, or about the development of norms and rules against the weaponisation of or warfare in cyber space or outer space, certain countries tend to dominate in a way that undercuts the very object and purpose of the First Committee—to pursue international security through disarmament and demilitarisation.

Investments in violence

While last year's session of the First Committee did manage to scrape through its general and thematic debates and pass about 60 draft resolutions along to the General Assembly for adoption, it's important to examine the tangible impact this has had on our world. There is always, of course, the immeasurable but positive impact that diplomacy has in terms of building or sustaining channels for cooperation among states. And we absolutely saw some delegations come together in innovative ways through joint statements, pressing for deeper commitments against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and raising gender perspectives on disarmament, for example. We also saw governments recommit to various disarmament processes and principles.

But we also saw the exhausting pattern of disengagement or disassociation by nuclear-armed states, or chemical-armed states, or explosive-weapon-using states, or autonomous-weapon-building states, etc., from any of initiatives or decisions that could constrain their armament intentions and capabilities. We witnessed the ways in which countries that assign value to their weapons fighting to preserve not just their right to possess weapons of mass destruction or indiscriminate human suffering but to ensure that value continues to be ascribed to these weapons by their allies—while also trying to prevent their proliferation to those deemed too “irresponsible” to handle them.

We also saw, throughout the year, massive investments in militarism. Global military spending increased by 3.6 per cent in 2019, rising to a staggering \$1.9 trillion.¹ During the pandemic, in many countries arms producers have been deemed essential services—putting workers at risk and diverting money away from those in desperate need of protective gear, ventilators, medical

personnel, and affordable access to health care. Arms transfers also largely continued unabated, despite the resounding rhetorical support for the UN Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire in March.² Investments in nuclear weapon modernisation has also continued despite those billions being needed elsewhere;³ and while some joint military exercises were cancelled, the US and some other countries continued to deploy troops to military bases around the world—exposing soldiers and local populations alike to the coronavirus, all in the name of “security”.⁴

Shaping peace together

This “order,” maintained through militarism at the expense of human and planetary well-being, is not the faith of the majority of governments, however. Most countries continue to reject nuclear weapons, and militarism more broadly, as beneficial to security. Many recognise that weapons and war are in reality the main impediments to security, as well as to peace, freedom, justice, and equality. South Africa's diplomats, for example, have drawn comparisons between the nuclear order and apartheid, arguing that it is another example of minority rule, in which “the will of the few will prevail, regardless of whether it makes moral sense.”⁵

The rejection of weapons and war as assets of “peace and security” is where the First Committee must ground its work. The UN theme of this year's International Day of Peace is “Shaping Peace Together”. We are marking 75 years of the organisation's existence—75 years since the end of the horrific slaughter that was World War II and 75 years of the Charter's promise to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” We are also, however, marking 75 years since the first detonations of atomic bombs, in New Mexico, USA and on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan.

Seventy-five years of nuclear violence. Seventy-five years of war and armed conflict, of military interventions and coups, of continued investments in weapons, of the spread of nuclear bombs and drones and explosive weapons and small arms.

As the First Committee meets in this 75th year of the United Nations, it must stake a claim for peace and security based on cooperation and collaboration, not on competition and corrosive politicking. “Global security is improved through mutual trust, transparency, and disarmament,” noted the Austrian ambassador at a recent UN event against nuclear testing.⁶ This is the foundation of diplomacy, and of disarmament.

Participants in the Committee’s work must advance disarmament not just through platitudes but through action that has a tangible impact on the material realities of world, and our cultural attitudes towards weapons and war.

Allowing the governments with the most weapons to dictate what is possible to the world is not acceptable. They have led us to violence; we must refuse to follow them any further and embark instead on a new road to peace, building our future through collective actions and investments not in weapons but in collective care for each other and our planet.

Note about the 2020 First Committee briefing book

At the time of publication, it is not clear in what format First Committee will be convened. It is also not clear what the status of resolutions or procedures for their negotiation will include, nor what kind of statements delegations will be able to provide. The analysis and recommendations included in this Briefing Book anticipate that First Committee will convene in some fashion; however, even if it does not, the suggestions made herein should be taken forward by states in other feasible ways. If First Committee is to be a credible forum for disarmament diplomacy, its members must figure out how to take the work forward in an even more meaningful way than in the past. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that we need innovative and progressive solutions to our shared challenges. As activists, we have continued throughout the pandemic to collaborate, share, strategise, and work for a better world. We hope that the UN system will do the same.

1 “Global military expenditure sees largest annual increase in a decade—says SIPRI—reaching \$1917 billion in 2019,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 27 April 2020.

2 Ray Acheson, “From Ceasefire to Divestment and Disarmament,” Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 26 March 2020; Ray Acheson, “A Sustainable Ceasefire Means No More ‘Business as Usual,’” Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 17 April 2020;

3 *Assuring destruction forever: 2020 edition*, Reaching Critical Will of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, April 2020.

4 Ray Acheson, “Foreign Military Bases Spread Violence and Virus,” Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 14 May 2020.

5 Statement by Ambassador Nozipho Joyce Mxakato-Diseko of South Africa to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, New York, 22 May 2015.

6 Statement by Ambassador Alexander Marschik of Austria to the UN commemoration of the International Day against Nuclear Tests, Online, 26 August 2020.

COVID-19 and humanitarian disarmament

An open letter from civil society

Many of the chapters contained in the 2020 First Committee briefing book reflect on how COVID-19 has impacted various disarmament initiatives and forums. This open letter argues that humanitarian disarmament can lead the way to an improved post-pandemic world and calls on states, international organisations, and civil society to follow its lead to create a “new normal.”

Since the letter opened for signature in June 2020, it has been signed by 252 organisations and the City of Freemantle, Australia. This letter is also available in Spanish and French.

Visit <https://humanitariandisarmament.org/covid-19-2/open-letter-on-covid-and-humanitarian-disarmament/> for more details.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy human and economic toll and shattered lives in many countries. The pandemic has also underscored that global solutions should be used to address global problems, in the current crisis and after it ends. Now is the moment to reflect on the world as it is and consider a better alternative for the future. A “new normal” should go beyond the field of public health to deal with other matters of ongoing international concern, including the humanitarian consequences of arms and armed conflict as well as peace and security more broadly.

Humanitarian disarmament, an approach to governing weapons that puts people first, can help lead the way to an improved post-pandemic world. Humanitarian disarmament seeks to prevent and remediate arms-inflicted human suffering and environmental damage through the establishment and implementation of norms. Originating in the mid-1990s, it has generated four international treaties, been recognized with two Nobel Peace Prizes, and inspired ongoing efforts to reduce other arms-related harm.

Humanitarian disarmament’s twin pillars of prevention and remediation should guide the allocation of resources to advance human security. COVID-19 has caused people to take a fresh look at states’ budgetary choices. To prevent arms-inflicted harm, governments and industry should stop investing in unacceptable weapons as well as strengthen the protection of civilians from the use of weapons and ensure arms transfers comply with international law. The money spent on nuclear arsenals and other military expenses could be better used for humanitarian purposes, such as health care or social spending. To remediate harm, governments should redirect money to programs that assist victims, restore infrastructure, clear explosive ordnance, and clean up conflict-related pollution. Funding the multilateral institutions that set standards on these topics and ensure their implementation would also advance humanitarian disarmament’s goals.

The principles of inclusion and non-discrimination, which are fundamental to humanitarian disarmament, should inform measures to address the inequalities that COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated. The pandemic has increased the challenges faced by conflict survivors and other persons with disabilities due to the vulnerability of certain groups, their inability to access health care and basic necessities, and restrictions on aid workers. A humanitarian disarmament response would ensure that such inequality and marginalisation do not become entrenched. It would also promote more sensitive programs than existed before. States and humanitarian actors should broaden efforts to involve affected individuals and diverse populations in decision-making, gather data disaggregated by gender, age, disability, and ethnicity, and deliver assistance in a non-discriminatory manner.

Inclusivity and accessibility should underpin diplomacy as it emerges from its current digital state. Since the pandemic led to a global lockdown, in-person disarmament meetings have been canceled, postponed, or held digitally. While face-to-face meetings have important advantages, once they resume, the international community could increase inclusivity and accessibility by permitting meaningful online participation at multilateral meetings. Individuals, including survivors and other persons with disabilities, who are unable to travel due to lack of funding or visa restrictions, could add their voices to critical discussions about setting and operationalising norms.

Finally, international cooperation should become a standard way to address global issues, as it is in humanitarian disarmament. Humanitarian disarmament treaties, which mandate international coordination, information exchange, and resource sharing, offer models of cooperation. States should adopt a cooperative approach to addressing the human and environmental harm inflicted by arms and increase their assistance to affected states. Such a cooperative mindset, reinforced by the pandemic experience, should carry over to other multilateral efforts to create, implement, and adapt international norms.

As the world transitions to a post-pandemic reality, we call on states, international organizations, and civil society to follow humanitarian disarmament's lead. The international community should prioritise human security, reallocate military spending to humanitarian causes, work to eliminate inequalities, ensure multilateral fora incorporate diverse voices, and bring a cooperative mindset to problems of practice and policy. Together we can reshape the security landscape for the future and help create a new—and improved—"normal."

Nuclear weapons

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

Background

In 2020, nine countries possessed over 13,000 nuclear weapons.¹ Each is currently investing in the modernisation of their nuclear warheads and/or delivery systems such as bombers, missiles, and submarines.² In 2019, the nuclear-armed states spent an estimated US \$72.9 billion on these weapons, an increase of US \$7.1 billion from 2018.³ Five additional states—Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey—host about 150 United States’ nuclear weapons on their territories.⁴ Twenty-six other countries allow the potential use of nuclear weapons on their behalf as part of defense alliances, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).⁵

Any use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences. With rising global tensions and the intentional destruction of nuclear weapon arms control agreements by the US and Russia, the risk of nuclear weapon use is increasing. No state or agency could address the immediate or long-term consequences of the detonation of a nuclear weapon.⁶ The body of research on the humanitarian and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons, including the devastating impact on global climate and the disproportionate impact of radiation on women and girls, continues to grow.⁷ In addition, new research shows that technological developments, including offensive cyber capabilities and artificial intelligence, can obfuscate decision making and reduce decision

making time, increasing the risk of accidental nuclear weapon use.⁸

There are several international treaties to constrain nuclear weapons activities, including the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone treaties, the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and most recently the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). There are also bilateral arms control agreements between Russia and the United States.

Current context

While some nuclear-armed countries have recently withdrawn from or insufficiently implemented these treaties, the majority of the international community continues to reject nuclear weapons by joining and implementing international agreements against nuclear weapons.

The 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty ceased operation in August 2019 following the United States’ withdrawal. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is under considerable threat following the United States’ withdrawal and reimposition of sanctions and Iran’s subsequent steps to decrease compliance with the nuclear limitations in the agreement. The US-Russia New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which limits strategic deployed and non-deployed nuclear warheads and delivery systems, will expire in February 2021 unless Russia and the United States decide to renew it.

While the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference was postponed due to COVID-19, the preparations for the meeting have continued in the past year, including through regional consultations with states and civil society.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) enters into force ninety days after it gains 50 ratifications or accessions and will hold its first Meeting of States Parties within one year of entry into force. During the pandemic, countries have continued to sign and ratify the *treaty* in recognition of its contribution to peace and security in uncertain times. The TPNW has already begun to impact behaviour and policies even in states that have not yet adhered to it. For instance, major financial institutions in states that claim protection from nuclear weapons have decided to exclude nuclear weapon-producing companies from their investment portfolios.⁹ City councils in several nuclear-armed states and states that endorse nuclear deterrence policies have added to the normative weight of the TPNW by endorsing the Treaty and urging their respective national governments to join it.¹⁰

On 6 and 9 August 2020, the international community commemorated the 75th anniversary of the first use of nuclear weapons in warfare in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the 75th anniversary of the first test of nuclear weapons on 16 July 2020. The survivors of these bombings called on all countries to join the TPNW and to abolish nuclear weapons forever.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Express deep concern at the continued risk for humanity represented by the possibility that nuclear weapons could be used and the

catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences that would result from the use of nuclear weapons;

- Reiterate the unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-armed states to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals to which all states parties are committed under NPT Article VI;
- Condemn nuclear-armed states' qualitative and quantitative advancement and modernisation of their nuclear arsenals;
- Call on nuclear-armed states to undertake nuclear disarmament, for some states to stop hosting other countries' nuclear weapons on their territories and for states to reject the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons on their behalf;
- Welcome the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in July 2017, call on all states to sign, ratify, and adhere to the TPNW, and note that the TPNW complements and strengthens the NPT as an effective measure as foreseen in NPT Article VI; and
- Include a reference to the TPNW in resolutions related to nuclear weapons.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Sign and ratify the TPNW and work to ensure its quick entry into force, including by encouraging other states to join it;
- Adopt national legislation and other measures to implement the Treaty, including by ending investments in nuclear weapon-producing companies;

- Designate a focal point within the government to assess the needs and plan implementation of victim assistance and environmental remediation efforts;
- Reject nuclear weapons as legitimate weapons and work to end any military activities related to the development and use of nuclear weapons; and
- Encourage, bilaterally and multilaterally, all states to join the broad international consensus against weapons of mass destruction and for nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear weapons.

Author: Alicia Sanders-Zakre



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 - 2 *Assuring destruction forever: 2020 edition*, Reaching Critical Will of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, April 2020, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/modernization/assuring-destruction-forever-2020v2.pdf>.
 - 3 “Enough is Enough: 2019 Global Nuclear Weapons Spending,” International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, May 2020, https://www.icanw.org/global_nuclear_weapons_spending_2020.
 - 4 “United States nuclear forces, 2020,” Federation of American Scientists, January 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00963402.2019.1701286>.
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 - 7 Ibid.; see also Unspeakable suffering: the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, Reaching Critical Will of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, February 2013.
 - 8 “Briefing: Emerging Technologies and Nuclear Weapons,” International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, January 2020, https://www.icanw.org/briefing_emerging_technologies_and_nuclear_weapon_risks.
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 - 10 International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, “ICAN Cities Appeal,” https://cities.icanw.org/list_of_cities.

Biological weapons

King's College London

Background

Biological weapons combine bacteria or viruses with a delivery mechanism to inflict harm, and are prohibited under international law.

The principal legal instrument banning biological warfare is the 1972 Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention (BWC). The BWC bans the development of biological agents and toxins, of any type or quantity including their components, that do not have protective, medical or other peaceful purposes, and any weapons or means of delivery for such agents and toxins. The Treaty itself is relatively short, comprising only 15 articles. Over the years, the Treaty articles have been supplemented by a series of additional understandings reached at Treaty Review Conferences.

The wider regime includes the 1925 Geneva Protocol and a growing array of other measures, such as export control regimes and UNSC Resolution 1540, which serve to bolster aspects of the prohibition and prevention of biological weapons.

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) First Committee traditionally considers an annual resolution on the BWC and a biennial resolution on the Geneva Protocol. The BWC resolution is usually uncontested, and has so far always been adopted by consensus. The Geneva Protocol resolution has so far always been agreed, but usually with a small number of regular abstentions.

Current context

In 2019, Tanzania became the 183rd state party to ratify the BWC. A further four states have signed but not ratified the convention, and 10 states have neither signed nor ratified the convention.

Key biological disarmament and non-proliferation activities in 2019 were carried out in connection with the second set of 2018–20 BWC intersessional Meetings of Experts (MXs) and the BWC Meeting of States Parties (MSP).¹ Reviewing the financial situation of the BWC formed a central focus for the 2019 MSP. The meeting also considered the reports of each MX, but as in 2018 the MSP report simply noted that “no consensus was reached on the deliberations including any possible outcomes of the Meetings of Experts.” However, the chair proposed and initiated a new process to circumvent the reporting impasse and feed substantive work of the MXs into the MSPs and the 2021 Review Conference. The process also encourages states parties to establish continuity between the work of the three intersessional years, to synthesise the work and identify areas of convergence, and to avoid a confrontational approach.

Due to COVID-19, the 2020 MXs, originally scheduled from 25 August to 3 September 2020, are now scheduled for 1 to 10 December 2020. The 2020 MSP, originally scheduled from 8 to 11 December 2020, is now scheduled from 12 to 15 April 2021, with the first session of the Preparatory Committee taking place back-to-back

with the meeting, on 16 April. The Ninth Review Conference remains scheduled for November 2021. The health impacts, as well as the significant socio-economic impacts, of the current pandemic may lend fresh energy to the search for ways of reinforcing the BWC so that it becomes a stronger instrument of biological disarmament in practice as well as in theory.

The 45th anniversary of the entry into force of the BWC took place on 26 March 2020. In his message to the disarmament community, the UN Secretary-General urged states parties “to think creatively about the future evolution of the Convention and how to uphold its central role in preventing the misuse of biology for hostile purposes.”²

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Reaffirm their commitment to the BWC and the Geneva Protocol;
- Report on measures taken to implement and strengthen BWC provisions.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Pay any outstanding assessed contributions in full, and pledge financial support for the implementation of the BWC;

- Strengthen information-sharing under the Treaty’s Confidence-Building Measures, and further evolve the consultation & clarification procedures and the peer review & transparency visits under BWC Article V;
- Establish a dedicated technical body such as a technical open-ended working group under the BWC to monitor relevant scientific and technological developments, consider their potential bearings on the BWC, and formulate individual and collective action to address possible challenges;
- Strengthen national and international assistance, response and preparedness efforts, including the UN Secretary-General’s Mechanism (UNSGM), in the event of a deliberate biological attack; and
- Promote and steer a new multi-stakeholder process to further evolve the BWC, beyond Review Conference reaffirmations of additional understandings and agreements.

Author: Filippa Lentzos



1 Filippa Lentzos, “Biological weapon disarmament and non-proliferation,” *SIPRI Yearbook 2020*, pp. 466–81.

2 UN Secretary-General’s message on the forty-fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Biological Weapons Convention, 26 March 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-03-26/secretary-generals-message-the-forty-fifth-anniversary-of-the-entry-force-of-the-biological-weapons-convention>.

Chemical weapons

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Background

The use of chemical weapons is universally considered to be a crime against humanity and contradictory to the dictates of public conscience. The 1992 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), prohibits the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer, or use of these weapons. Twenty-one years after its entry into force, the CWC has 193 states parties and one signatory state. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is tasked with regulating treaty compliance. Russia—formerly the largest possessor of chemical weapons—is officially said to have completed the destruction of its stockpile in 2017.¹ The United States has destroyed approximately 90 per cent of its stockpile.²

Chemical weapons, which are inherently indiscriminate, are any toxic chemical or its precursor that can cause death, injury, temporary incapacitation or sensory irritation through its chemical action, and includes related munitions and delivery systems. Chlorine, mustard gas, and sarin are among the most used weaponised chemicals. Many of the chemicals that can be used as a weapon are dual-use.

Following the ghastly Tokyo subway sarin gas attacks in 1995, there were no cases of chemical weapons use for nearly two decades, until their resurgence in recent years in Syria, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom. The use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict over an eight-year period has shocked the international community and poses a

significant challenge to the international norm and stigma against these weapons.

Current context

Since 2014, the discourse about chemical weapons in the First Committee has evolved to reflect concern about recent instances of use. As First Committee statements have become more specific by citing incidents in Syria, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom, for example, a new dynamic is emerging as to whether or not the First Committee is the appropriate UN forum to reference these specific cases, or if that is best left to the UN Security Council (UNSC) or meetings and mechanisms of the CWC. In both 2017 and 2018, the First Committee discussions were occurring against a backdrop of either debate in the UNSC about renewing the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), a partnership between the United Nations and the OPCW established in response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, or efforts within the CWC to establish an attribution mechanism.

In June 2018, a special session of CWC states parties voted to establish another mechanism to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks: the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT).³ Based on IIT investigations, which are ongoing, the OPCW Executive Council (EC) adopted by vote in July 2020 a decision addressing the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic, in which it concluded that there are reasonable grounds to

believe that the Syrian government used chemical weapons in Ltamenah, Syria in March 2017.⁴

The decision further establishes that the Syrian Arab Republic failed to declare and destroy all of its chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities under the CWC and demands that the Syrian Arab Republic immediately cease all use. The IIT's first report was transmitted to the UNSC by the UN Secretary-General, provoking debate in the Council during a May 2020 session.⁵

Within the First Committee, most UN member states have previously indicated through their statements and voting patterns that it is important to defend the norm and law against chemical weapon use by assigning responsibility and not allowing for impunity or continued transgressions. In this context, France established in January 2018 an International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, an association of 38 countries and international organisations.

A smaller group of states have argued against efforts to assign attribution to chemical weapon attacks. They have taken issue with statements delivered at First Committee that speak to recent incidents of use and to the inclusion of specific incidents in the annual First Committee resolution on chemical weapons. These states argue that such references unnecessarily “politicise” the issue.

This tension tends to come to a head in the context of voting on the chemical weapons resolution, which is traditionally sponsored by Poland. In 2019, draft resolution L.10 “Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction,” elicited five paragraph votes and several explanations of vote, in which accusations of deliberate politicisation and double standards were highlighted along with statements reinforcing the importance of the rule of law and multilateralism.⁶

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Highlight and publicly condemn any ongoing activities that are prohibited under the CWC;
- Defend the norm against chemical weapon use; and
- Report on measures taken to implement provisions from the CWC and pledge financial support to relevant mechanisms and instruments.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Commit to never using chemical weapons and proceed with stockpile destruction;
- Review, strengthen, and uphold national measures and policies in line with article VII of the CWC; and
- Adopt and enforce necessary legal measures to ensure effective compliance with the CWC, including by developing national action plans; sharing national experiences, challenges, and initiatives to adopt legal measures giving effect to the CWC; and sharing relevant laws and regulations.

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1 Yearbook 2018: *Armaments, Disarmaments and International Security—Summary*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/yb_18_summary_en_0.pdf.

2 “Chemical Weapons: Frequently Asked Questions,” Arms Control Association, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Chemical-Weapons-Frequently-Asked-Questions>.

3 See <https://www.opcw.org/iit>.

4 “OPCW Executive Council Adopts Decision Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic,” 9 July 2020, <https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2020/07/opcw-executive-council-adopts-decision-addressing-possession-and-use>.

5 Letter dated 15 April 2020 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2020/310, <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/310>.

6 For an overview of 2019 explanations of vote, see our coverage in the 2019 First Committee Monitor, No. 6, 9 November, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/FCM19/FCM-2019-No6.pdf>.



Photo by Dark Labs, Unsplash

Armed drones

PAX

Background

Over the last two years, the world has witnessed how armed drones shape warfare in various conflicts, while a boost in research, development and productions resulted in rapid proliferation of drones, with over 95 countries now using military drones, and a total of 21,000 drones in use worldwide.¹ Drones are becoming a standard tool in military operations conducted by both states and non-state armed groups due to their low costs and risks, and perceived effectiveness.

Emerging drone users have actively used armed drones in direct confrontation or in support of armed groups in countries like Syria², Iraq,³ Yemen⁴, Libya⁵, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.⁶ The use of armed drone strikes for targeted killings in long-running counter-terrorist operations have continued in places like Niger, Somalia and Syria.

The growing use of armed drones in and outside of armed conflicts continues to pose direct risk to the lives and well-being of civilians. Many of the current operations involving armed drones have been conducted without clear legal justifications for targeting suspected terrorists.

There is an alarming trend among states of deploying armed drones in murky military operations in support of armed groups, or providing armed groups with drone technology that has been used to targeted civilian areas and critical infrastructure.⁷ This has led to serious risks to regional security and the escalation of use of

lethal force in northern Africa and the Middle East, while there are mounting concerns over civilian casualties as a result of these operations. It is often only after civil society groups have conducted thorough investigations that responsible parties admit civilian casualties.⁸

The development and export of military drones is also raising the stakes in efforts meant to contain the expanding risk of remote control warfare. An increasing number of states are investing in drone production and aggressively seeking opportunities for new markets, while at the same time there are attempts to weaken existing international arms export control agreements in order to create more export opportunities for commercial gain. Another complicating element is rapid use of civilian technology in building military grade drones, and active deployment of these drones. Such development will complicate export control mechanisms developed to curtail proliferation.⁹ There is also a boost in the use of unarmed military drones on the battlefield, as an enabler of lethal operations by both state and non-state actors.¹⁰

Despite their growing use, states deploying drones have not yet clarified their legal position. The absence of reaffirming a progressive legal interpretation risks normalising the stretched interpretation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law applied by current users of armed drones in counter-terrorism operations. Now more than ever a clear position is needed to strengthen international norms, as rapid drone proliferation and use by states and

in support of non-state actors risks becoming a new trend in modern warfare, yet fails to address the troublesome consequences for civilian lives, security, and international peace.

Current context

During the UNGA First Committee meeting in 2019, only a handful of states raised concern over armed drones in their statements, which was a regrettable decline from the previous year, when 16 states referred to various issues around use and proliferation of armed drones. Considering the growing threats posed by armed drones, the unwillingness of states to actively and robustly seek to utilise the UN as the multilateral forum to address this issue is disappointing. More action should be expected in 2020.

The humanitarian impacts¹¹ of drones in armed conflicts was addressed by the UN Secretary-General in his 2020 report on the Protection of Civilians to the UN Security Council,¹² urging more transparency, oversight and accountability, as well as common standards to reduce the potential for unlawful acts, facilitate the implementation of export controls, and ensure the provision of more effective protection to civilians.

A renewed call by the UN Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on Extrajudicial Killings¹³ in June 2020 outlined specific concerns over the absence of discussion regarding the rapid increase of drone use, in particular for targeted killings. The Rapporteur makes a clear call to states to develop robust standards, undertake effective measure to control proliferation, engage in multilateral debates on legality of targeted killing, and investigate allegations of unlawful deaths caused by drone strikes. Two clear options are presented for member states by the call. The first is to “Establish a transparent multilateral process for

the development of robust standards in the use of drones.”¹⁴ The second is that “like-minded States should establish a group of experts to develop such standards as part of a time-bound forum for States, academics, and civil society to identify and strengthen legal norms and accountability mechanisms.”

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Recognise the ethical, legal, and humanitarian concerns that drones bring to the use of force in the contemporary landscape, and express a commitment to reducing and addressing harm and ensuring the protection of rights;
- Recognise the grave risk that international legal frameworks could be eroded through the use of armed drones, in the context of practices that challenge existing norms;
- Assert the need for transparency in the use of drones by any and all states, for the recording of casualties and the addressing of victims’ rights, and for accountability and democratic oversight; and
- Recognise the need for a broader multilateral conversation about what role drones should play in the use of force and the specific limits and standards for their use.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Raise these issues in all relevant international and regional forums, including human rights-focused forums. Ensure that issues related to export control are pursued in relevant arm control and disarmament forums, such as the Arms Trade Treaty; and

- Support the recommendations of the UNSG and UNSR for the development of robust international standards on the use and export of armed drones through a transparent, multi-lateral, and inclusive process.

Author: Wim Zwijnenburg



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Fully autonomous weapons

Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

Background

Removing human control from the use of force is now widely regarded as a grave threat to humanity that, like climate change, deserves urgent multilateral action. Since the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots launched in 2013, the need to respond to concerns raised by lethal autonomous weapons systems, another term for fully autonomous weapons, has steadily climbed the international agenda.

The Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) held eight meetings in 2014-2019 to discuss what to do about autonomous weapons (“killer robots”). Of the 97 states that have elaborated their views on killer robots there and/or at the Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly, virtually all have acknowledged the central importance of human control over the use of force.

Several states have committed not to acquire or develop lethal autonomous weapons systems and 30 countries have called for a ban on such weapon systems.¹ Group of states have also endorsed this objective, such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which has repeatedly called for a legally binding instrument stipulating prohibitions and regulations on lethal autonomous weapon systems.

A growing number of policymakers, artificial intelligence experts, private companies, international and domestic organisations, and ordinary individuals have endorsed the call to ban fully autonomous weapons. The Campaign

to Stop Killer Robots is now comprised of 165 governmental organisations in 65 countries.²

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has repeatedly urged countries to prohibit weapon systems that could, by themselves, target and attack human beings, calling such weapons “morally repugnant and politically unacceptable.”

Yet, the CCW talks have yielded little in the way of a lasting multilateral outcome. This is due to the opposition by a handful of military powers, who are investing heavily in the military applications of artificial intelligence and developing air, land, and sea-based autonomous weapon systems.

Decisions at the CCW are by consensus, which allows just a few or even a single country to block an agreement sought by a majority. At the last CCW meeting in August 2019, Russia and the United States bullied the meeting into accepting an outcome document containing ambiguous and unambitious recommendations for future work.³

Current context

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic delayed diplomatic meetings on fully autonomous weapons that were planned at the CCW in the first half of 2020, while several informal consultations have been convened virtually to discuss the modalities of future meetings.

Hopes are now rising that at least one of the CCW meetings on killer robots scheduled for September and November 2020 will proceed as planned now that the UN in Geneva is reopening and a new chairperson, Minister Counsellor Ljupcho Gjorgjinski of the Republic of North Macedonia, has been approved.

Governments should heed the invitation from the previous 2020 GGE Chair Ambassador Janis Karklins of Latvia to submit CCW working papers or commentaries to provide their “recommendations in relation to the clarification, consideration and development of aspects of the normative and operational framework”⁴ on lethal autonomous weapon systems.

A legally binding instrument or international treaty is the optimal normative framework for dealing with the many serious challenges raised by fully autonomous weapons. The CCW has heard proposals for political declarations and codes of conduct, as well as for greater transparency. Such measures have value but are by themselves insufficient to deal with this serious threat to humanity and could be more productively undertaken after the international legal framework has been put in place.

A new international treaty could lay down explicit rules to ensure appropriate constraints on autonomy in weapons systems and resolve differing views on human control over the use of force. Most importantly, it would show that states are serious about responding appropriately and with urgency to this existential threat to humanity.

To maintain momentum and retain public confidence, it is crucial that the CCW talks on fully autonomous weapons get back on track by the end of 2020, states must achieve measurable progress by the CCW’s Sixth Review Conference in December 2021. Focused deliberations will help lay the groundwork for the international ban

treaty that is urgently required to retain meaningful human control over the use of force.

To guide this work, the Campaign has produced its own CCW commentary,⁵ providing recommendations for how a new treaty could be effectively structured, through a multi-faceted approach, to meet the objective of prohibiting fully autonomous weapons and retaining meaningful human control over the use of force.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Acknowledge and support mounting calls to negotiate a new treaty to prohibit weapons systems that would select and engage targets without meaningful human control; and
- Express concern that the CCW has been unable to meet in 2020 and highlight the need for urgent progress as well as consideration of other ways to prevent killer robots.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Elaborate national views by providing CCW commentaries that identify factors to help determine the necessary quality and extent of human control over weapons systems and the use of force;
- Express their preferred normative framework and its basic content, including their position on calls for a new international treaty to ban or restrict fully autonomous weapons.

Author: Mary Wareham



1 The 30 countries calling for a ban on killer robots are: Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China (use only), Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Djibouti, Ecuador, El Salvador, Egypt, Ghana, Guatemala, the Holy See, Iraq, Jordan, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, the State of Palestine, Uganda, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe.

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Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

Explosive weapons in populated areas

International Network on Explosive Weapons

Background

Armed conflicts are being conducted in populated areas with weapon systems designed for open battlefields, presenting serious challenges to the effective protection of civilians. Many states, international organisations, and civil society have repeatedly highlighted the harm caused to civilians and civilian infrastructure by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas as a major humanitarian priority over the past decade. Each year, tens of thousands of people are killed and injured by the use of explosive weapons in neighbourhoods where people live and work. Data consistently shows that when these weapons are used in populated areas, approximately 91 per cent of those reported killed and injured are civilians.¹

The damage explosive weapons cause to vital infrastructure also means their impacts reverberate to affect a wider population and over time. Damage to hospitals limits the provision of medical care, making even easily treatable injuries life threatening.² Damage to sanitation systems leaves civilian populations susceptible to the spread of disease.³ Destruction, and the presence of explosive remnants in populated areas, causes and entrenches displacement—but where transport infrastructure is destroyed, civilians can also be prevented from fleeing to safety.⁴ Affected areas can become inaccessible to humanitarian aid⁵ as well clean food and water,⁶ with damage to energy infrastructure compounding these

challenges. Severe psychological harm is experienced by many.⁷

Current context

2019 saw distinct positive movement towards the development of an international political declaration aimed at addressing the harms caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Austria convened an international conference in October 2019 where 133 states participated, and which saw widespread support for developing an international political declaration and kickstarted a series of Geneva-based consultations.⁸

At the 2019 First Committee, a cross-regional group of 71 states supported a joint statement⁹ that encouraged all states to participate in international efforts to address the impacts of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas on civilians—including through working towards an international political declaration in 2020 that would make commitments on this issue.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN Secretary-General have continued to call on states to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas “owing to the immediate and cumulative, complex and long-term harm resulting from such use.”¹⁰ The focus on the heightened risk of harm from explosive weapons with wide

area effects and need to stop this through policy and practice, has also been a repeated key call from the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW).

In late 2019 and the early part of 2020, efforts got underway to produce a political declaration to address the civilian harm through binding commitments on states. The government of Ireland convened states in Geneva to discuss elements of a political declaration. Due to the situation caused by COVID-19, negotiations to finalise the text have not yet been able to take place but are expected to resume in Geneva in the coming months.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Acknowledge that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas causes severe harm to individuals and communities, including through both direct and reverberating effects;
- Endorse the UN Secretary-General's recommendation that states should avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas; and
- Support the development of an international political instrument on explosive weapons to protect civilians.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Commit to developing, adopting, and implementing an international commitment to address this clear and documented pattern of harm by stopping the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas and assisting affected people and communities;

- Review and make available national policies and practices related to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and make changes that will strengthen the protection of civilians;
- Support and make publicly available data-gathering on the use of and impact of explosive weapons in populated areas including age, sex, and disability, disaggregated recording of casualties; and
- Recognise the rights of survivors, families of those killed or injured, and affected communities and respond to their short and long-term needs.

Author: Laura Boillot



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Photo by International Network on Explosive Weapons



Landmines

International Campaign to Ban Landmines

Background

The 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and on their Destruction (or the Mine Ban Treaty—MBT) is one of the most universally adhered-to international instruments. Remarkable progress has been made towards eliminating these weapons and addressing their deadly legacy.

The MBT is one of the most successful disarmament treaties ever. With 80 per cent of the world's countries on board and many others in de facto compliance, it has nearly eliminated the production and use of antipersonnel landmines by states, while promoting sustained clearance and recognition of the needs of victims. Over 30 states are now free of landmine contamination; more than 55 million stockpiled antipersonnel landmines have been destroyed; and progress—though still not sufficient—is made to ensure accessible and adequate assistance for victims. However, sustained financial and political support is needed to ensure that the MBT fully delivers on its promises.

Current context

The Fourth Review Conference of the Treaty took place in 2019 and reaffirmed the aim of MBT states parties to “finish the job” by 2025, meaning to the greatest extent possible, ensuring the global elimination of antipersonnel mines. States

renewed their political commitment to the MBT and adopted the roadmap to guide their work over the next five years. The Oslo Action Plan (OAP) includes 50 specific actions and indicators, aimed at achieving greater progress on universalisation, stockpile destruction, land clearance, mine risk education, and victim assistance. MBT states parties reached a common understanding that the Treaty applies to mines of improvised nature, adopted “an early warning mechanism” to prevent delays in implementation and a cross-cutting action related to gender and diversity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a public health, economic, and humanitarian impact. It has also affected the MBT implementation, namely: additional delays in land survey and clearance; disruption in victim assistance; late submission of article 7 reports; changes to work plans; and extension requests to meet key Treaty obligations, such as clearance. The latter is still pending from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, and Nigeria.

The Treaty's first ever virtual intersessional meeting was held and despite organisational efforts, the format posed significant challenges to participation of civil society and to meaningful discussion. Should there be more virtual meetings, states must ensure better quality and interactivity of the discussions and equal and meaningful participation of all stakeholders including civil society.

Landmines, mostly of improvised nature, still kill and maim. Over 50 per cent of all recorded casualties are children. Myanmar remains the only

government that continues to use anti-personnel landmines, in addition to non-state armed groups in a handful of countries. Thirty-three states are yet to join the MBT. However, the vast majority abide de facto by its core provisions. Each year, half of them vote in favour of the UN General Assembly First Committee resolution on the MBT to show their support for the humanitarian aim of eliminating antipersonnel mines.

The 18th Meeting of States Parties will take place in November 2020 and, due to COVID-19, its format is still under consideration. This will be a moment for states to report on the progress and remaining challenges in implementation of the Treaty and the Oslo Action Plan.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Condemn any use of antipersonnel mines and reiterate that any use of landmines by any actor is unacceptable;
- Report on the progress towards joining the Treaty;
- Promote the Treaty by engaging bilaterally in discussions on the universalisation and implementation of the MBT; and
- Vote in favour of the resolution on the MBT and encourage others, such as regional group members, to do as well.

Beyond the First Committee, states should:

- Take all possible efforts to advance full universalisation and implementation of the Treaty globally and nationally;

- Contribute to discussions on how to ensure that there are sufficient resources which are being used efficiently to reach the goal of a mine-free world by 2025;
- Participate in meetings of the MBT and report on the efforts and challenges in implementing the OAP;
- Use bilateral and multilateral fora (e.g. high-level dialogues, Universal Periodic Review and regional meetings) to urge the states not party to join the MBT;
- Ensure active participation of landmine survivors; and
- Present annual transparency reports on time in compliance with the transparency obligations of the MBT.

Author: Diana Carolina Prado Mosquera



Cluster munitions

Cluster Munitions Coalition

Background

Impressive progress has been made towards ridding the world of cluster munitions over the last decade. The weapon has been successfully stigmatised, with 60 per cent of countries supporting the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), which has 109 states parties and 13 signatories. A large majority of other states abide by the prohibition on use and production of these nefarious weapons. Approximately 175 million submunitions have been destroyed, representing 99 per cent of stocks held by states parties. Vast areas of land have been cleared with ten countries finishing clearance completely—most recently Croatia and Montenegro— and steps to assess and address the needs of cluster munitions survivors and victims are being taken.

All states should join the CCM to promote international law, show solidarity with affected countries and communities, and to prevent future suffering by putting an end to cluster munitions once and for all.

Current context

Among the key challenges facing the CCM currently are the ongoing use of cluster munitions in Syria, the continued slow pace of universalisation, recent delays in implementation of time-bound obligations of the Convention, as well as implementation of victim assistance provisions.

Though impressive progress has been made and the use of these weapons by anyone, anywhere, under any circumstances is unacceptable and illegal, the *Cluster Munition Monitor 2019*¹ reported that cluster munitions continued to be used in Syria by government forces with the support from Russia. At least 674 cluster-munition attacks were reported. That accounts for more than 80 per cent of all recorded casualties globally.

In recent years the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the Human Rights Council have both condemned the use of cluster munitions in Syria. In 2019, the UNGA resolution on the implementation of the Convention was passed with 144 votes in favour, including 30 non-signatories. Russia was the only country who voted against it.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of entry into force of the CCM and the Convention's Second Review Conference will take place in Lausanne, Switzerland on 23-27 November 2020. It is critical that the Review Conference and its outcome documents effectively address the key challenges facing the Convention, namely: any ongoing use of cluster munitions; protection of the Convention's norms; the slow pace of universalisation; and recent implementation delays. Whichever format the Second Review Conference takes in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it must ensure inclusive participation of civil society and survivors.

The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the inequalities and the multiple and intersecting forms

of discrimination, it has also shown the different challenges victims and survivors face. Having a Lausanne Action Plan that takes into consideration diversity and a better understanding of different people's experiences in all its aspects will ensure that all affected communities are included, protected, and their needs are better acted upon.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given and continues to give different lessons of why human security should be at the forefront.

Recommendations

During the First Committee, delegations should:

- Condemn recent instances of use of cluster munitions (in Syria);
- Report on steps taken to join the Convention;
- Engage bilaterally in discussions on the universalisation or implementation of the Convention; and
- Vote in favour of the resolution on cluster munitions and encourage others, such as regional group members, to do as well.
- Request support on ratification or accession from the Implementation Support Unit, the Cluster Munition Coalition, UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the coordinators of the working group on universalisation;
- Use all bilateral and multilateral fora (e.g. high-level dialogues, Universal Periodic Review and regional meetings) to urge states not party to join the CCM;
- Ensure that the Lausanne Action Plan is ambitious and lays out targeted and effective actions to a cluster munition free world by 2030;
- Condemn all use of cluster munitions;
- Ensure an active participation of cluster munition victims and survivors in all aspects of the Convention; and
- Continue providing high levels of cooperation and assistance and increase technical and financial support for victim assistance in particular, to allow fulfilment of the Convention's obligations.

Author: Diana Carolina Prado Mosquera

Beyond the First Committee, states should:

- Follow-up on the steps taken to ratify or accede to the Convention in advance of the Second Review Conference;
- Renew and redouble states parties' efforts to achieve universalisation of the CCM, including by reaching out to neighbouring and partner states to encourage joining;



¹ See <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2019/cluster-munition-monitor-2019.aspx>.

Depleted uranium weapons

International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons (ICBUW)

Background

Depleted uranium (DU) is a by-product of the uranium enrichment process, which contains proportionally less of the fissionable uranium isotope U235, and more of the isotope U238 than natural uranium. It is classified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as low-level radioactive waste. As a material it is highly dense and pyrophoric, meaning that it has an incendiary effect upon impact. This effect can generate an aerosol of micron and sub-micron particles that can spread between tens and hundreds of metres from the target.

DU is used by a number of states in armour-piercing-incendiary ammunition fired by tanks, armoured fighting vehicles, and aircraft. DU weapons have been controversial since their first major use in the 1991 Gulf War. Radioactive and chemically toxic, DU use creates hotspots of persistent contamination that present a hazard to communities long after conflict ends, particularly for pregnant women, as well as children. Buildings and civilian infrastructure have regularly been targeted with DU, and its use can contaminate soils and groundwater and create vast quantities of contaminated military scrap. Effectively managing DU's post-conflict legacy places a significant financial and technical burden on affected states.

The refusal by some states to acknowledge the civilian health risks from DU contrasts starkly with the protective measures provided to their military personnel, as well as their own domestic standards for radioactive waste management, standards

that should form the basis of post-conflict DU management. It is also at odds with the shift in some DU user states towards less toxic alternatives for DU in munitions—itself a tacit acknowledgement of their growing unacceptability.¹

Current context

In spite of the calls made in previous UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions on depleted uranium², quite often no additional information has been released on the precise locations of DU munitions fired that could aid the identification, clean up, and remediation of target areas and awareness-raising measures. Such efforts would also be in line with the recommendations provided by the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Hazardous Substances and Wastes in 2016.³

On the other hand, there is growing national jurisprudence (such as in Italy⁴, and now in France⁵) to acknowledge compensation claims of DU victims based on a corresponding causal link. Civilian victims of DU use in Southern Serbia have been reported through the complaint procedure run by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.⁶

Peer-reviewed studies into the health risks and environmental behaviour of DU have continued to be published. In confirming a novel radiation effect from DU, researchers at the United States Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute suggested that cancer risk assessment models may have been underestimated;⁷ another study provided further recognition of DU's genotoxicity and the

means through which it can damage DNA.⁸ Finally, and more recently, a study analysing the impact of nanometre and micrometre sized particles of DU in the environment, states that the toxic effect of DU is overwhelmingly due to chemical and not radiological properties. With decreasing enrichment, the radiotoxicity reduces as well, while the chemical toxicity remains perpetual.⁹

Meta analyses of contamination in the Balkans¹⁰ and Middle East¹¹ both drew attention to the lack of data¹² on human exposure in affected regions. At least, and in the context of the so-called Gulf War and Balkan combat illnesses, it is assumed to be reasonable that DU can exert an additive toxic effect on the mitochondrial DNA.¹³

The health and environmental legacy of DU use should be viewed in the context of growing concern over the polluting legacy of armed conflict. UN Environment Assembly resolution 3/15 in 2017 specifically addressed the need to mitigate and minimise the effects of pollution on people in vulnerable situations, stressing the need for the swift identification, assessment, and remediation of conflict pollution.¹⁴ The International Law Commission (ILC) has adopted “Draft principles on protection of the environment in relation to armed conflict”¹⁵, no. 16 of which is devoted to “toxic and hazardous remnants of war”, their removal or rendering harmless. Not to forget that the COVID-19 pandemic “...has increased the challenges faced by conflict survivors” as stated in an Open Letter from Civil Society, which can be found elsewhere in this briefing book.¹⁶

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Raise concerns over the potential use of DU in past and current conflict areas and the

need for support to DU victims in regional and national statements; and

- Explain how they are implementing and possibly further developing A/RES/73/38 “Effects of the use of armaments and ammunitions containing depleted uranium”, in their national and regional statements.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Disclose and exchange targeting coordinates of any use of DU weapons to facilitate clearance and civilian exposure studies;
- Contribute technical and financial assistance to states affected by DU contamination, including public health and environmental monitoring for communities affected by the use of DU;
- Utilise suitable cooperation and institutional schemes, including, as appropriate, those of humanitarian demining;
- Establish a link to ongoing discussions and decision-making processes on the issue of Environment and Conflict; and
- Help strengthen the global norm against their use and dealing with its consequences by applying legal arguments of international humanitarian, human rights and environmental law, referring in particular to the precautionary principle, or approach.

Author: Manfred Mohr



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- 1 For example the use of DU—or beryllium, cobalt or nickel—in the proposed ammunition for the F35 Joint Strike Fighter was branded undesirable on the basis of its toxicity. See <https://www.fbo.gov/utills/view?id=f934399b74944eb51de1ec687f89bba8>.
- 2 The most recent resolution was adopted in 2018. The resolution, voting result, and explanations of vote are available at <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/unga/2018/resolutions>.
- 3 The Special Rapporteur called for “...an effective remedy for hazardous remnants of conflict and other military activities, including funding for full remediation, comprehensive medical treatment and compensation for individuals experiencing the effects of exposure to these materials”. See A/HRC/33/41, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes*, 2016, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/33/41>.
- 4 “Damages for Family of Soldier Killed by Uranium in Kosovo,” 16 March 2016, https://www.corriere.it/english/16_marzo_16/damages-for-family-of-soldier-killed-by-uranium-kosovo-f4179050-eb81-11e5-bd81-e841f592bd45.shtml.
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- 9 Lind et al, “Nanometer-micrometer sized uranium (DU) particles in the environment,” *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity*, 2020, Volume 211, pp. 1-8, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336926631_Nanometermicrometer_sized_depleted_uranium_DU_particles_in_the_environment.
- 10 Bešić et al, “Meta-analysis of depleted uranium levels in the Balkan region,” *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity*, 2017, Volume 172, pp. 207-217, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvrad.2017.03.013>.
- 11 Ibid, pp. 67-74, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvrad.2018.06.004>.
- 12 For example the use of DU—or beryllium, cobalt or nickel—in the proposed ammunition for the F35 Joint Strike Fighter was branded undesirable on the basis of its toxicity. See <https://www.fbo.gov/utills/view?id=f934399b74944eb51de1ec687f89bba8>.
- 13 Bjørklund et al, “Depleted uranium and Gulf War Illness: Updates and comments on possible mechanisms behind the syndrome,” *Environmental Research*, 2020, Volume 181, pp. 1-5, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0013935119307248?via%3Dihub>.
- 14 UN Environment Assembly, “Pollution mitigation and control in areas affected by armed conflict or terrorism,” UNEP/EA.3/Res.1, 2017, <https://undocs.org/UNEP/EA.3/Res.1>.
- 15 See <https://undocs.org/en/A/CN.4/L.876>.
- 16 The Open Letter on COVID-19 and Humanitarian Disarmament has been endorsed by more than 250 civil society organisations.

Incendiary weapons

Human Rights Watch

Background

Incendiary weapons, which produce heat and fire through the chemical reaction of a flammable substance, cause excruciating burns that are difficult to treat and lead to long-term physical and psychological injury. The weapons also start fires that can destroy civilian objects and infrastructure.

Protocol III to the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), adopted in 1980, prohibits certain uses of incendiary weapons, but its restrictions have failed to stop the civilian harm seen in Syria and elsewhere. The CCW protocol has two major loopholes. First, it prohibits the use of air-delivered incendiary weapons in “concentrations of civilians,” but has weaker regulations for ground-launched models. Second, many states parties believe the current definition does not cover multipurpose munitions, such as white phosphorus, because the definition is based on the purpose for which they were “primarily designed,” rather than on their effects.

Closing these loopholes, which would be legally if not politically straightforward, would create stronger rules for states parties and increase the stigma against incendiary weapons, influencing even actors outside the treaty.

Current context

This year is a crucial one for efforts to strengthen the legal regime on incendiary weapons. The CCW Meeting of States Parties, scheduled for November 2020, will set the agenda for the 2021 Review

Conference. Review conferences are traditionally the forum at which CCW states parties commit to amending or adopting new protocols.

The annual CCW meeting in 2019 saw both sustained support for addressing the humanitarian problems of incendiary weapons and small diplomatic gains. The majority of the states that spoke on the issue voiced concern about the use of incendiary weapons and called for setting aside time to discuss the issue in more depth.¹ The meeting’s final report recognised the widespread condemnation of use and calls for dedicated discussions on Protocol III, even though Russia took advantage of the body’s consensus rules to block the proposal to place the protocol on the 2020 agenda.

The most recent use of incendiary weapons has taken place in Syria. Since November 2012, Human Rights Watch has identified, through open-source material and interviews, almost 150 incendiary weapons attacks by the Syrian-Russian military alliance in Syria. The total number of attacks is likely much higher because some go unreported and others are not recorded by visual media so cannot be investigated.

In May–June 2019 alone, Human Rights Watch identified 27 uses of incendiary weapons, almost all of which involved ground-launched incendiary rockets. An attack on May 25 in Khan Sheikhoun, Idlib, for example, left approximately 175,000 square meters of burned farmland, according to Human Rights Watch’s analysis of satellite imagery.²

To make these identifications, Human Rights Watch reviewed videos and photographs of incendiary weapons use that were taken by the general public, first responders, and activists. The organisation examined additional visual material and testimony from after attacks showing the effects of incendiary weapons as well as their remnants. Human Rights Watch also assessed a time series of satellite imagery and identified extensive burn scars on agricultural land and near villages.

Syria has not joined CCW Protocol III, but Russia is a party and legally bound by its provisions.

Since 2010, more than three dozen countries, along with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN Secretary-General, and non-governmental organisations, have highlighted the harm that incendiary weapons can cause to civilians, and many have called for revisiting CCW Protocol III.³ Protocol III appeared on the agenda of the CCW annual meetings in 2017 and 2018, but Russia's veto led to its removal in 2019.

Although the pandemic has created uncertainty about the format of upcoming disarmament meetings, those bodies should ensure that all states, international organisations, and civil society groups have the opportunity to express their views on incendiary weapons. States should speak out on the issue at First Committee and during other segments of the CCW's November 2020 meeting. Indeed, they should intensify their work on the topic now so that they are prepared to take concrete action at the 2021 CCW Review Conference.

Recommendations

During First Committee:

- Delegations should draw more attention to the humanitarian concerns of incendiary weapons and the need to strengthen international law. Raising the issue at First Committee would bolster efforts to address incendiary weapons at CCW, where most discussions have taken place to date;
- Delegations should call for a formal review of Protocol III and amendments to address the negative humanitarian impacts of incendiary weapons; and
- Delegations should publicly condemn incendiary weapons use and urge states not party to accede to the CCW and Protocol III.

Beyond First Committee:

- At their annual meeting, CCW states parties should both condemn incendiary weapon use and call for reviewing and strengthening Protocol III; and
- CCW states parties should add Protocol III to the agenda of the 2021 Review Conference, with the eye to agreeing to a mandate to amend the protocol.

Author: Bonnie Docherty

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

1 Human Rights Watch notes from Meeting of States Parties to the CCW, November 2019.

2 "Russia/Syria: Flurry of Prohibited Weapons Attacks," Human Rights Watch press release, 3 June 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/03/russia/syria-flurry-prohibited-weapons-attacks>.

3 For more information, see Human Rights Watch and the Harvard Law School International Human Rights Clinic, *Standing Firm against Incendiary Weapons*, November 2019, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/news_attachments/201911arms_incendiaries.pdf.

Small arms and light weapons

International Action Network on Small Arms

Background

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) are frequently the weapons used in armed violence, including in armed conflict, criminal and interpersonal violence in non-conflict settings, gender-based violence, and violence involving armed gangs and organised crime. The proliferation of and misuse of SALW continues to pose a systemic and pervasive threat to the social and economic development of many countries. To reduce deaths resulting from the use of SALW, states need to focus on armed violence as a whole, rather than limiting their efforts to addressing only conflict violence. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated in *Securing our Common Future*, “High levels of arms and ammunition in circulation contribute to insecurity, cause harm to civilians, facilitate human rights violations and impede humanitarian access.”¹

Key instruments that address the trade in and misuse of SALW include the UN Programme of Action to Reduce, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (UNPoA, 2001) and its accompanying International Tracing Instrument (ITI, 2005); the UN Firearms Protocol (entry into force, 2005), supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (entry into force, 2003); and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT, entry into force, 2014).

Current context

The seventh Biennial Meeting of States on the UNPoA (BMS7), which was scheduled for June 2020, has been postponed until 2021 as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This delay gives states additional time to assess progress toward implementing the results of the June 2018 Review Conference on the UNPoA (RevCon3). The final outcome document for RevCon3 included renewed commitments by states to address a range of issues, including stockpile management and security, preventing the illicit manufacturing of SALW, marking, improving record keeping, addressing diversion, regulating arms brokering, and destroying surplus, confiscated, seized, and collected SALW. States also recognised the need for strengthened participation of women in implementation processes relating to the UNPoA and reaffirmed the need for states to mainstream gender in their implementation efforts. The delay also gives more time for completion of the important work of the Group of Governmental Experts on Problems Arising from the Accumulation of Conventional Ammunition Stockpiles in Surplus.

At time of writing, the form that the UN General Assembly First Committee will take is not yet clear. Even if the First Committee meets virtually or the meeting is limited in other ways, states could still follow virtually all of the recommendations below, both independently and in regional groupings. Proposals that are not put forward at the First

Committee could also be included in the BMS7 preparatory process and in BMS7 itself.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has constrained states' ability to meet and make progress on these issues. Finding ways to move forward while ensuring that civil society is fully included in substantive discussions is an important priority.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Focus on resolutions supporting gender-focused measures to prevent, curb, and eradicate SALW proliferation and violence, and work to ensure women's full and effective participation and representation in arms control programmes and diplomatic processes, including incorporating the results of the Fifth Conference of States Parties on the Arms Trade Treaty (CSP5), with its focus on gender;²
- Present comprehensive reports on their progress on meeting their RevCon3 commitments for BMS7;
- Emphasise the importance of addressing pervasive SALW armed violence, recognising that the vast majority of deaths and injuries due to SALW use occur in violence and crime, not in armed conflict;
- Strengthen the focus on achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 and respecting human rights law, international humanitarian law, and UN principles governing the use of force; and

- Prepare proposals to encourage states to exchange good practices on preventing, combatting, and eradicating the illicit trade in SALW and ammunition.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Prepare their national reports on progress in implementing their commitments from RevCon3, to be considered at BMS7;
- Develop and take advantage of synergies among the UNPoA, the Firearms Protocol, and the ATT, to increase participation in these instruments and strengthen their implementation;³
- Utilise UNPoA provisions on recordkeeping, end-user certification, prevention of diversion, stockpile safety and security, and provision for destruction of surplus weapons and weapons that remain when conflicts end, to strengthen the implementation of other relevant instruments;
- Apply the criteria, guidelines, and prohibitions in the ATT to help bring more of the international trade in conventional weapons, including SALW, into compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law;
- Partner with civil society organisations, by including civil society representatives on national delegations, fully integrating them into the work to reduce the human costs of armed violence, and ensuring diverse leadership from survivors, youth, and other traditionally underrepresented groups;
- Commit to increasing funding for civil society's work to raise awareness of these issues; and

- Implement all of the SDGs that are related to arms control issues. For example, fully addressing SDG 5, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” would affect the substance of states’ deliberations on the UNPoA and the ATT, as well as the membership and staffing of relevant agencies, national commissions, and delegations to international meetings and negotiations.

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1 António Guterres, *Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/sg-disarmament-agenda-pubs-page.pdf>; and “IANSA Quick Guide to Small Arms Issues in *Securing our Common Future*,” available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/bb4a5b_6b2c03222cf64947b0a15739f943f34c.pdf?index=true.

2 For additional detail and recommendations on these issues, see “Small Arms, Big Harms: A Call to Action by Civil Society on Gender and Small Arms Control,” IANSA, updated August 2019, https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/bb4a5b_3c33ffcbbd784b2e9e0276cfd89057e7.pdf and “Gaps in Women’s Participation and Representation in the Small Arms and Light Weapons Process,” IANSA, June 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/y9pcfaeq>.

3 See also “Quick Guide to the Results of the 2018 Review Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons,” IANSA, revised April 2019, https://92054894-4da4-47e4-9276-4b6cfef27021.filesusr.com/ugd/bb4a5b_6916952e48df41f2aed3b458a59286c1.pdf.



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International arms trade

Control Arms

Background

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) seeks to reduce human suffering by bringing the conventional arms trade under control. Implemented effectively, it can create new global norms for the transfers of arms and ammunition, assessed against the risk of misuse. Since the Treaty's entry into force in December 2014, 110 UN member states have become party to the ATT, with six new members in 2020—Maldives, Namibia, China, Sao Tome and Principe, Afghanistan, and Niue.

At the same time, international arms transfers have also increased by 5.5 per cent.¹ More concerning, arms transfers to countries in conflict, particularly in the Middle East have also increased by 61 per cent, with Saudi Arabia becoming the world's largest arms importer over the past six years.² During this time, ATT states parties including the United Kingdom, France, and Italy have continued to transfer arms to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners for use in Yemen, despite extensive documentation of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Yemen, as revealed by the UN, international research organisations, and civil society.

This year, as the world faces not only the COVID-19 pandemic, but also economic decline and instability, the consequences of irresponsible arms transfers and diversion are more devastating than ever. Yet, arms transfers have continued unabated, with a number of weapons manufacturers having been designated as “essential service” in a

number of countries³ including Italy and the UK. A number of governments have also lifted national restrictions on arms transfers to the Saudi-led coalition⁴ despite calls for a global ceasefire.⁵ Air strikes carried out by the Saudi-led coalition and the use of hospitals for military purposes by the Houthi forces⁶ have created barriers to accessing healthcare facilities in a country where the health system is already faced with a severe shortage of medical supplies and personnel.

Current context

The ATT process was not spared the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic this year. The second ATT Working Group meetings and the preparatory meeting for the Sixth Conference of States Parties (CSP6) that were scheduled for 14-17 April 2020, did not take place and instead, ATT stakeholders were invited to submit their statements and input in writing.

A “silence procedure” enabled ATT states parties to take action on 17 draft decisions put forward for consideration at CSP6. Following a 20-day period within which ATT states parties reviewed and had the opportunity to raise objections to the draft decisions, eleven of the 17 decisions were adopted. A majority were procedural in nature in order to safeguard the continuity of the ATT process and the work of the ATT Secretariat, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, two decisions that contained substantive aspects were adopted without open debate, discussion, or deliberation: one on focused on the mandate and priority areas of work of the ATT's Working Group on Transparency and Reporting (WGTR); and other which established a Diversion Information Exchange Forum, which will be a closed mechanism for states parties and signatories only to discuss concrete issues on diversion, including actual cases of diversion.

The topic of transparency—one of the key purposes of the Treaty alongside reducing human suffering and contributing to peace, security and stability—was at the centre of many of the discussions at CSP6. While these extraordinary working methods were adopted as a way to ensure continuity in the ATT process, they did not allow for significant progress towards the Treaty's effective implementation. Critically, these working methods also did not allow for open deliberations on the substantive decisions put forward for adoption this year, thereby weakening transparency, a key purpose of the ATT.

The reporting obligations found in article 13 of the ATT are key to bringing transparency to the global arms trade. Yet almost six years on, the steady decline in the quality of ATT reporting and a trend towards confidential reporting risks undermining the progress made to date in the ATT process in this area. Analysis from the 2020 edition of the Control Arms' ATT Monitor Annual Report⁷ shows that only 51 of the 97 states parties due to submit annual reports this year have done so (52 per cent), and nine have opted to keep their reports confidential (19 per cent). Analysis of initial reports shows that 100 states parties were due to submit their reports, and only 76 have done so (76 per cent). As with annual reports, confidential reporting rates for initial reports are on the rise, from six per cent in May 2016 to 18 per cent in June 2020.

The ATT's Working Group on Effective Treaty Implementation (WGETI) continued in 2020 to address the implementation of specific ATT articles in three dedicated sub-working groups on articles 6 and 7 (prohibitions and export assessment), article 9 (transit and trans-shipment), and article 11 (diversion) with the aim of developing good practices in the establishment of national control systems.

On 24 December 2020, the ATT will celebrate its sixth anniversary. This is noteworthy as after this date, ATT states parties will be allowed to propose amendments to the Treaty's text. Ambassador Lansana Gberie of Sierra Leone was elected President of CSP7, which is scheduled to take place in Geneva, Switzerland from 30 August – 03 September 2021.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Highlight and challenge arms transfers that contribute to human suffering;
- Recognise the impact of COVID-19 on armed violence and conflict;
- Encourage Treaty universalisation;
- Acknowledge the gendered impact of arms flows and trade, and of conflict and violence, and engage in initiatives that promote gender equality; and
- Support the annual resolution that calls for strong and effective ATT implementation.



- Call for transparency in ATT processes, including in the Diversion Information Exchange Forum;
- Share information regarding their arms transfer decision processes, in particular around article 6 and 7 risk assessment processes;
- Adopt the highest possible standards and establish the most rigorous possible practices when implementing the ATT;
- Robustly implement ATT and other obligations that seek to address diversion;
- Commit to timely, accurate, comprehensive, and public reporting; and
- Engage in the ATT process by actively participating in the working groups and preparatory meetings as well as in the CSPs.

1 “USA and France dramatically increase major arms exports; Saudi Arabia is largest arms importer,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 9 March 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/usa-and-france-dramatically-increase-major-arms-exports-saudi-arabia-largest-arms-importer-says>.

2 Ibid.

3 See, for example, “Decreto del presidente del consiglio dei ministri”, 22 March 2020, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/22/20A01807/sg> and “Pentagon declares defense contractors ‘critical infrastructure,’ must continue work”, 20 March 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2020/03/20/pentagon-declares-defense-contractors-critical-infrastructure-must-continue-work/>.

4 See, for example <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/britain-arms-sell-saudi-arabia-militaryexports-a9605636.html>, <https://nationalpost.com/news/saudi-arabian-canadian-arms-deal-improvedmore-transparent-federal-government> and <https://www.dw.com/en/german-arms-sale-approvals-jump-slightly-in-first-quarter-of-2020/a-53080988>.

5 See, for example <https://twitter.com/antonioгутерres/status/1242155073981087744> or <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-global-ceasefire-would-be-gamechanger-250-million-children-living-conflict>.

6 *Report of the detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen on “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014,”* UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 3 September 2019, A/HRC/42/CRP.1, p.9, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/A_HRC_42_CRP_1.PDF.

7 Control Arms Secretariat, *ATT Monitor 2020 Annual Report*, 26 August 2020, https://attmonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EN_ATT_Monitor-Report-2020_Online.pdf.

Outer space

Project Ploughshares

Background

The world depends on outer space to support everyday life and security, a dependence made starkly evident by the COVID-19 pandemic. Satellite communications have become a universal lifeline in a time of physical separation. Satellite imagery is used to manage the spread and impacts of the pandemic, including infectious disease modelling and monitoring global food production. Satellite navigation systems help to assess social distancing measures. Beyond the pandemic, space-based applications continue to provide concrete social and economic benefits for a growing proportion of humanity.

Such use cannot be taken for granted. Maintaining global access to and use of the outer space domain requires a focus on the security and sustainability of space as an environment that can be safely used by all. Yet the pandemic is short-circuiting space governance at a time of rapid change. Growing recourse to unilateralism risks fundamentally changing the nature of outer space as a peaceful, global commons.

The risk is particularly acute in relation to the security of space-based systems. In the absence of arms control and other collective measures necessary to maintain the peaceful use of outer space, more states are instead preparing for warfare, evidenced by the growing number of military units and forces dedicated to warfighting operations in space. To date, at least three states have conducted ground-based anti-satellite tests.

And recent allegations have been made that a “projectile” was fired from a space-based system in July 2020.¹

The risk of armed conflict in outer space threatens all uses and users. There is no separate zone for warfighting: the whole domain is the battlefield. Orbital space is shared globally and largely dictated by function, most satellites support multiple purposes and communities, and the damage from debris and other harmful environmental effects is indiscriminate and potentially catastrophic. Yet efforts to prevent this outcome and to preserve outer space as a peaceful domain continue to falter.

Current context

Widespread support for relevant UN General Assembly First Committee resolutions including on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS), Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space Activities (TCBM), and International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space indicates strong concern for the need to maintain outer space as a peaceful, global commons. But the international community is deeply divided on how to preserve and enhance this security, particularly the threat of an arms race in outer space.

The Conference on Disarmament, which has the primary responsibility for negotiations related to PAROS, has been deadlocked and unable to

conduct substantive discussions for decades. While the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) is a critical forum to address safety and sustainability in space, some members insist that its mandate precludes discussion of any security-related issues. Meanwhile, specific arms control proposals for both legally binding treaties and politically-binding norms of behaviour have stalled. And the UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space concluded in 2019 without a consensus report.

UN member states emerged from First Committee more divided than ever in 2019. Four resolutions were presented to advance political discussions, but for the second consecutive year, not a single one received consensus. Particularly disheartening was the fate of the resolution on TCBMs, which suffered splintering support after years of long-standing consensus among member states. The appearance of new, contentious language within some of the resolutions suggests a broader political struggle over the future direction of space governance.

And yet, there are clear opportunities for progress by building on existing international commitments including the Guidelines on the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space (LTS) adopted by COPUOS. A joint meeting in 2019 of the First Committee and the Fourth Committee, under which COPUOS is mandated, called for greater implementation of existing security and transparency measures in face of growing military activity.² Interest in an agreement that would restrict the intentional creation of debris through anti-satellite tests is also growing. And despite the loss of voting consensus on TCBMs, political support remains strong.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Re-establish consensus on a resolution to strengthen TCBMs related to outer space activities;
- Advance proposals for concrete security measures for space systems by building on momentum linked to:
 - Restricting military activities that intentionally create debris; and
 - Identifying specific responsible space behaviours and improving the understanding of intent to reduce the risk of conflict in space;
- Condemn any anti-satellite tests and the development of weapons to be placed in orbit or any system to be used to damage or destroy space-based assets;
- Pledge not to use any space- or ground-based capabilities, whether exclusively military or multi-use in nature, to deliberately damage or destroy space assets;
- Highlight the importance of preventing an arms race and the escalation of armed conflict into outer space;
- Indicate support for the negotiation of a treaty preventing an arms race in outer space and for practical voluntary measures toward that end; and
- Re-iterate the status of outer space as a global commons.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Refrain from testing and deploying space-based weapons or weapons that target space-based assets, including anti-satellite technologies;
- Work to enhance synergies and cooperation between the First Committee and other relevant UN bodies working on outer space security issues, including UN COPUOS, the CD, and the UN Disarmament Commission;
- Provide greater transparency on national uses of space, including military uses and technology demonstrations;

- Ratify and implement the existing collection of outer space treaties; and
- Implement best practices identified in the Guidelines on the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space (LTS) adopted by COPUOS, and report on national progress.

Author: Jessica West



1 United States (US) Space Command Public Affairs Office, "Russia conducts space-based anti-satellite weapons test," US Space Command, 23 July 2020, <https://www.spacecom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/2285098/russia-conducts-space-based-anti-satellite-weapons-test/>.

2 Jessica West, "Outer space," First Committee Monitor, Vol. 17, No. 5, 4 November 2019, pp. 10-11, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/FCM19/FCM-2019-No5.pdf>.



Cyber peace and security

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Background

The terms cyber or digital security have come to include an ever-widening spectrum of activities. These include espionage, surveillance, privacy intrusions, denial-of-service attacks, ransomware, and malware operations that variously impact states and individuals, and that can either target or utilise information and communications technology (ICT). Many of these activities have the ability to disrupt, disable, or destroy vital physical infrastructure or national or human security and well-being. Cyber operations have become an effective tool for states seeking to exercise power by causing disruption or confusion in other countries. Such operations are also transforming espionage. Digital technology has added new means by which governments can control or repress the human rights of individuals or groups.

There are also important points of intersection with militarism and traditional arms proliferation: for example, the dark web facilitates illicit arms trafficking while certain other technologies raise concerns related to surveillance and intelligence gathering. The vulnerability of certain existing weapon systems to digital attack present new areas of alarm, but also compelling incentives to disarm.

Since the first instances of malicious cyber operations between states were uncovered, there has been a growing pre-supposition of cyber space as a militarised one. This has been reinforced by the adoption of national cyber

strategies that allow for offensive operations or for their integration into military activities. Given the overwhelming civilian use of ICTs, it's vital to protect and promote peace in cyber space as based on a human-centric understanding of security and diversity of perspectives.

In 2018, the First Committee established its sixth Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) and for the first time, an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on ICTs. These are meeting concurrently throughout 2020 and 2021.¹ The two entities have similar, yet not identical, mandates. They also have varying modalities to receive inputs from non-governmental stakeholders or non-Group members. The creation of two similar bodies was against the preference of most UN member states; they emerged as a result of friction between the United States and Russia, each of which sponsored the respective resolutions that led to the establishment of each.

Current context

The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the substantial role that ICTs play in multiple dimensions of our lives and the importance of meaningful access to them. Yet, cybercrime against individuals has increased by up to 600 per cent since the start of the pandemic.² Multiple digital operations targeting medical facilities worldwide have sought to undermine responses to the health crisis, spread misinformation, or exploit our current increased reliance on digital

connectivity.³ Some governments are instituting digital contact tracing applications that raise concerns about privacy, surveillance, and human rights.⁴

More governments are reporting “attacks” against their critical infrastructure in this time as well.⁵ This shows that actors are increasingly incorporating ICT use into their strategies to retaliate against perceived aggressions, or to cause disruption elsewhere; and that relevant norms against such behaviour are not being respected.

Within the First Committee context, the OEWG on developments in the field of ICTs held its first substantive session in September 2019 and its second in February 2020. The third and final substantive session was scheduled for July 2020, in which member states would have sought to adopt a final report containing decisions and recommendations in line with the six agenda items it has focused on: threats, norms and principles; international law; confidence building measures; capacity building; and regular institutional dialogue.⁶ It has been tentatively rescheduled for March 2021, although that may require formal confirmation through the General Assembly.

To maintain momentum, OEWG Chair Jürg Lauber of Switzerland is convening a series of informal consultations. A pre-draft report was released in March 2020 and will form the basis of the informal consultations.⁷ Participating member states have found much common ground in most of the six agenda items, but significant differences remain in the topics of international law and regular institutional dialogue. There is also some divergence of views about the need for new international law in this area or if the existing norms are sufficient.

In December 2019, more than 100 representatives of civil society, academia, and industry participated in a three-day informal OEWG multi-stakeholder session. Non-governmental organisations without ECOSOC status have been prevented from participating in formal OEWG meetings and civil society has so far not been granted access to any of the virtual informal consultations. Non-governmental stakeholders can make written submissions to the OEWG, which are then made available online.⁸

The GGE held its first meeting in December 2019 but will not submit a final report to the General Assembly until 2021. The group is comprised of 25 members who are working in a personal capacity and is chaired by Ambassador Guilherme de Aguiar Patriota of Brazil. It is also examining new modalities to meet amidst the pandemic.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Articulate views and priorities for the GGE and OEWG;
- Speak out against hostile and provocative actions in cyberspace and the militarisation of technology, and speak in favour of cyber peace, human rights, and human security; and
- Support the full inclusion of civil society in future meetings of the OEWG; mechanisms for input with the GGE; and any future relevant bodies.



- Halt the development and use of offensive cyber capabilities, strategies, and doctrines, in particular against critical health infrastructure;
- Adhere to the agreed norms for state behaviour in cyberspace and establish accountability mechanisms;
- Work cooperatively to ensure mutually reinforcing outcomes between the GGE and OEWG and other normative frameworks;
- Supporting technical capacity building to build cyber resilience; and
- Refrain from undertaking or facilitating any repression of human rights or freedoms through digital means.

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7 Dates and documents can be found on RCW’s page for the OEWG: <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/ict/oewg>.

8 See <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/ict/oewg/documents#papers> and <https://www.un.org/disarmament/open-ended-working-group/>.

Gender and disarmament

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Background

Socially constructed norms about gender—how people are expected to behave, look, and be based on perceptions of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity—have implications for disarmament and international security.

Weapons and war are coded with gender norms. Feminists have shown that the dominant discourse on these subjects tends to perpetuate the highly problematic gender constructions of men who are violent and powerful and women and others that are vulnerable and need to be protected. The framing of war and violence as “strong” and “masculine” is often coupled with a framing of peace and nonviolence as “weak” and “feminine”.¹ In this context, weapons are typically seen as important for security, power, and control. Disarmament is treated as something that makes people or countries weaker or more susceptible to attack.

Changing these norms can be aided by increasing gender diversity in disarmament. There is a stark disparity in the level and volume of participation of men as compared to women and gender non-conforming people in disarmament and arms control discussions, negotiations, and processes. Recent research has shown that at any given intergovernmental meeting on disarmament, only about one quarter of participants are likely to be women and that almost half of all delegations are likely to be composed entirely of men.² This has a direct impact on what voices and perspectives

are privileged in conversations about weapons and international security, including which are considered credible.

Yet women often suffer disproportionate or differential harm from the development, use, and trade of weapons. Men tend to make up the majority of direct victims of armed violence. Sometimes, they are targeted just for being men.³ Women, however, can face differential impacts from the use of weapons such as social and political inequalities and pressures from the increase in female-headed households; inequalities in access to survivor assistance; and higher risk of sexual violence, especially when they are displaced from their homes.⁴ LGBT+ people can also face harm from armed gender-based violence.

An intersectional feminist approach to disarmament also recognises that gender does not stand alone. As Kimberlé Crenshaw explains, inequality based on sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, (dis)ability, class, and more intersect with each other, generating various experiences and perspectives of oppression.⁵

Current context

The interest in the topic of “gender and disarmament” continues to grow in international forums. At last year’s First Committee, 17 of the adopted resolutions (28 per cent) include gender references by advocating for women’s equal

participation, recognising gendered impacts of weapons, and/or urging consideration of gender perspectives more broadly. The number of First Committee delegations speaking about gender and disarmament in their statements also continued to increase, and 79 countries signed the joint statement on gender and disarmament—nearly 20 more than in 2018.⁶

At the Fifth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty in August 2019, states endorsed a set of recommendations related to implementing the Treaty's gender provisions, including its legally binding criterion to assess the risk of gender-based violence when making arms export decisions. This builds on recognition in 2017 from the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty about the need for gender diversity in disarmament, and from the Third Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) on small arms and light weapons (SALW) in 2018, which recognised the need for states to mainstream gender dimensions in their implementation of the UNPoA.

States have recently been considering gender perspectives on issues related to cyber peace and security, including at the most recent open-ended working group on information and communications technology.⁷ In addition, the latest draft political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), currently under negotiation by states, encourages further research into gendered impacts of the use of EWIPA and calls for the amplification of the voices of those affected, including women and girls.⁸

These developments are very welcome and should be continued and enhanced in as many disarmament forums as possible. However, a more robust reflection of the gendered norms associated with weapons, war, and violence,

is also crucial for effectively addressing the challenges associated with the proliferation and use of weapons in and out of conflict. An intersectional approach that recognises the ways the implications of other inequalities for disarmament and international security is essential.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Welcome the gender perspectives included in recent forums and documents, and commit to advancing the goals contained therein;
- Ensure that gains made on gender in the 2019 First Committee are maintained and expanded;
- Collaborate to make First Committee resolutions more gender-sensitive;
- Highlight the need to ensure gender and other forms of diversity in disarmament discussions and negotiations; and
- Share their experiences with ensuring gender perspectives in disarmament policies and initiatives.

Beyond First Committee, states and other actors should:

- Avoid gender essentialisms, gender binaries, and reinforcement of violent masculinities in resolutions and action plans on disarmament and arms control;
- Effectively implement and report back on agreed provisions related to gender diversity, gender perspectives, and against gender-based violence from relevant agreements;



- Seek to ensure gender and other forms of diversity in disarmament and arms control discussions, negotiations, and peace processes, with an emphasis on amplifying perspectives of those affected by armed violence, including Black, Indigenous, and women, gender non-conforming, and LGBTQ+ people of colour;
- Continue to research and assess the specific impact that weapons, armed conflict, and armed violence have on diverse populations, including through the collection of sex- and gender-disaggregated data;
- Promote practical linkages between the Sustainable Development Goals and the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and disarmament initiatives; and
- Invest in social equality, economic justice, and other human rights instead of militarism.

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Protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts

Conflict and Environment Observatory and PAX

Background

The environmental dimensions of armed conflicts and their impact on civilians and ecosystems continued to rise up the UN's agenda in 2020. This has been driven by events during conflicts and by ongoing debates and processes in international fora. Like gender, the environment is a cross-cutting issue. Because of this, delegations have an important role to play not only in mainstreaming the environment within peace and security, but also in supporting norm development and initiatives beyond UN General Assembly (UNGA) First Committee.

Current context

Interest in the environment, peace, and security has been growing in the UN Security Council. In a 2019 Arria-formula meeting, states discussed specific environment concerns and how to address these through improved data collection, legal compliance, and environmental mainstreaming in peacekeeping missions and reporting.¹ May 2020's Protection of Civilians report stressed how environmental degradation can impact the local populations.² Meanwhile, increasing concern over the FSO Safer oil tanker moored off of Yemen has underscored the potential humanitarian impact and regional security consequences of environmental emergencies during conflicts.³

In late 2019, the General Assembly's Sixth Committee debate on the International Law Commission's (ILC) 28 draft principles on the *Protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts* saw the majority of states welcome the principles and their commentaries, which had been adopted at first reading.⁴ States now have the opportunity to submit written comments on the principles.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is expected to launch its updated *Military Guidelines for Military Manuals and Instructions on the Protection of the Environment in Times of Armed Conflict* this autumn.⁵ This major update to its 1996 guidelines should be welcomed by states and provides an opportunity to reflect on and improve their own practice. Critically, the guidelines should be viewed as a normative floor, not a ceiling. Domestic implementation will be crucial if they are to contribute towards the urgent goal of reducing environmental harm.

The normative landscape around conflict and the environment will be further enriched by the Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure,⁶ and the newly launched Principles for Assisting Victims of Toxic Remnants of War.⁷ Collectively, these four initiatives represent the most significant development in the framework protecting people and ecosystems from the environmental consequences of conflicts in decades.

With environmental threats and degradation ever present in contemporary conflicts, enhancing protection is vital. In Syria, armed groups have targeted croplands, impacting food security and livelihoods.⁸ Water facilities have been held hostage,⁹ while dilapidated oil infrastructure is threatening health and agriculture.¹⁰ In Ukraine, water infrastructure continues to be damaged,¹¹ pollution from abandoned coal mines threatens rivers and aquifers,¹² while landmines prevent repairs to hazardous waste storage ponds.¹³

The severity of environmental degradation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories was made clear by a UN Environment Programme assessment,¹⁴ while in Libya, conflict parties have taken up positions in proximity to environmentally risky oil infrastructure.¹⁵ In Yemen, the conflict has had a severe impact on its key agricultural areas,¹⁶ with the tactics of conflict parties being one of a number of contributing factors undermining food security.

Delegations wishing to contribute towards increasing visibility for the environment, and to international initiatives to enhance environmental protection, can do so by articulating the environmental dimensions of the issues that the First Committee addresses. For example, new approaches are considering how the environmental impact of mine action can be reduced,¹⁷ and how the clearance process can encourage land use practices that protect biodiversity and reduce carbon emissions.¹⁸ In this respect it has been positive to see support for improved environmental standards and climate sensitivity in the process to develop the Convention on Cluster Munitions' Lausanne Action Plan.¹⁹

The environmental impact of the use of explosive weapons can be serious and long-lasting, with consequences for civilians.²⁰ The process towards a political declaration is a key opportunity to integrate these forms of harm into the discourse.

The toll that the ready availability of small arms and light weapons has on biodiversity gets little attention at the First Committee but this year is the subject of an International Union for the Conservation of Nature's congress motion.²¹ There are clear synergies here between disarmament processes and biodiversity agreements that delegations should build upon.

The ICRC recently identified "a particular need for continued and scaled-up efforts to research and understand the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons testing."²² While delegations at the First Committee have often raised the environmental impact of nuclear weapons use and testing in general terms, there is value in articulating harms to both the environment and to the predominantly Indigenous peoples affected with more precision. This was an approach taken by the Human Rights Council special rapporteur Baskut Tuncak to mark the 75th anniversary of the Trinity tests in July 2020.²³

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Support the developing of a normative framework on the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts by acknowledging and fully articulating the environmental dimensions of the topics they debate.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Engage with the ILC study on the *Protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts* in the Sixth Committee, and support the adoption of its draft principles;

- Adopt, implement, and promote the revised ICRC *Guidelines for Military Manuals and Instructions on the Protection of the Environment in Times of Armed Conflict*, following their publication; and
- Work with colleagues in national capitals and different international fora to identify and take advantage of synergies to integrate disarmament initiatives with environmental agreements on climate change, biodiversity, and pollution.

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Disarmament and development

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Background

There are many direct and indirect links between military expenditure, the arms trade, violent conflict, and the reduction of available resources for social and economic development. Governments that spend excessive financial, technological, and human resources on their militaries divert resources from economic, social, and environmental programmes.

National military-industrial complexes absorb vast amounts of funding that could otherwise be spent on human security, including the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ The manufacture and use of weapons also prevent sustainable ecological development and preservation, creating unequal access to resources and further impeding poverty reduction initiatives.

Article 26 of the UN Charter tasks the UN Security Council to create a plan for the regulation of armaments and reducing military expenditure—a task it has not just neglected but vigorously undermined with its permanent members' excessive military spending, rampant arms trading, and facilitation of conflicts worldwide. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) has tried to grapple with the connections between disarmament and development for the past four decades. The International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development in 1987 adopted an action plan that included commitments to allocate resources released by disarmament

to development and consider reducing military expenditure.² This followed an in-depth study by the UN in 1982 that set out the negative impacts of a large military sector on long-term economic growth and the structural changes required for economic development.³ The 1992 Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action contained commitments on innovative finance, including reallocating military resources toward sustainable peace.⁴

Current context

The world is facing the worst public health and economic crisis in a century. The crisis is affecting all countries, although impacts are distinct across regions and different groups of societies. The health and socio-economic repercussions of COVID-19 are posing significant setbacks to the achievement of the SDGs and sustainable development more broadly, the long-term consequences of the pandemic remain uncertain at this point.

Impacts of COVID-19 exacerbate humanitarian catastrophes in conflict-affected countries such as Yemen⁵ or Libya⁶, but also aggravate armed violence in non-conflict settings. In a statement to the Sixth Conference of States Parties of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the Bahamas stressed this link: “Unemployment, national lockdowns, extreme fiscal uncertainty and multiple strains on social services all contribute to increasing tensions in

households and communities that give rise to ripe conditions for gun-related crime.”⁷

Yet, total world military expenditure rose to US \$1917 billion in 2019, an increase of 3.6 per cent from 2018 and the largest annual growth in spending since 2010.⁸ Against the backdrop of extreme hardship all over the world, deepening of inequalities, lack of adequate health care services, intensified armed violence, skyrocketing unemployment rates, and other major challenges to sustainable socio-economic development, the continually increasing military expenditures are unconscionable.

Since the adoption of the SDGs there has been increased interest from the disarmament community in development and how reducing armed violence and related insecurity can be a catalyst for achieving the goals and their targets. Target 16.4 seeks to reduce “significantly” illicit arms flows, which could be accomplished via robust implementation of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapon (UNPoA) or the ATT. The reporting mechanisms for both instruments and related data could be utilised for measuring the indicator set for Target 16.4. As well, the fulfilment of obligations relating to women, gender, sexual violence, or gender-based violence that are included in weapons treaties such as the ATT or the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons also moves us closer to achieving SDG 5 on gender equality. The UN Secretary-General’s 2018 Agenda for Disarmament reaffirmed this.

Silos remain between arms control and disarmament, and development. This poses challenges to realising the transformative intent of the 2030 Agenda. In 2019, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the main accountability platform for the SDGs, reviewed SDG 16. Only a handful of states made references to disarmament.⁹ At the 2020 HLPF, impacts of armed conflict and violence on sustainable development were largely

missing from discussions, and key issues such as disarmament “completely absent.”¹⁰

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) should ensure increased coordination between arms control and disarmament efforts and the 2030 Agenda. It needs to take more active responsibility on this issue. It could consider commissioning a new study on military spending, following a similar approach to the 1982 study that could provide recommendations for additional work on reducing military expenditure and arms production and development. The UNGA First Committee could also consider adopting practices or policies related to increasing the participation of developing countries in disarmament forums.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Recognise and reinforce the specific ways in which disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control can advance development, including the SDGs;
- Address the issue of the underrepresentation of lower-income countries and regions in multilateral disarmament forums, and suggest practical measures to correct this; and
- Suggest new ways for the UNGA to effectively engage in this issue.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Recognise COVID-19 as an opportunity to fundamentally change unsustainable and destructive systems that negatively impact people and the planet, including capitalism and militarism;



- Reduce military budgets and redirect funds to social and economic development, including public health;
- Support programmes of sponsorship, training, and capacity building;
- Raise the visibility of marginalised lower-income countries and regions by supporting the consistent collection, monitoring, and analysis of participation data, to improve awareness and measure progress;
- Identify how current practices in disarmament and arms control can facilitate progress toward fulfilling certain of the SDGs and build on those practices; and
- Consider how security reform resources and initiatives can support the SDGs to achieve mutual objectives.

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Disarmament education

International Disarmament Institute, Pace University

Background

There is broad international consensus that disarmament has an educational dimension. Educational efforts transmit information about the impact of weapons on people to decisionmakers and can build political will for disarmament. According to the 1980 UNESCO World Congress on Disarmament Education, this is not just about “dissemination of data” or even “hopes and ideals.” Rather, “effective” disarmament education must “be related to the lives and concerns of the learners,”; analyse “the political realities within which disarmament is sought”; and offer insight into “political, economic and social factors” that could enable disarmament.¹

A 2002 report by the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) on “disarmament and nonproliferation education”² focused on best practices and programmatic approaches rather than public mobilisation. Nevertheless, it clarified that disarmament education is not just education about disarmament but, most crucially, education for disarmament.

The UNSG has reported on implementation of the 2002 report’s recommendations every two years and the UN General Assembly (UNGA) has passed biennial resolutions calling for ongoing implementation. However, few states submit reports to the UNSG as requested by successive resolutions and there is little substantive programming. In a joint civil society statement to the 73rd UNGA First Committee session,

Pace University students Sydney Korman and Terrie Soule noted that “lack of funding and few professional opportunities for youth who are passionate about disarmament issues” leaves them “ultimately disengaged.”³

The 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) has offered new impetus for reinvigorating peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education. The preamble specifically recognises “the importance of peace and disarmament education in all its aspects” and stresses the role of NGOs, “religious leaders, parliamentarians, academics and the hibakusha” as representatives of the “public conscience” in pressing for nuclear disarmament.

In 2018, UNSG Antonio Guterres specifically addressed disarmament education as a contribution to SDG Target 4.7 (which includes “promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence”) in his agenda for disarmament, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*. As a result, the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) committed to “further invest in disarmament education [and] ... youth engagement.”⁴ The General Assembly’s 2018 disarmament education resolution noted the UNSG’s proposals for disarmament education in *Securing Our Common Future*.⁵ Also in 2018, the UN Security Council (UNSC) renewed its 2015 resolution on Youth, Peace and Security, calling on UNSG to report to the Council on “participation of youth in peace processes, including disarmament...”⁶

Current context

On 16 August 2019, UNODA launched its Youth4Disarmament initiative (#youth4disarmament).⁷ The project has built a network of young people interested in disarmament through a series of events and creative use of social media. In 2020, UNODA announced the selection of 10 Youth Champions for Disarmament, who will receive training to “use their talents to help raise awareness and promote change for a more peaceful and secure world.”⁸

In late 2019, the UNGA unanimously adopted its first resolution on Youth, Disarmament and Non-proliferation. It encouraged the international community “to promote the meaningful and inclusive participation of young people in discussions in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation” and stressed “the importance of... education and capacity-building.”⁹

The devastating impact of COVID-19 on the global education sector is a major challenge for the UN, member states, and civil society institutions delivering effective disarmament education. According to UNESCO, “1 billion students and youth across the planet are affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-19 outbreak.”¹⁰ Youth4Disarmament and civil society disarmament education events have had to move online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, moving disarmament policymaking into less transparent, online formats limits young people’s access to in-person engagement with diplomacy and advocacy.

The First Committee will again consider its biennial disarmament and non-proliferation education resolution in 2020. *Securing Our Common Future*, UNODA’s new Youth4Disarmament initiative, and the inclusion of peace and disarmament education in the TPNW also offer opportunities to educate

governments on their responsibilities to support disarmament education, as well as build political will for more robust and coherent initiatives and resolutions in the future.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Support and strengthen the education resolution by:
 - Engaging with the specific recommendations of the UNSG’s *Securing Our Common Future*;
 - Highlighting the need for disarmament education to amplify the voices of survivors and youth; and
 - Addressing concerns raised by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Call on relevant actors to make submissions to UNODA for the 2020 report by the UNSG on implementation of the 2002 study;
- In their statements highlight the importance of disarmament education and its relevance to achieving SDG 4 on education and SDG 16 on peace and justice; honor the crucial role of hibakusha, survivors, civil society, educational institutions and youth in disarmament education; welcome the UNSG’s disarmament education actions in *Securing Our Common Future*, UNODA’s Youth4Disarmament initiative and the inclusion of peace and disarmament education in the preamble of the TPNW; report on their government’s peace, disarmament and non-proliferation education initiatives, including efforts to engage youth; and
- Vote in favour of any resolution(s) calling on states to join the TPNW.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Provide funding and institutional support to international organisations, associations of survivors, civil society, and educational institutions providing peace, disarmament and non-proliferation education, such as UNODA's Youth4Disarmament and Disarmament Champions projects;
- Seek synergies between peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education; the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development; past General Assembly resolutions on youth and disarmament; and the Security Council resolutions on Youth, Peace and Security;
- Make a submission to UNODA for its 2022 report on support for peace, disarmament and non-proliferation education;
- Implement actions on youth and disarmament that are set out in relevant UNGA and UNSC resolutions; and
- Implement peace, disarmament and non-proliferation education in ways that are sensitive to marginalisation and differential access; such as mainstreaming gender equality across all programmes and building capacity of poorly-represented peoples and groups, including survivors of violence.

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1 UNESCO, *World Congress on Disarmament Education: Report and Final Document*, <https://unoda-web.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/assets/education/docs/uneco.pdf>.

2 *United Nations study on disarmament and non-proliferation education: Report of the Secretary-General, A/57/124*, 2002, <http://www.undocs.org/A/57/124>.

3 Joint Civil Society Statement on Disarmament Education, 2018, http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com18/statements/18Oct_DisarmEducation.pdf.

4 Antonio Guterres, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, 2018, p. 68., <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/sg-disarmament-agenda-pubs-page.pdf>.

5 Ibid.

6 UN Security Council Resolution 2419, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2419.pdf.

7 Belen Bianco, "UNODA launches 'Youth4Disarmament' Initiative with dialogue on artificial intelligence and international security," 2019, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/update/unoda-launches-youth4disarmament-initiative-with-dialogue-on-artificial-intelligence-and-international-security/>.

8 "Ten Youth Champions for the United Nations Disarmament Training Programme Announced," <https://www.un.org/disarmament/youth-champions-for-disarmament/>.

9 "Youth, disarmament and non-proliferation," A/RES/74/64, 2019, <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/64>.

10 "#LearningNeverStops: COVID-19 Education Response," 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition/>.



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