

VOL.18 NO.3

25 October 2020



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EDITORIAL: NUCLEAR BAN TREATY REACHES 50!

Ray Acheson | Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) has reached the 50 **ratifications** required for its entry into force!

Honduras deposited its instrument of ratification on 24 October, **United Nations Day**, which marks the 75th anniversary of the entry into force of the UN Charter in 1945. The governments of Jamaica and Nauru deposited their instruments of ratification on 23 October, the eve of this anniversary. Their collective efforts mean the TPNW has reached the requisite 50 ratifications to enter into force, which will happen in 90 days, on 22 January 2021.

This is truly a historic moment for **nuclear abolition**, achieved only by the relentless efforts of generations of activists and diplomats around the world. In January, nuclear weapons will be unlawful to possess, develop, deploy, test, use threaten to use, or assist in any way, shape, or form for TPNW states parties. Nuclear weapons will be on the same legal footing as biological and chemical weapons, as landmines and cluster bombs, as blinding laser weapons. Just as chemical weapon stockpiling and use is so rightly condemned, so too will be the possession of nuclear weapons.

Speaking at the **First Committee side event** where Jamaica and Nauru announced their ratifications on Friday, 23 October, **Hiroshima survivor Setsuko Thurlow** said that when she heard the news of the TPNW's imminent entry into force, she found herself communing with the spirits of hundreds of thousands of people who lost their lives in Hiroshima and Nagasaki:

I was immediately in conversation with these beloved souls—my sister, my nephew Eiji, other dear family members, my classmates, all the children and innocent people who perished. I was reporting to the dead, sharing this good news first with them, because they paid the ultimate price with their precious lives. Like many survivors, I

made a vow that their deaths would not be in vain and to warn the world about the danger of nuclear weapons, to make sure that no one else suffers as we have suffered.

Condemning the “barbaric behavior of nine nations who continue to develop more horrendous weapons, prepared to repeat nuclear massacres,” Thurlow rejoiced that so many activists and governments persisted in spite of being confronted by indifference and ignorance; in spite of being ridiculed by nuclear-armed and nuclear-dependent states. “Nuclear abolitionists everywhere can be incredibly encouraged and empowered by this new legal status. Now, with greater intensity and purpose, we will push forward.” While we have a long path to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons, she noted, “with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, we can be certain that that beautiful day will dawn.”

We are long past due for the dawn of this day. The very **first resolution** of the UN General Assembly called for the abolition of nuclear weapons, making it even more fitting that UN Day would see the advancement toward entry into force of a new international law that finally prohibits these weapons. The TPNW is, as the **International Committee of the Red Cross** (ICRC) said during general debate, a response to this resolution. Among other things, “it offers a promise to current and future generations that one day we will be freed of the dark shadow of nuclear warfare.”

This year, as several delegations have noted through the First Committee general debate, is also the 75th anniversary of the first—and hopefully last—instance of nuclear war. The horrific atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States during World War II are, as **Palestine** described, war crimes and crimes against humanity that have left “an eternal scare on humanity's conscious.” **San Marino** remarked, “The touching testimonies of the survivors

are a constant reminder that we need to urgently commit to a world free of nuclear weapons.” This is why, as in previous years, the vast majority of UN member states issued resounding calls at the First Committee for total nuclear disarmament and a redirection of resources to protect people and planet.

But instead, the nuclear-armed states continue to **actively build-up** their arsenals, modernising warheads, missiles, bombers, and submarines; and spending billions to threaten each other and the entire planet with mass destruction. Their rhetoric about their commitment to nuclear disarmament is unequivocally empty and visibly disingenuous. After China, Russia, and the United States **viciously attacked** each other in the general debate last week, accusing each other of undermining the “international security environment” and the total “world order,” they joined together with France and the United Kingdom this week in a **joint statement** that passively—and patently falsely—reiterates their assurances that they’ve got everything under control.

One sign that they do not, in fact, have everything in hand is the US government’s apparent panic about the entry into force of the TPNW. As the **Associated Press** reported, the United States has sent a letter to countries that have ratified the Treaty, informing them that they have made a “strategic error” and thus “should withdraw your instrument of ratification or accession.”

It is extremely rare, if not unprecedented, for a government to demand sovereign states to withdraw from a treaty. This behaviour is not just about undermining the TPNW, to prevent its entry into force. It also undercuts state sovereignty, which the US government purports to be all about. It is offensive to the legislative processes within each country that decided to ratify the Treaty and is a belligerent and bullish move to tell other countries—mostly those of the global south—that they have made a mistake or did not understand what they were signing up to.

This move by the US is undermining to the concept of international law, of forming binding agreements

among nations to achieve peace, safety, and well-being. Of course, given the current US government’s propensity to withdraw from treaties, the revelation that it would urge others to do the same is not really a big surprise. What’s more interesting is that for a government so dismissive about and hostile to international law, it clearly recognises the threat that this treaty poses to its behaviour—regardless of whether or not it joins.

Proponents of the TPNW have always argued that outlawing nuclear weapons is not just about constraining the behaviour of states who sign and ratify the Treaty, but about the normative impacts it will have on the behaviour of all states. Even before the TPNW enters into force, it is **already having impacts** on economic investments in nuclear weapon producing companies, on national and local debates about the bomb, on city-level support for nuclear disarmament, on public engagement and activism, and on opening up space for new conversations about the patriarchal, racist, and colonial nature of nuclear weapons.

The nuclear-armed states have denied time and again that the Treaty will have any legal or political bearing on them. Yet, time and again, their behaviour shows that they know the opposite is true. They have consistently tried to pressure other countries—by threatening, cajoling, ridiculing, and bullying—to not support the establishment of the Treaty’s negotiation, to not participate in the Treaty’s negotiation, to not sign or ratify the Treaty—and now, to withdraw from it. Why are they making all this effort if they believe the Treaty will have no impact on them?

Rather than admit that they know this Treaty will advance meaningful normative, political, and legal consequences for the possession of nuclear weapons, most of the nuclear-armed states claim that the TPNW is contrary to existing international law on nuclear weapons, particularly the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This, too, is obfuscation. The norm against nuclear weapons that the TPNW solidifies into law actually enhances non-proliferation efforts. It’s remarkable to see these so-called champions of non-proliferation—

governments that have invested billions in various initiatives to stop other countries from doing what they themselves have already done—actively try to tear down the most stringent legally-binding rules against nuclear weapon development, possession, and proliferation of nuclear weapons.

In reality, the nuclear-armed states know that the TPNW, to **paraphrase** Setsuko Thurlow at the Treaty's adoption, makes weapons that have always been immoral, now also illegal. While we have much work to do in order to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons, if the nuclear-armed states are this afraid of the prohibition treaty, we know we're on the right track.

**To learn more about the
Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear
Weapons, visit our website:**

<https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/nuclear-weapon-ban>



Photo: International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Katrin Geyer | Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

In the final day of the general debate, states continued to express deep concern at the deterioration of the global security environment, and about the nuclear-armed states that are undermining the international rules-based nuclear disarmament regime. The attempts by the nuclear-armed states to evade responsibility in implementing their nuclear disarmament obligations under international law was juxtaposed with the vast majority of states' urgent calls to eliminate these weapons of horror before another nuclear catastrophe happens. Palestine, for instance, warned, "Humanity has foolishly developed the instruments of its own extinction. It must get rid of them before it is too late." Zimbabwe also reinforced that the elimination of nuclear weapons is of paramount importance for the survival of humankind and the planet.

Humanitarian and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons

Delegations continued to focus on the devastating humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

The De-alerting Group, Iraq, Tanzania, Palestine, Malaysia, Burkina Faso, the Holy See, Myanmar, Kenya, San Marino, Côte d'Ivoire, Botswana, Panama, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) highlighted these consequences. San Marino, Tanzania, and Côte d'Ivoire further expressed deep concern about the long-lasting effects on the environment.

As well, various states pointed out that the use or threat of use is in violation of international law. Panama reminded of the International Court of Justice's opinion about the illegality of nuclear weapons. Bolivia also said it rejected the use of nuclear weapons as means of deterrence as their use would be a crime against humanity, and in violation of international law, including international humanitarian law (IHL) and the UN Charter. Palestine made similar remarks.

Zimbabwe observed that the horrors and devastation caused in Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the US dropped two nuclear bombs on them in 1945 should give impetus to member states to eliminate them. San Marino also observed that the "touching testimonies" of survivors are a constant reminder why nuclear weapons need to be eliminated. Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Palestine, Congo, Myanmar, Burkina Faso, Denmark, Tanzania and the ICRC made similar remarks. Palestine called the nuclear bombings "an eternal scare on humanity's conscious".

Nuclear weapon risks, spending, and modernisation

The De-alerting Group expressed deep concern about the multiplying risks of use when nuclear weapons are in high alert, including through the possibility of misinterpretation of early warning data, and failures or false reports by early warning systems, amongst others. It also stressed that the impact of new technologies, notably cyber, can lead to new risks or exacerbate existing ones. Montenegro also explained that the risk of "technical malfunction and human failure is always present, jeopardizing international peace and security." Similarly, the Holy See stressed that "the evolution of technologies that may find application to nuclear weapon systems, such as nuclear-powered missiles, torpedoes, and hypersonic vehicles, adds further urgency to taking up immediately negotiations for limitations and reductions."

The De-Alerting Group presented its resolution on decreasing operational readiness of weapon systems, arguing that a strong and increasing support by member states "sends a clear message about the need to reduce the readiness of nuclear weapons on high alert." The De-alerting Group paid tribute to Bruce Blair, co-founder of Global Zero, who passed away this year and who championed calls for lowering the risk and alert levels of nuclear weapons.

Zimbabwe, Kenya, Mauritania, Montenegro, Holy See, and San Marino expressed concern about the modernisation of nuclear weapons arsenals. Montenegro underscored, “Even though the overall number of nuclear weapons is declining, they are now rebuilt, modernized and much stronger than ever before. This is especially worrisome when we talk about low yield nuclear weapons, which threaten to lower the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, with potentially catastrophic consequences.” Indonesia stressed that a false sense of security based on continued reliance on nuclear weapons fuels their proliferation and an arms race.

Tanzania called on the nuclear-armed states “to divert their resources to sustainable development from further modernization, upgrading, refurbishment, or extending the lives of their nuclear weapons and related facilities.” Zambia made similar remarks. Mauritania also argued that the implementation of Article VI of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the only guarantee that nuclear-armed states will devote resources currently spent on nuclear weapons to sustainable development and international peace and security.

Concerns about lack of progress

In light of the known devastation that will be caused by nuclear weapons, and the vast amounts of resources absorbed by their modernisation, various states including Indonesia, Congo, and Tunisia worried deeply about the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament. Zimbabwe warned that instead of progressing towards nuclear disarmament, the global nuclear disarmament architecture “is collapsing before our eyes”. Furthermore, Zimbabwe expressed concern about the nuclear-armed states’ inflexibility and their reluctance to diminish their arsenals, despite their statements of intent, thereby holding the “regime hostage”.

Nuclear weapon doctrines

A few delegations, including the Holy See, called for the removal of nuclear weapons in strategic and military doctrines. It said that the strategic

doctrines of nuclear-armed states have contributed to fomenting a “climate of fear, mistrust and hostility afflicting the world today.” It therefore urged the nuclear-armed states to “begin with a renunciation of defense strategies that blur the distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons.” The Holy See further argued, “If it is immoral to threaten to use nuclear weapons for purposes of deterrence, it is even worse to intend to use them as just another instrument of war, as some nuclear doctrines propose.”

The permanent five members of the UN Security Council (P5), which all possess and deploy nuclear weapons, said that a dialogue on doctrines “is an essential element of the P5 roadmap.” They informed that they will hold a side event presenting their respective doctrines at the Review Conference of the NPT.

Nuclear arms control

Italy, Tunisia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Denmark, Malaysia, and San Marino welcomed the recent dialogue between the US and Russia and hoped that this would lead to the extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). Denmark noted that “the significance of the Treaty can hardly be overestimated ... for world peace and security.” Portugal said that expanding the scope of New START is “worth exploring”. Slovakia, Denmark, and Slovenia welcomed if future talks on a disarmament framework would engage China as well. In this context, Slovenia asserted that China’s joining would be aligned with “how a great power and a responsible nuclear-weapon state should do.”

The vast majority of states taking the floor on Monday expressed support for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), of which many called on the remaining annex II states to accede to the Treaty. The majority of member states also expressed support to develop a framework for negative security assurances as well as to commence negotiations for a fissile material cut-off treaty in the Conference of Disarmament.

Nuclear disarmament

Italy, the Holy See, and Zimbabwe stressed that nuclear-armed states bear a special responsibility in reducing their nuclear arsenals. Tanzania called on nuclear-armed states to fully comply with their legal obligations for nuclear disarmament. The P5 said that it supported the “ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all.”

Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Portugal asserted that a world free of nuclear weapons can only be attained through a progressive and inclusive approach. Slovakia added that the “current security environment” needs to be considered.

Prohibition of nuclear weapons

During a high-level First Committee side event on Friday, 23 October, Jamaica and Nauru announced that they deposited their instruments of ratification for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). On Saturday, 24 October, Honduras submitted its instrument of ratification making it the 50th state to do so, and triggering the Treaty’s entry into force.

During the final day of the general debate, the vast majority of participants continued to express support for the TPNW, including Panama, Iraq, Bolivia, Mauritania, Palestine, Burkina Faso, the Holy See, Guyana, Congo, Zambia, Tunisia, Botswana, Myanmar, Malaysia, Tanzania, San Marino, Zimbabwe, and the ICRC.

Indonesia and Burkina Faso stressed that the TPNW complements the NPT. Malaysia specified that the TPNW “will further reinforce the norm that nuclear weapons are unacceptable, should not be used, should not be threatened to be used and need to be discarded and destroyed as soon as possible.”

Many of the states expressing their support for the Treaty also said that they are in the final stages of joining it. Zimbabwe and Iraq said that they will sign the Treaty at the earliest possible time, while

Indonesia, Myanmar, and Côte d’Ivoire informed that they are close to ratifying the Treaty. Zimbabwe, San Marino, Tunisia, Guyana, Myanmar, Zambia, and Bolivia urged others to join the Treaty as soon as possible. The Holy See encouraged nuclear-armed states to join the Treaty and to work with other states parties to develop the “competent verification authority or authorities” called for by Article 4(6) of the Treaty.” The Holy See explained, “The objective of such an authority is “to negotiate and verify the irreversible elimination of nuclear weapon programs, including the elimination or irreversible conversion of all nuclear-weapons-related facilities.”

Israel was the only state directly voicing opposition to the Treaty during the remaining segment of the general debate. It emphasised that the TPNW does “not create, contribute to the development of, or indicate the existence of customary law related to the subject or the content of the Treaty.”

Non-Proliferation Treaty

Panama welcomed the upcoming Review Conference (RevCon) of the NPT and described it as an opportunity to renew commitments under the Treaty. Many others echoed this. The vast majority of participants hoped for a strong outcome of the RevCon next year. Zimbabwe argued that a successful RevCon, underpinned by a “consensual and balanced” outcome document is “more urgent than before”. A few states underscored the need for nuclear-armed states to comply with Article VI of the Treaty, including Myanmar.

Various states called for the universality of the NPT, and for all nuclear-armed states to join the Treaty. Iraq, Palestine, and Oman called on Israel to accede to the NPT as non-nuclear armed state and to subject all its facilities to the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Israel however argued that the NPT “does not provide a remedy for the unique security challenges of the [Middle East], let alone the repeated violations of the Treaty by some of its member states.” It further asserted, “Four of the five cases of serious violations

of the [NPT] took place in the Middle East since its entering into force.”

The P5 said that the NPT has helped to “create conditions that would be essential for further progress on nuclear disarmament.”

Regional issues

Italy, Portugal, Tunisia, Slovenia, Malaysia, Slovakia, Denmark, and Indonesia expressed support to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Italy urged Iran to return to full compliance without delay and to provide the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with a full and timely cooperation with respect to all its safeguard-related commitments. Portugal and Denmark made similar calls. Israel argued that Iran has violated its nuclear obligations, and therefore welcomed the US’ decision to exercise its “legal right” to initiate the snap-back mechanism set out in UN Security Council resolution 2231.

Several states continued to express worry about the situation on the Korean peninsula. Italy expressed deep concern at the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s (DPRK) intention to retain and further develop its nuclear and ballistic programmes. San Marino, Malaysia, Denmark, and Slovakia had similar concerns. Italy, Slovakia, and Portugal called on the DPRK to return to the NPT, to sign and ratify the CTBT, and to resume its collaboration with the IAEA. Italy called for the international sanctions to remain in place until the DPRK provides tangible proof of its willingness to denuclearise. Portugal made similar calls.

In contrast, Tunisia welcomed the “positive dynamics” created by the inter-Korean summits and those between the US and the DPRK, and noted that “no new nuclear tests or long-range ballistic missile tests have been carried out since these summits.”

Nuclear-weapon-free zones

Next to existing nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs), most states also expressed support for a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass

destruction in the Middle East. Tunisia said that the conference should be held every year until a binding treaty is concluded. It suggested that the Conference could also create a regional security mechanism for lasting security in an inclusive and cooperative manner.

Iraq, Palestine, and Oman urged Israel to participate in second conference on a NWFZ in the Middle East. In response, Israel argued that “any framework of regional security can only be the outcome of a mutual political desire of all regional parties to engage with each other, taking into consideration the security concerns of each.”

Resolutions

Please note more resolutions on nuclear disarmament are forthcoming but were not available at the time of writing.

L.1, “Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East,” contains only technical updates from previous years. The resolution urges further action on establishing this zone and to act in accordance with the spirit of such a zone in the meantime. It is typically adopted without a vote, though a vote was taken the last two years, at which Israel and the US voted no.

L.2, “Risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East,” contains only technical updates from previous years. It calls for Israel’s accession to the NPT and IAEA safeguards and for implementation of the 2005 and 2010 NPT outcomes related to the Middle East. This resolution is usually more controversial, with European states abstaining and Israel, the United States, and a handful others opposing.

L.5, “Humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons,” contains only technical updates from last year. The resolution highlights the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons and calls on all states to prevent any use or proliferation of nuclear weapons and to achieve nuclear disarmament.

L.6, “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,” contains only technical updates from last year, including to reflect the current number of signatures and ratifications of the Treaty. The resolution welcomes the TPNW’s adoption and calls upon states to join the Treaty and promote adherence to it.

L.10, “African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty,” contains only technical updates from last year. It calls upon all African states to join and for Protocol III states apply the Treaty to relevant territories.

L.13, “Mongolia’s international security and nuclear-weapon-free status,” last adopted in 2018, contains only technical updates.

L.17, “Follow-up to the 2013 high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament,” is an annual Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) resolution that highlights the value of promoting 26 September as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons in furthering nuclear disarmament. It contains only technical updates.

L.22, “Conclusion of effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons,” contains only technical updates from previous years. It reaffirms the need for negative security assurances and appeals to nuclear-armed states to work “actively towards an early agreement on a common approach” that could result in a legally-binding instrument.

L.30, “Treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices” is a decision tabled this year by Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands as a placeholder for the agenda item.

L.34, “Reducing nuclear danger,” contains only technical updates from last year. It calls for a review of nuclear doctrines and urgent steps to reduce the risks of unintentional and accidental use of nuclear weapons.

L.36, “Convention on the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons,” contains only technical updates from last year. It reiterates its call on the Conference on Disarmament to commence negotiations on this subject.

L.46, “Nuclear disarmament verification,” is a draft decision to include the issue in the provisional agenda of the UN General Assembly’s seventy-sixth session.

L.55, “Follow-up to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons,” contains only technical updates, and underlines the ICJ advisory opinion from 1996 and calls on all states to engage in nuclear disarmament negotiations.

L.56, “Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia,” last tabled in 2018, only contains technical updates.

CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Allison Pytlak | Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

References to chemical weapons during the remainder of the general debate covered similar themes and points to those raised during the preceding week.

Guyana, Italy, Malaysia, Montenegro, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Tunisia condemned any use of chemical weapons. Bolivia said it categorically rejects the use of chemical weapons as an unjustifiable and criminal act. Botswana stated that the use of these weapons constitutes a serious crime against humanity and contradictory to the order of public conscience. Many of these states also raised points around accountability and ending impunity, with Guyana stressing that the “process of attribution should be evidence-based and should be conducted in an impartial manner without politicizing the issue.”

Regarding chemical weapons use in Syria, Denmark strongly condemned the Syrian government's “continued violation” of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and referenced the [first report](#) of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Denmark further stated that there should be consequences for Syria's complete lack of cooperation with the OPCW. Montenegro also welcomed the IIT report, while Italy welcomed the OPCW's Executive Council [decision](#) in July 2020 addressing Syrian possession and use of chemical weapons.

Israel referenced the use of chemical weapons by “States in the Middle East, against their own population and against neighboring countries,” which “occurred five times since the Second World War” in violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol.

Slovakia expressed its support for the work of the OPCW and said it regrets the questioning of the organisation's work and activities regarding the presentation of the IIT results. Denmark, Israel, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovenia, and Tunisia also spoke favourably about the work of the OPCW; Denmark said it is troubled by attempts of certain states to discredit the organisation.

Denmark, Italy, Slovakia, and Slovenia spoke of the recent incident involving Alexey Navalny, described as an assassination attempt by Denmark and Italy. Denmark, Italy, and Slovenia called on Russia to investigate the crime and/or cooperate with the OPCW.

At the time of publication, the annual resolution on the implementation of the CWC, sponsored and introduced by Poland in its statement last week, was not publicly available for analysis.

BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS

Filippa Lentzos | Kings College London

A further 10 states and one group of states (the League of Arab States) referred to biological weapons in the final round of the First Committee's general debate. This brings the total tally of statements referencing biological weapons up to 65 from individual states and six from groups of states—an unusually high number likely reflecting

both the COVID-19 pandemic and the upcoming Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) next year.

Similar to last week, references contained in this week's statements—by Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Italy, Myanmar, Palestine,

San Marino, Slovakia, and Tunisia—emphasised the importance of the BWC, expressed support for the Treaty, and highlighted the need to strengthen it. Conspicuously absent was any mention of biological weapons or the BWC in the statement by Kenya, the Chair of the 2020 BWC Meeting of States Parties.

The annual First Committee resolution on the BWC, **L.52, “Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction”** is usually uncontested, and there are no signs that it will not be adopted by consensus again this year.

In contrast, a new resolution, L.65, to update the UN Secretary-General’s Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons (UNSGM) has generated significant controversy. Introduced by Russia, the resolution encourages states to assess the effectiveness of the UNSGM, and requests the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) to seek states’ views on the technical guidelines and procedures operationalising the mechanism. The resolution also requests the UNSG to report back his findings to the 2021 General Assembly.

Several states have expressed misgivings about the resolution, highlighting that it weakens the credibility and independence of the UNSGM, and that it implies there is a problem with the mechanism. For instance, close neighbours to Russia used their statements in the general debate last week to reiterate their support for the UNSGM. The European Union noted the mechanism “has successfully worked in the past.” Latvia expressed concern at attempts to “undermine” the UNSGM. Lithuania said “any attempts to compromise its integrity, independence and efficiency are completely unacceptable.”

The draft resolution initially called for a Governmental Group of Experts (GGE) to be established by the UNSG. The GGE, with a proposed membership of up to 15 states, was to make consensus recommendations on updating the UNSGM technical guidelines and procedures. However, in light of opposition from a large number

of states from different regional groups, the ambition to create a GGE on this topic was scaled back. While dropping the GGE addresses some concerns, there is still language in the resolution seen by many states as undermining the UNSGM.

For example, the resolution stresses the role of the UN Security Council in investigating alleged breaches of the BWC, and it highlights that any allegations brought to the UNSG’s attention by any state party to the BWC must be considered and addressed in the framework of the BWC. Both aspects are part of Russia’s previously articulated position to limit any BWC-related investigation and compliance-assessment efforts taking place outside of the BWC framework and the UN Security Council.

The UNSGM resolution also calls on BWC states parties to “resume” multilateral negotiations in order to conclude a non-discriminatory legally binding protocol to the Treaty. While many states agree that there is a need for a legally binding mechanism, not everyone believes this necessitates a return to the protocol negotiations of the 1990s.

The verifiability of the BWC has been a divisive topic for many years in the BWC, and the continuing references to it in the resolution is another sign that it will play a key topic at the upcoming BWC Review Conference scheduled for November 2021.



Photo: Michael Longmire / Unsplash

ARMED DRONES

Alejandra Muñoz | PAX

Several states made reference to armed drones during the general debate of this year's First Committee. These statements largely centred on the implications of armed drones for international peace and security as well as international humanitarian and human rights standards.

In her opening remarks, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu reminded delegates of her Office's support for any state efforts to increase transparency, accountability, and oversight for armed uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs). Costa Rica seconded the need for such measures, pointing at the unique challenges presented by armed UAVs due to their low costs, low level of risk, and high effectiveness. It added that these efforts should also address the humanitarian and human rights implications connected to their use. The importance of transparency around the use of UAVs was also noted by the delegate from Ecuador, who additionally warned against the challenges presented by the "militarization of artificial intelligence" for international security, control, proportionality, and responsibility.

Similar concerns were raised by Peru and Venezuela. In its statement, Peru highlighted how novel technologies, including UAVs, and their rapid proliferation are changing modern warfare, generating new challenges for humanitarian and human rights law, and the maintenance of international peace and security. It therefore urged the international community to regulate their use, transfer, and proliferation. The same challenges were raised by Venezuela which advocated for further discussions to address the ethical, moral, technical, and legal implications of UAVs, foreseeing that doing so could eventually result in the adoption of a binding legal instrument. Nepal expressed its support for the international normative framework to regulate the use of "frontier technologies", including drones and lethal autonomous weapons.

Cuba called for the regulation of "military combat drones" and highlighted their harmful impact on the civilian population.

Armenia and Yemen raised concerns about the use of armed drones in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Yemeni conflict respectively. In a similar vein, Libya illustrated that, among other weapons, the proliferation of drones has led to a great deal of material loss and human suffering within Libya.

This year's civil society statement on armed drones was endorsed by 14 organisations. The statement highlighted the deployment of armed drones in Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Nagorno-Karabakh, and warned that their increased use may jeopardise regional security and contribute to an escalation of violence. The statement pointed to the unclear legal justifications surrounding drone strikes that risk undermining international humanitarian and human rights law. Another point of concern was the rapid proliferation of drone technologies, making these more available to non-state actors. Building upon the recommendations issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions in her [2020 report](#), the civil society organisations urged states to actively develop and engage in multilateral discussions addressing the development, production, export and use of armed drones.

A side event was also hosted by Stimson and PAX on 22 October 2020 to discuss trends, initiatives, and opportunities that could be undertaken in a multilateral and collaborative process to build meaningful standards on the proliferation and use of armed drones. The UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings, Agnes Callamard, participated in the event, alongside delegates from the United States and Costa Rica. A longer summary of the event can be found elsewhere in this edition.

FULLY AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS

Ousman Noor | Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

During the final day of the First Committee's general debate, Italy welcomed progress made at the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on the 11 Guiding Principles on lethal autonomous weapon systems and said it is crucial for states to agree on elements of an operational and normative framework, bearing in mind the application of international humanitarian law (IHL) to such weapons systems. Denmark also confirmed support for the work of the GGE and recommended the development of an understanding of the type and degree of human-machine interaction that is required for weapon systems.

San Marino joined other countries to express concern over the development of lethal autonomous weapon systems and urged states to cooperate to address the emerging legal and ethical challenges they create. The Holy See also reiterated its concern over the use of artificial intelligence in weapon systems.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) repeated its apprehension towards rapid military development in autonomous weapons, which should be understood as weapons that select and apply force to targets without human intervention.

It warned, "The associated erosion of human control over the use of force creates clear risks for civilians and combatants who are no longer fighting, challenges related to compliance with IHL, and fundamental ethical concerns about leaving life-and-death decisions to sensors and software". The ICRC is convinced that internationally agreed limits on autonomous weapons must be urgently established. It recommended measures aimed at ensuring human control, including limits on the types of targets, environmental constraints, requirements for human supervision and intervention, and deactivation measures. Finally, the ICRC stated that artificial intelligence and machine learning should be used to improve and augment human decision making and not replace it.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots calls on states to cooperate to ensure that fully autonomous weapons are prohibited and that meaningful human control over the use of force is retained.



Image: Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

LANDMINES

Diana Carolina Prado Mosquera | International Campaign to Ban Landmines

All the delegations that spoke about antipersonnel mines during this week expressed their support for the aim of eliminating this nefarious weapon.

Italy described the negative impacts that landmines cause and stressed international cooperation and victim assistance as key components of a holistic approach to mine action. Slovakia highlighted too the importance of international cooperation and victim assistance. Similarly, Bolivia underlined the relevance of victim assistance, and said that these weapons constitute a threat to socio-economic development. This was echoed by Italy and Tanzania.

Portugal, Italy, Slovakia, and Slovenia welcomed the results achieved in 2019 in the Fourth Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT) and continued to emphasise the commitment of states parties to finish the job and achieve a mine free world by 2025. Slovenia reiterated this latter point only. Italy also highlighted the importance of promoting gender and diversity responsive assistance.

Slovakia and Burkina Faso called for the universalisation of the MBT. Israel said that it has “extended their moratorium on all exports, sales or other transfers of all anti-personnel landmines for an additional period of three years, until July 2023.”

Iraq said that ISIS had planted mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in its country. Burkina Faso also expressed that IEDs are a challenge for the country and that it welcomes the support it has received by the United Nations Mine Action Centre in raising awareness among internally displaced persons. Italy also stated its concern about the use of these devices and their impact. Any explosive device that can be activated by proximity, presence or contact of a person is an antipersonnel mine and is fully covered by the scope of the MBT.

Myanmar, where the armed forces have used antipersonnel mines on a regular basis since the MBT entered into force, denied that it has done so. Bangladesh—a state party to the MBT— cited several sources in its statement including the Landmine Monitor, Amnesty International and the [report](#) of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights on “The situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar” (A/HRC/45/5). Bangladesh urged Myanmar to halt production and use of mines against their own people.

As the First Committee now moves into voting, the ICBL call on all states to vote in favour of [resolution L.26](#) that was tabled last week. We also urge states not party to take immediate steps to join the MBT and until adherence takes place, to take interim steps including adopting national moratorium on use, production and export of landmines; destruction of existing stockpiles; and submitting voluntarily transparency reports.



Image: International Campaign to Ban Landmines

CLUSTER MUNITIONS

Diana Carolina Prado Mosquera | Cluster Munition Coalition

All delegations that mentioned cluster munitions during the final day of the First Committee's general debate supported the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM).

Italy, Slovakia, Burkina Faso, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) mentioned the importance of the Second Review Conference that will take place in Lausanne, Switzerland on 23-27 November 2020 in a hybrid format. The Second Review Conference will be a moment to redouble efforts towards implementation of the Convention and progress towards a cluster munition free world.

Tanzania and the Republic of Congo mentioned the importance of this Convention, and its human security aspect. They also highlighted its successful negotiation process. Slovakia and the ICRC called on all states not party to join the Convention. Slovakia said that it has contributed to the CCM sponsorship programme, which also promotes universalisation.

Montenegro has recently cleared all cluster munitions remnants on its territory (as of July 2020). It shared this important achievement and highlighted that it has fulfilled its obligation under article 4 of the CCM (clearance and destruction of cluster munitions) before the deadline. Similarly Slovakia said that it remains committed to the obligations under the Convention, including the obligation of stockpile destruction, by 2024.

The use of cluster munitions continues to be one of the major challenges of the CCM. The ICRC expressed its concerns by the repeated reports of use of this weapon. The CMC calls on all States Party to condemn all recent instances of use by anyone, anywhere, and calls on all states not yet party to join the CCM immediately to save lives and prevent future tragedies.

Resolutions

Draft resolution L.43, "Implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions," is being co-sponsored by all the states that are represented on the Coordination Committee of the CCM, namely: Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Chile, Iraq, Mexico, Montenegro, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Zambia. This year's draft retains all previous components while updating the number of states parties and including an invitation to states and other stakeholders to attend the Second Review Conference. The draft is carefully worded and well-balanced: all states outside the Convention should be able to vote in favour of it, thus expressing their support for the humanitarian objective of eliminating the suffering caused by cluster munitions.

DAYS, MONTHS, YEARS, DECADES

THE LENGTH OF TIME DEADLY UNEXPLODED SUBMUNITIONS HAVE LAID DORMANT SINCE USE, READY TO KILL OR MAIM AT ANY MOMENT



WWW.STOPCLUSTERMUNITIONS.ORG

EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS IN POPULATED AREAS

Laura Boillot | International Network on Explosive Weapons

In the final day of the general debate, Italy, the Republic of San Marino and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) raised the issue of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

In its statement, San Marino described the widespread repercussions that result from the use of heavy explosive weapons in towns and cities, including physical and psychological harm, disruption to essential services, lack of access to medical care, education, forced displacement, and the uncertainty of being able to return for years or decades. Further, the bombing and shelling in towns and cities makes affected areas inaccessible to humanitarian aid, causing even more challenges and exacerbating suffering.

San Marino called on states to “refrain from the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas” and reiterated that “San Marino fully supports the adoption of an international political declaration on the prevention of civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.”

Italy expressed concern over the humanitarian harm and socioeconomic impact of explosive weapon use in urban centres and highlighted the importance of victim assistance.

The ICRC explained that whilst there is no general prohibition of heavy explosive weapons such as artillery, large mortars, bombs, missiles, and multi-barrel rocket launchers under international humanitarian law, their wide area effects make them ill-adapted for use in urban environments—even when directed against “military objectives”.

“This grave pattern of harm cannot simply be accepted as a normal and inevitable consequence of war,” the ICRC warned, describing the unacceptably high levels of civilian casualties and destruction, disruptions to water and electricity supplies, health care, and other services essential to the survival of the civilian population. It added that bombing and shelling cities displaces people and causes major setbacks to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRADE

Raluca Muresean | Control Arms Coalition

During the last day of the general debate, over 20 delegations stressed the need to regulate the arms trade, ten of which expressed their confidence in the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)’s ability to assist in this matter, including Burkina Faso, Congo, Montenegro and Tunisia. Botswana cautioned that the “illicit trade in arms and ammunitions contributes to [...] violence, lawlessness and conflict, a significant threat to the international peace and security” and called for strict compliance with the ATT, while Guyana, Slovakia, and Portugal also spoke in favor of the Treaty’s universalisation. Both the State of Palestine and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) expressed concern over

the indiscriminate targeting of civilians in conflicts, with ICRC noting that the supply of conventional arms has continued to “fuel serious violations of IHL and human rights law in armed conflicts and other situations of violence in many parts of the world”. The ICRC reminded states parties that the ATT is designed to prevent such violations. Palestine urged states parties to fulfil their obligations under its articles 6 and 7, which require governments to “monitor the arms trade prior to any transfer in accordance with international law, including IHL and international human rights law”.

Resolutions

Sierra Leone, the President of the Seventh Conference of States Parties (CSP7) to the ATT, introduced **L.53, “The Arms Trade Treaty.”** This year’s resolution, currently co-sponsored by 59 member states, includes technical and linguistic updates as well as a few substantive changes.

There is new language in PP5 that states, “Underlining the urgent need to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms, [including small arms and light weapons], and to prevent their diversion to the illicit market or for unauthorized end-use or end-users, including [through improvements to stockpile management], thereby preventing the exacerbation of armed violence, the commission of terrorist acts, and the violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.” These references to small arms and light weapons and to stockpile management are included to highlight the thematic focus selected by Ambassador Lansana Gberie of Sierra Leone, for his CSP7 Presidency.

There is new language in PP6 that states, “Emphasizing the responsibility of all States in accordance with their respective [regional] and international obligations and [commitments] to effectively regulate the international trade in conventional arms.”

PP13 was updated to include a list of new states parties to the Treaty while PP15, a new paragraph, notes “with concern the devastating global effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, including on the full and effective implementation of the Treaty,”.

OP5 has update/new language. It “Calls upon all States parties to submit and encourages them to make available, in a timely manner, and to update, as appropriate, their initial report, as well as their annual report for the preceding calendar year, as required under article 13 of the Treaty, thereby enhancing confidence, transparency, trust and accountability, and [welcomes the ongoing efforts of the ATT Working Group on Transparency and

Reporting to facilitate compliance of States parties’ reporting obligation.”

OP9 has a new paragraph that “Urges States parties and signatory States to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons, as set out in Articles 6 and 7, and to prevent diversion and unauthorized end-use or end-users of conventional arms, inter alia through efforts to improve efficient stockpile management;”

OP12 is also new. It “Welcomes the establishment of the Diversion Information Exchange Forum by the Sixth Conference of States parties to allow, on a voluntary basis, States parties and signatory States to share concrete and operational information about cases of suspected or detected diversion, and acknowledges that this is a step towards tackling diversion through enhancing information-sharing and a tool to improve practical implementation of the Treaty.”

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SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Amelie Namuroy | International Action Network on Small Arms

During the remainder of the general debate, states continued to emphasise that these are challenging times for disarmament and international security, and expressed concerns over the uncontrolled spread, pervasive availability, and illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW). For example, Burkina Faso highlighted that the illicit proliferation of SALW fuels conflicts as well as the activities of criminal and terrorist groups, and endangers the stability of several countries. Bolivia stated its concerns more starkly, noting that the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons is a threat to democracy.

Member states highlighted the links between some of the collateral effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the risks of increases in armed violence and transnational crime. Tunisia underlined that the illicit trade of SALW undermines regional security and stability by fuelling transnational organised crime and the activities of terrorist groups. Some delegations referenced the broader negative effects caused by the illicit proliferation of SALW on sustainable development, affecting all states regardless of whether they export SALW. For example, although Tunisia and Guyana neither manufacture nor export SALW, both states shared concerns about illicit proliferation of SALW and its harmful effects on their countries. San Marino stated that the illicit proliferation of SALW has become more dangerous as it is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing instability that the pandemic has caused worldwide.

However, despite emphasising these challenges, many states reiterated the importance of continued implementation of the existing frameworks to control SALW, including the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA). Kenya, as chair-designate of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7) (postponed until July 2021) affirmed its commitment

to the UNPoA. Kenya continues to implement the UNPoA, including recently strengthening policy and legislative frameworks to address loopholes in law to ensure proper national stockpile management of SALW.

The United Republic of Tanzania voiced its support for efforts to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in compliance with existing legal instruments. Burkina Faso underlined the opportunity offered by the forthcoming BMS7 to engage constructively and to set national targets on implementation of the UNPoA. Montenegro also affirmed its commitment to the implementation of the UNPoA and highlighted its contribution to the Franco-German initiative on SALW, which includes activities combating the illegal trade in SALW and its ammunition in the Western Balkans. Guyana called for stronger cooperation and collaboration at all levels in order to prevent the diversion and illicit international transfer of SALW that fuel armed violence, and also stated that countries should use the convening of BMS7 in 2021 to agree on additional concrete measures to enhance implementation of the UNPoA.

Bolivia noted that in order to effectively address the range of threats posed by the illicit proliferation of SALW, multilateral regional cooperation based on the exchange of information and experience is needed, as is the cooperation of international bodies. Côte d'Ivoire provided an example of the importance of cooperation and assistance, welcoming the support that Côte d'Ivoire received from the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), as part of the "September 2020— Amnesty Month in Africa" project to encourage people to surrender and collect of illicit SALW without fear of disclosure of their identity, humiliation, arrest, or prosecution from the authorities.

Resolutions

L.44, “The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects,” is an omnibus resolution tabled annually by Colombia, South Africa, and Japan. It welcomes the series of open, informal consultations in early 2020 held by the Chair-designate of BMS7; decides, pursuant to decision 74/552 of 14 May 2020, to convene a one week Biennial Meeting of States from 26 to 30 July 2021; renews its decision, pursuant to the schedule of meetings for the period from 2018 to 2024 agreed upon at the Third Review Conference, to convene a one week Biennial Meeting of States in 2022 and the fourth United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the UNPoA in 2024.

L.44 includes one new paragraph which “takes note of the Secretary-General’s report that includes an overview of challenges related to the diversion of SALW at the national, regional and international levels, as well as good practices, lessons learned and recommendations on preventing and combating the diversion and illicit international transfer of SALW to unauthorized recipients.”

OUTER SPACE

Jessica West | Project Ploughshares

A steady chorus of concern about the growing threat of warfare and weapons in outer space added to the urgency of debate on the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) this week. Much is at stake: as Côte d’Ivoire asserted, the deployment of weapons in this environment not only raises the spectre of war in outer space, it would have irreversible consequences for all of humanity. The humanitarian costs of such activity would be significant. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reminded delegates that “technology enabled by space systems permeates most aspects of civilian life.”

How to address this situation? At the time of writing, only one draft resolution is publicly available: **L.3, “Prevention of an arms race in outer space.”** Co-

This is in reference to the request for the UN Secretary-General to compile a report on member states’ practices relating to combatting diversion of SALW. This request was made in the 2019 resolution (A/C.1/74/L.43): “for the UN Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on best practices, lessons learned, as well as new recommendations on preventing and combatting the diversion and illicit international transfer of SALW to unauthorized recipients and to include them—along with views from the United Nations system and inputs from INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization—in a report for consideration at BMS7.”

L.11, “United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa” and **L.24, “Conventional arms control at the regional and subregional levels”** do not contain any substantive changes from last year.

sponsored by Algeria, Bangladesh, China, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Malawi, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, and Venezuela, this resolution is part of a nearly 40-year-old initiative inviting the Conference on Disarmament (CD) to establish a working group on PAROS. It usually enjoys near universal support, but differences over to how to achieve this goal persist.

Statements this week continued to favour two core approaches to PAROS. Some want to focus on the international legal regime, either by shoring up the existing framework, as suggested by Côte d’Ivoire and Malaysia, or through the adoption of a “complementary legal framework,” as advocated

by Malaysia, or by negotiating a new arms control agreement in the Conference on Disarmament (CD), the preference of Indonesia and Palestine. While not dismissing such an agreement in the long-term, in the short-term others prefer to pursue norms of responsible behaviour, as indicated in statements delivered by Italy, San Marino, Portugal, Myanmar, Slovakia, and Denmark. As described by Slovakia, this approach emphasises “improving transparency and confidence” and “avoiding risks of miscalculation and unwanted escalation.”

Within this context, the United Kingdom (UK) is advancing a new draft resolution entitled, “Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviours.” This is envisioned as a bottom-up, open-ended conversation to identify elements of both threatening and responsible behaviours in outer space. The resolution is not yet publicly available at the time of writing.

Russia has previously indicated that it will once again sponsor two draft resolutions: “No first placement of weapons in outer space,” which traditionally

asks states to make political declarations not to be the first to orbit weapons in outer space, and “Transparency and confidence building measures in space activities.” The latter—originally a source of consensus and joint sponsorship by China, Russia, and the United States—fell victim to competing agendas last year. Neither of Russia’s draft resolutions have yet been made public.

Although states favour differing approaches, laws and norms are not mutually exclusive. And, as emphasised by the ICRC this week, the PAROS debate does not take place in a legal vacuum: the use of weapons or other hostilities in outer space “are constrained by existing law” which includes, *inter alia*, “IHL rules governing the conduct of hostilities, including prohibitions and limitations on the use of certain means and methods of warfare, which afford protection for civilians.” Critically, the ICRC urged member states to acknowledge these limitations. Thinking them through might be one way to identify linkages between laws and norms. It is time to stop pulling in different directions.

CYBER

Allison Pytlak | Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

Peace in cyberspace and the security of information and communications technologies (ICTs) seem to have at last emerged as urgent matters of concern for the First Committee. There were more references to these and related topics during the 2020 First Committee general debate than there have been in past years; and the references tended to include greater detail and specificity.

Some states touched on issues of legality and norms for behaviour in cyberspace. Côte d’Ivoire said it advocates for a use of cyberspace that is in compliance with international law, human rights, and principles contained in the UN Charter. It said that it believes that standards for conduct could be achieved without prejudice to the adoption of legally binding rules. Palestine called for the development of an appropriate international legal framework

within the UN and with the active and equal participation of all states. The rule of law and human rights were further noted by Portugal, San Marino, Denmark, Slovakia, and Bolivia.

Portugal, Mauritania, Tunisia, and Bolivia further highlighted the relevance of respect for international humanitarian law (IHL). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Tunisia stressed the applicability of IHL to cyberspace, though they stressed that doing so does not suggest any endorsement of cyber warfare or the militarisation of cyberspace. “Considering how rapidly our societies are digitizing, it is critical that IHL be interpreted and applied in a way that protects the digital means and tools that we increasingly rely on in every aspect of our lives, just as it protects physical objects,” the representative of the ICRC stated.

Delegations outlined specific concerns about the threat landscape. San Marino highlighted cybercrime, including against medical facilities and the spread of misinformation in the context of COVID-19. Kenya stated that COVID-19 pandemic has taught us many lessons for the cyber domain and has enhanced its commitment to the protection and responsible management of national and international critical infrastructure. Côte d'Ivoire regretted that cyberspace has become a confrontational issue, leading to a new arms race. It is concerned about the increasing malicious use of ICTs by terrorist groups and organised crime including against health infrastructure in the context of COVID-19.

Denmark is also concerned about the rise in malicious cyber activity by state and non-state actors; Montenegro spoke of increase in scope and severity of such operations. Oman urged better information sharing and cooperation to prevent cyberattacks. Tunisia said it shares concerns expressed by other states about increasing cyberattacks especially against critical infrastructures and their great destabilisation capacity. Palestine said it rejects the use of new ICTs for non-peaceful purposes. The ICRC reiterated that cyber operations pose a real risk “to international security and—more importantly—to people.” It highlighted reports that emerged in September of the first-ever casualty related to a cyber operation, in which a woman died after being turned away from a hospital in Germany because it was experiencing a ransomware attack.

Some states provided updates of national or regional cybersecurity activities. Tunisia said it has developed, with the participation of the private sector and society civilian, a national cybersecurity strategy, that was released in December 2019. Israel described its educational and public awareness-raising around data and infrastructure security and resilience. Malaysia is increasing its operational and policy expertise, capacity, and capabilities. Kenya highlighted its work with the African Union and the East African community. Its computer incident and response team (CIRT) collaborates regionally with 54 national CIRTs regionally, and many others globally.

Denmark, Kenya, Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Malaysia expressed appreciation for work within the UN's Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on state behaviour in cyberspace and within the open-ended working group (OEWG), but also the hope that these two tracks could be merged into a single forum or dialogue. Panama and Portugal noted appreciation for the OEWG with Portugal expressing hope for “streamlining” in future; Tunisia would like to see continued dialogue. Malaysia hoped that the two mechanisms would continue to be utilised as a way to engage on “norms-setting, principles, rules as well as legally-binding commitments in cyberspace.”

Italy, Montenegro, Slovakia, and Slovenia said that they support the suggestion of establishing a programme of action for state behaviour on cyberspace, an idea which is gaining traction in the context of the OEWG based on initial thinking by France and Egypt. Kenya noted that it has supported a joint Australian-Mexican proposal in the UN's open-ended working group (OEWG) on ICTs to establish periodic reporting on implementation of the 2015 norms for state behaviour in cyberspace.

Despite the above references, the procedural path ahead is not yet clear. **Resolution L.8, “Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security,”** has been tabled by Russia. As expected, it calls for the establishment of a new (second) OEWG that would commence in 2021 and report back to the UN General Assembly in its 80th session (i.e. in 2025).

Resolution L.60, “Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/266 of 22 December 2018” is a draft decision submitted by Brazil which makes formal the change in meeting dates for the GGE as a result of COVID-19. It requests to have its third and fourth sessions before the end of May 2021. A similar draft decision regarding the changes in meeting dates of the OEWG was not available at the time of writing.

GENDER AND DISARMAMENT

Katrin Geyer | Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

In the final day of the general debate, member states continued to address the gender dimensions of disarmament. Portugal argued, "Continuing to incorporate gender perspectives will be instrumental to revitalizing the disarmament machinery." Guyana was pleased with the increasing recognition of the need to include a gender dimension in questions of disarmament, peace, and security.

Despite heightened awareness about the need to include gender perspectives, Botswana expressed concern "with the disparity in the level of and volume of participation of women and men in disarmament and arms control discussions, negotiations and processes." Many delegations, including Italy, Guyana, Slovenia, Portugal, Botswana, and Côte d'Ivoire expressed therefore their support to include women in disarmament negotiations and peacebuilding programmes, ensuring their full and equal participation. Similarly, Italy said it promotes policies and approaches "enabling the full empowerment of women".

Botswana further explained, "Incorporating women in the disarmament agenda would encourage their

role as agents of change who have perspectives, skills and experiences to bring to decisions making in order to formulate effective disarmament initiatives." Guyana made similar remarks, recognising the "essential contribution that women make."

Italy supported policies and approaches that take into due regard the gendered impacts of armed violence. Italy underscored the need for gender- and diversity-responsive victim assistance in the context of mine action. San Marino expressed concern at the use of small arms and light weapons that are predominantly used in cases of domestic and gender-based violence and observed that this type of violence has increased in the last months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a similar vein, Botswana observed that "women often suffer disproportionate or differential harm from development, use and weapon trade."

The UN General Assembly resolution on women, disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control, celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, will be forthcoming but was not available at the time of writing.



Photo: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

DEVELOPMENT AND DISARMAMENT

Danielle Samler | Lawyer's Committee on Nuclear Policy

In the closing segment of the general debate, references to the relationship between disarmament and development continued to accumulate. Panama, Zimbabwe, Indonesia, Tanzania, and San Marino raised concerns about excessive military spending. Zimbabwe said it is worried about military expenditure and the modernisation of nuclear and conventional weapons arsenals. It further noted that continuing this upward trend in military spending will trigger an arms race where no nation feels safe unless they match the arsenal of their rival. Tanzania also recognised the importance of reducing military spending and putting a halt to modernisation programs, calling “upon the nuclear weapons States to divert their resources to sustainable development from further modernisation, upgrading, refurbishment, or extending the lives of their nuclear weapons and related facilities.”

A number of states urged the reallocation of resources as a pathway to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Indonesia suggested states use the money spent on weapons of mass destruction for socioeconomic development and peacekeeping missions. Panama urged states to consider focusing on humanitarian, socioeconomic, and health needs, such as reducing poverty and inequality. San Marino highlighted the importance of achieving peace and security through “investing more in education, development, and cooperation rather than in armaments and wars.”

Mauritania stressed the importance of Article VI of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and acknowledged that it is the only guarantee that money and resources spent on nuclear weapons will instead be devoted to development and international peace and security. Zambia further emphasised the importance of resource allocation by reminding delegates that if ever there was a time to completely shift the paradigm from armament issues to achieving the SDGs, it is now. It noted that the SDGs “bind us to finding everlasting solutions that will help us eradicate pandemics such as Covid-19, poverty, climate change effects and other negative political, economic, and social discourse related matters.” The Holy See reiterated its suggestion for a Global Fund partially drawn from military expenditures to assist the most impoverished peoples. It said that this would be a contemporary expression of “turning swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.”

Togo pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic has undermined achievements in development and peacebuilding. Along these lines, Côte d'Ivoire noted that solutions to disarmament are essential to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Guyana stressed the urgency with which states must pursue disarmament, because development depends on peaceful, stable and secure societies. Botswana further strengthened this point by noting that “peace, security, and stability are the prerequisites for the promotion of an inclusive society for sustainable development.”

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN RELATION TO ARMED CONFLICTS

Doug Weir | Conflict and Environment Observatory

In a **joint statement** to the First Committee, civil society again urged states to do more to articulate the environmental dimensions of the topics on the First Committee's agenda. With humanity facing multiple crises linked to climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, all components of the international system have a responsibility to act. As it was, just twelve national and group statements addressed the environment, with the vast majority of these linked to nuclear weapons.

Guatemala, North Macedonia, Lao PDR, Nigeria, Ghana, Nicaragua, and Antigua and Barbuda all drew attention to the linked humanitarian and environmental consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. As Lao PDR observed, irrespective of whether this use is deliberate, accidental, mistaken or unauthorised.

The environmental legacy of nuclear weapon testing was highlighted by Guatemala, Algeria, Nigeria and Kazakhstan. It also featured in statements by the Group of African States and the States Parties of the Treaty on Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia, with the latter noting that the instrument had helped further "cooperation in the environmental rehabilitation and recovery of territories affected by radioactive contamination." Kazakhstan took the opportunity to encourage states to support its recurring Second Committee **resolution** on the rehabilitation of its Semipalatinsk region,¹ where the Soviet Union detonated 467 nuclear weapons.

Kyrgyzstan drew attention to the environmental harm of what had proceeded those tests—uranium mining, the legacy of which continues to blight the country and is the subject of a Second Committee resolution adopted at the UN's 73rd session. Other states also looked beyond the immediate environmental consequences of the use of weapons. Costa Rica attacked the grotesque levels of global

military spending, arguing that the money could instead finance our urgently needed transition to a green and resilient economy. Economic transition has been brought into sharp relief by COVID-19, and Kazakhstan also argued that it is now obvious that "peace, disarmament, justice, sustainable development and environmental protection are required to adequately address the pandemic."

While all these references to the environment are welcome, there were missed opportunities for states to highlight the environmental dimensions of other agenda items. The considerable environmental costs of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas was not mentioned. Nor was the devastation caused to biodiversity by the unchecked spread of small arms and light weapons. Reference to the potential for measures to address the legacy of explosive remnants of war to benefit the environment, through climate or biodiversity sensitive land use, were also absent.

Also continuing its long history of missed opportunities is the Non-Aligned Movement's resolution, **L.27, "Observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control"**. It is now one of many First Committee resolutions tabled each year to little apparent purpose. This is regrettable as there is considerable scope for rejuvenating this text to promote environmental mainstreaming in the First Committee and beyond, highlighting both the linkages between weapons and environmental harms, and acting as means of gathering positive practice from states.

1. International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan.

YOUTH AND DISARMAMENT EDUCATION

Matthew Bolton | Pace University

This session's First Committee will consider a biennial resolution on Disarmament and Nonproliferation Education, though it is not yet publicly available. The First Committee is also considering a resolution, **L.12, "United Nations disarmament fellowship, training and advisory services."**

Côte d'Ivoire commended the capacity-building efforts of the UN Regional Centers for Peace and Disarmament in improving the "effectiveness" of weapons regulations, particularly regarding small arms and light weapons. Côte d'Ivoire also called for "a strengthening of international cooperation" to raise public awareness of the threat posed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

With the world "speedily transforming into [a] digital and technological era," Tanzania called

for "multilateral and bilateral cooperation" on cyber security "to promote public awareness and facilitate greater participation in the global digital economy." Israel said "global resilience" of the "cyber ecosystem" requires "practical cooperation and capacity-building programs." As a result, Israel "supports educational programs and raises public awareness of cybersecurity."

A few states highlighted the needs and contributions of youth in disarmament. Botswana stressed the importance of "full participation of women and youth at all stages of decision making." Guyana, alluding to the UN Charter preamble, referred to "our collective aim to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Côte d'Ivoire asserted that "the noble goal of building a world of lasting peace and security" should benefit both "present and future generations."

EVENT REPORT: 2020 HUMANITARIAN DISARMAMENT FORUM

Farah Bogani | Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

A record turn-out of 115 people from 40 countries participated in Part One of the **Humanitarian Disarmament Forum** on 19-21 October, co-hosted by the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots and Soka Gakkai International. This was the ninth annual gathering of activists working across humanitarian disarmament since 2012 and the first Forum to be held virtually. It marked the beginning of a learning process that will see campaigners spend the coming year studying and discussing racism and how to adopt an intersectional approach to their collective work.

Hayley Ramsey-Jones of Soka Gakkai International and Mary Wareham from the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots **opened** the Forum by acknowledging the need for the humanitarian disarmament community to commit to being race-inclusive and adopting a wider intersectional approach. Drawing on this urgency,

this HDF aimed to create spaces for learning and honesty about "the ethical disconnect between what we are trying to achieve in this world and how we go about getting there." From acknowledging low levels of participation in United Nations meetings by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from formerly colonised countries, to the unequal workplace structures and policies in our own organisations, humanitarian disarmament is not exempt from racism and inequality. The old adage of "it's not about the weapons, but the people" is an important reminder for a community that focuses so heavily on arms issues, that sometimes we forget to look at who is in this field and how we work together.

Dominique Day, Chair of the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, took the virtual stage as the Forum's keynote. With strong

encouragement for the HDF, Day stressed the importance of self-analysis. She urged everyone to question the racialised assumptions that have come from a legacy of normalising white supremacy and violence against Black bodies; noting that otherwise, criticisms of racism and bias in disarmament and emerging technologies ring hollow. Without taking steps to understand what systemic racism looks like, we delegitimise and compromise our campaigns and work. Day urged the need to renegotiate our worldview and interrogate ourselves about the ways that we have been complicit in, and perpetuate, systemic and structural racism. She called on participants to recognise that the racialised nature of policy and decision-making has an impact on disarmament spaces because “how we act internally absolutely impacts and reflects our external priorities and vice versa.”

Judy Blair and Reagan Price, co-founders of Anti-Racism at Work (ARAW), provided a warm welcome with virtual open arms to participants, and acted as facilitators of breakout sessions throughout the HDF. They emphasised that anti-racist and intersectional work can be powerful tools, as the concept of intersectionality asks us “to examine how each of our identities shapes the power we have to determine our own realities, as well as the realities of others. More specifically, the term intersectionality

describes the way people’s social identities overlap to expand or contract their power.”

Throughout all three days of the Forum, participants broke into three affinity groups (Asian/Brown/Indigenous/Mixed, Black, and White) for discussion sessions. During these affinity group sessions, participants shared their experiences of power, privilege, and oppression. Discussions considered the complexity of identity, and evaluated how to apply learnings to the broader disarmament movement.

The **closing plenary** brought participants together to report back from the affinity group discussions. Gen Hidari presented reflections from the Asian/Brown/Indigenous/Mixed group, which included the complexities of holding these identities in relational power to whiteness and blackness. The group discussed colonial history and impact, and the way intersectionality can inform disarmament work today. Diana Prado represented the Black group. She shared the need for everyone to question who is not at the table and why, and to make visible those who are often invisible. Exchanging experiences of power and oppression across countries was also a fundamental part of the learning. Maaiké Beenes added the White group’s discussions about how identities influence the way we work, how to grow representation in the movement, and how privilege



Image taken from the website of the 2020 Humanitarian Disarmament Forum

can be used to platform voices that are not being heard. All attendees were then invited to share their questions and personal reflections to the wider group.

In the final session, Blair and Reagan from ARAW left participants with important lessons for continuing anti-racism work. They highlighted that the perpetual nature of doing anti-racist and intersectional work calls for constant self-reflection, and that solidarity is only one part of the process. When we commit to learning, we learn to “know better to do better”. Co-hosts Ramsey-Jones and Wareham provided brief closing remarks on what to expect next in the collective learning process of the Humanitarian Disarmament Forum 2020-2021, with thanks to all who made the event possible and to participants for their engagement.

The event also featured moving musical performances from British soul singer-songwriter Amahla and Afro-Colombian rapper Katerin Moreno

(also known as Kryn o soul). Amahla opened the HDF with a live performance of her original song “Apathy”, inspired by acknowledging the power of self-care and privilege of being able to turn off or turn away from overwhelming and difficult news. Kryn o soul ended the forum on a high note, with a rap about her personal experience of being Afro-Colombian, and the power of identity.

While the goal of humanitarian disarmament work is to prevent and mitigate human suffering from weapons, this field is not exempt from being complicit in, perpetuating, and suffering the inequalities of power. This HDF has only been the first step in the long and collective journey to do anti-racist work. As Day said in her keynote “[t]here is no scenario where we can dismantle systemic racism without dismantling the enabling environment for it, and we all live in that environment.” As a result, “[i]f we want to make change, we have to commit to do it. We have to commit to do it by any means necessary.”

EVENT REPORT: MULTILATERALISM AND ARMED DRONES—ESCAPING THE GRIDLOCK

Alejandra Muñoz | PAX

Armed drones and drone technology continue to proliferate around the world. The ramifications of their use are seen in Libya, Somalia, Yemen, and, more recently, in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. In a side event hosted on 22 October by the Stimson Center and PAX, experts discussed the role multilateral fora can play in developing international standards for the transfer and use of armed drones. The participants included the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings, Agnes Callamard; the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Mission of Costa Rica to the UN, Maritza Chan; Senior Policy Advisor of the Office of Conventional Arms Threat Reduction of the United States’ Department of State, William Malzahn; and Project Leader Humanitarian Disarmament at PAX, Wim Zwijnenburg.

Agnes Callamard reiterated some key points made in her [2020 report](#). She first expressed her concern about the uncontrolled proliferation of drones where both state and non-state actors are deploying more advanced drone technologies at a rapid pace, eager to join the “drone power club”. She mentioned the difficulties to assess the impact of drone strikes, noting that these often generate far more civilian casualties than reported. Other concerns noted by Ms. Callamard were the lack of effective oversight mechanisms, both domestically and internationally, as well as the ongoing lack of transparency surrounding drones strikes and exports. In her recommendations, she urged states to initiate a process of multi-stakeholder discussions to establish a drone technology control regime, which should include stricter control on military and dual-use technology; criteria to prevent ‘irresponsible

transfers' and adherence to civilian protection; and international humanitarian and human rights law.

In his presentation, William Malzahn outlined the existing international mechanisms governing the use and export of drones. He also described the current US-led process to establish a detailed set of international standards for the export and use of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The standards have not yet been finalised but are intended to reinforce existing international efforts. Mr. Malzahn also added that they should be more than merely a political declaration and intend drones to be deployed in a manner consistent with international humanitarian and human rights law.

Maritza Chan stated that efforts to establish new international standards should strengthen, not undermine existing international laws and regulatory regimes. She stressed the need for inclusivity in broader discussions on the implications of remote warfare. As she explained, these discussions should also involve states not manufacturing or importing drones themselves. She added that Costa Rica stands ready to join such debate.

Wim Zwijnenburg shared the main findings of PAX's recently launched report "**Violent Skies**", which aims to shed light on how drone technology is reshaping warfare. He described the different types of drones currently seen on the battlefields of Ukraine and Yemen, ranging from small hand-held ones to larger drones that can carry multiple payloads. He highlighted how commercial drones can easily be weaponised and how state and non-state actors are capable of adapting dual-use technology into lethal drones, presenting a challenge for export control mechanisms. He also warned that the unique capabilities of drones have lowered the threshold to use force, which can lead to an escalation of violence. He urged states to define their position on the use of lethal force in and outside of armed conflict situations, and to actively engage in a multilateral dialogue to address these concerns.

While William Malzahn considered the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons to be the most appropriate forum to develop drone standards, Agnes Callamard said she did not believe there to be an appropriate forum at this moment. Instead, she stressed that the first priority now is to determine the content of these standards. Finally, in response to the statement made by William Malzahn that the use of drones by the US government is consistent with international humanitarian and human rights standards, Agnes Callamard strongly expressed she did not believe this to be the case. However, she also mentioned the importance of critically assessing the practice of other states, in particular major drone exporter China.



FIRST COMMITTEE MONITOR

The First Committee Monitor is a collaborative NGO effort undertaken to make the work of the First Committee more transparent and accessible. The Monitor is compiled, edited, and coordinated by Reaching Critical Will, the disarmament programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

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Reaching Critical Will

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Reaching Critical Will is the disarmament programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the oldest women's peace organization in the world. Reaching Critical Will works on issues related to disarmament and arms control of many different weapon systems; militarism and military spending; and gendered aspects of the impact of weapons and of disarmament processes.

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FIRST COMMITTEE MONITOR

Vol. 18, No. 3

25 October 2020

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Cover photo: International Campaign
to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

The views in this publication are not necessarily those of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom or the Reaching Critical Will programme.