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EDITORIAL: HOSTILE AMENDMENTS TO DISARMAMENT

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

2020 has proven to be a universe of unprecedented happenings. The First Committee was no exception. Not only did it have to adjust to limited in-person meetings, virtual webcasting, and the physical exclusion of civil society, but it also dealt with new procedural antics that required a dusting off of the rules of procedure and a fortitude of spirit from most participants and observers.

While some of what went down this year may seem to be procedurally wonky, or perhaps even irrelevant compared to the challenges being faced every day in our world, it seems worth documenting and analysing because, regrettably, it may not be as irrelevant as we may wish. The goings-on at this year's First Committee session provide insights into what some of the most violent governments in our world are up to in relation to international law, intergovernmental institutions, and the use and development of weapons. Unfortunately, this has real-world implications for us all.

Four new moves

It's often difficult to determine what is behind the public theatrics at intergovernmental forums—to decipher motivations or to have a full picture of the debates going on behind the scenes. This is even more challenging when activists are only able to watch meetings on UN Web TV and not engage with flesh and blood diplomats. But based on what was visible, it seems that Russia tried at least four new things this year, which together provide a picture of a government flexing its muscles and trying to assert its authority over “law and order” at the international level. And while this story is not exclusively about Russia, as will be explained below, it's important to go through each of these moves to set the stage.

1. Russia tried to give the UN Security Council authority over the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons (SGM). Right

now, the SGM gives the Secretary-General the authority to launch an investigation in response to allegations made by any UN member state. In draft resolution [L.65/Rev.1](#), Russia sought to give the Security Council the role of requesting the Secretary-General to undertake investigations—rather than the Secretary-General being able to take such decisions on its own—and for the Security Council to inform states of the results and consider any further action.

Most First Committee delegations saw this as an attempt by Russia and others (such as co-sponsors China, Nicaragua, and Venezuela) to undermine the SGM. As Filippa Lentzos [reported previously](#), while Russia argued its resolution was meant to strengthen the SGM, it has previously condemned any further development or development of the mechanism, undermining this claim. In reality, the resolution's attempt to put the SGM under the authority of Security Council would give Russia and every other permanent member a veto over future investigations. This gambit was clearly seen and rejected by the majority of UN member states, with a [vote](#) of 31 in favour, 63 against, and 67 abstentions, making it one of the few resolutions in recent years that has failed to pass.

2. Russia tried to block the First Committee from taking action on the United Kingdom's new resolution on outer space. The UK delegation tabled a new initiative at the First Committee this year focused on “reducing space threats through norms, rules, and principles of responsible behaviours,” in [L.45/Rev.1](#). In an unprecedented move, as Jessica West [reported previously](#), Russia argued that the First Committee is not competent to address the resolution's content, arguing that it is not strictly related to preventing an arms in outer space (PAROS). A few states agreed, including Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Iran. In response, the UK argued that to the contrary, the development of norms of behaviour is an urgent component of PAROS. Russia's point of order was defeated with a vote of

15 in favour, 105 against, and 33 abstentions. Some delegations called for separate votes on various paragraphs of L.45/Rev.1, but each was easily retained and the UK's resolution was **adopted**.

During the same segment, the usual controversies over Russia's space-related resolutions continued. While it prefers to focus on preventing the placement of weapons in outer space or declarations of no first placement, others argue that Russia's own development of offensive systems undermine the credibility of these initiatives. At the same time, however, the US government's development of a Space Force and its clear intentions of turning outer space into a "warfighting domain" undermine the claims of the United States and some of its allies that they are concerned with preventing irresponsible behaviour in outer space. The United States and Israel continue to be the only two countries that vote against the **annual PAROS resolution** in the First Committee.

3. Russia sought to establish a new open-ended working group (OEWG) on cyber security issues without allowing the current group to decide collectively what should be next. In 2018, as Allison Pytlak explains in this edition of the Monitor, Russia and the United States forced the establishment of two separate UN processes on cyber issues. Russia argued that its OEWG was open and inclusive—though apparently this does not, in the Russian mindset, apply to civil society, which has been effectively locked out of a great deal of the proceedings, at the behest of Russia and a few others. But the OEWG was and is open to the participation of all UN member states, unlike the US-backed Group of Governmental Experts. Yet Russia's move at this year's First Committee to establish a second OEWG, to operate for the next five years (!), clearly runs counter to the Group's asserted inclusivity. Some of the meetings of the OEWG were postponed due to COVID-19—meetings where states would have considered different options for next moves on this issue, including the possibility of streamlining the two forums. Instead of allowing that discussion to take place and for recommendations to be formulated, Russia's tabling

of L.8/Rev.1 sought to pre-empt collective decision making and institutionalise its own preference for moving forward. Perhaps Russia believes this will give it more control over the direction of the OEWG, which it apparently sees as its personal property—proclaiming this week that the OEWG wouldn't even exist without Russia. But forcing the issue in this way undermines the good will of other states and thus risks sabotaging Russia's own process.

Unlike the other moves Russia made during this First Committee session, this one was successful. Despite the consternation expressed by many delegations, L.8/Rev.1 **passed its vote**. Not without difficulty, however. Certain delegations requested a separate vote on the paragraph in L.8/Rev.1 that set out the parameters for the new OEWG, a request that Russia vociferously condemned as "unethical" and "cunning," pointing out that without this paragraph its resolution would be pointless. It challenged the motion calling for the paragraph to be put to a vote—but this challenge was defeated by a **vote** of 57-31-63. Yet when the vote on the paragraph was held, the paragraph was retained, with 92 states **voting** in favour, 52 opposing it, and 24 abstaining. If Russia had been confident that the paragraph would hold and the resolution would be adopted, would it have tried this procedural move to prevent its division? Or, did it object to the division in the grander scheme of procedural moves it undertook at this session, regardless of its anticipated outcome?

4. Which brings us to the final example in this story. **Russia both introduced hostile amendments to the standard annual draft decision on the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) and introduced a competing resolution on the UNDC.** Russia's discontent with the UNDC stems from the failure of the US government—as the host country of UN Headquarters—to comply with the host country agreement's obligation to grant visas to diplomats. This issue has plagued multiple New York-based disarmament forums in recent years, including the First Committee. In 2019 this issue delayed the Committee from starting its work for several days. Most delegations have repeatedly expressed sympathy and solidarity with the Russian delegation

but have been equally firm that substantive work must not cease. They have urged the host country to comply with its obligations and for the matter to be resolved in the relevant UN bodies that deal with these issues, so that it doesn't halt or impede the work of disarmament. While First Committee was able to get to work last year after getting bogged down initially in this issue, the UNDC has not been able to commence its work at all for the past two years.

At First Committee this year, Russia decided to introduce "hostile amendments"—the term for amendments to a motion that changes or defeats the purpose or direction of the motion—to the annual draft decision on the UNDC. This text, [L.49](#), is typically tabled by the chair of the UNDC (currently Australia) and sets the dates for the Commission's next session. Russia's [proposed amendments](#) added several paragraphs about the visa issue and requested the Secretary-General deal with the problem. Only 16 countries [voted](#) in favour of these amendments, while 56 voted against and 70 abstained.

But Russia didn't just try to amend [L.49](#). It also introduced its [own draft decision](#) on the UNDC, along with co-sponsors Cuba, Iran, Nicaragua, Syria, and Venezuela. This text included much of the same language from the amendments proposed to [L.49](#), as a second attempt to get states to support its approach to solving the visa issue. But the majority of countries also rejected this effort, calling for separate votes on six paragraphs and then rejecting the decision as a whole with a [vote](#) of 34 in favour, 55 against, and 67 abstentions.

Hypocrisy Now

If you're wondering what all this means, you're not alone. On the face of it, it seems like Russia spent a great deal of effort throwing mud at the wall to see what would stick. But to what end? To demonstrate that they could jam the works of intergovernmental bodies in general? To sabotage disarmament forums specifically? To force their approach and perspectives on the international community?

From listening to the US and its allies in explanations of vote and right of replies, you might assume all of the above. And you wouldn't necessarily be wrong. But, while Russia and its group of ardent supporters that co-sponsored its resolutions and backed its moves are being publicly disruptive, the US and some of its allies are doing the exact same things.

There is a lot derision expressed by certain—in particular Western—countries to Russia's moves. Yet their disdain for Russia's subversion of procedural norms and substantive rules is matched by their disdain for these same norms and rules themselves. For every accusation against Russia for undermining international law or the international security environment, the same can be said about the United States, as well as many of their allies. All of these countries—particularly the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and others that support US nuclear weapons—flout international laws and attempt to do so with impunity for themselves and with arrogant denunciation of the other. They, too, engage in nuclear weapon modernisation and deployment, as well as in wars of aggression and occupation, in arms exports and sales, in economic warfare and manipulation, and in border imperialism.

All of this hypocrisy comes to a blinding head—in terms of its sheer ironic power—in the two competing Russian and US resolutions on compliance with treaties. [L.59](#), "Compliance with non-proliferation, arms limitation and disarmament agreements and commitments," is a draft decision tabled by the United States, while [L.64](#), "Strengthening and developing the system of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and agreements," is tabled by Russia.

Anyone reading the resolutions under these agenda items could be forgiven for assuming they are the exact same. They are nearly identical in their urging of states to implement and fully comply with their obligations under relevant treaties and agreements. Most delegations, surely with a warranted eye roll, vote in favour of both texts. But Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt,

Nicaragua, Russia, Syria, Venezuela, Zimbabwe abstained on the US draft (Iran voted no). The US voted in favour of Russia's text, but together with the United Kingdom it delivered an explanation that Russia's leadership on this resolution stands in sharp contrast to its behaviour, outlining the litany of ways in which Russia violates international agreements.

The “two men enter, one man leaves” approach to international relations

The gamesmanship on display here and throughout the First Committee's work is more than unsettling. It arguably represents the pursuit of Cold War-style hegemony by Russia and the United States over the norms and rules of disarmament law, but also the ways in which the United Nations itself operates on these issues. Russia's moves against the UNDC and the SGM described above are matched, for example, by the United States' demand that the international community either support its call on China to join arms control discussions with Russia immediately, “or else”.

Both Russia and the United States are increasingly audacious and outrageous in their attempts to assert that their way of doing things is the right way, and that the other is hypocritical, is violating international law, is endangering humanity. The true story is, they both are. All of the countries involved in this game are putting the lives of people and the fate of our planet at risk. All are hypocritical; all are gaslighters. They say they are acting in the interests of peace and security while they bomb civilians, build nuclear weapons, possess chemical stockpiles, develop space weapons, and then tell us, “there's nothing to see here—look over there, at the other guy.”

Meanwhile, other states are caught in the middle. Do they support one side or the other in this **Thunderdome**-esque match? Or can they ignore this polarising death match, or get around it to pursue work that is actually in the interests of all humanity? The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is a good example of this—the majority of countries came together in rejection of the false

convictions and violent hypocrisy of the nuclear-armed states to negotiate and adopt an instrument that builds new norms and laws against nuclear weapons.

This is why the nuclear-armed states hate the TPNW so much, of course. In their attempts to win “hearts and minds” in the fight over who is abiding by norms and rules and who is violating them, the rest of the world just went ahead without them and established new norms and rules. And the nuclear-armed states are all equally in violation of them.

Building and staying in community

It seems then we need more of this—more efforts by the majority to stay out of the ridiculously patriarchal and definitively childish attempts by the so-called major powers to reduce international affairs to violent competition, and instead to build with each other a real community.

Community requires reciprocity, trust, and understanding. It requires us to live in relationship with others, not simply to demand that everyone else obey our commands or conform to our way of thinking. This is not easy to build, and even more difficult to maintain, but this is the only way we can actually achieve the objectives of the UN Charter.

Australia made some welcome comments to this end during the final days of the First Committee, asking, are we here to work collaboratively or to try to oppose our will on others? It said that the failure of most of Russia's moves this year make it clear that “those who come to steam roll people or take over the Committee will not be rewarded,” and argued that we need to think beyond day-to-day wins and procedural battles, to how we embrace each other and move forward together.

This is exactly the kind of approach that the First Committee—and all international work—requires. Unfortunately, as Australian citizens **pointed out**, hypocrisy is not limited to the two nuclear-armed bullies—it's a game played by many. The Australian government, noted one critic, “blocks and

undermines disarmament efforts, holds refugees in criminalised detention for years, and regularly tries to steam roll regional governments on climate and security issues.”

This point is important. Rhetoric, and even good intentions, are not enough. Compelling words at international forums cannot replace actual behaviour. This is not just about Australia or any other single government. All of the delegations participating in the work of the First Committee and other disarmament forums represent governments that engage in problematic behaviour at home and/or abroad, undermining their claims to “responsible” behaviour or to acting in the best interests of humankind or our shared planet.

What this means is everyone needs to do better. The governments that say they believe in the rule of law, in cooperation and dialogue, and that they renounce violence and bullying—they need to work for consistency across their policies and practices in order to truly build community, internally and internationally. This includes working with activists

and other non-governmental actors to build a world that works for everyone, not simply for the elite segments of certain populations. It includes, as **San Marino** urged in the general debate, setting aside animosity and investing in cooperation, dialogue, transparency, trust, education, and development, rather than in armaments and wars.

We do not have unlimited time to work for peace and to build community. Those who are opposed to it—those who seek the preservation of their own power at any cost—are determined to undo the norms, laws, and institutions we’ve already built, and to dismantle our communities and our means and methods of cooperation so that we cannot build any more. This is a death project. We all hold the responsibility to stop it, and the only way we can is by working in solidarity and care with each other. There are more of us than there are of them. But to be effective, we must stop tacitly, implicitly, or actively supporting the behaviour of the death cult leaders—we must be willing to break with traditional practices, alliances, or actions and do what is necessary to save our planet and those that live upon it.

Thank you for following our coverage of the First Committee this year!

Please note that this edition of the *Monitor* does not include reports on all topics covered; for information and analysis on the full range of issues please see earlier editions of the *Monitor* at

<https://reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/unga/2020/fcm>.

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NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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

Looking back at the 2020 First Committee, it is clear that nuclear disarmament continues to face serious challenges. The increasing requests for votes on whole resolutions or separate paragraphs reflects the heightened division amongst states; while the continued watering down of language on previously agreed commitments and obligations in those resolutions shows how the nuclear-armed states and some of their allies are trying to maneuver even further away from disarmament.

Signs that the nuclear-armed states are “clinging ever more tightly to their arsenals,” as observed by Ray Acheson in the previous *Monitor's* editorial, could be seen throughout the general debate and on actions taken on nuclear-related resolutions. For instance, the United States voted for the first time **against** the First Committee **resolution** on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), having abstained in previous years. As well, Japan's **annual resolution**, renamed since 2019 to “Joint courses of action and future-oriented dialogue towards a world without nuclear weapons,” was further watered down. Delegations called for 15 separate votes on individual paragraphs in 2020, increasing from 12 separate votes in 2019. The resolution further backtracks from agreed outcomes of past Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conferences, commonly described as the “cornerstone” of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation—but nuclear-armed states and most of their allies were “going along with this brazen attempt to undermine, discard, rewrite, condition, or ignore legally-binding obligations and political commitments they have agreed to over the past fifty years,” as Acheson **observed**.

Such developments are particularly worrying in light of the upcoming Tenth NPT Review Conference, first rescheduled to January 2021 and now again postponed to August 2021 due to COVID-19 public health concerns. While many delegations expressed their hope for a strong consensus outcome during

this year's deliberations, the fact that well over 100 states **support** the backtracking on previously agreed NPT commitments and obligations doesn't offer too much hope.

But a massive piece of the puzzle is missing in this seemingly bleak outlook. While the nuclear-armed states were tearing each other apart during this year's general debate, the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) reached its 50th ratification on 24 October 2020. This means that the Treaty will enter into force and become international law on 22 January 2021. The overwhelming support to ban the most vicious weapon of all was also reflected in this year's support for the **TPNW resolution**: 118 states **voted** in favour of the resolution, demonstrating once again that the vast majority of UN member states are committed to achieving the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Some of the flaws of the system of nuclear weapons governance, becoming increasingly evident at First Committee and the NPT, can and will be addressed by the TPNW. But other pieces of this system are also important for achieving the goal, held since the creation of the United Nations, of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. It is therefore hoped that the TPNW, once entered into force, will reinvigorate other nuclear disarmament processes and will make for a stronger outcome at next year's First Committee, to work together with a “greater sense of collective responsibility,” aware of what's at stake, to work towards consensus, and to not continue “with business as usual,” as expressed by Indonesia and Mexico, respectively, in their concluding remarks to the Committee.

CHEMICAL WEAPONS

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

During the final week of the 2020 First Committee session, there were few references to chemical weapons, as resolutions relating to this topic had been put to a vote the week before. However, a few states spoke about chemical weapons in relation to other resolutions.

Iran explained that it voted against the US-sponsored draft decision L.59, "Compliance with non-proliferation, arms limitation and disarmament agreements and commitments." The draft decision recalls and keeps on the agenda a resolution from the First Committee's 2017 session (A/RES/72/32), which calls on states to be mindful of and implement their non-proliferation, arms limitation, and disarmament agreements. In its explanation of vote, Iran highlighted that the resolution is proof of another political policy of the United States, which has not complied with its own agreements in this area, including those under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The US has not completed destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile.

Yet, the United States joined with the United Kingdom in a joint explanation of vote (EOV) in connection with their yes vote on Russia-sponsored L.64, "Strengthening and developing the system of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and agreements." They stated that Russia's sponsorship of the resolution stands in sharp contrast to its history of violating these kinds of agreements. Included among their list of examples given in the joint EOV were the Alexei Navalny incident; the poisoning incident in the UK (against Sergei and Yulia Skripal); and Russia's "destabilising cyber operations" including the one against the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The US and UK reiterated that the use of chemical weapons anywhere, any under circumstances, is unacceptable. The European Union, in an EOV on L.64 that included several other countries as well, also recalled the attack against the OPCW.

While the First Committee has concluded its work for the year, other bodies within the United Nations will continue to address chemical weapons and the important work of the OPCW continues. Just last week, the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs briefed the UN Security Council on progress made by Syria in dismantling its chemical weapons programme. The OPCW's technical secretariat has assessed that the declaration submitted by Syria contains too many gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies to be considered accurate and complete.

The 25th session of the Conference of the States Parties to the CWC is scheduled to meet from 30 November–4 December, COVID-19 permitting. And in early December, L.29 will come up for vote again in the UN General Assembly along with all other First Committee resolutions.

Chemical weapons are unfortunately likely to remain bound up in the wider and ever more divisive tit-for-tat finger-pointing between a small, but powerful, group of states. The countries calling out and condemning the use of these horrific weapons are right to do so—chemical weapons are banned, and highly stigmatised, for a reason. Their use is horrific and completely unacceptable. Yet those same countries cannot overlook the double standards implicit in their condemnation. Most of them are nuclear-armed or nuclear umbrella states that are not only failing to comply with their nuclear weapons disarmament obligations but are also updating, modernising, and making more deadly the weapons of mass destruction that they have decided are somehow acceptable. At the same time, the countries that have been found to have used or facilitated the use of chemical weapons cannot simply point to these double standards to avoid accountability, or undermine the institutions and processes that have been built by the international community to investigate and deal with chemical weapon use.

FULLY AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS

Ousman Noor | Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

The 75th annual session of the UN General Assembly First Committee (UNGA) featured 37 states raising fully autonomous weapons (“killer robots”) in their remarks, including calls to make progress on a new international treaty on fully autonomous weapons. The UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, and the International Committee of the Red Cross emphasised the urgency of creating a new framework to ensure that humans remain in control of the use of force. In his address to the high-level debate of the UNGA in September, Pope Francis warned that lethal autonomous weapons systems would “irreversibly alter the nature of warfare, detaching it further from human agency.”

Beyond the First Committee, discussions within the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) framework stalled due to restrictions put in place concerning COVID-19. The CCW Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) meeting, due to be

held from 2–6 November, and the annual meeting due to be held on 11–13 November were both indefinitely postponed. An outcome to the 2020 CCW talks on killer robots was shaky all year, especially given Russia’s failure to participate in the last CCW meeting on killer robots in September after it contested the format and agenda and attempted to postpone the talks until 2021.

In October, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots **urged** states to forge a path forward by launching negotiations on a new international treaty to prohibit weapon systems that lack meaningful human control. Such a framework is essential to safeguard the values we stand for and to ensure that the technologies that we create are kept within our own control and used for the benefit of humanity.

Ample legal and normative precedent shows a new international ban treaty is achievable and essential, according to a new Human Rights Watch **report**.



However, diplomatic talks on lethal autonomous weapons systems since 2014 at the CCW still have not reached an outcome, let alone launched treaty negotiations.

The lack of diplomatic action on killer robots and moves to regulate will only exacerbate rising public concerns over the dangerous development of removing human control from the use of force. It will further diminish trust in the capacity of states to effectively use the consensus-based CCW framework to solve the fundamental security, accountability, legal, and ethical challenges raised by autonomous weapon systems.

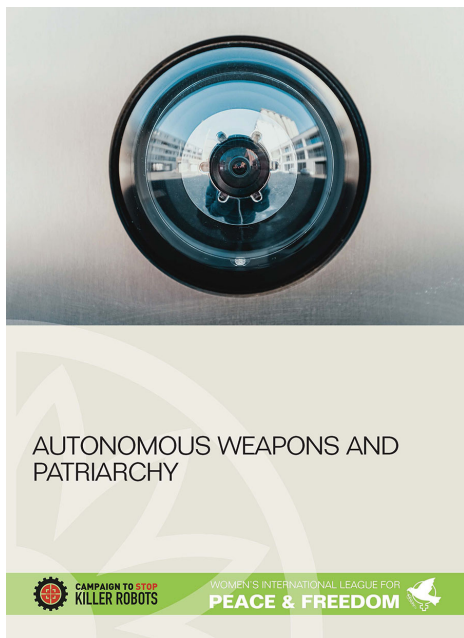
Despite the CCW's woes, 2021 could be a pivotal year for launching negotiations on a new international treaty. Statements made at the 75th UN General Assembly called for deeper understanding on the elements and substantive aspects of an international regulatory framework to retain meaningful human control over the use of force.

A [new leaflet](#) from Article 36 illustrates how a basic model of a new treaty to address autonomous weapons could be structured to address the problems that increased autonomy in weapon systems raise. In addition, a [policy brief](#) by the Campaign encourages states to take a broad view

of emerging technologies of concern and to resist efforts to arbitrarily narrow the scope of discussion. It lays out two fundamental questions that states must resolve: 1) What types of weapon systems or configurations are unacceptable per se? and 2) how can meaningful human control be ensured over any technologies that remain?

Governments continue to make high-level commitments of support to the goal of creating a new international treaty on killer robots. In September 2020, the new Belgian government declared, "Our country takes the initiative to come to a regulatory framework on fully autonomous weapon systems, thereby aiming for an international ban." In August 2020, Costa Rica's Minister of Justice and Peace outlined the ethical and moral unacceptability of lethal autonomous weapons and stated that such weapons have no place in society. Argentina's Senate issued a proclamation in February 2020 reiterating the government's support for the goal of banning killer robots.

Regardless of the forum, the events of 2020 show that states must come together and launch negotiations in 2021 on a new international treaty to ban fully autonomous weapons and retain meaningful human control over the use of force.



These papers from WILPF provide feminist analyses of particular problems posed by the development and potential use of autonomous weapon systems.

Autonomous weapons and patriarchy unpacks the concepts of patriarchy and militarised masculinities and explains how these are relevant for an analysis of autonomous weapon systems.

Autonomous weapons and gender-based violence explores the relationship between these weapons and the broader culture of impunity inherent in gendered violence.

[Download both reports](#)

CYBER PEACE AND SECURITY

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

Over the last few years international cyber security has (needlessly) become one of the most divisive issues on the First Committee's agenda. The antagonism borne out during the 2020 session has roots in the 2018 First Committee session, not to mention broader geopolitical rivalries and hostilities that are also eroding cooperation on other key security issues, like chemical and nuclear weapons.

The 2018 session established two concurrent bodies with near identical mandates to take forward UN discussions on this subject: a first ever **open-ended working group (OEWG)** on information and communications technology (ICTs) and the UN's sixth **group of governmental experts (GGE)** on state behaviour in cyber space. The OEWG was established by a Russian-sponsored resolution and the GGE by a United States (US)-sponsored resolution.

Despite their politicised origins, both entities commenced meetings under the stated commitment of their respective chairpersons and most UN member states to work in complementary and mutually reinforcing ways. As RCW's **own reporting** has stated, the atmosphere in the OEWG meetings was constructive and practical outcomes felt possible. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic ground both groups' work to a halt. Two corresponding draft decisions with near identical language were therefore presented at the 2020 First Committee session, acknowledging the need to change planned OEWG and GGE meeting dates because of the pandemic.

L.47, "Open-ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/27 of 5 December 2018," was tabled by Switzerland, whose Ambassador Jürg Lauber chairs the OEWG. L.47 states that the OEWG shall convene its third and final substantive session from 8–12 March 2021. This was adopted without a vote.

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," was a draft decision tabled by Brazil, whose Ambassador Antonio de Aguiar Patriota chairs the GGE. L.60 requests the UN Secretary-General to convene the GGE's third and fourth sessions before the end of May 2021. This was also adopted without a vote.

While these two draft decisions would have been sufficient to address cyber security at the 2020 First Committee, as Ecuador noted in its explanation of vote, two additional and substantive resolutions were also tabled. Both contain elements that are contradictory enough to have reportedly warranted behind-the-scenes exploration into the legal implications and feasibility of adopting both.

Resolution **L.4**, "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security," was tabled by the United States. It welcomes progress made in the GGE as well as the OEWG and notes the disruptions caused by COVID-19 to the work of both bodies. Where the text becomes provocative is in its operative paragraph (OP) 6, which "Decides that the General Assembly will consider the outcomes of the Group of Governmental Experts and the Open Ended Working Group at the conclusions of those processes, as established in A/RES/73/266 and A/RES/73/27, respectively, and that the Assembly will decide thereafter on any future work, as needed" (emphasis added).

It may sound innocuous and even logical to suggest that a process underway be allowed to decide its own outcome and way forward, particularly when doing so is part of its agreed mandate. However, resolution **L.8/Rev.1**, "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security," tabled by Russia, calls for the

establishment of a new OEWG that would commence work in 2021 as soon as the current OEWG has completed its work—making the decision contained in L.4’s OP6 a direct challenge to the core proposal of Russia’s resolution. One can speculate that this was indeed the intention of the US and other sponsors, in order to avoid further procedural conflict in this area, but in the heated atmosphere of US-Russian relations within and without of the First Committee, this was taken as a deliberate provocation (which may have also been intended).

The new OEWG as outlined in L.8/Rev.1 is proposed to last for a five-year period and the resolution includes a provision for it to establish thematic sub-groups. It identifies areas of focus for the group that are similar to the current OEWG’s six agenda items but also include some new elements or details, notably naming data security as among threats for consideration. In its OP3, L.8/Rev.1 attempts to bridge to the current OEWG by stating that the new group would commence its work as the current one completes its work and consider the outcome of the current OEWG. In addition, in OP4, the draft resolution suggests that the group “may decide to interact, as appropriate, with other interested parties, including businesses, non-governmental organizations and academia.” The qualifiers in this sentence—“may decide,” “as appropriate”—are significant given Russia’s steadfast but behind-the-scenes opposition to non-governmental stakeholder participation in formal OEWG meetings.

As we have reported in [earlier editions](#) of the 2020 *First Committee Monitor*, many member states expressed concern in their general statements at the prospect of voting now to establish a new OEWG before the current OEWG can complete its work and potentially decide on its own terms that a successor be established. As many delegations expressed, establishing a new OEWG now constrains and prejudices the current OEWG’s process.

This is why there was a separate paragraph vote on L.8/Rev.1’s OP1, as well as on its PP10, following the adoption of L.4 by a vote of [153-11-9](#).

A vote on OP1 was opposed by Russia, on the grounds that a separate vote on the core part of its resolution “erodes the text and removes its key idea of a new OEWG,” leaving the resolution with “no point or value”. Russia then invoked a rarely used UN General Assembly Rule of Procedure ([129](#)) to object to the motion to divide the resolution into paragraph votes, which in turn, prompted a vote about having paragraph votes on L.8/Rev.1. Per rule 129, an objection requires two states to support the objection, which Cuba did along with Russia. Nicaragua also supported, though this was superfluous. In a back-and-forth with the First Committee chairperson, Russian described the suggestion of a vote on OP1 as among the “cunning tactics” employed by its opponents, stating that it easily could have pulled a similar move with respect to OP6 of the US-sponsored L.4, but did not do so because that would have been “unethical”. Despite these objections, Russia’s challenge to the motion of division was defeated by a vote of [57-31-63](#), which meant that L.8/Rev.1 was subject to the paragraph votes requested.

PP10 was adopted by a vote of [108-49-11](#) and OP1 by a vote of [92-52-24](#). The resolution as a whole was adopted by a vote of [104 in favour, 50 against, and 20 abstentions](#), establishing a new OEWG.

There were numerous detailed general statements made in relation to these four resolutions, as well as explanations of vote (EOVs) delivered both before and after voting. Some states were uncharacteristically straightforward in describing their reaction to the voting results, depicting frustration and concern over the ongoing divide and politicisation of this issue; while other states highlighted specific concerns about the actions of Russia or the US in cyber space. All such statements are summarised below and organised in a thematic rather than chronological ordering.

Reactions to L.4

Iran said that L.4 ignores the two-year long discussions in the OEWG, as if there have been no

developments on this issue since 2015—which is when the last time that a GGE reached consensus and produced outputs. Iran also argued that L.4's main sponsor personifies a “notorious prototype” that commits malicious acts in cyber space, including the Stuxnet operation, and that it would vote against L.4. Cuba similarly explained that the US has authorised the use of cyber weapons and that urgent action is needed to prevent covert and illegal use of ICTs to harm third countries. Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua said they did not support L.4, with Cuba also noting that the US was not consultative in drafting it.

Russia asserted that L.4 almost completely copies its earlier resolution from 2016 and uses vague ideas to hide what is in OP6, trying to stop member states from putting forward any other initiatives on information security.

The United Kingdom (UK), Armenia, Australia, Argentina, and Switzerland explained that they supported L.4; Australia referred to it as a “great text” that welcomes the work of both the OEWG and GGE. Switzerland noted it is based on agreed language. Argentina said it agrees with L.4's suggestion to consider the conclusions of the OEWG and GGE.

Reactions to L.8/Rev.1

The US voted against L.8/Rev.1, describing it as a “needlessly division proposal” and stating that the attempt by Russia to “make irrelevant the current OEWG that they themselves created is an affront to all member states participating in that process.” The US criticised the resolution's drafting process for not including open or regional consultations, stating that the drafter wants to be “seen as a leader by paying lip service to an inclusive process” but “pursues an affirmation for its own authoritarian approach to cyber security” and is attempting to turn the OEWG and related First Committee resolutions into a Trojan Horse for its own parochial interests. Australia also noted concern about a lack of consultation in the drafting process.

The UK, Australia, and Switzerland echoed many of these concerns about the drafter's intentions and the process; the UK and Australia also highlighted that L.8/Rev.1 rolls back current OEWG commitments to the participation of all stakeholders and introduces topics that go beyond the mandate of the current OEWG, with Australia mentioning data security in particular. The UK said it welcomes the addition of OP2 but argued that in other respects this resolution undermines the UN process. New Zealand said it can see there is an appetite to continue the discussion started by the OEWG but that there are a range of ways in which this could go forward, which need to be discussed within the OEWG first, which is why it did not support L.8.

The European Union (EU) did not support L.8/Rev.1. It explained that its member states feel that it goes against the inclusive spirit of the original resolution that established the OEWG in 2018 and pre-empts on-going work.

Switzerland abstained on L.8/Rev.1 as a whole and the paragraph votes. It regretted that OP2 and OP3 minimise expectations about the results of the current OEWG.

Canada identified three issues with L.8/Rev.1, namely that the current OEWG is still on-going; the five-year mandate is exceptionally long; and that some of the language in the resolution is concerning from a freedom of expression perspective. It voted no.

Egypt voted in favour of L.8/Rev.1 but placed four concerns on record: the new OEWG should only be considered after the existing one concludes its deliberations; it sees structural issues with the proposed OEWG including that it may not lead to other steps like a UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) or other instrument; the references to data security, and national security, may create conflicts of interest; and the sub-groups identified in OP4 must not be used as a way to create exclusive or closed groups, considering as well capacity constraints that would impede participation in multiple sub-groups.

The Philippines warned that taken together, L.4 and L.8/Rev.1 create a situation that could be intense for member states to participate in, especially small delegations, and would create logistical challenges for the UN Secretariat.

Mexico explained that it voted in favour of L.8/Rev.1 but only to demonstrate flexibility. It noted that the five-year time period is arbitrary and doesn't correspond to the intentions of some to have a permanent body. Ecuador supported L.8/Rev.1 as a whole in order to not automatically oppose the formation of new groups but regrets that the draft did not wait for the current OEWG to complete work.

Brazil and South Africa abstained on L.8/Rev.1. Both cited similar concerns about prejudging outcomes. South Africa said it supports the idea of extending the OEWG in general, by two years, to focus on implementation of existing norms instead of developing new ones. Indonesia supported the resolution but abstained on OP1. It commended Russia for its consultative engagement but has concerns about the modalities of work for the new OEWG and would encourage its mandate to be updated every two years "to keep pace with ICT developments". Belarus stated that OP1 enshrines an idea which is key to the entire resolution; without it, the paragraph loses its importance.

Cuba defended L.8/Rev.1 as not prejudicing the outcome of the OEWG but rather as providing an institutional framework. Venezuela said it believes it to be appropriate that member states cooperate on the application of measures to introduce security and stability in the use of ICTs. China suggested that L.8/Rev.1 will put to an end the division caused by two parallel processes on cyber security, noting that many other states have also expressed that the UN should have a single inclusive process.

China also defended PP10, stating it is "shocking" that a country would call for a vote on this and asked if the country calling for this vote would deny that "we are a closely related community". Russia explained that the language of PP10 was taken from the 2017 First Committee resolution on ICTs.

Ecuador regretted that PP10 had been put to a vote. In this context, the EU said it regretted that the main sponsor of L.8/Rev.1 used language that did not enjoy consensus in the past.

Overall concerns about the way ahead

Beyond the specific votes on these resolutions, several delegations expressed frustration with this increasingly divisive situation. Malaysia, which voted in favour of both L.4 and L.8/Rev.1, called on states to not be comfortable with the "status quo of competing approaches and voting exercises. The question is not whether a resolution is adopted or not but what are the implications to international efforts on ICTs?"

The Philippines urged the sponsors of these texts to allow for sufficient discussions and attempt to arrive at a unified resolution before putting them to a vote. Egypt stated that progress on addressing the security aspects of ICTs has been held hostage for decades, as states are guided more by "competition than cooperation". It regretted that none of the ICT resolutions contain any tangible measures, highlighting that it's necessary to have rules to guide conduct in cyber space and preventing technology from being turned into weapons. The EU pledged to work with all to "plot a path" back to consensus. In that regard, it took note of growing support for a proposal within the OEWG to create a UNPoA on cyber security issues. Ecuador and Argentina stated their support for a UNPoA.

Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela spoke favourably about the need to adopt a legally binding instrument to close the significant legal vacuums that they see in cyber space. Venezuela said the proposal to create a new OEWG could provide an inclusive and transparent forum to move toward crafting a legally binding instrument.

Reflections on the existing OEWG and GGE

Some states also offered comments on the two existing processes. Cuba and Nicaragua referred to the OEWG as an historic process, in which all

member states can participate on equal footing. Russia said that creating a democratic process like the OEWG was a victory for the UN. Egypt recalled the valuable progress made during the OEWG, including the engagement with multiple stakeholders. Iran described the OEWG as the most inclusive mechanism, which needs to fulfill its mandate until or unless a new institution for dialogue is established within the UN.

The EU said it welcomes the GGE's consultations with other stakeholders, as done primarily through regional organisations. In contrast, Venezuela feels that the GGE has been insufficient in representing the perspectives of the full UN membership. Argentina noted that after six renewals of the GGE and a context in which cyber risks are rising, we are at a turning point in which states need to grant "greater institutionality" to consider this topic.

Many EOVs noted appreciation for work conducted so far in both bodies and/or their chairpersons, who delivered an [informal briefing](#) to the First Committee on 25 October. Their briefings largely provided an update of what had been discussed in each body so far and an indication of the way ahead, while encouraging continued constructive engagement from states. In an informal question and answer period, Canada said it was pleased to have been able to hear from a broad range of stakeholders via the OEWG. It asked Ambassador Patriota if he sees any challenges to the GGE and OEWG providing complementary guidance to states on implementation of cyber norms, and asked Ambassador Lauber how processes like the OEWG can take concrete steps to ensure the view of women and men are heard equally. Ecuador asked to what extent did the GGE's informal open meeting with all delegations help its deliberations. Informal remarks from Egypt questioned if the OEWG and GGE should move to more action-oriented formats, rather than covering the same ground in their deliberations.

Science and technology

While not strictly related to cyber issues, the First Committee also took action on draft resolution [L.33](#),

"Role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament." The draft, which contained only technical updates from the 2019 version, invites states to apply developments in science and technology for disarmament-related purposes and to remain vigilant in understanding how science and tech developments could imperil international security. It was adopted without a vote.

In general statements and an explanation of vote, Egypt and Pakistan stressed that science and technology are recognised as essential enablers of development and achieving the 2030 Agenda. Pakistan stated that proliferation concerns should not be used as a pretext to deny dual use technologies; and science and technology cannot be denied on political grounds.

Conclusion

Where to from here? The GGE will meet virtually in December. Since June, the OEWG chair has held a series of informal virtual consultations with member states that will wrap up in early December, after which the chair will produce the zero draft of the final report, which is meant to form the basis of the OEWG's third and final meeting, now confirmed for March 2021. Within that, states will continue to discuss and attempt to reach decisions about "regular institutional dialogue" on cyber and ICTs within the UN as per the OEWG's mandate—but now will do so under the shadow of a looming, succeeding OEWG that many states did not support but has nonetheless been adopted.

The fall-out from this decision, and how it was taken, might have repercussions for dynamics within the OEWG and GGE on other core agenda items, and on the willingness of member states to engage in a second OEWG. At a time when hostile cyber operations are on the rise and becoming ever more integrated into the regular military activities of a growing number of states, the need for cooperation toward cyber peace has never felt greater.

EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS IN POPULATED AREAS

Laura Boillot and Anna de Courcy Wheeler | International Network on Explosive Weapons

Despite delays and disruptions to proceedings, this year's First Committee confirmed there is a growing body of states clearly committed to developing new policy to respond to the pattern of civilian death, injury, and suffering caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA). There is also a growing understanding of how a policy response rooted in a political declaration can strengthen military policy and practice towards stronger civilian protection. This is grounded in a recognition that such a response needs to be pursued by those that are willing to do so, in a framework where they cannot be blocked by states without that commitment to stronger protection.

At the First Committee, several states took the opportunity to express their support for the political efforts currently underway, reflecting considerable political developments over the past year that saw the beginning of a series of consultations aimed at developing a political declaration to address civilians harm from the use of EWIPA. Such a declaration has repeatedly been called for by successive UN Secretary-Generals, and the initiation of consultations in 2020 under the leadership of Ireland marked a turning point in commitments to address this issue.

The final consultations—currently on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic—are expected to resume as soon as is safe and feasible, most likely in the first half of 2021. Thus far, the consultations have been productive, with a high level of engagement by states, numerous interventions, and wide-ranging support for the initiative. This high-level engagement has at the same time meant the process is best suited to in-person inputs including from national experts and civil society, and has consequently been difficult to move to online deliberations. States, however, will need to make sure that they deliver on the promise of a political declaration and finalise the negotiations on the text as soon as this is possible.

That is, hopefully, just a few months away. This issue remains urgent—civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons, particularly where they have wide area effects, remains unacceptably high. The recent outbreak of violent conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, where heavy artillery has been used in major cities, has again vividly demonstrated the death, injury and destruction explosive weapons cause when they are used in populated areas.

In the two rounds of consultations completed thus far, states made significant headway in the development of a text on the use of EWIPA: possible elements of a declaration have been elaborated, and a draft text exists. INEW has set out key points (including in INEW's commentary paper) that require further consideration when negotiations resume, which include:

A strengthening of the humanitarian understanding and response to the problem. This includes in the preamble, and relevant commitments. The preamble could benefit from clearer descriptions of the human suffering and humanitarian impacts from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, as well as the direct link between wide area effects and risk of harm to civilians. Humanitarian commitments in the areas of victim assistance, as well as data collection and sharing on both the impact of use and on the weapon use could also be further strengthened.

A declaration should recognise the direct relationship between wide area effects and the risk of harm this presents to civilians, and contain a concurrent commitment against such use. The preamble of the declaration should describe wide area effects as factors resulting from large blast and fragmentation radius, inaccuracy of delivery, or from weapons that have multiple warheads or multiple firings, and where the effects of the weapon extend beyond or outside of the target area of a specific military objective exposing civilians to a significant risk of harm.

It should prevent use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas—even against lawful military objectives—because of the excessive risk of harm it presents to the civilian population.

Whilst some fear that such an approach to entail a prohibition on certain types of explosive weapons, it should be understood as a reasonable obligation upon militaries to make more careful considerations over their choice of weapons in particular circumstances by undertaking thorough assessments in advance.

The declaration should require states to improve operational policy and practice to better protect civilians. To drive forward meaningful operational changes in practice as a result of joining the declaration, a commitment against use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas should be embedded in military doctrines and operational policies and procedures.

The declaration should instil processes where militaries are required to make detailed assessments to understand the effects of a weapon and especially the area effects, and to evaluate the implications of

those in context, including the presence of civilians and likely long-term “reverberating” effects. A declaration would benefit from suggesting some clear steps and understandings in these areas to ensure it provides useful guidance for militaries, and avoids commitments that are too general.

While some states have argued that a declaration should only address indiscriminate, disproportionate, or illegal use of explosive weapons, this would not serve any meaningful function in reducing harm. It is unclear upon what basis these states are making claims that civilian harm is a result of illegal use of explosive weapons only. A statement reminding other states to abide by the law is setting a very low bar for what can be achieved, and would fall short of the declaration’s humanitarian potential.

Many states and organisations, including the UN Secretary-General and the International Committee of the Red Cross, have called for states to avoid use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas, and this is what is needed—be it in this text formulation or another formulation that conveys the same meaning.

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Amelie Namuroy | International Action Network on Small Arms

Throughout First Committee, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on global security was a central theme. For many states the pandemic has reinforced the importance of international cooperation and assistance to curb the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW).

As noted by the Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), Renata Dwan, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected arms control work significantly, and as a result, activities have had to be adapted. Ms. Dwan underlined that assessing the support needed by member

states and regional organisations is a critical part of UNIDIR’s work on conventional arms. The institutional assistance offered by UNIDIR reflected a sentiment of many member states who reiterated the need to strengthen international assistance, work cooperatively to ensure the security and stability of states, and ensure states’ compliance with international law and applicable international humanitarian law and human rights law, in order to prevent the diversion of SALW and curb its illicit proliferation. Many states noted that the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7), scheduled to take place at the end of July 2021, will provide an opportunity to tangibly strengthen such cooperation.

During the last two meetings of the First Committee, member states took action on several resolutions related to SALW.

Regional Centres

L.40, “United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific,” which was adopted without a vote, states that the mandate of the Regional Centre is to provide substantive support for initiatives and activities focused on peace and disarmament that are mutually agreed upon by the member states of the Asia-Pacific region. With regard to SALW, L.40 takes note of the UN Secretary General’s report (A/75/112), which highlights the important work taking place in organising national and sub-regional workshops on the control of SALW, including: a training workshop for states of South-East Asia on the utilisation of the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC) to develop national action plans to reduce illegal arms flows; a project to provide technical and legal assistance to Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste to strengthen the implementation of the UNPoA and the ATT; and a capacity-building project for states in Asia and the Pacific on gun violence and illicit small arms trafficking from a gender perspective.

L.57, “United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean,” which was adopted without a vote, welcomed the ongoing support provided by the Regional Centre to member states in the implementation of the UNPoA including: assistance to some states in managing and securing national weapons stockpiles and in identifying and destroying surplus, obsolete, or seized weapons and ammunition; and initiatives to promote the equitable representation of women in all decision-making processes related to disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control.

L.11, “United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa,” which was adopted without a vote, reaffirmed the role of the Regional Centre in promoting disarmament, peace, and security at the regional level; welcomed the continuing and

deepening cooperation between the Regional Centre, the African Union (AU), and African subregional organisations in the context of the adoption of Agenda 2063, and the objective of silencing the guns in Africa by 2020; and welcomed the work of the Regional Centre in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, and target 16.4, which addresses the reduction of illicit arms flows.

Cluster 6 on regional disarmament and security

Pakistan introduced resolutions L.23, L.24, and L.25, emphasising that peace and security are codependent on maintaining security at regional levels and that this principle is recognised in the UN Charter.

L.23, “Regional disarmament,” was adopted without a vote. L.23 recognises the importance of confidence-building measures for regional and international peace and security. It also affirms that global and regional approaches to disarmament can be complementary to one another, and should be pursued simultaneously to promote regional and international peace and security.

L.24, “Conventional arms control at the regional and subregional levels.” One hundred and fifty-nine member states voted in favour, while Bhutan and Russia abstained and India voted against the resolution. Member states also voted on two of its paragraphs, with two member states, Russia and India, voting against preambular paragraph (PP) 7. PP7 states that “militarily significant States and States with larger military capabilities have a special responsibility in promoting such agreements for regional security”. Ninety-nine member states voted in favour of operative paragraph (OP) 2, 49 states abstained and India voted against it. OP2 “requests the Conference on Disarmament to consider the formulation of principles that can serve as a framework for regional agreements on conventional arms control, and looks forward to a report of the Conference on this subject.” In its explanation of vote, India stated that the Conference on Disarmament

(CD) is the forum for negotiating disarmament treaties of global application. Therefore, there is no need for the CD to negotiate on these matters at the regional levels as India is not convinced that conventional arms control, which is a global issue, needs to be pursued at the regional or sub-regional level.

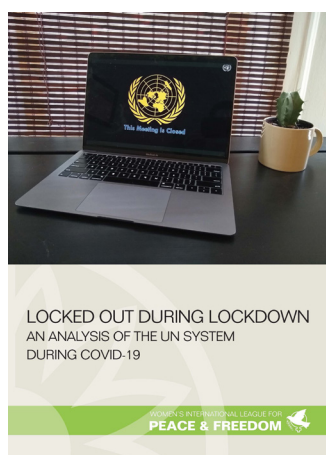
L.25, “Confidence-building measures in the regional and subregional context,” was adopted without a vote. L.25 noted concerns that the continuation of disputes among states may contribute to the arms race, endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, and hinder the efforts of the international community to promote arms control and disarmament. The resolution also states that resources released by disarmament can be devoted to economic and social development and to the protection of the environment for the benefit of all peoples.

L.9, “Maintenance of international security – good-neighbourliness, stability and development in South-Eastern Europe,” was adopted without a vote, as an item to include in the provisional agenda of the General Assembly’s seventy-seventh session.

L.31, “Strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region,” in part encourages member states to combat international crime and illicit arms transfers, which pose a serious threat to peace, security, and stability in the region (OP7). One hundred and sixty member states voted in favour of L.31, while two member states, Israel

and the United States, abstained. States voted on two of its paragraphs, OP2 and OP5. The United States and Israel both voted against OP2 and OP5. One hundred and fifty-four and 155 member states respectively voted in favour of the OPs; no member states abstained. OP2 “calls for full adherence to the principles of non-interference, non-intervention, non-use of force or threat of use of force and the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, in accordance with the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations”. OP5 “calls upon all States of the Mediterranean region that have not yet done so to adhere to all the multilaterally negotiated legal instruments in force related to the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, thus creating the conditions necessary for strengthening peace and cooperation in the region.”

In the closing meeting of the First Committee, the chairperson stated that when the work started, there was considerable pessimism as COVID-19 did not allow for normal sessions to take place. However, the Chair emphasised the importance of this year’s First Committee session because the world is facing a new arms race and regional tensions have heightened. The Chair concluded by stating that member states have taken action on more resolutions than usual and that this reflects hope that it is possible to collectively move forward and put an end to the threat of armed conflicts. The real test, of course, is the extent to which these resolutions are implemented and reduce the human cost of the excessive accumulation and illicit proliferation of SALW.



This recent **report** from WILPF provides an overview of the impact of the COVID-19-related changes in process and procedure at the United Nations, particularly in terms of transparency and accessibility to civil society. It focuses on processes and forums related to disarmament and human rights, and covers briefly the work of the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, and the Commission on the Status of Women, covering the period of March to mid-September 2020.

Written by Ray Acheson • Published in September 2020 by Reaching Critical Will, a programme of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom • 28 pages

GENDER AND DISARMAMENT

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

The biennial resolution L.21, "Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control," was adopted in the final week of First Committee. The resolution was adopted without a vote as a whole, but certain delegations called for separate votes on preambular paragraphs (PP) 5, 9, 13, and 16—all of which were retained. As described in the previous edition of this Monitor, this resolution is the strongest yet on this agenda item. Unfortunately, stronger language also meant that more voting was requested than in previous years. In 2018 and 2016, the only vote was requested on a PP referring to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

In its explanation of vote (EOV) in support of the resolution, the European Union (EU) and associated states stressed that gender equality is an "important cross-cutting theme," and that the EU mainstreams the Women, Peace, and Security agenda across EU initiatives.

Russia noted that while it joined consensus on this resolution, it regrets that the resolution references gender aspects of different international documents, explaining its abstention on the relevant paragraphs. Iran explained that it voted in favour of the resolution but put on record that the resolution is acceptable as long as it's in line with Iran's constitution, law, and procedures.

PP5 was retained with a vote of 173-0-4. It takes note of action 36 of the UN Secretary-General's disarmament agenda on the full and equal participation of women in decision-making processes, and action 37 on gender parity on disarmament bodies established by the Secretariat. Armenia, Syria, Iran, and Russia abstained.

PP9, recognising that women should not only be perceived as victims of gender-based armed violence but also as agents in armed violence reduction was retained with a vote of 171-0-4. The Solomon Islands, Algeria, China, and Russia abstained.

PP13, referring to gender aspects in the context of the ATT, was retained with a vote of 153-0-20. India explained its abstention to this PP as it is not a state party to the ATT.

PP16 was retained with a vote of 153-0-18. It addresses the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and increase of gender-based and domestic violence. Russia abstained from this PP as it doesn't support the reference to COVID-19, arguing that the pandemic impacts men and women equally. Iran also said that the reference to COVID-19 isn't relevant in the context of this resolution.

Overall, despite this year's challenges posed by COVID-19, First Committee adopted an unprecedented 18 resolutions including gender references, recognising the various close interlinkages between gender and disarmament. In 2020, L.11, L.12, L.21, L.24, L.26, L.38, L.40, L.43, L.44, L.45/Rev.1, L.52, L.53, L.54, L.57, L.61, L.69, L.72, and L.73 all call for women's equal participation; stress the gendered impacts of weapon systems and armed violence; and/or underscore the need for gender considerations in disarmament efforts more broadly. This is 25 per cent out of all 72 adopted resolutions and decisions in 2020. Two resolutions either added language on gender for the first time (L.45/Rev.1), or reintroduced language on gender after it had been deleted in 2019 (L.71). L.21 and L.40 have stronger and more comprehensive language on gender compared to when they were last tabled. (Please note that where action has been taken on these resolutions, they are reported on in other reports in this *Monitor*, as are the other non-gender related aspects of these resolutions.)

For comparison, in 2019 and 2018, 17 resolutions included gender references, respectively. This was 28 per cent of all resolutions in 2019—a then unparalleled number—and 25 per cent in 2018 of all adopted resolutions. This figure was 15 per cent in 2017, 13 per cent in 2016, and 12 per cent in 2015.

2018 was a particular turning point as six resolutions included gender language for the first time ever, while three resolutions had made their language on gender stronger. In 2019, four additional resolutions included language on gender for the first time.

Unfortunately, due to the restricted meetings this year, thematic statements, including under the cluster of disarmament machinery, could not be delivered in plenary. In the past years, an increasing number of states delivered a [joint statement](#) on gender under this cluster. Last year, the statement mobilised 79 states to put on record their support for gender considerations in disarmament and arms control processes. This is almost 20 more states than in 2018, where 60 states supported a similar statement. It would have been interesting to see if the support had continued this year. There is still the option for such a statement to be included in the 2020 First Committee compendium, collecting, amongst others, thematic written statements under all clusters, to be published early next year.

It is welcome that the increase of support for gender perspectives in disarmament continues to grow. As awareness about the need for more diverse

participation and the need to better understand gendered impacts of weapons and armed violence is increasing, the First Committee has to start implementing commitments in their resolutions and statements. It is high time that action follows rhetoric. States need to implement measures and policies that truly lead to more gender diverse delegations and civil society and expert participation. States should also improve sex- and gender-disaggregated data collection on the impacts of armed violence as well as improve the sharing and coordination of the data.

Moreover, applying a gender perspective also means that we collectively question gendered stereotypes of what is considered “feminine” and “masculine,” and how those are associated with violence, war and militarism. As this year’s [joint civil society statement](#) on gender observes, we need a more “robust reflection of the gendered norms associated with weapons, war, and violence,” and to change “our perceptions and understandings in order to crack through the deadlock and despair to make concrete progress in building a peaceful and just world for all.”

DISARMAMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Danielle Samler | Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy

The importance of prioritising development over military expenditure and modernisation of arsenals was expressed throughout the First Committee this year by a number of delegations, with many calling for resources to instead be allocated to addressing the unprecedented economic and health crisis all countries are experiencing now with the COVID-19 pandemic. The link between disarmament and development was further solidified through the adoption of resolution [L.15](#), “Relationship between disarmament and development,” without a vote.

Statements regarding development and disarmament in the latter half of First Committee

meetings included comments on development as it relates to cyberspace, outer space, the conventional arms trade, and military spending. Egypt and Armenia both identified the important role that science and technology play in enabling countries to fulfill the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Iran, in an explanation of vote on resolution L.45, noted that the monopolisation of outer space hinders developing countries in their pursuit of achieving the 2030 Agenda. Colombia highlighted the negative impact on development by the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, explosives, and ammunition.

It is without a doubt that the topic of development and disarmament was of particular importance this year as the First Committee met under unprecedented circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fact that while states spend trillions of dollars on their militaries and weapons systems, when they are faced with problems militaries and weapons cannot solve, they are vastly underprepared. The catastrophic loss of life and the extreme economic and social impacts the virus has had on United States alone brings to the forefront just how warped governmental priorities are. Rather than continuing to increase military spending and modernising arsenals, states must address the global health crisis at hand, which cannot be solved by a strong military and upgraded weapons systems. This was poignantly emphasised by Cuba, stating that the United States is most affected by the pandemic due to flawed policies, yet continues to give vast amounts to its weapon programmes.

Apart from the current global pandemic situation, hindrances to sustainable development caused by small arms and light weapons, landmines, cluster munitions, weapons of mass destruction, the weaponisation of cyberspace and outer space, as well as negative environmental impacts of weapons and war, continue to persist and worsen. While states acknowledged this important relationship between disarmament and development, military spending and modernisation programmes continue. Meanwhile, COVID-19 deaths are on the rise, forced displacement and attacks on critical infrastructure are increasing, and states are getting further and further away from achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. There is no better time than the present for states to seriously examine their priorities, reduce military spending, and pour resources into helping their people and societies in order to ensure long-lasting peace, stability, and sustainable development.

YOUTH AND DISARMAMENT EDUCATION

Matthew Bolton | Pace University

First Committee adopted draft resolution [L.42](#), “Disarmament and non-proliferation education,” without a vote. The text of the biennial resolution has minor changes from previous years, most of which align it with last year’s resolution on “Youth, disarmament and non-proliferation” (A/RES/74/64). A separate [vote](#) on operative paragraph (OP) 4, which notes relevant recommendations of the UN Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, received 170 votes in favour, none against, and three abstentions (Iran, Russia, and Syria). In explaining its vote, India expressed support for disarmament education.

The First Committee adopted other related resolutions. Both draft resolution [L.12](#) on the UN United Nations disarmament fellowship, training,

and advisory services and draft resolution [L.41](#) on the UN Disarmament Information Programme were adopted without a vote. Resolution [L.37](#) on the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) was adopted with a [vote](#) of 171 in favour, none against, and two abstentions (Israel and USA); a specific [vote](#) on OP8, regarding a possible budget increase, received 160 votes in favour, one against (USA), and three abstentions (Colombia, Israel, and Japan). In explaining their votes, Germany and France jointly highlighted the need for increasing UNIDIR’s budget and expressed regret that a vote was requested on the resolution. New Zealand offered strong support for increasing UNIDIR’s funding and appreciation for its role in high quality research, and creative thinking and dialogue. Brazil expressed support for UNIDIR though it also expressed concern about UN budgetary restrictions and related funding issues.

NEW PUBLICATION: “NAVIGATING DISARMAMENT EDUCATION: THE PEACE BOAT MODEL”

Peace Boat

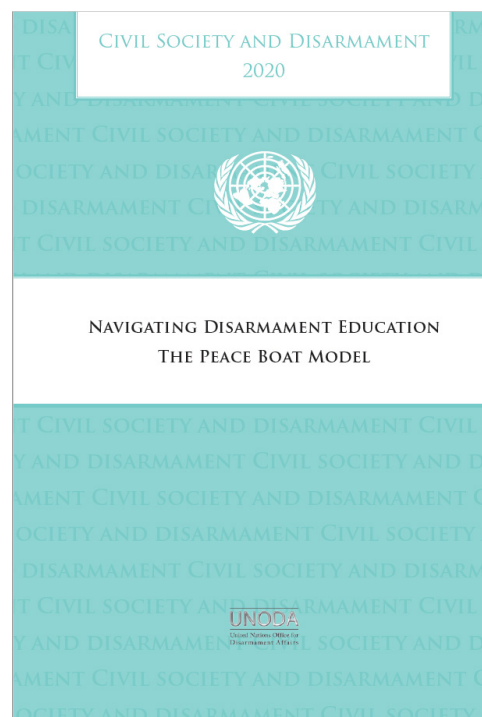
A new publication introducing Peace Boat’s methodology for disarmament education was released from the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) earlier this month. The publication, titled “[Navigating Disarmament Education: The Peace Boat Model](#)” and written by Hatakeyama Sumiko and Kawasaki Akira of Peace Boat with the assistance of Meri Joyce, is part of the series “Civil Society and Disarmament” which is published by UNODA within the context of the UN General Assembly resolutions on the United Nations Disarmament Information Programme and the United Nations Study on Disarmament and Non-proliferation Education.

With 37 years of experience in coordinating people-to-people exchange via voyages on a passenger ship, Peace Boat has implemented various disarmament education programmes over the past decades. As a steering group member organisation of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Peace Boat has been particularly active in engaging hibakusha—atomic-bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Together with hibakusha, Peace Boat has worked with youth from all backgrounds to think about why disarmament is important and how it works.

“Navigating Disarmament Education: The Peace Boat Model” directly stems from lessons learned through the implementation of various disarmament education programmes over the past decades. Through organising, coordinating, and leading various disarmament education initiatives, Peace Boat has reaffirmed its strong belief that effective disarmament education efforts should strive to be both “education about disarmament” and “education for disarmament”. It should teach people about wars, conflicts, weapons proliferation, and the arms trade, but it should also empower people to transform our society to one that is conducive to

disarmament. In order to strike a good balance between “education about disarmament” and “education for disarmament” and to achieve both, Peace Boat proposes that a well-devised disarmament education programme should include three complementary components: “feeling” the issue; acquiring knowledge; and learning the skills to effect change. The publication elaborates on these three components with specific stories that highlight each. It also discusses how disarmament education should be implemented in relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how digital technologies can be leveraged to provide a fruitful experience for participants.

Recognising the many other existing initiatives, Peace Boat hopes that the publication can inspire disarmament educators across the world in their efforts, and that its application can be broad, as disarmament education becomes more widely implemented formally and informally.



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).

Contributors to this edition:

Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, International Action Network on Small Arms, International Network on Explosive Weapons, Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, Pace University, Peace Boat, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom



Reaching Critical Will

www.reachingcriticalwill.org



www.wilpf.org

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.

Reaching Critical Will is your primary source for information, documents, and analysis about the United Nations General Assembly First Committee and other multilateral disarmament conferences and processes.

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Editors: Ray Acheson and
Allison Pytlak
disarm@wilpf.org

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.