

# FIRST COMMITTEE MONITOR

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- |    |                           |    |                                 |
|----|---------------------------|----|---------------------------------|
| 1  | Editorial                 | 19 | Small arms and light weapons    |
| 5  | Nuclear weapons           | 21 | International arms trade        |
| 12 | Biological weapons        | 23 | Outer space                     |
| 14 | Chemical weapons          | 25 | Cyber peace and security        |
| 15 | Autonomous weapon systems | 27 | Disarmament and development     |
| 16 | Cluster munitions         | 29 | Environment and disarmament     |
| 17 | Landmines                 | 30 | Gender and disarmament          |
| 18 | Explosive weapons         | 31 | Youth and disarmament education |



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# EDITORIAL: COMPETITION, CONFRONTATION, AND CONFLAGRATION—OR CONSTRUCTING PEACE THROUGH COOPERATION AND CARE

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

As First Committee wrapped up its general debate and moved through the first of two thematic debate segments, concerns with rising militarism were forefront in the statements of most delegations. Perhaps because of the spotlights that the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing climate chaos have shone on government preparedness and expenditure, more and more states are conveying dismay at the resources wasted on militarism at the expense of everything else. “The resources being expended as military budgets are direly needed elsewhere,” said Zimbabwe, “including for post pandemic recovery, development finance, preventing future pandemics, poverty eradication and climate adaptation and mitigation.”

Beyond the wasted resources, delegations are also concerned with the ongoing competition among heavily militarised countries—especially the nuclear-armed states. Many governments worry that this competition will lead to confrontation. “Perceptions of insecurity are fed by the return of aggressive rhetoric, stockpile announcements, and erosion of treaties,” warned Mexico, while Sierra Leone said that rising military spending breeds mistrust and indicates that states have “reverted to the arms race in preparation for military engagement.”

This has once again reached the point of an existential threat to humanity, Nepal admonished, arguing that today’s nuclear weapon modernisation race does not demonstrate *ability*, but rather the *inability* to make peace and build confidence, and our “propensity to live under constant fear.” Costa Rica cautioned that there is a “risk of a self-fulfilling prophecy” in the escalation of tensions between some nuclear-armed states, “as each takes progressively hostile measures in response to the actions of the other.”

## The pursuit of peace through disarmament

Most governments have appealed to the nuclear-armed states for decades to reconcile their differences and engage in multilateral action to eliminate their arsenals of mass destruction. Two decades into the 21st century, these appeals are still forthcoming. “Hopefully, one day in the not-too-distant future,” said Kiribati, the leaders of nuclear-armed states “would finally trust each other and agree to do away with all nuclear weapons and all other life-destroying machines and put all their wealth and resources to making the world a truly peaceful, loving, caring and happy home for all.”

While still issuing these appeals, many countries have worked to create this world themselves. The development of humanitarian disarmament treaties, including the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Mine Ban Treaty, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Arms Trade Treaty, and other agreements, are part of a genuine effort to construct a world where human security and human rights guide government action, rather than the profits of war and the perceived power of weapons. Building this world, a more just and secure world, requires us to “let weapons fall from our hands,” urged the Holy See. “When we yield to the logic of arms, we distance ourselves from the practice of dialogue and forget, to our detriment, that weapons monopolize financial resources, interrupt projects of solidarity and of useful labor, cause damage to the environment, and warp the outlook of nations even before their use wounds a single person.”

## Warped worldviews and tonal shifts

This warping is greatest amongst the most militarised countries in the world. Their arsenals

and violent global engagements are reinforced again and again by investing in weapons and waging war, regardless of how many times (every time) this results in more conflict and carnage. A feature of this warped perspective is the construction of narratives justifying the perpetual cycle of violence. It spawns rhetoric that contradicts reality, which works to preclude real action for change.

Purporting to be interested in pursuing a different path, for example, the United States told First Committee it will “head off costly arms races and re-establish U.S. credibility as a leader in arms control.” Yet in the same breath it said that it will ensure “the U.S. strategic deterrent remains safe, secure, and effective and that U.S. extended deterrence commitments to our allies remain strong and credible.” The emphasis on credibility in both sentences is curious, as being credible in one precludes credibility in the other. Either one is committed to arms control, or one believes in deterrence, but not both. As we have seen for the past 76 years, believing in deterrence means investing in, modernising, deploying, and threatening to use nuclear weapons, all of which undermines any

credibility of commitment to arms control, let alone disarmament.

The change in rhetoric is not unwelcome. In fact, in First Committee it feels like a breath of fresh air. The tone of the tensions between Russia and the United States is a much lower pitch so far this session. Russia reiterated its “cautious optimism” that it will be able “to creatively work on finding common ground” with the United States, while still expressing concern with the US withdrawal from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty and US nuclear weapon “sharing” with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) members. Furthermore, following an informal briefing from the chairpersons of the two UN cyber processes, Russia announced that it and the United States will jointly table a single resolution on cyber security, in order to allow the UN to “return to a single-track process” after three years of division.

The US delegation, in turn, highlighted its efforts to work with Russia on a Strategic Security Dialogue to “lay the groundwork” for additional arms control measures. Rather than berating Russia, as it has



Image: Dimity Hawkins

done extensively in past years, the United States focused its critique on China, proclaiming, “The PRC is building a larger, more diverse nuclear arsenal than the ‘minimum deterrent’ it has touted for decades. This rapid build-up has become more difficult to hide and highlights how China is deviating from decades of nuclear strategy based around minimum deterrence.” The US delegation argued that this demonstrates “why it is in everyone’s interest that nuclear powers talk to one another directly about reducing nuclear dangers and avoiding miscalculation,” and encouraged China to engage with the US “on practical measures to reduce the risks of destabilizing arms races and conflict.”

The US has been trying for more than a year to cajole China into joining nuclear arms control discussions with it and Russia. Several US allies also echoed the calls for China to join these talks, while in contrast, Russia said that “attempts to ‘compel’ anyone to participate in such discussions are counterproductive.” [Last year’s First Committee theatrics](#) in this regard were much more aggressive. However, while the language is toned down under the new US administration, the aggressive military posturing has increased dramatically with the recent announcement of the new nuclear submarine-based alliance with Australia and the United Kingdom (AUKUS) aimed at fortifying US military power in the Asia-Pacific region (see [last week’s editorial](#) for details).

China remarked that the US, “in pursuit of absolute military advantage, keeps hyping up major-power competition, strengthens military alliances, makes huge investment in upgrading its nuclear triad, lowers the threshold for using nuclear weapons, and constantly develops and deploys global anti-missile system, undermining global strategic balance and stability.” Arguing that the United States has a “special and primary responsibility” for nuclear disarmament given that it has conducted the most nuclear tests and makes the largest investments in its arsenal, China said the US must “create conditions for other nuclear-weapon states to join nuclear disarmament process.”

## Conditioning and posturing

It was only a matter of time, perhaps, before the nuclear-armed states started demanding condition-creating efforts of each other, rather than just of states that don’t possess nuclear weapons. A tiresome tactic to displace their responsibility for the stalemate in nuclear disarmament, the demand on other states to “create conditions” more “favourable” for disarmament is like an abuser arguing that the abused is responsible for the abuse and needs to change their behaviour for the abuse to stop. This patriarchal ploy has been deployed in First Committee and other multilateral disarmament forums for years. This new twist, while putting the responsibility at least partially where it lies, continues to displace the responsibility of others. That is, everyone concerned here has nuclear weapons, but some purport that their arsenals are not as devastating or as menacing.

Except, they are. Regardless of the possessor, Palestine said, “in all cases nuclear weapons are the enemy.” This is neither theoretical nor historical, noted Palestine. “The world has been on the verge of a nuclear war too many times to underestimate the risk. Let us not tempt fate any further.”

Why is it that the nuclear-armed take this risk in the first place? More and more governments are demanding answers to this question, as it is only a small fraction of countries that possess nuclear weapons or defend their existence. Mexico pointed out that 116 states are part of denuclearised zones and do not belong to military alliances that base their security on nuclear weapons and deterrence doctrines, the threat from which “is a form of terrorism against humanity.” Despite this, the nuclear-armed states argue that the security environment is not conducive to nuclear disarmament. “How long will they keep trying to deceive us?” asked Mexico.

Arguing that the world cannot just stand by and wait until the “conditions” are right for disarmament, Palestine remarked that the logic of this approach



implies that everyone is entitled to pursue “security” through “deterrence,” in which case all weapons of mass destruction are fair game. “But that is not the international law-based order we built,” said Palestine.

Every First Committee, this order appears more fragile than the last. “The aggressive postures of a few States to secure themselves through military means negatively affects the security of all States, in every layer of the atmosphere,” warned Liechtenstein. As the nuclear-armed states modernise and enhance their capabilities in the name of “deterrence,” they escalate tensions and enhance the momentum of nuclear proliferation, with dire consequences for global security. “The time is now for the world to completely shift the paradigm from armament,” proclaimed Zambia, and instead use the “huge sums of funds used in nuclear weapons research, manufacturing and testing” to save lives instead.

### **Shifting from weapons to welfare**

Costa Rica made some important suggestions in this regard, offering some concrete ideas for how to make the shift from weapons to well-being. It highlighted the value of taking a feminist approach to disarmament, “which challenges the archaic assumption that power competition is the right way to conduct foreign relations and ensure national security.” A feminist approach recognises that “the most dire threats to human security—from pandemics, food and water insecurity, to climate change—do not recognize the artificial constructs of borders, and they cannot be effectively mitigated by unilateral action.” A feminist approach also confronts “women’s underrepresentation and other patterns of marginalization” in disarmament fora and works to ensure “the participation of victims and survivors—those who have been most directly impacted by the trade and proliferation of weapons, along with the full consideration of their humanitarian consequences.”

Costa Rica noted that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) “shows us some ways

in which it is possible to create a more inclusive and safe future for all.” But, it argued, “that future will only be possible when the nuclear-weapon States stop multiplying

and modernizing their nuclear arsenals; when reductions are verifiable, transparent, and under the watchful eye of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).” And that future will only be possible when nuclear-armed states comply with all the obligations arising from relevant treaties, and not just some of them.

Outside of First Committee, we are seeing shifts both away from and towards such a world. The nuclear-armed states, unfortunately, are violating their non-proliferation and disarmament obligations while also investing in new technologies of violence. But others are not. The humanitarian disarmament treaties noted earlier are providing the guideposts for the policies of many countries in the world. States are seriously engaged in their implementation and universalisation. The newest instrument, the TPNW, is receiving support even from currently non-states parties, with Norway announcing last week that it will attend the First Meeting of States Parties (1MSP) as an observer—the first NATO member to do so, along with Sweden, Switzerland, and Finland. TPNW states parties Kiribati and Kazakhstan delivered a detailed joint statement to First Committee suggesting important considerations for 1MSP, signalling that they and others are preparing now for the meeting in March and are working hard to ensure the treaty has a meaningful impact in the world.

This is a possible future. Endless war and wasted resources and rising tensions are not inevitable. They are chosen, by a handful of states that have oriented their economies and politics around violence. They can change. The rest of the world can help them change, by guiding the way in climate action, in disarmament action, in human rights, justice, equality, and care. Standing together in solidarity is the best way to create this kind of change; we have seen it happen before, and at this point, it is the only way we’ll survive.

# NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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

In the second week of the First Committee's general debate and the first cluster of thematic debates, the topic of nuclear disarmament continued to be priority for many. While the handful of nuclear-armed states continued to try to justify their reasons for their persistent possession of nuclear weapons, many states directly called out the misguided notion of nuclear "deterrence". Mexico pointed out that the failure of "deterrence" is evident in an increase from five to nine nuclear-armed states. Austria argued that geopolitical competition cannot be managed by nuclear deterrence; the risks are too great, and consequences for all humanity are too dire, calling deterrence an "illusion of security".

The New Agenda Coalition (NAC) also argued that the global security environment isn't an excuse for inaction, but rather reinforces the urgency for nuclear disarmament. In a similar vein, Palestine asserted that "We cannot stand by and wait till the environment is ripe, till the circumstances are right, as there will always be a reason or a pretext not to move ahead." Mexico wondered how long nuclear-armed states will deceive the rest of the world with its argument that the complex security environment doesn't lend itself to nuclear disarmament.

Austria called for a "paradigm change". The vast majority of member states at First Committee rallied behind this sentiment, enthusiastically welcoming the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) as a vessel towards a world free of nuclear weapons. "Nuclear disarmament is not a question of choice," argued Zimbabwe, "but an existential imperative that our generation has to pursue, in good faith, to save future generations from possible annihilation."

## Nuclear weapon spending

The NAC urged reflection on the vast amount of resources spent on the maintenance and development of nuclear arsenals, which should

be better utilised for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), amongst other things. Zimbabwe is also frustrated at the increasing global expenditure for nuclear weapons, while Bangladesh noted that the amount spent on nuclear weapons in 2020 was "an astounding figure," and regretted that the pandemic failed to slow down nuclear weapons spending. Similarly, Zambia argued that "the huge sums of funds used in nuclear weapons research, manufacturing and testing could .... save many lives if used for poverty eradication and health care." Equatorial Guinea also said that it was "inexplicable to see trillion of dollars spent on a [nuclear] arms race," given that such money could have been used to achieve the 2030 Agenda, to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, and save lives. Similarly, the Holy See also regretted that human time, talent, and skills continues to be wasted on nuclear weapons modernisation, while urgent humanitarian and development needs continue to be unmet.

## Nuclear weapon modernisation

Austria, Costa Rica, Equatorial Guinea, Canada, Holy See, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Indonesia, Iran, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, South Africa, and Zimbabwe expressed concern at continued modernisation of nuclear weapons. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) regretted that over the past 70 years, the global nuclear arsenal has increased both in quality and quantity. The NAC criticised policy announcements moving further away from the global norm against nuclear weapons, and the risks of increasing nuclear stockpiles. Zambia was concerned that "we see nations developing nuclear arsenals for probable defensive and retaliation and in some cases for offensive purposes." Liechtenstein argued, "Every announcement of plans to stock-up and modernize nuclear arsenals and lower thresholds for their use, pushes the Non-Proliferation Treaty's ultimate purpose further into

the distance.” Mexico observed that perceptions of insecurity are fueled by aggressive rhetoric, and nuclear armed-states increase their stockpiles while the architecture of disarmament treaties has been eroded as never before since the Cold War. Singapore urged nuclear-armed states to redouble efforts to reduce nuclear arsenals and end their qualitative improvement and testing.

A few states highlighted specific nuclear-armed states’ actions. The DPRK called out the US’ modernisation, including its annual military expenditure of more than 700 USD billion, its development of state-of-the-art hardware including new-generation intercontinental ballistic missiles, amongst others. Similarly, China accused the US of pursuing military superiority by investing in nuclear trinity, lowering the threshold of use, and developing and deploying global missile systems, amongst others. The US in turn argued that China is “building a larger, more diverse nuclear arsenal than the “minimum deterrent” it has touted for decades, and that “China is deviating from decades of nuclear strategy based around minimum deterrence.”

### **Nuclear doctrines and geopolitics**

The NAC, the Arab Group, Guyana, Malaysia, NAM, and South Africa, amongst others, expressed concern at the continued reliance on nuclear weapons in security concepts, increasing the risk of nuclear proliferation. Sierra Leone called on nuclear-armed states to eliminate nuclear weapons in their political and military strategies. Organismo para la Proscripción de las Armas Nucleares en la América Latina y el Caribe (OPANAL) reminded that the vast majority of states are opposed to the indifference to those relying on nuclear weapons, allegedly in the name of national security. Similarly, the Holy See urged to go beyond the “outdated policy of deterrence.”

Some of the nuclear-armed states defended their doctrines. The US said that it will take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons, “while ensuring the U.S. strategic deterrent remains safe, secure, and effective.” India insisted that it follows a policy of

maintaining a credible minimum deterrence, based on a no-first-use posture and non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear armed states. The DPRK informed that its nuclear weapons are meant to safeguard the sovereignty of its state, and argued that its activities “never pose any threat and its rightful build-up of national defense capability is not harmful to the security of the neighboring countries.”

The hot topic of recently announced military alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and the US (AUKUS) continued to be addressed this week. The DPRK argued that the US’ transfer of technology of nuclear-propelled submarines to Australia reveals “once again that it would not be bound by its non-proliferation obligations assumed before the international community if it befits its own interests.” China said that it should be questioned if Australia is serious about its non-proliferation commitments. Mexico hoped that the new military alliance won’t undermine the region’s protection as a nuclear-weapon-free-zone (NWFZ). China and Malaysia also warned against AUKUS’ risk to provoke a new arms race, exacerbating regional tensions.

Lithuania expressed concern about the militarisation of the Crimean Peninsula, and transfers of weapon systems, including nuclear-capable aircraft and missiles, while Iran criticised the UK’s reliance on deterrence, including as expressed in its 2021 Integrated Review.

### **Humanitarian and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons**

Many participants, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the African Group, Austria, Botswana, Canada, Costa Rica, Finland, Haiti, ICRC, Iraq, Guatemala, Lao PDR, Madagascar, Malaysia, the NAM, the NAC, Nepal, Nigeria, OPANAL, Palestine, South Africa, Sweden, and Thailand highlighted the devastating and long-lasting humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons, with the vast majority stressing that their total elimination is the only guarantee against their use. Austria, Canada, Guatemala, Iraq, and the ICRC also recalled the devastating impacts of nuclear weapons on the

environment. In this respect, Austria welcomed the TPNW's recognition of long-term suffering caused by nuclear weapons, and the transgenerational impact. Similarly, the NAC reminded that the TPNW grew from the growing understanding of the grave humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, including their gendered impacts.

Japan said it has responsibility to spread awareness of the "realities of the disasters of Hiroshima and Nagasaki both across borders and down to future generations, as the only country to have ever suffered atomic bombings." Palestine noted, "We are not speaking of a theoretical threat, we have seen the effect of nuclear weapons, and how many times their use was seriously envisaged. We are not speaking of a past threat, we have witnessed threats of resorting to such weapons just a few years ago."

### **Prohibition of nuclear weapons**

Because of the lack of action by nuclear-armed states toward disarmament, the vast majority of delegations welcomed the TPNW, the first international legal instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons. The president of the UN General Assembly, the African Group, Algeria, Austria, ASEAN, Bangladesh, Brazil, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Holy See, ICRC, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Mexico, NAC, Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Malaysia, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, Palestine, Philippines, Uruguay, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Viet Nam, Zambia, and Zimbabwe welcomed the entry into force of the TPNW. Namibia called the TPNW "a big leap towards the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons." The Holy See noted that "the large number of States that voted in 2017 to adopt the Treaty, as well as the growing number of States that have ratified it is a positive indicator that one day nuclear weapons will at last be confined to the history books." The ICRC argued that the Treaty's entry into force sends a "clear signal" that nuclear weapons are unacceptable in humanitarian, legal, and moral terms. Kazakhstan called the TPNW the "new reality" and Kiribati believes that the TPNW not

only brings comfort to the victims of past nuclear weapon tests, but it also re-ignites a glimpse of hope for a more peaceful, loving, caring and trustful world in the future.

Botswana, Cuba, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Malaysia, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, and Viet Nam called on all member states to sign and ratify the Treaty without delay. Zimbabwe said that administrative processes for ratification are ongoing. Guatemala said it was in the last internal phase of ratification while Haiti announced it was committed to complete accession to the TPNW ahead of the first Meeting of States Parties (MSP). Liechtenstein reiterated its commitment to ratifying the TPNW.

Brazil, Guatemala, ICRC, Indonesia, Tunisia, Thailand, and Palestine stressed that the TPNW complements the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, while Liechtenstein noted it enhances the legal framework for nuclear disarmament, and ASEAN argued it complements other existing agreements. The NAC also argued that the TPNW is an effective legal measure, contributing to the implementation of Article 6 of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Arab Group said the TPNW is a new source for customary international law. The UK expressed its opposition to this claim.

Uruguay recalled that the threat of use of nuclear weapons is a crime against humanity and a violation of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the UN Charter. The Arab Group and Mexico made similar remarks. The ICRC also asserted that the use of nuclear weapons against concentrations of civilians, such as cities, or against targets in or near populated areas would violate IHL principles. Liechtenstein reminded that the principles of IHL "leave no space for inherently indiscriminate weapons," and Liechtenstein and Mexico recalled the 1996 landmark opinion of the International Court of Justice, advising to that effect.

Holy See, Ireland, the NAC, Nigeria, Paraguay, and Viet Nam looked forward to the First Meeting of States Parties (1MSP) in March 2022. The ICRC encouraged states parties to establish a solid



framework for the Treaty's future implementation, in particular its positive obligations to redress the harm caused by nuclear weapons use and their testing on people and the environment. Austria made similar remarks. Ireland hoped the MSP will set out concrete plans for the full implementation of the Treaty's humanitarian-centred objectives. Kiribati and Kazakhstan suggested for 1MSP to focus on the Treaty's positive obligations in Articles 6 and 7, as these provisions are central to the humanitarian goals of the Treaty and ensure that it addresses the harm from past use and testing of nuclear weapons as well as prevents future harm. They suggested that the MSP1 should examine victim assistance, environmental remediation, and international cooperation and assistance under a separate agenda item, or under individual agenda items, and called for adoption of a final report, declaration, and action plan that address the positive obligations. They suggested a list of considerations for states to prepare for 1MSP, available in [their statement](#).

The ICRC encouraged states not yet party to the treaty to attend the meeting as observers. New Zealand made similar calls. Austria also recalled the UN Secretary's invite to all states, civil society, and international organisations to participate. Switzerland confirmed it will participate as an observer.

Russia said that while it understands the views of those advocating for immediate and unconditional abolition of nuclear weapons, "attempts to impose on the states that possess nuclear weapons a complete and unconditional elimination of their arsenals are hardly practicable without taking into account current strategic realities and legitimate security interests." It called the TPNW "misguided and counter-productive". The UK reiterated it will not support, sign, or ratify the TPNW.

### **Nuclear arms control**

Virtually all delegations expressed support for the various "building blocks" or "stepping stones" aimed at supporting nuclear arms control and non-proliferation.

The vast majority of states continued to call for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), urging the Annex II states to sign and ratify it. The Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) said the CTBT has been a tool for the "monumental shift away" from the practice of nuclear testing, noting there were more than 2,000 tests before the CTBT and less than a dozen since the Treaty's adoption. He reminded that only eleven states remain outside of the CTBT, and that another 15 have signed but not ratified, which will soon drop to 14 as The Gambia is about to deposit its instrument of ratification. Portugal commended Cuba and Comoros for having recently ratified the CTBT. Liechtenstein noted that the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the CTBT is an opportunity to reflect on the "clear contribution it has made to establishing a de facto moratorium on nuclear tests," but regretted the "frustrating reality" that remaining Annex II states continue to prevent its entry into force. Pending entry into force, Italy, Uruguay, and Sweden urged all states to maintain a moratorium on nuclear tests. Viet Nam stressed that a de facto moratorium of tests is not enough. India reiterated its continued commitment to a unilateral and voluntary moratorium on nuclear explosive testing.

Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Germany, Hungary, Holy See, Italy on behalf of a group of states, Japan, Kazakhstan Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Netherlands, Nepal, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey, and Zimbabwe continued to cautiously welcome the five-year extension of New START. Russia explained that through the extension, an adequate level of mutual transparency in relation to strategic offensive weapons was secured. The DPRK noted that the prospect for a follow-up agreement is still uncertain.

Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Holy See, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Korea (ROK), Romania, and Turkey welcomed the renewal of the strategic stability dialogue between the US and Russia. Japan and Lithuania, amongst others, hoped that the dialogue will lead to the

development of a broader framework of arms control, which involves other countries beyond the US and Russia and covers a wider range of weapon systems. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Japan, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania encouraged China to join nuclear arms control talks.

Russia explained that it will use the dialogue to discuss all factors that impact strategic stability, including offensive and defensive arms, both nuclear and non-nuclear, capable of performing strategic tasks. It assessed the two rounds of meetings that took place so far as cause for cautious optimism in bring the US and Russia's positions closer together.

Mexico observed that while extension of New START is welcome, the US' withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, and the breakdown of the open skies treaties create insecurity and undermine trust. Iran also argued that US' withdrawal from the INF causes damage to nuclear disarmament efforts. Russia informed that to prevent a new arms race in the nuclear-missile area, Russia took over the initiative of no first placement of systems previously prohibited by the INF Treaty, and urged the US and its allies to make similar commitments.

The DPRK called on the US to stop placing states with different political systems on its list for preemptive nuclear strike. It also called on the US to stop sharing nuclear weapons with and transferring nuclear technology to its allies. China called on the US, as the country having conducted most nuclear weapons tests, and having made the largest investments into modernisation, to fulfill its primary responsibility in disarmament to create conditions for others to join the nuclear disarmament process. The US encouraged China to engage with the US on practical measures to reduce the risks of destabilising arms races.

### **Non-Proliferation Treaty**

While virtually all delegations expressed their hopes for and commitment to a successful outcome of the upcoming NPT Review Conference (RevCon),

described by the NAC as "critical juncture," many non-nuclear armed states shared their frustration about the lack of implementation. A vast majority of delegations called on nuclear-armed states to recommit to nuclear disarmament and related obligations. The Arab Group argued that nuclear-armed states are evading any specific timeframe to implement their obligations.

Liechtenstein observed that the nuclear arms race runs directly counter to the nuclear-armed states' obligations under article VI, threatening gains achieved under the non-proliferation pillar. It argued, "The NPT once charted a course to eliminate nuclear weapons by making it illegal to acquire them. Its lack of implementation is read by some as an incentive to do the opposite." The NAC reminded that the basis of the adoption and extension of the NPT is the "great bargain," and recalled commitments from 1995, 2000, and 2010, where nuclear-armed states have reaffirmed their unequivocal commitment to nuclear disarmament, of which many are not yet implemented. Palestine recalled that the NPT was not agreed to offer anyone "a privileged status granting them a right to possess nuclear weapons." Similarly, South Africa asserted that the goals of the NPT cannot be achieved if the NPT is seen as a means to protect the security interest of few states at dispense of humanity at large.

A group of US-nuclear-supportive allies issued a statement, delivered by Italy, sharing their perspective for a successful NPT RevCon, including reviewing the NPT review cycles' procedures and working methods, and finding compromise to advance the goals of the NPT, "taking into account the international security environment without losing sight of the risks posed by nuclear weapons." The group listed various measures that it described as "pragmatic" and "inclusive". In a similar vein, a few states, including Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovenia, while reaffirming their commitment to Article VI of the NPT, clarified their support for a step-by-step approach towards the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Austria called on the five nuclear-armed state parties to the treaty, who are also the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (P5),

to engage in a constructive approach to strengthen the NPT rather than sowing division. Italy on behalf of a group of states encouraged the P5 to increase their efforts to deliver concrete outcomes at the next RevCon and to “build pathways to further reductions in their nuclear arsenals.” Germany and the Holy See expressed similar hopes.

Morocco, amongst others, called for universalisation of the NPT. The Arab League, Iran, the NAM, and Syria called on Israel to join the NPT as non-nuclear-armed state and to subject all of its nuclear facilities to the safeguard system of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Israel argued that the NPT does not provide a remedy for the unique security challenges of the region, and regretted the “repeated violations of the Treaty by some member states.”

### **Nuclear risk reduction**

OPANAL argued that the existence of more than 13,000 nuclear weapons poses an unacceptable threat to humanity, and the danger of their use becomes more serious day by day. Kazakhstan argued that reliance on nuclear weapons can never ensure strategic security, but only prompt asymmetric responses, crossing lines of no return. Egypt observed that the rising levels of tensions, along with rapid technological developments makes the risk of the accidental use of nuclear weapons at one of the highest levels since the Cold War. ICRC also warned that the risk of their use continues to grow, and called on states to implement risk reduction measures at the NPT RevCon, including taking nuclear weapons off high-alert status and reducing their role in military doctrines, pending their total elimination.

Various initiatives were endorsed as means for nuclear risk reduction. Japan said that concrete actions should be taken to reduce the risk of accidental nuclear weapon use, including transparency and accountability efforts through reporting. Finland said that, while no substitute to nuclear disarmament, nuclear risk reduction, including measures such as a political declaration to technical crisis communication arrangement, can

advance the ultimate goal of a nuclear weapon free world. Japan and Italy on behalf of a group of states expressed their support to the Non-proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI).

Australia, Canada, Italy on behalf of a group of states, Japan, Finland, Indonesia, Netherlands, Norway, ROK, and Sweden pledged their commitment to the Stockholm Initiative, a cross-regional collective efforts towards a world free from nuclear weapons. Australia, Hungary, Italy on behalf of a group of states, and ROK welcomed the US process Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND). Other initiatives mentioned, including by Hungary, Italy on behalf of a group of states, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Turkey was the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament (IPNDV) or the Group of Governmental Experts on nuclear verification, including by Canada, Hungary, and the Netherlands. Moreover, Norway said it would like to start a dialogue on requirements for nuclear disarmament irreversibility.

The Holy See further proposed that the adoption of a “no-first use policy” by each of the nuclear-weapon-possessing states would be another positive step towards breaking down a climate of mistrust and fear, noting that the First Committee should be seen as a “laboratory” where such forward-looking strategies are formulated. Russia explained that it has four-fold reduced the number of non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) since 1991. “All NSNW have been transferred to the category of non-deployed, located within the national territory and concentrated in centralized storage facilities, where a maximum-level security is assured, preventing any accidental or unauthorized use of the nuclear weapons.” China said that it follows a nuclear strategy of self-defense, and that it has always pledged no-first use and no use against states that are part of a NFWZ, asserting that this policy has never changed.

### **Regional issues**

The Arab Group, Brunei Darussalam, Egypt, Ireland, the NAC, Tunisia, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, and Russia welcomed the successful

organisation of the first conference to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons (NWFZ) and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East, and looked forward to the second conference, to be held later this year. Tunisia hoped that the drafting of a legally binding instrument can commence quickly. Kuwait will hold the presidency over the second conference on a WMDFZ in the Middle East. It announced it will work in a transparent and inclusive manner. It urged all states that haven't participated yet to revisit their positions and stressed that it doesn't exclude anybody. It reiterated that the desired outcome is non-negotiable and shall not be compromised. Kuwait welcomed the political declaration and procedural and substantive resolutions from the first conference, facilitating preparation for the second conference. Mauritania, Ireland, and the NAM made similar remarks. The Arab League regretted that Israel refused to participate in the first conference, and the Arab League and Russia called on Israel to participate in the upcoming conference. Russia also called on the US to participate.

OPANAL recalled the recent adoption of a joint declaration by all states parties to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, underscoring priorities in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, including a new call on nuclear-armed states to withdraw or modify their declarations concerning the Treaty's additional protocols I and II. In the informal, interactive exchange, OPANAL's Secretary-General went into more detail about the outcome of OPANAL's recently concluded general conference. This included a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between OPANAL and the African Union, seeking to foster collaboration between the nuclear-weapon-free zones in Latin American and the Caribbean and Africa; to establish a Group of Governmental Experts to conduct a comprehensive study of NWFZs in all its aspects; and recognising, for the first time, the role and contributions of women to nuclear disarmament in the region. Following a question from Brazil, OPANAL confirmed it was committed to conclude MOUs with other NWFZs.

ASEAN stressed the importance of the full and effective implementation of the Plan of Action to Strengthen the Implementation of the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) (2018–2022) and reaffirmed its commitment to “engage the nuclear-armed states to resolve all outstanding issues.” However, Malaysia expressed disappointment that ASEAN is once again not submitting a substantive resolution on SEANWFZ, arguing that Treaty has a “clear loophole” because its Protocol has yet to be signed by any of the nuclear-armed states. “The indefinite extension of the status quo will not augur well for the future of SEANWFZ, a core element of ASEAN's regional security architecture,” warned Malaysia.

Hungary, Finland, Ireland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Romania, Switzerland, and Turkey expressed concern at or condemned the DPRK's nuclear and ballistic activities. Germany and Slovenia called on the DPRK to engage in dialogue with the US and ROK to enable steps toward complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearisation. Tunisia said that despite current difficulties, it is still possible to use momentum gained in the last years through Korean summits to achieve the denuclearisation of peninsula through dialogue. Cuba condemned the “unjust” measures against the DPRK, and Cuba and Kazakhstan argued that only through dialogue lasting political solutions can be achieved.

Bulgaria, Hungary, Ireland, France, Germany, Myanmar, Poland, Portugal, and Romania called on the DPRK to take concrete and credible steps towards complete and verifiable denuclearisation. The DPRK explained that the root-cause of the tension in the Korean peninsula is the US' “nuclear blackmail and threats against the DPRK.” The DPRK justified its nuclear build-up as “self-defensive deterrent” to US hostile policy and nuclear threats. The DPRK called out the double-standard by those condemning the DPRK's measures as threat to international peace and security, while “keeping silent about the large-scale joint military exercises with nuclear assets and frequent offensive weapons



tests.” It assured that it will “continue to consolidate its self-defense deterrent.”

Austria, Bulgaria, Cuba, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Myanmar, Romania, Slovenia, Switzerland, Turkey expressed support for the preservation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Israel, and Poland expressed concern at Iran’s non-compliance with the JCPOA. The Netherlands called on Iran to refrain from further escalatory measures. Israel argued that Iran has violated

nuclear non-proliferation obligations for two years and claimed that inaction against Iran’s nuclear advances bolsters its resolve to continue violating its commitments. Austria stressed that the urgency for compliance was highlighted by the latest report of the IAEA. Cuba rejected the US’ withdrawal from the JCPOA. Bulgaria and Slovenia urged Iran to return to compliance under JCPOA without delay, while France, Germany, Slovenia, and Poland, amongst others, called on Iran to return to negotiations in Vienna as soon as possible. Ireland, Iran, and Portugal called on all sides to conclude talks in Vienna.

## BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS

Filippa Lentzos | King’s College London

**A** further 13 states referred to biological weapons in the final few days of the First Committee’s general debate. Similar to last week, references contained in the statements emphasised the importance of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), expressed support for the treaty, and highlighted the need to strengthen it.

Hungary announced it will submit the annual First Committee resolution on the BWC. The resolution is usually uncontested. The 2021 resolution contains only technical updates, and there are no signs that the resolution will not be adopted by consensus again this year.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) emphasised the role of nuclear science in detecting and responding to zoonotic diseases. The agency highlighted its Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action (ZODIAC) initiative, established in June 2020, to strengthen the preparedness and capabilities of member states to rapidly detect and respond to disease outbreaks. The initiative has reportedly already spurred nominations of 143 national coordinators and 116 national labs.

In thematic debate 1-4, which includes weapons of mass destruction, a further 41 states referred to biological weapons, 18 of which had not already

done so in the general debate. This brings the total tally of statements from individual states referencing biological weapons in the first two weeks of First Committee to 73. In addition, the following nine groups of states also referred to biological weapons: Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Central American Integration System (SICA), China/Russia, European Union, League of Arab States, Non-Aligned Movement, Nordic Countries, and a group of 28 countries.

Several states—including India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nepal, Russia, Senegal, Spain, and Thailand—continued to emphasise the need for effective verification and a legally binding protocol to the BWC. ASEAN also called for the resumption of multilateral negotiations on a legally binding BWC protocol. The United States, which formally put an end to protocol negotiations in 2001 and which continues to advocate against a protocol, restated its intention, announced last week, to table specific measures to strengthen the Convention but it did not elaborate further. It said: “The U.S. hopes States can break the two-decade deadlock over strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention at the 2022 Review Conference. We will propose that States Parties adopt measures to strengthen the BWC immediately and, simultaneously, take steps to intensively

explore measures to strengthen implementation and promote compliance.”

Russia’s draft resolution on the UN Secretary-General’s Mechanism (SGM) for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons received significant attention. In its statement to the thematic cluster, Russia described the resolution as an effort “to ensure the effective use of the Mechanism.” Russia’s statement also highlighted a second initiative: to establish a group of governmental experts to develop a concrete mechanism within the BWC to investigate alleged treaty violations. Russia said: “Our proposal does not in any way prejudice the independent status of the UN Secretary-General’s mechanism for investigating alleged use of chemical and biological weapons. On the contrary, these international instruments could complement each other in the context of the implementation of the BWC and the 1925 Geneva Protocol.”

Several states are sceptical of Russia’s motives and have expressed concerns with the draft resolution in the two rounds of consultations Russia has held on it. In the thematic debate this week, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the group of 28 countries expressed their support for the UN Secretary-General’s Mechanism (SGM) in its current form. Most emphasised the instrument’s political independence and the need to preserve it. For example, the group of 28 countries said: “As the only currently available independent international mechanism for investigating alleged uses of biological weapons, the UNSGM is a key component of the non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. It should be preserved and strengthened, while avoiding any risk to its independence.” Some states also noted the SGM’s past successes.

Russia’s statement to the thematic cluster also picked up points expressed in last week’s joint statement by the Foreign Ministers of China and Russia on the BWC. It noted the “increased military-biological activity of certain States beyond their

national borders, which challenges the BWC regime as such activity is not controlled.” To enhance transparency about these activities and ensure the BWC is complied with, Russia proposed that the treaty’s confidence building measures should be amended to require “data on military-biological activity abroad.” This is not a new proposal, but it has so far gained little traction within the BWC, particularly from its main target: the United States.

Russia further called on “everyone concerned to refrain from the militarization of public healthcare.” Yet it labelled efforts from several states to use voluntary peer review as a way to enhance transparency about dual use facilities and research as “dubious,” claiming that they “lack impartial criteria for assessment and selection of participants.” Ukraine spoke of the “ruinous consequences of Russian aggression” negatively impacting Ukrainian biosafety and biosecurity. Iran described Israel’s rejection of BWC membership as “endangering regional security.” Spain raised concerns about military uses of artificial intelligence and biotechnology potentially generating new dangers.

China said conducting biological research in a responsible manner is crucial to reducing biosecurity risks and called on states to voluntarily adopt the Tianjin Biosecurity Guidelines for Codes of Conduct for Scientists. The Guidelines are high-level principles aimed at serving as a reference for a broad range of stakeholders to develop or amend national- or institutional-level codes of conduct, practices, protocols, or regulations.

China also referenced a new draft resolution on “Promoting International Cooperation on Peaceful Uses in the Context of International Security”. Criticising export control regimes, China explained the resolution’s objective “is to promote a balanced approach to relationship between non-proliferation and peaceful uses and facilitate more comprehensive and balanced implementation of the BWC, the CWC and the NPT.” The resolution has had an apprehensive reception and will be discussed in more detail in thematic cluster 5-7 next week.

# CHEMICAL WEAPONS

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

As the 2021 First Committee session moved from the general to thematic debate, the subject of chemical weapons continued to receive significant attention from member states. It's clear that recent use of these banned weapons of mass destruction is being met with wide condemnation and efforts toward accountability, but such actions are being met with resistance by those countries implicated.

As with last week, most delegations referencing chemical weapons in their statements also condemned their use, with many adding that this applies to use "by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances". Many also invoked the significance of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and international law. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) called on states outside the CWC to sign or ratify it as soon as possible.

The European Union (EU), Slovakia, Turkey, the United Kingdom (UK), France, Slovenia, Lithuania, Israel, Romania, Netherlands, Ukraine, Switzerland, Republic of Korea (ROK), New Zealand, and the United States (US) specifically referenced recent use in Syria. Slovakia, Turkey, Lithuania, Slovenia, and ROK called on Syria to cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in its investigative efforts.

Slovakia, the EU, and Switzerland expressed support for the [decision](#) taken by CWC states parties in April 2021 to suspend Syria's voting rights and privileges, while the US and the Netherlands referenced the decision. Turkey highlighted the importance of accountability for Syria's actions and the need for complete elimination of all its stocks.

Syria said that it has complied with the OPCW and has upheld all of its commitments under the CWC, which it joined in 2013. Syria asserted that some countries have engaged in a "flagrant politicisation" of the matter, in which false reports and information are being used to put in place

"illegitimate mechanisms" and to take decisions such as that undertaken by CWC states parties in April. This decision was informed by the [reporting](#) of the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), which concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Republic has used chemical weapons. This has led to some states calling into question the impartiality of the OPCW.

Russia spoke at length about this, stating that "a number of States have in fact reformatted the OPCW to serve their self-serving geopolitical agendas. This could not but affect the OPCW reputation and confidence in its expertise." Russia further describes the IIT's reports as "partial, factually unreliable, technologically ignorant and methodologically void" and regrets that this has led to the failure of consensus-based decision-making for the first time in the OPCW's history. Russia defended the quality of information provided the OPCW by Syria, which indicates that militants are to blame for the incidents in Syria.

Algeria and South Africa also expressed concern about polarisation in OPCW policy-making organs. Argentina said it is necessary to try to act, while maintaining a unity of purpose and avoiding political decisions. Philippines called for non-discriminatory implementation of all CWC provisions, a point echoed by Algeria.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Slovakia, Italy, Colombia, Portugal, UK, Turkey, Ukraine, Spain, Netherlands, Lithuania, Indonesia, Hungary, Nigeria, Czech Republic, India, Thailand, Viet Nam, and New Zealand, among others, expressed support for the OPCW or described its important role. Slovakia called on those hindering the OPCW's ability to implement its mandate to stop doing so. Colombia supported strengthening the OPCW. Thailand commended it for carrying out its working during the pandemic.

# AUTONOMOUS WEAPON SYSTEMS

Dr. Catherine Connolly | Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

In its statement to the First Committee this week, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) expressed its concern regarding the humanitarian impact of autonomous weapon systems (AWS) and the erosion of human responsibility over the use of force. It made a strong intervention in support of a new, legally-binding framework to regulate AWS and ensure meaningful human control. Warning that current trends and developments around the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine-learning software to control critical functions in AWS “dramatically heighten our core concerns,” the ICRC emphasised that this will require prohibiting certain types of autonomous weapon systems—“specifically, autonomous weapons whose effects cannot be sufficiently understood, predicted and explained, and autonomous weapons designed or used to apply force against persons as opposed to objects – and strictly regulating all others.” The ICRC described the forthcoming Sixth Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Review Conference as a “decisive moment” that states must “seize urgently”.

Echoing this urgency, Austria said that the international community has both the opportunity and the responsibility to work together to prevent the “serious legal, security, and ethical consequences” arising from autonomy in armed conflict. New Zealand argued similarly that addressing the serious concerns posed by AWS is one of the most pressing disarmament issues of our time, and reiterated that achieving prohibitions, limits, and controls on AWS is a key priority for the country. Cuba restated its stance that AWS should be prohibited as soon as possible. Algeria described the rapid technological development and possible use of AWS in armed conflict as “deeply alarming,” and stressed its support for a legally-binding instrument.

The issue of meaningful human control was again a key element in many references to AWS, including from the ICRC, the Holy See, Liechtenstein, Italy, Brazil, Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands and Austria.

Liechtenstein expressed its support for a legally binding instrument which “should place prohibitions on lethal autonomous weapon systems that cannot be used with meaningful human control across its entire life cycle.” Austria underlined that the minimum starting point for state deliberations on AWS should be “an unequivocal commitment” to keeping humans in control over autonomous weapons. Brazil emphasised that acknowledging the inescapable need for retaining human control in the use of force is an imperative, while the Holy See underscored the urgency of addressing “the ethical necessity to preserve human responsibility” in the use of force. The ICRC emphasised that the 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 for humanity.”

The challenges presented to international and regional peace and security by AWS were underscored by Austria, Algeria, and Pakistan. Pakistan said that it is critical that the Sixth CCW Review Conference establish a “robust, forward-looking and comprehensive process” on AWS, given the serious implications which autonomous weapon systems present to international humanitarian law and regional and international peace and security. Tunisia conveyed its concern regarding the increasing militarisation of new technologies, including AWS, and expressed its belief that the principal stakeholders in this domain have a particular responsibility to reverse such trends.

The European Union (EU) welcomed the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) substantive contribution to discussions on AWS, while the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) agreed that AWS should be thoroughly deliberated and examined. Numerous states, including Brazil, Ireland, Republic of Korea, Lithuania, the United Kingdom, Japan, Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Portugal, Czech Republic, Norway, Italy, Philippines, and Pakistan, either expressed



their support for continued discussions on AWS within the CCW framework, noted the importance of the work of the GGE on AWS, or hoped for a substantive outcome from the forthcoming Sixth CCW Review Conference in December.

## CLUSTER MUNITIONS

Aaron Lainé | Cluster Munition Coalition

Cluster munitions were mentioned by 21 delegations at First Committee this past week, as the plenary moved from the general debate to consider, among other issues, conventional weapons.

In light of the alarmingly slow pace of universalisation, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) urged states to join the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) without delay. It also called on states parties to double their efforts to increase the Convention's membership. Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) shared its commitment to continue actively promoting the universalisation of the CCM by working closely with all states parties and the international community. New Zealand echoed the call for treaty universalisation.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) called for the provision of necessary financial, technological, and humanitarian assistance to cluster munition clearance operations. Burkina Faso underlined that cluster munitions continue to prevent access to large exploitable areas of land in several regions of the world, thus delaying the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relating to food security, education, and empowerment of women, among others.

Ecuador reiterated its call to end all investments in companies that produce cluster munitions, condemning as particularly cruel this weapon that affects the most vulnerable groups.

Switzerland shared its experience in chairing last month's CCM Second Review Conference,

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots calls on all states to unite in negotiating a legally binding instrument to retain meaningful human control over the use of force.

which adopted a political declaration underlining the determination of states parties to promote the standards established by the Convention and advance its universalisation. Switzerland added that thanks to the Lausanne Action Plan (LAP), the Convention can now be based on concrete and measurable objectives to progress in its implementation until 2026.

The ICRC welcomed the adoption of the Lausanne Declaration, which condemns any use of cluster munitions by any actor, and further welcomed the adoption of the LAP, which identifies specific actions and indicators to measure the implementation of the Convention's key obligations.

Lao PDR and Ireland likewise welcomed the progress made at the Second Review Conference and the adoption of the outcome documents, with Lao PDR saying the LAP will provide a clear guidance for states parties to strengthen CCM implementation.

The United Kingdom underscored its commitment to the CCM with its assumption of the presidency of the Tenth Meeting of States Parties, highlighting that it will pursue universalisation of the Convention, explore alternative financing options for the clearance of cluster munitions, and start delivering on the LAP.

Switzerland hoped that this year's resolution on the "Implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions" will again receive broad support, after being adopted last year without a negative vote for the first time ever.

# LANDMINES

Aaron Lainé | International Campaign to Ban Landmines

In the second week of First Committee, the general debate came to a close and gave way to the first thematic cluster, discussing conventional weapons among other topics. Twenty-eight states voiced support for the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and on their destruction (or the Mine Ban Treaty—MBT).

The European Union called the MBT a “transformative milestone for disarmament” and Slovenia named it an “indispensable component of the global arms control architecture,” calling on all states that have not yet done so to adhere to the Treaty without further delay. Burkina Faso, Italy, New Zealand, and the International Committee of the Red Cross joined the call for treaty universalisation.

Indonesia called for the effective implementation of the MBT and the Oslo Action Plan in order to achieve the common goal of a mine free world by 2025. Italy, New Zealand, and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) echoed this call for effective treaty implementation.

Viet Nam asserted that landmines, including of an improvised nature, continue to pose a threat to civilians, peacekeeping operations, and socioeconomic development in more than 60 countries long after conflicts have ended. In April 2021, the Vietnamese foreign minister delivered the UN Security Council’s Presidential Statement on mine action (S/PRST/2021/8), which “encourages Member States, the United Nations system and other related relevant organizations, to enhance further support, including through sharing of best practices, providing technological and financial assistance to affected countries.”

The Democratic Republic of the Congo said that the issue of anti-personnel mines, including those of an improvised nature, is at the core of the “resistance of certain refractory and terrorist armed groups,” particularly in the eastern part of the country.

Mozambique shared its success in destroying an estimated 10,000 landmines before formally declaring its territory mine-free in 2015. It outlined efforts by the government to assist victims through action plans on social assistance, medical care, education and professional training, psychological support, and social and economic inclusion.

After outlining the social, economic, and environmental consequences of landmines, Iraq called on the international community to render assistance for its demining programme and help establish partnerships between international and local organisations, respectively to address mine contamination and to update national standards to align with international standards of the Oslo Action Plan. Burkina Faso joined the call for international assistance to countries affected by landmines.

Italy described a dedicated Trust Fund for Humanitarian Demining that was set up in 2001, to which it has since has devoted more than 62 million Euros to mine action programmes, and has doubled its budget for 2021 with respect to 2020 as a sign of renewed commitment.

Non-state party Republic of Korea said it will continue to work closely with the international community on landmine issues by participating in the MBT 19th Meeting of the States Parties as an observer, as well as by continuing its contributions to UN and other relevant trust funds.

This year’s annual resolution on the “**Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction**” was tabled by The Netherlands and Sudan, without any substantive changes.

# EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS IN POPULATED AREAS

Katherine Young | Explosive Weapons Monitor, International Network on Explosive Weapons

In the final days of the general debate, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) raised the issue of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), making clear that heavy explosive weapons—artillery, mortars, large bombs and missiles and multi-barrel rocket launchers—continue to cause harm to civilians and are responsible for the majority of civilian casualties when used during armed conflict in populated areas. The use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects results in “unacceptably high levels” of civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian objects, causing reverberating effects such as interrupted access to water and electricity, as well as health care and other essential services. The reverberating effects of the use of EWIPA have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as a lack of essential services poses challenges to patient care.

The ICRC explicitly called on states and all parties to armed conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide impact areas in populated areas, noting that “[h]eavy explosive weapons should not, as a matter of policy and good practice, be used in populated areas, unless sufficient mitigation measures are taken to limit their wide-area effects and the consequent risk of civilian harm.” The ICRC is confident that a political declaration that addresses the civilian harm caused by EWIPA will produce strong commitments on restricting and limiting the use of explosive weapons. As such, it urged states to work together to bring the diplomatic process to an end as soon as possible.

During the first thematic debate (which included conventional weapons, among other issues), Ireland, Austria, Switzerland, New Zealand, and Norway all expressed support for the continuation of the diplomatic process to finalise a political declaration to address civilian harm from the use of EWIPA, while Ecuador more generally expressed concern about explosive weapons use.

Ireland again made clear that addressing the “far-reaching effects” of the use of EWIPA is a priority and, as such, is leading the consultation process on the development of a political declaration. It believes good progress has been made to this end and is determined to finalise a declaration that will “bring positive and lasting behavioral change.”

Austria emphasised the importance of finalising the political declaration and called on all states to “engage constructively” to reinforce the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Switzerland similarly expressed its ongoing concern with the “humanitarian impact of the growing urbanisation of armed conflicts” and believes there is a need to take steps to strengthen the protection of civilians from the humanitarian consequences arising from the use of EWIPA. It remains hopeful that a political declaration will soon be completed.

New Zealand stated its firm commitment to supporting efforts to address the risks of the use of EWIPA, including the ongoing discussions on a political declaration.

Norway also expressed support for a political declaration, and Ecuador generally made clear its objections to the use of EWIPA.

Despite delays in the final consultations for a political declaration that addresses civilian harm from the use of EWIPA, First Committee discussions this year have shown both continued support for this initiative and the urgency of the issue at large. Civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons remains unacceptably high, and strong commitments to strengthen the protection of civilians are urgently needed.

# SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

amelie namuroy | International Action Network on Small Arms

During the remainder of the general debate, states continued to express their concerns over the deterioration of international security, caused in part by the pervasive availability of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and ammunition as a key enabler of armed violence and conflict. A number of states, including Ghana, Costa Rica, Burkina Faso, and Thailand highlighted the consequences of the widespread availability of SALW, such as the fueling of terrorism, international human rights and humanitarian law violations, transnational organised crime, and impeded socioeconomic development, which has also been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many states emphasised the need for the implementation of and compliance with existing legal instruments such as the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, and Portugal argued for the universalisation of the ATT as an effective way to curb illicit transfers of SALW. Egypt, however, stated that in its view the ATT has shortcomings and lacks a clear mandate.

Namibia, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Dominican Republic, Algeria, Egypt, Myanmar, and Ghana, among others, noted the positive outcome of the UNPoA Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7). This included some states that were not active participants in the BMS7 (for example, Bulgaria and the Dominican Republic). The fact that so many states have noted their satisfaction with the outcome of BMS7 seems indicative that states see the UNPoA as continuing to be a relevant and an important framework for addressing illicit SALW.

While states also continued to raise the importance of integrating gender into policies and processes addressing SALW, the participation of women in the First Committee has become an important, if rudimentary, metric of the considerable amount of work to be done. In concluding the general debate, the Chair of the First Committee noted that during the general debate 137 delegates made statements,

of which 33 were made by women. This statistic was also taken up by Costa Rica, which stated that in the First Committee, less than a quarter of statements made are likely to be given by a woman. In reference to a joint statement by sixty-four member states during BMS7, Costa Rica stated that it is clear that small arms and light weapons are a gender issue, and gender is a small arms and light weapons issue. Yet this still needs to be translated into action.

## National efforts

A number of states used their first thematic debate statements to outline concrete steps they are taking at the national level to address the issue of SALW. Nigeria stated that it has established a framework to work with civil society organisations to increase the participation of stakeholders in its efforts to address SALW proliferation. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) noted the work of the Small Arms National Commission (CNC-ALPC) and a workshop held in June 2021 to evaluate its national action plan and to plan activities for 2022. This activity follows on a joint training programme led in collaboration with the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC), which supported the development of a gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting mechanism to track the implementation of the country's national action plan (NAP) on small arms control and armed violence reduction.<sup>1</sup>

## Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and military expenditure

The United Nations 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a blueprint for a better, more sustainable, and peaceful future for all. The links between achieving the SDGs, reducing military expenditure, and addressing SALW were made by a number of states. Portugal emphasised the link between security and sustainable development while Sierra Leone noted



that military expenditures could be used to pursue the implementation of the SDGs. Bangladesh called on member states to imagine what the world would be like if military expenditures for 2020 (which amounted to 2 trillion USD) had been spent addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mozambique underlined that disarmament is important for sustainable development and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, yet economic benefits have been prioritised over human life. Ghana made the link between the 2030 Agenda and the African Union's "Silencing the Guns by 2030" initiative. Colombia emphasised that it is essential to address current and emerging challenges and to integrate the same efforts in the implementation of the UNPoA with those being made towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

### **Ammunition**

States like Romania, Bulgaria, Uruguay, Botswana, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, and Costa Rica recognised the need to include ammunition as an integral part of the issue of SALW. The consensus outcome document of the Group of Governmental Experts on Problems Arising from the Accumulation of Conventional Ammunition Stockpiles in Surplus (GGE) was recognised by Bulgaria, Hungary, and Colombia as creating a framework that would address existing gaps in ammunition controls and presented recommendations which are "constructive for discussion and action." While Ghana also lauded the GGE's report, it also stated its belief that the member states who are currently applying the provisions of the UNPoA to ammunition should continue to do so. On the issue of ammunition itself, Ghana strongly recommended a holistic approach throughout the life cycle of ammunition, to ensure the safe and secure management of conventional ammunition and prevent the diversion of stockpiles to unauthorised users.

### **Interactive informal exchange**

Ambassador Martin Kimani of Kenya, Chair of the BMS7, spoke on Friday, 15 October during a panel discussion and exchange with independent experts

and other high-level officials. The chair of the GGE on ammunition was meant to also join this session but was not able to do so, and instead will join the third virtual briefing meeting scheduled for 21 October. Ambassador Kimani reflected on the lead up to BMS7 and emphasised the fact that flexibility, commitment, and cooperation between states led to a matured draft outcome document. He noted that it was this multilateralism that led to the unanimous adoption of the outcome document, which sent a strong signal of the support of member states on the continuation of the UNPoA process. Ambassador Kimani highlighted these achievements in particular:

- Agreement on specific actions to prevent diversion of SALW to unauthorised recipients;
- Inclusion of two paragraphs on ammunition;
- Reaffirmation of a commitment to strengthen link between the UNPoA, the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), and the 2030 Agenda;
- Important strides made on the issue of gender;
- References to polymer and modular weapons; and
- Agreement on establishing voluntary national targets to measure progress of PoA implementation.

Ambassador Kimani recognised that despite BMS7's progressive outcome, member states admitted that there are still many challenges preventing the effective implementation of the UNPoA and ITI and that there is a need for enhanced sustainable development and cooperation between states. As such, member states agreed that during BMS8 (scheduled to take place in June 2022) they will consider means to enhance UNPoA and ITI modalities and procedures, including through the fellowship training programme that was established by BMS7.

Next week resolutions should be available, including the omnibus resolution on SALW tabled annually by Colombia, South Africa, and Japan, as well as others that are relevant to SALW in various ways. No doubt we will continue to hear statements from states

on the impacts of SALW on human lives. Hopefully, states will discuss in more concrete ways what steps they are committed to taking to translate their words into action.

## Notes

1. These workshops are part of a 3-year project led by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and funded by the European Union in support of

gender mainstreamed policies, programmes and actions in the fight against small arms trafficking and misuse, in line with the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The DRC is one of the six countries in Africa to participate in an in-country training programme on gender-mainstreamed policies in small arms control. IANSA is an implementing partner in this project and facilitated the participation of civil society organisations in the workshops.

# INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRADE

Paula Soumaya Domit | Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

During the final portion of the First Committee general debate and the Committee's first thematic debate last week, delegations drew attention to the gravity of the international arms trade. Many cited the illicit trade of arms as a significant threat to international peace and security. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) described how the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons plays a role in the perpetration of acts of crime and violence, loss of life, mental trauma, spread of fear and insecurity, and the impact it has on the region's development. Burkina Faso echoed this sentiment, adding that the illicit arms trade is also a cause for mass displacement and the increasing threat of terrorism.

Delegations similarly condemned the participation of States in irresponsible arms transfers. Uruguay, Liechtenstein, and Pakistan strongly stood against conventional arms transfers to conflict zones, emphasising that these transfers only perpetuate conflicts and further inflict enormous human costs. Equatorial Guinea pointed out how irresponsible arms transfers demonstrate the prioritization of economic profits over human lives. Many delegations expressed that the negative effects of irresponsible weapons transfers are further exacerbated when arms are transferred to unauthorized recipients. Senegal noted the importance of ensuring that weapons transfers are limited to properly authorized governments and entities.

The African Group, in a statement delivered by Ghana, noted that arms transfers to unauthorised recipients fuel conflict, and urged all states to refrain from arms transfers without the authorisation of importing states. Eswatini supported this statement and urged ATT States parties to implement the treaty in a balanced and objective manner that protects the interests of all states, not just exporting states. A few states called for specific action with regard to international arms transfers. Myanmar made an impassioned appeal directly to those countries that sell or transfer weapons to halt all arms exports to the Burmese military. Iran and Ukraine also called out irresponsible arms transfers by the USA and Russia respectively, claiming these transfers increase insecurity and regional instability.

States showed support for the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and 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). Tunisia, Botswana, Romania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the European Union, Nigeria, Senegal, and Bangladesh called for both the universalisation of the ATT and the full implementation of the UNPoA and urged states to implement these instruments as a step towards addressing the threats posed by the illicit arms trade and irresponsible weapons transfers. Uruguay insisted that the ATT is the cornerstone for international regulation of conventional weapons,

including small arms and light weapons, their components, and their ammunition.

Sierra Leone discussed the outcomes of its Presidency at the Seventh Conference of States Parties to the ATT (CSP7). Sierra Leone chose as its thematic focus the need to strengthen efforts to eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, specifically by ensuring efficient stockpile management. As such, Sierra Leone emphasised that the illicit trade and poor management of small arms and light weapons undermines security and human rights, and noted that, to achieve results, a sustained, integrated, and collaborative approach to ATT implementation is needed.

Delegations strengthened this discussion by noting other important practical considerations of ATT implementation. Senegal and Cameroon focused on the importance of transparency, noting that it is one of the fundamental pillars of the ATT's fight against illicit arms trafficking. Further, both Senegal and Cameroon called on states to submit national reports on arms transfers in accordance with article 13 of the ATT. Costa Rica also discussed the role of transparency, and noted that the arms trade poses a grave danger when it operates in the shadows with insufficient regulation. Further, Costa Rica called on ATT states parties to comply fully with articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty by ensuring that all arms exports are responsible, transparent, and accountable. The Czech Republic noted its membership in the ATT

Management Committee and claimed its readiness to contribute to the ATT's voluntary trust fund and to support ATT implementation.

Sierra Leone, among others, highlighted the importance of finding synergies between the ATT, the UNPoA, and other instruments with similar objectives, especially at the national and regional levels. Madagascar, Nigeria, Ghana, and Eswatini drew attention to important African initiatives to combat the illicit international arms trade, including the ECOWAS Convention, the African Union's Silencing the Guns Initiative, the Southern African Development Community Protocol, and the Bamako Declaration on an African Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons.

In addition to numerous calls for universalisation and improved compliance with the ATT, UNPoA, and other international instruments that cover conventional arms transfers, some delegations, such as Viet Nam, Eswatini, and ASEAN, noted the need to implement these instruments with continued respect for each state's sovereign "right" to acquire and transfer conventional weapons and ammunition for their security needs. Palestine, which is a state party and vocal advocate for ATT implementation and compliance in its national capacity, spoke on behalf of the Arab Group and called for the rights of states in article 51 of the UN Charter to be respected and rejected efforts to restrict them in any way.



Photo: Control Arms

# OUTER SPACE

Jessica West | Project Ploughshares

The almost 60 statements on outer space this past week are best situated in the context of the previous announcement from the United Kingdom (UK) that it would be tabling a resolution related to last year's consultations on "Reducing space threats through norms, rules, and principles of responsible behaviour." Specifically, the UK is proposing to advance the themes in the report of submissions by the UN Secretary-General through a new, inclusive, open-ended working group (OEWG). Support for this process was indicated in statements by Australia, the European Union (EU), France, Hungary, Indonesia, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea (ROK), Slovenia, Switzerland, Tunisia, Ukraine, and the United States (US).

The initiative is an attempt to broaden the long-standing debate on the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) by examining what the UK describes as "the behaviours, actions and omissions that could lead to conflict, not only at capabilities or placement of weapons." In statements of support, Switzerland argued that the normative framework in outer space must be strengthened if the international community is to prevent the emergence of armed conflict there, and the United States said that it is necessary to prevent competition in space from escalating to conflict.

Efforts to broaden the PAROS debate seem to be working. To be sure, weapons remain the driving concern of many. But the scope of the discussion on space-related weapons is expanding. New Zealand raised concerns about threats posed by anti-satellite capabilities, echoed by Pakistan alongside emphasis on the integration of anti-ballistic missile systems. Once focused almost exclusively on nascent concepts for space-based strike weapons, Russia this week called for "a total and comprehensive ban of space strike weapons, as well as all land-, air- or sea-based systems designed to hit objects in outer space." This broadened focus including weapons

*aimed at space* was reiterated by Egypt as well as the Arab Group. Helpfully, it responds to a long-standing concern that the debate prioritises non-existing weapons at the expense of weapons systems that are actively being tested.

Another gap appears to be diminishing between those states that advocate for hardware restrictions and those that support behavioural measures in space. Although providing no indication of support for the proposed OEWG, Russia's statement nonetheless urged a long list of voluntary behavioural measures that include not to build, test, place, or use space objects or Earth-based objects as weapons against objects in space or to strike Earth. Russia also urged the need for PAROS to become "a norm for national policies of UN Member States, a generally recognized international principle" and to formalise "a common understanding" that weapons should not be placed in space and that the use of force is prohibited. While these shifts in the debate do not amount to an embraced focus on the types of non-weapons-related behaviours driving potential conflict escalation in space that is advocated by the leaders of the OEWG proposal, they are a start.

However, the thorny issue of how to proceed with arms control in space remains unsettled. A formal arms control treaty is the clear preference of many states. Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Holy See, Indonesia, India, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Senegal, as well as collective statements by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Arab Group, African Group, and the President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Abdulla Shahid of the Maldives, all made statements to this effect. Russia reminded the Committee that the treaty it drafted with China in 2008 and revised in 2014 is still on the table at the Conference on Disarmament. Yet this is in addition to Russia's new embrace of principles and norms related to PAROS, and its continued effort to expand political declarations for "no first placement" (NFP)



of weapons in space through an annual resolution intended to serve as a transparency and confidence-building measure (TCBM).

Resistance to a broad weapons ban remains. But it is less about form—a legally-binding instrument—and more about how it would function. Whether legally- or politically-binding, in principle or in practice, there is yet no proposed resolution to the persistent concern that a general focus on banning weapons lacks veracity. The EU noted that any such agreement must be verifiable, while Australia raised doubt that such verification would be possible given the dual-use potential of space objects.

The proposed OEWG may help to reset this debate by separating form from content. The discussion on norms initially arose with a focus on voluntary rather than legal measures, in close connection to long-standing efforts to advance TCBMs in space. Some states support an OEWG not just because it emphasises behaviour, but also because they view voluntary, iterative measures that enhance mutual confidence as the best way forward (Hungary, Italy, EU). Others, such as Argentina, see it as a crucial step toward a new legally-binding instrument, while Cameroon and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) insisted that despite support for TCBMs, this final goal must not be obscured. For this reason, Indonesia called for synergy between various initiatives. For its part, the process on rules of behaviour in space has from the beginning been pitched as open-ended and

does not preclude a legally-binding agreement, albeit one focused on behaviour rather than hardware.

Regardless of the path forward, Guatemala reminded the Committee that war in outer space would be “utterly tragic for human life.” Despite its distance from Earth, the ICRC emphasised that space systems “permeate most aspects of civilian life.” Echoed by Portugal, it urged states to include international humanitarian law in their debates and their actions.

However, just as progress is beginning to take shape on PAROS, there are hints that the discussion may be expanded beyond Earth’s orbit in the future. Many statements this week underlined principles of free and equal access to space as well as its status as a global commons and common heritage. This is not new. But explicit emphasis on the peaceful *exploration* of space (Africa Group, Argentina, ASEAN, Colombia, Senegal, Thailand) stands out in the context of Russia’s statement urging the UN General Assembly to “proclaim the historic responsibility of all States to ensure that the exploration of outer space is carried out exclusively for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of humankind.” This is a core principle of the Outer Space Treaty. It is also core to the mandate of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). Only time will tell if there is more to this statement. But for now, a concern with keeping activities in Earth’s orbit peaceful provides more than enough work for the Committee.

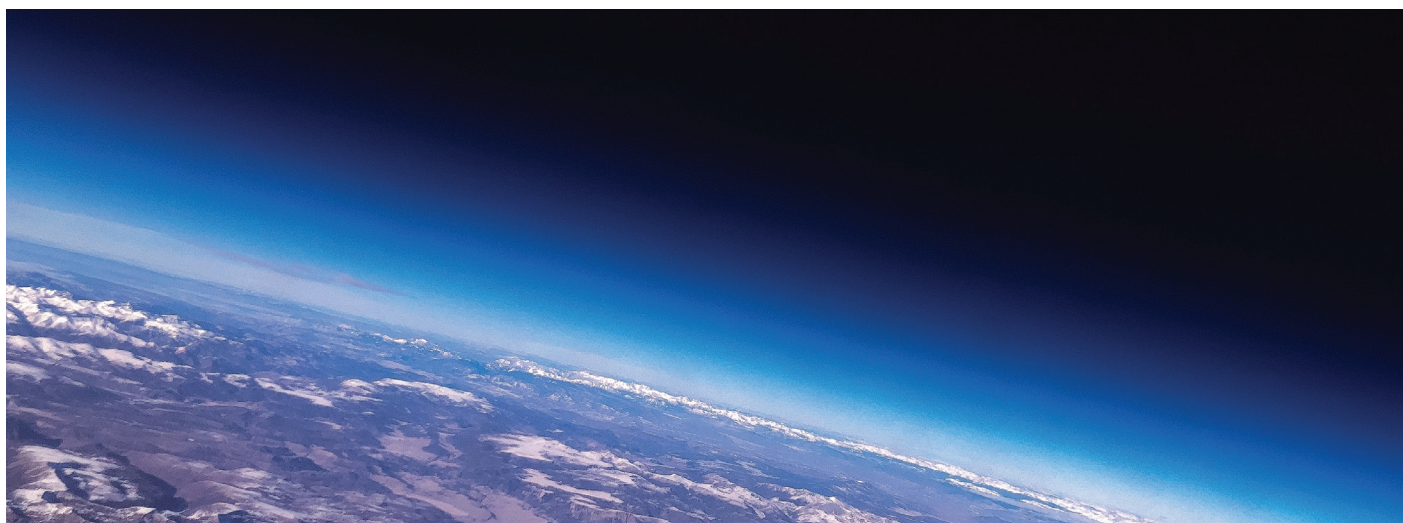


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# CYBER PEACE AND SECURITY

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

Delegations continued to address matters of cyber peace and security throughout the remainder of the general debate.

Slovenia, Romania, Hungary, Tunisia, Liechtenstein, Madagascar, Japan, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) welcomed the work of the UN's sixth **Group of Governmental Experts (GGE)** on responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, as well as that of the first **Open-ended working group (OEWG I)** on information and communications technologies (ICTs). Slovenia underscored that while the GGE and OEWG's final reports have noted that additional norms could be developed over time, they also underlined that this does not exclude efforts to implement the already existing norms.

Uruguay welcomed OEWG I's adoption of a report by consensus, stating that this "undoubtedly constitutes a strengthening of multilateralism in considering the use of ICTs in the context of international security." The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Zimbabwe underscored the inclusivity of OEWG I as a space in which all member state voices could be heard, regardless of size. The DRC said it is convinced that the new OEWG (**OEWG II**) will contribute to protecting cyberspace against conflict.

Hungary expressed hope that OEWG II, established for the period 2021–2025, will make further progress in addressing the risks posed by ICTs. Uruguay hoped member states will commit to "continuing with an inclusive and transparent negotiation process on ICTs" within the UN framework and further urged that through OEWG II, states remember "the importance of having a system to guarantee individual rights and defend privacy in this context."

Slovenia and Romania expressed support for the proposed UN Programme of Action to advance responsible state behaviour in cyberspace.

Slovenia added that this instrument could support implementation of the existing cyber norms.

A few delegations touched on applicability of international law. Liechtenstein reminded that the prohibition of the use of force, except when authorised by the UN Security Council or carried out in self-defence, must be enforced everywhere, including in cyberspace. It additionally highlighted that despite the common understanding that international law, in particular the UN Charter, fully applies to cyberspace, activities by states and other actors "to move the domain of warfare to cyberspace have met with little consequence." Liechtenstein shared that it has created a Council of Advisers on the Application of the Rome Statute to Cyberwarfare. Its first report aims to help develop a clearer understanding of how the Rome Statute applies in the cyber context.

Portugal urged the enforcement of international law, including international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) to all means and methods of warfare to avoid the weaponisation of cyber space. The ICRC referenced OEWG I's findings that states are developing ICT capabilities for military purposes and that the use of ICTs in future conflicts is becoming more likely, as well as its own observation that "disrupting critical civilian infrastructure has particularly severe consequences in societies that are already weakened by armed conflict. ICRC called on states to deepen their study of how and when IHL imposes limits during cyber operations, in line with recommendations from the GGE.

Madagascar said that it is convinced of the need for effective supervision in the use of cyberspace and that the latest developments in this domain "must fully agree with the need to respect the law international and fundamental rights."

Sierra Leone called for “demonstrable responsible behavior in cyber space, in compliance with international rules.” It further called on all parties engaged in malicious advances in digital tools to refrain from such acts and for a de-escalation in hostile cyber activities.

Some delegations spoke of specific threats. Liechtenstein said that “militarized cyberattacks against critical infrastructure including telecommunications networks, power grids, health programs as well as political and judicial systems undermine democratic norms and expose State institutions and their populations to great risk.” Viet Nam observed that ICTs play a leading role in transforming societies and economies, but that in the wrong hands they become a great threat. The DRC observed that developing countries are the most vulnerable in the field cyberspace.

With respect to national or regional cyber security initiatives, Hungary referenced its role as chair of the OSCE Informal Working Group (IWG) on cyber security. Brunei Darussalam established a Cyber Security Brunei (CSB) agency in 2020.

The President of the UN General Assembly addressed the First Committee after the start of the thematic debate. He observed that discussions of peace and security are now extending to cyber space as well and encouraged cooperation between the OEWG and GGE.

During the thematic debate on conventional weapons, Italy raised concern about the growing illicit flows of small arms and light weapons, including through the so-called deep web. Guyana linked soaring levels of gun violence with cybercrime, among other factors.

Reporting on references made during the thematic debate will be covered more extensively in the next edition.

During an informal interactive dialogue held on 15 October, the chairpersons of the sixth GGE and OEWG I reported back to the First Committee.

In his remarks, GGE Chair Ambassador Guilherme Patriota of Brazil explained both about how the GGE functioned as well the significance and content of the **final report**. “The agreements reached in the sixth GGE moved the goal post past previously agreed recommendations to provide additional layers of common understandings on the full range of issues discussed,” he observed. Some noteworthy aspects of the final report that he described include its updated assessment of ICT threats, including references to the COVID-19 pandemic and health; attribution; critical infrastructure of special concern; IHL and the application of law to state use of ICTs; protection of supply chain integrity; confidence and transparency building measures and capacity-building; and cooperation at many levels.

In explaining that the final report was negotiated and adopted solely through virtual means, Ambassador Patriota also observed that the GGE’s virtual method of work was a “fitting demonstration” and a “good sign of the times” as to how technology can be used to further the work of the UN and multilateral processes. He further described how this GGE was more consultative than prior GGEs have been, through regional consultations as well as two sessions held at the start and end of the GGE process with member states.

OEWG I Chair Ambassador Jürg Lauber of Switzerland similarly described both the working methods and substantive outputs from the process. Noteworthy aspects of the **final OEWG report** that were mentioned by Ambassador Lauber include: progress in assessment of threat landscape, including attacks on health facilities and recognising the potentially devastating humanitarian consequences of cyberattacks; the general availability and integrity of the Internet, and the impact of cyber operations during the pandemic; reaffirmation of the applicability of international law, especially the UN Charter; and several practical measures in the area of CBMs and capacity building. Ambassador Lauber acknowledged the many contributions from civil society actors to the process, including via written submissions that were posted to the **OEWG website**.

Both chairpersons underscored the efforts that they took to ensure the outcomes from the two processes were complementary and offer consistency for future work.

During informal discussion after these presentations, the Netherlands asked what advice the two ambassadors would offer the incoming OEWG II Chair, Ambassador Gafoor of Singapore. Both urged continued good will and frank discussions, including with non-governmental actors. A representative of Singapore delivered remarks to reaffirm its

commitment to build on the good work of past processes.

Russia also offered thanks for the work of the two chairpersons and announced that Russia and the United States will collaborate this year and table a single resolution on cyber and ICT issues. If adopted, this resolution would bring to an end the “two track” process that emerged in 2018 and hopefully pave the way for OEWG to start work in December in a “pragmatic and constructive manner.” At the time of writing, the resolution is not available for analysis.

## DISARMAMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Laura Varella | Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

During the second week of the First Committee, states continued to refer to the relationship between disarmament and development. Kiribati, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, the New Agenda Coalition, Equatorial Guinea, and Bangladesh, among others, raised concern about the issue of military spending and how it affects development.

Zimbabwe stated that “the continued rise in global military expenditures may have inadvertently triggered an arms race, which is partly a cause, effect and consequence of armed conflict.” It also expressed its frustration with increasing global military expenditure and the modernisation of both the nuclear and conventional arsenals, as these budgets “are direly needed elsewhere, including for post pandemic recovery, development finance, preventing future pandemics, poverty eradication and climate adaptation and mitigation.”

In the same sense, the Holy See stated that “vast quantities of precious financial resources and human time, talent, and skill continue to be used to maintain and modernize nuclear weapons while urgent humanitarian and development needs of the human family remain unmet.”

Botswana stressed that the continued existence of weapons of mass destruction “has a serious impact on human survival, especially in the environment, socio-economic development, food security and health care systems.” Zambia’s remarks complemented this, stating that the huge sums of funds used in nuclear weapons research, manufacturing, and testing could save many lives if used for poverty eradication and health care compliance. It called on all countries “to completely shift the paradigm from armament issues and concentrate on Sustainable Development Goals that 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.”

Ghana and the League of Arab States, among others, also spoke about the connection between military spending and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Cameroon expressed its belief that disarmament should be directly linked to the maintenance of international peace and security and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Palestine stressed that as billions of dollars are spent on weapons, the world continues suffering from systematic underfunding for the achievement of the SDGs, notably in the



context of the pandemic. It called on countries to “abandon the narrow interpretation of security and understand that in an interdependent world we must adopt policies that foster hope rather than fuel despair, resentment, marginalization, and hatred. The progress we achieve in the field of disarmament reverberates across many other fields that directly affect the lives and realities of our peoples.”

Liechtenstein spoke about SDG 5 on gender equality, noting that the illicit trade and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW) places civilians at daily risk and hampers sustainable development. The impact of the proliferation of SALW on development was also addressed by other member states. Haiti stressed that these weapons continue to increase uncertainty about the stability of countries and hamper their development, in addition of causing violent crime, increase insecurity and displace millions of people. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) stated that the continued prevalence of illegal firearms and ammunition in the region spread fear and violence, impacting development efforts.

The Chair of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the

Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (BMS7) reaffirmed the commitment of the group in strengthening the link between the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPOA), the International Tracing Instrument (ITI) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The relationship between development and other types of weapons was highlighted by other member states. Viet Nam pointed out that landmines, explosive remnants of war, and improvised explosive devices continue to threaten civilians and impact socioeconomic development in more than 60 countries long after conflicts have ended.

This week, NAM tabled its annual draft resolution on the “**Relationship between disarmament and development**”. The resolution, L.24, stresses “the importance of the symbiotic relationship between disarmament and development and the important role of security in this connection, and concern(s) increasing global military expenditure, which could otherwise be spent on development needs.” The resolution also encourages the international community to achieve the SDGs. L.24 does not contain any substantive changes from last year.





# ENVIRONMENT AND DISARMAMENT

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

Throughout the first two weeks of the general debate, over two dozen delegations made references to the interlinkages between conflict and environment. However, as the joint civil society statement on the topic noted, not enough member states connect the topics of disarmament and international security with the “the triple crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.” It stressed that until states make that connection, “conflicts and military activities will keep exacerbating the environmental crises we face.” The Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy (LCNP) made similar comments, concluding that “for this reason alone, states must actively work towards both environmental protection and disarmament.”

Various delegations, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Austria, Canada, Honduras, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Iraq, Lebanon, Guatemala, Liechtenstein, Nicaragua, Nigeria, and Palestine expressed concern about the devastating impacts of nuclear weapons on the environment. Kyrgyzstan reminded of the environmental consequences of uranium mining and associated nuclear fuel cycle activities in the production of nuclear weapons. A few of the delegations, including ICAN and Nigeria, specifically underscored the environmental impacts of nuclear weapons testing, with Nigeria arguing that “we all owe a duty to protect the environment by respecting the moratorium against nuclear testing,” while working towards universalisation of the Comprehensive-Test-Ban-Treaty (CTBT). China criticised Japan for releasing the Fukushima contaminated water into the ocean, harming global marine ecology and public health. A few delegations, including Honduras, ICAN, ICRC, and Kiribati, expressed their hopes, including Honduras, for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) to protect against environmental impacts of nuclear weapons, and to also begin to remediate contaminated environments.

While Cameroon and Holy See noted that all weapons degrade the environment, other participants, including the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), Iraq, and Spain mentioned the environmental impacts of explosive weapons, including landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and cluster munitions. Spain argued that the pollution created by landmines and cluster munitions is a hindrance to the development of many communities, and expressed its commitment to demining. The CMC reminded that the Second Review Conference of the Convention on Cluster Munitions adopted the Lausanne Political Declaration and Action Plan, including actions and decisions taking into consideration the environmental impacts in all aspects of the work under the Convention.

While many states criticised the vast amounts of military expenditure that could otherwise be used for socioeconomic and sustainable development, a few of those specifically stressed these funds should be used for addressing the climate crisis, including the joint civil society on youth engagement, ICAN, the Maldives, Lao PDR, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

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 devastation caused to biodiversity by the unchecked spread of small arms and light weapons was not mentioned. 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. With the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) fast approaching, delegations should also be mindful of the **impacts of military emissions on climate change**, which hundreds of civil society groups are **calling on** governments to commit to reducing.

# GENDER AND DISARMAMENT

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

A good number of states continued to raise various aspects of gender in the context of the First Committee's general debate, and during the first segment of thematic clusters. A handful of those states, including the United States (US), underscored the importance of mainstreaming the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) into all disarmament efforts. Namibia was pleased about the inclusion of the WPS in the outcome document of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7) to the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) on small arms and light weapons (SALW). It argued that the integration of all four pillars of the WPS agenda are critical to the full enforcement of the UNPoA on SALW. The Chair of BMS7, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic also welcomed the BMS7 outcome document's inclusion of gender perspectives, while Costa Rica stressed that the progress in language needs to translate into concrete actions. Botswana and the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL) expressed their support for inclusion of gender perspectives in disarmament more broadly, as stipulated in OPANAL's recently adopted resolution by consensus described below.

## Participation

Many delegates, including the President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Abdulla Shahid of the Maldives, Botswana, Canada, Costa Rica, Haiti, Italy on behalf of a group of states, Norway, Spain, and the US expressed their support for women's equal participation at the First Committee and beyond. However, the First Committee Chair informed that during the general debate, out of 137 delegations that made statements, only 33 women took the floor to deliver those statements. Costa Rica added that during the 2021 high-level meeting on the total elimination of nuclear weapons, only one in six speakers was a woman, noting that "Despite that small ratio, some of us did not even get the chance to take the floor." Costa Rica stressed the need to "confront women's underrepresentation and other

patterns of marginalization in these fora alongside other objectives, such as ensuring the participation of victims and survivors—those who have been most directly impacted by the trade and proliferation of weapons, along with the full consideration of their humanitarian consequences." Canada argued that having a diversity of perspectives will lead to more ideas and creativity. OPANAL reported that it recently adopted a resolution by consensus, on gender, non-proliferation and disarmament, recognising the valuable contribution of women to disarmament in the region, and promoting women's full and effective participation in the agency.

## Gendered impacts

Costa Rica argued that "Nuclear disarmament is a women's issue," while the New Agenda Coalition (NAC) reminded that the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) grew from the growing understanding of the grave humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, including their gendered impacts.

Other delegations raised the gender-specific impacts of SALW. The Dominican Republic and Namibia stressed how SALW are used to facilitate sexual and gender-based violence. Costa Rica and Ghana also expressed concern at SALW's gendered impacts.

Burkina Faso stressed that SALW proliferation hinders women's empowerment.

## Gender norms

Only two delegations referred to dominant gender norms as obstacles to disarmament. Namibia noted that SALW are used to reinforce violent, gendered social norms. Costa Rica called for a feminist approach to nuclear disarmament, challenging "the archaic assumption that power competition is the right way to conduct foreign relations and ensure national security."

## YOUTH AND DISARMAMENT EDUCATION

Vanessa Keeley, Nicki Eichenholtz, Mandi Karpo, and Matthew Breay Bolton  
Pace University International Disarmament Institute

This year the biennial resolution on “Youth, disarmament, and non-proliferation” introduced by Republic of Korea and first passed in 2019 (A/RES/74/64), will be considered by the First Committee. While the text of the resolution has yet to be released, statements from delegations highlighted the importance of youth participation and disarmament education.

“Throughout our disarmament efforts, it is my conviction that women and youth can make a meaningful contribution,” said President of the General Assembly Abdulla Shahid of the Maldives in his remarks to the First Committee. “Let us take special pains to ensure that women and youth, as well as civil society are more actively engaged in this work going forward.”

Kiribati also directed attention to “youth engagement in the field of international peace and security.” Kiribati highlighted “Pacific youth who have been rising up and expressing themselves.” It expressed hope that the global “partnerships, friendships and mingling” of youth “would one day change the mindsets of future leaders” in “powerful nations.” It held up as an example the values of Pacific societies “where human love, peace, happiness are the prime purpose of life.”

Canada asserted that youth are the “next generation of disarmament and non-proliferation leaders.” Italy, in a group statement on behalf of 29 US-nuclear-allied states, also noted the importance of youth participation, “inclusivity and diversity.” Portugal acknowledged women, children, and youth as particularly affected by conflict.

Cameroon stressed the importance of disarmament education in promoting a culture of peace and non-violence, particularly regarding small arms. Similarly, South Africa on behalf of the New Agenda

Coalition (with Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico and New Zealand), stated that their proposed resolution on “Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: accelerating the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments” will underline the importance of disarmament education to “increase awareness” of the “catastrophic humanitarian consequences” of nuclear weapons, “including their gendered impacts.” At the time of writing, this resolution was not available for analysis.

Other resolutions under consideration by First Committee include provisions on disarmament education. Draft resolution L.23, introduced by Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), on “[Follow-up to the 2013 high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament](#),” calls on the international community to “promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons through all means of educational and public awareness-raising activities about the threat posed to humanity by nuclear weapons.”

Draft resolution L.28, “[United Nations regional centres for peace and disarmament](#)” also proposed by Indonesia on behalf of NAM, reaffirms the role of the three United Nations Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament in “educational programmes that promote regional peace and security and that are aimed at changing basic attitudes with respect to peace and security and disarmament.” The text also commends the centres for their “seminars and conferences, capacity-building and training, policy and technical expertise, and information and advocacy at the global, regional and national levels.”

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# 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

[www.reachingcriticalwill.org](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org)



[www.wilpf.org](http://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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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.