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Photo: Allison Pytlak

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EDITORIAL: CONFRONTING THE PANDEMIC OF MILITARISM AT THE FIRST COMMITTEE

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

The UN's First Committee on Disarmament and International Security is taking place during not just an international health pandemic, but also an international law pandemic, consisting of the deliberate eradication of rules and norms against weapons and violence; and a militarism pandemic, consisting of massive investments in bombs and bullets.

During the first week of general debate, countless delegations lamented the re-emerging use of chemical weapons, the continued possession and modernisation of nuclear weapons, the development of autonomous weapon systems, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and rising attacks and aggression in cyber space. The treaties and normative frameworks built up over the decades since the Second World War are not coming undone by themselves; rather they are being purposefully annihilated by a handful of governments whose agendas are to preserve their personal prosperity and dominance at the expense of all others on the planet—and the planet itself.

The hellscapes of hypocrisy

What makes the situation even more frustrating is the hypocrisy of many of these governments, who condemn the use of chemical weapons while proclaiming a right and a necessity to possess nuclear weapons. Or those who condemn possession of nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles of certain states while possessing and modernising such weapons themselves. Vice versa, certain states say they need nuclear weapons to protect them from aggressive enemies, asserting that they abide by certain policies that constrain their behaviour, while condemning other countries for having “too many” nuclear weapons or “bad nuclear doctrines”—as if one atomic bomb is not enough. One was enough in Hiroshima. One was enough in Nagasaki.

The arrogance of asserting concepts like “limited” or “minimal” nuclear deterrence in a forum supposedly dedicated to disarmament and international security is as objectionable as the claims by other states, where people have been gassed with chemicals, claiming they don't even have these weapons.

Certain states identify each other as the Big Bad, insisting that the other makes the international security environment so unstable as to necessitate that they hold onto their weapons, as if we're in some sort of **game of chicken**. The accusations continued to fly this past week, for example, between the **United States, Russia, and China**. They circle each other, accusing and condemning as if in a diplomatic equivalent of a terrible dog fight—which is precisely what the rest of the delegations may feel as they look on in horror, realising that it is only a matter of time before one or all of them, as **Ghana** said, “open the floodgate of hell on Earth.” The three countries fight over who is to blame for the lack of nuclear disarmament or for massive investments in nuclear arsenals, while none will do what needs to be done—what they are legally obligated to do through the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a multitude of other comments and agreements. In what sounded like a warning, the **US ambassador** told the First Committee that the US has not even begun to embark upon a nuclear modernisation programme to match Russia and China (despite the fact that it **spends more** than both), but that if it does not “get the assistance” it demands from the international community, “we will have to take, unilaterally or in concert with allies, whatever steps are necessary to protect our national security interests.”

This kind of aggressive rhetoric at the First Committee is often difficult to sit through but provides us with important information about where and how and why things are the way they are. The rhetoric is rooted in **militarised masculinities** and

Orientalism, among other things. The idea that weapon possession is to be either permitted or outlawed on the basis of heavily racialised and patriarchal notions about the rationality or fortitude of the possessor is a grave fallacy that will get us all killed. Weapons, no matter whose hands they are in, will be used. That is what weapons are made for—and the world that so many governments have built for us, through the choice of their investments and view of “security,” is chock full of weapons.

Building back differently

This is precisely why so many other governments in the world are not just sounding the alarm but are actively trying to build something else. Recognising that the “international security environment” is of our own construction, some countries have urged a complete re-prioritisation of our collective investments. **Costa Rica** pointed out that if just a fraction of current military spending was used to invest in health and development, to reduce the digital divide and finance the transition to a green and resilient economy, and to politically and economically empower women and girls, “we could proudly say that our generation knew how to make decisions in favor of human security.”

The Maldives agreed that “security and strength are achieved not through the proliferation of weapons, but through investment in the well-being of our people and our environment.” It urged all states “to forgo spending billions on weaponries that only creates a false sense of strength and security, and instead, to invest in new challenges such as the eradication of poverty, increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change and the elimination of diseases, including overcoming the current COVID-19 pandemic which has taken lives and livelihoods.” **Uruguay** likewise urged investments in preventative diplomacy, dismantling and reducing arsenals, and “transferring resources from the military budget to the development agenda.”

Several delegations drew parallels between the challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and of global security—including that, as **Ireland**

said, the pandemic is both an urgent reminder “of the importance of international cooperation to avoid global catastrophes” and “that the arsenals of nuclear weapons afford us no security or safety and that we are completely ill-equipped to respond to such a catastrophic event.” **Ecuador** similarly argued that the survival of our countries doesn’t hinge on the extent to which we are armed or the number of nuclear warheads we have, but how we respond to challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gendered impacts and participation

Other countries noted how the pandemic has exacerbated challenges related to security and disarmament. **The Bahamas**, for example, observed that “unemployment, national lockdowns, extreme fiscal uncertainty and multiple strains on social services all contribute to increasing tensions in households and communities that give rise to ripe conditions for gun-related crime,” including in relation to gender-based and intimate partner violence, and violence against children and persons in vulnerable groups.

Few delegations spoke about gender-based violence in relations to weapons and war. One year after gender-based violence was the theme of the Arms Trade Treaty conference of states parties, this issue is still not receiving the attention it deserves or requires. A few delegations highlighted that this year marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of **UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security** and the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the **Beijing Platform for Action**. Both of these initiatives speak to the importance, among other things, of the inclusion of women in peace processes and of consideration of gendered impacts of armed conflict and armed violence. Ten years ago, the First Committee adopted for the first time a draft resolution on Women, disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control in recognition of the relevance of women’s participation to disarmament and international security.

Yet on the eve of all of these anniversaries, gender diversity at the First Committee is still rather

abysmal. Twenty-seven of the 108 speakers so far in the general debate have been women, which is 25 per cent.¹

Measuring progress through the gender “balance” of the delivery of statements by men and women is not, of course, sufficient to assess the work of the Committee in advancing gender considerations. It also reinforces the idea that there is a gender binary. But it does give us an indication that in 2020, women are still underrepresented in the diplomatic corps, particular when it comes to issues that are considered to be matters of “hard security”—in this case, weapons and warfare. This shows a lack of commitment by the majority of states to invest in gender equality at the level of representation, which in turn gives some indication of how seriously a government likely takes its commitments to other gender-based issues.

But the failure to advance women’s meaningful participation is only one piece of the overarching struggle around gendered behaviours and policies. WILPF and other organisations endorsing this year’s civil society statement on gender and disarmament urged First Committee delegates to “push beyond the boundaries of the binary in their work on gender and disarmament,” explaining, “

This isn’t just about adding particular bodies to a discussion. It’s about changing our perceptions and understandings in order to crack through the deadlock and despair to make concrete progress in building a peaceful and just world for all.”

Coalitions for care

This, as Nepal eloquently said, includes the realisation that the “excessive focus on the traditional notion of national security and armament is flawed.” It urged states “to focus on the security and wellbeing of our people, our citizens, and humanity at large,” noting that the world is interconnected. “Modern and accurate nuclear arms, weaponized outer space, and cyber warfare can promise security to some people, but it will be at the cost of billions of others.”

Instead of pursuing the patriarchal ideations of “power through violence,” some governments are looking in other directions. “In these times of strong nationalist tendencies and hostility towards cooperative and multilateralist approaches to disarmament,” said Liechtenstein, we should return to the UN Charter’s prohibition on the use or threat of use of force as vital to advancing our common objectives. “The history of the United Nations is shaped by coalitions of the willing,” Liechtenstein argued. Against all the odds stacked against us by the investments in power through violence, the world’s majority must stand together for peace through multilateralism, dialogue, and investments in promiscuous care for all.

1. *These include the representatives delivering statements on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition, the Member States of the Treaty on a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in Central Asia, Antigua and Barbuda, Albania, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ghana, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Lebanon, Lithuania, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Qatar, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates. To our knowledge based on indications on written statements none of the speakers so far identify as non-binary.*

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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

This year's calls for nuclear disarmament at the First Committee seemed more urgent than ever, against the backdrop of "rapidly eroding levels of security," as observed by Liechtenstein. Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, observed, "Even during a global pandemic, concerns about the increasing risk of the use of nuclear weapons are beginning to permeate beyond the walls of forums such as this. The world is rightly alarmed by the growing antagonism between nuclear-armed States, by the return of concepts of nuclear warfighting, by the race to improve nuclear weapons, and by the absence of guardrails at the intersection between nuclear weapons and domains such as cyber and outer space."

Nuclear weapon spending

In the midst of a global pandemic where countries are lacking resources to address the health and socioeconomic impacts of the crisis, a large number of states criticised that the nuclear-armed states continue to spend billions on their arsenals. Guatemala argued that the \$73 billion spent in 2019 on nuclear weapons would have made societies more resistant to a pandemic like COVID-19. Lebanon, Ireland, Lebanon, Ecuador, the Philippines, Ireland, Nicaragua, Mexico, Jamaica, the New Agenda Coalition (NAC), Kazakhstan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy (LCNP) made similar observations, further arguing that these resources should be spent on socioeconomic development and the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development. Some speakers, such as Ms. Nakamitsu, also underscored that a nuclear weapon detonation would be "significantly more destructive," than COVID-19, and that "no state is prepared to respond adequately." Similarly, Nepal stated that "No mask, no social distancing, no handwashing, and no lockdown can save humans from the annihilation."

Nuclear weapon modernisation

Many participants, including the Chair of the First Committee, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the African Group, the Central American Integration System (SICA), Guatemala, Cambodia, Senegal, Sweden, Namibia, the Philippines, Ireland, Austria, Iran, and LCNP expressed deep concern about the continued modernisation of nuclear weapons and a new arms race. Sri Lanka said that it was concerned that states are modernising their nuclear arsenals with increasingly destructive capabilities and developing new weapons and delivery systems, and that the "grave risk of accidental, mistaken or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons remains ever present." The African Group called on nuclear-armed states to cease the modernisation, refurbishments, or extending of the lives of nuclear weapons and related facilities.

The first days of the First Committee saw deflection of responsibilities among Russia, China, and the United States (US) with respect to their modernisation programmes. China said the US is modernising its nuclear triad, "developing and deploying low-yield nuclear weapons, and expanding the scope of nuclear deterrence." The US argued that while it has "invested in life extension programs and other sustainment activities, we have yet to take the strategic decision to match ongoing Russian and Chinese nuclear build-ups." The US said that "preventing a trilateral nuclear arms race among the three largest nuclear powers represents a central war and peace issue of our time," but asserted that such a trilateral arms race is "entirely avoidable." Russia argued that a "new hardline competitive approach is being actively imposed, which only aggravates the atmosphere of distrust and reduces the predictability," while China said that the US' intention in calling for trilateral arms control negotiation "is to find an excuse to shirk its own special and primary responsibility" for nuclear disarmament.

Nuclear weapon doctrines

Many states criticised the continued inclusion of nuclear weapons in military and security doctrines. NAM and Ecuador expressed concern that the role of nuclear weapons in nuclear-armed states' security policies hasn't changed. NAM particularly criticised that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) set out rationales for the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear armed states. Mexico urged that discourse attempting to justify the use or testing of nuclear weapons cannot be allowed to be normalised. SICA, Venezuela, Jamaica, Honduras, and the NAC called for the elimination of nuclear weapons in strategic doctrines and security policies. China urged the US to abandon its policies of nuclear umbrella and nuclear sharing.

Humanitarian and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons

The nuclear arms race and doctrines are an affront to all those that have experienced the extreme violence, destruction, and oppression of these weapons. The President of the UN General Assembly, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Iran, Guatemala, Ireland, Nigeria, Ghana, Sweden, El Salvador, North Macedonia, Uruguay, Nepal, the Lao PDR, the NAC, New Zealand, the Philippines, the African Group, and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) expressed deep concern about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the risks posed by their continued existence.

Mexico reminded that nuclear weapons have shown that they don't distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, don't distinguish between age, gender, or social status. It argued that those that continue to have them underestimate their threats to all of humanity. Ecuador also said that nuclear weapons' mere existence calls into question the survival of humanity.

Prohibition of nuclear weapons

While all participants agreed that they want a world free of nuclear weapons, they disagreed on the best way to get there.

The overwhelming majority of participants welcomed the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017. Many said they are pleased that the TPNW is very close to its 50th ratification, which will lead to its entry into force, including Mexico, Austria, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Bangladesh, the Bahamas, South Africa, Lesotho, Ghana, South Africa, New Zealand, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Ireland, and Ms. Nakamitsu. Austria said it looked forward to the first Meeting of States Parties at the United Nations in Vienna. Thailand noted, "Much work still lies ahead of us to translate the text of the Treaty into implementation reality." ICAN said that once the Treaty enters into force, "states parties and civil society will lead the way to its full implementation and universalisation. Around the world, countries, companies and people will see the Treaty's impact."

The African Group expressed hope that nuclear-armed states and those under the nuclear weapon umbrella will also sign and ratify the TPNW. Costa Rica, Jamaica, Namibia, South Africa, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Fiji, Sudan, New Zealand, Cuba, Austria, ICAN, El Salvador, Antigua and Barbuda, Kyrgyzstan, and Ireland invited all states to sign and ratify the TPNW.

Many states announced that they were in the last stages of ratifying the Treaty, including Guatemala, the Philippines, Mongolia, Nepal, the Bahamas, Sudan, Ghana, Jamaica, Cambodia, and Honduras.

Amidst an otherwise bleak nuclear disarmament landscape, many states expressed their high hopes for the TPNW. Ecuador said that the best way to pay homage to the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is for states to join the TPNW, Brazil called the TPNW "an evolutionary leap for the disarmament and non-proliferation regime," while ASEAN and South Africa described it as "historic". Austria said that the ratifying states to the Treaty are "sending a

clear message that nuclear weapons represent an existential threat to humanity and that only their total elimination can bring security.” Similarly, the African Group said the TPNW marked a watershed moment in the ambition to rid the world of nuclear weapons. CARICOM noted that the TPNW has challenged the perception that disarmament “is the neglected goal of the United Nations.”

ASEAN, Peru, Ireland, Austria, Nicaragua, Sudan, Uruguay, Nepal, the NAC, and the African Group underscored that the TPNW complements other existing nuclear disarmament instruments. Ireland, Nicaragua, and the NAC said that it provides a legal pathway for states to fulfil their obligations under Article VI of the NPT.

Ms. Nakamitsu thanked civil society organisations for their efforts in bringing the TPNW into force.

Very few expressed opposition to the Treaty. Sweden said that it decided against joining the Treaty due to “certain shortcomings,” but that it will seek to become an observer state once it enters into force. In an interactive dialogue with Ms. Nakamitsu, Russia said that the TPNW wasn’t adopted by consensus and without the support of nuclear-armed states.

Nuclear arms control

NAM, Nordic Countries, and Austria expressed concern over the termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Austria expressed concern that nuclear-armed states are developing new warheads and missiles, including some that were outlawed under the now-defunct INF Treaty. Belarus made similar remarks. The US argued that it documented in its annual compliance reports that Russia has failed to comply with its obligations under the INF Treaty. Russia asserted that after the INF’s demise, it “made a unilateral commitment not to deploy intermediate- and shorter-range ground-launched missiles in those regions of the world until similar US- manufactured systems are deployed there.” China was gravely concerned at the US attempts to deploy land-based intermediate-range missiles in the Asia-Pacific and Europe.

The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) is one of the few remaining intact nuclear arms control instruments. Many delegations, including Ms. Nakamitsu, Finland, the EU, Sweden, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Ireland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Poland, Estonia, the UK, Turkey, Switzerland, Kazakhstan, Australia, Germany, NAM, Bulgaria, Finland, and the Nordic Countries, amongst others, therefore welcomed the ongoing dialogue between the US and Russia, hoping this will lead to an extension of New START.

Some of these countries, including Poland, Bulgaria, the EU, Austria, and others expressed hope that the negotiations would also lead to a more ambitious and inclusive successor agreement. Sweden detailed that it would welcome the inclusion of more types of weapon systems, including non-strategic nuclear weapons. The UK asserted it would welcome an agreement that includes “new Russian systems”.

Russia said it was ready to extend New START. The US argued that deficiencies of New START allow Russia “to gain competitive military advantage,” and that they need to be addressed. The Nordic Countries, Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Turkey, Estonia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Australia, Japan, Bulgaria, Germany, the UK, and the EU, amongst others, encouraged China to join the nuclear arms control discussions. China argued that it was “unfair, unreasonable and infeasible” to expect it to join in any trilateral arms control negotiation given the “huge gap between the nuclear arsenals of China and those of Russia and the US.” It said it will never participate in such a negotiation but would participate in a global nuclear disarmament process.

The vast majority of states called for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), urging the Annex II states to sign and ratify it. The NAC expressed deep concern at any suggestion of a move away from adherence to the moratoria on nuclear testing, or of diminished support for the CTBT. NAM expressed concern at the decision of the US to not seek ratification of the CTBT, as announced in its 2018 Nuclear Posture Review. Venezuela made similar remarks. Australia was worried that the

DPRK announced that it no longer is bound by the moratorium on nuclear test explosions.

Non-Proliferation Treaty

Most participants also expressed hope that the Review Conference (RevCon) of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), postponed due to COVID-19 to 2021, will provide an opportunity to undertake a comprehensive review and assessment of the current status of the Treaty. Ms. Nakamitsu, the UNGA president, NAM, Mongolia, the African Group, Arab Group, Switzerland, Germany, Lebanon, Ireland, El Salvador, Hungary, and Iceland said the extra time should be used to lay the groundwork for a successful conference. Ghana said a balanced outcome would be “a gift” for the international community at the NPT’s 50th anniversary. Sri Lanka hoped that the recommendations in the working paper by the Chair of the Third Preparatory Committee in 2019 would guide member states towards a successful RevCon.

Some states were more disillusioned with the Treaty. Liechtenstein noted, “The NPT once charted a course to eliminate nuclear weapons by making it illegal to acquire them. The lack of its implementation is read by some as an incentive to do the opposite. The nuclear arms race runs directly counter to the article VI obligations of nuclear weapon States and thereby also threatens the important gains achieved under the non-proliferation pillar.” Ecuador, Algeria, Venezuela, and Austria also regretted the non-compliance by nuclear-armed states to the NPT. NAM also said that nuclear disarmament is at an “alarming impasse”. NAM noted that obstacles to nuclear disarmament are also due to “misguided notions,” including strategic stability. The Arab Group criticised that nuclear-armed states do not respect deadlines or timetables for nuclear disarmament. The African Group said it was time to raise the voice against the slow pace and lack of commitment by nuclear-armed states to dismantle their nuclear weapons.

Costa Rica was concerned at the lack of urgency and seriousness by nuclear-armed states, denying

or reinterpreting past commitments under the NPT. The NAC expressed similar concerns. Various states, including the African Group, the NAC, the Philippines, Iceland, Lao PDR, Germany, El Salvador, New Zealand, Albania, Uruguay, and Peru, insisted on the implementation of all measures of the NPT, especially Article VI, as well as all past commitments.

Nuclear risk reduction

Some participants also urged further action to reduce the risks of a nuclear weapon detonation. Kazakhstan urged renewed confidence-building measures (CBMs) between member states, arguing CBMs succeeded in stopping the arms race and preventing a nuclear catastrophe in the past century. NAM called upon nuclear-armed states to reduce immediately the operational status of nuclear weapons, including through complete de-targeting and de-alerting. The Netherlands encouraged further development and implementation of concepts such as nuclear risk reduction and verification. Ghana and Canada also called for practical measures towards risk reduction. The EU encouraged the US and Russia to seek further reduction to their arsenals and further discussions on risk reduction measures.

Ms. Nakamitsu observed that “Risk reduction measures that will lower the prospects of deliberate or accidental use or miscalculation are urgently required. But while risk reduction is important, let me reiterate: the only way to eliminate nuclear risk is to eliminate nuclear weapons.” NAM, Sri Lanka, Austria, Bahrain, the NAC, Algeria, Nigeria, Lesotho, Kuwait, Lao PDR, Mexico, Peru, the African Group, and ASEAN made similar remarks.

Nuclear arsenal reductions

The Czech Republic argued that gradual reduction of nuclear arsenals, taking into account legitimate security concerns, is the best way to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. Lithuania, Russia, Greece, Japan, Bulgaria, and the UK made similar remarks. Pakistan argued that member states need to address key motivations that drive states to possess

nuclear weapons. In contrast, Spain asserted that the current international security context isn't an excuse to achieve nuclear disarmament. The NAC also argued that "the global security environment is not an excuse for inaction, but rather, it reinforces the need for urgency. What is lacking is not favorable conditions, but political will and determination." Similarly, Ms. Nakamitsu said that during times of turbulence the stabilising forces of arms control and disarmament are needed most.

The UK argued that it's the only nuclear-armed state to have reduced its "deterrent capability" to a single system, having cut its numbers of nuclear warheads to "the level needed to provide a minimum, credible deterrent." Canada said that it "understands the need for nuclear deterrence," but that this shouldn't stop nuclear-armed states from taking steps towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Sweden noted it launched the Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament in 2019 "with a strong conviction that political engagement was much needed for an ambitious yet realistic outcome of the [RevCon]." In February 2020, ministers of the 16 non-nuclear armed states adopted a declaration and an annex with concrete proposals. Germany called on the nuclear-armed states to take these steps forward. EU, Spain, Norway, Greece, Germany, the Nordic countries, and ROK also welcomed the "stepping-stone approach". In addition, Norway, Greece, the Nordic countries, Japan, Hungary, and ROK welcomed the US initiative "Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament" (CEND).

The EU, Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, India, Sweden, Japan, Germany, Hungary, Greece, and Norway supported nuclear disarmament verification activities.

Regional issues

In terms of regional issues of nuclear disarmament, participants addressed the challenging situation in the Middle East as well as on the Korean peninsula.

The Nordic countries, Ireland, Nicaragua, Sweden, Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Bulgaria, South Africa, Spain, Iceland, China, Germany, Estonia, Argentina, Hungary, Thailand, Romania, Russia, Latvia, and Peru expressed their continued support to the Joint Comprehensive Programme of Action (JCPOA) with Iran. The EU, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Austria, Spain, China, Cuba, South Africa, and Russia regretted the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and the subsequent re-imposition of previously lifted US sanctions. Russia noted that the US policy of "maximum pressure" has failed. The Nordic countries, Thailand, Sweden, Norway, and the EU urged Iran to return to full compliance with the agreement and to fully cooperate with the IAEA on all its safeguards obligations.

The EU expressed grave concern at Iran's continued accumulation of low enriched uranium in excess of the JCPOA limit and said that its maximum enrichment level is above the limit set by the JCPOA. The EU also remained concerned about the continued enrichment in Fordow and the expansion of Iran's centrifuge R&D activities. Ireland, Poland, Germany, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia had similar concerns. Ireland welcomed the agreement reached by the IAEA and Iran to facilitate the full implementation of Iran's safeguards obligations and is encouraged by the swift start to implementing that agreement. Australia and others also welcomed the agreement.

The Nordic countries, Poland, the Czech Republic, and the EU asserted that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear weapon and missile programmes continue to remain in violation of numerous UN Security Council resolutions. Norway, Germany, Australia, Bulgaria, Iceland and Ireland also condemned the DPRK's nuclear weapon and missiles programme. Thailand, Latvia, Japan, and Spain expressed their commitment to relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

The Nordic countries, the EU, and the Netherlands reaffirmed their commitment to continue the imposition of sanctions. China said it was opposed to unilateral sanctions and "long-arm jurisdiction beyond the mandates of the UNSC resolutions". The

Republic of Korea (ROK) said that the milestone agreement reached between the leaders of the ROK, the United States, and the DPRK in 2018 to achieve complete denuclearisation and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula should not be underestimated, despite the stalling of the peace process.

Nuclear weapon free zones

As every year, the vast majority of participants emphasised the crucial role of nuclear-weapon free zones in contributing to global nuclear disarmament. Most focused on the impasse of concluding a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

Many participants, including the Arab Group, Algeria, Ms. Nakamitsu, the African Group, Egypt, Namibia, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Jamaica, Cuba, Libya, Russia, Belarus, Yemen, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon, Qatar, Turkey, South Africa, and NAM welcomed the adoption of the UNGA decision 73/546 and the first conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. NAM, Libya, the Arab Group, Iran, Syria, Spin, Turkey, Bahrain, Lebanon, Yemen and the Arab Group, amongst others, called upon all states of the region to actively participate in this Conference and negotiate in good faith for a legally-binding treaty.

Total 2019 spending: \$72.9 billion



Image: International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

CHEMICAL WEAPONS

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

Recent chemical weapon use is testing the longstanding norm against this weapon of mass destruction while also becoming another source of significant discord between states, as vocalised during the first week of the First Committee's general debate.

Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Estonia, the European Union (EU), France, Georgia, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nordic Countries, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US), among others, condemned the August 2020 incident in which a nerve agent allegedly caused Alexey Navalny, a Russian citizen and government critic, to fall ill on a trip from Berlin to Moscow. Most of these delegations further called on Russia to cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and/or for a full investigation. The formal statement from Russia did not comment on the Navalny incident, although during informal "right of reply" segments it outlined a range of possible explanations for what could have happened to Mr. Navalny. Ireland and Switzerland referenced the Navalny incident as a "worrying trend" threatening the global norm on the non-use of chemical weapons, and an indication of the current vulnerability of many international instruments.

Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Estonia, EU, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nordic Countries, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the UK, among others, referenced chemical weapons use in Syria. Some welcomed the April 2020 [report](#) of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) of the OPCW that attributes responsibility to the Syrian Arab Air Force in the use of chemical weapons in Idlib in 2017. China stated that in "dealing with the Syrian chemical weapons issue, the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) should be strictly observed and the authority of the Convention should be upheld," and that it "strongly opposes political manipulation of the

issue by a small number of countries for geopolitical purposes." France and Albania referenced their support for the July 2020 OPCW Executive Council decision on measures taken against Syria with respect to CWC infringements.

Austria, the Nordic Countries, the EU, Ireland, Norway, North Macedonia, Nepal, New Zealand, and Spain, among others, stressed the importance of accountability and ending impunity. Liechtenstein noted that while there is a "continued broad consensus that violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention have to be fully investigated and brought to justice, in practice many of these efforts face obstructionism and political attacks."

Australia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Estonia, EU, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, and Romania reiterated their confidence in the professionalism and impartiality of the OPCW and/or its Technical Secretariat. Liechtenstein particularly applauded the work of the independent bodies of the Syria Accountability Mechanism (SIAM) and the IIT.

In contrast, Iran said the "politicised approach" of some within the OPCW is a matter of concern. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) expressed "deep regret" for the non-adoption of a report at the Fourth Special Session of the CWC Conference of States Parties, "owing to lack of consensus and politicisation on some issues." Russia described an "unacceptable situation" that has led to the OPCW being "literally split". It referenced its intention to submit a draft resolution in relation to the need to update the principles and procedures of the UN Secretary-General's mechanism for investigation into chemical and biological weapons uses; although did not specify if that will be a First Committee resolution.

Estonia and Finland joined the EU, Greece, and Sweden, among others, in expressing that deliberate

efforts to discredit the OPCW and undermine its authority are regretful and unacceptable. Finland further noted that while states have a duty to support the OPCW with resources needed to implement its mandate, the “final responsibility for achieving accountability rests with the UN Security Council. We are yet to see the Council fully shoulder this responsibility.”

Diverse other delegations such as Algeria, Austria, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Guatemala, Ecuador, Hungary, Mexico, Peru, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Thailand gave voice to concerns about norm erosion and called on all states to uphold obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Several of these countries condemned the use of chemical weapons but without reference to, or condemnation of, specific incidents.

The NAM, China, and Iran highlighted that the US has yet to complete destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile per its obligations under the CWC.

Poland introduced its annual resolution on the Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which was not available at the time of writing. Noting that the UN General Assembly “must uphold a strong, united and unambiguous signal of support of the whole international community for the CWC and the OPCW,” Poland explained that the draft resolution “offers an excellent opportunity to do that. Our efforts to curb proliferation of chemical weapons have brought undeniable success, but we must not be complacent and neglect the remaining challenges in this area.”

BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS

Filippa Lentzos | Kings College London

Five groups of states and 55 individual states referred to biological weapons in the General Debate statements to the 2020 UN First Committee. Most of the remarks emphasised the importance of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) and expressed support for the Treaty. Many highlighted the need to universalise and effectively implement the BWC.

COVID-19’s devastating impacts were referred to by several states as a stark example of the potential consequences and disruption we could see if biological weapons were ever used. Many, including Australia, Canada, Greece, Finland, France, India, Ireland, Nepal, Netherlands and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said the pandemic underscored the need to strengthen the BWC. China said “COVID-19 has sounded the alarm on biosecurity and highlighted the importance and urgency of strengthening global biosecurity governance.”

For Russia and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in particular, but also for others like Brazil, China, Spain, and Netherlands, strengthening the BWC means negotiating a legally-binding verification mechanism. Many signalled that this is a main priority for them at the upcoming Review Conference in 2021.

For other states, strengthening the BWC means a whole host of other things. Activities expressed in General Debate statements included: greater international cooperation, assistance and preparedness; proper and sustained financial support for the treaty; more institutional capacity and fostering synergies between relevant international organisations; establishing a scientific advisory body; improving implementation of the treaty’s confidence-building measures and adopting additional transparency measures like peer review; creating mobile biomedical units to assist in responding to deliberate outbreaks; and developing a voluntary code of conduct for life scientists.

Kazakhstan reiterated its proposal to establish a special multilateral body—an International Agency for Biological Safety—to strengthen the BWC, which was first introduced by the President of Kazakhstan at the 75th General Debate of the General Assembly.

Following usual practice, Hungary introduced its draft resolution on the BWC. Since in-person informal consultations cannot be held due to the pandemic, and noting that its priority is to preserve consensus—something felt to be particularly important in a year preceding a Review Conference—Hungary said changes from last year’s version have been kept to a minimum.

Indonesia, on behalf of NAM, introduced the biennial resolution **L.18, “Measures to uphold the authority of the 1925 Geneva Protocol”**.

Several unsupported allegations and insinuations of activities in contravention of the BWC were made. Iran said it is “deeply concerned about the clandestine biological weapon programs pursued by some countries.” Syria said, “Israel’s arsenal of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons remains the greatest threat for peace and security in the Middle East region”. China said, “The international community is highly concerned with the US military’s biological programs. We urge the US to act in an open, transparent and responsible manner and fully clarify its activities in numerous bio-labs overseas.” The United States, one of the three Depository Governments of the Treaty, spoke of “the plague unleashed onto the world by the People’s Republic of China” and the need to hold China to account, but did not refer to the BWC in its statement.

FULLY AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS

Isabelle Jones | Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

“The ceaseless development of new technology has not been slowed by the pandemic,” warned the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu at the opening of the First Committee. “Therefore, finding ways to keep ahead of the implications posed by emerging weapon technologies has never been more urgent.” Stressing the critical stage of discussions at the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons, she expressed support for the points of consensus that have been established by the group, in particular “the need to ensure that humans remain in control of weapons and the use of force.”

Also stressing the importance of retaining human control over the use of force, the European Union emphasised “that human beings must make the decisions with regard to the use of lethal force, exert control over lethal weapons systems they use, and remain accountable for decisions over the use of force in order to ensure compliance

with International Law.” Liechtenstein noted that meaningful human control across the life cycle of weapon systems is essential, and Sweden said it remains convinced that human control of use of force must be upheld.

In their statements, Ireland, Poland, Colombia, and Venezuela acknowledged risks posed by emerging technologies, including autonomous weapons. Peru pointed to challenges to international law, human rights, peace, and security raised by autonomous weapon systems, and Ecuador stated that militarisation of artificial intelligence poses challenges for security, transparency, accountability, and proportionality. Austria stressed that the use of lethal force without human control would undermine international humanitarian law and invited states to participate in an international conference to address the issue of autonomous weapons, which it will organise in 2021.

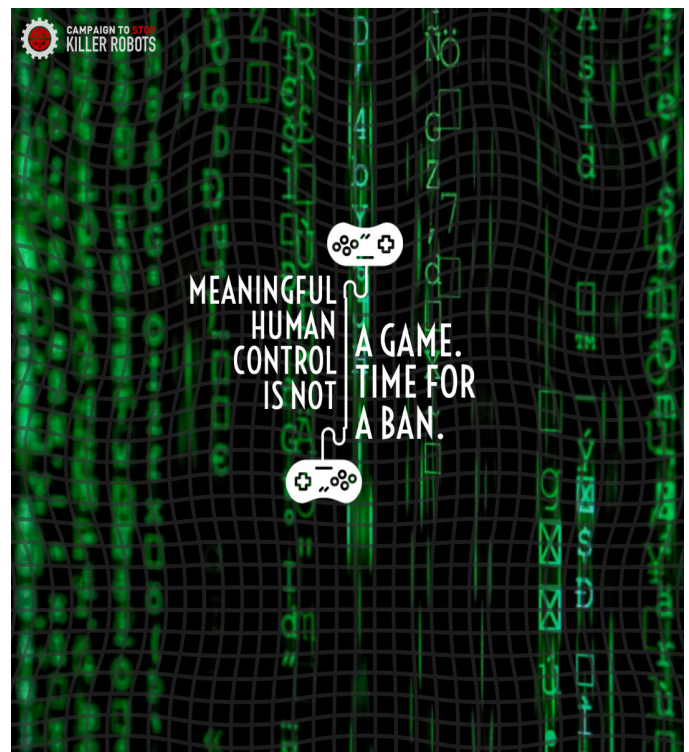
The Non-Aligned Movement was consistent in expressing its position that there is an “urgent

need to pursue a legally-binding instrument” on autonomous weapons; Costa Rica and Cuba also reiterated their call for the CCW to adopt a legally binding instrument. Brazil believes that such an instrument “is the best option to ensure human control” and cautioned that the opportunity to adopt an appropriate legal framework is narrowing quickly. The Philippines identified the need for “a robust and future-proof” legally binding instrument and Sri Lanka encouraged states to “deepen and fast track the discussion” to urgently address the issues posed by autonomous weapon systems.

Speaking for the first time on the issue, Iceland referred to autonomous weapons as a “new challenge and frontier in the field of disarmament,” and noted its hope for concrete results to address this area of work. Nepal also expressed support for international normative frameworks to regulate “frontier technologies” such as autonomous weapons. Albania, referencing the issue for the first time, supported a need to continue deliberations on autonomous weapon systems, as did Turkey. Since the issue was first raised in 2013, 99 states have publicly elaborated their views on killer robots in a multilateral forum.

Many statements, including those from Finland, Japan, Australia, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, India, Greece, Bulgaria, and France reiterated that the CCW is the appropriate forum for work on autonomous weapon systems, valued the work of the GGE, or welcomed the 11 guiding principles developed by the group in 2018. Statements from the Nordic Countries, the Netherlands, Iceland, and Brazil specifically referenced advancing work on autonomous weapons by the CCW Review Conference in 2021.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots views quickly developing autonomous technology as a threat stripping humans of their role in the use of force. Weapons without meaningful human control would undermine basic principles of international humanitarian law and human rights law including the rights to life, remedy, and dignity. The statement on behalf of our coalition of 165 nongovernmental organisations in 65 countries called on all states to negotiate an international treaty to ban fully autonomous weapons, reminding them that “we are all individually and collectively responsible for developing and shaping the technologies that frame the interactions between us. We must work to ensure that future technologies are developed and used to promote peace and respect for each other’s inherent dignity.”



LANDMINES

Diana Carolina Prado Mosquera | International Campaign to Ban Landmines

The 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and on their Destruction (or the Mine Ban Treaty—MBT) is one of the most universally adhered-to international instruments. Remarkable progress has been made towards eliminating these weapons and addressing their deadly legacy. During the opening days of the First Committee, almost 30 delegations spoke about the Treaty and expressed support for its humanitarian aims.

The Nordic Countries, Australia, and the Netherlands welcomed the Oslo Action Plan adopted in 2019 in Norway and said that it needs to be implemented with strong determination, in order to finish the job of a mine free world by 2025. The European Union (EU) and South Africa encouraged further universalisation of the Treaty. Canada and Australia welcomed the focus that the action plan puts on gender and diversity. Ghana highlighted the importance of a gender and humanitarian analysis in the frame of the MBT.

Landmines, mostly of improvised nature, still kill and maim and this is one of the challenges of the MBT. Norway expressed its concern about the rise of improvised mines and highlighted that this must be addressed within the framework of the MBT. The Netherlands highlighted that victims of landmines are increasing especially those ones from improvised landmines, and Colombia reiterated that the country has been affected by the use of these weapons, especially by organised groups that are linked to illicit drug trafficking.

Chile shared information about its successful mine clearance process and Cambodia shared that it has made advances in toward meeting its clearance deadlines. Tajikistan made a general call for Central Asia to be free from mines and to strengthen cooperation in humanitarian demining. Sri Lanka expressed that it seeks to complete clearance by 2020, but that inadequate funding has prevented

them from achieving this goal. Yemen said that despite the current armed conflict it continues their mine clearance efforts. Thailand expressed that it is focusing on mine clearance operations, to complete its demining tasks by 2023.

Myanmar remains the only non-state party to still use landmines. Bangladesh expressed its concern over the use of landmines by Myanmar against its own people. The EU strongly condemned any use.

Senegal highlighted that affected countries must pay attention to socio-economic rehabilitation of victims. Similarly, the Central American Integration System and the EU expressed the importance of victim assistance obligations. Philippines said that mine action must be undertaken with a survivor centered-approach.

Colombia said that it hopes to continue receiving cooperation and assistance. Chile and Ecuador said that they will cooperate with other countries in their humanitarian demining efforts.

Sudan, as current President of the MBT, said that it will continue to contribute towards achieving a mine free world. It announced that the annual resolution on this topic has been tabled. **L.26, “Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction,”** is an update of the previous resolutions with no substantial changes included. It was introduced by the Netherlands, Norway, and Sudan.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines calls on all member states to vote in favour of this resolution.

CLUSTER MUNITIONS

Diana Carolina Prado Mosquera | Cluster Munition Coalition

The Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) celebrated its tenth anniversary earlier this year and the Convention's Second Review Conference will take place in Lausanne, Switzerland on 23-27 November 2020 in a hybrid format. During the first two weeks of the First Committee delegations were supportive of the Convention and of the aim of eliminating the suffering caused by these weapons.

One of the major challenges that the CCM faces is the ongoing use of cluster munitions. In its statement, the Cluster Munitions Coalition condemned the use of cluster munitions in Nagorno-Karabakh and Syria, and called on Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Syria to join the Convention and ban these weapons. The European Union (EU) urged all states to refrain from using cluster munitions. The Philippines and Austria expressed concern about new use of cluster munitions. New Zealand strongly condemned the use of cluster munitions in Syria. Costa Rica condemned the use of cluster munitions in the South Caucasus while Switzerland—current President of the CCM—expressed its concern for the alleged use of cluster munitions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan and Armenia denounced the use of cluster munitions in their territories.

Costa Rica, Ecuador, Philippines, and Switzerland stressed the importance of universalisation of this Convention. Maldives noted that they had acceded to the CCM in 2019. New Zealand urged all states not yet party to the Convention to commit to the prohibition of these weapons. South Africa, Japan, and Honduras supported full implementation of the Convention.

Norway stated that the Oslo Action Plan of the Mine Ban Treaty is a good reference point for the forthcoming Lausanne Action Plan that will likely be adopted by the end of November 2020 at the Second Review Conference. Netherlands also expressed the relevance of the new action plan and highlighted the importance of universalisation and implementation

of the CCM. Switzerland expressed that despite the conference being held in a hybrid format it seeks to have an inclusive and productive conference.

Austria stated that ridding the world of cluster munitions remains a concern. Norway and Japan said that these weapons kill indiscriminately and maim long after the end of the conflict. Lao PDR, one of the two countries in the world with massive contamination, described the effect that these weapons have by killing and maiming innocent people, especially children, and highlighted that they have adopted an additional voluntarily Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to be “cluster munitions free” and called on all states to help implement this SDG.



Image: Cluster Munition Coalition

EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS

Laura Boillot | International Network on Explosive Weapons

This year's discussions at the First Committee take place amid rising civilian casualties in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a result of heavy shelling by both Armenia and Azerbaijan, including in Ganja, Stepanakert, and other cities and towns in the region. The situation has been **described** by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, as "deeply worrying". She has called for an urgent ceasefire and for parties to ensure they are "avoiding the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas."

This once again highlights an urgent need to develop new standards to prevent the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas. Efforts towards this have been building since the 2019 First Committee. Following an international conference in Vienna hosted by the government of Austria, Ireland has initiated an international process to develop a political declaration that will lay out concrete recommendations to help protect civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. This process is expected to conclude in the coming months. Several states have voiced support for this initiative in their First Committee statements.

Austria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ghana, Iceland, Ireland, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Switzerland all raised explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) in their national statements the first week of general debate, as did the group of Nordic States, the European Union, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW).

The UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu recalled that 50 million people are affected by war in cities. She highlighted heavy explosive weapons as being particularly problematic when used in populated areas, causing injury, disability, displacement, and insecurity, and damage and destruction to essential infrastructure. This has knock-on effects for the effective

functioning of healthcare systems, provision of medical services, as well as the many other services and needs that rely on power, water, and sanitation systems.

Nakamitsu welcomed the political declaration process being led by Ireland and encouraged all governments to "support this effort and to commit to avoiding the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas." Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, she added, this commitment is more necessary and urgent than ever.

A survivor of explosive weapons, Mahpekay Sidiqi from Afghanistan, spoke on behalf of INEW during the segment for civil society presentations. She described her own terrifying experience of her village being bombed and fleeing for safety with her siblings. Sidiqi's legs were blown off in an explosion and she now works in an orthopedic centre helping other victims with their rehabilitation. Intervening from Kabul, Sidiqi urged states to finalise the political declaration as soon as it becomes possible and to "approach this with the aim of developing stronger humanitarian standards that will protect people from harm."

Reflecting on motivations for supporting the political process, New Zealand emphasised the need for human security and better protection of civilians in armed conflict, adding that "the need for effective action in this context cannot be overstated." Colombia called on states to avoid use of explosive weapons in populated areas, while Costa Rica reiterated the need for new standards over the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and called for an international political declaration to prevent use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in urban areas. Austria noted that a political declaration should not only help strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law, but also work towards the goal of preventing human suffering.

The Philippines also expressed its support for the international political declaration and its intention to continue to participate in the process. Iceland recognised the significance of the political process on explosive weapons, describing it as “an important stride in the right direction” and affirming Iceland’s strong support for the process. Ghana referenced the inclusive nature of the process and called on other states “to show genuine political will towards such innovative measures for the protection of civilians.”

The Nordic Countries also supported the political declaration process and described the civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas as “a humanitarian challenge that must be addressed urgently considering the growing number and intensity of conflicts affecting populated areas.”

In a misrepresentation of the aims and purpose of the political declaration process, the draft declaration text itself, and the data on harm caused by the use of EWIPA, the European Union’s statement welcomed the consultations but sought to suggest that it was working to address “the indiscriminate and disproportionate” use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Whilst one particular EU state has been actively mobilising support for an approach that focuses only on illegal attacks, this approach is not backed up with any real evidence, nor has this country explained the humanitarian benefits of such an approach. INEW and other organisations have made it clear that a declaration that only serves to reaffirm the law would miss the opportunity to set stronger standards of protection and have real humanitarian potential.

INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRADE

Raluca Muresan | Control Arms Coalition

The beginning of the 2020 First Committee session saw more than 30 statements that made reference to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) as a key framework for regulating the global arms trade.

“COVID-19 has exacerbated the impact of the illicit use of small arms and light weapons [SALW]. Unemployment, national lockdowns, extreme fiscal uncertainty, (...) all contribute to increasing tensions (...) that give rise to ripe conditions for gun-related crime” stressed the Bahamas, a concern that was voiced by many member states and civil society organisations.

Sweden and the European Union stressed the importance of multilateralism in addressing security challenges, with Sweden noting the need for a holistic approach focused on the “implementation of multilateral agreements such as the ATT and the International Tracing Instrument”. Other member states, including Costa Rica, Iceland and Kazakhstan, emphasised the importance of exploring synergies between disarmament and arms control instruments including the ATT and the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA).

Finland noted the shared goal of the two instruments on diversion prevention.

The ATT’s implementation is a priority for a number of states. Costa Rica reminded member states that the Treaty was adopted to ensure that “conventional arms transfers do not fuel conflicts, circumvent Security Council embargoes, facilitate terrorism or are used to commit serious violations of human rights or international law”. Senegal referenced a new draft ATT legislation which, once adopted, will facilitate the establishment of a national arms control system and national checklist, ensuring compliance with the Treaty’s provisions.

While El Salvador called for cooperation and international assistance to support the effective implementation of the ATT, New Zealand, the current Chair of the ATT’s Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF), informed that a series of instructive videos will provide insights on how they can submit high-quality proposals to the VTF. New Zealand also committed to providing earmarked funding to the VTF and bilateral assistance for projects focused on the Pacific region. China reported its readiness to provide assistance

to developing countries and stressed its support for the African Union's initiative of "Silencing the Guns in Africa".

Australia encouraged all states that not yet party to the ATT "to look at it afresh, noting it does not impinge on a state's right to regulate and control its conventional arms exports." China and the Maldives recalled their recent accessions to the Treaty, in which **China** stressed its commitment to "promoting global arms trade governance".

Noting that diversion plays a key role in the rise of conflict and terrorism, Nigeria reiterated its commitment to ATT implementation. The **Nordic countries** emphasised that "transparency and information sharing are of utmost importance in reducing the risk of diversion" while **Canada** committed to strengthening its national export control system to tackle diversion and expressed its support for open discussions on mitigation measures to prevent diversion, including post-delivery verifications.

Iceland, the Bahamas and Finland, among others, registered concern that gender-based violence (GBV), has increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as noted also by the **International Action Network on Small Arms** (IANSA) and **Control Arms**. The Nordic countries called for continued attention to the risks of serious acts of GBV as progress toward

the Treaty's implementation continues. **Norway** and Finland underlined the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in arms control efforts.

Despite a steady decline in ATT reporting rates over the past few years, only Argentina, **North Macedonia**, and Senegal referenced the importance of reporting. North Macedonia reminded that reporting obligations under Article 13 are key to bringing transparency to the global arms trade, while **Senegal** stressed the need for "complete, regular and timely submission of national reports on international arms transfers under the ATT".

The Control Arms Coalition expressed concern over the growing gap between states' commitments to international humanitarian law and human rights, in the ATT and in other international and regional agreement. It called on member states to: universalise and implement the ATT in a consistent, objective and non-discriminatory manner to end weapons transfers that unleash disease, destitution, despair, and death; support transparency in arms transfer decisions to prevent diversion of arms and ammunition and build confidence and mutual security among states; document the impact of COVID-19 on armed violence and conflict; and acknowledge the gendered impact of arms flows and trade, and of conflict and violence, and engage in initiatives that promote gender equality.



SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Amelie Namuroy | International Action Network on Small Arms

During the first week of the 2020 First Committee session, many UN member states focused on the threat that small arms and light weapons (SALW) pose to security and development, emphasising the need to increase international cooperation and national capacity to stem the tide of illegal weapons. Member states frequently referenced the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on an already fragile international community and its severe consequences on the socio-economic health of many states, noting how the pandemic is exacerbating the instability created as a result of the illicit proliferation of SALW.

Many states addressed the threats of SALW to security and development. For example, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) underlined that the increasing proliferation of SALW accounts for a significant loss of life as illegal firearms are used in a high number of violent crimes and homicides. Nicaragua emphasised that security and stability are essential to ensure human security. Mexico added that the proliferation of SALW exacerbates conflict and transnational crime and that the diversion of SALW becomes possible through illicit, although in many cases permissive channels, because of outdated legal frameworks and insufficient control mechanisms. Guatemala emphasised that the suffering caused by SALW prevents the creation of an adequate environment to promote human and sustainable development. Thailand underlined the linkages among transnational crime, terrorism, and human rights violations. Expanding on the issue of security, India shared its concern about the transfer of conventional weapons, including SALW to terrorists and non-state actors. The representative of Eritrea said the increased accessibility of small arms and light weapons is causing death and misery in developed and developing countries alike, with commercial and security interests driving their production.

A key UN official and several states also advocated for controls on ammunition. The UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, underlined the promising advances made on conventional ammunition by the relevant Group of Governmental Experts. She stressed that progress in this area is critically important because ammunition is an essential component of conventional weapons use in conflict settings. In addition, the Central American Integration System (SICA) reiterated the need for the continued implementation of obligations and commitments concerning ammunition under relevant regional and international instruments, such as 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) and its International Tracing Instrument (ITI). Ghana also recognised that ammunition sustains conflict, and emphasised that the outcomes of the Third Review Conference on the UNPoA addressed the need to include ammunition controls in the fight against the proliferation of SALW. Peru stated its support for the strict and consistent control of SALW and related ammunition, reiterating its commitment to implement the UNPoA and the ITI.

As First Committee continues, IANSA expects states to continue to raise concerns about the effects of COVID-19. The pandemic seems to have highlighted states' recognition that international assistance and cooperation are indispensable conditions to the successful implementation of the UNPoA and other SALW controls.

The First Committee traditionally adopts several resolutions relating to SALW. At the time of writing, these have not been introduced and/or are not publicly available online.

OUTER SPACE

Jessica West | Project Ploughshares

Despite a new year, a new format, and a new initiative, the opportunity for a fresh start when it comes to international security in outer space may be slipping. An annual resolution on the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) has been jointly tabled by Sri Lanka and Egypt for almost 40 years, enjoying near unanimous support. Yet this shared concern has yielded few results. Progress has been marred by divides over process (voluntary versus legally binding, versus politically binding approaches) and, more subtly, between those who prioritise traditional arms control, and those who would instead contain the effects of an arms race believed to be already underway.

South Africa's call to "find common ground and a return to consensus outcomes" on these issues reflects a growing fatigue with this stalemate. Fortunately, this is the stated goal of a new initiative proposed by the United Kingdom in its draft resolution (which is not publicly available at the time of writing) entitled "Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviours." It is focused on identifying actions and activities that threaten space systems in conjunction with the further development of norms of responsible behaviour to reduce these threats. Yet it is firmly situated within the context of PAROS, structured as an open-ended and bottom-up process, and holds open the door to possible contributions to a legally binding instrument. This new and practical approach to an old problem was welcomed by the joint NGO statement delivered by Jessica West of Project Ploughshares and by the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu.

Despite these nods to consensus building, broad agreement is not yet clear. Numerous states indicated support for the draft resolution including the Nordic Countries, the European Union (EU), Norway, Finland, South Korea, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Turkey, France, and Japan. But Russia

issued a strong rebuke, calling the resolution "cynical" and urging member states not to be tricked. Yet consensus on other approaches seems equally elusive. The negotiation of a legally binding arms control treaty remains a clear priority for some, indicated by statements delivered by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Kazakhstan, Colombia, Kyrgyzstan, the Arab Group, China, North Korea, Bangladesh, and Nepal. So too is there a desire to advance the findings of the recently concluded Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on this initiative, which were welcomed by South Korea and India. Canada said it sees merit in exploring ways to end debris-generating anti-satellite (ASAT) tests; Sweden likewise called for restraint.

Russia, who along with China has previously sponsored a draft treaty titled "Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force Against Outer Space Objects" (PPWT) at the Conference on Disarmament (CD), will once again sponsor two draft resolutions: "No first placement of weapons in outer space" and "Transparency and confidence building measures in space activities." Neither draft is yet publicly available. But Russian credibility on these initiatives was called into question by both the United States and Ukraine, who suggested that Russia has recently engaged in tests of space-based ASAT weapons.

There is no single solution to the many security challenges in outer space today. Yet, from the testing of ASAT weapons noted by the Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, the United States, and Ukraine; to concern for the future possibility of space-based strike weapons emphasised by Russia, China, and the NAM, and worry about the growing focus on warfighting highlighted by Iran and Ghana; it is clear that weapons and weapons-capable technology are driving insecurity in space. The PAROS resolution remains as relevant as ever. It is urgent that states work together to forge a path forward on this issue to make good on this 40-year-old promise.

CYBER

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

A significant number of delegations referenced cyber space, cyber security, or information and communication technologies (ICTs) in their First Committee statements. The remarks made it clear that concern about instability and conflict in cyber space is on the rise, alongside support for finding political solutions to address those threats.

Argentina, Austria, Ghana, Jamaica, Iceland, Ireland, North Macedonia, Norway, and Singapore, among others, spoke to the substantial role that ICTs have come to play in multiple aspects of daily life, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic—while also noting that ICTs, and their users, have correspondingly become more vulnerable in this time. Costa Rica, Iceland, Ireland, Switzerland and a joint civil society statement referenced in particular operations targeting health or medical facilities and infrastructure. Georgia emphasised a recent cyber operation carried out against the Lugar Research Center and the computer system of the Georgian health ministry as well as the on-going “propaganda war” being conducted by Russia against this same institute. The civil society statement further referenced the growth of online gender-based violence and widening digital gender gap, as well as concerns over internet shutdowns that impede access to vital information and contract tracing applications.

Several statements focused on the militarisation of cyberspace. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) called for the intensification of efforts towards safeguarding cyberspace “from becoming an arena of conflict and ensuring instead its exclusive peaceful uses.” Cuba condemned the militarisation of cyberspace. Ghana highlighted that the attempt by some states to “create new fighting domains in cyberspace” is worrying. Liechtenstein observed that recent years have seen a militarisation of cyber space and identified “pervasive data collection and manipulation, as well as militarized cyber-attacks against critical infrastructure including telecommunications networks, power grids, health

programs as well as political and judicial systems” as undermining “democratic norms and expose State institutions and their populations to great risk.” Brazil spoke of the malicious uses and increasing weaponisation of ICTs, stating that unchecked behaviour in cyberspace can no longer be tolerated “without putting our shared values of peace, security, democracy and human rights in peril.” Bangladesh, Bulgaria, the European Union (EU), Ethiopia, Iran, Lithuania, North Macedonia, and Sri Lanka expressed similar concerns about malicious operations and/or misuse of technology. Civil society explained that “the use of digital technologies as tools of, or targets for, aggression is becoming more frequent and, as a result, more normalised, by a growing number of states and other actors.”

In 2018 the First Committee established amidst much friction two bodies to address issues relating to state behaviour in cyberspace and ICTs: an [open-ended working group](#) (OEWG) and a [group of governmental experts](#) (GGE). The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Austria, Canada, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Norway, Singapore, Thailand, and the United Kingdom (UK) were among delegations welcoming work conducted in both bodies. Argentina, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Egypt, Ethiopia, and the NAM spoke only of the OEWG.

Russia sponsored the resolution that established the OEWG in 2018 ([A/RES/73/27](#)) and announced that—although the OEWG has not yet concluded its work—it will submit a new resolution in this session of the First Committee “providing for convening a new OEWG in 2021 for a period of five years, with its mandate unchanged.”¹ It may also be noteworthy that in its statement, Russia continues to use the term “international information security (IIS)” —a term less favoured by most other (mainly Western) countries to describe the subject and focus of work of bodies mandated by the First Committee, given the term’s implied emphasis on content control.²

The UK and Australia welcomed the work of both groups but warned against pre-empting how best to continue these discussions at the UN. Norway stated that decisions on how to advance this agenda item should be taken after these groups complete their work, while Austria stated that the successful conclusion of the OEWG could lay the “groundwork” for possible future institutional arrangements. Civil society noted that there are issues of non-governmental stakeholder access to the OEWG.

To that point, France said that it, along with more than thirty partners, supports the establishment of a new instrument—a programme of action—to promote responsible behaviour in cyber space. The Nordic Countries welcomed “efforts to merge the current parallel tracks on international cybersecurity within the UN to a single Programme of Action.” Ghana expressed that it hopes this initiative to streamline the two parallel tracks “would be workable,” with similar views expressed by the Netherlands.

The (as of yet not formally tabled) proposal to eventually negotiate a programme of action on state behaviour on cyberspace may be a way to bridge gaps between states who would like to see new binding law in this area and others who prefer to continue with a norms-based approach, complemented by the application of existing law. Singapore said that it looks forward to working with colleagues toward a “common rules-based multilateral system in cyberspace.” Nicaragua urged the development of a legally binding international response to “the significant loopholes seen today”. Cuba and Jamaica also spoke in favour of legally binding approaches, while the NAM noted that the development of any international legal framework “should be pursued within the UN with the active and equal participation of all states.” Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, and Switzerland, among others, referenced applicability of existing law and already agreed norms with Brazil highlight that the consensual reports adopted by the past GGEs “constitute an important *acquis* in terms of non-binding principles, norms and rules for responsible State behavior in cyberspace.” Liechtenstein observed that despite

common understanding about the applicability of law, activities that “move the domain of warfare to cyberspace meet with little consequence.” It is exploring the role the International Criminal Court may play in the regulation of warfare as it evolves in the 21st century by creating a Council of Advisers on the Application of the Rome Statute to Cyberwarfare.

China referenced its newly announced Global Initiative on Data Security, which calls on all states to oppose using ICT activities which “impair other States’ critical infrastructure or steal important data, oppose abusing ICT to conduct mass surveillance against other States, desist from requesting domestic companies to store data generated and obtained overseas in one’s own territory, and ask ICT products and services providers not to install back-doors in their products and services.” CARICOM stressed the challenges it faces with cybercrime and efforts of the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) to build resilience in the Caribbean region through public awareness, building capacity, investigation, and prosecution.

Canada described the priority it places on advancing understanding about the gendered impact of cyber operations and increasing the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of cyber security. It has advanced this priority by supporting the Women in Cyber fellowship programme with Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and the UK and by commissioning two research papers³ that were submitted to the OEWG and promoted in other spaces.

India announced it will table its annual resolution on the “Role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament,” which has traditionally been adopted without a vote.⁴ The United States will also table a resolution in this session of the First Committee, but did not comment on it during its statement and the text is not yet available.

1. Resolution text not publicly available at time of publication.
2. For more information, see Eneken Tikk and Mika Kerttunen, *Parabasis: Cyber diplomacy in stalemate*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2018.
3. Deborah Brown and Allison Pytlak, *Why gender matters in international cyber security*, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Association for Progressive Communications, 2020; and Dr. Sarah Shoker, *Making Gender Visible in Digital ICTs and International Security*, University of Waterloo, 2020.
4. Resolution text not publicly available at time of publication.

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IN SEARCH OF ENEMIES

*The Governments holding Humanitarian
Disarmament hostage*

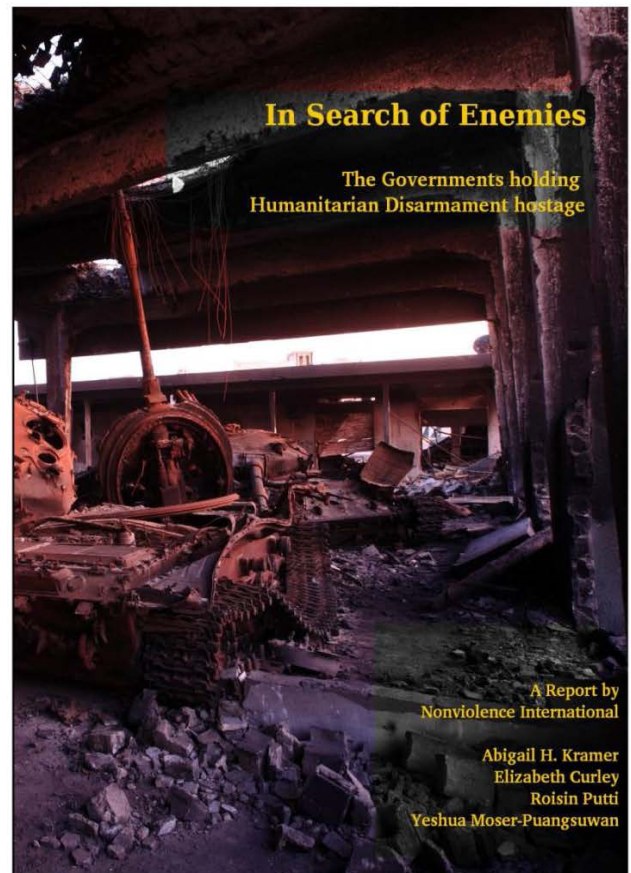
Report Launch

23 October 2020

14:00 EDT, New York

Register at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwsc-qqqDMiHtO8IpjzH3uh9SsJy6q33h1>

This report examines the behavior of the 30 most militarized states through analysis of government publications and each country's participation in disarmament treaties. The findings are stark. Highly militarized governments use ill-defined and irrelevant threats to justify spending large amounts on weapons. They rely on the language of deterrence to make false links between military expenditures and a safer world. The governments that spend the most on weapons are among the least committed to humanitarian, people-centered approaches to disarmament. This report calls out the worst actors in unconstrained military spending, and urges an end to the shielding of this issue within disarmament fora.



DISARMAMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Danielle Samler | Lawyer's Committee on Nuclear Policy

A point raised by Ecuador during the opening week of the 2020 First Committee, echoed by Egypt and Maldives, was that our collective security does not rely on how many weapons states possess or how many nuclear weapons they have, but rather, how prepared the international community is to overcome threats such as COVID-19 and future viruses to come.

Bangladesh emphasised this point by expressing to delegates that if the pandemic has taught us anything it is that development not armament that can ensure global peace and security. Kazakhstan highlighted that the pandemic has “brought to the fore the flawed logic of enormous military expenditures” and that our resources already diminished by COVID-19 must be spent on global public health and climate mitigation. Egypt recognised that the global pandemic has revealed how interdependent states are. It also recognised “how invaluable it is to direct resources to arms races which do not increase the security of any nations, but undermine international security overall.” Antigua and Barbuda emphasised that concrete steps can be taken to remove the silos between the discussions on development and disarmament.

Costa Rica, Peru, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Arab Group, Austria, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nicaragua, Kazakhstan, the New Agenda Coalition, Eritrea, Guatemala, Nepal, and the Maldives all made statements about how rather than increase spending on modernising nuclear arsenals and investing in emerging weapons technologies, states should invest in health and socioeconomic development, and addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. Costa Rica noted that an estimated \$500 million is needed to help developing countries mitigate COVID-19 and said that “this is not an issue of resource scarcity, but of priorities.” In a similar vein, Nepal expressed concern over the fact that powerful countries are continuing to pour resources and money into militarisation and

modernisation of their arsenals while developing countries can't afford enough personal protective equipment (PPE) for their citizens.

The alarming amount of global military expenditure in 2019 (US \$1.9 trillion) was pointed out by Jamaica, Sri Lanka, the Central American Integration System (SICA), and Pakistan. Sri Lanka provided examples of how even a fraction of total military expenditure could be reallocated when it said that “the cost of achieving quality universal primary and early secondary education for all...would only be over 3% of global military expenditure. Similarly, eliminating extreme poverty and hunger...would only cost about 13% of annual military expenditure. Extending basic water, sanitation and hygiene...to people would only cost less than 2% of annual spending.” China, Iran, Cuba, and Venezuela pointed out that the United States is the leader in military spending. Iran noted that in 2019, the US spent roughly US \$36 billion on its nuclear arsenal. Lebanon, Peru, South Africa, Ireland, and Venezuela also made statements about the worrisome trend of growing military expenditure. South Africa posed an important question to delegates in this regard, asking, “if investment in peace and prosperity will not better yield the security which drives the military expenditure in the first place?”

States also expressed concern that achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seems further and further away. Mexico, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), South Africa, Haiti, Fiji, Bahamas, El Salvador, Uruguay, and Honduras all included references in their statements to this effect by calling for more robust implementation of the SDGs, particularly SDG 16. El Salvador commented that “there cannot be sustainable development without peace, and there cannot be peace without sustainable development.” CARICOM said it remained cognisant of the contribution that the First Committee can make to SDG target 5.2 (on gender equality) as well. The Bahamas recognised

the importance of advancing SDGs related to health, education, gender equality, decent work, and economic growth.

Spain, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and a collective statement from the states parties to the treaty on a nuclear weapon free zone in Central Asia all spoke about the interrelationship between development and disarmament.

Lao PDR noted that in order to create an environment conducive for sustainable development we must achieve disarmament and recognise the important linkages between disarmament, development, and socioeconomic development. Spain reiterated this point by highlighting the connections between non-proliferation, disarmament, and the objectives of sustainable development. Cambodia concluded its remarks by urging all states to work towards a common objective, “to end all threats caused by nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction

and other types of weapons so that the world will continue to prosper and our people will live without fear.”

Resolution L.15, “Relationship between disarmament and development” as tabled by Indonesia, does not contain major updates from last year. This resolution emphasises the interrelationship between disarmament and development, expresses concern over the global increase in military expenditure which could be spent on development needs, and acknowledges that there are new challenges for the international community in the fields of development, poverty eradication, and the elimination of the diseases that afflict humanity. It calls upon states to devote available resources from disarmament and arms limitation agreements to economic and social development and reminds states about the provision in the UN Charter which envisions peace and security with the least diversion of resources.

GENDER

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

This is a year of many anniversaries, including in the sphere of women’s rights, gender, and disarmament. Several delegations observed that 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (WPS), and the 10th anniversary of the UN General Assembly resolution on women, disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control. Various states supported the inclusion of gender perspectives in disarmament fora and documents, including Nepal, Norway, the Philippines, the Nordic Countries, the European Union (EU), Ireland, Costa Rica, and Namibia, as well as Izumi Nakamitsu, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

Sweden said that as a government with a feminist foreign policy, it is convinced of the benefit of applying a gender equality perspective in all aspects of arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament to strengthen international peace and

security. Ms. Nakamitsu regretted the inability of the Conference on Disarmament to agree to make its rules of procedure gender neutral. The joint civil society gender statement, delivered by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Germany, stressed that the root of many current challenges lies in patriarchal militarism, “a world order resting upon massive investments in weapons and war and the celebration of violent ideas about masculinity.” The statement called for a more robust reflection of the gendered norms associated with weapons, war, and violence.

Ms. Nakamitsu observed that “women remain chronically underrepresented, not least in decision-making and leadership,” in the field of disarmament. She called for setting standards and ensuring accountability in reaching parity targets. Many delegations, including El Salvador, the United Arab Emirates, Ms. Nakamitsu, the EU, the Nordic Countries, Ireland, Canada, Bangladesh, Antigua

and Barbuda, South Africa, Australia, and Albania supported the full and effective equal participation of women and men in all aspects of disarmament and arms control, and recognised women's contribution to sustainable peace. Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Iceland, Australia, and Ireland, amongst others, said this was important to advance the WPS agenda. Canada added it also supports women's leadership in disarmament and reminded that it champions action 36 of the UN Secretary-General's (UNSG) disarmament agenda. The EU also expressed its commitment to actions 36 and 37.

Various participants, including the President of the UN General Assembly, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and the Bahamas noted that the work of the First Committee can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality.

The joint civil society gender statement, however, asserted that it's not just about "adding particular bodies to a discussion. It's about changing our perceptions and understandings in order to crack through the deadlock and despair to make concrete progress in building a peaceful and just world for all."

Many delegations, including Canada, Costa Rica, and Jamaica, recognised the gendered impacts of different types of weapons, and of armed conflict and armed violence. Uruguay stressed the gendered impacts of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and noted that women and children suffer most from SALW. Afghanistan also underscored that the flow of conventional arms, including SALW, contributes to gross human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence (GBV). Antigua and Barbuda and Ecuador also highlighted the link between armed conflict and GBV. Latvia reminded that the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is the first agreement to address the link between conventional arms transfers and the risk of GBV. Iceland and Finland made similar remarks. Latvia underscored that a "robust action plan" on gender and GBV was adopted at the 2019 ATT Conference of States Parties.

Jamaica said that "while most men are often the

victims of crimes, increasingly women are becoming targets," and "are often the ones left to pick-up the pieces following these devastating acts." Ms. Nakamitsu observed that lockdowns and loss of livelihoods have led to a dramatic increase in domestic and GBV, "where small arms have long played a deadly role." The Bahamas reiterated the link between gun-related crime and domestic violence, including GBV and intimate partner violence.

Next to conventional weapons, the New Agenda Coalition (NAC) recalled that the urgency of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) "grew from the increased understanding of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons ... including their strong gendered impacts." With respect to landmines, Canada welcomed the enhanced focus on gender in the 2019 Oslo action plan of the Mine Ban Treaty.

Canada informed that it has commissioned research on the gender dimensions of cyber space, and shared its efforts to increase meaningful participation of women in capacity-building programmes related to information and communication technology (ICTs) in international peace and security.

Trinidad and Tobago presented its resolution entitled on women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. It welcomed the UNSG's report on member states' implementation of resolution 73/46 on this initiative. Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, and Jamaica expressed their support for the resolution.

This session's First Committee will consider a biennial resolution on Disarmament and Nonproliferation Education, though it is not yet publicly available. However, in its statement on 9 October, Mexico noted that it would soon present the resolution, "20 years after the Mexican initiative" placed disarmament education on the First Committee agenda.

YOUTH AND DISARMAMENT EDUCATION

Matthew Bolton | Pace University

The text and discussion of the repeating resolution have changed little over the years. However, last year, the First Committee passed its first ever resolution on Youth, Disarmament and Nonproliferation (A/RES/74/64). In statements over the last week, states, UN officials, and civil society have drawn linkages between the two resolutions, seeking to highlight the importance of education in ensuring youth have access to disarmament policymaking.

“Disarmament education, if implemented in ways that take our voices seriously, can enable the active participation of diverse young people in making the world a more just, peaceful and sustainable place,” said Pace University student Cindy Kamtchoum in a joint civil society statement on youth and disarmament education, signed by 29 organisations, including three Nobel Peace Prize Laureates.

In her remarks to this First Committee session, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu welcomed the Youth and Disarmament resolution’s reaffirmation of “the important and positive contribution that young people can make in sustaining peace and security.”

The Republic of Korea, which introduced last year’s resolution on youth, drew linkages between education and “youth empowerment,” saying such initiatives are “meaningful not only for enhancing diversity, but, more importantly, for nurturing young experts who will lead our collective efforts in the future.”

The civil society statement asserted, “Young people often come to disarmament work through social movements, such as those addressing intersecting issues of racism, exploitation, disability, LGBTQA rights, the environment, gender-based violence, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is why we must work on intersectionality and connect disarmament to people’s everyday experiences

of insecurity.” The statement noted, “For many young people in this city and around the globe, our participation in Black Lives Matter demonstrations has spurred us to educate both ourselves and others about the devastating, racialized impact of police violence.”

Kazakhstan paid tribute to the “popular movement” that led to the end of nuclear testing, saying “wider involvement of youth” brings “zeal and dynamism” to disarmament. The United Arab Emirates said “strengthening the role of women and youth in all levels of decision-making” helps to address “emerging issues, which require innovative solutions.” Nepal stated that the “engagement of women, youth, civil society, and the private sector gives disarmament a human face.” Pakistan also underscored the role of youth in disarmament.

Several statements highlighted particular initiatives. High Representative Nakamitsu, the Republic of Korea, and the civil society statement all highlighted the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) Youth4Disarmament platform, which recently launched a new website (<https://youth4disarmament.org>). Nakamitsu also called attention to UNODA’s Youth Champions for Disarmament project.

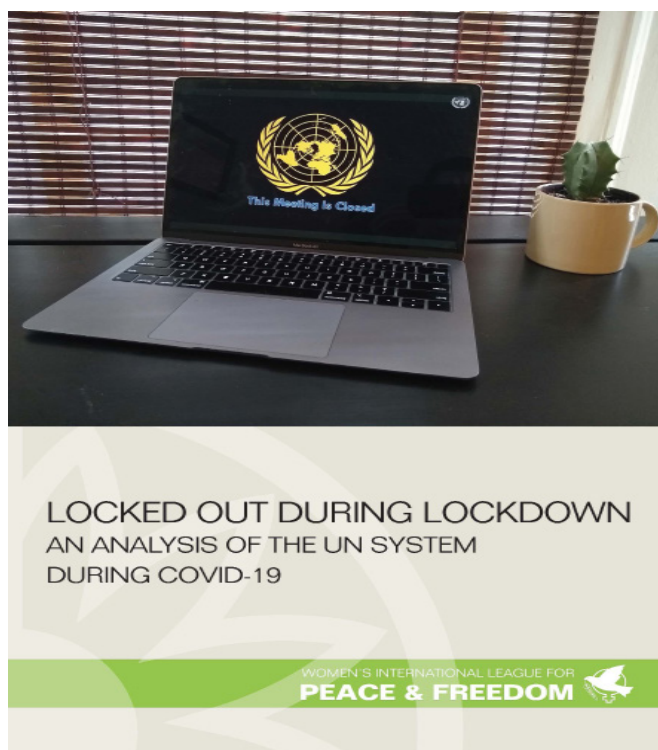
Sri Lanka said that, along with nine other states, it participated in a Baseline Assessment for Disarmament Education with the UN Regional Centre in Asia and the Pacific. In recognising the “high priority” of disarmament education, India mentioned its Annual Disarmament and International Security Affairs Fellowship, launched last year.

The civil society statement called for “paid opportunities for students and young people,” particularly from marginalised communities, and for delegations to include youth representatives. It noted the challenges for education in the COVID-19 pandemic but pointed out that “this year’s digital

diplomacy also offers a chance to be more inclusive and to hear directly from those who cannot normally travel to New York, Geneva or Vienna.”

Several statements focused on specific weapons issues. Sri Lanka called for greater “education and awareness” about the “problem of illicit small arms.” Germany said, “We can all do more in promoting nuclear education,” and Lao PDR urged, “we should redouble our efforts to raise public awareness ... on the danger of nuclear weapons.”

The First Committee is also considering another related draft resolution (L.12) on the United Nations disarmament fellowship, training and advisory services, which was introduced by Nigeria on behalf of the Africa Group.



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

Written by Ray Acheson • Published in September 2020 by Reaching Critical Will, a programme of WILPF • 28 pages

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 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.