Joint civil society statement on gender and disarmament
UN General Assembly First Committee, 8 October 2021
Drafted by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

Chairperson, delegates,

Our world is on fire. And where there are not flames, there are floods. Civil society is locked out of the UN because the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take lives. People are fleeing brutal conflicts, where bombs are dropped on their cities and towns, and human rights defenders and land and water protectors—especially women—have targets on their backs.

And yet, despite all of this, military spending is on the rise. Investments in nuclear weapons continue, despite their prohibition. Investments in arms production and trade continues, despite their regulation. Investments in new technologies of increasingly autonomous weapons are soaring, despite the ongoing talks to prevent their development.

It seems that governments are investing in anything other than peace.

While there are many factors involved in making our world so militarised, at the heart of them lies patriarchal militarism. As we noted last year, our current world order is built upon massive investments in weapons and war and the celebration of violent ideas about “masculinity”.

We have built a world in which governments imagine the capacity of violence as providing security for their people. But weapons do not provide us with security. Care, justice, equality, housing, education—these are what make us secure.

Delegates at the First Committee should discuss and acknowledge these dynamics. While the civil society organisations that have signed onto this joint statement welcome the growing interest in the topic of “gender and disarmament” over the past few years, we also note that this isn’t just about adding particular bodies to a discussion.

We call for a more robust reflection of the gendered norms associated with weapons, war, and violence. For example, in the context of deliberations on autonomous weapons, states should look at how norms of militarised masculinity are shaping the justifications for these weapons, and driving their development.

We also thank those delegates advancing the work on gender and disarmament within the UN system, and urge all delegations to be open to these discussions, rather than refuting their relevance.

Weapons are not the answer to insecurity. As Panama said last week at the UN meeting on autonomous weapons, disarmament is our best defence.

For the list of organisations that have endorsed this statement, please see the written version online. Thank you.
Statement delivered by Laura Varella and drafted by Ray Acheson.

The following civil society organisations endorse this statement:

Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy
Campaign to Stop Killer Robots
Cluster Munition Coalition
Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines
Control Arms
International Campaign to Ban Landmines
International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War
Mines Action Canada
PEAC Institute
Soka Gakkai International
Women's Institute for Alternative Development
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom