2021 Joint Civil Society Statement on Youth Engagement and Peace, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education

Written version for delivery to the UN General Assembly
First Committee (Disarmament and International Security), 8 October 2021.

Young people are consistently told to "get involved" and engage with the world around us. But when we seek to address the pressing issues of peace, disarmament, international security, and non-proliferation, we are too often left outside the room. More than 40% of the world's population is under the age of 25, most of whom live in the Global South. We are not just "the future," young people are also here now. We have the right to intergenerational equity, with a voice in the international community. It is time we are more meaningfully included in conversations about our lives.

Violence has a profound impact on young people's lives around the globe. We are at the frontlines of human insecurity, affected by armed conflict, mass shootings, and gender-based violence. We are mentally drained by the complex effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our homes, our schools, and our workplaces are too often unsafe and unwelcoming. We face the catastrophic existential threats of climate change and nuclear weapons. We urgently deserve a safe environment, where our fundamental human rights are respected and we play a role in the sustainable development of our communities. Disarmament not only saves lives, it can redirect crucial resources to health, education and climate action.

The past year and a half has made clear the importance of technology in educating young people. Concerns about cybersecurity have become a foundational part of our experience. As our lives are increasingly defined by the use of information and communications technology, it is critical to ensure that all people have safe access to the internet. With rapid technological change, we must measure new methods of warfare against the principles of humanity. High-tech weapons are not exempt from international humanitarian and human rights law. Killer robots (autonomous weapons systems) are unacceptable and must be banned.

Our schooling often neglects peace, disarmament and nonproliferation, with scattered coverage in specialist programs of higher education. By incorporating disarmament education into every level of the curriculum, in innovative and accessible ways, we can prepare young people to address the fundamental questions of our time. Programs like UNODA's Youth4Disarmament also raise awareness beyond the classroom, cultivating a new generation of leaders for peace.

But education comes not only from lectures, books or websites. We learn about peace, disarmament and non-proliferation through direct action and involvement in our communities. Recent civil society campaigns demonstrate that young people can play a fundamental role in shaping the conversation about disarmament. Many young people get involved in disarmament work through social movements, including those addressing intersecting issues of racism, exploitation, gender-based violence, environmental degradation, disrespect for people with disabilities, disregard for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and disdain for the rights of LGBTQIA+ people. As we struggle against systemic marginalization, we face unique challenges based on our identities. We are not homogenous. As we work for a less violent world, we struggle in different circumstances, facing multiple forms of discrimination. Through intersectional approaches to disarmament we reach for a future where our fears subside and our communities flourish.

We have ambition and energy. But youth can only plead so much for our futures while power is held tightly. You must open the door. Our concerns for our futures are valid. Our input into your decisions is valuable. Youth empowerment can aid in your efforts to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" (UN Charter). Invest in our diverse potential to make disarmament happen. This means opening First Committee and the disarmament machinery to meaningful -- and, where feasible, in-person -- civil society participation. It means counteracting our despair by making tangible progress on eliminating stockpiles. It means funding educational initiatives, internships, entry-level positions and mentoring opportunities. It means policymaking driven by those most affected by weapons, not those who have the biggest arsenals. It means including Indigenous Peoples in your meetings. It means incorporating young people into your delegations. It means reforming the Security Council, so there is a clear pathway from our communities' concerns to robust Resolutions.

We are encouraged by the recent revitalization of interest in youth and disarmament education. The 2019 General Assembly Resolution "Youth, disarmament and non-proliferation" called for "meaningful and inclusive participation of young people." Last year's biennial Resolution on "Disarmament and Non-proliferation Education" aligned the two areas of work. The Preamble of the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) recognizes "the importance of peace and disarmament education in all its aspects." The 2021 Seoul Youth Declaration for Disarmament and Non-proliferation, called for "incorporating the perspective of youth" in policy discussions, with "equitable, full and effective participation of all genders."

Nevertheless, the Secretary-General's 2020 report to the Security Council on Youth, Peace and Security noted "structural barriers limiting" young people's "essential role in peace and

security," including "violations of their human rights; and insufficient investment in facilitating their inclusion and empowerment."

As a result, we urge delegations to:

1. Support this year's "Youth, disarmament and non-proliferation" resolution, incorporating recommendations from this joint civil society statement and the Seoul Youth Declaration, particularly regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. The resolution should make linkages to other pressing issues such as climate action and addressing the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. Highlight the crucial role of youth and disarmament education in First Committee statements, calling for efforts sensitive to intersectional marginalization, mainstreaming promotion of gender equality and building capacity of poorly-represented peoples and groups, including survivors of violence;
3. Support any resolution(s) calling on states to join the TPNW;
4. Provide funding and institutional support to youth inclusion and disarmament education efforts, including UNODA's Youth4Disarmament;
5. Include language on disarmament education and youth in outcome documents of both the forthcoming NPT Review Conference and TPNW Meeting of States Parties.

Statement delivered by Pace University student Jeremiah Williams. Drafted by Taylor Mangus, Jeremiah Williams and Matthew Breay Bolton, with input from Pace University's Global Politics of Disarmament and Arms Control class and youth and disarmament education stakeholders around the world.

Supporting Organizations as of 7 October 2021

- Action on Armed Violence: www.aoav.org.uk
- Article 36: article36.org
- Campaign to Stop Killer Robots: www.stopkillerrobots.org
- Campaign to Stop Killer Robots- Hungary activist network
- Campagna Italiana contro le mine: www.campagnamine.org
- Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos, México: estudiosecumenicos.org.mx
- Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines (CCCM): colombiasinminas.org
- Control Arms: www.controlarms.org
- Global Thought MX: www.globalthought.com.mx

- International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and its global medical student movement: www.ippnw.org (1984 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate)
- Indian Institute for Peace Disarmament & Environmental Protection: www.iipdep.org
- International Campaign to Ban Landmines - Cluster Munition Coalition: www.icblcmc.org/ (1997 Nobel Peace Prize co-Laureate)
- International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) Canada: www.ippnwcanada.ca
- Iraqi Alliance for Disability: iraqad.org
- Marshallese Educational Initiative: www.MEI.ngo
- Mines Action Canada: www.minesactioncanada.org
- Nuclear Age Peace Foundation: www.wagingpeace.org
- Pace University Peace and Justice Studies program: www.pace.edu/dyson/programs/ba-peace-and-justice-studies-nyc and International Disarmament Institute: www.pace.edu/dyson/disarmament
- PAX: paxforpeace.nl
- PEAC Institute - **P**eace | **E**ducation | **A**rt | **C**ommunication: www.peacinstitute.org
- Poverty and Associated Maladies Alleviation Initiative (PAMAI) www.pamai.org.ng
- Red de Seguridad Humana para América Latina y el Caribe (SEHLAC): sehlac.org
- Regional Network on Peace & Stability (RENOPS)
- Reverse The Trend: Save Our People, Save Our Planet www.rttreversingthetrend.com
- Rotary District 5550 World Peace Partners: rotary5550.org/
- Soka Gakkai International: www.sgi-usa.org
- Somali Human Rights Association: www.sohrasom.org
- Peace Boat US: www.peaceboat-us.org
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: www.wilpf.org
- Youngsolwara Pacific https://www.youngsolwarapacific.com
- Youth Nuclear Peace Summit: www.youthnuclearpeacesummit.org/