

Joint civil society statement on gender and diversity

UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament and International Security

12 October 2022

The patterns of harm from specific weapon systems, the discourse within disarmament discussions, and diversity in participation in disarmament and arms control negotiations are key issues requiring further consideration during the First Committee and beyond.

There is a stark disparity in the level and volume of participation of men as compared to women in disarmament and arms control discussions, negotiations, and processes. However, while important, increasing the number of women is insufficient to challenge gender norms or diversify perspectives on weapons and militarism. It is also not useful to treat “women” as a monolithic group. Disarmament needs people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, races, classes, abilities, and more, coming from various backgrounds and experiences.

Real diversity is not just about adding bodies into rooms but about creating space for non-hegemonic ideas, imaginations, and perspectives to change policy and practice. Diversity is not about inclusion into systems of racial capitalism, patriarchy, and militarism that perpetuate the dominant thinking about security and weapons. It’s about amplifying and listening to those who offer alternatives to the thinking that has gotten us into the mess in which our world is currently embroiled.

To this end, diversity is essential to challenging socially constructed norms about identity that impact our approach to weapons and militarism. Gender norms, for example, perpetuate a binary social construction of men who are violent and powerful and women who are vulnerable and need to be protected. In this context, weapons are typically seen as important for security, power, and control, while disarmament is treated as something that makes countries weaker or more vulnerable. This is extremely problematic when it comes to seeing disarmament as a credible approach to security.

Lack of diversity also impacts consideration of how weapons cause harm and to whom they cause harm. Weapons development, testing, and use has racialised impacts. For example, nuclear weapons testing has primarily been carried out by the nuclear-armed states on the lands, water, and bodies of Indigenous people globally. Uranium mining for nuclear weapons has taken place primarily on Indigenous land as well, by settler states and colonial governments. Nuclear weapons development and radioactive waste storage is largely situated within or near poor communities, especially communities of colour.

Autonomous weapons, if programmed to consider certain people as targets, would inevitably incorporate biases within their algorithms. This would have devastating effects for people of particular sexes or gender identities, races or ethnicities, religions, or disabilities.

These are just a few examples. Taking an intersectional approach to weapons and war requires engagement with the testimony, writing, and appeals from those most impacted by militarism in order to develop credible disarmament and arms control processes.

The interest in the topic of “gender and disarmament” has grown in international forums. At last year’s First Committee, 31 per cent of resolutions included gender references. Several other disarmament processes have raised gender perspectives in recent years, including the First Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Tenth Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, the Political Declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, the Arms Trade Treaty, Mine Ban Treaty, Convention on Cluster Munitions, the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, and more.

These developments are very welcome and should be continued and enhanced in as many disarmament forums as possible. This is especially important to counter those who are currently pushing back against intersectionality, diversity, and gender identities and perspectives across many forums.

However, a more robust reflection of the gendered norms associated with weapons, war, and violence, and more robust intersectional approach to the impacts of weapons and solutions for disarmament, are also crucial for effectively addressing the challenges associated with the proliferation and use of weapons in and out of conflict.

Among other things, during First Committee, we recommend that delegations:

- Welcome the commitments and recommendations made in relation to gender, diversity, and inclusion in various disarmament treaties and outcome documents, and commit to advancing their goals.
- Instead of reinforcing binaries by calling for women’s participation, delegations should call for the inclusion of people of all genders and seek a diversity of participation in terms of race, region, disability, and more.
- Challenge delegations that push back against the incorporation of gender perspectives, gender diversity, and other intersectional approaches in resolutions and outcomes.
- Collaborate to make First Committee resolutions more intersectional and ensure this year’s resolution on Women, disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control is strong and meaningful.

This statement was drafted and delivered by Ray Acheson of Reaching Critical Will, the disarmament programme of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

This statement has been endorsed by:

Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas
Conflict and Environment Observatory
Control Arms
Corruption Tracker
International Campaign to Ban Landmines – Cluster Munition Coalition

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)

Mines Action Canada

New Detroit

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PROTECTION

Red de Seguridad Humana para América Latina y el Caribe (SEHLAC)

Women's Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD)

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)