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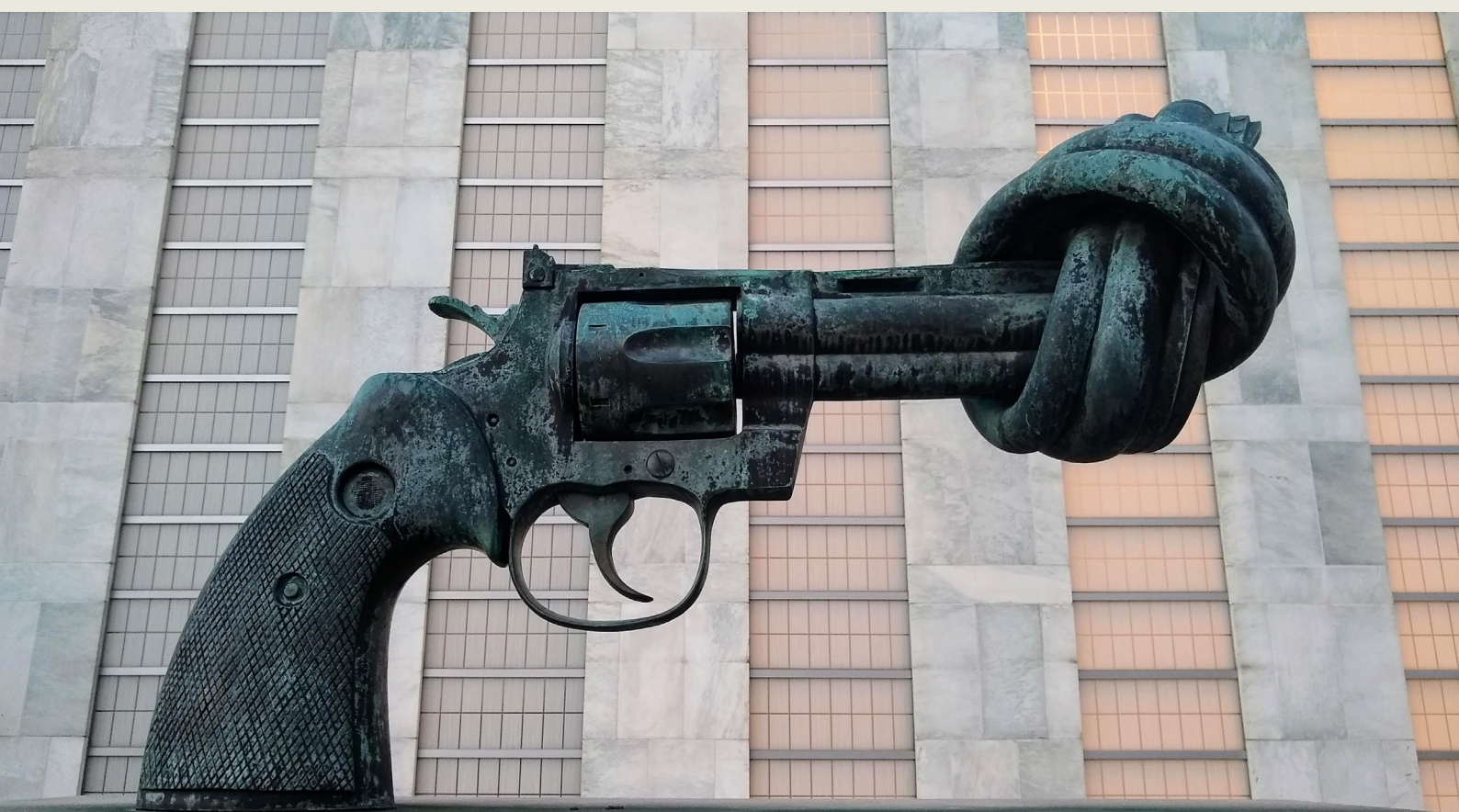


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Reaching Critical Will



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Editorial: We Must End Violence to End Violence

Ray Acheson | Reaching Critical Will, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Once again, bloodshed has become the backdrop to the First Committee's work. Last weekend, horrific violence exploded in Israel and Palestine. On Saturday, 7 October, Hamas attacked Israel with thousands of rockets, broke through the border fence enclosing Gaza, and killed and detained hundreds of Israelis. Hamas' brutal attacks against civilians are violations of international law and war crimes. In response, Israel has escalated its own war crimes, intensifying its siege of Gaza and carpet bombing the open-air prison it created to effectively imprison more than two million Palestinians for 17 years under the apartheid policies of a settler colonial state.

The catastrophic consequences of Israel's 75-year occupation of Palestine largely dominated the First Committee's interactive "right of reply" segments this past week. Israel's bombardment of Gaza, with both explosive and incendiary weapons, is particularly relevant for the Committee's work. But the larger dynamics at play all point to the wider issues underscoring all First Committee work, including militarism, colonialism, and hypocrisy.

Language matters

On Monday, two days after Hamas' attack on Israel, the Israeli delegation delivered its **general debate statement** to the First Committee. It unsurprisingly addressed the appalling massacre of Israeli civilians. But the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations also used language infrequently heard in the First Committee, saying, "Hundreds of innocent Israeli civilians have been murdered by barbaric Hamas terrorists in cold blood and many innocent men, women and children have been taken captive by these sadistic savages."

Descriptors such as "barbaric" and "sadistic savages" are adjectives used by colonisers throughout history against those whose lands they occupy. Such words are meant to impose superiority—the "civilising" force of the occupier is necessary to "tame the savages"—and dehumanise the colonised peoples, making them more disposable, more killable, easier to subject to ethnic cleansing and genocide. Language like this should give First Committee delegates pause and direct their attention toward the context behind last weekend's attacks—and toward the Israeli government's response.

Context matters

In a **right of reply** on 9 October, Israel's Deputy Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament described some of the violence against Israeli civilians in visceral detail. While heartfelt and impactful, the appeal to humanity inherent in these remarks also concealed certain facts. They concealed the *inhumanity* imposed upon Palestinians. They concealed Israel's illegal policies of apartheid and its daily degradation of Palestinian lives, the unlawful detainment and murder of Palestinian civilians, the repeated bombardment of civilians and civilian infrastructure in Gaza, the violations of international law, the impunity for war crimes. These remarks also concealed the fact of colonialism, the root cause and context of this current violence.

To draw attention to root causes is not to condone specific acts of violence, but to point out that there are consequences to violence. In her 9 October remarks, the Israeli Deputy Permanent Representative said that Hamas "broke into Israeli territory and led a ruthless, unprovoked attack on the citizens of Israel." Yet, as some Palestinians **pointed out**, the fighters did not so much "break into Israel" but broke *out* of Gaza, widely known as an **open-air prison**. Similarly, to describe the attack as "unprovoked" is to deny

75 years of occupation, expulsion, apartheid, blockade, and bombardment. As Israeli journalist Haggai Matar **acknowledged** on 7 October, “This is not a ‘unilateral’ or ‘unprovoked’ attack. The dread Israelis are feeling right now, myself included, is a sliver of what Palestinians have been feeling on a daily basis under the decades-long military regime in the West Bank, and under the siege and repeated assaults on Gaza.”

The consistency of the violence of Israel against Palestinians is what led to the current crisis. This is not at all a justification for Hamas’ massacre of civilians or other war crimes committed against Israelis. But as human rights lawyer Noura Erakat **notes**, while Israel is describing its current assault on Gaza as retaliation for Hamas’ weekend attacks, the state of Israel has already engaged in four large-scale military offensives against Gaza in the past. “During these attacks,” writes Erakat, “Israel has killed entire families—spanning several generations—with missile strikes at their homes. Israel has also repeatedly bombed UN hospitals and schools sheltering civilians, bearing the UN’s unmistakable blue emblem. Despite the litany of well-documented war crimes, no one has been held to account and the siege has only tightened.”

Furthermore, all nonviolent resistance to Israel’s repression has been met with state violence. As Erakat highlights, from “the 40,000 Palestinians who, weekly, participated in the Great March of Return in 2018 demanding their right to return to the homeland they were expelled from and the end of the siege, only to be shot down like birds by Israeli snipers,” to the “thousands of Palestinians and their allies globally who have engaged in boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaigns aimed at isolating Israel and incapacitating its lethal threat,” to the “civilian flotillas that attempted to break the naval blockade of Gaza as well as the multiple legal challenges within national courts, the International Court of Justice, and now the International Criminal Court,” nonviolent resistance has been met with accusations of “terrorism” and with violent repression by the Israeli state, as well by other governments such as Germany and the United States, which have criminalised the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement against Israeli apartheid. “The message to Palestinians is not that they must resist more peacefully,” points out Erakat, “but that they cannot resist Israeli occupation and aggression at all.”

Impunity and inaction

Israel’s actions have been widely condemned by the international community for many years. Multiple **UN resolutions** have called for an end to its settlement building and expulsion of Palestinians. The UN human rights commission of inquiry **found** Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territory to be illegal. The International Court of Justice **ruled** that Israel’s wall in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem was illegal. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Francesca Albanese, has **recommended** that the government of Israel “complies with its obligations under international law and ceases to impede the realization of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, ending its settler-colonial occupation of the Palestinian territory immediately and unconditionally and making reparations for its wrongful acts.”

Despite all of this, there has been absolute impunity for Israel’s actions against Palestinians. No action at the International Criminal Court. No official curtailment of support for Israel’s apartheid policies. Instead, there has been billions of dollars’ worth of military aid and provision of weapons to Israel from Western governments, **including** the United States, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, and Canada, among others. Many governments also buy weapons and surveillance systems from Israel, including the United States, which also engages in exchanges of training of soldiers and police in what the Jewish Voice for Peace **describes** as an “exchange of worst practices”.

Furthermore, there has also been repression, intimidation, and blacklisting of Palestinian activists and those standing in solidarity with them. In this current crisis, as many times before, political leaders have

been calling anyone who advocates for Palestinians supporters of terrorism. Some countries have moved to **criminalise** the Palestinian flag and other expressions of solidarity with Palestinian people. Critiques of the Israeli state are often labelled antisemitic as a means of silencing opposition to state violence. “Much like the response to the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement, which urges people to not financially support the occupation,” **writes** Joshua P. Hill, “the response to these peaceful rallies shows that at the moment there is no right way to support Palestinians. And that appears to extend even to the basic humanitarian call to not bomb the hell out of countless civilians.”

As human rights defenders have **pointed out**, “The historical lack of accountability has bred a culture of disregard for international law that directly resulted in the weekend’s violence.” It enabled Hamas to massacre civilians and is now enabling a genocidal response by the state of Israel against all Palestinian people.

War crimes in response

In the Israeli government’s statements to the First Committee, its representatives apply the descriptors of “barbaric” and “sadistic savages” to Hamas fighters. Outside of the UN, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant **described** the Hamas attackers as “human animals,” Major General Ghassan Aljan of the Israel Defense Forces **said** that Hamas had “opened the gates of hell,” and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu **said** Israel would “return fire of a magnitude that the enemy has not known.” An Israeli security official **told** Israel’s Channel 13 that “Gaza will eventually turn into a city of tents... There will be no buildings.”

While in most of these cases the officials named Hamas as “the enemy,” in the Israeli state’s response to the attack, it has directed its wrath against the entire Palestinian population. Some Israeli officials have been explicit about this. Israel’s Minister for the Advancement of the Status of Women May Golan **said**, “All of Gaza’s infrastructures must be destroyed to its foundation and their electricity cut off immediately. The war is not against Hamas but against the state of Gaza.” It is in line with this kind of thinking that Defense Minister Gallant **announced** a brutal intensification of Israel’s siege of Gaza, saying it would cut off electricity, food, water, gas, and medicine to the more than two million people living in Gaza. Then the government unleashed a brutal bombing attack against Gaza, indiscriminately destroying apartment blocks, schools, hospitals, and other critical civilian infrastructure.

As the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) said in a **statement** that called on both Hamas and Israel to stop their rocket attacks and airstrikes, “The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is a leading cause of harm to civilians. Civilians are killed and injured, with many experiencing life-changing injuries and yet more suffering psychological harm and distress. Damage and destruction of critical infrastructure including housing, hospitals and schools causes yet further harm. Unexploded ordnance poses an ongoing threat to civilians during and after hostilities have ended and impedes the safe return of refugees and displaced persons.”

Humanitarian workers in Gaza report that hospitals are **completely overwhelmed** by civilian casualties. More than 400,000 people have been displaced. So far thousands of people have been killed in the bombardment, including hundreds of children. **Half of the population** in Gaza are children, meaning many more will die if Israel’s onslaught continues. The dead so far also include at several Palestinian journalists, staffers at the UN Palestinian refugee agency, and medics.

Meanwhile, on 10 and 11 October the Israeli military used white phosphorus in both Gaza and Lebanon. Human Rights Watch has **verified** multiple airbursts of artillery-fired white phosphorus over the Gaza City port and two rural locations along the Israel-Lebanon border. “White phosphorus, which can be used either for marking, signaling, and obscuring, or as a weapon to set fires that burn people and objects,

has a significant incendiary effect that can severely burn people and set structures, fields, and other civilian objects in the vicinity on fire,” explained the organisation in a **press release**. “The use of white phosphorus in Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, magnifies the risk to civilians and violates the international humanitarian law prohibition on putting civilians at unnecessary risk.”

Mass murder is not self-defence

The Israeli state’s use of **genocidal language** and its ordering and commission of war crimes have set the stage for ultraviolence against the Palestinian people. Collective punishment is a violation of international law. Ethnic cleansing is a crime against humanity. During the past week, civilians have been told to evacuate northern Gaza. Those who leave are unlikely to ever be allowed to return; those who stay are likely to be killed. As Itay Epshtain, an international humanitarian law lawyer and advisor to the Norwegian Refugee Council **explained**, Israel’s evacuation announcement “blatantly disregards the obligation to offer evacuees a place of refuge and guarantee that evacuated will be brought back to their homes as soon as possible. Absent these guarantees, it would not meet the requirement of an admissible evacuation, and would amount to forcible transfer, a grave breach of the [Fourth Geneva] Convention codified as a war crime.”

States have a duty to prevent genocide. The **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide** has been ratified by most states and has been incorporated into international customary law. The International Court of Justice has also **ruled** that the prevention of genocide is a legal obligation, and that states must use “due diligence,” a concept in international human rights law in relation to the positive obligation of a state to act in response to threats to human rights, including life and security. The Court notes that the duty to act arises “at the instant that the state learns of, or should normally have learned of, the existence of a serious risk that genocide will be committed.”

The governments supplying weapons to Israel and those condoning its bombardment, siege, and ground invasion of Gaza are not just failing to prevent genocide, they are actively enabling it. Compounding this material assistance, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has **warned** that “rhetoric from high-level officials raises concerns that a message is being sent to the members of the Israeli Defense Forces that international humanitarian law has become optional rather than compulsory.”

**When towns and cities are bombed,
it is civilians that suffer the most**

**When explosive weapons are used in
populated areas, 90% of the victims
are civilians**



**your SIGNATURE
CAN SAVE LIVES**

#STOPBOMBINGCIVILIANS

Nevertheless, right now it seems like impunity for Israel and support for its war crimes will continue. “The moment Hamas launched its attack,” **writes** Hill, “wave after wave of sympathy for the Israeli state and the Israeli dead came forth from” across the world. But just two days later, “When the bombs started to rain down on residential buildings in the densely populated open-air prison which people cannot flee, flattening neighborhoods and killing hundreds of civilians, those same people were silent.”

Dominant English-language Western media outlets have amplified this disproportionate sympathy by showing pictures and sharing stories of the Israelis killed or detained, while only showing masses of Palestinians, blurry images, bodies under rubble. On 7 October, multiple news outlets counted those “killed” in Israel, and those “dead” in Palestine. Israelis are murdered, this suggests, while Palestinians just mysteriously die.

The skewed coverage of the violence lends support to the perpetuation of violence against Palestinians. Many of those supporting Israel’s actions against Gaza do so on the basis of Israel’s alleged right to self-defence—but as the representative of the State of Palestine **asked** in a right of reply at the First Committee on Tuesday, “What is this right to self-defence that allows you to massacre civilians?” The answer is, there isn’t one. International law is clear that war crimes cannot justify war crimes. Atrocities cannot justify atrocities. “Failure of one party to a conflict to abide by the laws of war does not absolve the other party from complying with the laws of war,” **noted** Sarah Leah Whitson, director of Democracy for the Arab World Now.

This is a basic tenet of international law, which all delegations to the First Committee claim to respect, which many have spent years building up and promoting. But the unqualified statements by many Western governments that Israel “has a right to defend itself” suggests that Israel is entitled to take whatever action it wants, including committing war crimes and ignoring the right of Palestinians to security, to safety, to life.

Time and again, when the most militarised governments in the world perceive their interests as being threatened, or experience any of the violence they have doled out for decades, suddenly international law evaporates. We can see this with Russia’s unlawful invasion and occupation of parts of Ukraine; with the United States’ countless wars, coups, special forces operations, and other military actions abroad; and we see it today with Israel’s attack on Gaza.

Several Israeli and foreign commentators have drawn parallels between Hamas’ 7 October attacks and the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, arguing that no one called for US restraint at that time. Of course, that was the problem. The free pass given to the US government then **led to** the death of at least 900,000 people, displacement of millions more, war for more than 20 years, environmental devastation, and has cost US taxpayers more than 8 trillion USD. “There is nothing on earth like the fury of the powerful when they believe they have been defied by their inferiors,” **writes** Jon Schwartz.

The war profiteers know this well. The stock prices of weapon manufacturers **skyrocketed** last weekend and have continue to rise as Israel bombards Gaza and launches its ground invasion. And so, these companies will profit, the governments will remain unaccountable, and the civilians will suffer.

The valuation of human life

This is the way the world is currently ordered. Violence is met with violence is met with violence. CEOs line their pockets as civilians bleed; politicians issue bellicose rhetoric while people’s lives are turned upside down or are ended forever. In the process, humanity is stripped away. It becomes easier to hate each other, more difficult to understand each other. This is particularly so when one group of people oppresses and violates another with impunity. As Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has **written**, “With the

establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has already begun. Never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed.... Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons—not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized.”

In response to the Palestinian delegate’s questions about which international laws allow such “inhumane acts,” Israel’s representative answered, “I am not a lawyer. I am a human being.” While perhaps meant to convey the raw emotion inherent in trying to grapple with the recent atrocities experienced by Israelis, these remarks once again conceal the inhumanity imposed upon Palestinians. For if the government of Israel saw Palestinians as human, too, would it act differently in its response to Hamas’ violence?

This question illuminates a key issue underscoring the current crisis: the different value placed on human life. This itself is a tragedy, among (and underpinning) all the tragedies being experienced right now. And it must be reckoned with if there is to be any chance of building true peace and justice.

“We cannot continue justifying the death of Palestinians,” said the representative for the State of Palestine. “That is not possible. That is inhumane. That is racist. That is supremacist. It is not about the religion or the national identity or the origin of them being killed. It’s about them being killed.... Continuing to deny Palestinian humanity and rights is not a way forward. That will always lead to violence.” He argued:

Consistency is the condition of credibility. When one says nothing justifies the killing of Israelis and in the same breath condones the killing of Palestinians, that is morally reprehensible, legally unacceptable, and politically and humanly catastrophic. Palestinian civilians are not less deserving of protection. Palestinian lives are not less worthy of respect. The families of hundreds of Palestinians killed, overwhelmingly civilians ... deserve solidarity and compassion.... If you abandon them, you abandon your humanity, you undermine our international law-based order, you serve neither the cause of justice nor the cause of peace.

Disparities in how human beings are treated and perceived is not, of course, unique to Israelis and Palestinians. Menominee organiser Kelly Hayes and Black organiser Mariame Kaba **described** similarities with how the Black and Native communities are treated in the United States, noting that they see “parallels between this disparity and the manner in which Israeli losses have resulted in a global outpouring of grief and concern, while the murder, kidnapping, imprisonment, surveillance, torture and coercion of Palestinians throughout decades of apartheid have gone unmourned by so many who now demand justice in the wake of Israeli deaths.” They also noted that just as Black and Native incarceration and brutalisation by the police in the United States is characterised not as war but as “peace,” so too are Palestinians expected to live under perpetual violence and have it treated by the world at large as a state of peace.

But repression, injustice, and violence are not peace. And the discrepancy of how people are treated—and how the so-called international community responds to it—have meaning. Palestinians see how politicians around the world condemn Russia for its unlawful occupation of Ukrainian lands, how they call out Russian war crimes and its bombardment of Ukrainian towns and cities, how they rush to provide military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine—while at the same time, they condone, support, and provide aid to Israel’s bombardment of Palestinian town and cities, its war crimes, its occupation of Palestinian lands. They see how these governments, so quick to provide aid to Ukraine, cut their aid to Palestine and condemn nonviolent protests that call for valuing Palestinian life.

They see how governments speak about Russia’s violations of international law in contrast to Israel’s. For example, in its general debate statement to the First Committee this past week, **Belgium** said, “Norms, agreements and oversight create a buffer against a world disorder, where might is right and

where the self interest of some prevails over the common interest of humanity.” In this context, Belgium argued, “One cannot provide lip service to the principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity and at the same way look away from Russia’s aggression, its illegal war and its blatant disregard of international humanitarian law and human rights.”

Can we imagine applying this universally to the critique of all governments? To uphold the rights of all civilians? Could that be a step toward lessening the violence? Could solidarity with all victims of violence help drain violence of its fuel? Naomi Klein urges this kind of true solidarity in an **article** in *The Guardian*, in which she calls for “Humanism that unites people across ethnic and religious lines. Fierce opposition to all forms of identity-based hatred.” An approach “rooted in values that side with the child over the gun every single time, no matter whose gun and no matter whose child.” An approach “that is unshakably morally consistent, and does not mistake that consistency with moral equivalency between occupier and occupied. Love.”

Taking action to break the cycle of violence

It is imperative to prevent further atrocities and loss of life. For this, an immediate ceasefire and a release of those detained by both Hamas and Israel is necessary. A durable and fair peace will only be achieved by eliminating the root causes of violence and oppression. The international community cannot wait for yet another escalation of hostilities to create a realistic path for justice and peace. It must act now.

Despite the repression of those speaking out against the ethnic cleansing and potential genocide of Palestinians, there has been an outpouring of solidarity globally from **Baghdad** to **Paris**. Activists in the United States have organised direct actions against companies supplying weapons to Israel, such as **L3Harris** and **Elbit Systems**. Some governments have spoken out against Israel’s siege and bombardment of Gaza.

All members states and the responsible bodies of the UN must uphold the UN Charter and other international law, including by:

- Calling for an immediate ceasefire;
- Calling for an end to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas by all parties, and for an end to the use of incendiary weapons by Israel;
- Demanding that Israel lift the siege on Gaza and ensure access to goods essential to the survival of the people in the enclave;
- Demanding that Israel abide by its obligations under international law and make all necessary efforts to protect civilian populations in the Occupied Palestinian territories, and also calling on Israel to end the occupation;
- Reinstating humanitarian aid so as to avoid collective punishment of Palestinians by donors and member states;
- Initiating a UN-brokered process for peace and justice that centres Palestinian voices and perspectives to enable a move towards peace;
- Ending military and other support for Israel’s occupation of Palestine and its apartheid regime, including by imposing an arms embargo on Israeli weapon imports and exports;
- Not criminalising, condemning, or repressing nonviolent action in solidarity with Palestinians;

- Implementing the recommendations in the **2022 report** of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967; and
- Recognising Palestinian statehood.

Delegations to the First Committee have an opportunity to support the above, particularly on the issues related to weapons and armed violence, including by:

- Calling on Israel to stop its indiscriminate bombing of Gaza and to endorse the **Political Declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas**;
- Calling on Israel to stop its use of white phosphorus and working to **strengthen the Convention on Conventional Weapons protocol on incendiary weapons**;
- Supporting a two-way arms embargo on Israel, as consistent with the **Arms Trade Treaty**;
- Calling on Israel to end the siege, ethnic cleansing, and possible genocide in Gaza and urging all governments to not support these actions and to uphold their legal responsibility to prevent genocide; and
- Urging delegates not to use language that dehumanises people or that seeks to justify war crimes and other violations of international law.

More broadly, First Committee delegates would do well to offer their solidarity to all civilians suffering under this rein of violence and to call for action that de-escalates harm rather than exacerbates it. As Joshua P. Hill **writes**, “We must act. We must do what we can, no matter how little it may seem, to save lives. A ceasefire is the first step. For any of us to abdicate from our responsibility to act is to once again go along silently in the stream of bloodshed.”



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Nuclear Weapons

Laura Varella | Reaching Critical Will, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

During the second week of the general debate, speakers continued to address nuclear weapons in their statements. While most delegations reiterated their commitment towards a world free of nuclear weapons, the persistent reliance on nuclear doctrines and the modernisation of nuclear arsenals by a few states cast doubt on how truly committed they are to this goal. As stated by Kiribati, “The rhetoric and the actions of the Nuclear-Weapon States have raised profound concerns about their commitment to the nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament regime.”

The following report covers only the discussions held during the general debate. The next edition of the *Monitor* will report on the discussions of the thematic debate, which began on Friday, 13 October. This report provides an overview of interventions across major themes and is not a comprehensive accounting of all positions on every issue.

Nuclear rhetoric and nuclear threats

Concern over the current international security scenario was a common element among the second week's statements. “Describing the current international security events as ‘unprecedented’ has become obsolete,” said Croatia. “Nothing unprecedented is continuous. And that paints a scary picture of where we are at the moment.”

Croatia, Iceland, Kiribati, Libya, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) expressed concern about the increase in nuclear rhetoric and nuclear threats. Colombia particularly highlighted that 2000 nuclear weapons are kept in high operative alert, increasing the risks of miscalculation, misunderstanding, or accident. Peru stated that “the state of alert and fragility in which we find ourselves is ultimately only due to the existence of these weapons.”

Some delegations, including Croatia, France, Georgia, and Spain, specifically opposed Russia's nuclear rhetoric.

Nuclear weapon spending and modernisation

As in the previous week, delegations continued to condemn the modernisation of nuclear arsenals. Angola, Dominican Republic, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kiribati, Nicaragua, Senegal, Peru, Zambia, and others expressed concern over this trend. So did the ICRC, which expressed concern over the “development of smaller nuclear weapons claimed to be more ‘usable’ and intended for tactical military use in combination with conventional capabilities,” and with “suggestion that AI may be introduced into the command- and-control systems of nuclear weapons.” As Senegal argued, “There can be no general and complete disarmament if the nuclear States continue to modernise their atomic arsenals and if other countries circumvent the legal instruments in force in order to acquire them.”

During the civil society presentations, held on Wednesday, 11 October, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) emphasised that in 2022, “nuclear-armed states spent \$82.9 billion on their nuclear arsenals, at least \$29 billion going directly to the companies that produce parts of nuclear weapons and that lobby and invest in think tanks to promote these weapons.” In this vein, Nicaragua underscored that these resources, as well as those spent on the “expansion of military alliances” and “in the aggression and destabilisation of countries,” could be better spent in international solidarity and cooperation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) condemned the modernisation of arsenals by the United States.

Nuclear weapon deployment and sharing

Croatia condemned Russia's decision to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus. In a right of reply, Russia pointed out that the United States' nuclear weapons are deployed in states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The DPRK said that the United States should "put an immediate end to 'nuclear sharing' and 'strengthening of extended deterrence' that undermine the very foundation of the international non-proliferation regime and foment a nuclear arms race." The DPRK also said that Japan should stop "resorting to the reckless and anachronistic moves to realize its militaristic ambition of becoming a military power and military conspiracy with the 'NATO'."

In a right of reply, Japan said that nuclear sharing is not allowed in Japan and that it has no intention to consider nuclear sharing arrangements.

Nuclear deterrence and nuclear doctrines

The ICRC expressed concern with nuclear deterrence theories regaining vigour and with the growth of the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines. Similarly, Paraguay expressed concern over the security model of deterrence, stressing that for some it represents security, while for others it threatens current and future generations. The Holy See also rejected deterrence, saying that nuclear weapons offer only "an illusion of peace". It said that real peace requires the international community to reject war and to ceaselessly work to foster a "just peace: one that is 'stable and lasting', 'built not on the precarious balance of deterrence, but on the fraternity that unites us'."

"Erosion" of the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture

Several delegations regretted the lack of an agreed outcome document in the last two nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conferences. Many expressed concern over a more broad scenario of weakening of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Peru said that "the special interests of the nuclear-weapon states make any meaningful engagement to promote nuclear disarmament impossible," and that this is "the major obstacle to effective progress on non-proliferation." Botswana warned that "consensus is increasingly becoming hard to reach even on matters that we all used to agree on," and that differences have deepened.

The DPRK attributed the "erosion" of the international disarmament regime to the United States, which "has deliberately created obstacles to the implementation of the international nuclear arms control regime for years."

Iceland opposed "Russia's continuous attempts to derail the important work on the implementation of the NPT," while Spain said that Russia's nuclear rhetoric and the suspension of the implementation of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) are "an unprecedented challenge to the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation architecture." Many other delegations also regretted the suspension of the implementation of New START.

Israel said that the "Middle East is still struggling with a chronic lack of compliance with non-proliferation and arms control norms, obligations and mechanisms." It asserted, "This gap between the breach of international norms in the region on the one hand and the lack of accountability on the other, has created

an urgent need for the international community to focus its efforts on the implementation, compliance and verification of state obligations.” Israel said that while diplomacy remains a crucial tool, “it must be backed by strong enforcement mechanisms to deter violations.”

In a right of reply, Iran said that Israel had no moral or legal grounds to address anything on Iran or on the region given its “dark records in all aspects.” It said that it was ironic that Israel accused Iran of violating Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), when Israel had repeatedly violated this resolution over the years, in addition of having a “deplorable track record of developing, producing, and stockpiling various types of weapons of mass destruction.” Palestine said that Israel has continued its systematic breach of international agreements by withholding information on its nuclear capacity.

Nuclear testing

The majority of speakers called for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and urged the Annex 2 states to sign and ratify it. Many have also asked for the maintenance of the moratorium on nuclear tests pending the Treaty’s entry into force.

A few delegations, including Belgium, Croatia, Iceland, and Türkiye, expressed concern over the reports of Russia’s intention to revoke its ratification of the CTBT.

Humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons

The League of Arab States, Colombia, Djibouti, Holy See, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Namibia, and Nigeria acknowledged the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons. Several delegations stressed that the only guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is their complete and irreversible elimination.

Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Support for the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) continues to grow. In addition to the delegations that spoke last week, Eritrea, Haiti, the Holy See, Mauritania, Myanmar, and Panama have also expressed support for the Treaty. Algeria, Eswatini, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone welcomed the entry into force of the TPNW. Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Haiti, and Peru welcomed the declaration and Action Plan adopted in the First Meeting of States Parties.

Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Kiribati, Nicaragua, Palestine, Paraguay, Sierra Leone and the ICRC emphasised the complementarity between the TPNW and the NPT.

Kiribati said that, together with Kazakhstan, it is co-chair of the working group on victim assistance, environmental remediation, international cooperation, and assistance. Both countries are also presenting a new resolution to the First Committee entitled “Addressing the Nuclear Weapons: Providing Victim Assistance and Environmental Remediation to States Affected by the Use or Testing of Nuclear Weapons.” According to Kiribati, “This resolution is intended to help affected states and impacted communities through multilateral treaties, including the NPT and the TPNW. It does not create a hierarchy between these two treaties.” The Holy See expressed support for the resolution.

Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Holy See, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Peru expressed enthusiasm with the upcoming Second Meeting of States Parties, to be held from 27 November to 1 December in New York.

Haiti congratulated the Bahamas and Sri Lanka on their recent accession to TPNW. Djibouti, which signed the Treaty on 9 January 2023, said that the ratification is underway. Eswatini said it will soon sign the Treaty. Cabo Verde highlighted paragraph 36 of the “Declaration of Mindelo,” adopted at the end of the VIII Meeting Ministerial of the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZOPACAS), which is dedicated to the ratification of the TPNW. Botswana, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Cabo Verde, Holy See, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Palestine, Vanuatu, and Venezuela encouraged states that have not ratified the Treaty to do so.

Israel, the only country to speak against the TPNW, asserted that “the Treaty, which Israel does not support, does not create or contribute to the development of, or indicate the existence of customary law related to the subject or the content of the Treaty.”

AUKUS nuclear-powered submarine agreement

The DPRK said that the AUKUS agreement “constitutes a clear violation of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and has a seriously negative impact on the strategic security in the region and the rest of the world.”

DPRK’s nuclear programme

Many delegations, including Belgium, Croatia, Spain, and Türkiye, expressed concern about the DPRK’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Iceland said that the DPRK’s nuclear programme is sheltered by two of the P5 states, which paralyses efforts by the Security Council.

Several states, including Croatia, France, and Spain, called on the DPRK to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner. Similarly, Belgium, Spain, and Türkiye called upon the DPRK to comply with its obligations under the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Iceland called on the DPRK to return to compliance with its international obligations, in particular the NPT and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Safeguards Arrangements and the CTBT.

The DPRK said that the “bolstering of the self-defensive deterrence is a justified exercise of the sovereign right to safeguard its own dignity and security and to control and manage the ever-worsening situation of the Korean peninsula in a stable way in the face of the threats posed by the outrageous hostility of the U.S.” In the same vein, Syria called for an end to United States drills on the Korean peninsula.

In a right of reply, the Republic of Korea said that military exercises with the United States are routine and defensive in nature.

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

Many delegations expressed concern with the uncertain future surrounding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Türkiye called on the parties to “seek a constructive approach with a view to revitalizing the Plan.” Spain also supported a diplomatic solution to the issue. Syria condemned the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and expressed solidarity to Iran.

Croatia called on Iran to come back to its obligations under the JCPOA, while France called on Iran to reverse the escalation of its nuclear programme and cooperate with the IAEA. Belgium supported the sanctions applied to Iran. Many delegations, including Spain, and Türkiye, expressed support for the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Israel said that the “accumulation of irreversible knowledge by Iran make the JCPOA worthless from a proliferation point of view at this time,” and that “returning to the JCPOA will legitimize Iran, while enabling it to maintain its advanced nuclear capabilities.” Israel also said that “it is unfathomable to imagine the extent of destruction that Iranian terror proxies such as Hamas can cause, should they be shielded by an Iranian nuclear umbrella.”

In a right of reply, Iran rejected all allegations from Israel, adding that “the Israeli regime has consistently used every opportunity to undermine the JCPOA and to hinder the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) by United Nations Member States.” Iran also said that its nuclear programme has been verified and confirmed as peaceful by the IAEA on numerous occasions. Iran stressed that while it stands in solidarity with Palestine, it is not involved in Palestine’s response.

War in Ukraine and nuclear dangers

Some delegations, including Belgium, Croatia, France, Georgia, Iceland, Spain, and Türkiye, condemned or expressed concern over Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. Croatia, Georgia, and Iceland also expressed concern for the situation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), with Iceland and Georgia commending the work of the IAEA in this regard. Syria supported Russia’s right to “self-defence” in response to hostile western policies.

Resolutions

The following is a brief analysis of the resolutions related to nuclear weapons available at the time of writing. More resolutions on nuclear disarmament will be forthcoming and will be considered in the next edition.

L.1, “Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East,” contains only technical updates from previous years. The resolution urges further action on establishing this zone and to act in accordance with the spirit of such a zone in the meantime. It was traditionally adopted without a vote, though a vote has been taken the last five years. In 2022, Israel voted no and the United States and Singapore abstained.

L.2, “The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East,” contains only technical updates from previous years. It calls for Israel’s accession to the NPT and IAEA safeguards and for implementation of the 2005 and 2010 NPT outcomes related to the Middle East. This resolution is usually more controversial, with European states abstaining and Israel, the United States, and a handful others opposing.

L.8, “Follow-up to the 2013 high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament,” is an annual Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) resolution that highlights the value of promoting 26 September as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons in furthering nuclear disarmament. It contains only technical updates.

Biological Weapons

Filippa Lentzos | King's College London

A further 18 states referred to biological weapons in their general debate statements this past week. Similar to the first week, many emphasised the importance of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) and expressed support for the Treaty.

The success of the Ninth BWC Review Conference in November–December 2022 remained a focal point. Croatia said the successful outcome shows the international community does have capacity to bridge gaps: “We can work together on strengthening the arms control regime, instead of dismantling the already achieved hard-work on previously mentioned treaties, which make each and every member state safer—as long as each and every member state abides by it.”

Iceland said the intersessional working group established by the Review Conference to strengthen implementation of the treaty was a “step forward” that “must be sustained and reinforced”. Brazil, too, characterised the working group as “a positive start,” and, like Croatia and others, noted that the successful Review Conference demonstrated that there are niches where the international community is “capable of mustering the necessary political will to achieve progress.” The Holy See also welcomed the working group, stating that by appropriately addressing international cooperation and assistance, scientific developments and verification, the group “will promote the role of biological sciences in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while building mutual trust among States.”

Earlier this week, the Holy See released a **statement** marking 60 years since the publication of Pope John XXIII’s encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), written in the wake of the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Among other things, the statement called for states to “counter any attempt to erode the international norms and architecture against biological weapons, including by providing swift and strong rebuttals of baseless non-compliance claims in meetings of the Biological Weapons Convention, the UN General Assembly, and the UN Security Council.” It noted that “such claims erode confidence in essential public and animal health infrastructure and significantly undermine international cooperation and global biosafety and biosecurity efforts.” The statement also called for frameworks and capacity to be developed “to address harms of using biology for surveillance, tracking, and suppression” and urged stakeholders to “foster bold ideas for re-envisioning responsible bio-innovation for the future.”

Wednesday’s **civil society statement** to the First Committee on biological weapons echoed the calls in the Holy See anniversary statement. It urged First Committee delegations to “condemn health security information manipulation and disinformation about BWC compliance” noting that baseless non-compliance claims not only erode confidence in essential public health infrastructure and hamper global biosafety and biosecurity efforts but that they could also “seriously undermine development aid and cooperation efforts on peaceful biological research.” Like the Holy See statement, civil society also drew attention to potential harms from genomic data and artificial intelligence, highlighting that genomic data can be “put to nefarious uses, such as surveillance, tracking and influence programmes, suppression, and even targeted weapons,” and called for frameworks and capacities to be built to ensure responsible bio-innovation.

Against a backdrop of war in Ukraine and an unfolding war in the Middle East, the civil society statement urged First Committee delegations “to heighten the political costs of undermining the norm against using biology and disease as weapons of war.”

Chemical Weapons

Clara Palmisano | Reaching Critical Will, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Throughout the remaining part of the First Committee's general debate, states reiterated several key points on chemical weapons that had been raised in the previous week. Various countries expressed their unwavering support for the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), emphasising the importance of its effective implementation and universalisation. Some states continued to commend the destruction of the last declared stockpile of chemical weapons by the United States.

At the same time, there was a collective call for an end to impunity for those who allegedly violated the Convention, including Syria and Russia. The prevailing perception of a lack of transparency, combined with the frustration stemming from the failure to adopt key outcome documents during the Fourth and Fifth CWC Review Conferences, intensified the tension in the room. Yet again, differences in opinion about the choice to vote on the establishment of investigation-related measures in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) bodies re-emerged. Venezuela joined other member states underscoring the need to prevent the politicisation of the OPCW and that of its work. Syria stressed its concern that the OPCW is being manipulated to establish illegal mechanisms that would set dangerous precedents.

Belgium recalled that chemical weapons are the only weapons of mass destruction employed in conflict during the 21st century and that the use of chemical weapons in Syria ten years ago has victims still waiting for accountability. There were numerous condemnations directed at Syria to this regard, with accusations of Syria's ongoing non-compliance with the CWC. During this week, Syria consistently exercised its right of reply to respond to the accusations levelled against its government, denying any possession of chemical weapons and condemning their use, as well as declaring its commitment to complying with CWC obligations.

In the same week, Syria was involved in an International Court of Justice hearing on a complaint filed by Canada and the Netherlands claiming Syria's violation of the Convention Against Torture, which cites Syria's use of chemical weapons as a means of torture against the civilian population. It is interesting to see how disarmament matters are addressed in other international fora, where states seek more thorough responses. Regardless of the court's decision, a human rights and victim-centred perspective has the potential to strengthen the CWC and the protection it offers to civilians.

Israel, a state that has signed but not ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), delivered long statements that extensively addressed the topic of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. It disclosed its concern that the Middle East is struggling with "a chronic lack of compliance with non-proliferation and armed control norms, obligations, and mechanisms," as the use of chemical weapons by some states in the Middle East has occurred five times since the Second World War, violating the 1925 Geneva Protocol on the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. In particular, Israel accused Syria and Iran of violating the CWC and of continuing concealment about their arsenals. Israel demanded further international investigation and recalled the work of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team, including one of its comprehensive reports regarding the chemical attack in Douma in 2018, which designated Syria as the perpetrator.

Israel expressed equal concern about Iran's alleged pursuit of dual-use central nervous system-affecting chemicals for offensive purposes and its delivery of these to terrorist groups. To conclude, in one of its right of reply statements, Israel asked: "Sitting here with us are representatives of nations who aim to

stockpile chemical weapons while at the same time vigorously promoting a treaty to establish a middle east zone free of nuclear weapons, and all other weapons of mass destruction. What do these treaties mean, when they are signed by nations for whom the words within these treaties mean nothing?”

In their own right of replies, Iran and Syria refuted Israel’s claims and pointed out that Israel is not party to any of the treaties addressing weapons of mass destruction, including the CWC, the Biological Weapons Convention, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and that Israel is the only state in the region to possess nuclear weapons.

Some states mentioned chemical weapons in relation to UN Security Council Resolution 1540 on preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery by non-state actors. Botswana emphasised the progress it has made in strengthening the capacity to implement the resolution. Its implementing agencies and relevant stakeholders benefited from the collaborative efforts of the 1540 Committee, the Office for Disarmament Affairs and project partners, leading to the design and submission a National Implementation Action Plan in early 2022. Brunei Darussalam also welcomed the 1540 Committee’s readiness to assist member states and affirmed it will continue to work alongside the OPCW’s Technical Secretariat to finalise a comprehensive national legislation and establishment of a national regulatory body.

Lastly, the joint civil society statement on gender, intersectionality, and disarmament, endorsed by 17 organisations, recalled that for the first time ever, states parties to the CWC considered issues related to gender equality and diversity at the CWC Review Conference in May 2023, when Canada presented a working paper on this topic, sponsored by over 60 states.

Autonomous Weapon Systems

Catherine Connolly | Stop Killer Robots

This week at First Committee, Austria tabled the first-ever resolution on autonomous weapons at the UN General Assembly. This historic resolution, which has a cross-regional and growing list of cosponsors, including Belgium, Costa Rica, Germany, Ireland, Mexico, Aotearoa New Zealand, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and Switzerland, will mandate the UN Secretary-General to seek the views of all states and stakeholders, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), scientific communities, industry, and civil society on addressing the legal, ethical, humanitarian, and security risks associated with autonomous weapons systems, and to submit a substantive report on the way forward.

Following last week’s joint call from the UN Secretary-General and the ICRC President, which urged states to “establish new international rules on autonomous weapons systems, to protect humanity,” the ICRC’s statement this week was clear that “the unconstrained development and use of autonomous weapon systems presents unacceptable humanitarian, ethical and legal risks that the international community must address today.” The statement further noted that it is “difficult to envisage a realistic combat situation in which the use of an autonomous weapon system against a person would not pose a significant risk of violating IHL,” and said that states “must now go beyond merely recalling existing legal frameworks and negotiate a legally binding instrument that establishes clear and specific red lines regarding which autonomous weapons are prohibited and how others must be restricted.” Similarly, the Holy See insisted that “providing machines with the capacity to maim and kill autonomously is not only legally questionable, but also morally abhorrent,” and welcomed the Secretary-General’s

recommendation that states conclude a legally binding instrument by 2026. Meanwhile, the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Adedeji Ebo, speaking on the Secretary-General's *New Agenda for Peace*, said that states should "consider how to prohibit lethal autonomous weapons systems."

A number of states declared their support for negotiating new international rules on autonomous weapons, some for the first time. Kiribati recommended that states "expressly prohibit unpredictable autonomous weapons," coupled with "a prohibition against systems designed or used to target humans." Equatorial Guinea said that states should "adopt new legally binding rules to regulate autonomous weapons systems to ensure that a sufficient degree of human control and discernment is maintained in the use of force." Venezuela, Colombia, Haiti, and Palestine also expressed their support for the creation of new legally binding international law on autonomous weapons systems.

Costa Rica's statement this week highlighted why human control must be maintained over the use of force, as "autonomous weapons follow their algorithms, but cannot make decisions like humans, and cannot act with a sense of human morality or human dignity." The need for human control was reiterated by Haiti, which stressed that autonomous weapons must be addressed "with a view to maintaining significant human control and protecting the civilian population against serious ethical, legal and humanitarian problems posed by these weapons." Kiribati recognised that "there is a need for new rules in order to preserve human control over the use of force and the effects of these weapons," while Palestine stated that it is imperative that autonomous weapons that "cannot be meaningfully controlled are completely banned." Colombia advocated for "significant human control" over all autonomous weapons systems.

A number of states expressed their support for the continued work of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (GGE on LAWS), including Belgium, Brazil, Israel, and France.

The need for discussions on autonomous weapons to take in a broader range of views than only those of state parties to the CCW was evident again this week, with a number of non-CCW member states—including Haiti, Equatorial Guinea, Kiribati, and Vanuatu—speaking on autonomous weapons at the First Committee, some for the first time.

As Stop Killer Robots emphasised in its **statement** at the First Committee, we are at the edge of a revolution in how technology is used for violence. Through increasing autonomy in weapons systems, we risk relinquishing control, and becoming detached from how force is used. This process is **fundamentally dehumanising**, and unconstrained development and use of autonomous weapons will have profound consequences for our fundamental values, principles of rights and dignity, and our shared humanity. After 10 years of discussions at the UN, without concrete outcomes, there is no time for delay. Stop Killer Robots calls upon government officials to take leadership to safeguard the rights and dignity of humanity in the face of rapidly advancing technological change, and stands ready and willing to support all states committed to launch negotiations for a legally binding instrument.



Cyber

Paul Meyer | ICT4Peace

General debate continued in the second week of the First Committee with national statements largely echoing what was heard during the initial week. There were several references, including from Peru, Croatia, Türkiye, and Vanuatu, to the continued impact of cyber-attacks and the undermining that such attacks represent for the goal of “a peaceful ICT environment”. In the words of the Croatian delegate, “Cyberspace is also a battlefield, as we daily witness an increasing number of malicious cyber attacks.”

While the cyber security issue continued to be absent from several statements, most delegations taking the floor to address it, including Peru, Belgium, Croatia, Sierra Leone, Türkiye, Bahrain, and Paraguay, affirmed the positive role that adherence to the normative framework would represent. Some, such as Venezuela, continue to press for a legally binding instrument. In this context, Belgium, Croatia, and Türkiye stipulated their support for “an inclusive and permanent Programme of Action (PoA),” with Belgium noting that the PoA represented “the most appropriate instrument to render operational the agreed norms.”

In its statement, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) expressed its concern about the increase in malicious cyber operations and said, “focused exchanges among states on the limits that IHL [international humanitarian law] imposes on such operations are urgently needed.” The ICRC also was seriously concerned over “the growing involvement of civilians ... in digital operations related to armed conflicts.” In this regard, “Next week ICRC will release a set of four guiding principles and 25 recommendations to protect civilians against digital threats during armed conflicts.”

The French delegation indicated that it would again introduce a resolution on the PoA, adding that it aims at establishing the PoA “after the end of the OEWG [Open-ended Working Group] in 2025 and no later than 2026.” The Holy See stated that it was concerned over the fragmentation of the UN’s approach to cyber security and called for “a return to consensus” on this topic.

Singapore, whose Ambassador Gafoor chairs the OEWG, introduced a draft decision that would have the First Committee endorse the second annual progress report adopted by the OEWG “and convene additional intersessional meetings of up to ten days across 2024 and 2025.” The decision would also request “the Secretary General to implement the functions of directory manager beginning in 2024.” This would empower the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs to activate the envisaged Points of Contact Directory and undertake steps (such as regular “pinging” of these contacts) to ensure validity.

The most powerful statement delivered this week was that from civil society reflecting the views of nine NGOs. The **joint statement** dryly noted that “our message of the imperative to use cyberspace for peaceful purposes is not currently being reflected by state behaviour.” Several of the norms for responsible state behaviour agreed in 2015 are being violated, such as the ban on targeting critical infrastructure and on employing proxies, as well as the prohibition on involving computer emergency response teams (CERTS) in state conducted offensive cyber operations. In this context, “The lack of implementation and accountability mechanisms that would hold states to account for their cyber actions is particularly troubling.” The statement stressed, “Preventive action should be guided by human-centric and rights-based approaches and informed through a process of meaningful stakeholder engagement.” Support was also expressed for the New Agenda for Peace recommendation to “establish independent multilateral accountability mechanisms for malicious use of cyberspace by States.”

Outer Space

Jessica West | Project Ploughshares

As states, international organisations, and civil society continued to speak out against the growing threat posed by possible weapons and armed conflict in outer space this past week, signs emerged that despite acknowledged risks to humanity, the ongoing diplomatic tug of war that has obfuscated practical progress on efforts related to the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) over the last four decades continues to escalate; so too does frustration.

Although statements this week expressed alarm related to peace and security in outer space in a variety of ways—militarisation (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Cameroon, Haiti, Gabon), use of weapons (Equatorial Guinea, Palestine), warfighting (Sierra Leone), an arms race (Türkiye, Paraguay, Kyrgyzstan, Brunei Darussalam, Iceland) and risks to safety, security, and sustainability in outer space (Belgium, Spain, Zambia)—they were united by a common concern for the harm to humanity. As Israel noted, the peaceful use of outer space is to benefit all of humanity, and thus, in the words of Gabon, “protection of outer space is not only in the interests of each nation, but also all of humanity.”

Equatorial Guinea pointed specifically to the humanitarian concerns arising from possible hostilities in outer space. This humanitarian concern was echoed in the **statement** delivered by Jessica West of Project Ploughshares on behalf of several civil society organisations, which identified the potential for human impacts stretching for generations as a result of environmental contamination in space and potential conflict and even nuclear escalation on Earth. Civil society also emphasised that even non-destructive actions against space systems, such as disruption of critical civilian services like navigation, communications, energy, and health care infrastructure, can be catastrophic for some people, creating different and disproportionate impacts based on gender, race, geography, and socio-economic status.

To this point, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) joined Belgium and Equatorial Guinea in reaffirming the applicability of international law to outer space, including both the UN Charter and international humanitarian law (IHL). The ICRC emphasised that IHL in particular is essential for the protection of civilians on Earth against activities in space.

Nicaragua, Cameroon, Kenya, Mauritania, and Palestine called for efforts to strengthen this existing legal regime, with Nicaragua explicitly urging a new treaty based on the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects (PPWT) prepared by Russia and China. This is the focus of discussions at the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Further Practical Measures for the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) set to begin this November.

The GGE follows the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Reducing Space Threats, which concluded its discussions on norms, rules, and principles of responsible behaviour this past September. Although no consensus on documentation was reached, recognition of the value of this process was expressed by Türkiye, Brunei Darussalam, Spain, France, Bahrain, Palestine, the ICRC, and civil society. France asserted that the positive results have been immediate, pointing to last year’s overwhelming support for UN General Assembly resolution **77/41** which called on states to adopt commitments not to conduct destructive tests of direct-ascent anti-satellite missiles. The Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Adedeji Ebo, issued a similar call for the development of norms to address threats to outer space.

Although in theory these processes focused on voluntary norms of behaviour and a legally binding arms control treaty complement one another, the statement by civil society described their implementation as part of an ongoing “diplomatic tug of war” that *must end*. But if anything, signs this week suggest that the struggle to set the rules for the maintenance of peace in outer space is escalating. During debate on working methods and programme planning, Mexico registered concern with the emergence of a new practice whereby states sponsor competing resolutions without negotiating with one another. While this has been witnessed with regards to cyber peace and security, Mexico expressed dismay that it has spilled over into space diplomacy in the form of proposed parallel processes. It is likely that this statement was about intentions by Russia to call for an OEWG on a legally binding instrument on PAROS to run *at the same time* as the proposed renewal of the OEWG on norms of behaviour announced by the United Kingdom last week—and for twice as long.

States are clearly frustrated with this duplication of diplomatic fora. Djibouti lamented the inability to find common solutions to disarmament problems including the protection of outer space. Speaking specifically to the dual proposals for OEWGs on PAROS, Mexico emphasised the financial implications on both the UN and states, arguing that it hinders the effective and egalitarian participation of all delegations in these processes and must not be normalised. Noting the impact that this approach has had on cyber peace and security, the Holy See argued that duplicate and competing institutions reduce efforts to govern and place a resource strain on smaller states.

Like civil society, Gabon called for states to work in concert with one another. To this end, Brazil highlighted the efforts of what it referred to as “middle ground states” that reject polarisation, and which it argues has kept First Committee running and productive during difficult times, including working constructively at the OEWG on Reducing Space Threats. It is not at all clear that a middle ground can be found that might prevent the drain of resources, time, and spirits on two parallel and simultaneous Open-Ended Working Groups related to PAROS. While the Holy See urged states toward Pope Francis’ “audacity of peace,” many states pine for the mere civility of cooperation.

Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

Katherine Young | Explosive Weapons Monitor, International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW)

Many states and international and civil society organisations referred to the devastating humanitarian consequences of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas during the second week of the First Committee’s general debate. Sierra Leone, for example, stated that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas “poses complex and ... grave danger for the protection of civilians.”

Both the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) made clear that the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas **continues** to be a major cause of harm to civilians in armed conflict. Brazil, Georgia, Israel, Myanmar, Republic of Korea, State of Palestine, and the United States all gave examples of this devastation in current conflicts, including in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Myanmar. The League of Arab States also referred to the use of heavy explosive weapons in conflict.

INEW reflected on the way in which civilians experience explosive weapons use in conflict and recalled that of Nujeen Mustafa, a survivor activist who fled Aleppo, Syria, who, in her wheelchair, “was pushed, pulled and carried across eight country borders to Germany when it became clear that the bombing, which continues today, would not stop.”

During an exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Adedeji Ebo, noted the need to increase the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The **Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas** aims to do just this.

France and Kiribati shared that they endorsed the political declaration and encouraged other states to do so.

Endorsing states should expeditiously begin work to implement the political declaration's commitments ahead of the Oslo Conference next year. The ICRC reminded states of one such commitment, "restricting or refraining from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, where such use may cause civilian harm, and ... considering the indirect or reverberating effects, notably on essential services, when planning and conducting military operations."

INEW outlined key areas of implementation, which include:

- Developing national policy and practice to restrict or refrain from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas;
- Developing national policy and practice to protect civilians from the foreseeable direct and indirect effects of military operations;
- Establishing capacities to gather and share data to better understand the humanitarian consequences of military operations; and
- Assisting victims, their families, and affected communities, and facilitating humanitarian access to civilians in need.

Statements delivered by other civil society organisations and coalitions also included references to the political declaration and the harm to civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The joint civil society statement on humanitarian disarmament highlighted the endorsement of the political declaration by 83 states as a key accomplishment of the past year. Statements on the protection of the environment in armed conflict and landmines referenced harm to civilians and the environment from damage and destruction caused by armed conflict in towns and cities, as well as contamination from landmines and other explosive ordnance.

INEW welcomes calls to action by states and civil society and international organisations to address the full of harm to civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. It encourages states to endorse the political declaration and to work to implement its commitments without delay.



Armed Drones

Christina Parandii and Francesc Teodoro | PAX

Proliferation and use of uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs), more commonly referred to as drones, is still far from being a mainstream topic during the First Committee discussions. Yet, the two weeks of the general debate saw quite a few mentions of the issue in the interventions from member states and civil society. Most referred to specific drone use in conflict areas around the world, but there were also statements on broader peace and security implications of drones, as well as of other emerging technologies.

Trends in drone use

UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, highlighted the increased use of drones in conflict over the past year, including against civilian targets and critical infrastructure. The UN High Representative called for “a multilateral discussion on the transfer and use of armed uncrewed aerial vehicles, which could take place under the auspices of the United Nations.”

Portugal acknowledged that although developments related to armed drones have traditionally not been a subject of multilateral deliberations in disarmament bodies, their proliferation has become a noteworthy trend, and their acquisition has become more prevalent. Portugal supported the proposition for holding multilateral talks on the potential peace and security challenges associated with armed drones and announced its readiness to facilitate such exchanges in the near future. In addition, Bahrain stated its support for cooperation on the use of modern technology, such as drones, to prevent their acquisition by terrorists.

Use of armed drones in conflict areas

Most frequently, armed drones were mentioned in the context of Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. Ukraine bemoaned that Russia is using Iranian drones, which it said have been transferred by Tehran to Moscow in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2231, as a method of warfare against highly populated areas and the country’s critical infrastructure.

The European Union expressed its horror over Russia’s campaign of systematic missile and drone strikes against civilian targets in Ukraine. Estonia mentioned that civilian infrastructure, targeted by Russia’s attacks, often includes grain facilities and energy infrastructure, and highlighted humanitarian consequences of such attacks happening amid the cold season approaching. Estonia called on Iran to stop participating in Russia’s “war crimes that are often committed through the use of drones” by ceasing drone transfers.

Iran’s provision of drones to another armed group, Houthi militias in Yemen, was also deplored by Yemen, which called on Iran to stop this “interference”.

Drone transfers in breach of the UN Security Council resolutions

The breach of the UN Security Council resolutions—both in the context of the illegal transfer of drones from Iran to Russia or the probable transfer of munitions from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to Russia—was raised as a big concern and condemned by a number of states, including the European Union, Switzerland, Latvia, and Lithuania. In particular, Latvia and Estonia called for investigation of the violations of the Security Council resolutions by the UN Secretariat.

Civil society's take on drones

This year's **joint civil society statement** on drones, delivered by Action on Armed Violence on behalf of nine organisations, highlighted pressing ethical, legal, and humanitarian concerns around the proliferation and use of armed drones. In particular, the statement raised attention for civilian casualties arising from the drone use against civilian infrastructure and in targeted killing campaigns, and called on all states to comply with international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and law governing the constraint of force in their drone use.

Cluster Munitions

Erin Hunt | Mines Action Canada

During the second week of the First Committee, a number of states discussed cluster munitions in their general debate statements, with the humanitarian impact being at the centre of most comments.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the **Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC)** noted the rising human harm caused by cluster munitions. Myanmar stated that the military junta has increased the use cluster munitions and the CMC noted that Myanmar has been added to the list of cluster munition users by the *Cluster Munition Monitor* after documenting the use of an apparently domestically manufactured cluster bomb.

Croatia stated that more than one third of Ukraine is now contaminated by landmines and cluster munitions. The CMC condemned the use of cluster munitions in Ukraine, noting that Russia is primarily responsible for the increase in casualties due to its widespread use of the weapon following its invasion of the country. The CMC also expressed dismay at the use of cluster munitions by Ukraine and Syria as well as the transfer of cluster munitions from the United States to Ukraine. Spain stated that cluster munition contamination continues to hinder the development of many communities.

Belgium said that the Convention on Cluster Munitions saves lives day after day, while the ICRC said the Convention "reflected life-saving norms against these treacherous weapons." Both the CMC and the ICRC called on states to condemn all use of cluster munitions.

France and Spain reiterated their support for the Convention, with Spain adding that it has worked on universalisation over the past year and actively supports demining activities. The CMC welcomed the newest states parties to the Convention, Nigeria and South Sudan. The ICRC called on all states to stop using, producing, and transferring cluster munitions and to promote the universalisation of the norms of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The CMC similarly called for states to join the Convention and to vote in favour of the annual resolution on the topic this year. The Deputy High Representative for Disarmament Affairs listed joining the Convention as a practical action that states can take to put human beings at the center of disarmament.

Although the *Cluster Munition Monitor* reported the highest ever number of casualties of cluster munitions this year, some positive news was shared this week. The CMC reminded member states that this year marks the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and noted successes over the past year including, "Bosnia and Herzegovina becoming free of cluster munition contamination; and Bulgaria, Slovakia, and South Africa announcing completing destruction of their remaining stockpiles of the weapon." In a dark time, these successes provide light towards a safer future for civilians during and after armed conflict.

Landmines

Yohan Freuville | University of Liège and Gillian Fludel | Mines Action Canada

During the second week of debates, states continued to express their concern about the use of landmines and the humanitarian impact of those weapons on civilians in contaminated areas.

Colombia stated that the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT) is having difficulties with implementation and universalisation and called on states to cooperate to achieve a mine-free world. Haiti recalled that it is undeniable that proliferation of landmines has a destabilising effect on socio-economic development and is a major issue for national, regional, and international security. Croatia stated that landmines continue to have a devastating humanitarian effect globally and that much of the fertile land will remain contaminated by landmines which is hindering the global food supply and consequently disturbing global security. Spain recalled that contamination from landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) impede development.

Some delegations discussed the specific landmine situation of certain countries. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan accused the other of using landmines in the South Caucasus. The Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations said that the military junta has increased its use of antipersonnel landmines. Croatia and PAX estimated that one-third of the Ukrainian territory is contaminated by landmines and other ERW.

A number of states reaffirmed working and cooperating for the implementation of the MBT. Belgium, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the **International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)** called for full universalisation of the MBT.

Belgium recalled that the MBT saves lives day after day. Colombia and Tajikistan reaffirmed their commitment to the MBT and its full implementation.

Croatia and Colombia cited their national experience with demining as a contribution to global security and peace. Croatia and Ukraine co-organised an International Donor Conference on Humanitarian Demining in Ukraine on 11–12 October, hosted in Croatia. Spain remains committed to support demining efforts. Tajikistan strives to see Central Asia free of landmines and called for international support to reach this goal. Congo reported it developed a mine action approach in a development framework and included it in its national order and with country-specific approach to cooperate for regional development.

On the machinery of the MBT, Colombia, as part of the troika leading the resolution on the implementation of the convention, thanked Germany for its presentation and called all states to support and cosponsor the resolution. France reaffirmed its engagement to the MBT through the role it serves as chair of the committee on article 5 implementation.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stated that the use of landmines has grown alarmingly and the casualties linked to mines and other ERW has spiked dramatically. The ICRC recalled the immediate and long-lasting humanitarian and indiscriminate consequences of landmines and that the MBT is saving lives. The ICRC and ICBL condemned the use of landmines by anyone and the ICRC further urged all states and parties to conflict to stop using, producing, transferring, and stockpiling of mines to prevent further victims.

ICBL shared the many achievements of the MBT, such as 30 countries becoming mine free. Despite achievements, the ICBL expressed concern about the extensive use of antipersonnel mines in the last

year, which has resulted in an increased number of people maimed and killed. ICBL condemned the extensive use of antipersonnel landmines and banned booby-traps in Ukraine and called on Ukraine to investigate and report in a transparent manner the reported use of antipersonnel mines by Ukrainian armed forces. ICBL also recalled the governmental use of antipersonnel mines for almost two decades by Myanmar and that non-state armed groups are also using antipersonnel mines in multiple countries. ICBL recalled that 33 countries still had not adhered to the treaty. The Campaign called on states to “condemn any use of antipersonnel mines, including of an improvised nature, and reiterate that any use of landmines by any actor, under any circumstances is unacceptable” and to vote in favour of the First Committee resolution on the MBT.

PAX, in a joint civil society statement on protection of the environment in armed conflict, highlighted the long-term risk to human health and the environment due to the contamination of landmines and other ERW, especially in Ukraine. A joint civil society statement on humanitarian disarmament stated that the new use of mines is challenging the strict norms of the MBT and called on states to publicly condemn the use of mines and for states that have not yet done so, to join the MBT.

As the Deputy High Representative for Disarmament Affairs said, achieving universality of treaties banning inhumane weapons like the MBT should be a priority for member states.

Small Arms and Light Weapons

Amelie Namuroy | International Action Network on Small Arms

Throughout the second week of the First Committee’s general debate, member states foregrounded their statements in the grim context under which this meeting is taking place as wars waged in many places around the world. Several delegations stressed the devastating impacts these conflicts are having on innocent civilian lives. As a result, states such as Vanuatu called for a more human-centred disarmament, underlining that the humanitarian impact of current events indicates that stricter arms control is essential. Vanuatu welcomed the UN Secretary General’s *New Agenda for Peace*, which calls for such an approach, as well as the reduction of military spending. The Dominican Republic echoed similar calls for peace by stating that it was the duty of the members of the UN General Assembly to strive for a more secure world.

In this context, small states such as Kiribati urged those who produce and trade weapons to not hinder their goals relating to sustainable and socio-economic development and environmental protection. Several delegations, including Haiti, Algeria, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Libya, Türkiye, and the League of Arab States, outlined their support for the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA) and its International Tracing Instrument (ITI) as a framework aimed at ending the illicit trade and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and contributing to a more secure world.

Tajikistan expressed its support for the leading role that the UN takes in international cooperation and assistance by states to combat the illicit trade in SALW and reaffirmed that the UNPoA remains the main multilateral mechanism to curb the proliferation of SALW. Peru noted, however, that the establishment of an open-ended working group to create a framework on ammunition management outside of the work of the UNPoA meant that in practical terms this crucial issue continues to be excluded from the only UN mechanism on SALW containing commitments assumed by all states.

In terms of actions taken at the national level, Nicaragua shared that it has taken steps to address the illicit trafficking in SALW and has adopted new legislation to trace such weapons in the form of Law n° 510, entitled, “Special law for the control and regulation of firearms, ammunition, explosives, and other related materials.”

Many states stressed the devastating impacts of the illicit trade and misuse of SALW on civilians, sustainable development, gender equality, peace and security, and violations of international law, including respect for human rights. Equatorial Guinea noted that the illicit trade in SALW is due in part to inadequate legislation as well as insufficient capacity and resources in developing countries to better regulate said trade. Equatorial Guinea emphasised that there are instruments in place to promote transparency of the SALW trade and that African countries as well as manufacturing states must adhere to them. Türkiye also stressed the importance of a responsible and transparent arms trade. Similarly, Gabon called for the strengthening of marking procedures for SALW to help prevent the trade fuelling terrorist armed groups and gangs.

The Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Adedeji Ebo, during the exchange he had with the member states, stated that regulations for the use of SALW must be enhanced and should pursue “whole-of-government” approaches toward violence reduction.

Despite the limited time allocated to civil society in the total programme of work and the time limit imposed on the delivery of their statements, civil society representatives made statements on a range of thematic issues, including SALW. The **IANSA statement** reminded the assembly of the need to take urgent and stricter measures to curb the illicit trade in, and misuse of, SALW, as well as measures to mainstream gender, engage with civil society and set regional and national targets for the implementation of the UNPoA. Regardless of the topic, most of the civil society statements called for accountability by states, recognition of the importance of civil society, and the need for other positive changes. Moreover, the range of men, women, gender-diverse individuals, and youth who delivered those statements was a testament to the importance of diversity in the representation of international civil society in processes such as the First Committee.

The following day, during the debate on working methods and programme planning, Mexico made the following comment as part of its contribution:

During the informal segment where the First Committee listens to civil society representatives, we regret that their contributions are reduced to an informal mode. The voice of civil society is central to our work. But beyond this informality, we find it counterproductive that even the nameplates now only read “civil society” and an assigned number. We suggest that the name of each organisation be reflected, since being in an informal mode entail that there is no record. We believe that this is the least that civil society representatives deserve.

In order to achieve progress, IANSA regularly encourages states to work in close partnerships with civil society organisations, including women, youth, and underrepresented groups, especially those representing people living in situations of high levels of armed violence and recurring conflict, to create public awareness of the dangers of unregulated SALW and misuse and ways to address those dangers. IANSA believes that such partnerships are crucial for building more political will to develop effective and incremental measures to implement the UNPoA.

During this week no resolutions relating to SALW were proposed for consideration. More resolutions on disarmament and arms control issues will continue to be introduced by member states in the upcoming weeks.

International Arms Trade

Clara Palmisano | Reaching Critical Will, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

This week, member states reiterated their concerns about the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and its ammunition. Many delegations, including those from Zambia, Peru, Colombia, Cameroon, Haiti, and Equatorial Guinea, emphasized that SALW constitute a major source of destruction around the world, exacerbating local tensions leading to full-fledged conflicts and fuelling violence, crime, and terrorism. Haiti defined itself as a victim of the illegal trade in SALW, while calling upon member states to take the necessary measures to prevent the supply, sale, or direct or indirect transfer of these weapons to Haiti.

Most statements mentioning SALW focused on their diversion by non-state actors, which fuels illegal markets and transnational organised crime. Equatorial Guinea asserted that several regions in Africa continue to face the consequences of the flow of arms between borders exploited by terrorist groups, including ISIS and Al Qaeda affiliates, as well as foreign fighters in Libya.

Arms Trade Treaty

Several delegations expressed the importance of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), including Nigeria, Botswana, Vanuatu, Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone, Iceland, Haiti, and signatory states Israel and Türkiye.

Haiti emphasised the critical need for compliance with the obligations laid out in the ATT and in the International Tracing Instrument. The delegation underscored the importance of responsible management and trade of firearms. Moreover, it called upon countries that manufacture and export arms and ammunition to be responsible and cooperate with non-producing countries. Similarly, Spain expressed the pivotal role of export control regimes in advancing responsible transfers of military or dual-use equipment and technologies, as they constitute an essential element of non-proliferation architecture. To this end, Spain called for universalisation of the ATT and affirmed its commitment to it, as demonstrated during its presidency of the Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Treaty.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) called for greater diligence in assessing the risks posed by arms exports, encouraging states to implement timely, robust, and practical measures that can prevent suffering and realistically offset risks of violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and of the ATT. For the ICRC, this is a humanitarian imperative. Its delegation stressed, "Those who supply the means by which wars are fought assume a special responsibility, they must do everything reasonably in their power to ensure respect for IHL by recipients who are party to an armed conflict. States must refrain from transferring arms where there is a clear risk that these would be used to commit IHL violations."

In regards to arms- and ammunition-producing countries, Equatorial Guinea complained about their lack of transparency and responsibility in the illegal trade of SALW and other conventional weapons that fuel conflicts in Africa. The delegation accused high-income countries of seeing Africa as a global arms market, where old weapons, diverted from arsenals of countries that are modernising their military capabilities, are recycled. According to Equatorial Guinea, this is exacerbated by the ongoing competition among certain countries, which either see African states as "clients" by selling and donating arms or providing military assistance or support the illegal trade of arms by rebel groups to destabilize incumbent governments. This was an important statement condemning the prioritisation of business interests of arms industries over taking concrete steps towards achieving international peace and security.

As stated by Control Arms in its **statement** during the civil society segment, states continue avoiding opportunities to address the role of industry and its obligation to conduct human rights due diligence. This year's ATT Conference of States Parties could have served as a platform for reflection on the arms industry's growth and impunity. In order to truly observe the ten-year anniversary of the ATT's entry into force, states parties must discuss how they implement and apply Articles 6 and 7 on illegal transfers and export assessments, which are inextricably linked with respect of IHL and human rights.

Gender

The civil society statements by the **International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)** and the **joint statement on gender, intersectionality, and disarmament** reminded the Committee of the importance of incorporating gender perspectives in discussions on arms, including their trade. Costa Rica focused its statement on the gender blindness that these discussions often have and condemned the rise in sexual violence escalated by the unchecked spread and illicit trafficking of SALW and its ammunition.

Environment

Francesc Teodoro and Christina Parandii | PAX

As during the first week of the general debate, First Committee discussions continued to see multiple references to the interlinkage between the humanitarian disarmament agenda and the environment. In particular, environmental consequences of the use of weapons of mass destruction were highlighted as a big concern by a number of member states, international organisations, and civil society organisations. A few statements briefly reflected about international treaties' protective capacity towards nature. At the same time, civil society representatives presented a comprehensive agenda for better protection of the environment in armed conflict in their collective statement.

Environmental impacts of weapons of mass destruction

Devastating environmental and humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons were highlighted by many member states as an argument for upholding the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and achieve universal adherence to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Particularly, Angola, Cameroon, Djibouti, Eswatini, Mexico, Malaysia, as well as International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) heeded a warning about nuclear weapons' long-lasting impairments for ecosystems.

In this regard, Nigeria stated that all states have "a duty to protect the environment by respecting the moratorium against nuclear testing" and called on all states to ratify the CTBT without further delay, particularly the remaining eight states listed in Annex 2 of the Treaty.

France highlighted disastrous environmental consequences of the use of chemical weapons, warning against Russia's use of chemical weapons in Ukraine and expressing its support for the Chemical Weapons Convention and its investigative mechanisms, as well as for the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

Remediation of environments contaminated by nuclear weapons

Kiribati outlined pathways for progress on victim assistance and environmental remediation within the framework of the NPT and provided further details about a new resolution entitled "Addressing the Nuclear Weapons: Providing Victim Assistance and Environmental Remediation to States Affected by

the Use or Testing of Nuclear Weapons,” which the delegations of Kiribati and Kazakhstan will present this year. The objective of the resolution is to establish an international trust fund to help affected states and impacted communities through multilateral treaties, including the NPT and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Environmental remediation efforts spearheaded by Kiribati and Kazakhstan were lauded by The Holy See and Germany.

Environmental and climate resilience impacts of conflicts and military activities

Spain expressed concern about the pollution related to landmines and cluster munitions. Croatia furthered previous remarks by zooming into Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. The country warned about the global shockwaves on food supplies resulting from the contamination of agricultural fields. In its statement for the civil society segment, PAX, on behalf of 22 organisations, took stock of environmental and climate resilience consequences of the wars in Syria and Ukraine, as well as of increasing military emissions.

The link between growing militarisation and challenges in addressing climate change were also highlighted by several member states. For instance, Myanmar and Cameroon noted that excessive accumulation of nuclear and other weapons is threatening the measures that the international community is taking to address climate change and fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals. Nicaragua and Nigeria echoed multiple member states in deploring the uneven regard to the environment in comparison with nuclear proliferation. Gabon advised to “reduce military spending in order to allocate the resources needed to meet the challenges of climate change.”

The protective nature of international frameworks

International treaties act as a deterrent in case of state’s misconduct. They forge pathways for global cooperation and pledge to respond in case of violation. The environment is no exception to this principle. In that regard, Equatorial Guinea praised the relevance of the Convention on Cluster Munitions to preserve arable lands. The Holy See referred to the TPNW as the necessary world commitment to preserve humans and nature.

Civil society’s take on environment and disarmament

Statements by civil society organisations (CSOs) further highlighted the importance of protective stance of international frameworks towards the environment. Endorsed by multiple organisations, the joint statements on the **environment** and on **humanitarian disarmament** commended the International Law Commission’s 2022 **Draft principles on protection of the environment in relation to armed conflict (PERAC)**. Environmental remediation stood out in comments about the TPNW delivered by the **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)**. King’s College London’s **statement** underscored the role of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) in enshrining biosafety and biosecurity efforts.

Additionally, CSOs elaborated with scrutiny on environmental issues surrounding disarmament. Youth organisations **critiqued** the military sector due to its excessive greenhouse emissions. CSOs working on incendiary weapons **lamented** their deleterious environmental impact. Lastly, the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) **decried** the structural damage to water infrastructure provoked by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Socioeconomic Justice

Antje Hipkins | Reaching Critical Will, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

During the second week of the First Committee, member states placed renewed emphasis on the relationship between disarmament and achieving sustainable development. Many highlighted their concerns about the perpetual increase in military expenditure, including Peru, Congo, Sierra Leone, Panama, Colombia, Namibia, Haiti, Costa Rica, Mauritania, Vanuatu, Gabon, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See, as well as the Deputy High Representative of Disarmament Affairs, expressed similar sentiments. Peru identified growing international distrust and tensions between the most militarised states in the world as the impetus for the continuous increase in military spending.

Cameroon reminded the Assembly of the assertion made in Article 26 of the UN Charter that “only the minimum of human and economic resources be diverted towards armaments of the world,” and identified the unique opportunity provided by the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “to reconsider the historical relationship between disarmament and development.” Cameroon also noted that the reduction of military budgets could provide opportunities for growth in the achievement of several SDGs, including SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (reduction of inequalities), and SDG 16 (promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies). Panama stated that the resources used to build peace and international cooperation are an investment in “security, sustainable development, and the wellbeing of all of humanity.”

Many states highlighted the connection between the modernisation and expansion of nuclear arsenals and the lack of funding for sustainable development agendas. CARICOM identified that nuclear-armed states have spent approximately 89 billion USD on the modernisation and growth of their nuclear arsenals, in direct opposition to internationally agreed-upon norms and commitments, while programmes that support the SDGs remain woefully underfunded. Nicaragua and Equatorial Guinea called for the resources spent in this manner to be reallocated to achieving the SDGs and creating a more peaceful and just global society. Kiribati encouraged nuclear-armed states to realign their priorities with Article 26 of the UN Charter and encouraged fellow non-nuclear-armed member states not to allow those who “build their profits on the tools, instruments, and spoils of war” to inhibit action toward achieving positive development toward a more peaceful world.

Several states noted the widespread impacts that armed conflicts have on global development efforts. Vanuatu identified that the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine has worsened inflation and created food and energy insecurity on a global scale. Peru similarly attributed to the war in Ukraine the growing international instability and impediments to sustainable development efforts, highlighting the large-scale humanitarian and migration crisis and the deterioration of the global economy that has resulted from the conflict. Namibia asserted that rather than engaging in armed conflicts, the world needs to work toward peace “that can sustain development and peace that can build bridges of opportunity for future generations.”

Peru identified that the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons (SALW) can impede the development and peace within even nations widely perceived as stable. Sierra Leone made similar assertions, identifying that specifically in post-conflict regions, this illicit market has devastating impacts on socioeconomic development, especially in the hands of non-state actors. Equatorial Guinea argued that for “developed states,” Africa remains little more than a market for the illicit sale of SALW. Equatorial Guinea asserted that it is on the African continent where “old weapons are often recycled,” the excess remnants of wealthy nations’ continual modernisation of their own military stockpiles. It argued that

while some global powers may sell or donate their weapons to legitimate governments with the aim of providing military assistance, others escalate instability by supporting rebel groups that fuel internal conflicts, in turn greatly inhibiting sustainable development efforts in many regions in Africa.

Tajikistan emphasised the role that information and communications technologies (ICT) play in achieving the SDGs by accentuating the “huge economic, political, and social opportunities” that can be provided by advancements in ICT. Djibouti stressed the importance of bolstering digital infrastructure against cyberattacks, particularly for developing nations. The Dominican Republic supported this assertion and underlined the importance of enhancing mechanisms for developing states to reduce the gaps between nations and “allow States to develop training and capacity-building programs” in the face of rapidly increasing technological advancements and digitisation in all areas of the world.

Gender and Intersectionality

Emma Bjertén | Reaching Critical Will, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

During the second week of the First Committee general debate, delegations continued to raise the importance of addressing a gender perspective in the context of international security and disarmament. Spain, which has a feminist foreign policy, described how it has addressed gender mainstreaming in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, including the adoption of practical measures, and how it is a primary object for Spain.

Costa Rica referred to the problem of gender blindness in all instruments concerning international peace and security, describing it as “the failure to recognize the distinct roles and responsibilities assigned or imposed on men, women, boys, and girls across various socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts.” Costa Rica described its efforts to address this issue, but noted that there is resistance; people are still arguing that gender discussions belong to the Third Committee, others claim that gender is irrelevant, and there are people describing gender as controversial, a topic that should be avoided to maintain consensus.

Addressing gendered impacts of weapons

Costa Rica, which allocated its whole statement to highlighting the relevance of a gender perspective in the work of the First Committee, addressed how all weaponry has a gender dimension that has long been overlooked. It recognised how artificial intelligence (AI) discriminates against individuals who are already marginalised in society and how it can only target people based on a broad profile. Costa Rica emphasised the urgent need for new gender-sensitive frameworks addressing cybersecurity, cybercrime, and AI.

On Wednesday during the civil society segment, several statements highlighted the need to address the gendered impacts of various weapon systems. In a **joint statement on cyber peace and security**, several civil society organisations warned that the internet and connected devices are being weaponised in ways that negatively impact human rights, and how measures disproportionately harm individuals and groups in society on the basis of their race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression. In a **joint statement on armed drones**, several civil society organisations also problematised the use of gender and other blanket categorisations as criteria for targeting drone strikes, especially the categorisation of adult men as militants, arguing that “this undermines the principle of presumption of civilians in international humanitarian law and constitutes a form of gender-based violence.”

The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) **addressed** how small arms and light weapons (SALW) fuel gender-based violence and has differential impacts on people of all genders. A number of states also addressed the gendered impacts of the illicit trafficking of SALW and its ammunition. Costa Rica underlined how these weapons contribute to the escalating risk of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings and recognised disarmament and arms control as vital tools in preventing this. As the Vice-President of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Conventional Ammunition, Costa Rica expressed how it was pleased with the adoption of the Global Framework and how the joint declaration acknowledges the role of conventional ammunition in promoting armed violence, including gender-based violence. Colombia made similar remarks. Iceland also welcomed the significant role that arms control instruments can play in preventing gender-based violence and in the protection of civilians.

IANSA encouraged states to build on the gender-related outcomes of the Eighth Biennial Meeting of States of the UN Programme of Action with particular attention to the collection of data disaggregated by sex, age, and disability, and the differential impact of illicit SALW on people of all genders. In a **joint statement on humanitarian disarmament** and a **joint statement on gender, intersectionality, and disarmament**, several civil society organisations called on states to ensure that their work take diversity and intersectionality into account and address racial and gender discrimination.

Recognising the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda

Besides specific arms control instruments, several states including Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, and Namibia highlighted the WPS Agenda as an important tool for the advancement of gender equality in the field of disarmament and arms control. Croatia commended the UN Secretary-General for continuing the implementation of the WPS Agenda while Costa Rica and Namibia emphasised the importance to address the disarmament-gender nexus. Namibia called for “a formalized mechanism to facilitate reflection, peer-learning and evaluate implementation gaps with the view of ensuring an enriched second and third generation of NAPs and their successful implementation.” Costa Rica called for stronger alignment between national strategies on the WPS Agenda and the regulation of SALW, arguing that integrating arms control practices into national action plans on WPS, and integrating gender considerations into SALW regulation plans, can move these initiatives forward.

During the general debate a number of delegations, including Costa Rica, Iceland, and Namibia, stressed the important efforts to advance the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in the disarmament agenda. Iceland acknowledged that there is room for improvement and that the participation of more women is required to revive, develop, and implement the global arms control architecture. Costa Rica said it is a must to increase the number of women as head of delegations in negotiations and recognised the need to incorporate gender experts in delegations. Costa Rica also recognised women’s influential roles in conflict prevention and mediation and argued that ensuring precise, representative, inclusive, and disaggregated data could be a way to amend the gender blindness of international peace and security instruments.

Costa Rica also highlighted the UN Secretary-General’s report on WPS from 2021, referring to its plea to decrease military spending and bolstering investments in public programmes including peacebuilding, education and health. The delegation of Costa Rica recognised the efforts made by the women’s peace movement in this regard, to reverse the trend of military expenditure, and highlighted this goal as a central commitment for the UN.

Considering gender in working methods and programme planning

The importance of incorporating a gender perspective was also address in the Wednesday session on working methods and programme planning. The United Kingdom specifically welcomed the

strong language on gender equality and the participation of women throughout programme three on disarmament in the Committee for Programme and Coordination. Similarly, Costa Rica stressed the need to guarantee the full equitable and meaningful participation of women in the plenary of the commission and in the negotiated texts. Even though Costa Rica noted the increase in women's participation in the Commission, it recognised that there is resistance regarding their inclusion, which contributes to gender blindness and creates obstacles for the composition of delegations. By referring to Claudia Goldin, the recent winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, who says government policies and labour market often are slow in responding to women entering the market, the delegation of Costa Rica argued, "The way we conduct our First Committee work is a reflection of this reality that ignores the importance of work-life balance. Let us take the opportunity to rethink the working methods of this Commission, not only to be more effective in our actions, but also to improve our working conditions."

Beyond participation of women

On Friday, during the exchange with the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mexico asked for recommendations to improve the participation of young people in rebuilding the disarmament machinery. In his answer, the Deputy to the High Representative, Adedeji Ebo, not only addressed the inclusion of youth, but also emphasised the need to ensure that women are involved in disarmament conversations. He noted that gender parity is yet to be reached and that states have to do more in order to ensure women are adequately represented. He also addressed the need to not only ensure that women are present in the room but to actually ensure women's perspectives in resolutions, discussions, and outcomes. He noted that this needs to be done at a faster pace with more intensity. This was echoed by Ambassador Flávio Damico Soares, who on behalf of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL), said it is not only about participation but that women's perspectives are important. In the following thematic debate on nuclear weapons, the Netherlands addressed how the international community must reconsider how it deals with international organisations, civil society, and outside experts, and emphasised the need to structurally include gender and youth perspectives in disarmament and non-proliferation processes.

In the civil society segment on Wednesday, several organisations addressed this issue in a joint statement on gender, arguing that the understanding of intersectional impacts of weapons requires more meaningful diversity in disarmament. They noted that the dominant approach to improving diversity so far often has been for states to increase the number of women in their delegations or policy teams. While this is important, they argued it is insufficient since disarmament needs people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, races, classes, abilities, backgrounds, and experiences.

FIRST COMMITTEE SIDE EVENT

ADVOCATING FOR NUCLEAR JUSTICE

Join our panelists for a discussion on victim assistance and environmental remediation in the wake of nuclear testing

A LIGHT LUNCH WILL BE SERVED

📅 **Thursday**
October 19, 2023

🕒 **1:15 PM - 2:30 PM EST**

📍 **Conference Room E**

Permanent Missions of Kazakhstan and Kiribati
contact: syrymbetzhangeldy@gmail.com



NUCLEAR AGE PEACE FOUNDATION



H.E. Ambassador Teburoro Tito
Permanent Representative of Kiribati to the UN



H.E. Ambassador Akan Rakhmetullin
Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the UN



Veronique Christory
Senior Arms Adviser for the ICRC Delegation to the UN



Bonnie Docherty
Director of the Armed Conflict and Civilian Protection Initiative, Harvard Law School



Benetick Kabua Maddison
Executive Director of the Marshallese Educational Initiative



Christian Ciobanu
TPNW Advisor of Kiribati, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation

Youth and Education

Matthew Breay Bolton, Elena Bater, Jordyne Hebron, Miya Morrison, Chandler Murphy |
Pace University's International Disarmament Institute

The First Committee is considering a draft resolution on Youth, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, sponsored by the Republic of Korea. The United Kingdom said it was “pleased” with the Secretary-General’s **report** on the 2021 version of resolution and would support this year’s iteration.

In a **joint statement** on youth and disarmament education, Ellis Clay said, “We implore you to include diverse youth in the decision-making processes at all levels to change the policies, educational processes and narratives for disarmament and non-proliferation.” Speaking on behalf of 75 civil society organizations and coalitions, he called on states to support a robust version of the Youth, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation resolution.

Namibia urged states to “sustain development and peace that can foster future generations,” saying that it was “encouraged by the recommendations from New Agenda for peace” and calling attention to the upcoming Summit of the Future in September 2024. A UN preparatory brief for the Summit identifies “meaningful inclusion of young people ... in UN decision-making processes” as a key aim of the conference. At the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) side event “Assessing Options for the Future of International Peace and Security,” Namibia highlighted the “wisdom in carving out space for future generations” in any outcome of the Summit, such as an “Envoy for Future Generations.”

“As we prepare for the Summit of the Future, we can celebrate the increasing attention to the role of youth in disarmament processes, as well as advances in disarmament education policy,” said Clay, in the joint civil society statement, applauding the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs’ (UNODA) Youth4Disarmament programme.

“But there is so much more that must be done,” said Clay. “Our participation in disarmament processes is stymied by intersecting forms of marginalization, along lines of Indigeneity, gender identity, race, class, caste, sexual orientation and disability. We disproportionately bear the brunt of armed conflict and inhumane weapons. We are targets of disinformation and polarized educational practices that seek to foment extremism. Violence hinders our access to schooling and militarization diverts precious resources from our education, healthcare and social services.”

Kenya called for “Disarmament for current and future generations.” Similarly, at the UNIDIR side event, Germany stressed that policy “decisions cannot be made without consideration of future generations.” At the same event, Namibia called for “intergenerational dialogue”.

Spain identified the “need for a greater participation of civil society, and especially youth in all forums disarmament and non-proliferation.” The Netherlands offered similar remarks. The statement from the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) urged states to “Partner with civil society organizations ... ensuring diverse participation from survivors, youth, and other traditionally underrepresented groups.”

Djibouti called on delegations to “imagine a world without atomic weapons, in which the funds used” for nuclear arsenals could be “injected” into sustainable development, including education. Costa Rica expressed similar sentiments and, along with Botswana, Kyrgyzstan, Namibia, and Israel, highlighted the role of education and capacity building in disarmament and international security.

Mexico, on behalf of the states parties and signatories to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) said, “Any use of nuclear weapons would inflict indiscriminate destruction” and impact “the health of current and future generations, including having a disproportionate impact on women and girls.” Iceland, Israel, Palestine, and the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) raised the importance of protecting children from armed violence.

During an interactive exchange with First Committee delegates on Friday, Adedeji Ebo, Deputy High Representative of Disarmament Affairs told the First Committee that “perhaps those who have to inherit the planet have a more legitimate right” to define its future. He urged delegates to be “humble” in engaging with young people: “What we think youth want, may not be what they actually want. And if it is what they want, it might not be how they want it.” Ebo highlighted the work of Youth4Disarmament.

Rytis Paulauskas of Lithuania, Chair of the First Committee, as well as Ambassador Flávio Damico Soares on behalf of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL), both highlighted the importance of internships and educational programmes for younger diplomats. Mexico introduced a youth representative in its First Committee delegation. Timor-Leste suggested the UN involve students as UN ambassadors for peace.



Pace University students Miya Morrison, Jordyne Hebron, Ellis Clay, Chandler Murphy and Elena Bater (left to right) observed the First Committee this week as part of a class on Global Politics of Disarmament and Arms Control.

Open Letter on SSOD IV

Paul Meyer and Dan Plesch

Paul Meyer, a former Canadian Ambassador for Disarmament and a Director of the Canadian Pugwash Group has cooperated with Professor Dan Plesch of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London and the Scrap Weapons project in developing an Open Letter for signature by civil society and academic representatives.

Commencing the preparation of the UN's Fourth Special Session on Disarmament

It has been 35 years since the UN's First Special Session on Disarmament (UNSSOD I) was held. This 1978 session established the multilateral disarmament machinery that has governed the UN's work in this realm ever since. The session enumerated both the priority objectives for arms control and disarmament and the key institutions to realize them, namely the Commission on Disarmament in New York (a deliberative body) and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva (a negotiating forum with a current membership of 65 states). Two other special sessions followed in 1982 and 1988 without major change to the architecture agreed in 1978.

While this machinery worked reasonably well in an earlier period, producing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 1993 and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 it has not been able to produce any treaties subsequently. In particular, the Conference on Disarmament has been mired in dysfunction since the CTBT, failing even to agree and implement a programme of work on any of the items on its agenda. It is increasingly evident that the UNSSOD I framework is no longer "fit for purpose" and requires a comprehensive review and likely reform.

UN member states have recognized the desirability of holding UNSSOD IV for years, adopting an annual resolution on this topic. The latest iteration (A/RES/77/46 adopted without a vote on 13 December 2022) reiterated "its conviction that a special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament can set the future course of action in the fields of disarmament, arms control, non-proliferation and related international security matters".

The universal support for convening UNSSOD IV has however not been followed by purposeful action to bring it about. For almost 30 years the UN General Assembly has instead been engaged in a perpetual "consultation" on "next steps" without actually taking any. Normally, a Preparatory Committee would be established that would decide the practical questions for holding a special session. The UN has however opted to "defer the issue of the possible establishment of a preparatory committee to the General Assembly" to which the General Assembly has responded by continuing "consultations" ad infinitum. This pretence of dealing with an agreed goal while in effect continuing to ignore it, is alas not an uncommon feature of the General Assembly and one convenient to states not keen on addressing the admittedly challenging issues that an UNSSOD IV would entail. This prolonged neglect of a crucial area of the UN's work on peace and security at a time of intensified rivalry amongst leading powers and the dismantlement of much of the existing arms control and disarmament framework is untenable.

In his New Agenda for Peace, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has recognized the need "to reform the disarmament machinery" and has called for the establishment of "an inter-governmental process to ...consider the role, timing and preparations of a special session of the General Assembly on disarmament". We the undersigned, representatives of civil society and academia urge all member states to cease the damaging procrastination and support a resolution that would initiate by 2025 a committee to oversee preparations for UNSSOD IV.

FIRST COMMITTEE MONITOR

Reaching Critical Will (RCW) is the disarmament programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the oldest feminist peace organisation in the world.

RCW works for disarmament and the prohibition of many different weapon systems; confronting militarism and military spending; and exposing gendered aspects of the impact of weapons and disarmament processes with a feminist lens.

RCW also monitors and analyses international disarmament processes, providing primary resources, reporting, and civil society coordination at various UN-related forums.

The *First Committee Monitor* is produced by the Reaching Critical Will programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of RCW or WILPF.

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