

Gender Perspectives on Disarmament

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Seminar to launch the publication: *Gender Perspectives on Disarmament*

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Before starting, I would like to give special thanks to Angela King, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, for co-sponsoring this event. I am pleased to work with her and her staff in launching our new publication on gender perspectives on disarmament.

We are also honored to have with us several distinguished and hard-working individuals today as panelists. It is fitting that they would come from two national missions, an international organization, a non-governmental organization, and a university -- this is a virtual microcosm of the global support network needed to promote disarmament in a society increasingly sensitive to gender-based perspectives.

This is not the occasion to elaborate on the progress we have made inside the Department of Disarmament Affairs to end all forms of gender disparities in this, the smallest of UN departments. We will continue our efforts to make progress not only in promoting gender equality *chez nous*, but also -- through means such as the publications we are releasing tDDAy -- to incorporate a gender perspective in our substantive work as well.

Today's meeting is significant in that it marks not just the launching of a publication -- but even

more importantly, the inauguration of a process. Our meeting today marks a new beginning, not a one-time event. For too many years, the two noble causes of disarmament and gender equality have been pursued on separate but parallel tracks. Our goal is achieve a greater fusion of effort, for it is in unity that we will be able to achieve the full potential of our important common agenda.

This is not to say that affirmative action on a two-track approach has been fruitless -- to the contrary, there have been some significant achievements over the years on each of these separate tracks. Yet think about what more we could accomplish by pooling our efforts, by finding common ground, and by pressing forward together over the many of the obstacles we share -- the familiar obstacles of ignorance, of competing priorities, of ideological prejudice, and of apathy.

The two-track approach has succeeded largely through the advantages of specialization: the communities who work on disarmament and on gender issues have each developed over time their own sources of information, expertise, and constituencies of support. They each have their own publications and their own specialized audiences. They recruit new members from their own respective pools of candidates. They have their own specialized literature, their own (and often obscure) acronyms, their own trained negotiators, their own websites, and their own national and international networks.

This is all quite understandable and should be recognized as a proper division of labor in addressing a robust international agenda of global issues.

Yet are these communities really so different? Surely not in their fundamental goals. Neither the United Nations nor its individual Member States regards disarmament, for example, as an end in itself. Instead, disarmament seeks to advance the cause of international peace and security -- people-based security first and foremost -- and in so doing it frees enormous human and economic resources for more productive uses in society. This is a cause that is deeply rooted in the Charter -- one that treasures the life of every single human being, regardless of gender or any other attribute.

It is also important to note that we work within a shared tradition of international law, a tradition that obliges States to discriminate between combatants and non-combatants in the conduct of armed conflicts. Literally all the efforts throughout the history of the United Nations to abolish weapons of mass destruction -- that is, nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons -- have rested heavily upon this basic tenet, the very same legal principle that seeks to protect women and children in war. We stand together, in short, in defence of the rule of law.

This tradition is no modern contrivance: its heritage is dated in millennia. In 1996, the International Court of Justice issued its historic Advisory Opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons. In a separate opinion, Judge Weeramantry carefully traced the evolution of the humanitarian law of war back thousands of years and surveyed its development

both across time and across many diverse cultures. While the restraints associated with this tradition have obviously not always been faithfully observed, it nevertheless offers a strong common foundation for future work by those who work on disarmament and gender issues.

Another common link between disarmament and gender issues is more architectural in nature. It concerns the fact that both involve collaborative efforts throughout the UN system. The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues is no more an island in the UN system than is the Department of Disarmament Affairs. We work with many of the same additional offices -- including all the familiar UN acronyms: DPA, DPKO, DPI, DGAACS, UNDP, OLA, UNICEF, DESA, UNEP, UNHCR, UNHCHR, and others. We also recognize the great value in working closely with numerous non-governmental organizations in civil society.

The challenge we share is therefore to integrate our efforts, to forge a holistic common cause, by building on the foundations we share. We seek as much to integrate gender perspectives into the global process of disarmament as we seek to integrate disarmament into contemporary efforts on behalf of gender equality. Viewed in a broader perspective, our common cause is to mainstream both gender and disarmament -- to serve all the peoples of the United Nations.

Those who have devoted their time and energies to advance gender issues at the UN and elsewhere have much to offer the cause of disarmament. They have loyal constituencies who can help to promote disarmament goals by working with non-governmental groups, the media, academic experts, religious institutions, legislatures, private businesses, and other important participants in the agenda-building process both inside and outside of government. While disarmament simply cannot, and must not, turn a blind eye to the interests and ideals of half of humanity, it is equally true that all of humanity stands to benefit from progress in disarmament -- a global public good if ever there was one.

The six Briefing Notes we are releasing today represent six steps forward in this collective effort. Each is written clearly, in language that is refreshingly free of acronyms, and each is expressly action-oriented, in the sense that they will leave the reader with some advice on resources for future work. The first two Briefing Notes describe the specific linkages between gender perspectives and weapons of mass destruction and document the long history of women's efforts on behalf of peace and disarmament. As time goes by, it is easy to lose track of past accomplishments, like the fact that ten women have received the Nobel Peace Prize. Incidentally, two of these -- Jane Adams and Emily Greene Balch -- were co-founders in 1915 of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, an organization that is represented here today by Felicity Hill.

The third Note addresses gender perspectives on small arms issues -- a tremendously important subject, given the utter devastation that small arms have caused among civilian communities around the world and also given the fact that the issue is ripe for action in the world community. Next July, the UN will host a major international conference on illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

A fourth Note examines efforts in the field of "disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration" (DDR) -- the United Nations uses such tools to assist the often-difficult transition from the end of armed conflicts to a stable peace. In its Declaration issued after its Millennium Summit last September, the Security Council stressed the "critical importance" of DDR and emphasized that such efforts should be integrated into the mandates of peacekeeping operations. A month later, the Council adopted Resolution 1325, which encouraged DDR planners to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependents.

The fifth Note addressed Landmines -- these are weapons that are on their way to being abolished worldwide given their brutal and indiscriminate effects on innocent civilians. The Note describes the issue, explains the legal framework for eliminating such weapons, and identifies a number of useful measures that are urgently needed to address the problem.

The sixth and last Note in this series addresses the linkages between disarmament, development and gender perspectives. Armed conflicts not only kill soldiers and civilians, but also can ruin national economies and set back development goals for decades. This Note provides a useful description of the problem, explores its implications, and offers some constructive ideas on practical action.

Amid all the troubles we face today both with respect to disarmament and the advancement of gender equality, it is easy to yield to cynicism and despair. Our effort today, however, takes a completely different approach, one that looks upon hard times as a call to action -- a reminder of our solemn responsibility to keep tilling the rough terrain that others have worked so hard before us, a job that can only be made easier by widening the community of tillers. This is an occasion for hope, for re-commitment to the ideals of the Charter, and for warm anticipation of the cooperation and success that lies ahead.

[Back to top](#)