

Women, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Preventing War

by

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to thank the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom for inviting me to this most auspicious event marking the 89th anniversary of your distinguished group. I am especially pleased to discuss with you today the contribution of the Department of Disarmament Affairs (DDA) to gender mainstreaming in the field of disarmament, and to address this issue when many in your organization are here to attend the final session of the Preparatory Committee of the 2005 NPT Review Conference.

Virtually everybody who has worked in the field of disarmament recognizes the important contributions that women have made over many decades in advancing this great goal. By the year 2000, DDA had become increasingly aware of the many concrete linkages between gender perspectives and various categories of weapons, ranging from small arms to the most devastating weapons of mass destruction. Recognizing these linkages, however, was not

enough -- we wished to explain them to a wider audience and draw appropriate conclusions in terms of practical action. In 2001 -- and in close cooperation with the Office of Ms. Angela King, then the Secretary-General's special adviser on gender issues, and Carolyn Hannan of the Division for the Advancement of Women -- DDA broke new ground by publishing its "Briefing Notes on Gender Perspectives on Disarmament."

This publication -- which we prominently display on our departmental web site and continue to distribute at many meetings -- reflected DDA's sincere commitment to advancing the debate on the role of men and women in disarmament, peace, and security. This successful first step paved the way for DDA's elaboration of its Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan (GAP), in 2003. As long as we have anniversaries on our minds, let me add that DDA just celebrated the first anniversary of the successful public launch of this plan.

The primary assumption behind this work is that gender mainstreaming produces a double benefit -- it strengthens our collective ability to achieve disarmament goals, while also promoting a deeper sensitivity to gender perspectives in this difficult field. My friends in WILPF may smile at this rather "late" awakening in the UN, since they were already convinced when they started covering the NPT process in 1970, and indeed, well before then.

Though we only have a year of experience in implementing the action plan, DDA has already learnt a number of lessons and gained valuable experience. Gender is indeed being mainstreamed now in most of DDA's activities.

This is apparent when regional conferences and meetings are organized, as specific gender related items are now a traditional feature of their agendas. It is seen in the fact that more and more women experts participate in the discussions, and recommendations of Expert Groups that work in this field. It is reflected in the increasing number of women NGOs that are invited to events that DDA organizes or co-sponsors. It is apparent in much of our work on small arms, which recognizes that the disastrous effects from the illicit trade and use of such weapons are borne by men and women differently -- and work that supports and promotes the many positive contributions women have made to eradicate this illicit trade.

Gender mainstreaming at DDA is also illustrated by the increasing number of women who participate in the UN Disarmament Fellowship Program -- a Program that now includes lectures and discussions on gender mainstreaming in disarmament, as well as on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 as part of its regular curriculum.

In addition to its individual undertakings, DDA also contributes actively to UN-wide efforts to mainstream gender perspectives, while also ensuring that disarmament and security are mainstreamed in gender-related discussions. DDA -- for example -- is an active member of inter-agency working groups and task forces on SC Resolution 1325, on gender equality and also on mine action. In this connection, I would like to mention that, as I speak, a set of "Guidelines for gender mainstreaming in Mine Action" is being finalized.

DDA is also finalizing the establishment of a data base on women experts in disarmament issues, and experts in disarmament and gender issues. Hopefully, when it is up-and-running, this database will be a useful contribution to wider UN efforts to implement Security Council Resolution 1325.

That being said, even if I am somewhat proud of the achievements of DDA in its new endeavor, I must also acknowledge the challenges and constraints that affect DDA's efforts. Our calls to encourage Member States to nominate women to expert positions or as high-level representatives are not always successful. The very concept of gender-mainstreaming is not always well understood and sometimes encounters resistance at the field level, and occasionally within the UN as well. Establishing linkages between gender and the daily work of DDA in the field of WMD and non-proliferation does not prove to be so easy. Thus the ultimate test of our ability to implement our G.A.P. will depend on our ability to bridge the "gap" between words and deeds.

I am well aware that a lot more work remains to be done. Understanding and knowledge need to be deepened and resources need to be allocated to this issue, which I sincerely believe will only grow in importance on the UN agenda in the years ahead.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to those of you who have supported, and continue to assist the United Nations, and DDA in particular, in its pioneering work. I also want to thank those Member States which will ensure that DDA has the capacity to pursue its goals, and finally, to express my appreciation to my UN colleagues, in OSAGI, DAW, UNIFEM, and OHRM¹ -- all of whom have always stood by our side in this difficult, but exciting, journey.

¹ OSAGI (Office of the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women), DAW (Division for the Advancement of Women), UNIFEM (UN Development Fund for Women), OHRM (Office of Human Resources Management).