

Opening Remarks

By

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Launch of a new report

***Applying a Disarmament Lens to Gender, Human Rights, Development,
Security, Education and Communication: Six Essays***

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to open this panel discussion today.

We are here for the official launching of a publication that addresses disarmament as a cross-cutting issue at the United Nations. The new report contains essays on—the role of women in disarmament and post-conflict recovery programmes; human rights; development; education; and communication. Though published by the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs, this publication represents the diversity of views coming from civil society. I am happy to say that some of the contributors are with us today.

In addition to expressing our gratitude to the essay writers, I would like to thank our colleagues at Global Action to Prevent War, Katherine Prizeman and Bob Zuber, without whom, this publication, and this event, would not have been possible.

As many of you know all too well, advancing these causes is not easy work. In disarmament, bad news abounds. It often seems that every advancement is balanced by steps in reverse.

The worst possible response would be to quit in the face of such difficulties. Instead, we must recognize good news when we see it, take inspiration from it, and build upon it.

Let me cite two recent examples.

First, the General Assembly adopted last week the Arms Trade Treaty by an overwhelming majority vote. This is a historic achievement of multilateral diplomacy, the result of seven years of complex negotiations and an unyielding belief in a good cause. The Treaty has been widely praised as robust, incorporating the most important weapons categories, including ammunition, and it also contains a rigorous set of standards for countries to use in processing export licenses. It has significant potential to contribute to peace and security and the work of the United Nations throughout the world. The Treaty is good news for the people that have been victimized by the unregulated arms trade, but also for the ability of the United Nations to advance the wider cause of disarmament. Given that the “regulation of armaments” is a mandate found in the UN Charter, the conclusion of this treaty is an enormously welcome development, even if it is many years overdue.

The second example of recent good news is the successful outcome of the Second Review Conference of the United Nations Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. The Program of Action offers a political framework for countering the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The positive outcome of that Review Conference is a welcome step forward in reaffirming the validity of this instrument and in providing a fresh impetus for States to prevent, combat and eradicate illicit trade in these weapons. The UN’s Office for Disarmament Affairs has been supporting these efforts for many years now.

But apart from these welcome developments, I see a number of other, perhaps less celebrated, but no less remarkable achievements that contribute to the goal of disarmament.

I think it is very significant indeed that disarmament is no longer seen as an isolated, narrowly defined field. The world is learning that progress in disarmament—or the lack of

it—has enormous implications in many other areas, including social and economic development, the protection of human rights, and in peace-building operations.

The essays in this publication explore these linkages in some detail and together contribute to the discourse on disarmament as a cross-cutting issue. They can stimulate discussions, advance understanding and inform policy choices of intergovernmental organizations and civil society working for a saner set of international priorities. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has put it, “the world is over-armed and peace is under-funded”.

One of the goals of the Office for Disarmament Affairs is to explore these cross-cutting issues and interweave them, within our mandate, into its work, alongside our more traditional priorities. Let me say a few words about two of these cross-cutting areas, which also feature in today’s publication: gender and disarmament, and disarmament education.

A gender perspective is increasingly finding its way into deliberations of the United Nations on peace and security issues. Special needs of women and girls are increasingly being taken into consideration when mandating peace-keeping and peace-building operations, in particular for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has for many years been championing women’s contributions to disarmament. We know for a fact that women have made significant contributions in advancing disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control policy and decision-making. We have seen their productive efforts over the years to achieve such goals as bans on atmospheric nuclear testing, landmines, cluster munitions—as well as in gaining international recognition of the horrific effects of armed conflict on women and girls, culminating in Security Council Resolution 1325.

Important work in this field is being done by our regional disarmament centres. The Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC), for example, has been assisting the Government of Togo in incorporating gender perspectives in the work of its national defense and security sectors. The United Nations Regional Center for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC) published recently a compilation of the experiences of 58 women from national governments, law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations in the region.

We are also developing what are called “International Small Arms Control Standards”, to serve as guidelines to practitioners and policymakers on fundamental aspects of small arms and light weapons control. These Standards are evolving and will include a module dedicated specifically to women and gender.

Moving on to disarmament and non-proliferation education, I view this as one of the most important mandates of the Office for Disarmament Affairs. We cooperate with Member States, civil society and the general public, using the traditional tools—such as print publications, conferences, workshops, media events, public speaking engagements, as well as modern technologies. At any given time, the Office hosts a number of interns, which provides an excellent opportunity for introducing a younger generation to the actual day-to-day work of disarmament. Our website has a page dedicated specifically to disarmament and education in all six United Nations official languages. We have launched a series of disarmament podcasts, in which experts address pressing disarmament issues.

I was particularly touched by two recent projects. In 2012, the Office collaborated with the Department for Public Information and the Harmony for Peace Foundation to organize a world-wide “Art for Peace” contest, in which children, teens, and young adults submitted drawings of their vision of the nuclear weapons-free world. The response from the public was overwhelmingly positive. Especially moving is the project carried out with the *hibakusha* – the surviving victims of the atomic bombs explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki—in which our Office is working to expand public access to the victims’ testimonies.

In conclusion, I would like to recognize again the contribution of these essays to the understanding of the linkages of disarmament with other issues on the UN agenda. These topics require further exploration, but the issues they raise constitute a useful introduction to the cross-cutting nature of our work in disarmament. It is my hope that they will inspire both thought and action, for both will surely be needed in the years as we continue our difficult work at the United Nations to fulfil the most solemn goal of the Charter: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.