

FACT SHEET

DISARMAMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

“The movement to abolish nuclear weapons is supported by an overwhelming majority of NPT States parties. Peoples everywhere understand the utterly self-destructive nature of this threat. I count on you to continue working to realize our vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world. The United Nations stands with you in this noble quest.”

Secretary-General's remarks to civil society organizations at international conference in New York's Cooper Union on 24 April 2015 entitled “For a Nuclear-Free, Peaceful, Just, and Sustainable World.”

The Role of Civil Society in Disarmament

The role of civil society and non-governmental organizations is explicitly recognized in Article 71 of the United Nations Charter. There were over 2,500 representatives from many societies and organizations present at the founding conference in San Francisco in 1945 who were instrumental in drafting the first seven words of the Charter, “We the peoples of the United Nations...”

Civil society plays a vital role in raising awareness and capturing the public conscience to advance disarmament and non-proliferation. Its involvement has been instrumental in efforts to end atmospheric nuclear weapons testing, the ban on anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions, and the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty in 2013.

Non-governmental organizations have been key stakeholders in almost all inter-governmental disarmament processes including the review cycle of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Programme of Action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, the work of the United Nations First Committee on Disarmament and International Security, and efforts that led to the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty, regulating the international trade in conventional arms.



UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Ray Acheson, Director of Reaching Critical Will, speaks on 30 March 2017 to the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination.

The Role of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) has worked in close partnership with civil society organizations to advance the cause of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. To serve this purpose, UNODA, in close collaboration with civil society and academic institutions:

- Organizes quarterly UNODA-NGO consultative meetings to ensure effective cooperation between UNODA and the NGO community, facilitates NGO participation, and provides access to intergovernmental meetings via on-line accreditation and registration in close cooperation with the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs;
- Makes arrangements for presentations by NGO representatives when invited to do so at inter-governmental and other meetings;
- Facilitates NGO side events and exhibits at UN Headquarters during disarmament-related meetings;
- Organizes seminars, film screenings, exhibitions with NGO sponsors;
- Provides a platform for disarmament-related NGO materials through UNODA's Disarmament Education website (<https://www.un.org/disarmament/education/>);
- Works with NGOs on numerous disarmament education/outreach projects such as Nobel Voices, Hibakusha Stories, Peace Lessons from Around the World, Mayors for Peace Exhibition, Art for Peace, etc;
- Coordinates production of one NGO publication, "Civil Society and Disarmament (<https://www.un.org/disarmament/publications/civilsociety/>)" per year.

UNODA & NGO Coordinators

UNODA works closely with the following NGO coordinators in order to facilitate coordination for NGO-related matters including possible speakers to address the disarmament-related conferences at the United Nations:

For meetings concerning nuclear weapons issues:

Ms. Ray Acheson, Reaching Critical Will project, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

For meetings concerning conventional weapons issues:

Ms. Rose Welsch, International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)

Civil Society Participation at Major Disarmament Meetings

- 332 representatives from 41 NGOs participated in the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference held in May 2017, Vienna.
- 222 representatives from 58 NGOs participated in the first substantive session of the United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading Towards their Total Elimination, held in March 2017, New York.

For more information: www.un.org/disarmament