Contribution to the Report of the Secretary-General on Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control

General observations

Since the last report on this topic, gender perspectives have become increasingly central to the discussions of Member States on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation issues. As a cross-cutting issue, gender considerations were raised in a number of disarmament bodies in a variety of contexts, including a focus on enhancing women’s participation in disarmament forums, the gendered impacts of weapons and the nexus between effective arms control and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, notably Goal 5 on gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence. Member States also demonstrated a renewed emphasis in 2016 and 2017 on gender considerations with regard to weapons of mass destruction.

Issues related to women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control were addressed in a variety of multilateral forums, including the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Conference on Disarmament and the review processes of disarmament instruments. The Secretary-General also addressed the relationship between gender, small arms and light weapons, and the women and peace and security and sustainable development agendas.

In the outcome document of the Sixth Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (A/CONF.192/BMS/2016/2, annex), held from 6 to 10 June 2016, States undertook: to take account of the differing impacts of illicit small arms and light weapons on women, men, girls and boys in policies and programmes designed to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons; to promote the meaningful participation and representation of women in policymaking, planning and implementation processes related to the Programme of Action; to encourage the collection of disaggregated data on gender and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons; and to seriously consider increasing funding for policies and programmes that take account of the differing impacts of illicit small arms and light weapons on women, men, girls and boys.

In his 2016 report to the General Assembly on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects (A/71/438), the Secretary-General noted that women’s groups could be powerful actors in monitoring peace agreements if given the access and support to do so. In his 2017 report to the General Assembly on this issue and on assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them (A/72/122), the Secretary-General highlighted progress achieved on gender-related issues in the outcome document of the Sixth Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms. In addition, the Secretary-General underscored
the acknowledgement of the link among the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (in particular Goal 16.4, which relates to the reduction of illicit arms flows), the Programme of Action on Small Arms and the International Tracing Instrument as one of the most significant achievements of the Meeting. States underlined that achieving Goal 16.4 would have positive effects on other development goals, including those concerning gender equality.

On 18 December 2017, the Security Council held an open debate on the issue of small arms and light weapons. The debate was informed by the biennial report of the Secretary-General on small arms and light weapons (S/2017/1025). In that report, the Secretary-General noted the highly gendered nature of the causes and consequences of the use of weapons and recommended that the gendered nature of armed violence and conflict inform policy and programmatic responses. He has also recommended the mainstreaming of gender into efforts to control small arms to ensure more effective outcomes.

Regarding the women and peace and security agenda, in his 2016 report to the Security Council on women and peace and security (S/2016/822), the Secretary-General welcomed the increased commitment to addressing the destabilizing impact of the illicit transfer, accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, including its negative impact on women and girls. In his 2017 report to the Security Council on this issue (S/2017/861), the Secretary-General noted that the prior year had seen the continued use of heavy and unconventional weapons, including chemical and explosive weapons, in civilian areas, with grave impacts on civilian populations, particularly in the Syrian Arab Republic. He reiterated the importance of focusing on the gender-specific effects of armed violence and the promotion of the role of women in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control to better understand how illicit arms flows and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons fed a continuum of violence.

At the initiative of the Presidency of Pakistan, and building on the success of the first meeting in 2015, the Conference on Disarmament held its second plenary meeting on women and disarmament on 19 May 2016. Member States highlighted the importance of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), as well as the Sustainable Development Goals, in providing frameworks for further promoting the relationship between gender and disarmament. States underlined the need to include women in decision-making processes and leadership positions to enhance the effectiveness of disarmament efforts. States also noted the different impacts of armed conflict, including the use of nuclear weapons, on women and men.

Since 2010, a focus on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons has brought renewed impetus to disarmament efforts. The groundswell of support for the humanitarian initiative has contributed to increased attention being paid to integrating cross-cutting issues, such as gender, public health and the environment, into multilateral processes in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

During the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, States parties used the forum to express support for the humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament, including its relationship to gender, at each of the preparatory meetings held in 2017 and 2018. Many States supported the call to ensure that women and men were equally represented in Treaty discussions to enhance the capability and effectiveness of Treaty processes and their outcomes. The disproportionate impact of ionizing radiation on women was also noted. On the margins of the second session of the Preparatory Committee, the Permanent Missions of Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and Sweden to the

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted on 7 July 2017, included a reference to the gendered impact of nuclear weapons, as well as to the strengthening of women’s participation in nuclear disarmament. In its preamble, States parties highlighted that the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons had a disproportionate impact on women and girls, including as a result of ionizing radiation, recognized that the equal, full and effective participation of both women and men was an essential factor for the promotion and attainment of sustainable peace and security, and committed to supporting and strengthening the effective participation of women in nuclear disarmament. In addition, article 6 of the Treaty commits States parties to adequately providing age- and gender-sensitive victim assistance.

Several States also raised gender considerations in their statements at the seventieth and seventy-first sessions of the General Assembly during the meetings of the First Committee. In both sessions, States emphasized the need to make greater progress on mainstreaming gender perspectives in disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation policies and programmes to ensure the participation of women in decision-making processes. During the seventieth session, the Permanent Mission of Ireland, in conjunction with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, held a side event on the topic of gender and nuclear weapons. The event was informed by the joint study by the Institute and the International Law and Policy Institute on “Gender, development and nuclear weapons: shared goals, shared concerns”. The study argued that a gendered impact was useful in understanding the impact of, discourse on and the actors dealing with nuclear weapons. It found that nuclear weapon detonations affected women and men differently, including biologically, that applying a gender lens to the discourse on nuclear weapons challenged the established pattern of power relations and that women continued to be underrepresented in multilateral disarmament forums.

During the seventy-first session, Canada delivered a joint statement on behalf of 43 States on the participation of women in disarmament deliberations, characterizing the approach of the disarmament machinery to gender representation and gender perspectives as tepid, highlighting the gendered impacts of various weapons and calling for a comprehensive approach to including gender perspectives in First Committee resolutions and other disarmament instruments.

On 5 December 2016, the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/55 on the ethical imperatives for a nuclear-weapon-free world, a follow up resolution to resolution 70/50, adopted in 2015. In resolution 71/55, the Assembly again declared that greater attention must be given to the impact of nuclear weapon detonation on women and the importance of their participation in discussions, decisions and actions on nuclear weapons.

Activities and initiatives of the Office for Disarmament Affairs

The Office for Disarmament Affairs continued to address the link between gender and disarmament. In 2016, the Office updated its gender mainstreaming action plan1 and, in consultation with UN-Women and the Department of Political Affairs Gender Unit, designed new mandatory training for its staff. In 2017, the Office adopted a gender parity strategy implementation plan to complement its Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan and to align the Office with the recommendations in the United Nations system-wide strategy on gender parity.

In addition to creating pathways to reach numerical targets for professional staff at all levels, the plan calls for concrete measures to be adopted in three strategic focus areas: leadership and accountability; recruitment and progression; and creating an enabling environment. The High Representative for Disarmament Affairs has also been a vocal advocate for strengthening the effective participation of women in disarmament, including by publishing an op-ed\(^2\) for young women on the need for greater participation in disarmament, as well as speaking at a side event on “Women in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty”, hosted by the Permanent Missions of Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and Sweden to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva.\(^3\)

Throughout 2017 and 2018, the Office supported the Secretary-General in the development of a new initiative to revitalize global disarmament and renew efforts to accomplish “disarmament that saves lives”. In May 2018, the Secretary-General launched his disarmament agenda, “Securing our Common Future”, which prioritizes ensuring the equal, full and effective participation of women in all decision-making processes related to disarmament. The Agenda also calls for States to incorporate gender perspectives in the development of national legislation and policies on disarmament and arms control.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has also made an effort to answer the calls of Member States to improve capacity to consider the gendered impacts of weapons, as well as to collect gender-disaggregated data. Following the Sixth Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms, and in response to the recommendations made in the outcome document of that Meeting, the Office revised the Programme of Action national reporting template to include for the first time two questions regarding gender considerations. Of 77 national reports received as at 31 March 2018 for the 2016–2017 reporting period, 33 States affirmed that gender considerations are taken into account in policymaking, planning and implementation of the Programme of Action. Nineteen States provided specific examples or relevant criteria. Eleven States replied that they collected disaggregated data on gender and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. These voluntary national reports are made publicly available on the Office’s website.\(^4\)

The United Nations internal mechanism for Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) adopted a new International Small Arms Control Standards module on men, women and the gendered nature of small arms and light weapons.\(^5\) The module provides guidance for practitioners on the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender-sensitive small arms and light weapons control initiatives. Additionally, the 2017 call for proposals for the United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation required for the first time the inclusion of gender considerations for all funding applications.

The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa continued to support gender-focused activities and the participation of women at all levels of decision-making. In December 2017, the Centre organized a capacity-building workshop to help develop substantive and advocacy skills for supporting gender perspectives in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control processes in the Lake Chad basin. Civil society representatives from four Lake Chad basin countries — Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria — were joined by government representatives of those same countries to discuss several themes that


\(^4\)http://smallarms.un-arm.org/national-reports.

\(^5\)www.smallarmsstandards.org/isacs.
underscored the important role of women in fighting the proliferation of arms and ammunition. The workshop, in which 85 per cent of participants were women, was part of a project funded by Sweden, to increase the participation of women at all levels of decision-making in conflict resolution. The initiative, entitled “Mainstreaming gender perspectives in preventing the acquisition of arms and ammunitions by terrorist groups in the Lake Chad Basin”, is also designed to reduce illicit arms trafficking in support of the achievement of target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific promoted a gender perspective in all its activities by ensuring the highest possible female participation at its events and by selecting female experts whenever possible. The gendered impact of the illicit small arms trade was a central element of two subregional workshops organized by the Centre in 2017 to strengthen the implementation of the Programme of Action and to reduce illicit arms flows.

The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean continued to include gender issues as a cross-cutting theme in the design and implementation of all its projects. In December 2017, the Centre organized its first regional symposium on women and security, which was held in Peru and brought together more than 40 women from the region dedicated to advancing the global peace and security agenda. The Centre also made a significant effort to include women in its activities: over the course of 2017, on average, female participation reached 40 per cent.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs at the Vienna International Centre continued to promote disarmament and non-proliferation education, including through the implementation of its Women Scholarship for Peace initiative to train young female professionals on peace, disarmament and non-proliferation. In 2016, 170 early career female professionals from the global South received scholarships through the programme. In 2017, the Office began implementing a similar training course for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe region, whereby 60 scholarships have been provided to train local early career female professionals working on issues related to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.