

Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace in UN Office for Disarmament Affairs
Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace Thematic Papers

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Introduction: Disarmament and Sustaining Peace

Today, we see heightened tensions and dangers in the geopolitical sphere. Conflicts are progressively protracted and further complicated by a proliferation of armed groups. International arms-control architecture and global norms are being challenged and undermined. Amidst this, regional challenges persist and tensions between nuclear-armed rivals have intensified.

The cost of this violence is significant: the economic impact of violence on the world economy was estimated to be \$14.76 trillion – or about 12.4% of the world GDP in 2017¹. The majority of this is in military expenditure.

Peace cannot be sustained in an environment fraught with weapons. In this context, disarmament has become an increasingly key part of realizing the promise of the UN Charter for a secure and peaceful world. From the founding of the UN, disarmament and arms control has helped prevent and end crises and armed conflict. Measures for disarmament help maintain international peace and security, uphold the principles of humanity, protect civilians, and promote sustainable development.

The Secretary-General’s Disarmament Agenda, *Securing our Common Future*, serves as a roadmap outlining practical measures to foster peace and reduce the risk posed by weapons of mass destruction, conventional arms and emerging weapons technologies. Aligning with the goals of sustaining peace, the Agenda seeks to put people at the center of the Organization’s disarmament efforts in order to save lives and create a peaceful world for future generations. The Agenda also places a firm emphasis on partnerships for achieving its objectives: with other UN entities for better coherence and impact, and with women, youth and civil society organizations to ensure a diversity of voices are included. Furthermore, key disarmament objectives in the Agenda are closely linked to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and advancing common human, national and collective security.

In this turbulent world, disarmament is a path towards sustaining peace. Both sustaining peace and disarmament aim to prevent conflict, promote people-centered approaches, and advocate for respecting international norms and standards. Though the Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA) is a non-operational UN entity, it nonetheless contributes to the larger UN efforts for sustaining peace. This thematic paper focuses on two areas where ODA is making the most impact: financing for peacebuilding and partnerships.

ODA’s Efforts Contributing to Sustaining Peace

A) Financing for Peacebuilding

¹ Institute for Economics and Peace, “[The Economic Value of Peace 2018](#),” October 2018.

A major pillar of the Secretary-General's Disarmament Agenda is a call for *disarmament that saves lives*, which encompasses the need for a paradigm shift from short-term and compartmentalized approaches to long-term, holistic and integrated small-arms control and armed violence reduction programmes. Such a shift requires a change in strategic orientation and approach as well as accompanying funding and delivery mechanisms.

In this regard, systematic integration of a small-arms and light-weapons control perspective into the UN's operational peacebuilding and sustaining peace work at field level is key to delivering more coherent and sustainable responses. ODA supports such coherence through the provision of expertise, as well as through innovative financing mechanisms that enable and catalyze more comprehensive UN approaches to community violence reduction; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; security sector reform; and capacity-building.

Two examples of such innovative financing for peacebuilding enabling mechanisms are the long-standing UN Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR), as well as the recently-launched "Saving Lives Entity" (SALIENT). Since UNSCAR's inception in 2013, \$12.5 million have been allocated to sponsor nearly 100 projects, implemented by civil society, (sub-)regional organizations, as well as UN entities. Over 140 States have benefitted from UNSCAR-funded initiatives in the areas of small arms control and armed violence reduction.

To support the paradigm shift towards longer-term mainstreaming of small arms control in broader peacebuilding work, ODA, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched SALIENT, in 2019 – a global fund² that will allocate grants to catalyse comprehensive approaches to small-arms and armed-violence reduction in most-affected countries.

Working on both the demand and supply sides of the illicit trafficking and misuse of small arms, SALIENT will support national initiatives in a holistic and transformative manner, including with a strong gender lens. The work leverages the complementary expertise and operational capacities of ODA and field-based UN entities in order to ensure that small arms control is integrated into peace and security and development policy and programming. As such, it serves as an enabler for a coherent strategic approach to peacebuilding and sustaining peace – one in which the small arms control perspective is mainstreamed as an integral component.

Specifically, SALIENT will use the SDGs – notably SDGs 16+ and 5, as well as national SDG Action Plans – to guarantee national ownership, while ensuring an integrative approach to small arms control and armed violence reduction. Sustainable outcomes will be supported through, inter alia, programmes aimed at advancing policy and legislation to regulate access to small arms and ammunition, including the gendered dimension of armed violence, as well as strengthening the capacities of countries to implement measures for regulating and controlling small arms and ammunitions (for instance through improving the security of weapons armouries, improved marking and record-keeping). SALIENT will also support programmes to increase the

² In the report, the Secretary-General commits to establishing a dedicated facility within his Peacebuilding Fund to support government action to tackle small arms and light weapons as part of a comprehensive approach to addressing armed violence and the diversion of weapons, and as a contribution to SDG Target 16.4.

effectiveness and accountability of criminal justice systems, which are vital to peacebuilding through establishing the norms of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, protecting people from violence and creating safe environments for all citizens.

Through ensuring that conventional arms control perspectives are mainstreamed in overall UN strategy and underpinned by innovative financing tools, operational responses will be far better placed to meet the challenges inherent in building and sustaining peace.

B) Partnerships for Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

A second dimension of more coherent, impactful approaches is the role of partnerships. To this end, ODA is committed to ensuring an inclusive approach to its work both in its internal structures, as well as in multilateral disarmament discussions and decision-making processes.

Civil Society

The General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed the contributions of civil society not only to sustaining peace, but also to the field of multilateral disarmament in biannual resolutions on the UN Disarmament Information Programme and the UN study on disarmament and non-proliferation education. Recognizing the crucial role of civil society in advocating and informing progress in disarmament and non-proliferation, ODA facilitates access by non-governmental actors to UN disarmament processes and meetings while advocating for greater integration of experts, industry and civil society.

In line with the Secretary-General's Disarmament Agenda, ODA undertook a mapping exercise in 2019 to identify good practices for ensuring such integration. ODA also helps civil society to access and participate in intergovernmental disarmament processes by, inter alia, facilitating online accreditation and registration; arranging for presentations by NGO representatives when Member States invite them to address inter-governmental and other meetings; and providing administrative support for NGO side events and exhibits at UN Headquarters.

In addition, ODA and its three Regional Centres cooperate with civil society organizations in the provision of capacity-building and technical assistance to Member States. The Centres also partner with civil society to promote awareness-raising and advocacy on disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control issues. The Vienna Office has worked with a wide range of civil society organizations to provide training on disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control education, in particular to women from the Global South.

Through its online and print publications, ODA offers a platform for civil society actors to access and contribute to a range of perspectives on the activities. Its ad hoc Occasional Papers regularly feature the edited reports and lectures of NGO representatives and academic scholars, and its "Civil Society and Disarmament" series spotlights the activities of civil society in the context of relevant issues and perspectives.

Youth

Today, we see the largest generation in history: 1.8 billion young people, 90 percent of whom reside in developing countries. Therefore, it is imperative to work with, and for, youth, increasing our peace dividends which can be leveraged to build the foundations for lasting peace within our communities, nations, regions and the world. Young people around the world especially have a critical role to play in raising awareness and developing new strategies to

reduce threats from weapons of mass destruction and conventional arms, including their proliferation.

Recognizing the importance of young people in affecting change, ODA places youth engagement at the core of its disarmament education efforts, with the goal to increase youth participation and create spaces both on and offline for young people to make meaningful substantive contributions to facilitating progress on disarmament.

In addition, ODA has also launched the Youth4Disarmament initiative, which intends to connect geographically diverse young people with experts to learn about today's international security challenges, the work of the UN and how they can be active participants. In 2019, the programme undertook three events: in the first event, participants joined expert-led discussions on the implications of artificial intelligence for international peace and security. A second event, "Youth Champions for Securing our Common Future," followed and coincided with the meetings of the General Assembly First Committee. Seventy-five youth participants between the ages of 18 and 30 were teamed up with UN officials, diplomats and representatives of civil society networks. The third event, "Disarmament That Saves Lives," focused on raising awareness as to how disarmament and arms control can contribute to saving lives and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Ultimately, ODA's engagement with youth aims to support the request made by the General Assembly (A/Res/74/64) to the Secretary-General to promote the meaningful and inclusive participation and empowerment of youth on disarmament and non-proliferation issues. ODA's disarmament education programme imparts knowledge and skills to young people and empowers them to make their contribution to disarmament and sustaining peace, as national and world citizens.

Gender

ODA understands that women and men participate in and are affected by conflict differently. For instance, the misuse and illicit trafficking in small arms have considerable deleterious and different impact on girls, boys, women and men which, if not addressed properly, negates prospects for sustainable peace and development. Addressing the gendered dynamics of conflict and of weapons systems means ensuring that the perspectives, experiences and needs of all people, regardless of gender, are addressed and met through disarmament and peacebuilding activities. Therefore, ODA has gender equality at the core of its objectives and carries it out by mainstreaming a range of gender approaches.

ODA prioritizes improving the equal and meaningful participation of both men and women in disarmament decision-making, in line with sustaining peace's recognition of the important role that women have in peacebuilding. Though Member States are ultimately the decision-makers regarding composition of their delegations in disarmament fora, ODA now monitors and records sex-disaggregated data from meetings and other fora in order to track participation and trends. Ensuring that Groups of Governmental Experts (GGEs) facilitated by ODA meet equal representation of women and men is the goal for 2020 and thereafter, and there has already been successes in this regard in the GGE on the continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development as 53 percent of participants identified as

women, and the GGE on advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security, which approached balance with 44 percent women. Ensuring that women are equally represented and listened to is not only a normative imperative, but also an operational necessity that enables a more effective approach by allowing for women and men to be equal partners in these processes and any follow-on efforts.

Further, ODA provides gender training to governments to ensure that women are capacitated to participate in the disarmament field and that all national programmes are duly sensitive to the different needs of men and women. ODA also supports various opportunities to better link both the WPS and disarmament agendas, capitalizing on the successes of both to enhance a sustainable peace. For instance, the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa supported the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), including by holding a workshop in Lomé in February 2018 to support Togo in drafting a national action plan for implementing the resolution and proposed ways to incorporate the SDGs more systematically in the plan. Meanwhile, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean manage a multi-year project, *Building Momentum for the Regional Implementation of A/RES/65/69 on Women, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control*³, including technical training activities that the Centre hosted in Colombia and El Salvador. A new EU-funded project on support of gender mainstreamed policies, programmes and actions in the fight against small arms trafficking and misuse will continue regional and sub-regional efforts to enhance disarmament and WPS.

ODA advocates for the incorporation of gender considerations into all arms control initiatives and programmes, as evidenced by the success in including gender considerations in the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA). As an operational response, ODA launched in 2019 a multi-year initiative to assist States in meeting the global commitments on small arms control and gender in line with the Women, Peace and Security agenda. It is executed in partnership with the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA). Activities include workshops, trainings, assistance programmes in support of national authorities and civil society to mainstream gender considerations in their small arms control-related work, initiatives to promote the linkages in implementing the small arms and the WPS agenda, as well as synergies with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Regional Organizations

One recommendation stemming from the Secretary-General's 2018 report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace called on the UN to engage with "regional and subregional organizations on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, with a focus on regular dialogue, enhanced information-sharing, improved coordination, and joint approaches and activities, on the basis of comparative advantages." In this regard, ODA has developed a close working relationship with the African Union, providing support for implementing the Africa Amnesty Month and organizing, through its Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, capacity-building activities in support

³ <http://unlirc.screativa.com/en/publicaciones/building-momentum-for-the-regional-implementation-of-a-res-65-69-on-women-disarmament-non-proliferation-and-arms-control/>

of the implementation of the Kinshasa Convention on the fight against illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa within the framework of the AU Silencing the Guns Master Roadmap.

Most current small-arms control activities focus on military and police-owned weapons. But worldwide, some 85 percent of small arms are in civilian hands⁴. In Africa, citizens own more than 40 million small arms⁵. Only few civilian owners are licensed.

In 2017, the Assembly of the African Union declared the month of September of each year until 2020, the “Africa Amnesty Month” for the surrender and collection of illicit small arms and light weapons⁶, in line with African and international best practices. “Amnesty Month” is seen as a contribution to the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns by 2020 (“Lusaka Roadmap”).

The Africa Amnesty Month is a rare opportunity to work in a coherent, sustainable manner on reducing illicit civilian ownership of small arms, particularly in key post-conflict areas across the African continent. Sizable quantities of illicit small arms in post-conflict societies create temptations for their use, fuel gun black market practices, challenge peace-building efforts and constitute formidable risks for relapse back to conflict. Illicit ownership in both peaceful and conflict settings contributes to the outbreak or escalation of armed violence, including gender-based violence.

Thus, reducing illicit trafficking of small arms in every society entails: removing the tools that enable the escalation of violence; giving dialogue a chance at all levels of social disagreement; creating an environment conducive for peace and development; and preparing States to meet Target 16.4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for the reduction of illicit flows of arms.

Under the Africa Amnesty Month, the United Nations and the African Union Commission will assist States in organizing media and public-awareness programmes on the harmful consequences of small arms misuse and illicit ownership and trafficking; build States capacities in proper weapons collection and destruction and encourage stricter physical security and stockpile management practices.

Conclusion

While arms trafficking and armed violence are often symptoms of deeper societal problems that must be addressed at an early stage before they morph into open conflict, peacebuilding and sustaining peace cannot be achieved without substantial investment of efforts and resources in disarmament and arms control.

By advocating for States to pursue security through diplomacy and dialogue, we can pave a more peaceful pathway forward. Prioritizing political solutions over military action also helps ensure

⁴ Estimating Global Civilian-held Firearms Numbers, by Aaron Karp. Briefing Paper, June 2018. (See also the Annexe with data by country/territory.)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The Decision of the AU Assembly (Assembly/AU/ Dec. 645(XXXIX)).

the least diversion of the world's human and economic resources towards arms. These additional resources could help finance sustainable development and ultimately promote sustainable peace.