

First Committee

BRIEFING BOOK / 2024



Reaching Critical Will

Reaching Critical Will, a programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

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“As we live and die through this current and future horror, those participating in the work of the United Nations cannot afford to despair.... We need action from everyone to stop this global bloodshed, and we need it now.”

– Ray Acheson

Introduction

RAY ACHESON

One week into last year's First Committee session, Israel began to bombard Gaza in retaliation for an attack by Hamas that crossed a border wall built by the settler colonial occupier. Israel's bombardment, nearly one year later, continues relentlessly, along with its construction of new unlawful settlements, attacks against civilians in the West Bank, the destruction of water, sanitation, and agriculture systems throughout Palestine, and horrific sexual violence against those it holds in detention. Israel is waging a genocidal war against Palestinian people and land, which is facilitated by several other UN member states that have continued to supply Israel with weapons, ammunition, fuel, and other military material in open defiance of international law, national laws, UN special rapporteurs, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The United States alone has **sent** over 50,000 tons of weapons and military equipment to Israel since 7 October 2023.

Meanwhile, genocides and wars in Ukraine, Sudan, Congo, Myanmar, and more are also killing, injuring displacing, and destroying lives, cities, and societies. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons globally is fueling armed violence across communities and countries, disproportionately impacting the most marginalised and oppressed

around the world. Cluster bombs, landmines, and chemical weapons have been used in recent conflicts despite being banned; explosive weapons are being used to pummel populated areas despite international humanitarian law and the new political declaration aimed specifically at ending such attacks. Foreign policies based on militarism have fed the monsters of war for so many decades that we now find ourselves lurching not toward, but into, a kind of permanent world war.

From all this carnage, the military-industrial complex rakes in unprecedented profits: the leading 15 weapon producing companies are **forecast** to "log free cash flow" of at least 52 billion USD in 2026—almost double their combined cash flow at the end of 2021. Overall, military spending last year reached an **all-time high** of 2.443 trillion USD. The nine nuclear-armed states **spent** about 91.4 billion USD on their arsenals, while billions more dollars are **going to** tech companies to build new weapon systems powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and autonomous technologies.

As we live and die through this current and future horror, those participating in the work of the United Nations cannot afford to despair, to wring their hands and abdicate responsibility to those committing these atrocities. We need action from everyone to stop this global

bloodshed, and we need it now. We need to learn the lessons of our past—the lessons of rising facism, the slaughter of groups, the threats of annihilation, the concentration of peoples into camps—and we must ensure that “never again” actually, in fact, means now.

The First Committee is a place for this kind of action. The United Nations, after all, was established to prevent war and demilitarise the world after the butchery of World War II. Since then, the UN has facilitated the adoption and implementation of many commitments and constraints against violence. The UN’s current flailings and failures are not an excuse for inaction but a motivation to do better. Because the alternative is death—of the institution, and of the world.

To this end, delegates to the First Committee should take inspiration from the activists, workers, and politicians that have combined efforts to **prevent the supply of military jet fuel** to Israel and from the Palestinian Youth Movement’s campaign to **stop the shipping company Maersk** from transporting weapons to Israel. Delegates should look to the government of Namibia’s **refusal** to allow a ship with weapons bound for Israel to dock at its ports, Colombia’s **refusal to supply Israel with coal**, and South Africa’s **initiative** at the ICJ to hold Israel’s government to account for its violations of international law.

There are many other bold, creative actions by people around the world against war and violence, but we need more—and we need solidarity among these actors and actions. We need to coordinate efforts to end war profiteering,

to end the provision of weapons to warmongers, to end the Orwellian idea that war is the path to “peace” and that weapons are the way to “security”.

Last year’s First Committee was challenging and fraught, even as progress was made in some areas, such as setting up a process for a UN Secretary-General’s report on autonomous weapon systems. This year’s First Committee must do so much better. Delegations need to not get sucked into the fracturous dramas created by those representing violent, militarised states, but instead work among the majority to generate meaningful new collective disarmament projects to circumvent and upend the minority’s death projects.

Beyond words on pages, beyond condemnations and critiques, we need real action: we need resolutions that dig deep into confronting and dismantling the ideas and the material structures of power and violence that cause grave suffering around the world. We need statements that commit governments to enact real policy changes outside of the conference room. We need negotiations on new treaties and implementation of existing ones, and consequences for those who treat international law as a constraint only on others. Equality before the law is a key principle of the United Nations, and this First Committee is the time to remind all delegations that we can stand together and **“rage against the dying of the light.”**



Nuclear Weapons

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO ABOLISH NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Background

As of early 2024, nine countries (China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, France, India, Israel, Pakistan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) possessed **more than 12,000** nuclear weapons. Each is **currently investing** in the modernisation of their nuclear warheads and/or delivery systems such as bombers, missiles, and submarines. In 2023, the nuclear-armed states spent an **estimated 91.4 billion** USD on these weapons, spending that flowed from governments to weapon contractors, as well as think tanks and lobbyists. Six additional states—Belgium, Belarus, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey—host foreign nuclear weapons on their territories, including **about 100 deployed** US nuclear weapons in the five countries part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). **Twenty-eight other countries** allow the potential use of nuclear weapons on their behalf as part of military alliances and other agreements, including NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).

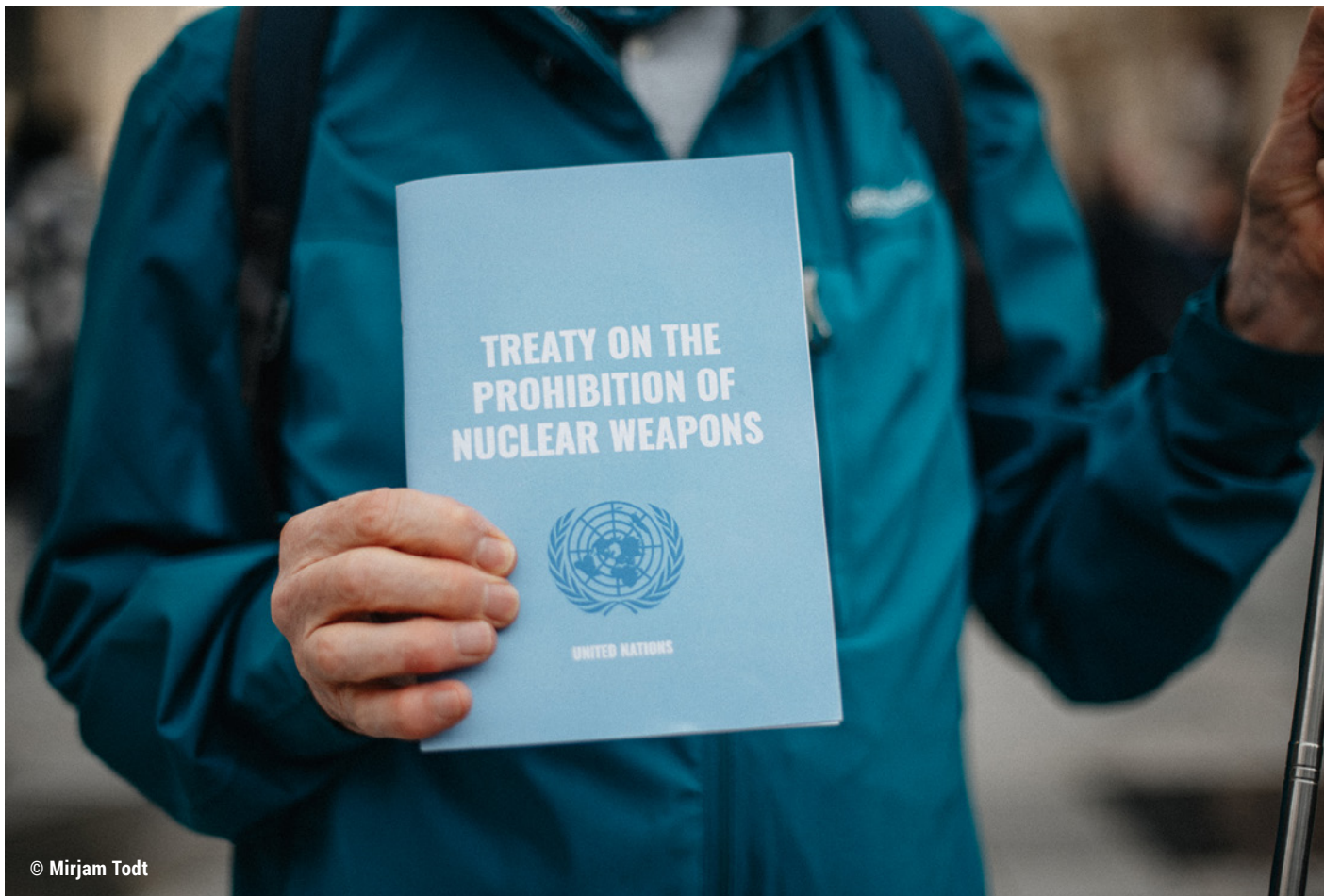
Any use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences. With rising global tensions, the risk of nuclear weapon use is increasing. No state or agency could address the **immediate or long-**

term consequences of the detonation of a nuclear weapon. After several years of a global pandemic, the world cannot afford **the global health crisis** that would follow the use of nuclear weapons. The body of research on the **humanitarian and environmental impacts** of nuclear weapons, including the devastating impact on global climate and the disproportionate impact of radiation on Indigenous communities and on women and girls, continues to grow. In addition, new research shows that technological developments, including offensive cyber capabilities and artificial intelligence, can obfuscate decision making and reduce decision making time, **increasing the risk** of accidental nuclear weapon use.

There are several international treaties that constrain nuclear weapons activities, including the regional nuclear weapon free zone treaties, the 1968 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), and most recently, the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

Current Context

In 2024, the risk of nuclear use, and the harms posed by nuclear weapons even when they are not used, continued to



intensify. Yet nuclear-armed states and those endorsing their nuclear policies did not take any significant action towards nuclear disarmament. Two nuclear-armed states, Israel and Russia, are currently engaged in wars of aggression, increasing the risk of nuclear use. Some European politicians, in Sweden, Poland, France, and Germany, **expressed** in 2024 an inclination or willingness to station nuclear weapons on their territories, expanding even further where nuclear weapons could be stationed. These political comments came **in opposition to** some of these countries' domestic popular will.

In the meantime, nuclear-armed states continued to upgrade their arsenals, adding new capabilities to warheads and delivery vehicles, including with

numerous missile tests, or increasing their number of warheads and delivery systems. Some are expanding or refurbishing their facilities for nuclear weapon production or testing.

The 191 states parties to the NPT had an opportunity to condemn these negative developments and work towards proactive steps to advance nuclear disarmament when they met in Geneva in July–August 2024 for the second Preparatory Committee of the NPT's Eleventh Review Conference cycle. But the forum **failed to adopt** by consensus a factual summary of the meeting, allowing it to be submitted only as a Chair's working paper. In stark contrast, states parties to the TPNW has **met frequently** throughout 2024 to advance intersessional work to implement the

Treaty since the Second Meeting of States Parties from 27 November to 1 December 2023 in New York. In 2024, the Treaty's membership has continued to grow; as of August 2024, it had 70 states parties and 93 signatories. TPNW states parties will meet for its **Third Meeting of States Parties** in New York in March 2025 before its first Review Conference.

All UN member states have the chance to welcome the countries that have joined the TPNW and the ongoing and productive work of the TPNW, and to call all states to join the Treaty as soon as possible and to engage in outreach to support other countries' adherence by supporting the annual First Committee resolution on the TPNW. Likewise, they can express their deep concern about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, emphasise that the only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will not be used again is their total elimination, and urge states to work to eliminate nuclear weapons through the annual First Committee resolution on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

New to this year's First Committee is a report by the UN Secretary-General on views of member states on addressing nuclear legacies: providing victim assistance and environmental remediation to member states affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons. The report, mandated by UN General Assembly resolution 78/240, adopted last year, summarises the views of fifteen governments that submitted inputs and provides observations and views of the Secretary-General in response, including to note the efforts underway by TPNW states parties to coordinate

international victim assistance efforts, and the benefits of the proposed voluntary international trust fund in that regard. UN member states will also have the opportunity this year to establish an independent scientific panel on the effects of nuclear war, through the adoption of a First Committee resolution. The panel would examine 21st century science on the climactic, environmental, radiological, and physical effects of nuclear war, and publish a comprehensive report, including areas requiring future research. The last UN study on this topic was published in the 1980s.

Recommendations

During the First Committee, delegations should:

- Express deep concern at the ongoing risk for humanity represented by the continued possession and modernisation of nuclear weapons and the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences that would result from the use of nuclear weapons;
- Reiterate the unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-armed states to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, to which all states parties are committed under NPT Article VI;
- Condemn nuclear-armed states' qualitative and quantitative advancement and modernisation of their nuclear arsenals, including the 91.4 billion USD nuclear-armed states spent on nuclear weapons in 2023;

- Condemn unequivocally threats to use nuclear weapons;
- Call on nuclear-armed states to undertake nuclear disarmament, for relevant states to stop hosting other countries' nuclear weapons on their territories, and for all states to reject the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons on their behalf;
- Call on all states to sign, ratify, and adhere to the TPNW, and note that the TPNW complements and strengthens the NPT as an effective measure for nuclear disarmament as foreseen in NPT Article VI;
- Urge all states to attend the Third Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW;
- Co-sponsor and vote in favour of resolutions that welcome the entry into force of the TPNW, that recognise the humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, and the resolution about nuclear war effects and scientific research;
- Include a reference to the TPNW in resolutions related to nuclear weapons;
- Welcome efforts to address the rights and needs of affected communities through victim assistance, environmental remediation, and international cooperation and assistance as provided for by the TPNW.

Beyond the First Committee, states should:

- Sign, ratify, and accede to the TPNW and work for its universalisation, including by encouraging other states to join it;
- As TPNW states parties, participate actively in the intersessional work ahead of the TPNW Third Meeting of States Parties;
- Support victim assistance and environmental remediation efforts to communities affected by nuclear weapon production, testing, and use; and
- Reject nuclear weapons and work to end any military activities related to their development and use.

Author: Alicia Sanders-Zakre



Biological Weapons

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

Background

Biological weapons combine bacteria or viruses with a delivery mechanism to inflict harm and are prohibited under international law.

The principal legal instrument banning biological warfare is the 1972 Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention (BWC). The BWC bans the development of biological agents and toxins, of any type or quantity including their components, that do not have protective, medical or other peaceful purposes, and any weapons or means of delivery for such agents and toxins. The Treaty has 187 states parties and four signatory states. Six states have neither signed nor ratified the convention. The BWC is relatively short, comprising only 15 articles. Over the years, the Convention's articles have been supplemented by a series of additional understandings reached at Review Conferences.

The wider regime includes the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons in war, and a growing array of other measures, such as export control regimes and UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1540, which serve to bolster aspects of the prohibition and prevention of biological weapons.

The First Committee traditionally considers an annual resolution on the BWC and a biennial resolution on the Geneva Protocol. The BWC resolution is usually uncontested and has so far always been adopted by consensus. The Geneva Protocol resolution has so far always been agreed, but usually with a small number of regular abstentions.

Current Context

Current geopolitical tensions continue to affect biological weapon disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. Russia's long-standing and strategic campaign about what it considers nefarious activities at Western "biolabs" significantly escalated following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. By September 2022, this campaign had led to a formal consultative meeting under Article V of the BWC and to several rounds of discussions in the UN Security Council. This was followed by an unprecedented request from Russia to the Security Council in October 2022 for an investigation into "military biological activities in Ukraine."

According to some, Russia's initiatives failed on all accounts. There was no conclusion reached at the formal consultative meeting; the UN Secretary-General's mechanism to investigate bioweapon allegations remained intact;

and UN Security Council members did not find Russia's evidence convincing and voted against Russia's proposal.

However, Russia remains a major actor in the BWC, and one that plays the long game. The Russian government's posturing has been driving the narrative on BWC verification and compliance, and affecting the meeting mechanics of the intersessional working group, established in 2022 by the Ninth BWC Review Conference, to strengthen the Convention.

Russia's theatrics at the BWC Meeting of States Parties (MSP) in December 2023 meant the programme of work and rules of procedure could not be adopted, and the meeting was only able to agree to a thin procedural report with a decision on dates for the BWC meetings in 2024. There was no general debate at the MSP, and no opportunity for international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to deliver statements, which had been long-standing past practice. Instead, states submitted their statements as working papers, and the European Union and NGOs laid out printed copies of their statements at the back of the room and actively promoted them on social media. A joint statement by nearly 60 states on "The value of inclusive participation" in BWC meetings was submitted as a working paper.

While remaining BWC sessions in the 2023–2026 intersessional cycle seem to be still going ahead, they are likely to face similar politically motivated manoeuvres, and it seems clear that Russia will continue to demand clarifications from the United States on its "military biological activities in Ukraine," at least

as long as the war in Ukraine continues. These allegations and their impacts on the international security community are part of the conflict; they are not a side show but a dimension of the clash between two different visions of the world. In terms of biosecurity, imagining reconciliation or productive discussions on BWC verification and compliance seems difficult as long as this clash continues, and it risks significantly eroding what remains of the international architecture against the proliferation of biological weapons.



First Committee delegations must actively support the new intersessional process and seize the opportunity it affords to reclaim the narrative on verification and compliance.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Reaffirm their commitment to the BWC and the Geneva Protocol;
- Report on measures taken to implement and strengthen BWC provisions;
- Prepare the ground for constructive discussions on confidence-building, transparency, compliance, and verification at the upcoming BWC working group meeting in December 2024;
- Provide swift and strong rebuttals of baseless non-compliance claims in the First Committee. Such claims erode confidence in essential public and animal health infrastructure and significantly undermine global biosafety and biosecurity efforts. Furthermore, framing development assistance as a form of non-compliance with the BWC seriously undermines development aid and cooperation efforts on peaceful biological research under Article X of the BWC; and
- Counter any efforts to further erode the international architecture against the proliferation of biological weapons.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Provide swift and strong rebuttals of baseless non-compliance claims in BWC meetings, the UN General Assembly, and the UN Security Council;

- Bolster international structures to systematically register, monitor, and inspect maximum-containment facilities and high-risk biological activities including research with pandemic risks;
- Outline action plans, and subsequent implementation plans, to strengthen national, regional, and international capacities for early identification, response, and mitigation of disease outbreaks;
- Establish an international body, at the nexus between public health and security and ideally UN-based, with a mandate to investigate suspected outbreaks of international concern as soon as initial reports emerge, and regardless of any indications of it being natural, accidental, or deliberate;
- Support and strengthen the UN Secretary General's Mechanism (UNSGM) to conduct independent, in-depth investigations of suspected bioweapons use; and
- Heighten political costs of a biological weapons attack and develop a framework to coordinate an international response following any use of biological weapons.

Author: Filippa Lentzos



Chemical Weapons

CBW EVENTS

Background

Chemical weapons are weapons designed to cause death, injury, temporary incapacitation, or sensory irritation through toxic action on living processes.

They were the first category of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to be banned under international verification arrangements and their destruction carried out under international supervision. After decades of negotiation, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was opened for signature in 1993 and entered into force in 1997. The CWC prohibitions are broad, banning the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer, or use of these weapons and any related munitions. The Convention is underpinned by a concept known as the “general purpose criterion,” which holds that all toxic chemicals are assumed to be chemical weapons unless for a permitted purpose and held in types and quantities appropriate to the purpose. Many chemicals that fall within the CWC definition of chemical weapons have peaceful uses and are sometimes referred to as “dual-use” or “multiple use”.

The CWC established the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), of which all CWC states parties are members. The OPCW has a Technical Secretariat, which carries out the verification and monitoring activities specified in the Convention. As of 1 September 2024, the CWC has 193 states parties. The non-parties are the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt, Israel (signatory), and South Sudan.

After the CWC entered into force in April 1997, debate during the First Committee was primarily concerned with ensuring that the stockpiles of chemical weapons by the major possessors were fully destroyed with the initial ten-year timescale. However, technical, safety, environmental, and cost issues delayed destruction of the two major stockpiles held by the United States (US) and Russia. Following the US completing destruction of its declared stocks in September 2023, all declared chemical weapons have now been destroyed. There was a period of focus on what the role of the Convention might be in the post-destruction-era, but this was overtaken by concerns about use of chemical weapons in Syria (multiple uses), Malaysia (assassination of Kim Jong-nam), the United Kingdom (the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal), and Russia (the poisoning of Alexei Navalny).

Current Context

The multiple instances of use of chemical weapons in Syria and the subsequent investigations by the OPCW have been the main focus of divergences of opinion on chemical weapons within the First Committee, other UN bodies, and the OPCW. Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has raised concerns of possible use of chemical weapons in that conflict, with claims and counter-claims of use of riot control agents—prohibited under the CWC as a method of warfare—but neither side has made a formal allegation.



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All international treaties are creatures of the time they were negotiated, reflecting the contemporary concerns of the negotiators. The verification measures within the CWC for investigations of alleged use were more suited to situations of large-scale use of chemical weapons in a major conflict than use in a civil war. Therefore, in 2014, a Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) was established by the OPCW to carry out investigations of alleged use in Syria. However, there were pressures to include the UN Security Council (UNSC) in the investigation process and so the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) was established by UNSC resolution 2235 in 2015. The UNSC extension of the JIM mandate was vetoed by Russia in October 2017. In June 2018, a special session of the CWC Conference of States Parties (CSP) voted to **establish the Investigation and Identification Team** (IIT) with powers to attribute, in cases where the evidence supported it, the use of chemical weapons. There are claims that voting to establish investigation-related measures in OPCW bodies, as opposed to taking decisions by consensus, is politicising the Convention. Others suggest that the use of prohibited weapons is the source of the politicisation.

The IIT has published four reports (available on the **OPCW website**), the first three of which found there were reasonable grounds to believe that chemical weapons had been used by Syrian forces. The fourth report (February 2024) found on similar grounds that ISIL had used chemical weapons in Marea, Syria, in September 2015. In July 2020, the OPCW Executive Council voted through a decision calling on Syria to cease use of chemical weapons and to declare and destroy

remaining elements of its chemical weapons programme. The decision also asked the next CSP session to consider the situation and the CSP **voted** in April 2021 to suspend certain rights and privileges for Syria under the CWC.

It was widely anticipated that the CWC **Fifth Review Conference**, held in May 2023, would be unable to reach consensus on substantive issues following the earlier Syria-related votes. However, the Review Conference was preceded by a thorough review of the operation of the Convention via an **open-ended working group** (OEWG). Within the OEWG, for the first time ever states parties to the CWC considered issues related to gender equality and diversity. Canada introduced a **paper** on this topic to the OEWG, sponsored by over 60 states parties, which was also added to the Review Conference documents.

There has been voting in recent years on the CWC resolution in First Committee, which is traditionally sponsored by Poland and was, until about six years ago, adopted by consensus. In 2023, **draft resolution L.14** "Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction," prompted **votes** on one preambular paragraph and seven operative paragraphs. Most of these related to Syria, with also one paragraph on the Navalny poisoning and one paragraph on **aerosolized central nervous system-acting chemicals**. All of the paragraphs remained in the resolution, which was then adopted as a whole.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances;
- Defend the norm against chemical weapon use;
- Report on measures taken to implement CWC obligations; and
- Pledge financial support to relevant voluntary funds maintained by the OPCW.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Commit to never using chemical weapons and proceed with destruction of those remaining stocks;
- Designate a national authority in accordance with Article VII of the CWC and ensure the national authority is empowered to interact with relevant entities within the country;
- Implement legal measures for effective compliance with the CWC, including arrangements for periodic reviews of national implementation and enforcement; and
- Encourage universalisation of the Convention.

Author: Richard Guthrie



Armed Drones

PAX

Background

Ongoing conflicts worldwide are increasingly defined by the massive surge in the use of drones in all shapes and sizes. From long-range explosive drones used to target civilian infrastructure in a number of conflicts, to widespread use of weaponised commercial drones, to ongoing campaigns of extrajudicial killings with armed drones, both state and non-state actors have made armed drones a core part of their lethal toolbox. Around 50 countries and 65 armed groups worldwide are operating or acquiring armed drones as of 2024, while the size of the military drone market has been growing at a compound annual growth rate of nine per cent, with projections for further expansion in the coming years.

Such widescale proliferation and use of armed drones is accompanied by major concerns about their implications for human rights and international peace and security. Targeted killing programmes, with the use of drones by states, even outside of conflict zones, continue to occur without legal justification and are often accompanied by civilian casualties. These practices undermine the foundational principles of protection of civilians against state violence and principles of international law regarding the legitimate

use of lethal force. The failure of the international community to condemn and push back against such operations ever since the clandestine drone wars conducted by the United States in the context of the counter-terrorism operations set a worrying precedent, resulting in impunity and replication of these practices by other states.

Furthermore, rapid development and production of deadly drones from commercial components, which can be deployed with military precision and are not controlled by any export control mechanisms, poses increasing challenges for ensuring transparency and oversight of the acquisition and use of armed uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs), including by non-state actors.

Current Context

One of the most significant drone developments in 2023–2024 is the growing use of one-way large explosive drones in various conflicts by states and non-state actors. This trend has been especially prominent in the Middle East, where various non-state actors have been equipped with this type of drone by Iran and have used them against United States bases in Iraq, and Syria but also targets in Israel and associated with alleged Israeli owners such dozens of

cargo ships and oil tankers in the Red Sea. In Sudan, similar drones—albeit of unknown origin—have been used by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) against the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), seemingly built from commercial components but armed with military explosives. Despite a UN embargo, Iran continued shipping military drones to the SAF.

The mass production and use of hundreds of thousands of small explosive commercial drones in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war by both parties is offering a glimpse into the future of warfare. Both countries are reportedly deploying their expertise on this type of drone use in other conflicts such as Sudan and the Middle East. In Syria, both the regime and rebels groups like Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) are stepping up the production and use of home-made and commercially imported drones equipped with explosives. This has already resulted in the killings of civilians in the regime's attacks on internally displaced person (IDP) camps and damages to civilian infrastructure, such as oil refineries.

Drones have also continuously been used for striking long-range targets in various conflict contexts. For instance, Russia has been deploying drones to target civilian centres such as hospitals, schools, residential areas, and energy infrastructure in Ukraine, while Ukraine has been frequently hitting military and dual-use targets in Russia with long-range explosive drones, with some having a commercial origin. In northern Iraq, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has also started to use larger commercial drones for long-range strikes against Turkish forces on Iraqi soil in Spring 2024.

The use of armed drones for targeted killings by military and intelligence agencies also persisted, mostly without legal justification and reported civilian casualties. In Nigeria and Burkina Faso, faulty intelligence led to hundreds of civilian deaths in counter-insurgency operations. In Ethiopia, drone strikes against separatist groups have also caused civilian casualties, with little government accountability and no reparations given to families of the victims. In northeast Syria, Türkiye carried out 114 drone strikes against suspected militants in the first eight months of 2024, also hitting energy infrastructure, which resulted in pollution of rivers and energy shortages in the winter. Türkiye also conducted targeted killings in northern Iraq against alleged PKK militants. Israel has carried out targeted killings in southern Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank, with reported civilian casualties.

After years of stalled progress in developing regulations for the use and proliferation of armed drones, several states, including Portugal, along with the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, reintroduced this issue at the policy level during the 2023 UN General Assembly First Committee, which they followed with a series of online discussions throughout 2024. To address some of the concerns over increasing use of uncrewed systems, a group of 21 states published a Joint Statement on increasing multilateral exchanges of views regarding armed Uncrewed Aerial Vehicles in March 2024, reiterating the need to step up the debate about ways to improve transparency, oversight, and accountability in the

acquisition, transfer, and use of armed drones, including by non-state actors. This initiative has resulted in a draft resolution to be submitted at the First Committee in October 2024. Such multilateral exchanges could become an important measure to foster international cooperation on promoting the responsible and transparent use of armed drones, with the longer-term aim to reach an agreement on international standards and regulations.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Acknowledge the ethical, legal, and humanitarian challenges posed by the use of drones in modern warfare, and commit to upholding and strengthening international legal frameworks to prevent the erosion of established norms, while ensuring the protection of human rights and minimising harm;
- Support a thematic resolution on improving transparency, oversight, and accountability in the acquisition, transfer, and use of armed drones as a stepping stone towards establishing clear, robust, and binding international standards; and
- Commit to further international engagement and cooperation on the issue through an inclusive process involving states, international and regional organisations, civil society, the scientific community, and industry.

Beyond First Committee, delegations should:

- Raise these issues in all relevant international and regional forums, including human rights-focused forums;
- Clarify their legal position on the use of force through armed drones and the justifications for their use outside of armed conflict, in line with the recommendations by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings 2020 report; and
- Ensure that issues related to drone export controls are pursued in relevant arms control and disarmament forums, such as the Arms Trade Treaty.

**Authors: Wim Zwijnenburg and
Christina Parandii with contributions
from Sanni Suomela**



Autonomous Weapon Systems

STOP KILLER ROBOTS

Background

Autonomous weapons, which the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) defines as weapons systems that “select and apply force to targets without human intervention,” are one of the most pressing matters on the peace and security agenda. As the UN Secretary-General and ICRC President noted in their joint call for new prohibitions and restrictions on autonomous weapons last year, these weapons “pose serious humanitarian, legal, ethical and security concerns.” Reports of the development and use of weapons systems with varying autonomous capabilities continue to proliferate, underlining the urgent need for new legal rules.

Increasing autonomy in weapons, along with the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for military purposes, including target recommendation “decision support systems” used by Israel in Gaza, highlight the digital dehumanisation inherent in autonomous weapons systems and military AI more broadly, and raise serious concerns for meaningful human control over the use of force, accountability and responsibility, and automation bias.

Last year, the UN General Assembly adopted the first-ever resolution on

autonomous weapons, with states resoundingly voting in favour of resolution 78/241, “Lethal autonomous weapons systems.” The text, tabled by Austria and co-sponsored by a cross-regional group of 43 states, mandated the UN Secretary-General to seek the views of UN member and observer states, as well as international organisations and civil society groups, on ways to address the challenges and concerns raised by autonomous weapons and on the role of humans in the use of force. The resolution mandated the UN Secretary-General to submit a report on this topic at this year’s UN General Assembly session.

Current Context

The report, published in August 2024, demonstrated views from a range of stakeholders that existing international humanitarian law is insufficient to address the risks posed by autonomous weapons systems. Ninety-one submissions were made to the Secretary-General, 58 of which were made by individual states, groups of states, or international organisations of states. Twenty-eight submissions were made by civil society, including Stop Killer Robots.

In the conclusion to his report, the Secretary-General underscores the “widespread recognition of the

deleterious effects” that autonomous weapons systems could have, recognises that autonomous weapons “have the potential to change warfare significantly and may strain or even erode existing legal frameworks,” and notes the “widespread recognition that human control is essential to ensure responsibility and accountability, compliance with international law and ethical decision-making.” The report reiterates the Secretary-General’s call for the negotiation of a new legally binding instrument by 2026, and reaffirms that “machines that have the power and discretion to take human lives are politically unacceptable and morally repugnant, and should be banned by international law.”

Along with the Secretary-General’s report, international and regional conferences held since 2023’s First Committee demonstrate that appetite for a new treaty continues to grow, with regional conferences on the issue hosted by the Philippines in December 2023 and by Sierra Leone in April 2024. The **Freetown Communiqué**, adopted by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at the Sierra Leone conference, recognises that “new legally binding rules, with prohibitions and regulations that effectively address the threats and challenges posed by autonomous weapons systems” should be established.

Also in April 2024, Austria hosted the **“Humanity at the Crossroads” conference**, which with 144 states and over 1000 participants was the largest meeting on the issue of autonomous weapons to be held outside of the United Nations to date. At the time of writing, **38 states**

have endorsed the **Chair’s Summary** of the Vienna conference, which affirms their strong commitment “to work with urgency and with all interested stakeholders for an international legal instrument to regulate autonomous weapons systems.”

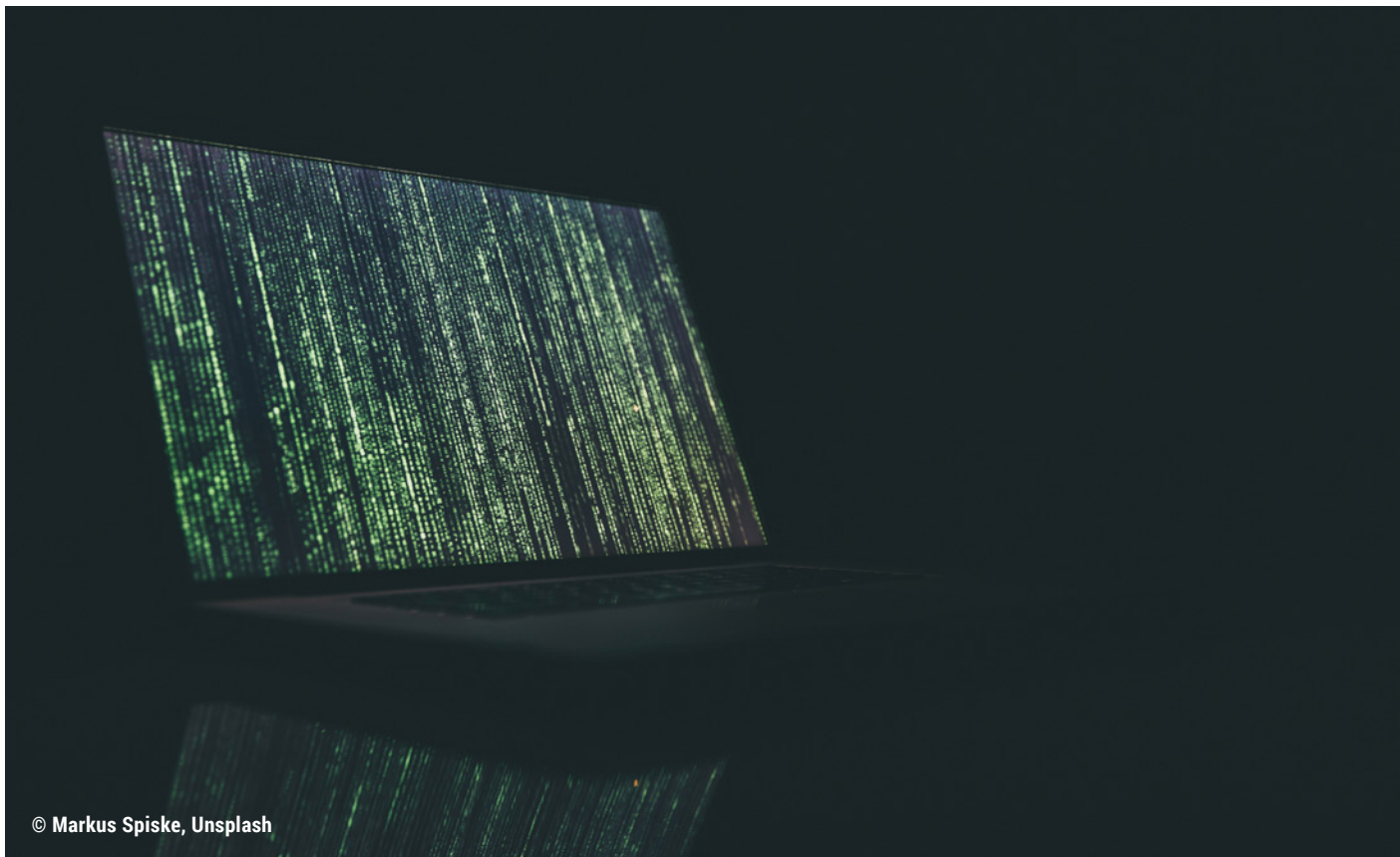
A growing number of states continue to join the call for the negotiation of new rules. Some **124 states** now support the negotiation of a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapon systems. During last year’s UN General Assembly, 152 states voted in favour of the aforementioned resolution 78/241 on autonomous weapons.

Meanwhile, discussions at the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (GGE on LAWS) at the UN in Geneva continue. The GGE on LAWS, meeting for over ten years now, continues to be stymied by abuse of the CCW’s consensus rule, which is essentially being used as a veto. The work of the majority of states who seek the negotiation of legally binding prohibitions and regulations is consistently blocked by a small group of states. Combined with a mandate that doesn’t require the group to produce a report until 2026, the GGE is rendered incapable of delivering a meaningful outcome.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- ➔ Promote, co-sponsor, and vote in support of a resolution on autonomous weapons mandating treaty negotiations at UN General Assembly this year;



- Recognise in national statements that the targeting of humans by autonomous weapons is a serious ethical concern;
- Acknowledge that meaningful human control over the use of force is vital, and that autonomy in weapons systems presents a critical threat to our shared humanity and to international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law;
- Support the negotiation of a legal instrument on autonomous weapons, noting that it should contain prohibitions on systems that do not allow for meaningful human control and on systems that target people; and positive obligations and regulations on all other systems in order to ensure meaningful human control over these.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Collaborate with civil society and other stakeholders to initiate a transparent and inclusive diplomatic process for a legal instrument prohibiting and regulating autonomous weapon systems; and
- Develop and share national policies on autonomous weapons that enshrine meaningful human control over the use of force and prohibit systems that target people.

Author: Catherine Connolly



The Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS (INEW)

Background

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is a leading cause of harm to civilians and their environments in armed conflict. It kills and injures tens of thousands of civilians each year, and it destroys critical civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, and power and water systems, which impacts the provision of essential services and leads to long-term civilian suffering far beyond the location and time of an attack. When the bombing stops, communities are tasked with rebuilding homes, hospitals, schools, and other infrastructure, often while facing long-lasting injuries, psychosocial trauma, food insecurity, and impeded economic development.

In towns and cities across the world in 2023, civilians experienced an unprecedented level of harm from the use of explosive weapons. Civilian casualties and impeded access to services like healthcare, education, and humanitarian aid increased drastically in 2023. While this was most pronounced in Palestine, civilian harm also increased in other countries marked by the use of explosive weapons in conflict, such as Sudan, Myanmar, and Syria. Civilian harm also

continued in other contexts, including Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Yemen.

On 18 November 2022, 83 states endorsed the *Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences of the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas*, the first formal international recognition that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has severe humanitarian consequences that must be urgently addressed. The culmination of almost three years of consultations, the Political Declaration aims to limit the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and to address their immediate and longer-term impacts. By endorsing the Declaration, states both recognise the harms experienced by civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and commit to work to prevent and address these harms together with the United Nations (UN), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society, both during and after conflict.

Current Context

More than 90 states attended the first conference to review the implementation of the Political Declaration in Oslo,

Norway, on 23 April 2024. The **Oslo Conference** brought together state officials and experts from ministries of defence and foreign affairs, armed forces, as well as international and regional organisations and civil society. The conference aimed to take stock of the Declaration's implementation and to discuss progress, opportunities, and challenges, and the future follow-up work.

Ahead of the Oslo Conference, the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) and the Norwegian Red Cross organised a **Protection Forum**, which provided an interactive space to discuss how to meet the needs of conflict-affected communities and to foster dialogue to strengthen protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The forum also put a spotlight on the humanitarian impacts of ongoing explosive weapons use in Gaza, Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, and elsewhere. It provided a platform for first responders and other civil society organisations to share their efforts to meet the needs of conflict-affected communities.

The Political Declaration sets an expectation that endorser states will act in good faith and implement their commitments, and states should urgently do so. They should review existing policies and practices relevant to the protection of civilians and engage in dialogue with key partners, including international organisations and civil society. Existing efforts to protect civilians should not automatically be considered sufficient but should instead be held against the standards that the Political Declaration sets and strengthens to avoid civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons.

There is still much work to be done in this regard and the time to act is now.

All states should endorse the Declaration. For example, for states that possess and/or use explosive weapons, implementation of the Declaration's provisions can help to avoid civilian harm during and after military operations. Endorsement by affected states can ensure victims and affected communities access to assistance. For all states, endorsement of the Declaration is an act of recognition of the harms experienced by civilians as a result of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, an expression of solidarity with those affected, and a promise to work to prevent and address future harms.

Recommendations

During the First Committee, delegations should:

- Continue to publicly acknowledge and call for action to address the severe harm to individuals and communities from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, both direct and indirect;
- Support the recommendation of the UN Secretary-General and the ICRC that parties to conflict should avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas; and
- Encourage other states to endorse the *Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas*.



Beyond the First Committee, states should:

- **Endorse** the *Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas* by writing to the government of Ireland via its permanent missions in Geneva (genevapmun@dfa.ie) or New York (newyorkpmun@dfa.ie), or directly to the Irish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, copying ewipa@un.org, to inform of their decision to endorse;

- Promote the Political Declaration's adoption and implementation by the greatest number of states, including through convening or participating in discussions at the regional/sub-regional level;

- Assess the steps required at the national level (including the revision of existing, or development of new, policy and practice) to implement the Declaration's commitments; and

- Designate government focal points for this work, including in the areas of military policy and practice, victim assistance/humanitarian access, and data collection.

Author: Katherine Young



Landmines

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO BAN LANDMINES

Background

Antipersonnel landmines are designed to be detonated by the presence, proximity, or contact of a person. These explosive weapons indiscriminately kill or injure, posing a grave threat to the safety of civilians during conflicts and long afterwards.

The 1997 Mine Ban Treaty (MBT) is one of the most universally adhered-to international instruments and successful humanitarian disarmament treaties, with 164 states parties. A majority of the 33 states outside of the Treaty are abiding by its core provisions. Nearly half of the states not party of the Treaty vote in favour of an annual United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution promoting the Treaty's universalisation and full implementation.

Since its adoption in September 1998, the MBT has made a tangible difference on the ground. Some 30 states parties have cleared their mined areas and become mine-free. Efforts to provide life-saving risk education and victim assistance are ongoing. Despite this progress, serious challenges remain in achieving a mine-free world, including new use of antipersonnel landmines. In addition, at least 60 states and other areas remain contaminated by landmines, the pace of land clearance has been slow, some 33

states parties are yet to become mine free, and more efforts are needed to fulfill the rights and needs of landmine victims.

Current Context

Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the number of people killed and injured has spiked alarmingly due to new use of landmines and other explosive weapons. Russia has used antipersonnel landmines and booby-traps extensively, while Ukrainian forces have used antipersonnel mines.

In June 2023 Ukraine publicly committed to carry out an investigation into the reported use of antipersonnel mines. In June 2024 at the MBT's intersessional meeting, Ukraine announced the investigation was ongoing and committed to report on its outcome in a transparent manner once the investigation is concluded.

In addition, the government forces of Myanmar have continued to use antipersonnel landmines, as it has done continuously over the past two decades.

All use of antipersonnel mines needs to be condemned and halted immediately.

In June 2024, the First Preparatory Meeting for the MBT's Fifth Review Conference provided an opportunity

for the first public discussion among states and other stakeholders on the draft outcome documents of the Review Conference and on organisational matters. The next stage of these discussions will take place at the Second Preparatory Meeting in Geneva on 18 September.

The **Treaty's Fifth Review Conference**, the Siem Reap-Angkor Summit on a Mine-Free World, will be held in Siem Reap, Cambodia, from 25–29 November 2024, and will feature a high-level segment.

Last year's UN General Assembly resolution on the promotion of the MBT was adopted by 170 states, while 16 states abstained and one, Russia, voted against. At this year's First Committee, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines-Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC) expects to see a reduction in the number of abstentions and an increase in the number of states strongly condemning the use of landmines by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances, especially in the current context of renewed large-scale use of these nefarious weapons.

Recommendations

At First Committee, delegations should:

- Condemn all use of antipersonnel mines and reiterate that any use by any actor is unacceptable under any circumstances; and
- Vote in favour of the annual resolution promoting the MBT and encourage others to do so.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Accede to the MBT, if they have not already done so;
- Urge states not party to join the MBT without delay and promote the Treaty's universalisation bilaterally in discussions;
- Attend the Fifth Review Conference at the highest possible level and announce meaningful steps on the universalisation or implementation of the Treaty;
- Pledge financial support for the implementation of MBT obligations, including clearance, provision of risk education, and assistance to survivors, their families, and communities;
- Ensure full inclusion and diverse participation of landmine survivors, women, youth, and other underrepresented groups in all spaces and processes related to the MBT; and
- Ensure that gender perspectives and diversity considerations are integrated in all aspects of mine action.

**Authors: Kasia Derlicka-Rosenabuer
and Charles Bechara**

**INTERNATIONAL
CAMPAIGN TO BAN
LANDMINES**
1997 Nobel Peace Prize Co-Laureate

Cluster Munitions

CLUSTER MUNITION COALITION

Background

Cluster munitions are air-dropped or surface-launched weapons that contain several to hundreds of submunitions or bomblets that scatter over a wide area. Many submunitions fail to detonate, leaving explosive remnants that threaten lives and livelihoods for years if not decades.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) provides the only international framework for effective eradication of the weapon. Since the CCM's adoption in May 2008, there have been no reports or allegations of new use of cluster munitions by any state party. As of September 2024, the Convention has 112 states parties and 12 signatories. The CCM has established a global norm that is stigmatising cluster munitions through its strict prohibitions on any use, production, stockpiling, and transfer of these weapons.

The Convention also requires stockpile destruction, clearance, risk education, and victim assistance. A total of 28 countries and other areas remain contaminated by cluster munition remnants, including 10 states parties to the Convention. The Cluster Munition Monitor 2024 details progress made under the Convention in these and other areas.

Current Context

The last country to accede to the Convention was South Sudan in August 2023, while Nigeria was the last to ratify it in February 2023. Greater outreach efforts are needed by states parties and partners to bring more countries onboard the Convention.

In 2024 cluster munitions continued to be used extensively in Ukraine by Russian and Ukrainian forces, while new use was also recorded in Myanmar and Syria.

Ukraine recorded the highest number of annual casualties globally for the second consecutive year. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, over a thousand cluster munition casualties have been recorded in Ukraine.

Civilians accounted for 93 per cent of all casualties recorded for 2023. Children accounted for almost half (47 per cent) of all casualties from cluster munition remnants in 2023.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines-Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC) strongly condemns the use of cluster munitions by any actor, anywhere, under any circumstances, including in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Following Ukraine's requests, the United States (US) began to transfer an unspecified quantity of stockpiled cluster munitions to Ukraine in July 2023. Since then, the US has sent five transfers of cluster munitions to Ukraine. These decisions caused international outcry, critical media coverage, and concern from leaders and officials from more than 20 countries and dozens of organisations, including the CMC.

Following a domestic decision in July 2024 to withdraw from the Convention, Lithuania submitted on 6 September its instrument of withdrawal to the depository, the UN Secretary-General, citing the changed security situation as the reason for this shocking move. As per Article 20 of the Convention, the withdrawal would take effect six months later, on 6 March 2025.

The CMC condemns this decision and calls on Lithuania to reconsider and revoke the withdrawal without delay. This unprecedented decision across international humanitarian law (IHL) instruments not only undermines the Convention, but also tears the protective fabric of IHL aimed to protect civilians in ongoing and future armed conflicts. It contributes to further erosion of IHL and the rule of law, and should be publicly deplored.

The Twelfth Meeting of States Parties (12MSP) of the CCM, presided over by Mexico, took place at the UN in Geneva on 10–13 September 2024. During the meeting, most delegations that spoke expressed great concern over use, production, and transfers of cluster munitions and Lithuania's withdrawal from the Convention, noting broader

implications on IHL, and called on Lithuania to reconsider the decision.

The meeting also reviewed progress in universalisation and implementation of the Convention and its Lausanne Action Plan. It welcomed completion of destruction of all cluster munitions held by states parties, following declarations of completion by the two last states parties—Peru and South Africa. The 12MSP granted further deadline extensions for contamination clearance to Chad, Germany, and Laos.

In its **Final Report**, the 12MSP expressed "deep regret" over Lithuania's withdrawal from the Convention and it "urged" Lithuania to reconsider the decision. It also "strongly condemned any use of cluster munitions by any actor and under any circumstances" and emphasised "the legal obligation of the States parties to promote universal adherence to and strict observance of the Convention's norms, including to discourage, in every possible way, the use, development, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions."

The annual United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution promoting the CCM was adopted in December 2023 by 148 states, including 37 non-signatories to the Convention. Russia was the only country to vote against it. At this year's First Committee, the ICBL-CMC expects to see an increase in the number of states voting in favour of the resolution and speaking strongly in condemnation of the use of cluster munitions by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances, especially in the current context of renewed large-scale use of these nefarious weapons.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Condemn any use and transfers of cluster munitions, by anyone, under any circumstances, and demand an immediate halt to all use and transfers of this weapon;
- Denounce Lithuania's withdrawal decision and call for its reversal;
- Encourage signatories and countries remaining outside the Convention to take immediate steps to ratify or accede to the convention without delay; and
- Vote in favour of the UNGA resolution on the CCM and encourage others, such as regional group members, to do so as well.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Ratify or accede to the CCM, if they have not already done so;
- Urge states not party to join the CCM without delay and promote the Convention's universalisation bilaterally in discussions;
- Increase technical and financial support for victim assistance and provide greater cooperation and assistance;
- Ensure full inclusion and diverse participation of cluster munition survivors, women, youth, and other underrepresented groups in all spaces and processes related to the CCM; and

- Ensure that gender perspectives and diversity considerations are integrated in all aspects of mine action.

**Authors: Kasia Derlicka-Rosenbauer
and Charles Bechara**



Depleted Uranium Weapons

INTERNATIONAL COALITION TO BAN URANIUM WEAPONS (ICBUW)

Background

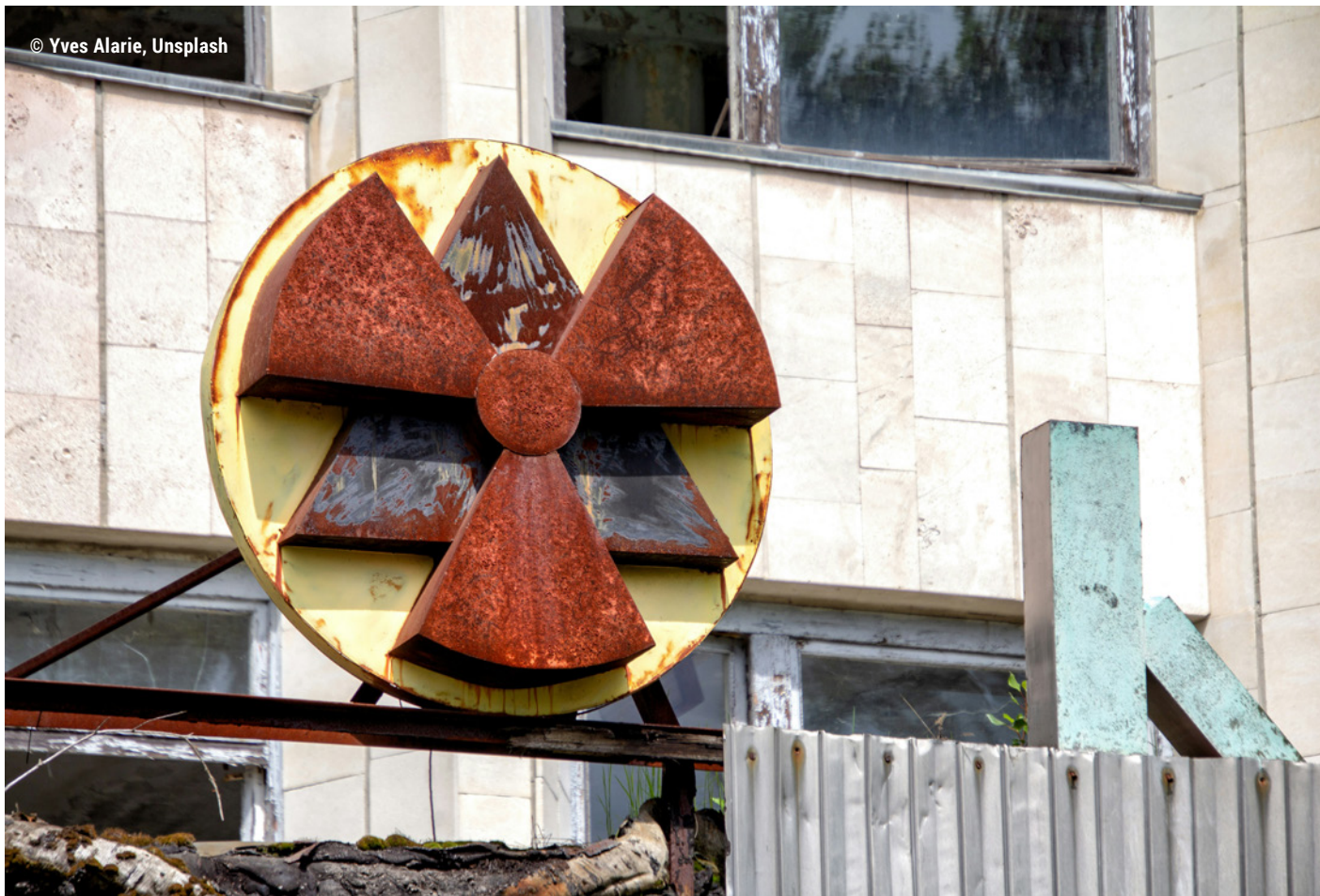
Depleted uranium (DU) is a by-product of the uranium enrichment process. It is used by a number of states in armour-piercing-incendiary ammunition fired by tanks, armoured fighting vehicles, and aircraft. The first major use of DU weapons was in the 1991 Gulf War, followed by the Balkans and other war areas. Radioactive and chemically toxic, DU use creates hotspots of persistent contamination of soil and groundwater that present a hazard to communities long after conflict ends. DU may form part of complex pictures such as the Gulf War or the Balkan syndromes. ICBUW has compiled and published a **collection of scientific articles** reflecting on the effects of DU and the assessment of associated risks.

The refusal by some states to acknowledge the civilian health risks from DU contrasts starkly with the protective measures provided to their military personnel, as well as their own domestic standards for radioactive waste management. The investigation of possible, or alleged DU use (e.g. in the **Gaza context**) should be linked to both the military or combat scenario (e.g. tank battles) and to the weapon systems operating in the area. ICBUW has updated a detailed file on "**Depleted Uranium Weapons and Platforms Worldwide**" that

outlines the various types of depleted uranium weapons and the platforms that can deploy them.

Though there is not yet a legally binding treaty prohibiting the possession, development, production, or transfer of DU weapons (as proposed in terms of ICBUW's **Draft Convention**), their use can arguably already be regarded as illegal under existing international law by applying, inter alia, the following arguments or standards:

- The principle of distinction (between civilians and combatants) and environmental protection obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL);
- The human right to a healthy environment as well as the protection against toxic substances under human rights and environmental law (EL); and
- The precautionary principle under IHL and EL, according to which scientific uncertainties do not relieve states from taking precautionary measures against environmental risks.



Current Context

In 2022, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a **resolution** on “Effects of the use of armaments and ammunition containing depleted uranium” (A/RES/77/49). The resolution—like previous ones—contains references to principles that are important for the DU issue, such as transparency, assistance and support, and the precautionary approach.

Meanwhile, there is growing national jurisprudence (especially in **Italy**) to acknowledge compensation claims of DU victims based on a corresponding causal link. Civilian victims of DU use in Southern Serbia have been reported—as recommended by ICBUW—through the complaint procedure run by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The ongoing war in Ukraine once again emphasises the urgency of the problem. In view of DU-capable Russian tanks and DU ammunition deliveries by the United Kingdom and the United States, more than **concerns** remain. Through coordination with demining actors, ICBUW continues to carefully monitor the situation and to call for a non-use of DU weapons on both sides to prevent long-lasting environmental damage, especially in the field of **agriculture**.

These recent negative trends in favour of DU weapons use are at odds with a previous tendency of replacing DU by less toxic alternatives—which was a tacit acknowledgement of its unacceptability due in part to civil society influence.

The health and environmental legacy of DU use should be viewed in the context of growing concern over the polluting legacy of armed conflict. The International Law Commission (ILC) has adopted "Draft principles on protection of the environment in relation to armed conflict," no. 26 of which is devoted to "toxic and hazardous remnants of war," their removal, or rendering them harmless. These and similar rules and documents are directly applicable in cases of DU use, forming the basis for victim assistance and environmental remediation, which has also found entry in Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

In general, it looks like the DU issue is high on the political and media agenda, as expressed in statements, articles, films, and more. ICBUW's work, which is directed at reducing the human cost of weapons through banning uranium weapons, represents a specific but relevant contribution to the New Agenda for Peace, to the fight against war and for disarmament, as well as a peaceful solution of international conflicts.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Continue to raise concerns over the use and potential use of DU in past and current conflict areas and the need for support to DU victims;
- Exchange on ways of further discrediting DU weaponry and exerting influence to not use or threaten to use DU; and

- Explain how they are implementing A/RES/77/49 and develop ideas as to improve the resolution during this First Committee session, inter alia, by emphasising links to environmental and human rights protection within the draft text.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Disclose and exchange targeting coordinates of any use of DU weapons to facilitate clearance and civilian exposure studies;
- Contribute technical and financial assistance to states affected by DU contamination and support DU victims;
- Help strengthen the global norm against the use of DU weapons and dealing with their consequences; and
- Work towards a universal ban on DU weapons directed at their elimination on the basis of ICBUW's Draft Convention.

**Authors: Manfred Mohr
and Ilia Kukin**



Incendiary Weapons

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Background

Incendiary weapons, including white phosphorus, are notorious for their horrific human cost. They cause excruciating burns that are difficult to treat and lead to long-term physical and psychological injury. Incendiary weapons can set homes, agricultural areas, and other civilian objects on fire.

Incendiary weapons are regulated by Protocol III of the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), which has been **ratified by 116 countries**. The protocol's effectiveness has been limited by two major loopholes:

1. Its definition does not cover multipurpose munitions such as white phosphorus because they are “primarily designed” to create smokescreens or signal troops, rather than for use as an incendiary weapon. Yet white phosphorus has the same cruel effects and should not escape regulation.
2. It prohibits the use of air-delivered incendiary weapons in “concentrations of civilians,” but permits ground-launched incendiary weapons even though they produce the same horrific injuries.

Stronger international law that addresses these problems would build norms and stigma against incendiary weapons. A complete ban on incendiary weapons would have the greatest humanitarian benefits.

Current Context

Incendiary weapons are currently being used in at least four conflicts, putting civilians at risk.

In south Lebanon, Israeli forces **used** airburst white phosphorus munitions in at least 17 municipalities between October 2023 and June 2024, including five municipalities where burning felt wedges from airburst munitions landed on top of residential buildings, putting civilians at grave risk and contributing to civilian displacement.

In the Gaza Strip, videos verified by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International show multiple airbursts of artillery-fired white phosphorus used by the Israeli military, including over the Gaza City port on 11 October 2023. Israel has used white phosphorus previously in Gaza, including **in 2009**.

In Syria, Human Rights Watch **verified photo and video evidence** that showed Syrian government forces using ground-

fired Grad-series rockets containing incendiary weapons on 6, 7, 8, and 18 October 2023. The 18 October attack hit a house in Darat Izzah, killing a 13-year-old girl and injuring her 11-year-old sister, who suffered burns.

In Ukraine, visual evidence reviewed by Human Rights Watch shows that there were at least 157 attacks using surface-fired incendiary weapons between February 2022 and August 2024. Remnants of two types of unguided 122mm Grad incendiary rockets have been positively identified at some of the impacted locations. It has not been possible for Human Rights Watch to attribute responsibility for these attacks, but Russia and Ukraine both possess 122mm Grad rockets that deliver incendiary weapons.

Criticism of recent use and calls for discussions of Protocol III were common themes in statements at the CCW's **annual meeting** in November 2023.

More than 80 countries, in national or joint statements, expressed concern at the use of white phosphorus in Lebanon and Gaza. This use has captured public attention and media scrutiny, demonstrating the relevance of incendiary weapons to the public conscience.

A statement by the State of Palestine and 63 other countries as well as a **working paper** by Palestine on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Countries Group, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, South Africa, Namibia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela expressed alarm at the reports of use of white phosphorus by Israel in areas

of high concentration of civilians. CCW states from the Non-Aligned Movement as well as an Arab Group of CCW states also **expressed alarm** at Israel's use of white phosphorus in areas of high concentration of civilians and condemned its use of white phosphorus in Lebanon.

Israel is not a party to CCW Protocol III and did not respond to the concerns over its use of white phosphorus in its statements and working paper.

At the meeting, Ukraine **objected** to how Russian forces in Ukraine have been "indiscriminately using different types of weapons" in Ukraine "including those prohibited or restricted by the CCW and its Protocols and by the international humanitarian law, such as ... incendiary weapons." Russia did not respond to these comments.

Calls to hold stand-alone discussions on incendiary weapons concerns have multiplied in recent years.

At the November 2023 CCW meeting, Austria, Belgium, Costa Rica, Ireland, Mexico, Aotearoa New Zealand, Norway, and Switzerland issued a **joint statement** and **working paper** that reiterated the need for the CCW "to return to meaningfully discussing the implementation of Protocol III, as well as to consider measures to bolster its universalization." They asked the incoming CCW President to "conduct informal consultations during the intersessional period" on Protocol III and report back to the November 2024 meeting of high contracting parties "under a specific agenda item."

At least 10 other states, including **Australia**, Canada, Panama, Spain, and the **United Kingdom**, also supported discussions, as did the International Committee of the Red Cross and the European Union. Six non-governmental organizations (NGOs) issued **a joint statement** at the CCW meeting, following **a joint statement** by 19 NGOs at UNGA First Committee.

In a **working paper**, the European Union and Albania, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Ukraine called on all states not yet party to join Protocol III and urged full compliance with its provisions.

At the November 2023 CCW meeting, Russia repeatedly challenged the need to address concerns over incendiary weapons. Because the CCW operates by consensus, Russia's objections meant that the meeting failed to include language on incendiary weapons in its final report, for the second year in a row, despite widespread support. The official record had included specific references to Protocol III or incendiary weapons in every CCW meeting of high contracting parties and review conference held between 2011 and 2021.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Condemn the use of incendiary weapon due to the devastating humanitarian consequences;

- Urge Israel to stop using white phosphorus munitions in populated areas, given the risk of civilian harm;
- Highlight the need to implement, universalise, and strengthen CCW Protocol III; and
- Call for informal discussions of the adequacy of international law on incendiary weapons and the concerns raised by these weapons, with the ultimate goal of creating stronger international standards.

Beyond First Committee:

- At their next meeting in November 2024, CCW high contracting parties should condemn new use of incendiary weapon and ensure their concerns are reflected in the final report of the meeting; and
- States should agree to hold informal discussions to assess the adequacy of Protocol III and other measures to address the concerns raised by incendiary weapons, with the ultimate goal of creating stronger international standards.

Author: Mary Wareham



Small Arms and Light Weapons

INTERNATIONAL ACTION NETWORK ON SMALL ARMS

Background

In the **outcome document** of the Fourth Review Conference (RevCon4) on the UN Programme of Action to Reduce, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (UNPoA), held in New York from 18 to 28 June 2024, states expressed

grave concern that the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, including illicit manufacture, brokering, transfer, circulation, their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled proliferation, initiates, exacerbates and sustains armed violence, has a wide range of negative humanitarian and socioeconomic consequences, undermines the rule of law as well as the respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and impedes the provision of humanitarian assistance to people affected by armed violence.

The UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2001, followed by its accompanying **International Tracing Instrument (ITI)** (2005). They are complemented by two global treaties, namely **the UN Firearms Protocol** (entry into force, 2005); and **the Arms Trade Treaty** (entry into force,

2014), in addition to a number of regional and sub-regional instruments.

Review conferences of the UNPoA-ITI have been held every six years. The President of RevCon4 and its Preparatory Committee was the Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the UN, Ambassador Maritza Chan-Valverde, who facilitated a comprehensive consensus outcome.

Current Context

The First Committee will now consider follow-up actions to implement the RevCon4 outcomes. The successful implementation of these agreements will depend on action by states, international and regional organisations, and civil society.

The final outcome document did not address all aspects included in **previous drafts** on themes such as climate change, regulation of SALW transport, and the reference to the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management. Even so, the final text commits states to a wide range of actions from 2024 to 2030 and urges international and regional organisations, industry, and civil society to be closely involved in these and related efforts.



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In the RevCon4 outcome document, states endorsed an Open-ended Technical Expert Group (OETG) to meet twice in conjunction with the Biennial Meetings of States (BMS) to address growing challenges posed by developments in SALW manufacturing, technology, and design, in particular on the use of polymers in SALW manufacturing; marking, record-keeping, and tracing; and the illicit 3D printing of SALW, their parts, components, and accessories.

Guidelines and actions are included to strengthen the prevention of diversion throughout the lifecycle of each SALW, such as through control of brokering, stockpile management, and marking and tracing. Many provisions promote international cooperation and assistance,

national and regional target-setting, and the mainstreaming of youth and women's perspectives and participation. States agreed to actively engage with civil society and enhance women's equal, full, meaningful, and effective participation, especially regarding community safety, violence reduction, collection and destruction of SALW, stockpile management, conflict prevention, and peace-building. States are also urged to engage more fully with victims and survivors.

The outcome document addressed challenges related to limited technical and financial resources, and a lack of infrastructure in some states. States recommended utilising, amongst other funds, Official Development Assistance-eligible funds, and requested that the

UN Secretariat prepare options for the General Assembly to establish a dedicated UN funding mechanism to advance implementation of the UNPoA-ITI by all relevant stakeholders. States also committed to provide higher levels of information exchange, reporting, and transparency.

Recommendations

During the First Committee, delegations should:

- Express their full support for the adoption of the outcome document of RevCon4;
- Support the work of the OETG to address technical developments on SALW and their parts, components, and accessories;
- Support the establishment of a new dedicated UN fund and call for increased and sustained funding for international assistance, including to civil society actors, to advance UNPoA-ITI implementation; and
- Call for a comprehensive approach to UNPoA-ITI implementation that fully engages youth, gender-diverse individuals, victims and survivors, and civil society organisations.

Beyond the First Committee, states should:

- Strengthen transfer and diversion controls by implementing complementary measures in the UNPoA and ITI, the Firearms Protocol, the ATT, and relevant regional instruments;

- Call for inclusion of ammunition in the UNPoA-ITI, especially in light of the adoption of the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management;
- Establish strict prohibitions and controls on the civilian possession and use of SALW;
- Promote a culture of peace through education and inclusive public awareness programmes on the problems of the illicit SALW trade. Actively engage with civil society actors, including with grassroots organisations, inviting civil society representatives to take part in UNPoA-ITI processes, and ensuring participation from survivors, youth, gender-diverse individuals, and other underrepresented groups; and
- Set national and regional targets for UNPoA-ITI implementation, review the needs for cooperation and international assistance, and build capacities for collection and destruction of illicit, obsolete, and surplus SALW and their ammunition.

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iansa
International Action Network
on Small Arms

International Arms Trade

CONTROL ARMS

Background

Monday, 19 August 2024 was not only the opening day of the Tenth Conference of States Parties (CSP10) to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), but it also marked World Humanitarian Day. On this day, 413 humanitarian organisations wrote an **open letter** to member states of the United Nations, describing the casualty and injury toll in this year's conflicts as "staggering" and reporting an "unprecedented" number of attacks on frontline aid workers. Despite the ATT and its objectives of setting the highest standards for the international trade in conventional weapons and preventing the human suffering caused by irresponsible arms transfers, the international arms trade has continued to contribute to this suffering.

Current Context

2024 stands out as a year in which there was unprecedented attention to the role of arms transferred in violation of the ATT and international law. Arms transfers were the subject of litigation in both the international and national courts, media scrutiny, and ongoing advocacy, including public protests. From Gaza to Myanmar to Sudan, there has been intense focus on the states transferring weapons to these conflicts.

In January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the **case** of *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)* ordered Israel to take all necessary measures to prevent acts that could lead to genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. In an **advisory opinion** issued on 19 July 2024, Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, the ICJ stated that all states are obligated "not to recognize as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory" and must not assist in maintaining this situation. The International Criminal Court (ICC) also sought **arrest warrants** for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Palestine. These actions by the ICJ and ICC underscore the gravity of the situation. They also put all ATT states parties on notice that transferring weapons that are at risk of being used in Palestine would be in **violation** of Article 6(3) of the Treaty and could lead to complicity in genocide.

Over the past year, transfers of conventional weapons to the military regime in Myanmar and the warring parties in Sudan continue to be subject



to intense scrutiny. In his [2024 report](#) to the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, details how Myanmar's State Administration Council procures weapons which are used to target civilians and the role banks play in enabling this trade. In its 25 July 2024 [briefing paper](#), "New weapons fueling the Sudan conflict," Amnesty International details the violations of international humanitarian law and human rights being committed by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and their allies, along with those states providing weapons to this conflict. In both Myanmar

and Sudan, there are serious allegations of some ATT states parties transferring weapons to these contexts clearly in violation of the Treaty.

The most significant development this year in the ATT meetings was the first ever [formal discussion](#) on a case concerning compliance with the Treaty's core provisions, Articles 6 and 7. The discussion focused on upholding legal obligations under the ATT and the case of the Palestinian people during the newly established Sub-working Group on Current and Emerging Implementation Issues. This was not the first time that there have been requests for discussions on real-world cases of weapons transfers. For example, several years previously, such discussions had been requested on transfers to the warring parties in the Yemen conflict. Thus, the discussion on arms transfers to Israel marked a significant, but overdue step in addressing the critical need for accountability.

Against the backdrop of unprecedented attention to arms transfers and striking an appropriately somber tone at the opening ceremony of CSP10, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mirjana Spoljaric, posed the question, "Can the international community accept that vast quantities of conventional arms and ammunition continue to flow—overtly and covertly—to some of the most brutal armed conflicts, where there is a clear or overriding risk that they could be used to commit or facilitate international humanitarian law violations?" That question largely went unanswered in much of the discussion which followed. Instead, ATT states parties continued to largely talk past each

other and to studiously avoid discussion on compliance with the Treaty's core provisions of Articles 6 and 7. The United Kingdom proposed "**A Political Declaration for the next decade of the Arms Trade Treaty**," which was intended to mark the ten-year anniversary of the Treaty. The text reaffirms the object and purpose of the Treaty but does little else. It is not action oriented, nor does it provide a way forward for progressing implementation in the coming years. At a time when serious questions are being raised concerning compliance with the ATT, the Political Declaration does not provide a response.

On a positive note, the **CSP10 final report** requests that discussions continue on violations of Articles 6 and 7, including in relation to gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women and children, and on the role of industry in responsible international arms transfers. There were also constructive recommendations adopted on arms transfers and GBV and violence against children.

Recommendations

During the First Committee, delegations should:

- Express support for the ATT and call out weapons transferred in violation of the Treaty and international law;
- Call for a document to be developed and endorsed by all ATT states parties that sets targets and proposes actions for progressing universalisation and implementation of and compliance with the Treaty; and

- Support an annual ATT resolution that calls for universalisation and implementation of the ATT and includes a strong focus on Articles 6 and 7.

Beyond the First Committee, states should:

- Adopt the highest possible standards and establish rigorous practices when implementing the ATT and other conventional arms control instruments;
- Call for the regularisation of discussions on real world application of Articles 6 and 7 in the ATT Working Groups and Conferences of States Parties;
- Call for discussions on best practices concerning the implementation of and compliance with Articles 6 and 7; and
- Commit to timely, accurate, comprehensive, and public reporting to all international and regional instruments, including the ATT, the UN Register on Conventional Arms, and the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons.

Author: Hine-Wai Loose

controlarms

Outer Space

PROJECT PLOUGHSHARES

Background

With more than 10,000 active satellites in orbit and growing, the use of outer space is critical to humanity. But peaceful and equitable use of space is threatened by a simmering arms race.

Military use of outer space, particularly through satellites, has long been accepted as peaceful. But this use has spurred development of capabilities that can interfere with or destroy space systems. Four states have conducted ground-based, kinetic anti-satellite (ASAT) tests, the most **recent** in 2021. There is **evidence** that the development of other ASAT capabilities is accelerating. Harmful interference with satellites—such as jamming communications, dazzling sensors, and **cyber intrusions**—has become rampant.

International law, including the United Nations (UN) Charter, imposes restrictions on military activities in outer space. The 1967 **Outer Space Treaty** bans the deployment and use of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in space (but not their development). However, efforts to establish additional rules and restrictions under the General Assembly mandate on preventing of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) have failed for decades.

Harmful actions in space, even those short of war, threaten satellites that provide essential services to civilians on Earth. These actions could contaminate an already fragile environment and lead to war and nuclear escalation. Most governments and civil society organisations agree that we must work together to preserve outer space as a peaceful, shared domain.

Current Context

Outer space security was discussed at the **UN Security Council** for the first time ever this year, prompted by concerns about potential development of nuclear weapon capabilities intended for orbit. This turn of events illuminates the risks of an unrestrained arms race in outer space that is emerging in the wake of diplomatic dysfunction.

Support for the annual UN General Assembly (UNGA) **resolution** on PAROS is nearly universal, but states disagree on its implementation. Procedural preferences create roadblocks; some states prioritise a new legal agreement banning weapons, while others focus on transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) and norms of behaviour to support existing laws and prevent conflict. The insistence by some states on separating the work of the



First Committee and the Conference on Disarmament from the work of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) impedes progress on cross-cutting issues like space debris. Delays are further caused by competing focuses on capabilities in space versus behaviours and uses.

On the capabilities side, initiatives include a draft treaty updated by Russia and China in 2014 on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force Against Space Objects (**PPWT**), and an annual resolution supporting a political declaration not to be the first to deploy weapons in space (**No First Placement**). However, some states argue that these lack clarity on what counts as a weapon and on verification.

The 2022–2023 Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Reducing Space Threats focused on behaviour. Participants **identified** numerous voluntary measures to mitigate shared security concerns. During this process, the United States declared a unilateral moratorium on destructive testing of ground-based, direct-ascent ASAT capabilities, joined by 37 states and supported by UNGA resolution **A/77/41**. But some states held reservations about the language of responsible behaviour and insisted on a legally binding instrument focused on banning weapons in outer space, blocking consensus on an outcome document.

Yet most states see various approaches to enhancing peace and security in outer space as complementary. To this end, in

2023 the UN Disarmament Commission adopted **recommendations** to promote practical implementation of core TCBMs identified by a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) in **2013**.

Additionally, a separate GGE on Further Practical Measures for PAROS, which focused on substantial elements of a legally binding instrument, concluded its work in August 2024 with a consensus **report** outlining the scope of discussions and the varying views among states. Importantly, it reflects core approaches and themes that structured the previous OEWG process, including a comprehensive approach to space threats; the relationship between legal and non-legal measures to reduce harms that can stem from both behaviour and/or intentional actions as well as certain capabilities in space; numerous or layered approaches to verification; and consideration of mechanisms for consultation and dispute resolution.

In 2023, the UNGA adopted resolutions mandating the establishment of two separate OEWG processes to begin in 2025: one that would continue the work of the previous OEWG on reducing space threats through a focus on norms of responsible behaviour (**A/RES/78/20**), and another that would continue the work of the GGE focused on a legal agreement on PAROS (**A/RES/78/238**). Many states raised concerns about financial and diplomatic burdens imposed by parallel meetings. However, common threads of discussion across these two approaches indicates possible scope for combining them into a single, comprehensive process.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Reiterate that the use of outer space is intended for the benefit and interests of all, and the importance of preventing an arms race and escalation of armed conflict in space;
- Reaffirm the legal prohibition against the placement or use of nuclear weapons in outer space, and commit not to develop capabilities for such purposes;
- Adopt or support unilateral measures of restraint as a step toward new arms control measures in outer space, such as the moratorium on destructive tests of ground-based, direct-ascent anti-satellite capabilities, and commitments not to place weapons in outer space;
- Condemn ASAT tests and the deployment or use of weapons in orbit or other capabilities used to disrupt, destroy, damage, or disable objects in space and commit not to do so;
- Emphasise the environmental and humanitarian consequences of harmful activities against space systems;
- Champion the importance of gender, racial, geographic, and other forms of diversity in discussions on PAROS and the need to assess the possible differentiated impacts of an arms race or armed conflict in outer space on different peoples;

- Define and support complementarities between the planned OEWG discussed focus on responsible behaviours and a legal agreement respectively—such as **TCBMs**, definitions, and verification—and/or support efforts to combine these two approaches; and
- Acknowledge the value of transparency and civil society inclusion in official proceedings.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Not test or deploy capabilities for use as weapons in outer space or against space systems;
- Refrain from activities that deliberately damage or destroy space objects, or that interfere with essential civilian infrastructure and services;
- Take steps to ensure that adherence with political commitments is observable to others; Implement the recommendations on TCBMs adopted by the UN Disarmament Commission;
- Use the cooperative provisions of the Outer Space Treaty such as consultation, observation, and information exchange to address perceived space threats and resolve uncertainties, and speak out against violation of treaty obligations; and
- Work constructively to establish the foundations that give practical effect to both multilateral and unilateral commitments, such as common understandings of threats and key terms, and means of verification and compliance; and

- Adopt national legislation and regulations to make space activities consistent with international law, norms, and voluntary commitments.

Author: Jessica West



Cyber

THE STIMSON CENTER

Background

The negative impacts of malicious cyber activity, including the misuse of information and communications technology (ICT), have widespread implications for the international community and the maintenance of international peace and security.

Activities ranging from denial-of-service attacks, ransomware, and malware operations can disrupt, disable, or destroy critical physical and information infrastructure as well as national or human security. These and other tactics have been used by states to cause disruption or sow confusion in other countries, including as part of electoral interference, and to control or repress human rights. Cyber operations are increasingly part of the toolkit of hybrid warfare and used to complement military or economic tactics below the threshold of conflict—but are also employed within armed conflict. Cybercrime and cryptocurrency theft is also being linked to enabling sanctions violations and funding the development of weapons of mass destruction.

ICT, or “cyber” issues, have been on the First Committee’s agenda since 2004, when a Russia-led resolution established a first Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on the subject. Two significant

outputs of the GGEs were the consensus agreement about the applicability of international law to state use of ICTs, and the elaboration of 11 voluntary norms. Together with cyber capacity-building and confidence-building measures, this combination of existing law and norms is increasingly referred to as the UN Framework for Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace.

The closed and limited format of the GGEs, however, led to calls for the establishment of other more inclusive bodies. In 2018, the First Committee established a sixth and seemingly final GGE (2019–2021) and for the first time, an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG). In 2020, a **second OEWG** (OEWG II) was established, which will run until 2025.

OEWG II is being chaired by Ambassador Burhan Gafoor of Singapore. It covers the same six thematic topics as its predecessor: threats; international law; rules, norms, and principles; confidence-building measures; capacity-building; and regular institutional dialogue. Five substantive sessions have occurred since 2021, alongside a growing number of intersessional meetings and informal consultations.

Current Context

It has again been a very active year for UN efforts to address international cyber peace and security.

OEWG II held two substantive sessions in 2024 as well as a series of intersessional meetings, including a first-ever Global Roundtable on ICT Security Capacity Building. During the substantive session held in July 2024, member states adopted the Group's **third annual progress report** (APR).

Positively, the APR reflects the growing depth and nuance of the OEWG's discussions on cyber threats, highlighting in particular the threats posed by ransomware, artificial intelligence, and critical infrastructure attacks. Other notable aspects of the APR include the introduction of four new confidence-building measures in addition to those already established by the OEWG and the introduction of a voluntary trust fund to support cyber capacity-building.

Of concern, however, is the deepening friction between states about the status of the existing Framework vis-à-vis the need for new legally binding commitments. While many states are encouraging the introduction of tools and initiatives to better map progress of the implementation of norms, others are pushing back against language that would encourage operationalisation of the norms, arguing instead for new legal commitments. Division between states was also apparent in the discussion about "regular institutional dialogue," or, what will happen after OEWG II concludes in 2025. The Chair attempted to get agreement on this aspect

during the July session via the APR to avoid uncertainty in the Group's final year of work, but was unable to do so. There are effectively two competing proposals: one seeking to establish a UN Programme of Action (Cyber PoA) and a second to create a Permanent OEWG. The two proposals broadly mirror divisions between states over implementing existing commitments through the Framework, versus negotiating new obligations.

Member states do agree, however, on the need for a permanent UN forum on international cybersecurity and for a "seamless transition" in getting there. To that end, states such as Brazil, India, and South Africa have been vocal in calling for a moratorium on cyber resolutions at the First Committee. This is an appeal to end the so-called "dueling resolutions" trend of recent years, in which similar but different resolutions have been tabled either by Russia and the United States, or more recently, by Russia and France, the latter of whom is the penholder on the cyber PoA process. A roadmap for the PoA process was outlined through a **resolution** adopted during the 2023 First Committee. There is not really a need to introduce another PoA resolution again in 2024 and similarly, attempting to hijack OEWG discussions and decisions about its successor through a First Committee resolution would be counterproductive. At the time of writing, there are not any draft resolutions in progress—although that could change by October.

That said, the third APR will be presented to the UN General Assembly via a largely procedural First Committee resolution tabled by Singapore, as was done in 2023 for earlier APRs.

Looking beyond the First Committee to other recent UN happenings, it is noteworthy that the **Third Committee-based process** to negotiate a global cybercrime treaty concluded with the adoption of a new convention in August. It was adopted by a vote, including several paragraph votes, indicative of the challenging negotiation process. The Convention is a source of significant concern from a diverse grouping of human rights and press freedom organisations, technology companies, industry groups, security researchers, and the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. The crux of their shared concern is that the treaty's safeguards are too general and often defer to national laws, which leave it vulnerable to misuse in ways that could harm human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) held two meetings on cyber security in 2024. The Republic of Korea (ROK) organised **an Arria-formula meeting** in April 2024 with Japan and the United States on the "Evolving Cyber Threat Landscape and its Implications for the Maintenance of International Peace and Security". In June, ROK hosted the UNSC's second-ever High-level Open Debate on the topic, which saw rich participation from more than 70 member states.

The contentious and difficult process to negotiate a Global Digital Compact and Pact for the Future will have concluded by the time the First Committee gets underway, but elements of both (as of yet draft) documents are relevant to the Committee and bodies like the OEWG II.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Condemn the malicious use of ICTs by states and non-state actors;
- Provide updates on how the UN Framework is being implemented, including views on national interpretations of international law; and
- Articulate views and priorities for OEWG II-related work, including around inclusivity of non-governmental stakeholders and for regular institutional dialogue post-2025.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Halt the development and use of malicious cyber capabilities;
- Adhere to the agreed norms for state behaviour in cyberspace;
- Take measures to enhance transparency and confidence in the pursuit of accountability; and
- Uphold human rights and international human rights law online.

Author: Allison Pytlak

STIMSON

Gender, Intersectionality, and Disarmament

REACHING CRITICAL WILL

Background

Gender is about social norms. Gender norms are the ideas of who a person is and how they should act based on their body. Gender norms are socially constructed, they are not innate. The persistence of gender norms across time and cultures relies on people accepting them. Challenging gender norms is important for many reasons, including individual and social freedom and equality. Gender diversity is an irrefutable fact throughout history that some cultures repress because enforcing a gender binary suits political and economic interests of a dominant class. For the purposes of the First Committee, challenging gender norms is also important not just to reflect reality, but also to support disarmament and demilitarisation.

Gender norms perpetuate a binary construction of men who are violent and powerful and women who are vulnerable and need to be protected. The framing of war and violence as “strong” and “masculine” is often coupled with a framing of peace and nonviolence as “weak” and “feminine.” In this context, weapons are typically seen as important for security, power, and control, while

disarmament is treated as something that makes countries weaker or more vulnerable. Diplomats and activists who highlight the humanitarian and environmental impacts of weapons and call for their prohibition or restriction often are accused of being “emotional” and “irrational,” which are typical **gendered responses** meant to “feminise” and ridicule. This gendered framing is extremely problematic when it comes to accepting disarmament as a credible approach to security.

The binary gendered framing of strength being best achieved through violence has implications for policies related to all weapon systems, from nuclear bombs to small arms. Whether it is the **marketing of nuclear weapons** as essential to deterring invasion or projecting power globally, or the **marketing of guns** to cisgendered men as essential to preserve their dominance in society, each perpetuates a protection racket that says weapons are necessary to ensure power and privilege. Thus, gendered norms undermine efforts for disarmament while increasing the profits of the military-industrial complex.

The persistence of these kinds of gender norms is enabled, in part, by the lack of

diversity in disarmament discussions. People of diverse genders, sexual orientations, racial identities, disabilities, as well as people from communities most affected by weapons and war, can help articulate alternative conceptions of strength and security that foster disarmament and demilitarisation.

Diversity can also help illuminate the various ways in which weapons have gendered, racial, and other **intersectional impacts** on particular communities and peoples. For example, the nine nuclear-armed states have primarily carried out nuclear weapon testing on the lands, water, and bodies of Indigenous Peoples. Settler states and colonial governments have mined uranium for nuclear weapons primarily on Indigenous lands. Nuclear weapon development and radioactive waste storage are situated largely within or near impoverished or marginalised communities.

Drone strikes, meanwhile, have almost exclusively been conducted in countries of the Global South, as has most use of explosive weapons in populated areas since the end of World War II—with Russia’s ongoing illegal invasion and war in Ukraine as an exception. More broadly, the use of explosive weapons and of small arms and light weapons can also have disproportionate gendered impacts. Men tend to make up the majority of direct victims of armed violence and armed conflict, and are sometimes **targeted** for being men, which constitutes gender-based violence (GBV). But women, girls, nonbinary, and LGBTQ+ people suffer harm from weapons disproportionate to the number of those directly involved in conflict or violence. **Further**, they are more likely

to be targeted for acts of GBV, experience differential impacts from the destruction of cities and towns in bombings, and may also face social and political inequalities in relation to access to survivor assistance or participation in peacebuilding or post-conflict reconstruction.

New weapon technologies, such as the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and autonomy in weapon systems, will **further increase** the gendered and racialised impacts of weapons and war. AI and algorithms are known to be biased and discriminatory to people of colour, women, trans people, and people with disabilities. They are already causing harm in the context of policing and border surveillance; once weaponised, these technologies will bring untold horror to humans around the world.

Current Context

Interest in the topic of “gender and disarmament” has gathered momentum in recent years, though most statements, working papers, and resolutions do not take an intersectional or nonbinary approach to the impacts, diversity, or norms described above.

At last year’s First Committee, **37.7 per cent of resolutions** included gender references (23 out of 61 resolutions). Seventy-eight delegations endorsed a **joint statement** on gender and disarmament.

Intersessional work to implement the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)** and the **Action Plan** adopted at its **First Meeting of States**

Parties in June 2022 has included meetings of the Gender Focal Point throughout 2023 and 2024, while affected communities have been consulted in meetings of the Articles 6 and 7 Working Group.

At the Tenth Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in August 2022, 67 states parties signed onto a joint statement on gender, diversity, and inclusion. At the latest NPT Preparatory Committee in July–August 2024, many civil society groups and some governments highlighted the importance of gender perspectives and intersectionality for nuclear disarmament.

As described elsewhere in this briefing book, outcomes from meetings of the Arms Trade Treaty, Mine Ban Treaty, Convention on Cluster Munitions, the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, and the Political Declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas have included gender dimensions, and civil society and some states have raised gender concerns within meetings of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Open-ended Working Group on Information and Communications Technologies, and the Open-ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats.

These developments are very welcome and should be continued and enhanced in as many disarmament forums as possible. However, a more robust reflection of the gendered norms associated with weapons, war, and violence is also crucial for effectively addressing the challenges

associated with the proliferation and use of weapons. Furthermore, an intersectional approach that recognises the implications of diverse identities and experiences for disarmament and international security is essential.

The UN Secretary-General's *New Agenda for Peace*, released in July 2023, calls for dismantling “the patriarchy and oppressive power structures” and encourages governments, society, and the United Nations to “fight back and take concrete action to challenge and transform gender norms, value systems and institutional structures that perpetuate exclusion or the status quo.” This is what delegates to the First Committee should prioritise.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Welcome the commitments and recommendations made in relation to gender, diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality as noted above;
- Challenge delegations that oppose the incorporation of gender perspectives, diversity, and other intersectional approaches in resolutions;
- Collaborate to make First Committee resolutions more intersectional and nonbinary;
- Commit to enhancing diversity and inclusion in disarmament discussions, negotiations, and decision-making processes; and



- Raise concerns about gender norms in relation to weapons, militarism, and conflict.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Avoid gender essentialisms, gender binaries, and reinforcement of violent gender norms in action plans on disarmament and arms control;
- Implement and report back on agreed provisions related to enhancing diversity, incorporating gender perspectives, preventing gender-based violence, and including survivors, affected communities, and persons with disabilities;
- Seek to ensure intersectional diversity in disarmament and arms control discussions, negotiations, and processes, with an emphasis on centering perspectives of those affected by armed violence, including racialised people and women, nonbinary, and LGBTQ+ people;

- Continue to research and assess the specific impacts that weapons, armed conflict, and armed violence have on diverse populations, including through the collection of sex-, gender-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data;
- Support work investigating and illuminating the impact of patriarchy and other systems of oppression on disarmament and demilitarisation efforts, and undertake concrete measures to dismantle the militarised gender norms that the *New Agenda for Peace* acknowledges; and
- Invest in social equality, economic justice, and human rights instead of militarism, weapons, and war.

Author: Ray Acheson



Reaching Critical Will

Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts

CONFLICT AND ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATORY AND PAX

Background

Environmental harm in conflicts damages ecosystems and undermines fundamental human rights. Both are also placed at risk by the damage that conflicts inflict upon environmental governance.

Global interest in the environmental dimensions of armed conflicts and military activities is at an historic high and continues to grow. While engagement remains limited in the First Committee, the outside world is increasingly witnessing the environmental consequences of conflicts and interpreting them in light of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

The appalling devastation in Gaza exemplifies the means through which the use of explosive weapons in populated areas can cause environmental harm, with both immediate and long-term, intergenerational consequences. To date, at least 39 million tonnes of debris have been generated in Gaza, while water and sanitation infrastructure has been

destroyed, agricultural areas have been deliberately targeted and razed, and civilians, including humanitarian aid workers, have been **exposed** to a wide range of toxic remnants of war. Israel's attacks on Gaza have also renewed attention to the humanitarian and environmental impact of incendiary weapons.

In Ukraine, environmentally sensitive industrial objects continue to be targeted creating lasting pollution risks for soils and ground and surface waters. Landscape fires and physical damage have devastated areas of ecological importance in front line areas, many of which are heavily contaminated with mines and explosive remnants of war. The ongoing and acutely risky military occupation of Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant is testament to the extent to which environmental norms have been ignored.

While the intensity and conduct of the war in Ukraine has spotlighted attention on the environmental dimensions of conflicts, not all conflicts enjoy the same degree of attention. In Sudan, many areas have yet to be remotely assessed, but in Khartoum industrial areas have been devastated,

creating pollution risks to people and the wider environment. Nationwide, oil infrastructure has been deliberately targeted or disrupted by the conflict, with frequent damaging fires and spills.

Off Yemen's Red Sea coast, months of attacks on shipping continue to create oil and chemical spills that threaten its delicate marine ecosystem and could cause broader humanitarian concerns for civilians. These Houthi attacks stand in stark contrast to their apparent past concerns over the risks formerly posed by a spill from the FSO Safer oil terminal—a threat that was successfully addressed by a UN mission after years of diplomatic efforts in 2023.

In Colombia, Amazon deforestation rates have been intimately linked with its armed conflict and with its peace agreement. This year, as the government has advanced its cause of total peace with non-state armed groups, the protection of forest areas has been **used** as a bargaining chip. Colombia's experience of the interactions between armed conflict and the protection of biodiversity, and of the opportunities that protecting nature can provide for advancing peace, has informed its *Paz con Naturaleza* theme for COP16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which the country will host in October 2024.

Current Context

In February 2024, the Sixth UN Environment Assembly passed its third consensus **resolution** on the environmental dimensions of armed conflicts. The resolution urged states

to adhere to the law protecting the environment in relation to armed conflicts, invited states to take note of the Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts (PERAC) **Principles**, and requested that the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) develop technical standards for the collection of environmental data.

In July 2024, a long-awaited **update** to the International Mine Action Standard on environmental protection was adopted. The revamped standard introduces guidance for tailored national mine action standards and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), along with environmental data collection and climate adaptation measures. Many conflict-affected countries are highly vulnerable to climate change and there are huge benefits from embedding environmental management and climate adaptation measures in mine action.

In 2024, Environment, Peace and Security (EPS) concerns continued to be priority issues for several UN Security Council (UNSC) members. In February, the Council met to discuss the links between "Climate Change and Food Insecurity" during a high-level open **debate** under Guyana's presidency of the Council. In July, Council members Slovenia, Guyana, Republic of Korea, and Sierra Leone further **explored** the topic of environmental challenges and opportunities for peace during an Arrria formula meeting. Furthermore, the UN Secretary-General included environmental and climate risks to health and human suffering in his annual **report** to the UNSC on the Protection of Civilians for the sixth consecutive year; UNSC members maintained environmental

and climate mandates in the mandates of peacekeeping and special political missions in UNFICYP, UNMISS, UNAMI, MINUSCA, and MONUSCO; and 11 of 15 Council members (France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States)—all of which are supporters of the joint pledges on climate change, peace and security—released a **statement** on the importance and urgency of incorporating environmental and climate considerations into the UN peacekeeping framework during a joint media stakeout after the annual debate on UN Peacekeeping Operations in September.

Following agreement on the Political Declaration on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA), work is underway to incorporate environmental considerations in its implementation. This includes **exploring** field data collection methodologies to identify human and ecological health risks from toxic remnants of war.

In May, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the Geneva Water Hub launched **the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts** during a **side event** to the annual UN Protection of Civilians week in New York. The Alliance aims to promote the implementation of UNSCR 2417 (2018) and 2573 (2021), the EWIPA Political Declaration, and other tools available, including international humanitarian law (IHL), to advance the protection of freshwater and related installations from armed conflicts and explore possibilities for an intergovernmental political declaration for “sparing water from armed conflicts.

Substantive work has continued in order to breathe life into the positive obligations for victim assistance and environmental remediation under the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons. In recent months this has focused on the establishment and operation of a trust fund to support its aims.

Efforts to mainstream peace and security consideration across environmental agreements continue. Colombia’s two-year presidency of the CBD presents an historic opportunity to foreground the relationship between biodiversity and conflict. Issues of particular relevance to the First Committee include the relationship between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and wildlife declines, and the importance of the nature-sensitive clearance of mines, and explosive remnants of war in ecologically important areas.

On the climate crisis, COP29 host Azerbaijan also wants to integrate peace and security considerations into its presidency and has already drawn attention to the relationship between climate change and mine action. At COP29 in November 2024, there will be further pressure on governments to transparently **report** military greenhouse gas emissions and to include them in their nationally determined contributions.

Lastly, as of writing, negotiations throughout 2024 on the **Pact for the Future** have yielded three drafts (Zero draft, Rev.2, and Rev.3) with language and actions dedicated to promoting the importance of strengthening multilateral efforts in dealing with the existential threat of climate change

and environmental degradation. This includes Action 21 of Rev.3, which addresses means of “adverse climate and environmental impacts that could contribute to the onset or escalation of conflict” in Chapter 2 on International, Peace and Security.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Champion the PERAC Principles on the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts and support their implementation;
- Draw attention to military contributions to the climate emergency and the need for meaningful pledges to transparently report on and cut military greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; and
- Commit to fully articulating the environmental dimensions of the topics on the First Committee’s agenda during statements, including drawing attention to the humanitarian impacts of environmental degradation in conflicts as a consequence of conflict pollution and toxic remnants of war.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Raise concerns over the environmental dimensions of armed conflicts and militarism in national interventions in all relevant debates and briefings across the UN system, including within the Summit of the Future and negotiations leading up to the Pact for the Future, as well as at

the UN Security Council, UN Human Rights Council, UN Environment Assembly, and cross-cutting bodies like the Peacebuilding Commission;

- Commit to reducing military GHG emissions and improving military emissions reporting, including in UN peacekeeping operations, and support efforts to develop a global standard for reporting and reductions under the framework of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change;
- Adopt, implement, and promote the revised International Committee of the Red Cross Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict; and
- Increase support for relevant environmental work in humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction activities, including promoting collaboration and cooperation across UN agencies, funds, and programmes, and in preventing the environmental impacts of armed conflict.

**Authors: Doug Weir
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**Conflict and
Environment
Observatory**

Disarmament and Socioeconomic Justice

REACHING CRITICAL WILL

Background

Militarism and war contribute to obstacles for sustainable development through environmental destruction caused by military activities as well as by being one of the greatest polluters and consumers of resources. Military activities often threaten human health through the toxic legacy of weapon production, leading to environmental contamination. Explosive remnants from conflicts are also making land dangerous to farm or live on, which hampers socioeconomic justice including by limiting access to education, food security, and safe housing, and by delaying reconstruction processes. In addition, governments that spend excessive financial, technological, and human resources on militarism, weapons, and war also divert resources that otherwise could be spent on economic, social, and environmental programmes that are necessary to ensure human well-being and ecological regeneration.

The relationships between militarism, economic inequality, and social injustice have been a recurring theme since the foundation of the United Nations. Article 26 of the UN Charter tasks the UN Security Council to create a plan for the

regulation of armaments and reducing military expenditure. However, this task has been neglected and undermined by its permanent members' excessive military spending, rampant arms trading, and engagement in and facilitation of armed conflict.

In 1982, a UN study set out the negative impacts of a large military sector on long-term economic growth and the structural changes required for economic development. In 1987 this was followed by the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development that adopted an action plan including commitments to reduce military expenditure and allocate resources released by disarmament toward development. The 1992 Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action contained similar commitments on reallocating military resources toward sustainable peace as well as on innovative finance. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 and the UN Secretary-General's 2018 report Securing our common future: an agenda for disarmament also address how arms control, peace, and security contribute to development.



In *Our Common Agenda* from 2021, the UN Secretary-General calls on states to “correct a glaring blind spot in how we measure economic prosperity and progress,” arguing that “when profits come at the expense of people and our planet, we are left with an incomplete picture of the true cost of economic growth.” This refers to a discussion that over the years has challenged problematic “development” frameworks, which can perpetuate exploitative economic systems dictated by the Global North. The growth imperative of political economy, often measured in GDP, has been **described** as the leading driver of environmental degradation, generating insecurity including justifying increased military expenditure. New insights have led to the **degrowth movement**, which focuses on human flourishing and

ecological stability. It argues that sectors, such as public healthcare or regenerative agriculture, need to grow to ensure human well-being, while sectors such as fossil fuels and the arms industry must radically shrink.

Current Context

Global military expenditure increased 6.8 per cent in 2023 to **2443 billion USD**, the highest level ever recorded. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was followed by an increased military spending by many states, a trend that continued in 2023. As so-called geopolitical relations deteriorate, **ideological and financial investments in nuclear weapons** grew. In 2023, nuclear-armed states spent **91.4 billion USD** on

their arsenals, a 10.7 billion USD increase from 2022.

During the Preparatory Committee of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in July–August 2024, delegations **expressed concerns** over nuclear weapon spending and modernisation. Some suggested these resources should be redirected to sustainable development. Socioeconomic justice was also a central theme at the Fourth Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons In All Its Aspects in June 2024, where several statements as well as the adopted **outcome document** addressed consequences of the illicit trade in small arms on peace and sustainable development.

The UN Secretary-General **described** 2023 as a “resoundingly grim” year with a 72 per cent increase in civilian deaths compared to 2022. As of 15 April 2024, a **UN report** on the expected socioeconomic impacts of the war in Gaza described how approximately 370,000 housing units in Gaza had been damaged, of which 79,000 were destroyed. The report projects it will take 80 years to rebuild the housing units that had been destroyed so far.

During the UN Security Council debate on the protection of civilians in May 2024, several **delegations addressed** the role of arms exporters in fueling the conditions for conflicts and some stressed how reducing conflict equals reducing military expenditure. Widespread protests to the genocide of Palestinians have also highlighted the consequences

of the economy of war, not least the links between military companies and academic institutions, through which many universities in western countries profit from violence or harm. With mixed results, students, faculty, employees, and others have urged these institutions to divest from weapon manufacturers and other companies profiting from Israel’s genocide of Palestinians, and called attention to the **“military-industrial-education complex”** that undermines sustainable peace and socioeconomic justice.

When states met for the High-level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in July 2024, only six years remained to complete the goals of Agenda 2030.

In his **report to the meeting**, the UN Secretary-General described how only 17 per cent of the SDG targets were on track to be achieved, half the targets were showing minimal or moderate progress, and for over a third of the targets, progress had stalled or regressed. He emphasised the need for peace to achieve the SDGs and called for an end to conflicts across the world.

In September 2024, states parties will meet for the Summit of the Future. While the third revised **draft** of the Pact for the Future does not explicitly call for action to decrease military expenditure, it addresses concerns regarding the “potential impact” that global increase of military expenditures could have on investments in sustainable development. It calls for addressing root causes to armed violence and for states to ensure that spending on arms “does not compromise investment” in sustainable

development and peace. It also requests the UN Secretary-General to provide analysis on the impact of the global increase in military expenditure on the achievement of the SDGs by the end of the seventy-ninth session of the UN General Assembly.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- Call for serious reductions in military expenditure and outline ways in which they are working to reduce their spending on weapons and war;
- Recognise and reinforce the specific ways in which disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control can advance the promotion of human and planetary well-being, equality, and justice;
- Urge the implementation of Article 26 of the UN Charter through the UN General Assembly and regional and bilateral means, since the UN Security Council has failed in this task; and
- Call for the convening of regular interdisciplinary discussions across the General Assembly's committees on cross-cutting issues relating to disarmament, social equality, economic justice, human rights, and environmental regeneration, in line with the recommendation in *A New Agenda for Peace*.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Reduce military budgets and redirect funds to investment in social equality, economic justice, human rights, and environmental regeneration;
- Enhance the participation of marginalised lower-income countries and regions in disarmament by supporting funds to increase the diversity of participation in meetings as well as capacity-building projects, and support the consistent collection, monitoring, and analysis of participation data to improve awareness and measure progress;
- Identify how current practices in disarmament and arms control can facilitate progress toward socioeconomic justice and care, and build on those practices; and
- Identify how economic prosperity and progress is defined to ensure that economic growth is not made at the expense of people or the environment but benefits ecological stability and human well-being.

Author: Emma Bjertén



Reaching Critical Will

Youth and Disarmament Education

INTERNATIONAL DISARMAMENT INSTITUTE, PACE UNIVERSITY

Background

Frustration at the lack of progress on nuclear and other forms of disarmament prompted a 1979 UN General Assembly [resolution](#) to call for “ways and means of mobilizing world public opinion” for disarmament. This recognition that disarmament is not solely an endeavor of diplomats is the foundation for disarmament education, which according to a [2002 report](#) by the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) on “Disarmament and non-proliferation education” (issued in response to a 2000 UN General Assembly [resolution](#)), is not just education *about* disarmament but, most crucially, education *for* disarmament. Action 22 of the [final document](#) of the 2010 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) encouraged all states to implement the UNSG’s recommendations.

For much of the last two decades, disarmament education has focused more on programmatic activities than public mobilisation. Unfortunately, few states have submitted [reports](#) to the UNSG as requested by successive biennial resolutions on disarmament education and there is little substantive programming. A 2019 [report](#) from the

United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific of disarmament education efforts in the region, found that “lack of understanding” of disarmament education “results in underestimating its value” and lack of investment.

Nevertheless, in recent years, concerted civil society advocacy and multilateral action has revived interest in disarmament education, resulting in impressive advances in policy, particularly in encouraging youth participation in disarmament.

The preamble of the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) recognised “the importance of peace and disarmament education in all its aspects.” The [Action Plan](#) adopted at the TPNW First Meeting of States Parties commits states parties to engage with youth and provide disarmament education.

The following year, UNSG António Guterres specifically addressed disarmament education as a contributor to the Sustainable Development Goals in his agenda for disarmament [Securing Our Common Future](#). In 2018, the UN Security Council (UNSC) [renewed](#) its 2015 resolution “Youth,

Peace and Security” and the following year, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) launched its **Youth4Disarmament initiative**, which, supported by contributions from the Republic of Korea, Germany, and Kazakhstan, has built a diverse network of young people interested in disarmament through events, training opportunities, **a dedicated website**, and social media outreach.

Annual joint civil society statements at the First Committee since 2016 have consistently raised concerns that the youth and disarmament education agenda has been interpreted too narrowly and timidly. Young people called on policymakers to build connections to climate action and other global issues and to address inequities resulting from sexism, racism, ableism, economic exclusion, and violations of LGBTQIA+ rights (see, for example, last year’s **statement**). This challenges the misconception of disarmament education as a “youth thing,” illustrating the important role young people play in contributing to disarmament education and providing diverse perspectives on disarmament. The 2021 **Seoul Youth Declaration for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation** and the joint youth **statement** at the 2023 Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW similarly called for equitable participation of diverse youth in disarmament policymaking, as well as funding for youth disarmament initiatives.

UNODA released a new **Disarmament Education Strategy** in 2022, which highlighted “a pressing need for authoritative, far-reaching, and inclusive disarmament education” and that existing efforts “have largely remained

ad hoc, lacking coordination and a clear direction.” The Strategy aims to provide “coherence and coordination” for UN disarmament education, enhancing and diversifying partnerships and promoting sustainability through fundraising and accountability mechanisms.

Current Context

Civil society advocacy and reinvigorated diplomatic attention have generated exciting progress in the field of youth and disarmament education over the last two years.

Japan announced a 10 million USD contribution to the UN in 2022, to establish a **Youth Leader Fund for a World Without Nuclear Weapons (YLF)**. The project began in 2023 and has eight years of funding. The first phase of the online component of the project provided training to 100 participants, aged 18–29, in nuclear disarmament, through online courses, expert webinars, and skills building workshops. In August 2024, YLF participants released a **Declaration for a World Without Nuclear Weapons**, which called for youth participation in political and diplomatic processes on disarmament. With additional funding from Republic of Korea and Germany, the UN’s Youth4Disarmament programme has trained young leaders from around the world on issues of disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control.

Nevertheless, funding for disarmament education is miniscule in comparison to the 2,443 billion USD record high **global military expenditure** in 2023. Current support, including Japan’s unprecedented

multi-year contribution is still insufficient to cover the global effort needed for impactful and sustainable disarmament education and has not yet been replicated by other states.

A New Agenda for Peace, launched by UNSG António Guterres in July 2023, represents an especially encouraging step forward for youth and disarmament education, demonstrating attentiveness to many issues raised by the joint civil society statements. The UNSG calls particular attention to the need to build linkages between disarmament and climate action.

A new civil society and academia working group on Nuclear Disarmament Education, convened by the Judith Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies at Cornell University, met in June 2024 to begin considerations of possible recommendations on improving disarmament education.

Youth Fellows delivered remarks on behalf of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Cluster Munition Coalition at the meetings of states parties for both the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Mine Ban Treaty last year.

In July 2024, UNSG António Guterres released his biennial **report** on the implementation of the recommendations of the 2002 UN study on disarmament and non-proliferation education, collating a record number of submissions from states, international organisations, and civil society. The number of submissions from states more than quadrupled since 2022. It was also the first time in 20 years that a one of the permanent

members of the UNSC—the United States—made a submission.

At the First Committee this year, Mexico will again sponsor its biennial resolution on “**Disarmament and non-proliferation education**,” which in 2022 called on the international community to support disarmament education initiatives and recognised “the importance of civil society, including academia” and NGOs. This resolution alternates with and is connected to the First Committee’s related biennial resolution on “**Youth, disarmament and non-proliferation**.”

While it does not specifically deal with disarmament education, the **third revised draft** of the outcome of the upcoming Summit for the Future also offers addresses issues of meaningful youth participation and education for peace and human rights.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

- ➔ Support the “Disarmament and non-proliferation education” resolution and strengthen it by:
 - Calling on the UN Secretary-General to seek specific measures, supported by voluntary contributions, to further strengthen global disarmament and non-proliferation education efforts;
 - Calling for investment by the international community into disarmament education;

- Celebrating renewed multilateral action on youth and disarmament education, including UNODA's Youth4Disarmament initiative and inclusion of peace and disarmament education in the preamble of the TPNW;
 - Welcoming UNODA's Disarmament Education Strategy and its emphasis on partnership-centered education efforts, attention to youth participation in *A New Agenda for Peace*, and relevant outcomes from the Pact to the Future;
 - Incorporating recommendations of the 2021 Seoul Youth Declaration and 2023 joint civil society statement, particularly those regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion; and
 - Drawing linkages between youth, disarmament, and other pressing issues, such as climate action, human rights, sustainable development and gender equality.
- ➔ In their statements, delegations should:
- Commit to match or exceed the contributions of donors including Japan, Germany, the Republic of Korea, and Kazakhstan to youth and disarmament education efforts;
 - Honour the crucial role of hibakusha, survivors, civil society, educational institutions, and youth in disarmament; and
 - Report on their government's disarmament education initiatives, including efforts to engage youth.
- Beyond First Committee, States should:***
- ➔ Promote action on disarmament education and youth in other disarmament fora, including in meetings of states parties of relevant treaties;
 - ➔ Provide funding and institutional support to peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education—they should aim to match or even exceed recent contributions by donors including the Republic of Korea, Japan, Germany, and Kazakhstan;
 - ➔ Honour the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki next year, including by emphasising the importance educational and awareness raising activities for disarmament;
 - ➔ Provide resources to UNODA to replicate the baseline disarmament education study conducted in 2019 in Asia and the Pacific at the global level and publish regular and systematic "State of Disarmament Education" reports every four years;
 - ➔ Make submissions to UNODA for the 2025 UNSG report on youth and disarmament; and
 - ➔ Implement peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education in ways that are sensitive to intersectional marginalisation—for instance, by mainstreaming promotion of gender equality and building capacity of poorly-represented peoples and groups, including survivors of armed violence.

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Disability and Disarmament

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Background

In recent decades, the work of the First Committee has been increasingly focused on the humanitarian dimension of disarmament, recognising that national and human security can and must be pursued as complementary objectives, in accordance with the dictates of public conscience and international law. The need to include marginalised voices and groups in discussions and decision-making regarding peace and disarmament is now widely recognised, and three treaties include victim assistance provisions: the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT); the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM); and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

However, while the First Committee has both the responsibility and capacity to do so, it has not yet ensured the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities—over one eighth of the human family—in its deliberations. After consultation with a number of disability rights and disarmament stakeholders, we believe the First Committee must both integrate disability rights more thoroughly into existing resolutions, and develop a new resolution dedicated to this multidimensional, morally-compelling, yet long neglected topic.

Through the 21st century, the United Nations as a whole has embraced more expansive definitions of peace and security, notably with the formal adoption of a Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions), and a Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda (UNSCR 2250). Correspondingly, the First Committee's agenda now features biennial resolutions on *Youth, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation and Women, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control*.

A new resolution on *Disability, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation* would not simply be a logical next step, but one that is long overdue. As the 2006 Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), now ratified by 191 states, makes clear, persons with disabilities should be viewed primarily not as victims or patients but rather as critical enablers of change, leaders on the path to a more livable world. In the context of international security, persons with disabilities are among those groups most disproportionately affected by armed conflict and deserve a much greater say in how systems and machines of violence can be dismantled, disarmed, and replaced.

Current Context

Article 11 of the CRPD requires states parties to “take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict.” This landmark provision helped inspire the UN Security Council’s historic resolution 2475 (2019) on the protection of persons with disabilities in armed conflict. That same year, the UN adopted a Disability Inclusion Strategy that “provides the foundation for sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion throughout all pillars of the work of the United Nations.” Both of these developments have major implications for the First Committee’s work, as the protection of persons with disabilities in armed conflict cannot be separated from work to prevent armed conflict, or to prohibit the use of inhumane weapons and tactics. It also requires the empowering of persons with disabilities to bring their invaluable experiences and perspectives to bear in discussions—and decisions—on peace and disarmament.

Remarkably, in the First Committee’s last session, only one resolution, on cluster munitions, made any mention of disability, while also stressing the importance and impact of the CRPD. At the 2022 session, only two resolutions—on cluster munitions and on women, disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control—referred to disability. Yet a close reading of the 61 substantive resolutions adopted in 2023 suggests that at least a third could and should have included references to disability rights issues, ranging from treaty-specific resolutions on inhumane weapons—e.g. texts on the MBT, TPNW, and small arms and light weapons—to texts more generally addressing

humanitarian impacts and consequences of modern war and new technologies, to yet broader topics, e.g. regional disarmament and peace education, where disability is all-too-often a missing dimension or submerged concern.

Recommendations

During the First Committee, delegations should:

- Include references to this topic in their statements;
- Develop a new resolution on disability, disarmament and non-proliferation;
- Include references to disability rights in a wide range of existing resolutions;
- Host a high-profile side event on disability and disarmament; and
- Express support for the rights and participation of persons with disabilities in national and group statements, while inviting other States and groups to do the same.

Beyond the First Committee, states should:

- Consult with relevant civil society groups, academics, international organisations, and most importantly persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, to raise the profile of the issue wherever and whenever possible.

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Torture-Free Trade

TORTURE-FREE TRADE NETWORK

Background

On December 10, 1984, the General Assembly adopted the UN Convention against Torture. Forty years later, however, manufacturers continue to produce, and states across the world continue to trade, equipment that has no practical use other than for the purpose of torture or other ill-treatment, and equipment. Other more standard law enforcement equipment, such as regular batons, handheld pepper sprays, some types of tear gas dispersal systems, and handcuffs, is widely traded globally but often misused for torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (“other ill-treatment”), including in the suppression of peaceful protests and abuse of detainees. Despite the serious human rights risks that both standard equipment and inherently abusive equipment pose, the trade remains unregulated at the global level.

The absence of common, binding international standards that would prohibit trade in equipment that can only be used to commit torture or other ill-treatment—and that would regulate equipment that can readily be misused for the same—is contributing to the current chasm between some states’ commitment in theory to the prohibition on torture, and the reality that they violate

the prohibition in practice. Allowing states and companies to trade the tools of torture and ill-treatment with impunity, and to profit from that trade, undermines respect for the absolute prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment, and so facilitates torture.

From the early 2000s onwards, a series of **statements**, studies (i.e. [A 72/178](#) and [A/68/295](#)), and resolutions ([A/RES/56/143](#)) in the UN system has highlighted that states should regulate the trade in law enforcement equipment to help prevent torture and other ill-treatment.

In 2017, Argentina, the European Union, and Mongolia led the creation of the **Alliance for Torture-Free Trade**, a group of more than 60 states that have pledged to “act together to further prevent, restrict and end trade” in goods used for torture and other ill-treatment as well as goods used in the death penalty”.

Between 2017–2019 the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights developed the **Human Rights Guidance on Less Lethal Weapons**, which elaborated the obligations states have with respect to procurement and transfer of such equipment.

A 2019 UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution charged a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) with assessing the feasibility, scope, and parameters for common international standards on torture-free trade and gave the UN Secretary-General a mandate to survey states on the topic. The UN Secretary-General presented his **report** “Towards torture-free trade: examining the feasibility, scope and parameters for possible common international standards” to the 74th session of UNGA. In 2022, the GGE **recommended** establishing such common international standards for trade in law enforcement equipment, while noting that “the issue of goods related to the death penalty [should] be treated separately.”

In 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture dedicated a thematic **report** to the global trade in law enforcement equipment. The report emphasised the need for a legally binding instrument to control the trade in standard law enforcement equipment and prohibit inherently abusive equipment and contained detailed lists of each equipment type. Other UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures mandate holders have joined the Special Rapporteur in **calling for a treaty**. On 26 June 2023, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, **said**, “I am fully supportive of all efforts to limit trade in items that could be used for torture, including through a new international torture-free trade treaty.”

There have also been regional developments. The 2002 **Robben Island Guidelines**, adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, recommend that African

Union states prohibit and prevent use, trade, and production of inherently abusive equipment and the abuse of other equipment for torture or other ill-treatment. A 2020 Commission **resolution** (ACHPR/ Res.472 (LXVII) 2020) reinforces this recommendation.

In May 2023, the African Union’s Commission for the Prevention of Torture in Africa (CPTA) organised an awareness-raising panel at the African Commission Open Session in Banjul, to launch their report on the production, trade and use of instruments of torture in Africa. There was strong representation from the Torture-Free Trade Network on the panel. Commissioner Hatem, the Chair of the CPTA, made an unequivocal call for African States to join the Alliance and to push for a Torture-Free Trade Treaty. **The Torture-Free Trade Network** was formed in January 2023 and now comprises of over 80 NGOs from all world regions.

In 2005, the European Union (EU) approved the EU Anti-Torture Regulation (**EU 2019/125**), which requires EU states to prohibit inherently abusive equipment and control trade in standard equipment. The law was substantially strengthened in 2019. EU states must deny exports of standard equipment when there are risks the equipment could be used for torture or other ill-treatment. The EU is in the process of amending the lists of prohibited and controlled goods in response to changes in the international security market, including technological changes, changes in use and misuse of law enforcement equipment, and emerging challenges, notably extra-custodial torture and other ill-treatment during the policing of peaceful protests.

A 2021 Council of Europe Recommendation (**CM/ Rec (2021)2**) adopted by its Committee of Ministers urges Council of Europe member states to prohibit inherently abusive equipment and control trade in standard equipment.

A 2023 regional **hearing** of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on the use of force in protest explored the human rights consequences of police use of less lethal weapons in protest.

Current Context

In October 2023, at the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Dr. Alice Jill Edwards, presented **a thematic report** that looked at the global trade in weapons, equipment, and devices used by law enforcement and other public authorities that are capable of inflicting torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. In a significant advance, the Special Rapporteur's report included two annexes with sets of **prohibited** and **controlled** law enforcement goods—the first time this has been laid out in a UN document. The Special Rapporteur made the sobering observations that over the last year there has been an “uptick in torture” and the “reality remains that far too many torturers are getting away with it.”

Research undertaken into commercial companies found that between January 2018 to June 2023, approximately 335 companies from 52 countries have manufactured or promoted equipment

that the Special Rapporteur believes should be prohibited because it has no practical purpose in law enforcement other than to commit torture or other forms of ill-treatment, such as electric shock belts, shock batons, thumb cuffs, and spiked batons. The Special Rapporteur calls these items “*de facto* modern-day torture tools.” Nearly half of these companies were based in Asia (146), with the next highest number in Europe (76), followed by North America (71). Many states are free to buy these tools or to allow their sale to other states.

In November 2023 at the Milipol

Paris arms and security fair, Amnesty International and Omega Research Foundation researchers found four Chinese companies promoting illegal equipment, including spiked batons, thumbcuffs, leg fetters, leg fetters with attached handcuffs, and spiked arm guards in their marketing materials. This included direct contact electric shock stun guns, stun batons and stun gloves, electric shock batons, electric shock gloves, ammunition containing multiple kinetic impact projectiles (KIPs), and multi-barrel kinetic impact projectile launchers marketed for sale by Chinese, Czech, French, Italian, South Korean, Turkish, and US companies. After being alerted to these breaches, the Milipol Paris organisers took the necessary measures to comply with current French and European legislation.

On 21 June 2024 the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture **contacted** the French Government ahead of a major security and arms fair being held in Paris, to ensure that exhibitors do not promote illegal torture tools.



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The Special Rapporteur on Torture noted in her [report](#) that standard law enforcement equipment, such as regular batons, tear gas, and pepper spray, is manufactured or promoted in at least 63 countries and is often misused to commit torture or other ill-treatment. According to a forecast the Special Rapporteur references, global trade in law enforcement equipment is expected to grow by almost 10 billion USD over the next five years. She also noted that there have been multiple incidents of police violence, some fatal, fuelled by a dangerous mix of heavily armed and technologically equipped police and increasing mobilization of social movements and peaceful protests.

Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation have conducted in-depth research on [batons](#), [tear gas misuse](#), [Kinetic Impact Projectiles](#), and the [trade in weapons](#) used to crush dissent, with forthcoming research on electric shock devices.

In concluding her thematic report Dr. Edward called on states to:

Imagine a world where all inherently cruel, inhuman or degrading equipment used by law enforcement and other public officials was no longer in the hands of untrained officers or ruthless leaders, because its manufacture and trade had been banned. Consider a world where responsible exporters and government regulators halt the

export of certain equipment when there is evidence that such equipment is being misused to torture, harm or repress political opponents or citizens exercising their rights to assemble and express themselves, or against other vulnerable persons including young people in detention, psychiatric patients, or the elderly. An important means of facilitating torture and other harmful or excessive conduct would be extinguished. Not only that, removing the incentive to trade in barbarous items would reduce research and development of such items: a significant victory for human rights.

On the same day, 12 October 2023, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said:

In principle, the ICRC would support efforts towards a legally binding instrument that would both prohibit trade and other transfers of goods whose only practical use is torture or other ill-treatment, and regulate trade and other transfers of goods that may have legitimate law enforcement uses but which are frequently abused to perpetrate torture or other ill-treatment.

Such an instrument could have positive practical and symbolic impacts. At the same time, improved respect for and implementation of the full range of existing obligations in relation to torture and other ill-treatment under international humanitarian law and international human rights law remain essential and urgent.

Following the publication of the Special Rapporteur's report, the next step towards global regulation should be a UN General Assembly vote to establish diplomatic negotiations to produce a Torture-Free Trade Treaty. A "yes" vote will be seen as a commitment to strengthen respect for the absolute prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment. A "no" vote will be seen as undermining respect for the absolute prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International, the Omega Research Foundation, and Harvard Law School's International Human Rights Clinic have produced a [position paper](#) that sets out the key content and operational features of a prospective treaty.

Recommendations

During the First Committee, delegations should:

- Indicate support for a Torture-Free Trade Treaty in their statements;
- State their support for the recommendations contained in the Special Rapporteur's [report](#);
- Share existing national law and practice on the issue of trade in law enforcement equipment with other delegations; and
- Commit to working towards global torture-free trade.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Support future efforts at the UNGA and within regional forums towards legally binding norms on Torture-Free Trade;
- Commit to ending the manufacture, trade, marketing, and use of all goods on the Special Rapporteur's **prohibited list**;
- Ban items from the Special Rapporteur's prohibited list from being marketed, displayed, or sold at Arms and Security Fairs taking place in their territory;
- Develop national laws covering the manufacture, export, and use of regulated goods on the Special Rapporteur's **controlled list**, in line with the OHCHR Guidance;
- Support future efforts at UNGA and within regional forums towards legally-binding norms on Torture-Free Trade, in line with the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur. Doing so is consistent with the absolute ban on torture and other ill-treatment, and states' related obligation to take all possible steps to prevent such acts.
- It can also help reduce the prevalence of torture and other ill-treatment and the profound, lasting harm it causes to survivors, their families, and their communities; Furthermore, a legally binding instrument has far more chance of resulting in tangible changes to national laws, policies, and practices than do other forms of regulation.

- Make a statement on the 40th anniversary of the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT), committing to uphold the absolute prohibition on torture and other ill treatment by working together to end the trade in torture tools.

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