

2024 Joint Civil Society Statement on Youth and Disarmament Education

Full Written Version for Submission to the United Nations General Assembly First Committee (Disarmament and International Security), New York, 16 October 2024

Last year, global military expenditure hit an all time high – an estimated \$2,443 billion. Each one of these dollars represents a diversion from education, health, climate action and productive economic opportunities, a diversion from areas that are vital to the futures of young people, a diversion from all of us, all around the world.

Our education, health and wellbeing is threatened by armed violence, whether from violent crime, police brutality or war. Too many young people face the systematic destruction of schools, hospitals, housing and cultural institutions in Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Palestine, particularly Gaza. Disarmament education means little if it fails to address the shocking lack of international action to prevent genocide, crimes against humanity, and flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. Landmines, cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war generate pervasive anxiety, limiting our freedom of movement and freedom from fear. We are alarmed at rising casualties from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Destruction of the environment, both deliberate and as a result of military pollution threatens the ecological systems that support our lives. Nuclear weapons pose an abhorrent risk to our planet and radioactive legacies of their development and testing continue to affect our health. We call on you to act now to safeguard our future – to safeguard us now, so that we can grow up in safety. Disarmament education, which can help us seek a more peaceful future, must be a top priority.

As you deliberate in conference rooms in New York City, Vienna and Geneva, we call on you to center the voices and experiences of communities affected by the weapons you are discussing. Work to ensure their meaningful participation, which can serve as a way for policymakers themselves to be educated about how weapons affect real people's lives. First-hand accounts and direct participation of survivors, including inter-generational storytelling, humanize what can often seem like dry, technical discussions.

It is often through participation in social movements, advocacy and policymaking on other pressing issues that people – young or otherwise – find their way into disarmament. As a result, we must seek to highlight the connections between weapons, violence, climate inaction, colonization and intersecting forms of marginalization along the lines of gender, race, class, Indigeneity, sexuality, caste and disability.

Regrettably, disarmament, arms control and nonproliferation policymaking is made to seem distant from our everyday lives, a space only for elites and experts. This disenfranchises us. The few mentions of youth and/or disarmament education in delegations' First Committee statements so far have been brief, often at the very end of their interventions. We encourage you to offer substantive input, committing to action and reporting on your existing initiatives. We believe that disarmament education should not be a peripheral subject, but a core element to achieving a peaceful and secure world. The desire to shield young people from the unpleasant realities of the world can sometimes keep us from helping you to solve the very real challenges we all share, across generations. Indeed many young people are living these unpleasant realities and deserve our solidarity.

Disarmament education needs to feel relevant and meet us where we are in accessible formats and jargon-free language. Take advantage of the opportunities offered by social media to inform us about disarmament concerns and amplify calls for action. Nevertheless, education for peace and disarmament cannot just be about sending an occasional social media post. It must be integrated and mainstreamed into curricula at all levels of schooling. Lessons should not only inform students about weapons and their effects, but also the possibilities for agency and empowerment, including past pathways to disarmament success. Disarmament education is education *for* disarmament, not just *about* disarmament. As a result, disarmament education should not just list the awful things we need to work on. It must foster the courage to imagine a more peaceful, just and sustainable world, one free of nuclear weapons, automatic rifles and minefields.

As such we encourage States to join, uphold and invest in humanitarian disarmament processes that save our lives and address harms to our communities. This includes older instruments like the biological, chemical, landmine and cluster munition ban treaties, processes on small arms and light weapons and the more recent Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. But as new weapons technologies are increasingly deployed in conflicts today, youth around the world are currently confronting the realities of digital dehumanization and the erosion of meaningful human decision-making and control. We have grown up in a digital age and are acutely aware of the impacts that emerging technologies could have on young people now and in the future. Autonomous weapons systems delegate life and death decisions to machines — machines that cannot and can never understand the value of human lives. If used to target humans, autonomous weapons would dehumanize us by reducing our nuanced and complex humanity into mere data points. There is an urgent need for States to reinvest in international law by negotiating a treaty on autonomous weapons, to ensure meaningful

human control over the use of force and to safeguard future generations from growing up in fear of being killed by autonomous weapons.

There are some bright spots:

- Since 2019, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs' (UNODA) Youth4Disarmament initiative, has built a diverse network of young people interested in disarmament through events, training opportunities, a dedicated website, and social media outreach. This was possible due to generous support from the Republic of Korea, Japan, Germany and Kazakhstan. We encourage States and private donors to match or even exceed these crucial contributions.
- The Action Plan adopted at the First Meeting of States Parties of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons outlined specific ways for States Parties to fulfill the treaty's recognition of "the importance of peace and disarmament education in all its aspects."
- At the inaugural Youth Leader Conference hosted by UNODA and the government of Japan in Hiroshima young leaders presented and adopted their Declaration for a World without Nuclear Weapons ("DeclarACTION").
- This year saw a record number of submissions to the UN Secretary-General reporting on implementation of the recommendations of the 2002 UN study on disarmament and non-proliferation education. Four times the number of States submitted reports compared with 2022. It was also the first time in 20 years that a Permanent Member of the Security Council – the United States – made a submission.
- Action 20 of the recently negotiated Pact for the Future commits States to "accelerate the implementation of our commitments on youth, peace and security," increasing "the inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels in prevention and the resolution of conflict."

But we young people are not just the future. We are here now. Invite young people, particularly from affected communities, to address your meetings. Engage with us, include us in your delegations, campaigns, NGOs and social movements. Open access to spaces like this one – too often subject to marginalizing restrictions. Seek out our perspectives. Offer internships, fellowships, and youth conferences – and not just for students of political science, law and diplomacy! Participation in disarmament processes can offer vital lessons in civic education.

Here at First Committee, we call on delegations to support the "Disarmament and non-proliferation education" resolution, strengthening 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;
- 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 to partnership-centered education efforts; attention to youth participation in *A New Agenda for Peace*; and relevant outcomes from the Pact for the Future;
- Incorporating recommendations of this and recent youth civil society statements in disarmament forums, particularly those regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion;
- Drawing linkages between youth, disarmament, and other pressing issues, such as climate action, human rights, sustainable development and gender equality;

Beyond First Committee, we call on the international community to:

- 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;
- Honor the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki next year, by emphasizing the importance of 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 (as required by A/RES/78/31);
- Work for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions on Youth, Peace and Security (UNSCR 2250 and 2419); and
- Implement peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education in ways that are sensitive to intersectional marginalization — for instance, by mainstreaming promotion of gender equality and building capacity of poorly-represented peoples and groups, including survivors of armed violence.

In this pivotal moment, we stand ready to collaborate with Member States and the international community to act on these actions together. Through an opportunity to make disarmament education more relevant, inclusive and impactful, we can build a world free from the fear of armed violence.

Drawing on consultation with partners around the world, statement drafting led by faculty and students of Pace University's International Disarmament Institute including Matthew Breay Bolton, Emily Welty, Rachel Kohley, Zachary Powers, Teresa M. Siniak, Chloe Lauren Stout and Marlene Thomas. For delivery by Layne Davis.

Supporting Organizations - Please add your organization's name as a comment below!

1. A world without chemical and biological weapons-www
2. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)
3. Actors Rwanda Organization
4. African Council of Religious Leaders-Religions for Peace
5. Albanian Young Professionals Network
6. Anfal Stories Organization
7. Article 36
8. Basic Rights Watch (BRW)
9. Beydaar Society
10. BeHuman
11. Campaign to Stop Killer Robots activist network- Hungary
12. Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas (CCCM)
13. Canadian Voice of Women for Peace
14. Club Génération Consciente du Gabon (CGCG)
15. Conflict and Environment Observatory
16. Control Arms
17. Disarmament and Security Centre, Aotearoa NZ
18. Drabzeen for Human Development (Jordan)
19. Eltazim Initiative (Jordan)
20. Encode Justice
21. Fashioning Social Environmental Justice (FSEJ)
22. Fundación Barco
23. Fundación LATIR, Equidad en el Mundo
24. Fundación Váyalo - Venezuela
25. Global Campaign for Peace Education
26. Global Peace Action
27. Global Platform (Jordan)
28. Halabja Chemical Victim's Society
29. Human Building Bridges
30. Hunter Peace Group (Newcastle NSW Australia)
31. IMPACT VOICES - The Social Innovation Intermediary

32. Inclusive Bangladesh
33. Indian Institute for Peace Disarmament & Environmental Protection
34. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)
35. ICAN Aotearoa New Zealand
36. ICAN Australia
37. ICAN France
38. Italian Network for Youth Peace and Security
39. International Campaign to Ban Landmines - Cluster Munition Coalition
40. International Centre for Peace Human Rights and Development in Africa (IPHRD-Africa)
41. International Institute on Peace Education
42. International Peace Research Association (IPRA)
43. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War's (IPPNW) Canada
44. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War's (IPPNW) Global Medical Student Network
45. Japan Campaign to Ban Landmines
46. Jesuit Refugee Service
47. Kurdish Organizations Network Coalition for the International Criminal Court (KONCICC)
48. Kurdistan without Genocide
49. LABRATS International (Legacy of the Atomic Bomb. Recognition for Atomic Test Survivors)
50. Legacies of War
51. Life Campaign to Abolish the Death Sentence in Kurdistan
52. Malaysian Youth Diplomacy (MyDiplomacy)
53. Manawa Organization For Martyrs & Anfal's Inquiry
54. Marshallese Educational Initiative
55. Mines Action Canada
56. Moruroa e Tātou NGO
57. Naturefriends Greece
58. Norwegian People's Aid
59. Nuclear Age Peace Foundation
60. Nuclear Truth Project (NTP)
61. Organization against Weapons of Mass Destruction in Kurdistan
62. Organization of Landmine Survivors and Amputees in Rwanda (OLSAR)
63. Organization of the Justice Campaign
64. Pan-African Peacemakers Alliance (PAPA Africa) - South Sudan
65. PAX
66. Pax Christi International
67. Pax Christi Ireland

68. PEAC Institute
69. Peace Movement Aotearoa
70. Peacebuilding Project
71. Peoples Federation for National Peace and Development (PEFENAP) - Malawi
72. Physicians for Social Responsibility
73. Positive Peace for Ethiopia
74. Rafd for Development and Training
75. Red de Seguridad Humana para América Latina y el Caribe (SEHLAC)
76. Reverse The Trend: Save Our People, Save Our Planet
77. Reverse The Trend South East and South Asia (RTT SESA)
78. Scientists of Global Responsibility
79. Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (Scottish CND)
80. Soka Gakkai International
81. Solidarity Youth Voluntary Organisation (SOYVO)
82. Stop Killer Robots
83. Sustainable Cooperation for Peace & Security (Italy)
84. Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society
85. Topzawa: A Magazine Specialized in Genocide and Anfal Issues
86. Teachers for Peace
87. The Association of Service Civil International (IVZW)
88. Union Chrétienne des Jeunes Gens (U.C.J.G Māōhi Nui, French Polynesia)
89. United Network of Youth for Peace and Diplomacy (UNYPD)
90. Vision GRAM-International
91. West Virginia Campaign to Ban Landmines and Cluster Bombs/ PSALM: Proud Students Against Landmines and Cluster Bombs
92. WILPF Lebanon
93. World BEYOND War
94. Women's Network for Peace - Germany
95. World Esperanto Youth Organisation (TEJO)
96. World Without Weapons
97. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
98. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)-Canada
99. Young Naturefriends Greece
100. Youth Arts New York/Hibakusha Stories
101. Youth Development Foundation
102. Youth for TPNW
103. Youth Nuclear Peace Summits
104. Youth Social Advocacy Team (YSAT)
105. Zimbabwe Campaign to Ban Landmines