

Civil society statement to First Committee on gender and disarmament

28 October 2014, New York

Gender shapes the impact of weapons and violence on societies. It shapes the role of weapons in society. And it shapes how we work together to develop and implement the policy and legal responses that violence demands.

First, the impact of weapons and violence.

We know that women and men are exposed to different patterns of violence. Not as a result of biology, but of socially constructed gender roles. Gender-based violence is violence that is directed at a person because of their sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The majority of gender-based violence is violence inflicted by men onto women.

However men also face gender-based violence, particularly in armed conflict, where men and adolescent boys tend to be the most frequent direct victims of violence.

Women affected by conflict often have less access to health care, services, and reconstruction processes. If heading the household they sometimes face systematic discrimination and can become more susceptible to further physical attack and sexual exploitation.

And the weapons matter. Guns are often used to commit acts of sexual and gender-based violence. The gender patterns evidenced amongst explosive weapons indicate a wider risk to civilians. Understanding such patterns is vital to developing the right practical and policy responses.

Secondly, the gendered perceptions around weapons and violence in society.

While men make up the most direct victims, this is rarely presented as evidence of their weakness.

Our social relationship with weapons is linked to a persistent construction of women as the “weaker sex,” in need of protection by men.

Weapons are considered to be men’s business. Our societies still expect men to be violent. And often men continue to perpetuate this.

We can see this expectation in the reported policy of using maleness as a signifier of militancy in the targeting and casualty analysis of drone strikes.

And so we edge towards the protection of only “innocent civilians”—women, children and the elderly—simultaneously reinforcing expectations that men are violent, undermining the law, and stripping women of their agency.

Third, how we work together.

Framing women as weak and in need of protection continues to enable their exclusion from authoritative social and political roles here and elsewhere, and weakens the effectiveness of those processes. From all male panels of experts, to participation in peace talks, or treaty negotiations the voices of women must be heard. We note that First Committee has only had one female chair in 69 years.

We have seen some progress in recent years, notably UN Security Council resolution 1325, and considerations from 2010 in the General Assembly. The provisions within the Arms Trade Treaty on the prevention of arms transfers that could facilitate gender-based violence are landmark, and it has been welcome to hear many states refer to the importance of this provision.

But much remains to be done.

Recommendations

We make the following recommendations:

- Strengthen the collection and analysis of sex- and age-disaggregated data on the impact of weapons, including through the implementation of systematic casualty recording.
- Incorporate a gender analysis and education into work on disarmament and conflict—and look to challenge assumptions of male violence and female vulnerability.
- Pay careful attention to language around gender; for example, avoid linking “women and children” as if they are the same.
- Implement the measures and commitments contained in UNSCR 1325, UNSCR 2117, BMS5, the ATT, and the current draft resolution on Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.
- Work for gender diversity in panels, discussions, and negotiations on disarmament and other international security.

Strengthening our work on gender and disarmament will strengthen our work for the security of all people.

This statement was drafted by the Reaching Critical Will programme of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and Article 36 and has been endorsed by the following organisations:

Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy
Article 36
Cluster Munition Coalition
Control Arms
Every Casualty
Fundipau (Fundacio per la Pau)
International Campaign to Ban Landmines
International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons
International Committee of Robot Arms Control
International Peace Research Association
Jesuit Refugee Service
Mines Action Canada
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, NY
Oxfam
PAX
Pax Christi International
Peace Movement Aotearoa
Project Ploughshares
Protection Against Armaments
Saferworld
Swedish Physicians against Nuclear Weapons
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
World Council of Churches