

**2020 Joint Civil Society Statement on Youth Engagement
and Peace, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education**
**Written Version for Delivery on 13 October 2020 to the UN General Assembly
First Committee (Disarmament and International Security)**
Includes all signatories as of 14 October 2020

1. We often hear young people described as the world's future. While true, this cliché doesn't tell the whole story. More than 40% of the world's population is under the age of 25. We are here now, in the present day, representing close to a majority of the world's population. But we are severely underrepresented in forums like this one, where decisions about our present and future – our peace, our security, our human rights – are made. Disarmament education, if implemented in ways that take our voices seriously, can enable the active participation of diverse young people in making the world a more just, peaceful and sustainable place.

2. Our lives are at the intersecting frontlines of so many human security problems. The proliferation of small arms threatens the lives of youth caught between armed groups and security forces. Even places of learning are not safe – we fear mass shootings and the bombardment of our schools. Militarization entrenches colonial legacies and gendered inequalities. As many of us engage in social movements calling for more just and democratic methods of ensuring human security, our bodies are targeted by those who are supposed to protect and serve the public.

3. The diversion of the world's resources into the weapons of war and oppression takes money and talent better directed to addressing public health emergencies and creating jobs in a sustainable economy. We face a climate catastrophe, our communities battered by natural disasters, biodiversity loss and the toxic legacies of violence, including radioactive contamination and military pollution. The effects of these environmental consequences of weapons and war are disproportionately borne by Indigenous Peoples and marginalized communities. High-tech forms of remote and autonomous killing abuse information and communications technology, which could be used to build productive linkages between the world's young people.

4. The 2002 UN Secretary-General's Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education emphasized that education must not only be *about* disarmament, but also *for* disarmament. If targeted well, disarmament education can empower youth – particularly marginalized communities, women, survivors of violence and Indigenous people from impacted regions – building our capacity to engage in peace and security policymaking. One of the most powerful ways to bolster peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education is to combine it with tangible action. Young people often come to disarmament work through social movements, such as those addressing intersecting issues of racism, exploitation, disability, LGBTQA rights, the environment, gender-based violence, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is why we must work on intersectionality and connect disarmament to people's everyday experiences of insecurity. For many young people in this city and around the globe, our participation in Black

Lives Matter demonstrations has spurred us to educate both ourselves and others about the devastating, racialized impact of police violence.

5. Civil society, academia and social movements bear much of the burden of advocacy and instruction on peace and disarmament issues. But Member States must also adhere to their obligations for disarmament education. Peace, disarmament and nonproliferation issues are rarely covered in public primary and secondary education. It is disappointing that so few Member States submit reports to the Secretary-General for reports on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education. There is a lack of funding and few professional opportunities for youth who are passionate about disarmament issues, leaving many of us ultimately disengaged – particularly those of us facing intersecting forms of marginalization. The structures of disarmament diplomacy are not designed for youth participation, especially not youth from affected communities. It is time to move beyond talking about the importance of including youth; we must see them included on panels, in discussions, and, most importantly, at high-level policy meetings.

6. The overwhelming effects of COVID-19 on the global education sector is a major challenge for the UN, member states, and civil society institutions delivering effective disarmament education. According to UNESCO, “1 billion students and youth across the planet are affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-19 outbreak.” UN and civil society disarmament education events have had to move online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Transferring disarmament policymaking into less transparent, online formats can limit young people’s access to in-person engagement with diplomacy and advocacy. But this year’s digital diplomacy also offers a chance to be more inclusive and to hear directly from those who cannot normally travel to New York, Geneva or Vienna

7. Indeed, renewed multilateral action on disarmament education and youth gives us reasons for hope. Target 4.7 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education includes “promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence.” The Secretary-General’s 2018 Agenda for Disarmament committed the UN to “further invest in disarmament education [and] ... youth engagement.” UN Security Council Resolution 2419 highlights the importance of “participation of youth in peace processes, including disarmament....” Last year’s First Committee resolution on Youth, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation stressed the “need to promote the sustainable entry of young people into the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.” UNODA’s Youth4Disarmament program has been a great step forward.

8. We are especially encouraged by the nearing entry-into-force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which stresses the “importance of peace and disarmament education and of raising awareness of the risks and consequences of nuclear weapons for current and future generations.” The TPNW has shown that a significant change is possible, especially with a strong partnership between Member States and civil society. For younger generations today, a world without nuclear weapons is a possibility within our lifetime.

9. Seventy-five years ago, the founders of the UN committed to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” Twenty years ago, this body passed its first resolution on disarmament and nonproliferation education. In this landmark anniversary year, we call on you to recommit to those of us in the “succeeding generations.” Elders and youth from different backgrounds and cultures must come together in the spirit of intergenerational cooperation and solidarity, working for a world where peace and security do not depend on the use and threat of mass violence. Hear our voices, include us in making the decisions that literally determine whether we will live.

10. Therefore, we call on delegations to:

- Express vigorous support for action on disarmament and nonproliferation education,
- Promote greater connections between disarmament education and the empowerment of youth, particularly those from marginalized communities,
- Engage in international cooperation and assistance to support youth engagement and peace, disarmament and non-proliferation education, such as UNODA’s Youth4Disarmament and Disarmament Champions projects,
- Include us in your delegations and expand paid internship, fellowship and professional opportunities for students and young people pursuing vocations in disarmament and nonproliferation, particularly those from marginalized communities,
- Implement peace, disarmament and non-proliferation education in ways that are sensitive to human rights, gender and differential access,
- Use creative and innovative methods, including information and communications technology, to expand access to disarmament education and youth networking, particularly to those cut off from educational institutions by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supporting Organizations

- Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy: acronym.org.uk
- Amplify: www.amplifyyouth.org
- Article 36: www.article36.org
- Association for Public Policy-APP (Argentina)
- Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) Peace Education: cnduk.org/education
- Conflict and Environment Observatory: www.ceobs.org
- Conflict Awareness Project: www.conflictawareness.org
- Control Arms: controlarms.org
- Environmentalists Against War: www.envirosagainstar.org
- International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), 2017 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate: www.icanw.org
- International Campaign to Ban Landmines – Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC), 1997 Nobel Peace Prize co-Laureate: www.icbl.org/
- International Committee for Robot Arms Control (ICRAC): www.icrac.net
- International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), 1985 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate: www.ippnw.org

- Latin America and Caribbean Human Security Network (SEHLAC): www.sehla.org
- Mines Action Canada: www.minesactioncanada.org
- Nuclear Age Peace Foundation: www.wagingpeace.org
- Pace University Peace and Justice Studies program: www.pace.edu/dyson/programs/ba-peace-and-justice-studies-nyc and International Disarmament Institute: www.pace.edu/dyson/disarmament
- Pathways To Peace: pathwaystopeace.org
- PAX: www.paxforpeace.nl
- Peace Boat: peaceboat.org
- Peace Boat US: www.peaceboat-us.org
- Peace Education Scotland: www.peaceeducationscotland.org
- Project Ploughshares: ploughshares.ca
- Reverse The Trend: Save Our People, Save Our Planet
- SafeGround: safeground.org.au
- Soka Gakkai International: www.sgi.org
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF): www.wilpf.org
- Young Women+ Leaders for Peace-Philippines: www.facebook.com/ywlphilippines
- Youth Nuclear Peace Summit: www.youthnuclearpeacesummit.org