



# THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE

## DISARMAMENT & INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

### PURVIEW OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE

The General Assembly First Committee addresses the disarmament of conventional weapons, weapons of mass destruction and related international security questions. The First Committee makes recommendations on the regulation of these weapons as they relate to international peace and security. The First Committee does not consider legal issues surrounding weapons possession nor does it address complex peace and security issues addressed by the Security Council. For more information concerning the purview of the United Nations General Assembly as a whole, see page 29.

**Website:** [www.un.org/ga/first/index.shtml](http://www.un.org/ga/first/index.shtml)

### WOMEN, DISARMAMENT, NON-PROLIFERATION AND ARMS CONTROL

In 1979, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which states that complete disarmament “will contribute to the attainment of full equality between men and women.” This declaration set a precedent for examining armed conflict as a community issue as well as a military one. Men make up the vast majority of combatants in armed conflicts, though the number of female combatants has grown. The conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has also highlighted the role that many women play in supporting armed combatants. In conflict resolutions where women are directly involved in negotiations, agreements are over 20 percent more likely to last longer than two years. Armed conflicts disproportionately affect women. Women and children compose 80 percent of refugee populations. In countries with armed conflict, maternal mortality rates are 2.5 times higher, the number of girls with primary education drops by almost 20 percent, and women’s likelihood of owning property decreases by half. Female combatants are targets for sexual assault and abuse and carry the burden of domestic needs for their fellow combatants. Yet, despite these effects, women and gender are addressed in less than a third of disarmament agreements.

In 2000, the Security Council passed a resolution encouraging Member States to mainstream gender perspectives in tackling conflict resolution. A 2004 Secretary-General report acknowledged progress toward integrating women in peace and security efforts through policy measures but noted the work that remained regarding the work of women in disarmament efforts on the ground. Some recommendations from that report came to fruition through a 2006 review of women’s contributions toward the implementation of the 2001 United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA), a foundational policy document in arms control. While the original Programme of Action provided detailed policy recommendations, it did not discuss how the illicit small arms trade affects women or what their role is in addressing disarmament. The report addressed this deficiency and the broader issue of integrating women into discussions on arms control and disarmament. The report created a set of guidelines on gender mainstreaming in four areas: women’s relevance in combating the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons; planning and implementation of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration; national and regional focuses

and civil society integration and public awareness initiatives. These guidelines were reviewed again in 2010 and 2016 and have served as guides for efforts moving forward.

In 2010, the General Assembly passed the first resolution focused solely on the role that women play in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. It called attention to women’s contributions in practical disarmament in both regional and national spheres. Subsequent resolutions reaffirmed the General Assembly’s original position, though few additional recommendations were made until the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in 2013. The ATT serves as the primary international agreement to regulate the legal movement and transfer of arms both within and between countries. Article Seven identifies the connection between gender-based violence and international arms transfers, stating that any exporting State Party shall assess the risk of the arms being used to commit “gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children.” While this formalized the need to address gender in armed conflict, it did not fully address women’s participation at the negotiating table, the disproportionate effect of indirect violence and economic strife on women, or the need to confront cultural barriers to considering and incorporating women into disarmament measures, nor did it address the needs of women who are combatants.

The Security Council also passed a resolution in 2013 that notes the role of arms proliferation in gender-based violence, as well as the disproportionate effects of violence on women. The General Assembly continues to hear reports of how Member States are implementing disarmament policies as they relate to women, and recent resolutions have contained increasingly thorough recommendations for States and actors when including gender perspectives in the disarmament process, such as better understanding of the effects of violence on women and including them in the design and implementation of disarmament efforts. In its most recent resolutions, the General Assembly worked to strengthen its cooperation with local and regional organizations that help in armed conflict. These are also called disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs, these organizations focus on halting conflict and reintegrating persons and groups involved in armed conflict into society at large. The General Assembly has also asked States to increase spending on gender-based violence and armed conflict de-escalation policies and programs with a specific bent on the illicit trade of small arms and increasing women’s roles in disarmament negotiations. The PoA, ATT, and other United Nations initiatives continue to meet resistance in adoption and implementation for multiple reasons, most prominently that women are still largely unseen in conflict and cultural norms that preclude women’s participation in the negotiating processes.

Overall, progress on the topic remains slow, and while countries have made some progress at the State level, the United Nations continues to face both cultural and practical resistance to women’s inclusion in arms control. Without women at the table, conflict areas face two distinct realities: successful disarmament is significantly less likely, and the economic and physical needs of women, both armed and civilians, will go unacknowledged. DDR programs planned without women are significantly less likely to address the decrease in education and health care or the significant violence women face, including economic vulnerability



as a result of being refugees, the increased likelihood of human trafficking and the inability to provide income. The United Nations must come together to address the needs of women in disarmament and to overcome the systemic reasons women are not included in disarmament negotiations and illicit small arms trade preventions.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- How can Member States alleviate the barriers that prevent women from participating in disarmament and non-proliferation efforts?
- What practices should Member States and the United Nations consider to support greater participation of women in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs? How can the United Nations ensure that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs meet the unique needs of women?
- What policies and practices can Member States adopt to ensure that women are able to participate in discussions on disarmament and the illicit trade in small arms?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Douglas, Sarah, Vanessa Farr, Felicity Hill, and Wenny Kasuma (2010). Getting It Right, Doing It Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration. UN Women.
- Grimmett, R. (2009). Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, (2001-2008). Congressional Research Service. 4 September.
- Holtom, P., & Mark, B. (2010). The International Arms Trade: Difficult to Define, Measure, and Control. Arms Control Association. 2 July.
- Kane, A. (2014). Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control: The role of the United Nations. Vienna International Centre.
- Kytomaki, E. (2015). The Arms Trade Treaty and Human Security: Cross-Cutting Benefits of Accession and Implementation. Chatham House. February.
- Lindsey, Charlotte (2001). Women Facing War. International Committee of the Red Cross. October.
- United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs (2016). United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan.
- United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs (2010). Mainstreaming gender for the effective implementation of the UN PoA. 18 June.
- United Nations, UN Women. Facts and Figures: Peace and security.
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (2011). International Women's Day Seminar: Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control Outcome Document. 7 March.

## UN DOCUMENTS

- Arms Trade Treaty (2013).
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979).
- United Nations Conference to Review Progress in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons In All Its Aspects (2006). Guidelines for gender mainstreaming for the effective implementation of the UN programme of action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. 7 July. A/CONF.192/2006/RC/CRP.3.

- United Nations, General Assembly (2016). Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. 5 December. A/RES/71/56.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2016). Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control: Report of the Secretary-General. A/71/137.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2015). United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean: Report of the Secretary-General. 14 July. A/70/138.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2014). Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. 2 December. A/RES/69/61.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2013). Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. 5 December. A/RES/68/33.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2012). Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. 3 December. A/RES/67/48.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2010). Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. 8 December. A/RES/65/69.
- United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs (2001). Report of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. A/CONF.192/15.
- United Nations, Security Council (2015). Resolution 2220 (2015). 22 May. S/RES/2220 (2015).
- United Nations, Security Council (2013). Resolution 2122 (2013). 26 September. S/RES/2122 (2013).
- United Nations, Security Council (2013). Resolution 2117 (2013). 26 September. S/RES/2117 (2013).
- United Nations, Security Council (2010). Resolution 1325 (2000). 31 October. S/RES/1325 (2000).
- United Nations, Security Council (2004). Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General. 13 October. S/2004/814.

## COUNTERING THE THREAT POSED BY IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have a history that spans centuries. Today, IEDs include a broad range of devices, from crude bombs made using commercially available products to highly specialized systems capable of defeating advanced military armor and countermeasures. Use of IEDs became increasingly common throughout the past two decades as a cheap, easy option for non-state actors and were responsible for over 120,000 casualties in 68 countries between 2011 and 2016. IEDs have impacted the operations of the United Nations around the world, with attacks targeting United Nations' residences, offices and vehicles, with at least 38 attacks in 2015 alone. United Nations personnel and peacekeepers face limited supplies of armor and require training and medical support. With the ongoing proliferation and evolution of IEDs, Member States have increasingly sought the assistance of the international community to stem the flow of precursor materials and disrupt technology sharing between insurgent and terrorist groups.

Non-state actors use IEDs to inflict harm upon their opponents and to execute high-profile attacks that are difficult to detect and interrupt. Even crude IEDs are capable of degrading societal stability, security and economic activity. The increasingly prolific use of IEDs in war zones and the highly-publicized use of these weapons in the past two decades has ensured broad global concern over this problem. With criminals and terrorists unwilling to abide by international law and norms, much of the focus has been on detection of, prevention of and response to attacks.



The conflict in Iraq drove IED advancement considerably in the early 2000s. An arms race between military engineers and terrorist bomb makers ensued. To overcome these countermeasures, terrorist bombers shared their increasingly hard-to-defeat designs among themselves, ensuring IEDs constantly evolved. Two key technological advancements proved especially noteworthy: the use of explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) and the development of non-metallic IEDs. EFPs are capable of defeating many forms of armor and inflict great harm against well-defended targets. Once this technology was adopted by insurgent groups, it quickly became one of the most devastating types of IED. Nonmetallic IEDs began appearing in 2009 and are often able to pass through metal detectors and X-rays. These bombs can be smuggled aboard planes, into government offices or buried in roads awaiting their target. In 2015, the terrorist group Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula released a detailed explanation of the construction of these weapons. This ongoing evolution of the technology and design of IEDs and the sharing of these plans is an alarming trend that the international community seeks to arrest.

The United Nations has addressed the issue of IEDs through multiple channels, leveraging several international regimes governing conflict, small arms and terrorism. It first addressed the issue in 2009 through the Group of Experts of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW) Amended Protocol II. These discussions identified prevention, protection, detection and clearance as key areas for mitigating the threat of IEDs. The participants also affirmed the role of the Amended Protocol II in regulating IEDs, finding that the use of these weapons as booby-traps or mines by non-state actors often caused unnecessary or unjustifiable suffering to combatants and civilians. The recommendations stressed information sharing on countermeasures, ammunition stockpile management, and import and export controls. The United Nations found that IED attacks are not mere attacks of opportunity but usually involve long-term leadership, planning, financing, construction and targeting.

The United Nations has used existing bodies and regulations to curtail the use of IEDs. Supporting national and international law enforcement, particularly the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), has been a common approach. In 2015, INTERPOL hosted the inaugural International Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Leaders' Forum to encourage component controls, capacity building, public awareness and information sharing. INTERPOL also created Project Watchmaker, a data collection effort targeting IED technologies, precursor materials, and individuals and groups constructing and using IEDs. This project joins INTERPOL's Chemical Anti-Smuggling Enforcement (CHASE) and Chemical Risk Identification and Mitigation Project (CRIMP) as international organizations and Member States target smugglers, precursor materials, and persons to combat the criminal and terrorist use of IEDs outside of warzones. Since 2010, the World Customs Organization, INTERPOL and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime partnered to create Programme Global Shield, designed to provide training, technical assistance, and real-time information and intelligence sharing focused on 14 precursor chemicals. The first three years of this program led to the discovery and seizure of over 60 IEDs, 194 metric tons of solid precursors and 50 arrests.

In areas of elevated or active hostilities, law enforcement and other government forces may be overwhelmed, under-resourced or even complicit in the use of IEDs against unlawful targets. Weak or complicit States are attractive for IED manufacturers and smugglers, allowing these actors to research, test, train, construct, transport and employ these weapons. How to best deal with remote havens remains a difficult question for the United Nations and is especially important when peacekeepers are present. Going forward, the General Assembly must strengthen information sharing and coordination amongst Member States, international organizations and commercial partners. The 2016 report of the Secretary-General recommends building on the success of CHASE, CRIMP and Global Shield toward a unified regulatory system for key IED components and increasing contributions by Member States to developing countries and countries recovering from conflict in managing their weapons and ammunition stockpiles.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- How can Member States work together to improve regulation of the transfer of arms, military equipment, and goods and technology that can be used in IED manufacturing?
- How can the United Nations balance the important role and mission of United Nations' peacekeepers and personnel and the threat of IEDs? What level of risk should be tolerated, and how can it be best managed?
- How can the success of CHASE, CRIMP and Global Shield translate to a global regulatory regime? What best practices in customs and law enforcement activities will have the most outsized effect in preventing the diversion of precursor materials?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AOAV's global Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) map. Action on Armed Violence (2016).
- Cruickshank, Paul; Nic Robertson; and Tim Lister (2012). Al Qaeda's biggest threat. CNN. 16 February.
- Green, J. J. (2015). Al-Qaida threatens to use 'undetectable' bombs against U.S.. WTOP. 5 January.
- Higginbotham, Adam (2010). U.S. Military Learns to Fight Deadliest Weapons. WIRED. 28 July.
- INTERPOL (2015). International Leaders' Forum backs creation of Global Alliance to combat IED threat. 4 September.
- INTERPOL (2017). INTERPOL operational exercise targets smuggling of chemical explosive precursors. 10 February.
- INTERPOL. Chemical and explosive terrorism - Operation Chase.
- INTERPOL. Chemical and explosive terrorism - Operation Crimp.
- Programme Global Shield. World Customs Organization (2013).
- The Group of Experts of the High Contracting Parties to CCW Amended Protocol II (2009). Improvised Explosive Devices. 19 October. CCW/APII/CONF.11/2.
- Scarborough, Rowan (2009). Exclusive: Taliban makes IEDs deadlier. The Washington Times. 15 September.
- United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).
- United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. Amended Protocol II.

## UN DOCUMENTS

- United Nations, General Assembly (2016). Countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices. 25 July. A/71/187.



- United Nations, General Assembly (2016). Countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices. 15 December. A/RES/71/72.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2016). The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review. 19 July. A/RES/70/291.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2015). Assistance in mine action. 15 December. A/RES/70/80.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2015). Countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices. 15 December. A/RES/70/746.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2015). Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. 24 December. A/70/674.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2014). The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. 11 December. A/RES/60/51.