Gender and disarmament
Reaching Critical Will

Background
Gender refers to socially constructed ideas that attribute meaning to and differentiate between the sexes. Ideas about masculinity and femininity can affect the way people and societies view weapons, war, and militarism. For example, taking up arms to “protect” one’s territory or property is often construed as reflecting masculine strength, while exercising restraint or negotiating disarmament has at times been portrayed as feminine weakness.¹

Thus considering gender can help in developing deeper understandings of “gun cultures,” nuclear or conventional armament policies, or obstacles to disarmament and arms control. Having a “gender perspective” on disarmament also means looking at whether and how men, women, and others are affected differently by weapons and armed conflict. The possession, use, and trade in weapons affect men and women in different ways, due to their socially-constructed roles in society. The gender perspective has largely been absent from disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation processes, though some efforts have been made recently in UN resolutions and treaties to address this.

UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and its follow-up resolutions provide a political framework recognising that men and women experience wars differently. It requires these differences be taken into account and recognises that women’s full and equal participation in all aspects and stages of peace processes is essential to building sustainable peace. And in 2010, the General Assembly began to consider the specific implications of 1325 for disarmament with the adoption of resolution 65/69 on “Women, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation.”

Current context
In 2013, the UN General Assembly resolution adopted a third resolution on this subject, 68/33, which urges member states and other relevant actors to promote equal opportunities for women in disarmament decision-making processes and to support and strengthen the effective participation of women in the field of disarmament.

The need for implementation of this resolution became clear in May 2014 at the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), when during an
experts meeting on fully autonomous weapons, only men addressed the plenary meetings. In response, civil society is compiling a list of non-male experts for future reference as well as a list of those who identify as men that refuse to speak on male-only panels.

Women’s participation most recently got some attention at the fifth biennial meeting of states on the UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (UNPoA). Two articles in the outcome document refer to UNSCR 1325 and highlight the need to ensure the participation of women in the implementation of the UNPoA.

While important, promoting women’s participation does not fully address the need for incorporating a gender perspective into the implementation of the UNPoA or other weapons-related instruments. A more robust reflection of the relationship between weapons and gender-based violence, differential impacts of the use of weapons or of the arms trade on the sexes, and gendered engagement in armed conflict and armed violence are crucial to addressing the challenges associated with the proliferation and use of weapons in and out of conflict. The inclusion in the Arms Trade Treaty of a legally-binding provision on preventing armed gender-based violence is a good example of such efforts.

**Recommendations for governments**

*During the First Committee:*
- Delegations should welcome the inclusion of the provision on gender-based violence in the ATT and highlight the need for implementation of this criterion.
- They should welcome the increased attention to the participation of women in the BMS5 outcome document and highlight the need to ensure gender diversity in other disarmament discussions, such as those on autonomous weapons.
- All states should submit reports to the Secretary-General on their implementation of the UNGA resolution on women and disarmament. They should also identify and discuss ways of strengthening and improving this resolution, including strengthening language on incorporating a gender perspective in disarmament-related programmes and policies.
Beyond First Committee:

- States should effectively implement the ATT provision against GBV by training export licence officials and updating their risk assessment procedures accordingly.
- All states, international organisations, and civil society groups should seek to ensure gender diversity in discussions, negotiations, and peace processes.

- All relevant actors should also continue to research and assess the specific impact that weapons and armed conflict have on people of different sexes in order to ensure a gender perspective in all policies on weapons and disarmament initiatives and to explore how gender constructions affect armament and disarmament policies and budgets.

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4 For example, in February 2014 Reaching Critical Will published a study on the impact on women of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. See Women and explosive weapons, Reaching Critical Will, February 2014, http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/WEW.pdf

5 GBV is violence perpetrated against a person based on gender conceptions and can include rape and sexual violence, forced prostitution, trafficking, domestic violence, and forced marriage. Irresponsible transfers of weapons across borders have resulted in acts of GBV perpetrated by both state and non-state actors.