Disarmament and development
Reaching Critical Will/WILPF

Background
There are many direct and indirect links between military expenditure, the arms trade, violent conflict, and the reduction of available resources for social and economic development. Governments that spend excessive financial, technological, and human resources on their militaries divert resources from economic, social, and environmental programmes. The military-industrial complex—composed of a state’s armed forces, the government, suppliers of weapons systems and services (corporations), and academic institutions that conduct research on weapon systems and designs—absorbs vast amounts of funding that could otherwise be spent on human security, including the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, funds reserved for development initiatives are increasingly spent on emergency relief and rehabilitation operations to clean up after violent conflict. The manufacture and use of weapons also prevents sustainable ecological development and preservation, creating unequal access to resources and further impeding poverty reduction initiatives.

Article 26 of the UN Charter tasks the UN Security Council to create a plan for the regulation of armaments and reducing military expenditure—a task it has not just neglected but vigorously undermined with its permanent member’s excessive military spending, rampant arms trading, and facilitation of conflicts worldwide.

Given the failures of the UN Security Council to effectively deal with the problem of military spending, the UN General Assembly has tried to grapple with the connections between disarmament and development for the past four decades.

The International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development in 1987 adopted an action plan that included commitments to allocate resources released by disarmament to development and consider reducing military expenditure. This followed an in-depth study by the UN in 1982 that set out the negative impacts of a large military sector on long-term economic growth and the structural changes required for economic development.

A reappraisal of the relationship between disarmament and development by a Group of Governmental Experts was released in 2004. Reaffirming the core concerns and evidence regarding military expenditure and economic development, the report also elaborated on other
threats to safety, stability, and development that can result from the trade and use of certain weapons (e.g. landmines and small arms).

Every year, a resolution is introduced to the First Committee on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on the relationship between disarmament and development, requiring the UN Secretary-General to report on this issue.

Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 there has been an increased interest from the disarmament community in development and how reducing armed violence and related insecurity can be a catalyst for achieving the goals and their targets. For example, target 16.4 seeks to reduce “significantly” illicit arms flows; something that could be accomplished via robust implement of the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons or the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The reporting mechanisms for both instruments and related data could be utilized for measuring the indicator set for Target 16.4 or national indicators, many of which are yet to be established. As well, fulfilling obligations relating to women, gender, sexual violence, or gender-based violence that are included in weapons treaties such as the ATT or the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons also moves us closer to achieving SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment.

**Current context**

In 2016, global military spending reached 1.686 trillion USD. The United States continues to dominate, spending 611 billion on militarism (without including its nuclear weapons). The other four permanent members of the UN Security Council are also among the top ten spenders.4

The UN General Assembly—including through its First Committee—needs to take more active responsibility on this issue, beyond its annual resolution or national statements. It could consider commissioning a new study on military spending, following a similar approach to the 1982 study, that could provide recommendations for additional work on reducing military expenditure and arms production and development. First Committee could also consider adopting practices or policies related to increasing the participation of developing countries in disarmament forums.

Recent research on participation data of meetings between 2010 and 2014 of thirteen forums addressing disarmament and weapons issues shows the serious underrepresentation of developing countries in discussions. Lower-income countries are less likely to attend, speak at, or hold formal roles in multilateral meetings on disarmament and weapons issues. Where they do attend, they field smaller delegations than richer countries.5

Developing countries often more negatively affected by the use and trade of weapons, and less likely to be major arms producers. A diverse range of interests must be fully represented at international forums for any attempt to construct an equitable international legal order that reflects the concerns of populations worldwide.6 Developing countries and their civil society are currently relatively marginalised from agenda setting and decision-making in disarmament through their structural underrepresentation. This must be addressed.
Recommendations

During the First Committee, delegations should:

- Recognise the contribution that disarmament, the restriction of certain weapons, and reduction of military spending can make to development, or to removing barriers to development; and
- Recognise the need to address the issue of the underrepresentation of lower-income countries and certain regions in multilateral disarmament forums, and suggest practical measures to correct this; and
- Suggest new ways for the UN General Assembly to effectively engage in this issue, including new studies and recommendations for international level work.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

- Reduce military budgets and redirect funds to social and economic development within their countries and through development aid;
- Support and resource programmes of sponsorship, training, capacity building, and preparation, and promote the consideration of other practical measures in the organisation of forums that could maximise participation (e.g. regarding length of meetings, location etc.);
- Contribute to the wider framing of disarmament and weapons issues to address a broader range of concerns, for example through making links with humanitarian and development agendas, in order to facilitate broader inclusion;
- Raise the visibility of marginalisation by supporting the consistent collection, monitoring, and analysis of participation data, to improve awareness and measure progress;
- Identify how current practices in disarmament and arms control can facilitate progress toward fulfilling certain of the SDGs and build on those practices; and
- Consider how security sector reform resources and initiatives can support the SDGs to achieve mutual objectives.

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