Thank you, Chairperson.

I am delivering a statement about gender perspectives on disarmament on behalf a number of non-governmental organisations, which are listed in the statement that is available electronically.

Over the past few years, much of the opposition to banning nuclear weapons has been heavily gendered. Some delegations to First Committee and other forums have linked caring about humanitarian concerns to being weak, unrealistic, and not relevant for the job that people in power have to undertake to “protect” their countries.

This approach not only suggests that caring about the use of nuclear weapons is silly, but also makes the pursuit of disarmament out to be an irrational and even “emotional” objective.

By consequence, achieving disarmament becomes relegated to the realm of fantasy while in reality, military budgets continue to rise and increasingly high-tech weapons of violence are developed and deployed. This must be challenged, and a gender perspective is useful for doing so.

Employing a gender perspective means investigating and analysing the ways in which weapons and war are coded with gender norms. The framing of war and violence as “strong” and “masculine” is often coupled with a framing of peace and disarmament as “weak” and “feminine”.

Changing these norms can be aided by increasing gender diversity in disarmament. There is a stark disparity in the level and volume of participation of women, men, and others in disarmament and arms control discussions, negotiations, and processes. Recent research has shown that at any given intergovernmental meeting on disarmament, only about one quarter of participants are likely to be women and almost half of all delegations are likely to be composed entirely of men.

Yet women often suffer disproportionate or differential harm from the development, use, and trade of weapons. Men tend to make up the majority of direct victims of armed violence. Sometimes, they are targeted just for being men. Women, however, can face differential impacts from the use of weapons such as inequalities in access to survivor assistance and higher risk of sexual violence, especially when they are displaced from their homes. Armed conflict directly impacts women’s health, sexual and reproductive rights, education, economic status, and access to food and water.

Where cities or towns are militarised, women tend to face higher rates of domestic and community violence. There is also evidence of connections between foreign military bases and the sexual exploitation and abuse of local women and of human trafficking.

Yet these impacts of militarism and armed violence are usually overlooked. Women are consistently left out of discussions and processes of conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and disarmament; thus women’s unique experiences are frequently invisible.

The First Committee resolutions on “Women, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation” urge states and others 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.

Recent nuclear weapon forums have taken forward this charge. The Chair’s summary of the 2017 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Preparatory Committee reflects that states parties “were encouraged, in accordance with their commitments under United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, to support participation of female delegates in their own NPT delegations and through support for sponsorship programs.” The new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons recognises “that the equal, full and effective participation of both women and men is an essential factor for the promotion and attainment of sustainable peace and security, and committed to supporting and strengthening the effective participation of women in nuclear disarmament.”

These developments are very welcome. They should be used to increase women’s participation in disarmament and to encourage efforts in other forums and to highlight disproportionate impacts where
relevant. However, a more robust reflection of the relationship between weapons and gender-based violence, and other gendered aspects of armed conflict and armed violence, are crucial to addressing the challenges associated with the proliferation and use of weapons in and out of conflict.

**Statement prepared by** the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

**Statement delivered by** Emily Welty of the International Peace Research Association

**Statement endorsed by:**

International Committee for Robot Arms Control
International Peace Bureau
International Peace Research Association
Mines Action Canada
PAX
Peace Movement Aoteara
Protection of armaments and consequences
World Council of Churches
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
Women’s March Global