Disarmament education
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Background
There is broad international consensus that pursuing disarmament requires an educational dimension. Educational efforts transmit information about the impact of weapons on people to decisionmakers and can build political will for disarmament. According to the 1980 UNESCO World Congress on Disarmament Education, this is not just about “dissemination of data” or even “hopes and ideals.” Rather, to be “effective” disarmament education must “be related to the lives and concerns of the learners”; analyse “the political realities within which disarmament is sought”; and offer insight into “the political, economic and social factors on which the security of peoples could be based.”

This animating spirit can also be found in the book *Action for Disarmament: 10 Things You Can Do!* published by UNODA in 2014.

In the decades since 1982, however, policymaking on disarmament education has tended toward a more technocratic tone. The UN’s “World Disarmament Campaign” was renamed the “United Nations Disarmament Information Programme” in 1992. A 2002 report by the UN Secretary-General on disarmament and non-proliferation education (in response to a 2000 General Assembly resolution) focused on best practices and programmatic approaches rather than public mobilisation. Nevertheless, it did clarify that disarmament education is not just education about disarmament but, most crucially, education *for* disarmament.

The UN Secretary-General reports on implementation of the 2002 report’s recommendations every two years and the General Assembly has passed biennial resolutions calling for ongoing implementation, which change little in substance each time and attract little to no opposition. However few states submit reports to the UN Secretary-General as requested by successive resolutions and there is little substantive programming.

The 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) offers new impetus for reinvigorating peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education. Its preamble specifically recognises “the importance of peace and disarmament education in all its aspects” and stressed the role of non-governmental organisations, as well as “religious leaders, parliamentarians, academics, and the hibakusha” as representatives of the “public conscience” in pressing for nuclear disarmament.

A 2018 joint civil society statement to the First Committee noted that the “lack of funding and few professional opportunities for youth who are passionate about disarmament issues” leaves them “ultimately disengaged.” In contrast,
they called for education to “help empower the greater participation of youth, women, survivors of violence and people from the Global South in peace and security policymaking.”

Current context

In 2018, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres specifically addressed disarmament education as a contribution to Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in his Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament.

In the most substantive change to the biennial resolution since 2002, the 2018 resolution expressed appreciation to the Secretary-General for doing so and took note of the proposed actions in the agenda.

On 16 August 2019, the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) launched its Youth4Disarmament initiative (#youth4disarmament) which “seeks to connect young people with experts to learn about today’s international security challenges, the work of the United Nations and how they can become involved.” On 11 October 2019, UNODA and PeaceBoat will hold an event in New York meant to give young people the opportunity to engage with UN officials, diplomats, and civil society working towards disarmament.

The First Committee will not consider a disarmament and non-proliferation education resolution in 2019 (the biennial resolution will return to the body next year). However, Securing Our Common Future, UNODA’s new Youth4Disarmament initiative, and inclusion of peace and disarmament education in the TPNW offer opportunities to inform governments about their responsibilities to support disarmament education, as well as build political will for more robust and coherent initiatives and resolutions in the future.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:

• Highlight the importance of peace and disarmament education and its relevance to achieving the SDGs;
• Honour the crucial role of hibakusha, survivors, civil society, and educational institutions in peace and disarmament education;
• Report on their government’s peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education initiatives;
• Welcome the various disarmament education initiatives described in this chapter; and
• Call on member states, international organisations, civil society, and educational institutions to make submissions for the 2020 report by the UN Secretary-General on implementation of the 2002 Study.

Beyond First Committee, states should:

• Provide funding and institutional support to international organisations, associations of survivors, civil society, and educational institutions providing peace, disarmament and non-proliferation education.
• Seek synergies between peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education and the implementation of the SDGs and Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security.
• Make a submission to UNODA for the 2020 report on their support for peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education.
• Implement peace, disarmament, and non-proliferation education in ways that are sensitive to marginalisation and differential access, for example, mainstreaming promotion of gender equality across all programmes and building capacity of poorly-represented peoples and groups, including survivors of violence.

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