Statement on gender and disarmament
Drafted by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
United Nations, New York, 18 October 2016

Chairperson, delegates,

The civil society organisations that have signed onto this joint statement welcome the growing interest in the topic of “gender and disarmament”. We are pleased that last year’s First Committee saw a considerable increase in the number of resolutions advocating for women’s equal participation or recognising gendered impacts of weapons. We also appreciate that the Fifth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty earlier this year focused on the Treaty’s gender provisions and adopted action points to carry forward the implementation of those provisions.

These developments are very welcome and should be continued and enhanced in as many disarmament forums as possible. However, a more robust reflection of the gendered norms associated with weapons, war, and violence is also crucial for effectively addressing the challenges associated with the proliferation and use of weapons in and out of conflict.

Across most of the world, the normative understanding of sex and gender is that there are men and women, and that these men and women should behave in so-called masculine and feminine ways. The men must be strong and rational—which means they need to be willing and able to use violent force. Women, on the other hand, are assumed to be in need of protection—by men, from other men.

This binary view of the world is dominated by heteronormativity and hegemonic notions of violent masculinity and passive femininity. This perspective does not recognise the plethora of gender identities, sexual orientations, and ways of being and acting in the world. It also obscures the systems upon which conflict is built—it makes it difficult to see why we circle back, again and again, to violence as the answer to conflict. To the supposed necessity of weapons as the solution to insecurity.

Understanding how this sex/gender binary reinforces the idea that militarism is inevitable is crucial to disarmament. If we do not reflect on this, if we don’t investigate why militarism is always posited as the best answer to tension or conflict, it is difficult to see disarmament as anything other than weak, passive, and irrational. But from a non-binary perspective, in which we start to understand how gender is constructed and who controls that construction and who is impacted by it, we can start to see disarmament as not only a valid option, but in fact the only option that can ensure our survival.

Weapons are not the answer to insecurity. Disarmament is. We call on First Committee delegates to push beyond the boundaries of the binary in their work on gender and disarmament. This isn’t just about adding particular bodies to a discussion. It’s about changing our perceptions and understandings in order to crack through the deadlock and despair to make concrete progress in building a peaceful and just world for all.
The following non-governmental organisations support this statement:

- Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy
- Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy
- Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines
- Control Arms
- International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)
- International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)
- Mines Action Canada
- Mines Action Group
- Peace Track Initiative
- Project Ploughshares
- Seguridad Humana en Latinoamérica y el Caribe (SEHLAC)
- Women’s Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD)
- Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
- World Federalist Movement – Canada