Madam President,

Thank you again for inviting the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to address the Conference on Disarmament on the occasion of the International Women’s Day.

International Women’s Day is an occasion upon which WILPF, together with other women’s organisations all over the world, highlights the injustices and discrimination that women face every day. WILPF has since 1915 emphasized the link between women’s rights and military expenditure, the arms trade, and armed violence.

In just a few days, all UN members will gather in New York to engage in the second diplomatic conference in order to agree on the world’s first multilateral international arms trade treaty (ATT). WILPF has since 2006 been engaged in the ATT process in order to support the establishment of an international tool that will prevent the transfer of arms when there is a possibility that these weapons might be used to violate international humanitarian law, human rights, or undermine socioeconomic development.

Yesterday, our annual International Women’s Day seminar focused on the inclusion of a criterion in the ATT to prevent arms trade if there is a possibility that the weapons might be used in order to facilitate gender-based violence (GBV).

Rape and other forms of gender violence has increasingly become a deliberate tactic of terror in war and other conflict situations and are often fueled by increased presence of weapons.

For example, more than 400,000 women ages 15 to 49 experienced rape between 2006 and 2007 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. That is equivalent to 1,152 women raped every day, 48 women raped every hour, or four women raped every five minutes. Despite this, arms sales to this country continue, with a wide range of weapons, ammunition, and related equipment being supplied.

Women around the world suffer different and serious violations due to the proliferation and misuse of arms and the long-lasting effects of armed conflict.

We therefore call on all states that will participate in the arms trade treaty negotiations to make sure that the treaty includes a solid reference to gender-based violence, a reference that doesn’t undermine existing international law and places gender-based violence amongst other criteria, such as violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

We want the Arms Trade Treaty to be strong on this issue, to be a credible tool for addressing the impact of arms sales on women all over the world. The treaty
must be based on and contribute to the growing body of international law on violence against women.

So I urge you all to support a strong Arms Trade Treaty that that will stop transfers of conventional arms where there is a substantial risk that the weapons are likely to be used to facilitate acts of gender-based violence, including rape and other forms of sexual violence.

The humanitarian perspective inherent in the demand for an effective international arms trade treaty is also at the heart of discussions that took place last week in Oslo, Norway on nuclear weapons. 127 states, along with many international and civil society organizations, gathered to explore and discuss the humanitarian impact of the use of nuclear weapons. This discussion was instrumental in reframing the discourse around nuclear weapons, focusing on the direct humanitarian consequences of their use rather than on myths of their alleged value for state “security”.

The key conclusions from the conference, highlighted by Norway’s Foreign Minister in his closing summary, were that no state or international body could adequately address the humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation; that nuclear weapons have a demonstrated devastating immediate and long-term effects; and that such effects will not be constrained by national borders, and will have regional and global impacts.

The humanitarian approach to nuclear weapons challenges the foundation of possessing nuclear weapons. It undermines any incentives for proliferation and encourages disarmament of existing arsenals, something that should be in the interest of all states around the world. We therefore welcome Mexico’s announcement that it will host a follow-up conference to deepen the international community’s understanding of these weapons of terror.

This initiative recognizes that nuclear weapon free countries have an important role to play and highlighted the need for preventative measures. We look forward to continuing this discussion with all states and organizations both in the traditional disarmament fora and in Mexico.

Thank you, Madam President.