International Women’s Day Statement to the Conference on Disarmament

11 March 2014
Mr. President,

Last year here at the CD, WILPF called on all governments to ensure that the second negotiation conference of the Arms Trade Treaty would include a legally-binding provision on preventing armed gender-based violence. We called for a provision that would not undermine existing international law and places gender-based violence on the same footing as other criteria for refusing arms transfers, such as violations of human rights and international law.

The final text, adopted by the General Assembly, now signed by 116 states and on its way towards entry into force, achieved this.

It is the first ever treaty that explicitly links gender-based violence with international arms trade. The treaty is one of the most significant achievements of our disarmament community in the last few years. We are now focusing our efforts at ensuring that the treaty will be efficiently implemented in order to help to prevent human suffering and armed violence.

This should be the goal of all the treaties we negotiate. This is not about action plans, programmes of work, or informal working groups. Disarmament treaties should prevent civilian casualties, prevent humanitarian catastrophes, and should prevent armed violence and escalation of armed conflicts.

There is no lack of international problems that need solving today. Unfortunately, the Conference on Disarmament does not contribute to preventing civilian casualties. It does not reduce the risk of any humanitarian catastrophe. It does not prevent armed violence.

Progress is being made on disarmament everywhere else but here. The Arms Trade Treaty will hopefully have its first meeting of states parties soon. The conferences in Oslo and Nayarit, and the coming meeting in Vienna, have created a unique momentum on nuclear weapons that will have an impact far beyond the 2015 NPT Review Conference. The issue of fully autonomous weapons is rapidly taking a place on the international agenda and will be discussed extensively in Geneva this year. More and more states and other actors are calling for an end to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Some say that the CD risks losing its relevance. Civil society has certainly turned elsewhere in the interest of achieving progress on disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation issues.

This is a serious challenge for all governments that want to move forward. Civil society engagement is not only important for progress on multilateral negotiations, it is essential. Without campaigns, media, experts and other elements that civil society brings to these forums, governments struggle with making progress on difficult issues that require compromise and negotiations.
But beyond civil society engagement, there is also the question of scarce resources—where should your taxpayers’ money go? To negotiating treaties or to holding plenary meetings in a body that has not adopted a programme of work in years? There is the question of making a difference in the world, strengthening international law, doing what each of us can from our different positions to advance human security for the betterment of our shared security and wellbeing.

These are questions to think about as the CD continues its work this year. Achieving change requires creativity and courage. Nearly 100 years ago, women from around the world gathered in The Hague to protest the slaughter of World War I. Next year, we celebrate that event by marking WILPF’s 100th anniversary. 100 years of working for sustainable peace through disarmament and demilitarization. We urge you take the creativity and courage of the women and men then and now working for peace. Seize the momentum created in other forums and break the deadlock, or move forward productively elsewhere. Either way, the goal should be preventing armed violence and advancing human security.

Thank you, Mr. President.