Gender and the NPT
Statement drafted by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom for the 2019 NPT Preparatory Committee, New York, 1 May 2019

We are encouraged by recent interest by many governments in exploring the linkages between gender and nuclear weapons.

Issues of gender and sex intersect with nuclear weapons in multiple ways. These include: patterns of harm; discourse and approach; and diversity in participation in disarmament processes and negotiations.

As with other types of weapons, nuclear weapons have gendered impacts. Women face unique devastation from the production, testing, and use of nuclear weapons, in particular the effects of ionising radiation on reproduction and maternal health. In some communities where nuclear weapon testing has occurred, the social and cultural responsibilities of women have also put them at greater risk of exposure. Women who have survived nuclear weapon tests or use also face unique social challenges related to how they are treated in societies and communities.

But there are other ways in which gender is relevant for thinking about nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapon discourse is mired in dichotomies such as hard versus soft security, strong versus weak, active versus passive, and national security versus human security. With remarkable consistency, the masculine-identified sides of these pairs are tacitly attributed more value than the other. Those talking about humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and supporting their prohibition are accused of being divisive, polarising, ignorant, and even emotional.

This gendered discourse around nuclear weapons undermines the contributions of those promoting a perspective of disarmament and peace, whether those individuals are women, men, or non-binary. In spite of widespread international agreement on the importance of women’s participation in decision-making and peace processes, there continues to be noticeable disparity in the level and volume of participation of women and non-binary people as compared to men in disarmament and arms control discussions, negotiations, and processes.

During the last two NPT Preparatory Committees, a growing number of states parties have called for improving gender diversity in nuclear disarmament and in their statements to the plenary. Some also have also spoken about the gendered impacts of nuclear weapons use and testing. We welcome the side events, statements, and working papers at this PrepCom that continue to highlight this important issue, and hope it will be reflected in the Chair’s summary. But we also encourage states to go further in using gender analysis to challenge conventional notions of security that are linked to nuclear deterrence instead of nuclear disarmament and diplomacy.
To this end, we recommend that:

- States and organisations must ensure gender diversity on their delegations to the NPT Preparatory Committee at all levels, as well as in panels at side events or other meetings. They should also work to ensure that survivors and those impacted by nuclear weapons production, testing, and use are included in discussions.
- Language in statements and outcome documents should reflect the need for gender diversity, not just the equal representation of the men-women binary.
- States parties should incorporate gender analysis and awareness in their work on the NPT and nuclear disarmament in national policies, practice, and communication on the subject.
- Any recommendations or outcome from this Preparatory Committee should reinforce previous agreements on the gendered impacts of nuclear weapons and the importance of gender diversity in nuclear discussions and negotiations. Outcomes this year and in 2020 should build upon this language to also acknowledge and encourage states parties to explore the gendered nature of nuclear weapon discourse and theory and to begin unpacking and un-privileging particular dominant perspectives as gendered.

This statement is endorsed by the following civil society organisations:

Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy
Arms Control Association
Gender and Radiation Project
ICAN France
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation
Project Ploughshares
Soka Gakkai International
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom