

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom



International Women's Day Statement to the
Conference on Disarmament 8th March 2011

Thank you Mr. President, we really appreciate the opportunity to speak directly to the Conference in a plenary meeting for the second year in a row.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), talking on behalf of women from around the world, has taken this opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament on International Women's Day. This day has linked women's engagement in political processes for peace and justice since 1911, celebrating 100 years this year.

Yesterday, WILPF organized our annual International Women's Day seminar on disarmament here at the United Nations here in Geneva. This year, the seminar focused on United Nations General Assembly resolution 65/69 on "Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control," which was adopted without a vote in 2010. Participants discussed the importance of including the women, peace, and security agenda within the international security agenda in general, and in the disarmament and arms control agenda in particular. This approach has received increased attention during recent years, but the international security community often ignores the importance of gender in discussions on disarmament.

We had speakers from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Costa Rica, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom, who all highlighted the linkages between women, peace, security, and disarmament in their national and regional contexts. They emphasized the problems that ever-increasing militarism causes for human security and for women in particular.

United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace, and security clearly highlights the importance of women's participation in all levels of decision-making in the sphere of peace and security. However, women's participation in international disarmament and arms control negotiations is still very low, and the negotiations too often tend to ignore the importance of women's participation and experiences. The consequence is biased outcomes, with a disproportional and narrow focus on the experiences of a very limited number of men.

In addition to the Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, the Beijing Platform for Action from 1995 in its focus area E specifically addresses the importance of including a gender perspective in disarmament policies. It recommends states "undertake to explore new ways of generating new public and private financial resources, inter alia, through the appropriate reduction of excessive military expenditures, including global military expenditures, trade in arms and investment for arms production and acquisition, taking into consideration national security requirements, so as to permit the possible allocation of additional funds for social and economic development, in particular for the advancement of women."

16 years after the Beijing Platform for Action, the international arms trade is still big business. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates that the value of the annual global arms trade as of 2007 was about 50.5 billion US dollars. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council account for about 76 per cent of arms sold each year. Despite the global economic crisis, global military expenditure has continued to increase, totaling 1.5 trillion US dollars in 2009. In addition to this, huge investments in the modernization of nuclear arsenals are being planned around the world.

As the weapons spread, so does their use. Armed conflict, war, terrorism, and occupation are cause and consequence to the ever increasing levels of militarism and military spending around the world. While military expenditure increases, investments in conflict resolution, peace building, and

development lags far behind. Armed conflict and excessive militarism prevent economic stability and sustainable livelihoods and absorb vast amounts of funding that could otherwise be spent on human security, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Funds reserved for development initiatives are increasingly spent on emergency relief and rehabilitation operations to clean up after violent conflict. The high level of militarism is also inextricably linked to the reported human rights violations and the failure of peace processes.

This is why WILPF believes that each disarmament measure must make a contribution to preventing armed conflict, preventing the violation of human rights and international humanitarian law, and seriously reducing the culture and economy of militarism.

In a world of increasing economic inequalities and political instabilities, and shrinking natural resources and environmental deterioration, weapons continue to be tools of violence and oppression for those that use them and tools of financial gain for those who make and sell them. The Conference on Disarmament must help realize the mandate of article 26 of the UN Charter, which demands “the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources” through “the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments.” Right now, negotiations on an arms trade treaty are ongoing at the UN General Assembly, but article 26 goes beyond the mere regulation of the arms trade to the regulation of armaments themselves. It foresees a redirection of military expenditure, implying that the system of regulation will afford security by other means.

The CD should have been contributing to this objective throughout its history, but instead it has remained deadlocked for more than a decade and no progress on its four core issues have taken place. The CD must return to work, and when it does, it must recognize that in reality it only has one core issue: disarmament.

For example, if the CD is to negotiate a treaty banning the production for fissile material, it must lay the groundwork for complete, verifiable, and irreversible nuclear disarmament. And in order to achieve a treaty that would meet the needs and expectations of the international community, all nuclear weapon possessors should immediately cease and rescind their plans for the modernization, replacement, refurbishment, and upgrading of nuclear arsenals, complexes, facilities, and delivery systems and cease production of fissile materials for military purposes.

People all over the world are expecting the nuclear weapon possessors to deliver concrete disarmament measures in line with their commitments. If the fissile materials treaty is to be a credible step in an approach to a world free of nuclear weapons, it will have to include provisions for the next steps on that road, a nuclear weapons convention. A simple cut-off that will do little more than keep the status quo will not be able to meet the demands for prevention of armed conflict, prevention of the violation of human rights and international humanitarian law, and reductions of the culture and economy of militarism. The CD is not mandated to maintain the status quo, it is mandated to negotiate multilateral disarmament treaties—it is thus in fact mandated to **change** the status quo.

In their report from 2006, the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission emphasized the importance of gender in WMD negotiations. They conclude “that armament policies and the use of armed force have often been influenced by misguided ideas about masculinity and strength. An understanding of and emancipation from this traditional perspective might help to remove some of the hurdles on the road to disarmament and non-proliferation.” My advice to you today, distinguished delegates, is to keep this in mind in order to get past the stalemate of the CD and fulfill your mandate.