Gender and disarmament

Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

Background

Gender refers to socially constructed ideas that attribute meaning to and differentiate between the sexes. Ideas about gender affect the way people and societies view weapons, war, and militarism. Considering gender can help in developing deeper understandings of “gun cultures,” nuclear or conventional armament policies, or obstacles to disarmament and arms control. It can also help determine appropriate policy or budgetary responses to particular challenges.

While gender refers to social constructions of masculinity, femininity, etc., the concept of a “gender perspective” on disarmament also includes looking at whether and how men and women are affected differently by weapons and armed conflict. The possession, use, and trade in weapons affect men and women in different ways. The gender perspective has largely been absent from disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation processes, though some efforts have been made recently in UN resolutions and treaties to address this.

Current context

UN Security Council resolution 1325 and its follow-up resolutions provide a political framework recognizing that men and women experience wars differently. It requires these differences be taken into account and recognizes that women’s full and equal participation in all aspects and stages of peace processes is essential to building sustainable peace.

While 1325 brought the concept of “gender mainstreaming” to bear on UN offices and programmes dealing with disarmament and arms control issues, it was not until 2010 that the General Assembly began to consider its specific implications for disarmament with the adoption of resolution 65/69 on “Women, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation”.

In 2012, the UN General Assembly resolution adopted a second resolution on this subject, 67/48, which recognizes “the valuable contribution of women to practical disarmament measures carried out at the local, national, regional and subregional levels in the prevention and reduction of armed violence and armed conflict, and in promoting disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.” This resolution urges member states and other relevant actors to promote equal opportunities for women in disarmament decision-making processes and to support and strengthen the effective participation of women, including through capacity-building efforts, in the field of disarmament.

Aside from this UNGA resolution, the importance of a gender perspective in arms control was also recognized in the recently adopted Arms Trade
Treaty (ATT). During negotiations, civil society organizations and like-minded governments worked together to ensure that the treaty included a legally-binding provision on preventing armed gender-based violence (GBV).1 GBV is violence perpetrated against a person based on gender conceptions and can include rape and sexual violence, forced prostitution, trafficking, domestic violence, and forced marriage. Irresponsible transfers of weapons across borders have resulted in acts of GBV perpetrated by both state and non-state actors.

The ATT is the first treaty that recognises the link between GBV and the international arms trade, and was a step towards more comprehensive recognition of the relationship between weapons and gender.

However, much more is needed. It is crucial for the General Assembly and all its member states to continue to highlight the specific impact that weapons and armed conflict have on women in order to ensure a gender perspective in all policies on weapons and disarmament initiatives. It is also important for states, international organisations, and civil society to explore and understand how gender constructions affect armament and disarmament policies and budgets.

Recommendations for governments

*During the First Committee, governments should:*

* Welcome the inclusion of a specific provision on gender-based violence in the Arms Trade Treaty and highlight the need for implementation of this criterion.
* Recognize the particular impact that explosive weapons in populated areas have on women, and recognize the need to end the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.
* Highlight the outcome of the 2012 Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, which expressed concern about the negative impact of the illicit trade of SALW on women and underscored the need for further integration of the role of women into efforts to combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms.
* Submit reports to the Secretary-General on their implementation of the UNGA resolution on women and disarmament.
* Identify and discuss ways of strengthening and improving the biannual resolution on "Women, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation", including strengthening language on incorporating a gender perspective in disarmament-related programmes and policies.

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