**Background**

Gender issues intersect with weapons issues in at least three ways:

- Gendered patterns of harm from armed violence and armed conflict
- Gendered discourse and approach to weapons and war and violence
- Gender diversity in arms control and disarmament negotiations and discussions

Women and men are exposed to different patterns of violence. This is not as a result of biology, but of socially constructed gender roles. Gender-based violence is violence that is directed at a person because of their sex, or their perceived gender roles, or their gender identity, or their sexual orientation. The majority of gender-based violence is violence inflicted by men onto women.

We see this most easily with guns and other small arms. The illegal or poorly regulated arms trade results in weapons flows to areas of conflict and instability in order to generate profits. These sales often result in ample access to small arms, which are used in conflict and after it to commit gender-based violence, including sexual violence.

Even when women are not targeted for acts of gender-based violence, they can face different experiences from the use of weapons. Nuclear weapons are a stark example of this. Women face unique devastation from the effects of the use of nuclear weapons, such as the effects of radiation on reproduction and maternal health. Women who have survived nuclear weapon tests or use also face unique social challenges related to how they are treated in societies and communities.

Gendered patterns of harm are clear throughout every example of armed conflict. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas can have a unique effect on women, such as access to public places and services. Women affected by explosive violence often have fewer opportunities to engage with health care services and reconstruction processes. If heading the household they sometimes face systematic discrimination in trying to provide for their families. They also become more susceptible to further physical attack and sexual exploitation, especially when displaced from their homes.¹

However men also face gender-based violence and differential impacts of armed conflict, where men and adolescent boys tend to be the most frequent direct victims of violence. And men are often targeted just for being men. We can see this expectation in the reported policy of using maleness as a signifier of militancy in the targeting and casualty analysis of drone strikes.²

Weapons are considered to be men's business. Our societies still expect men to be violent. And our social relationship with weapons is linked
to a persistent construction of women as the “weaker sex,” in need of protection by men. While men make up the most direct victims, this is rarely presented as evidence of their weakness. States and groups often call for the protection of “innocent civilians”—described as women, children, and the elderly—which reinforces expectations that men are violent, undermines the law, and strips women of their agency. Framing women as weak and in need of protection continues to enable their exclusion from authoritative social and political roles and weakens the effectiveness of those processes. From all male panels of experts, to participation in peace talks, or treaty negotiations the voices of women must be heard.

Current context
UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and its follow-up resolutions provide a political framework recognising that men and women experience wars differently. It requires these differences be taken into account and recognises that women's full and equal participation in all aspects and stages of peace processes is essential to building sustainable peace. And in 2010, the General Assembly began to consider the specific implications of 1325 for disarmament with the adoption of resolution 65/69 on “Women, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation”. In 2014, the UNGA adopted a fourth resolution on this subject, which 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 in the field of disarmament.

While important, promoting women’s participation does not fully address the need for incorporating a gender perspective into the implementation weapons-related instruments. A more robust reflection of the relationship between weapons and gender-based violence, differential impacts of the use of weapons or of the arms trade on the sexes, and gendered engagement in armed conflict and armed violence are crucial to addressing the challenges associated with the proliferation and use of weapons in and out of conflict. The inclusion in the Arms Trade Treaty of a legally-binding provision on preventing armed gender-based violence is a good example of such efforts.

Recommendations for governments
During the First Committee:
• Delegations should welcome the inclusion of the provision on gender-based violence in the ATT and highlight the need for implementation of this criterion.
• They should highlight the need to ensure gender diversity in disarmament discussions and negotiations.
• All states should submit reports to the Secretary-General on their implementation of the UNGA resolution on women and disarmament.

_Beyond First Committee:_
• States and other actors should avoid gender essentialism or victimisation of women in resolutions and action plans on disarmament and arms control. All actors should also develop awareness and policies to prevent reinforcement of violent masculinities or notions of men as expendable and as warriors.
• States should effectively implement the ATT provision against GBV by training export licence officials and updating their risk assessment procedures accordingly.

• All states, international organisations, and civil society groups should seek to ensure gender diversity in discussions, negotiations, and peace processes.
• All relevant actors should also continue to research and assess the specific impact that weapons and armed conflict have on people of different sexes in order to ensure a gender perspective in all policies on weapons and disarmament initiatives and to explore how gender constructions affect armament and disarmament policies and budgets.

1 Women and explosive weapons, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, February 2014.
2 Sex and drone strikes: gender and identity in targeting and casualty analysis, Reaching Critical Will and Article 36, October 2014.