Disarmament and development

**Disarmament**: the reduction and elimination of weapons, weapon materials, and weapon delivery systems, in order to enhance security, peace, and the survival of humanity.

**Development**: the reduction of poverty, satisfaction of human needs, and the steady improvement of the quality of life (economic, social, and environmental) for all individuals through sustained efforts by the international community.

The United Nations recognizes disarmament and development as "two of the international community's most important tools for building a world free from want." They are mutually reinforcing processes: disarmament helps create conditions favourable for development, while development creates conditions favourable for disarmament.

As the former Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs Jayantha Dhanapala has said, "wars claimed more than 5 million lives in the 1990s, and nearly 3 billion people, almost half the world's population, live on a daily income of less than $2 a day. Poverty and conflict are not unrelated; they often reinforce each other. Poverty is a potent catalyst for conflict and violence within and among states, particularly at a time when poor countries and peoples are increasingly aware of the relative affluence of others. Conflicts plunge many individuals into poverty and deal a severe blow to a country's longer-term development efforts. Even where there is no active conflict, military spending absorbs resources that could be used to attack poverty."

However, disarmament and development do not automatically trigger each other: disarmament must be accompanied by efforts to build or rebuild economic, social, and governing structures that foster political participation and social integration and equality, and that transfer resources effectively to the programmes and efforts that require them most. Disarmament also does not automatically result in a surplus of resources—the disarmament process can be expensive, and funds freed from a reduction in military spending will not necessarily be immediately plugged into disarmament measures.

With this in mind, disarmament policies and processes can help to:

- facilitate a decrease in military expenditure;
- defuse tensions and encourage trust in international and intra-state relations;
- impede the development of and spending on new weapons; and
- diminish the risk, incidence, and severity of armed conflicts and armed violence.

These effects improve stability and free up resources for economic and social development. In turn, development policies and processes can help to:

- eradicate poverty;
- promote economic growth and stabilize economies and states;
- create conditions of increased security and well-being; and
- reduce intra- and inter-state conflict.
There are several links between disarmament and development which needs to be explored:

**Military expenditure:** States spend excessive financial, technological, and human resources on their militaries. This diverts resources from economic, social, and environmental programs. In addition, funds reserved for development initiatives are increasingly spent on emergency relief and rehabilitation operations to clean up from violent conflict.

**Military-industrial complex:** As a composite of a state's armed forces, the government, suppliers of weapons systems, supplies, and services (corporations), and academic institutions that conduct research on weapon systems and designs, the military-industrial-academic complex absorbs vast amounts of funding, usually taking resources away from social and environmental programmes.

**Security:** Weapons are used to kill people and destroy infrastructure, creating a culture of fear, violence, and instability. This impedes development by upsetting social programs, education, transportation, business, and tourism, which prevents economic stability and growth. The manufacture and use of weapons also prevents sustainable ecological development and preservation, creating unequal access to resources.

**Gender:** Conceptions of gender are inextricable from conceptions of weapons and of disarmament; for example, the idea of “manliness” connotes defending one’s national security and international interests through the maintenance of armaments and the use of force. In addition, women are generally excluded from disarmament processes at the national and international levels, and even at the community level during times of post-conflict reconstruction.

**Environment:** The production and use of weapons negatively affects the environment, often impeding use of land and water by poisoning natural resources or physically blocking access to resources. Military activities further destroy land and resources, either intentionally as a method or tool of warfare, inadvertently in the acts of war, or in the aftermath of conflict.

**Public health:** The impact of armed conflict on health is far from limited to death as a result of injuries sustained in direct conflict. The World Health Organization notes that increased mortality rates of civilians during violent conflicts are usually due to injuries, decreased access to food, leading to poor nutrition, increased risk of communicable diseases, diminished access to health services, reduced public health programmes, poor environmental conditions, and psychosocial distress.