

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom



International Women's Day Statement to the
Conference on Disarmament
9th March 2010

Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to start by thanking all members of the CD for letting us speak here today. We, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) represent women from many parts of the world. We have taken this opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament on International Women's Day, a day that highlights women's engagement in political processes for peace and justice, since 1984. We appreciate the opportunity to speak directly to the Conference in a plenary meeting for the first time.

2010 is an important year in many ways. In this room, we all know about the NPT Review Conference in May and other significant events, but we would like to remind you that 2010 is also the 10th anniversary of the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. By placing gender within the UN's mandate of maintaining international peace and security, UNSCR 1325 provides an important framework and context for raising gender awareness in all aspects of security and defence. Such work around gender, peace, and security can affect and deepen arguments for disarmament. The resolution brings into light a focus on the contribution of women as stakeholders in peace and disarmament, and the role of women in decision-making as a necessary element for promoting the prevention of conflicts. As one of the most important decision-making bodies in multilateral disarmament, the CD has taken a small step to implement resolution 1325 by allowing us to read out our statement today.

The linkages between nuclear weapons and women run deep. Women's organizations have protested nuclear weapons since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and have campaigned for cessation of nuclear testing. Women anti-nuclear activists have successfully closed nuclear weapons bases, such as the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in the United Kingdom, and engaged in concerted efforts that forced governments to change policies or create nuclear weapon free zones at the municipal level throughout the world. They have also monitored and lobbied international meetings on disarmament.

Furthermore, issues related to cultural associations of what it is to be women and men—i.e., notions of gender—affect efforts to abolish nuclear weapons and halt their proliferation. For this reason, it is important that governments and NGOs consider gender issues in their deliberations and use the tools of gender analysis to reform traditional behaviours and values expressed in negotiations and discussions on nuclear weapons. The role of a certain kind of masculinity in the dominating political structures that organize wars and oversee security matters is beginning to be questioned.

The CD is an excellent place to continue questioning and reforming assumptions about weapons and security. The CD is still the only body that all nuclear-armed states belong to, both those within the NPT and those outside. Its members need to seize the opportunities afforded by this unique construction. The CD provides a forum for these nuclear-armed states to engage with others that do not possess nuclear weapons in order to reach agreements that enhance global collective security. The CD has a central role to

play in establishing international law that will help prevent conflict, war, and increases in military expenditure. This Conference can help fulfil Article 26 of the UN Charter, which calls for a plan “to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources” through a “system for the regulation of armaments”. Security must reflect the true needs of all people – economic and welfare needs alongside social, environmental, and political justice. True security of human beings is in fact undermined by the creation, existence, and potential use of nuclear weapons.

Despite this, the political and military elites that are tied to nuclear weapon laboratories and industries in nuclear-armed states continue to emphasize the importance of maintaining an “effective nuclear deterrent” in order to protect “national security”. But there is wide recognition among civil society and military strategists alike that nuclear deterrence is irrelevant to the perceived threats facing the world today—such as climate change, terrorism, food, water, and energy shortages, and increasing global economic disparity. Indeed, nuclear weapons are adverse to mitigating these converging threats, as their development, deployment, and proliferation increases global tensions, disparities, polarizations, and environmental degradation and squanders the economic, political, and human resources that could otherwise be used to confront and solve these crises. In fact, the only thing that nuclear weapons seem to deter is disarmament.

We need to make progress towards nuclear disarmament in order to even stand a chance of tackling other global threats. The Conference on Disarmament has a crucial role to play in this. In the permanent agenda of the CD, you are tasked to work on the reduction of military budgets and armed forces, the linkages between disarmament and development, nuclear disarmament, conventional weapons, and disarmament as a confidence-building measure. We support and encourage the CD to find innovative ways to make progress on these issues. We are here, engaging in the work of the CD, because we still believe that it has a vital role to play. We believe that all of you sitting here on the floor today have an opportunity to improve global security and to make the world a little bit safer. Take this opportunity.