

2022 Joint Civil Society Statement on Youth Engagement and Peace, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education

Final Written Version for Submission to UN General Assembly
First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) on 13 October 2022

While its Charter dedicates the UN to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”, disarmament diplomacy has largely excluded youth – we of the “succeeding generations” – from securing our own future.

This year represents the 40th anniversary of the 1982–1992 UN World Disarmament Campaign, which sought to build global political will for disarmament. It is also the 20th anniversary of the UN Secretary-General’s study on disarmament and non-proliferation education which asserted that disarmament education is not just education *about* disarmament but, most crucially, education *for* disarmament. However, in the last two decades, disarmament and non-proliferation education has focused more on programmatic activities than public mobilization. But we are facing a moment of profound threat to our future, where we must build new momentum for disarmament, not just tell people what disarmament is.

Our generation faces numerous crises: a harrowing climate emergency, a still-ongoing pandemic, legacies of nuclear testing and an increased threat of nuclear warfare. We face everyday insecurity from violent crime, armed conflict and militarized policing. These crises did not arise out of a vacuum; many of them are a direct cause of actions taken by generations older than ours. World leaders too often refuse to heed the voices of youth, turn away from voices of science and conscience, and fail to address the root causes of these crises. Militarism, racism, xenophobia, economic inequity, colonialism, sexism and homophobia limit our ability to access the spaces where decisions about our security are made.

Most of the world’s youth lives in the Global South and lacks access to safe and quality education. The proliferation of the digital and technological divide in this region and others further stratifies the already immense gap in the accessibility of remote learning. This gap is fueled by the lack of available electricity, network connectivity and electronic devices. Survivors of violence are often particularly marginalized. Rising extremism, hate speech, and misinformation fuel insecurity. Some of us are targeted by the very states that are supposed to ensure our human rights. Lack of adequate technological equipment as well as the crackdown on free speech in restricted societies make for sometimes deadly situations, as well as those that prohibit and further perplex attempts at advocacy and campaigning for disarmament and non-proliferation.

Voices like Autumn Peltier, Greta Thunberg, Vanessa Nakate, Malala Yousafzai and X González prove that young people can be effective advocates. Resurgent social movements show that these individuals represent much broader grassroots calls for global change. However, young people cannot bear the burden of creating a more just and peaceful future alone. Holistic disarmament and non-proliferation education is vital to ensure young people learn the language, knowledge and tools needed to advocate for peace in their communities

and nations. Education builds pathways for meaningful inclusion of youth – particularly those of us from marginalized communities – in global discussions of peace and security.

We must focus on how we teach peace to children at a very young age. We need to reframe how we teach about conflicts and violence at school, introducing robust curricula prioritizing the message of peace. Additionally, youth have a right to have their voices heard even if they haven't received a formal education as they still have valuable first-hand experience and expertise on the topic. While education for young people is important, disarmament education is also about life-long learning. Everyone can learn about the humanitarian consequences of weapons and the need for disarmament, within or outside of an educational institution.

We are encouraged by recent advancements in global policy on youth and disarmament and disarmament and non-proliferation education, including the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) Youth4Disarmament initiative, which has built a network of young people interested in disarmament. The 2021 UN General Assembly First Committee resolution on “Youth, disarmament and non-proliferation,” called for “meaningful and inclusive participation of young people in discussions ... of disarmament and non-proliferation.” The 2022 Action Plan adopted by the First Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in Vienna, commits States Parties to engage with youth to “highlight humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons,” educate them on disarmament and non-proliferation and assist communities affected by nuclear weapons. Most recently, in September, the General Assembly established the UN Youth Office to advance youth issues across the UN, including in the areas of peace and security. We hope this office will allow for more young peoples’ voices to be better heard in this building and beyond. Of course these policies and institutions are only useful if they are fully implemented. We call on all states to uphold their commitments to youth empowerment and disarmament education.

However, the scale of the challenges to meaningful youth inclusion and disarmament education require rising above the existing commitments to meet our moment of compounding crises.

Therefore, as delegations consider any First Committee resolution on disarmament education, we urge you to:

- Take advantage of the UN World Disarmament Campaign's 40th anniversary and 20th anniversary of the Secretary-General's study on disarmament education to call for a renewed Campaign and new study;
- Highlight the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion;
- Draw linkages between youth, disarmament, and other pressing issues, such as climate action and addressing the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic;
- Report on national and regional youth and disarmament education activities; and
- Highlight the relevance of disarmament education to SDGs 4 on education and 16 on peace and justice; honor the crucial role of hibakusha, survivors, civil society, educational institutions and youth in disarmament; welcome UNODA's

Youth4Disarmament initiative; report on their government's disarmament education initiatives, including efforts to engage youth.

Beyond First Committee, we urge you to:

- Support disarmament education and youth empowerment that mobilizes the global public for disarmament, communicating the humanitarian and environmental costs of war and militarism;
- Facilitate youth access to multilateral forums and negotiations on peace and security, particularly those coming from the underrepresented and marginalized communities;
- Use new and innovative forms of outreach, including social media, not just to engage but build political will for disarmament;
- Provide funding for youth and disarmament education, particularly efforts at a grassroots level;
- Share good practices of implementing disarmament and non-proliferation education in formal and non-formal settings at the individual, local and national levels, and analyze their impacts;
- Commit to creating a world order conducive to young people's ability to carry out disarmament advocacy without fear of persecution from authorities; and
- Address the root causes of violence, including discrimination and inequality, and redirect investment in arms to health, education and sustainable youth livelihoods.

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Supporting Organizations:

A World Without Chemical and Biological Weapons (WWW)

Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy (AIDD)

Anfal Stories Organization

Assalama for Mines and UXO Actions

Association of Defending the Anfal Victims and Their Families

Beyond Nuclear

Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas

Center for International Policy

Control Arms

Corruption Tracker Project

Cri de Secours contre la Prolifération des armes légères en Afrique (CRISPAL-AFRIQUE)

Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft – Vereinigte KriegsdienstgegnerInnen (DFG-VK)

Droits Humains sans Frontières D R Congo.

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons Australia (ICAN Australia)

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons France (ICAN France)

International Campaign to Ban Landmines-Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC), 1997 Nobel Peace Prize Co-Laureate

International Institute on Peace Education (IIPE)

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War Canada (IPPNWC)

The International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War's Medical Student Movement

Foundation for Environmental Rights, Advocacy & Development (FENRAD) Nigeria

FundiPau (Foundation for Peace), ICAN partner. Barcelona, Spain

Global Campaign for Peace Education (GCPE)

Global Thought Mx

Grupo de Práticas em Direitos Humanos e Direito Internacional

Halabja Chemical Victim's Society

Ibero-American Alliance for Peace

Initiative for Women Empowerment & Development (IWED) Nigeria

JASMAR Human Security Organization (JASMAR)

Jos Stakeholders Centre for Peace

Journalists for Human Rights-North Macedonia

The Jüdische Kulturbund Project and its Bullets to Books Initiative

KNOW NUKES TOKYO

Kurdish Organizations Network Coalition for the International Criminal Court (KONCICC)

The Kurdistan Organizations' Network to Abolish Nuclear and Mass Destruction Weapons

Kurdistan without Genocide

Legacies of War

Life Campaign to Abolish the Death Sentence in Kurdistan

Manawa Organization For Martyrs & Anfal's Inquiry

Marshallese Educational Initiative

Mines Action Canada

MISA4thePacific

Naturefriends Greece

New Detroit, A Racial Justice Organization

Nuclear Age Peace Foundation

Organization Against Weapons of Mass Destruction in Kurdistan

Organization Of Defending Mass Graves Victims' Rights

Organization of the Justice Campaign

Pace University's International Disarmament Institute

Peace of Art International

Physicians for Social Responsibility

Red de Seguridad Humana en Latinoamérica y el Caribe

Reverse The Trend: Save Our People, Save Our Planet

Rotary District 5550 World Peace Partners (WPP)

PEAC Institute |Peace Education Art Communication

Peace Boat

Peace Boat US

Promised Land Secondary School, Juba-South Sudan.

Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Secure Scotland Network

Stolen Dreams

Soka Gakkai International

Somali Human Rights Association (SOHRA)

Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)

Topzawa: A Magazine Specialized in Genocide and Anfal Issues

United Nations Association Scotland

United Nations House Scotland

Virtual Planet Africa

Vision GRAM-INTERNATIONAL

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

World Council of Churches

Wings for Amazon Project

Youth For Freedom Collective

Youth for TPNW

Youth Initiative Against Violence and Human Rights Abuse-YIAVHA (Nigeria)