



Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control

by Jeannine Gliddon Owens
Old Dominion University Graduate Program in International Studies

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND	2
CURRENT SITUATION	6
ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS.....	8
LANDMARK AGREEMENTS AND RESOLUTIONS	9
MAJOR COUNTRY AND BLOC POSITIONS	11
PROPOSALS FOR ACTION	14
BIBLIOGRAPHY	15

Introduction

As the international system becomes more complex and political tensions increase, it is a good time to ask, what can be done differently to reverse these trends? One answer that deserves attention is how to ensure more women are included in all *Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control* (DNPA) processes. There are many reasons why this should be the case, but most important among them is the belief that women are more successful preventing conflict and negotiating peace than men.¹

Gender stereotypes play a large role in preventing more women from having a seat ‘at the table,’ since they don’t fit the heretofore prescribed perception of what a security policy professional should look like. The DNPA community suffers from that bias and has consequently been dominated by men. Subsequent decisions only reflect a male perspective which limits successful outcomes.

Despite progress in recent decades, women still only represent about 33 percent of participants in international disarmament meetings. Even fewer are delegation heads. Even at conferences on the impact of nuclear war—in which women and their children suffer as much, if not more—some nations send delegations comprised only of men.²

Ensuring equal female participation in Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control is the task of the UN’s *Women, Peace and Security Agenda* (WSP). But at a recent Security Council meeting, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the crucial resolution, Security Council resolution 1325, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres noted, “Around the globe, we see troubling trends in military spending, more armed conflicts, and more shocking brutality against women and girls...”³

Other voices see even greater challenges, ‘...as global backlash against gender equality resounds ever-louder through the halls of the

¹ UN Women. “Fact and Figures: Women, Peace, and Security. *UN Women*. 23 October 2024. https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security#_edn2

² Kazi, Reshmi. “Women and Weapons: Redressing the Gender Gap: An Indian Response.” *Bulletin of*

the Atomic Scientists 70 (5): 8-11. 1 September 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096340214546831>.

³ Edith M. Lederer, ‘25 years after landmark UN resolution, UN chief says women are too often absent from peace talks’, *Associated Press*, 7 October 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/un-women-peace-conflict-sexual-violence-49727f35eab9a03c57e72cf4f0ad6b34>



Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control



UN, clear political messaging in this crucial moment for ensuring gender equality is urgently needed to protect the rights of women and girls in conflict zones.’ Major powers, led by the Russian Federation and the United States, lead effort to reverse gender equality in the UN.⁴

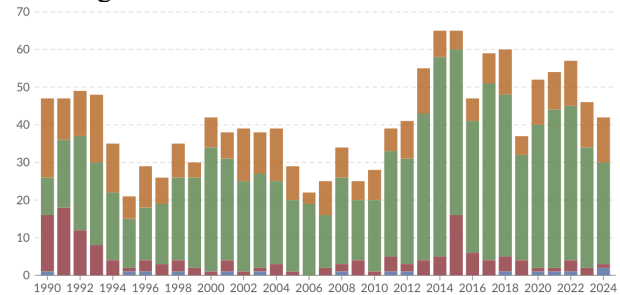
It’s no surprise that the perception of a security policy professional skews male, since the global gendering system often frames them that way. That needs to change though and since the United Nations remains the central forum for global dialogue and advancing international norms, it must lead the way to affect that change.

It is an axiom of feminist scholarship and activism that women possess different world views, communicate differently, and approach problems differently than men, and that is the key to their success. They are generally socialized to develop soft skills, such as employing empathy, building community, and engaging in verbal communication, all valuable assets in negotiation. In addition, since women are disproportionately affected by violence and war, they have valuable insight in preventing it and are uniquely qualified in developing innovative de-escalation strategies that men may not have considered.

Key international frameworks to address this problem include: the UN Security Council’s *Women, Peace and Security* (WPS) agenda, based largely on Security Council Resolution 1325, a foundational resolution that recognizes the importance of women’s equal participation in peace efforts; and the UN General Assembly’s Resolution 65/69, which highlighted the importance of women in disarmament, violence reduction, and arms control decision-making processes.

Additional resolutions, treaties, and initiatives have continued the effort toward

gender parity in DNPA areas, but urgent attention is needed as the number of armed conflicts rise globally (Figure 1) and gender parity flattens. Diverse ideas are needed to make the world a safer place and reverse these alarming trends.



Number of new armed conflicts each year, 1990-2024. Source: Herre, Bastian, et al. “War and Peace.” *Our World in Data*. 2024, <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/number-of-new-armed-conflicts>

Background

The global gendering system often frames men as leaders, who are strong and powerful and women as followers, who are weak and in need of protection. From an early age, men and women are socialized and educated differently. Boys and men are generally valued for their aggressive and competitive behavior, and girls and women valued for their nurturing and communicative behavior. Boys and men are socialized to do the ‘hard’ work, find solutions, and hide emotions. Girls and women are socialized to do the ‘soft’ work, seek help, and display emotions.⁵

War is more often linked to men because they ‘go off to war,’ are trained in military action, and are subsequently honored for their

⁴ Crystal Downing, ‘The WPS Agenda Needs Strong Wills to Counter Rough Headwinds’, *PassBlue*, 5 October 2025, <https://passblue.com/2025/10/05/the-wps-agenda-needs-strong-wills-to-counter-rough-headwinds/>

⁵ Kark, Ronit, Eagly, Alice H. “Gender and Leadership: Negotiating the Labyrinth.” In: Chrisler, J., McCreary, D. (eds) *Handbook of Gender Research in Psychology*. Springer, New York, NY. 2010. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1467-5_19

‘violent masculinities.’⁶ Many in our global society, both men and women, still equate strength with security and weapons technology, designating anything related to them as ‘a man’s job.’ But women, feminist scholarship and activism maintain, possess a different kind of strength and are uniquely qualified to ask ethical questions about the ‘severe human consequences of conflict’ at the negotiating table.

Three examples illustrate the point:

- While the initial impact of a nuclear weapon does not discriminate in its destructive efficiency,⁷ the radioactive fallout does — women are much more likely to develop cancer and die from it than men.
- In conventional warfare, sexual violence against women, directly tied to small weapons and ammunition, remains a well-used tactic — recently used in places like Ukraine¹ Haiti, Ethiopia,⁸ and Palestine,⁹ and
- In everyday life, women face greater levels of social, cultural, and psychological violence, since men are

generally socialized to be louder, stronger, and more dominant. As the recipient of many a ‘violent masculinity,’ women are able to connect the dots from ‘violent and misogynistic video games and online spaces, to beatings at home, to rape in the streets, to killing on and off the battlefield.’¹⁰

This gendering system was embedded in the nuclear policy field from the onset when women, who played significant roles in the Manhattan Project’s success, faced discrimination throughout and excluded from the final phase of building the bomb. At the same time, it was being assembled, 51 countries gathered in San Francisco to create the United Nations, a new international organization dedicated to maintaining peace and security in the hopes of preventing another World War. When the US dropped the first bomb in 1945, WWII ended, and the US claimed global superiority, responsibility for a nascent arms industry, and control of post-war diplomacy.¹¹

International outrage ensued as Japanese survivors, and many scientists, including the

⁶ Cohn, Carol, and Sara Ruddick. “A Feminist Ethical Perspective on Weapons of Mass Destruction.” Chapter. In *Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, edited by Sohail H. Hashmi and Steven P. Lee, 405–35. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/ethics-and-weapons-of-mass-destruction/feminist-ethical-perspective-on-weapons-of-mass-destruction/C3FC714EFB809A7AC873386FD70E543F>

⁷ Jervis, Robert. *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*. Cornell University Press. 1989.

⁸ Kapp, Caroline. “The Devastating Use of Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War.” *Think Global Health*, 2 November 2022.

<https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/devastating-use-sexual-violence-weapon-war>

⁹ OHCHR. ““More than a human can bear”: Israel’s systematic use of sexual, reproductive and other

forms of gender-based violence since October 2023.” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 13 March 2025. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/more-human-can-bear-israels-systematic-use-sexual-reproductive-and-other>

¹⁰ Cohn, Carol, and Sara Ruddick. “A Feminist Ethical Perspective on Weapons of Mass Destruction.” Chapter. In *Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, edited by Sohail H. Hashmi and Steven P. Lee, 405–35. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/ethics-and-weapons-of-mass-destruction/feminist-ethical-perspective-on-weapons-of-mass-destruction/C3FC714EFB809A7AC873386FD70E543F>

¹¹ Stimson, Henry L. “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb.” *Harper’s* February 1947: 97-107. <https://harpers.org/archive/1947/02/the-decision-to-use-the-atomic-bomb/>



Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control



scientific director of the American nuclear weapons program, J. Robert Oppenheimer, called for disarmament and the elimination of war.¹² The international scientific community joined forces, as did other pacifist groups including the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, to advocate for international peace and a world government.

Albert Einstein wrote "Only through world government, can our civilization be saved."¹³ Six months later, the United Nations Charter had been ratified, and the Atomic Energy Commission was created by the first resolution of the UN General Assembly 'to deal with the problems raised by the discovery of atomic energy' and 'entirely eliminate the use of atomic energy for destructive purposes.'¹⁴

The US continued to authorize production of nuclear weapons and their growing stockpile threatened Soviet security. To right this imbalance, the Soviets accelerated their own nuclear weapons program, testing their first atomic weapon in 1949. The arms race escalated from there, creating a new security dilemma where countries had to balance threat by producing a weapon that should never be used.¹⁵

The Cuban Missile crisis sobered thinking about nuclear war. International relations scholars joined the growing call for disarmament, arguing that 'the most important task confronting us is to find the means of halting the arms race and eliminate the danger of nuclear war.'¹⁶ Arms control and non-

proliferation sub-fields were created with associated treaties, but the arms race continued, as the profitable scientific-political-military-industrial complex was firmly entrenched.

At the same time, social barriers in the US, that had limited women's participation in these fields began to fall including the fact that women were allowed into military service academies and admitted to Ivy League and other elite all-male colleges. As women gained the necessary expertise, they provided an additional source of brain power as the industry was growing.

Despite this talent windfall, women were still excluded and since 1970, only 12% of leadership positions in US Departments of State, Defense, Energy, and the White House were women and since 1990, representation on DNPA international delegations only averaged about 30 percent (Figure 2).¹⁷ Not only are there few women in the field, but their invaluable perspective is absent from the media, publications, think tanks, and academia.

¹² Rotblat, Joseph. "Movement of scientists against the arms race." *Scientists, the Arms Race and Disarmament: A UNESCO/Pugwash Symposium*. 115-57. London: Taylor & Francis. 1982

¹³ Inagaki, Morikatsu. "World Federal Government Movement in Japan." *Crusade for World Government Newsletter*. 1948.
[https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/1\(I\)](https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/1(I)).

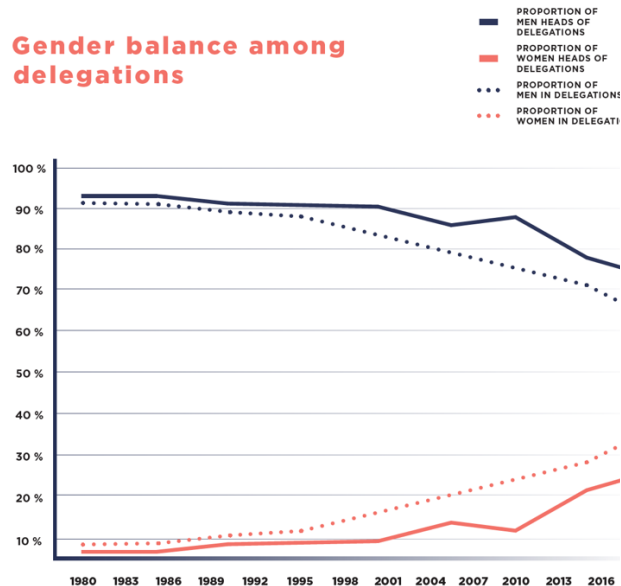
¹⁴ Frye, W. R. (1960). "Characteristics of Recent Arms-Control Proposals and Agreements." *Daedalus*, 89(4): 723-743. Fall 1960.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20026613?seq=1>

¹⁵ Brodie, Bernard. "The Development of Nuclear Strategy." *International Security* 2(4): 65-83. 1978
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2538458>.

¹⁶ Wiesner, Jerome B. "Foreword to the Issue 'Arms Control.'" *Daedalus*, 89(4): 677-80. Fall 1960.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20026610>.

¹⁷ Borrie, John, Et.al. "Gender, Development and Nuclear Weapons: Shared Goals, Shared Concerns" *United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and International Law and Policy Institute*. October 2016.
<https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/gender-development-and-nuclear-weapons-en-659.pdf>

Gender balance among delegations



Source: Dalaqua, Renata Hessmann, et.al. "Still Behind the Curve: Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Diplomacy." *United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research*. 2019. <https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Still-behind-the-curve.pdf>

There is a distinct division between the two nuclear policy communities: the 'core' deterrence/nuclear posture community, which is closed off and hierarchical; and the arms control/nonproliferation community, which is more welcoming to women, diverse perspectives, and innovative ideas.

The overwhelmingly male 'core' community reinforces patriarchal systems but also determines global nuclear order as well. This exclusive and highly hierarchical group, values long experience and insider knowledge above innovation. It is insulated and unwelcoming, with a small group of long-time insiders controlling what new ideas and/or individuals are considered.¹⁸

Gender stereotypes play a large role, and many women are discounted even though they possess the same expertise as their male counterparts. They suffer through harassment, assault, discrimination, and lesser problems intersecting with 'feminine' social norms, paying a heavy 'gender tax' in order to succeed.¹⁹ In addition to needing the requisite IQ, women are also expected to possess higher levels of the socially expected EQ (emotional intelligence),²⁰ creating additional burdens. Discrimination is routine and sometimes the harassment was a team effort to bully women into quitting.

Policy discussions follow a prescribed script among officials who share experiences and perspective. In addition, core members controlled access and agenda to senior policymakers, preventing any new ideas from even reaching consideration at the senior level.²¹

For instance, ironically enough, one deterrence strategy not even considered at the time, was that in this more complex and unstable era, a nuclear strike may end a conflict when it

¹⁸ Hurlburt, Heather, Et al. "The 'Consensual Straitjacket': Four Decades of Women in Nuclear Security." *New America*, 5 March 2019. <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/the-consensual-straitjacket-four-decades-of-women-in-nuclear-security/>

¹⁹ Drezner, Daniel W. "The Tax on Women in National Security," *Washington Post*, 9 November 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteveryting/wp/2017/11/09/the-tax-on-women-in-national-security/>

²⁰ Rosette, Ashleigh Shelby and Tost, Leigh Plunkett. "Agentic Women and Communal Leadership: How

Role Prescriptions Confer Advantage to Top Women Leaders." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93(2) 221-235. 2010.

<https://msbfile03.usc.edu/digitalmeasures/tost/intellcont/Rosette%20and%20Tost%202010%20JAP-1.pdf>

²¹ Hurlburt, Heather, Et al. "The 'Consensual Straitjacket': Four Decades of Women in Nuclear Security." *New America*, 5 March 2019. <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/the-consensual-straitjacket-four-decades-of-women-in-nuclear-security/>



Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control



has devolved into desperation and ethical decline, rather than the staid assumption that a nuclear strike would only open a conflict. Assuming that a rational actor model will persist throughout a prolonged conflict is problematic in a system that perpetuates domination and control.²²

Current Situation

Conflict, instability, and armed sexual violence is on the rise. In 2022, three UN reports highlighted the prevalence of gender based violence in Ukraine, Haiti, and Ethiopia, where sexual violence was used to torment civilian populations; punish ethnic, political, or cultural rivals; and assert and maintain control. Since then, the proportion of women killed and/or subjected to armed sexual violence has increased by 50 percent.²³

In 2025, a UN report stated that Israel increasingly violated international law in those areas. Navi Pillay, Chair of the Commission stated: “Evidence reveals a deplorable increase in sexual and gender-based violence. For many UN Member States, there is no escape from the conclusion that sexual and gender-based violence was employed to terrorize Palestinians and perpetuate a system of oppression.”²⁴ The availability of small arms and light weapons remains a problem—70 to 90 percent of sexual violence involve these weapons.

In many cases, those perpetuating the violence are the only ones invited to the negotiating table, despite the fact that women, who hold more key roles in local peacebuilding efforts, are more successful. For example, in Sudan, over 49 women-led organizations formed the Peace for Sudan Platform to push for an inclusive peace process.

The UN’s record on inclusivity is getting better, but in need of focused attention. While the mention of women in First Committee resolutions has increased, there has been only one woman that led the First Committee in 80 years and of 61 General Assembly resolutions on DNPA issues, only 23 recognized the gender dimensions of weapons or called for involving women equally in the negotiating processes. In 2024, only 33 percent of Security Council Members had a woman Permanent Representative and at the Conference on Disarmament there was a notable downward shift in gender equity. Women’s overall presence declined from 46 to 38 percent of registered delegates and from 32 to 28 percent of heads of delegations as well.²⁵

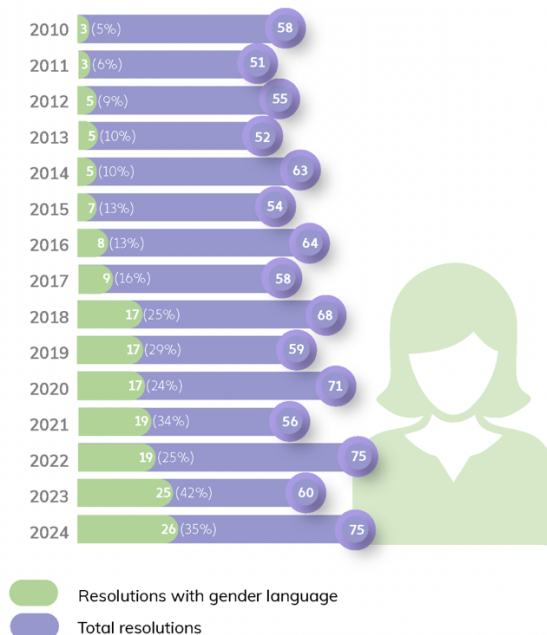
²² Biggs, Adam T. “Nuclear Risks Rise as Great-Power Conflict Goes On.” *The Washington Quarterly* 47 (1): 25-38. 2024. doi:10.1080/0163660X.2024.2326725.

²³ Kapp, Caroline. “The Devastating Use of Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War.” *Think Global Health*, 2 November 2022. <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/devastating-use-sexual-violence-weapon-war>

²⁴ OHCHR. ““More Than a Human Can Bear”: Israel’s systematic use of sexual, reproductive and

other forms of gender-based violence since October 2023.” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 13 March 2025. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/more-human-can-bear-israels-systematic-use-sexual-reproductive-and-other>

²⁵ UN Women. “Fact and Figures: Women, Peace, and Security.” *UN Women*. 23 October 2024. https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security#_edn2



First Committee resolutions incorporating gender language. *Source:* UN ODA. “Gender and Disarmament.” *United Nations 2024 Yearbook*. 2024. <https://yearbook.unoda.org/en-us/2024/chapter6/>

At the 79th session of the General Assembly in 2024, Izumi Nakamitsu, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs stated: ‘Women are significantly underrepresented in multilateral arms control and disarmament processes, and face barriers to participating in conventional arms control at the national level. Removing the barriers for women’s participation not only contributes to breaking down gender norms and challenging patriarchal systems that drive conflict-related sexual violence; it also leads to more effective response efforts.’²⁶

All 193 UN member states agreed that more needed to be done and prioritized commitments on women, peace, and security in the ‘Pact for the Future.’ For the first time, the General Assembly (Resolution 79/57) recognized women’s contribution in all aspects of arms

control and disarmament efforts, including weapons of mass destruction, and for the need to fast-track women’s leadership in disarmament efforts. States also pledged to take accelerated action to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence.

Eleven Security Council members — Malta, Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States — made a joint statement urging all States to deploy pertinent treaties to prevent conflict-related sexual violence. They reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring women’s equal, meaningful, and safe participation in all UN-facilitated peace negotiations, ceasefire negotiations, and security sector reforms (Figure 4).



Joint Statement in 2024 urging States to deploy treaties preventing conflict related sexual violence. *Source:* UNODA. “Gender and Disarmament.” *United Nations 2024 Yearbook*. 2024. <https://yearbook.unoda.org/en-us/2024/chapter6/>

A common, underlying concern is the global surge in military budgets. In 2024, military expenditure around the world, reached \$2.7 trillion, an increase of 9.4 percent in real terms from 2023 and the steepest year-on-year rise since the end of the Cold War. It increased in all world regions, with particularly rapid growth in

²⁶ Nakamitsu, Izumi. “Statement at the 15-Year Anniversary of the Establishment of the Mandate on Sexual Violence in Conflict.” New York. 23

October 2024. https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/241023.HR_remarks.pdf



Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control



both Europe and the Middle East. The top five military spenders — the United States, China, Russia, Germany, and India — accounted for 60 percent of the global total.²⁷

This surge stands in direct opposition to both Article 26 of the UN Charter, which calls for minimal diversion of resources to armaments, and outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the UN's mechanism for gender equality and women's empowerment, which repeated the call for a reduction of excessive military expenditures and availability of weapons.²⁸

Role of the United Nations

Throughout history, interactions between countries have often been violent, but as a matter of self-preservation, the need for an international society defined by mutual agreements, norms, and laws became apparent.²⁹ The Peace of Westphalia is often attributed as one of the first manifestations of a cooperative international institution, but since states realistically always act in their own self-interest, it devolved into new rivalries.

The death and destruction of world wars begat a more comprehensive international institution devoted to peace. The UN was created with a mission to maintain international peace and security, foster friendly relations

among nations, and promote international cooperation to solve global problems.

Today, eighty years later, the UN remains the central forum for global dialogue and plays an important role in advancing international norms. Its core mission — to prevent and remove threats to peace, suppress acts of aggression, and settle international disputes peacefully — is carried out by the Security Council using tools such as mediation, peacekeeping missions, sanctions, and military force, as a last resort. The Security Council is comprised of five permanent members (P5 members include China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and United States) with veto power, and 10 non-permanent members with rotating two year terms, elected by the General Assembly to ensure equitable geographic representation.

It has a mixed record of success, scoring significant wins in some instances while failing to prevent mass atrocities in others. Peacekeeping missions are often successful at reducing violence and shortening conflicts, but its overall success in preventing conflict is limited because of the power of the P5 veto, which is often at odds geopolitically. This veto power has undermined action on urgent crises, from halting aggression to addressing human rights abuses.³⁰

This record can change, though, as the spotlight focuses on the positive relationship between women's participation and peaceful and sustaining outcomes. Resolutions such as Security Council Resolution 1325 and General

²⁷ SIPRI. "Unprecedented Rise in Global Military Expenditure as European and Middle East Spending Surges." *Stockholm International Peace Institute*. 28 April 2025.
<https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/unprecedented-rise-global-military-expenditure-european-and-middle-east-spending-surges>

²⁸ UN Women. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. *United Nations* 1995.
<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Head>

[quarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/PFA_E_Final_WEB.pdf](#)

²⁹ Bull, Hedley. "Society and anarchy in international relations." *Diplomatic Investigations*. Butterfield and Wight, eds. London: George Allen & Unwin. 1966.

³⁰ Senadhira, Sugeeswara. "United Nations: Successes, Failures, and Future Hopes." *Daily News*. 3 October 2025.
<https://www.dailynews.lk/2025/10/03/featured/868605/united-nations-successes-failures-and-future-hopes/>



Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control



Assembly Resolution 65/69 go far in recognizing this relationship.

While the UN cannot mandate gender parity, it can normalize it by advocating for quotas, supporting policy and training, and publishing pertinent information about the causal link between women and peace. It can also work to eliminate existing barriers such as: the exclusive characteristics of the arms control field; the practical challenges of work-life balance, given the fact that women still carry most of the family responsibilities load; the gender pay gap; and the lack of role models.³¹ Groups like the Women's International Forum, Women in International Security, the Women's Security Society and government agencies, think tanks, and institutions like the International Atomic Energy Agency, should redouble efforts to recruit and support women as well.³²

Landmark Agreements and Resolutions

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted unanimously by the UN in 1995, built on agreements from three previous global conferences to empower women. The Platform of Action represents a continued commitment to address critical areas of concern, including the call that States should 'ensure that the responsibility for the advancement of women is vested in the highest possible levels of government; ensure that methodologies for gender-based analysis addressing differentiated effects of policy be developed; ensure the

government-wide mainstreaming of gender-equality perspectives in all policy areas; and ensure that women gain opportunity to influence development of all government policies.'

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (the SDGs) was adopted by the General Assembly unanimously in 2015, and maps out a global plan to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity. It is built on 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of which advocates for gender equality in DNPA related areas, citing the unequal effects of conflict on gender.

Resolutions

- In 2000, Security Council Resolution 1325 was unanimously adopted, as the foundational resolution and crucial component of the UN's work on the topic of Women, Peace and Security (WPS). It recognizes the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and stresses the importance of their equal participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.
- In 2008, Security Council Resolution 1820 was unanimously adopted recognizing that sexual violence is a tactic of war and threat to international peace and security, linking armed conflict to the specific vulnerabilities faced by women and girls.
- In 2010, General Assembly resolution 65/69 was adopted by consensus, specifically linking gender issues to

³¹ Dwan, Renata. "Women in Arms Control: Time for a Gender Turn?" *Arms Control Association*. October 2019.
<https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-10/features/women-arms-control-time-gender-turn>

³² Grzebalska, W., Kováts, E., & Pető, A. Gender as symbolic glue: How 'gender' became an umbrella term for the rejection of the (neo)liberal order. *Political Critique*. 2017. Find article here:

Grzebalska, W., Kováts, E., & Pető, A. (2017). Gender as symbolic glue: How 'gender' became an umbrella term for the rejection of the (neo)liberal order. *Krytyka Polityczna*, 0113.
<https://politicalcritique.org/long-read/2017/gender-as-symbolic-glue-how-gender-became-an-umbrella-term-for-the-rejection-of-the-neoliberal-order/>

disarmament. It recognizes the valuable contribution of women to disarmament measures and calls for the equitable representation of women in all decision-making processes related to DNPA. It promotes a better understanding of the impact of weapons and armed conflict on gender and advocates for integrating gender perspectives into disarmament work.

- In 2015, Security Council Resolution 2242 was unanimously adopted and calls for better integration of the WPS agenda within counterterrorism and countering violent extremism, two areas with significant implications for arms control.
- In 2019, Security Council Resolution 2467 was adopted (13 Yes; 0 No; Russia and China abstaining) and focuses on combating conflict-related sexual violence. It emphasizes a survivor-centered approach to addressing sexual violence, recognizes that gender inequality is a root cause of such violence, and stresses the need for justice and accountability. This resolution highlights the connection between rampant sexual and gender-based violence and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.
- In 2024, the 'Pact for the Future' General Assembly Resolution 79/1, was adopted, where States agreed to advance their commitments on women, peace and security; take accelerated action to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence; and address barriers to women's participation in science, technology, and emerging technologies.

Treaties

Arms control and disarmament agreements completed after Security Council resolution

1325 show the effect of deliberate attention to inclusion of women.

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) adopted in 2013, is the first legally binding instrument negotiated to establish common standards for the international transfer of conventional weapons. It is groundbreaking in that it requires states to assess the risk of arms being used to commit gender-based violence, recognizing the significant link between the two. 155 in favor, 3 against (Iran, North Korea, and Syria), and 22 abstentions.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions, adopted in 2010, prohibits all use, transfer, production, and stockpiling of cluster munitions, a type of explosive weapon that scatters 'bomblets' over an area. It stipulates that States must: provide age- and gender-sensitive assistance to victims, including medical care, rehabilitation, psychological support, and social and economic inclusion; collect and analyze associated data to inform intervention and risk education; and encourage the full, equal, and meaningful participation of all individuals, including women, in decision-making processes.

The Cluster munitions convention recognizes that men and boys are more likely to be directly killed or injured by cluster munition remnants, while women and girls are often *indirect victims*, impoverished when their men are killed or injured, forced to assume caregiving roles and providing financial support for their families when male providers are unable.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, or nuclear ban treaty) adopted in 2017 is a multilateral treaty that explicitly recognizes the disproportionate impact of nuclear weapons on women and girls and requires that States provide victim assistance and environmental remediation, acknowledging gender-sensitive needs. The TPNW represents a crucial step in integrating gender analysis into disarmament, especially regarding weapons of mass destruction. As of 2025, 94 countries have



Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control



signed, but none of the nine nuclear states, nor any countries allied to them.

Major Country and Bloc Positions

African Union (AU): The African Union (AU) promotes sovereign equality among its 55 Member States. The AU tends to take very general positions on major international issues like governance, peacebuilding and development. AU resolutions tends to stress general principles, relevant to all of its Member States. It occasionally gets involved in regional conflicts, but not consistently. Like the Arab League, the African Union leaves actual policy-making up to each of its Member States. On most issues, each state's parallel membership in the Non-Aligned Movement (below) can be a more reliable guide to their positions.

Africa has had the fewest number of women delegates. In some cases, African delegations were comprised of about 18% women, a figure well below the global average. Gender bias and stereotyping is persistent, resulting in continued exclusion from leadership or decision-making processes, despite success on the local level.

Arab League: Because of sharp differences among its 22 Member States, the Arab League tends to act cautiously, and typically permits its Members to pursue their own distinctive policies. On divisive and controversial issues gender issues the Arab League is especially likely to leave policy-making up to each of its Member States. The biggest exception is any issue relevant to Palestine, on which it is more unified.

Arab League states are likely to see any debate, including debates on Women, Peace and Security, in terms relevant to their support for Palestine. On most other issues, each state's parallel membership in the Non-Aligned Movement (below) can be a more reliable guide to their positions. But for Arab states, issues of women in Palestine are definitive. Critics—foreign and domestic—say this priority can be a way of diverting attention from their own societies.

China: While some countries are reducing their reliance on the UN, China is increasing its investment in the organization, making it the center of much of its foreign policy. For China, the great appeal is the UN Charter's emphasis on national sovereign equality, which China sees as supporting its authority at home, and facilitating working with other countries as legal equals.³³ China consistency supports goals established by the UN, and supports international institutions.³⁴ China also stresses the UN as a tool for increasing its influence over global values, a key element in its campaign to make the world more like China itself.

China's UN policy is not without concerns. It fears the UN will be used to create precedents for international action in the domestic affairs of Member States, precedents that could be used against China. As Chinese UN diplomats at the UN said in another context, 'China's continuing and vehement insistence on respect for other nations' sovereignty is not only a cornerstone of its foreign policy but a foundational ethos for the government of a nation that has traditionally struggled to maintain control at its edges — from Xinjiang and Tibet in the far west to Hong Kong and Taiwan off its east coast.'³⁵

³³ 'Xi says China always a trustworthy partner of UN', *Xinhua*, 1 September 2025, http://en.cppcc.gov.cn/2025-09/01/c_1120831.htm

³⁴ Wen Sheng, 'China leads global efforts to realize UN sustainable development goals for 2030',

Global Times, 27 June 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202306/1293251.shtml>

³⁵ Ted Anthony, 'China, at UN, warns against 'expansion of the battlefield' in the Ukraine war', *Associated Press*, 28 September 2024,



Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control



European Union: for the 27 Member States of the EU, universal values always matter most. EU Member States can be expected to stress an approach that serves the entire international community, with all countries working toward agreed goals and standards. It often is the most visionary of actors within the UN system. The European Union also is the most generous funder of global development projects, offering grants or subsidized, low-interest loans for major initiatives.

But even the European Union is not as generous as it used to be. Aid money is going down, as it switches funding to national security. And European aid is highly conditional, with careful oversight to ensure it is spent as planned, efficiently, without fraud. This is resented by many recipient government, which few conditionality as an attack on their sovereignty. Many EU donor states also make their aid conditional on basic national goals, including strengthening democratic government, rule of law, respect for minorities and equal rights for women.

Progress is slow and varies across the region, where a rising anti-gender movement poses a challenge to the WPS agenda. In Eastern Europe, women's participation remains significantly lower than men's, despite regional initiatives to address this gender gap. This movement has gained support among a wide variety of actors, and been linked with the rise of conservative, right-wing populism. Hungary and Poland have been most outspoken in opposition to WPS.³⁶

In the Western European and Others group, women's participation remains at about 32 percent, as women benefit from the Young Women and Next Generation Initiative. But

even in Western Europe, there is erosion of feminist goals.

Sweden, for example, for eight years, 2014-22, pursued a feminist foreign policy (FFP), making the feminist agenda part of its complete foreign policy. This was dropped in 2022, although feminist goals remain important under the current government, they often are secondary to matters like NATO membership, support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, countering Russian threats and subversion and blocking illegal migration.

Non-Aligned Movement: The 120 Member States of the NAM, the UN's dominant voting bloc and primarily interested in approaches to any issue that serve their needs as developing economies, burdened with significant poverty and demands for faster economic development. The NAM generally support universal values, such as EU efforts to create global standards on this, like most other issues.

Women in many NAM Member States contribute at the highest numbers, approaching 45 percent, as diplomats, civil society leaders, and security professionals. Organizations like the UN Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean have worked to increase their participation through training and policy initiatives.

The situation is very different in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, where women's participation remains significantly lower than men's especially in high-level decision-making positions, even though regional efforts have advanced the broader WPS agenda and produced meaningful involvement of women.

<https://apnews.com/article/china-united-nations-general-assembly-51ea58a6cd821656382f06ad0b3b93bc>

³⁶ Corredor, Elizabeth S. "Unpacking 'Gender Ideology' and the Global Right's Antigender

Counter-movement." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44(3), 613-638 2019.
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/701171>



Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control



Where the NAM departs most from the EU and other advocates of action, is on funding. Although many of its members are not poor—its membership includes many wealthy oil exporters—the NAM routinely demands that any proposal for action come with generous funding, increases in foreign aid from wealthier Western countries.

While the NAM, as post-colonial states, welcome foreign funding, they resist the oversight and control that normally comes with it. Donor countries may offer assistance, but will make it conditional. Such oversight—whether intended to ensure progress toward program goals, to prevent fraud, or the direct investment back to the countries volunteering the money—is seen by NAM members as a threat to their national sovereignty. They welcome the money, in other words, but not the oversight. This sets up a confrontation, a diplomatic challenge, as sides struggle to advance their rival goals.

Russian Federation: Outside the Security Council, Russia can be an unpredictable actor in UN bodies. It's primary goal in all UN fora is insulating Russian freedom of action in Ukraine, to ensure other issues cannot become a wedge allowing discussion of the war or its effects.

In recent years Russia has become strongly opposed to nay gender-based initiative, including Women, Peace and Security. But it sometimes remains quiet on the issues, playing for concessions on other issues, especially anything related to the Ukraine war.

Russia usually can rely on support from socialist countries like Cuba, Nicaragua,

Venezuela and sometimes Vietnam. South Africa and African countries depend on Russian military help also can be very sympathetic. On particular issues the Russian Federation can work with China, Iran and North Korea.³⁷ Under the leadership of President Trump, the United States cooperates with Russia, albeit unpredictably.³⁸

United States: In general, the United States wants to minimize the role of UN agencies in all international issues. Cutting UN budgets is a prominent American goal that will be applied to this issue.³⁹ Expect American diplomats to work to reduce the cost and effect of any UN initiative. The ideal UN initiative, from their perspective, allows each Member States to do as it pleases.

The new American position has been transformative. In the words of one observer, 'It's clear that gender equality commitments have been eroding in recent years, but few experts could have expected the sledgehammer that the United States is taking this year to principles that many people had taken for granted...'⁴⁰

The American approach is not without international support. Far-right governments in countries like Argentina, El Salvador, Hungary, Israel and sometimes the Russian Federation may be tempted to support the United States on specific issues.

The United States also has enjoyed sudden success working with authoritarian leaders in non-aligned countries, typically by making issues part of a larger deal, trade-off to other

³⁷ 'General Assembly Debates Russian Federation's Security Council Veto of European Amendments Seeking 'Just' Peace in Ukraine', *United Nations*, 6 March 2025,

<https://press.un.org/en/2025/ga12677.doc.htm>

³⁸ James Landale and Patrick Jackson, 'US sides with Russia in UN resolutions on Ukraine', *BBC News*, 25 February 2025,

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c7435pnle0go>

³⁹ Amy Mackinnon, Waltz vows to take Trump's chainsaw to the United Nations', *Politico*, 15 June

2025,

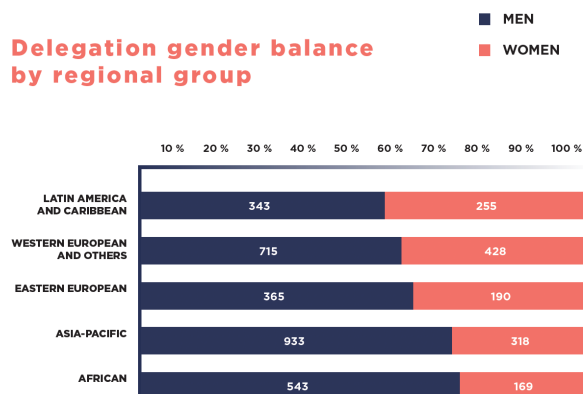
<https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/15/mike-waltz-un-ambassador-hearing-00454617>

⁴⁰ Crystal Downing, 'The WPS Agenda Needs Strong Wills to Counter Rough Headwinds', *PassBlue*, 5 October 2025,

<https://passblue.com/2025/10/05/the-wps-agenda-needs-strong-wills-to-counter-rough-headwinds/>

goals American leaders are more concerned with. A large real estate deal, for example, involving territory in a host country, might be facilitated by other commercial deals. In this case, deals with tobacco or medical companies might be used to win development of tourist centers or city re-development plans.

Delegation gender balance by regional group



Source: Dalaqua, Renata Hessmann, Et.al. "Still Behind the Curve: Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Diplomacy." *United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research*. 2019. <https://undir.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Still-behind-the-curve.pdf>

Proposals for Action

The Member States of the General Assembly and its Committees are free to act as they will. While the GA shows great respect to its resolution and treaty history, its Members, as sovereign states, are free to take any action they believe suitable. They can demand the international community reaffirm its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Security Council Resolution 1325, or encourage measures that allow each state to act in ways of their own, even if that undermines global solidarity. Some possible proposals for consideration include:

Focus attention on specific countries abusing or denying the rights and proper role of women in peace and security. Rather than stress universal action, the UN often finds it easier to agree to focus on problems of a specific country.

Afghanistan under the Taliban is an example emphasized by Western countries especially. The Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement focus on Israel's treatment of Palestinians. But other countries might be identified as a special source of risk. The General Assembly could stress fact find investigations or demand action such as trade sanctions.

Prioritize the implementation and development of women's expertise through education, mentoring, and networking through such organizations as the Project on Nuclear Issues, Women in International Security, and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security.

Prioritize gender equality and leadership opportunities in all decision-making processes and delegations. The UN tends not to get involved in the internal issues of Member State delegations. The states are sovereign, not the UN. The states tell the UN what to do, rarely the other way. But there is interest to change this. The General Assembly could set standards for female representation on delegations to the UN and future arms control and disarmament negotiations. Such measures would be seen by some as controversial infringement of national prerogatives, and a powerful symbolic and functional advance by others

Adopt agendas that examine gender perspectives and use gender inclusive language. The General Assembly could ask that all future resolutions on peace and security include explicit attention to gender issues and the effects on women specifically. Such a proposal would be welcome by advocates, but it potentially clashes with budgetary pressures, with declining UN budgets, for the UN to do less and focus



Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control



more. Ensuring that the interests of women remain an explicit part of the remaining focus will require deliberate attention and awareness of trade-offs for other priorities.

Prioritize inclusive policy that integrates diverse perspectives and considers work-life balance.⁴¹

Continue to research and publish data about the linkages between power, peace, war, and gender. Essentially this means calling for reporting. Reporting is a favorite choice of the General Assembly, especially when it cannot

agree on other action. But reporting is not neutral. It will show some countries better than others. As a result, it is likely to be opposed by some. Reporting also requires a mandate saying who or which agency will undertake the work and how it will be financed. Paying often is the hardest part.

Re-examine rising military expenditures and their effect on peace and women's welfare.

Address unconscious bias and re-examine the Security Council's characteristics so they are inclusive in all ways.

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⁴¹ Dwan, Renata. "Women in Arms Control: Time for a Gender Turn?" *Arms Control Association*. October 2019.

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Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control

