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General Assembly First Committee Background Guide 2022

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NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS



Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2022 National Model United Nations Conference in Washington, DC (NMUN•DC)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the General Assembly First Committee. This year's staff is Director Kenny Nyugen and Assistant Director Joshua Andersen. The topics under discussion for General Assembly First Committee are:

1. Addressing the Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons
2. The Relationship between Disarmament and Development

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to conduct additional research, explore your Member State's policies in-depth, and examine the policies of other Member States to improve your ability to negotiate and reach consensus. In preparation for the conference, each delegation will use their research to draft and submit a [position paper](#). Guidelines are available in the [NMUN Position Paper Guide](#).

The [NMUN website](#) has many additional resources, including two that are essential both in preparation for the conference and as a resource during the conference. They are:

1. The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not discuss the topics or agenda with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which includes the long and short form of the rules as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretary-General Ana Williamson at usgana.dc@nmun.org or Secretary-General Adam Wolf at secgen.dc@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Sincerely,
Kenny Nyugen, Director
Joshua Andersen, Assistant Director



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Committee Overview

“We cannot create a safer world through uncoordinated action. Disarmament works best when we work together: governments, experts, civil society and individuals.”¹

Introduction

With universal membership, the General Assembly is the main deliberative and policy-making body of the United Nations (UN) and one of the six principal organs established by the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945).² The work of the General Assembly is undertaken in subsidiary committees, each of which debate and adopt draft resolutions on their particular topics and allocated agenda items.³ The General Assembly First Committee considers matters related to disarmament and international peace and security, as outlined in the Charter.⁴

Agenda items addressing other types of weapons, as well as disarmament in outer space, are also part of the First Committee’s work area.⁵ Additionally, agenda items such as state behavior in cyberspace, developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security, and the illicit trade and curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons are considered.⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the workflow of the Seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, including transitioning to virtual dialogues and pre-recorded statements from in-person dialogue; however, in the recent 76th session, certain procedures have returned including the thematic debate segment.⁷ Despite the obstacles created due to the pandemic, the General Assembly Committee adopted a number of draft resolutions during the 76th session which took place from 4 October 2021 to 5 November 2021.⁸ Several of the resolutions passed focused on a variety of topics including disarmament and reducing the dangers of nuclear and chemical weapons through verification, youth involvement, prevention and the creation of regional treaties and actions plans.⁹ Another crucial event that took place in July of 2021 was the Seventh Biennial meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all Its Aspects (PoA).¹⁰ The meeting session concluded with the committee reaffirming its commitment to principles of the PoA, creating a variety of action plans at the regional, national and international levels to address emerging conflicts and issues in order to maintain peace and security.¹¹ The General Assembly plans for the Seventy-seventh session of the First Committee to take place between the 3 October 2022 and 18 November 2022, under COVID-19 restrictions and precautions.¹²

¹ UN Office of the Secretary-General, *Remarks at the University of Geneva on the Launch of the Disarmament Agenda*, 2018.

² *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

³ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2017, p. 68.

⁴ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Chapter IV, Article 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁶ UN General Assembly, *Allocation of Agenda Items to the First Committee (A/C.1/75/1)*, 2020.

⁷ UN DGC, *First Committee Approves Agenda, Programme of Work for Seventy-Sixth General Assembly Session, Elects Vice-Chair*, (2021).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2021.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2021.

¹⁰ UN General Assembly, *Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects*, 2021.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2021.

¹² SDG Knowledge Hub, *77th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 77)*, 2022.

Governance, Structure, and Membership

The General Assembly is comprised of all 193 UN Member States.¹³ Observer status can be granted to intergovernmental organizations and states without full UN membership.¹⁴ During the Seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly, there were a total of 194 speakers, including 100 heads of states and other international figures.¹⁵

In the General Assembly, each Member State has one equal vote.¹⁶ Decisions on important matters require a two-thirds majority vote.¹⁷ Such matters include the maintenance of international peace and security and budgetary questions, as well as the admission, suspension, and expulsion of Member States.¹⁸ All other matters, such as determining additional categories or that does not fall under matters needing two-thirds majority, will require a simple majority vote.¹⁹ It is important to note that a vast majority of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly are adopted by consensus without a recorded vote.²⁰ In 2020, around 85% of resolutions were adopted without a vote, illustrating the consensus-based nature of the General Assembly.²¹ Resolutions from the First Committee are non-binding.²² Despite this, they are typically adopted by the General Assembly following the recommendation of the committee, and are often adopted as customary international law to serve as international policy norms.²³

Each session of the First Committee has a Bureau comprised of one Chairperson, three Vice-Chairs, and one Rapporteur.²⁴ For the 76th session in 2021, H.E. Mr. Omar Hilale from Morocco served as the Chairperson, with Mr. Amir Hamzah Mohd Nasir from the Malaysia, Mr. Saša Milanović from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mr. Andres Fiallo from Ecuador as Vice-Chairs, and Ms. Sanna Leena Orava from Finland as Rapporteur.²⁵

The First Committee receives substantive and organizational support from three entities: the General Committee, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM).²⁶ The General Committee is comprised of the President of the General Assembly, the 21 Vice-Presidents, and the Chairpersons of all six General Assembly Main Committees.²⁷ All positions are elected each session on a non-renewable basis.²⁸ The General Committee's main duty is to determine the agenda of the General Assembly Plenary and the six main committees, and make recommendations on organizational issues.²⁹ The president of the General Assembly is selected based on geographic rotation and elected by the General Assembly Plenary.³⁰

Within the Secretariat, UNODA provides “objective, impartial and up-to-date information on multilateral disarmament issues,” substantive and organizational support, and promotes the implementation of

¹³ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Ch. IV.

¹⁴ UN DGC, *About Permanent Observers*; UN DGC, *Non-Member States*.

¹⁵ UN General Assembly, *Closing of the 76th General Debate Remarks by H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly*, 2021.

¹⁶ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Ch. IV, Art. 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2020.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²¹ UN Digital Library, *Resolutions of the 75th Session*.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 13.

²⁴ UN General Assembly, *Bureau of the 75th Session*.

²⁵ UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee) Bureau of the 76th Session*.

²⁶ UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*.

²⁷ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2017.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

measures for a general and complete disarmament, especially in post-conflict settings.³¹ While nuclear weapons remain a primary focus, disarmament and nonproliferation of conventional weapons also are addressed by UNODA.³² It further encourages norm-setting across the General Assembly, the Conference on Disarmament (CD), and the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC).³³

The First Committee works in close cooperation with the CD and UNDC.³⁴ The CD is an independent entity with a crucial role in addressing disarmament issues, as it is the only recognized “multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community.”³⁵ Unlike the CD, UNDC is a subsidiary organ of the First Committee and is composed of all 193 Member States of the UN.³⁶ It is mandated to provide recommendations on disarmament issues to the First Committee and to follow-up on the implementation of decisions.³⁷ Both CD and UNDC report at least annually, though sometimes more frequently, to the First Committee.³⁸ Several other disarmament-related entities and organizations also report to the General Assembly through the First Committee, such as the regional centers on disarmament and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).³⁹

In addition, the General Assembly and its First Committee can make recommendations to Member States and the Security Council regarding cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security and bring the Security Council’s attention to situations which endanger peace and security.⁴⁰ It further discusses questions of international peace and security brought forward by the Security Council.⁴¹

Civil society organizations have an important relationship with the General Assembly First Committee, as they provide alternative research and perspectives on disarmament issues.⁴² They are often invited to participate in committee sessions through granting them observer status.⁴³

Mandate, Function, and Powers

Article 11 of the *Charter of the United Nations* states that the General Assembly may consider matters relating to international peace and security, including disarmament, and this forms the basis for the First Committee’s mandate.⁴⁴ The First Committee is mandated to act as a forum for dialogue and cooperation to provide recommendations and norms to guide the international community when addressing disarmament issues and other threats to international peace and security.⁴⁵ It focuses on general policy recommendations, and does not carry out operative tasks.⁴⁶ The implementation of General Assembly decisions is instead conducted by Member States, the UN Secretariat, and its subsidiary bodies.⁴⁷ In addition, the General Assembly and its subsidiary committees are not permitted to make decisions on current situations and conflicts under consideration by the Security Council.⁴⁸

³¹ UNODA, *About Us*; UN General Assembly, *General and Complete Disarmament (A/RES/1378 (XIV))*, 1959.

³² UNODA, *About Us*.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*.

³⁵ UNODA, *Conference on Disarmament*.

³⁶ UNODA, *United Nations Disarmament Commission*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*.

³⁹ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2017, p. 63.

⁴⁰ *Charter of the United Nations* 1945, Chapter IV, Article 11.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter IV, Article 11.

⁴² Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2017.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁴ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Chapter IV, Article 11.

⁴⁵ Nuclear Threat Initiative, *United Nations First Committee*, 2020.

⁴⁶ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2017.

⁴⁷ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2017, p. 52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-63.

At the outset of the UN, the First Committee addressed more traditional questions on disarmament and international peace and security.⁴⁹ Currently, disarmament is organized into seven clusters: nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction, disarmament aspects in outer space, conventional weapons, regional disarmament and security, the disarmament machinery, and other disarmament measures and security.⁵⁰ The First Committee continues to address biological, chemical, and nuclear disarmament in the 76th session, and is focusing on regional treaties and the development of Centres for Peace and Disarmament.⁵¹ Matters under consideration by the First Committee not only include disarmament and international security in the scope of the Charter, but also the development of norms and principles in disarmament and arms control, measures for increased stability with low-level SALW armament, and the promotion of cooperation in international peace and security.⁵²

The customary workflow for each item of the First Committee consists of a General Debate.⁵³ The debate is followed by an interactive dialogue between experts, UN organizations, and Member States assisting by submitting reports and answering questions.⁵⁴ An example of such an expert is the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), or the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.⁵⁵ Based on the input given by experts and other UN entities, draft resolutions are developed and later voted upon; the First Committee adopts on average 50 to 70 resolutions and decisions per session.⁵⁶ Once adopted, they are presented to the General Assembly Plenary.⁵⁷ The implementation of decisions is conducted by other organs, programs, and entities.⁵⁸

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

During opening remarks of the Seventy-sixth session of the First Committee in October of 2021, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, highlighted the important of the First Committee, as tensions and crisis have increased in recent years.⁵⁹ Ms. Nakamitsu indicates non-proliferation is as crucial as ever with the rising emergence of sophisticated technologies and the increase probabilities of disturbing global peace and security.⁶⁰ Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Nakamitsu reemphasized the importance of continued support and implementation of the 1972 *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction* (BWC) and maintaining Member State accountability for any violations in the use of biological and chemical weapons.⁶¹ Additionally, Ms. Nakamitsu points toward the importance of studying the underlying reasons for continued conflict utilizing the Secretary-General António Guterres's new agenda for peace, which focuses on the six cores of the agenda.⁶² The Secretary-General's new agenda for peace serves as a tool to aid in collaborative efforts to increase disarmament and reduce international conflict surrounding nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.⁶³

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵¹ UN General Assembly, *Draft Indicative Timetable for Structured Discussion of Specific Subjects On the Adopted Thematic Approach on Disarmament And International Security Agenda Items (A/C.1/76/CRP.2)*, 2021.

⁵² UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*.

⁵³ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2017, p. 69.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 69-71.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 70.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2017.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2017.

⁶⁰ UNODA, *Opening statement to the First Committee of the General Assembly at its 76th session, Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu High Representative for Disarmament Affairs*, 2021.

⁶¹ Ibid., 2021.

⁶² Ibid., 2021.

⁶³ Ibid., 2021.

The agenda of the 76th session presented a wide variety of topics including the establishment of nuclear free zones in Africa, the Middle East, and South-East Asia, completing full disarmament including the relationship between disarmament and development, increasing developments in the telecommunication and information fields related to security, and the prevention and reduction of production and stockpiling of chemical and biological weapons.⁶⁴ The First Committee adopted 55 draft resolutions in this session, with the thematic concept of the work focusing on the importance of reducing and eliminating the fear and insecurity associated with weapons of mass destruction (WMD).⁶⁵

Another priority of the First Committee centers on the 2017 *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons* (TPNW).⁶⁶ The treaty was negotiated in March, June, and July of 2017, and was adopted in 7 July 2017 and entered into force in January 2021 after achieving ratification from 50 Member States.⁶⁷ The TPNW outlines different topics of concern regarding nuclear weapons such as testing, productions, manufacturing, stockpiling, threat of usage, assistance to victims and environmental remediation cause by nuclear fallout.⁶⁸ Chemical and biological weapons have their own conventions that prohibits the productions, stockpiling, and use of chemical and biological weapons such as the 1993 *Chemical Weapons Convention* (CWC) and BWC.⁶⁹ Both of these conventions are reviewed and highlighted frequently to demonstrate the importance of the guidelines set forth in them, and now the TPNW will serve in the same manner for nuclear weapons.⁷⁰

Disarmament was further debated by the First Committee during the 76th session, as seen in General Assembly resolution 76/37 on the “General and complete disarmament: relationship between disarmament and development.”⁷¹ The resolution called upon the international community, including regional, sub regional and non-governmental agencies, to dedicate resources and integrate disarmament and development into their agendas.⁷² As its previous 75th session, the 76th session was impacted by restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷³

The Seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly First Committee is scheduled for October to November 2022.⁷⁴ The draft provisional program of work and timetable for the 77th session includes an exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, including a follow-up on resolutions and decisions adopted by the Committee at the 77th session.⁷⁵ The session will also allow for panel discussion and exchanges with high-level officials encompassing regional groups and independent experts.⁷⁶ The process of selecting the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the 77th session is ongoing.⁷⁷ It is hoped that the 77th session will be convened in person at UN Headquarters in New York.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Since the establishment of the UN, the First Committee has acted as a global forum to foster dialogue and cooperation to achieve disarmament.⁷⁹ The Covid-19 Pandemic has not halted the present issues of

⁶⁴ UN General Assembly, *Status of documentation for the First Committee*,(A/C.1/76/INF/1), 2021.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 2021.

⁶⁶ UN General Assembly, *Status of documentation for the First Committee*,(A/C.1/76/INF/1), 2021.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2021.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 2021.

⁶⁹ Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)*, 1972; Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, *Chemical Weapons Convention*,1997.

⁷⁰ Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)*, 1972; Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, *Chemical Weapons Convention*,1997.

⁷¹ UN General Assembly, *Relationship Between Disarmament and Development (A/RES/76/37)*, 2021.

⁷² Ibid., 2021.

⁷³ Acheson, *First Committee BRIEFING BOOK / 2021*, Reaching Critical Will , 2021.

⁷⁴ SDG Knowledge Hub, *77th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 77)*,2022.

⁷⁵ UN General Assembly, *Draft Provisional Programme of Work and Timetable of the First Committee for 2022*, 2021.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

regional nuclear disarmament, the threat of biological and chemical weapon usage.⁸⁰ However, the First Committee has continued its dedication to increasing regional treaties and centers, continuing to facilitate disarmament and aid in peace and security.⁸¹ It is imperative that these issues are addressed with the objective of achieving consensus on how to promote global cooperation.⁸² Therefore, the First Committee will continue to play an important role in setting standards and norms, as well as promoting treaties to advance disarmament and maintain international peace and security.⁸³

Annotated Bibliography

- General Assembly. (2021). *General and complete disarmament: relationship between disarmament and development*. Retrieved 11 May 2022 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/76/37>
This document highlights the importance of the topic of development. Many of the current issues were put on hold or resources were reallocated to accommodate for the negative impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic. With progress being made on the Covid-19 Pandemic and vaccination, many of the efforts placed on hold are progressing once again. One of the largest points of General Assembly First Committee is the positive usage of chemical, biological and nuclear energy, and resources rather for weapons of mass destruction. This document highlights the current situation on development and disarmament.
- Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. (2017). *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. Retrieved 1 May 2022 from: https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/mission-new-york/en/documents/UN_GA_Final.pdf
This handbook was published by the Permanent Mission to the United Nations of Switzerland. It is a very good introduction to the General Assembly and its First Committee, including its processes, and structure. This source will support delegates in better understanding the General Assembly in its entirety as well as gaining more information on existing rules of procedure, the structure of resolutions, and the workflow of the General Assembly as they begin their research.
- Reaching Critical Will. (2021). *Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms*. Retrieved 1 May 2022 from: <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/salw/2020>
This webpage has many useful overviews and documentations of the most recent Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms. This is important for delegates as disarmament is a crucial focus in the most recent 75th and 76th sessions. As well provides documents for background information to understand how the focuses have changed and what actions have been set forth by past meetings. Another important part of this webpage is the link to side events. These side events are more focused orientated on subtopics of the large and broad issue of small arms, such as women, addressing youth and validation systems.
- Reaching Critical Will. (2021). *First Committee Briefing Book 2021*. Retrieved 1 May 2022 from: <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com21/briefingbook/FCBB-2021.pdf>
This briefing book will provide delegates with a useful overview of the positions of Member States on a myriad of topics such as nuclear weapons, small arms and light weapons, cyber security, and peace. It provides a useful summary of relevant information on the General Assembly's current priorities and will assist delegates in forming their Member States position on Committee topic. Additionally, each substantive topic includes a useful "recommendations" section, which highlights the recommendations from civil society and IGOs on the recommended action that Member States should take during the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ UNODA, *Opening statement to the First Committee of the General Assembly at its 76th session, Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu High Representative for Disarmament Affairs*, 2021.

⁸² Reaching Critical Will, *UN General Assembly First Committee 2021*, 2021.

⁸³ Ibid.

upcoming sessions, which will prove useful as delegates begin drafting their own solutions to the issues at-hand.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. (2021). *Opening statement to the First Committee of the General Assembly at its 76th session: Statement by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu High Representative for Disarmament Affairs on 4 October 2021 in New York*. Retrieved 1 May 2022 from: https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/11.0010/20201009/yBOH3dYWEM2T/Pq5RHLU1a4Wh_en.pdf

This opening statement is important as Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu covered a large range of topics that not only were discussed in the 75th and 76th General Assembly First Committee session, but as well are on the agenda for the 77th First Committee session. A well, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu addressed delegates, Secretary-General António Guterres and other heads of states on the important of continuing the efforts of the First Committee, especially during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

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1. Addressing the Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons

“My agenda has three priorities: disarmament to save humanity, disarmament to save lives, and disarmament for future generations. First: disarmament to save humanity aiming to reduce eliminate weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, chemical, and biological.”⁸⁴

Introduction

The first use of large-scale chemical weapons occurred in Belgium on April 22nd, 1915 during World War I, with artillery munitions being used to inflict horrific casualties on both sides.⁸⁵ These weapons caused an estimated 100,000 fatalities and millions of casualties that were deemed to be indiscriminate and causing devastating long-term effects.⁸⁶ Chemical weapons have been defined as “a chemical used to cause intentional death or harm through its toxic properties.”⁸⁷ Biological weapons are defined by their ability to “disseminate disease-causing organisms that can harm or kill humans.”⁸⁸ Biological weapons consists of two parts – a weaponized agent and a delivery mechanism that affects living organisms.⁸⁹ In addition to strategic or tactical military applications, biological weapons can be used for political assassinations; the infection of livestock or agricultural produce to cause food shortages and economic loss; the creation of environmental catastrophes; and the introduction of widespread illness, fear, and mistrust among the public.⁹⁰ The devastating nature and effects of these weapon systems would put them in their own classification of weapon systems commonly known as Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs).⁹¹

The United Nations General Assembly First Committee has played a large role in disarmament efforts with Chemical and Biological Weapons.⁹² The mandate of peace and security falls the authority of the General Assembly, the primary goals of which pursue disarmament efforts and policy.⁹³ Disarmament is one of the core practices promoted by the United Nations (UN) to maintain the principles of international peace and security established in the Charter of the United Nations (1945), which was drafted in the aftermath of World War II.⁹⁴ These systems put into place were to eliminate chemical and biological weapon systems as well as to eliminate war as an instrument of international foreign policy.⁹⁵ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established by the UN in 2015 with the expectation of completing and accomplishing them by 2030.⁹⁶ SDGs 14 (oceans) and 15 (forests, desertification, and biodiversity) are connected to disarmament efforts, which focus on contamination and the environment.⁹⁷ SDGs 14 (oceans) and 15 (forests, desertification, and biodiversity) are heavily affected by remnants of war because of the environmental aftermath caused by testing and use of chemical and biological weapon systems.⁹⁸ Disarmament efforts and continued prohibition of these weapon systems will reduce the flow of weapons and decrease the impact of these weapon systems on the environment.⁹⁹ Reducing and managing stockpiles, mitigates the risks of unintended explosions and diversion, allowing for a secure post-conflict environment through demobilization and reintegration programs.¹⁰⁰

⁸⁴ United Nations, Office of the Secretary General. Speech by Secretary General *at the University of Geneva on the launch of the Disarmament Agenda on May 24th 2018.*

⁸⁵ OPCW, *Looking back helps us look forward.*

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ OPCW, *What is a Chemical Weapon?*

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ OPCW, *What is a Chemical Weapon?*

⁹⁰ UNODA, *What are Biological Weapons?*

⁹¹ Arms Control Association, *Chemical Weapons: Frequently Asked Questions.*

⁹² UNODA, *Securing our Common Future - An Agenda for Disarmament*, p. 6, 2018.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ UNODA, *Securing our Common Future - An Agenda for Disarmament*, p. 9, 2018.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ UNODA, *Securing our Common Future - An Agenda for Disarmament*, p. 9, 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

International and Regional Framework

In the aftermath of the First World War, the international community united to formally establish limitations and prohibitions against biological and chemical weapons.¹⁰¹ The usage of these weapons systems confirmed for governments and the general population the need for a series of laws or established norms that would further eliminate and ban the use of these weapons in future conflict.¹⁰² These efforts would lead to the predecessor of the United Nations, the League of Nations, which would establish the *Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare*, commonly known as the Geneva Protocol, where it was signed and adopted in 1925.¹⁰³ The Geneva Protocol, with its original 38 States parties, together affirmed the prevention of the use of chemical and biological weapons; however, it did not prohibit the development, production, or possession of these weapons systems.¹⁰⁴ This resulted in states having joined the protocol but still permitting the use chemical weapons against states that did not join the Protocol.¹⁰⁵

Due to the rise of the Atomic Age in the latter half of the 20th century and the growing threat of nuclear weapons throughout the 1940s-1960s, biological and chemical weapons disarmament efforts were not addressed for 20 years.¹⁰⁶ Efforts for disarmament of these weapons would only be brought up at a *Geneva Convention on the Statutory Limitations to War Crimes* in 1968, leading to the adoption of the *Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)* in 1971, and ultimately the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (CWC)* in 1993 during the aftermath of the Cold War.¹⁰⁷ The BWC was fully enacted in 1975, prohibiting the development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling, and use of biological and toxin weapons.¹⁰⁸ The BWC was the first multilateral disarmament treaty to effectively ban an entire weapon system and as a result, Biological Weapons were one of the first classifications of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) to be banned as well.¹⁰⁹ The CWC is currently ratified by 193 Member States and 98% of the global population lives under the protection and jurisdiction of the CWC.¹¹⁰

Additionally, in 1987, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 42/37 on “Chemical and Biological Weapons” and the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 620 in 1988, establishing the Secretary-General’s Mechanism (UNSGM).¹¹¹ The UNSGM mandate and authority would allow for investigations to be conducted in conjunction with United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA).¹¹² In 2004, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1540 which stated that all Member States must refrain from providing any form of support for non-state actors that attempt to build, develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, or use chemical or biological weapons and their means for delivery for terrorist purposes.¹¹³ Resolution 1540 required all Member States to adopt and enforce appropriate laws to ensure the prevention and proliferation of these weapons systems to non-state actors for terrorist purposes.¹¹⁴ In February of 2022, the Security Council would extend the mandate of resolution 1540 and its committee until November 2022 where a group of experts will continue to provide a comprehensive review on the status of implementation within Member States.¹¹⁵

¹⁰¹ UNODA, *Securing our Common Future - An Agenda for Disarmament*, p. 24, 2018.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ OPCW, *Looking back helps us look forward*.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ OPCW, *Looking back helps us look forward*.

¹⁰⁶ UNODA, *What are Biological Weapons?*

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ UNODA, *Biological Weapons Convention*.

¹¹¹ UNODA, *Secretary-General’s Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons*.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ UN Security Council, *Resolution 1540 at its 4956th meeting, (S/RES/1540)*, 2004, p.1.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.2.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.1.

Role of the International System

The General Assembly established the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) in 1980 to focus on dialogue, action on disarmament, and security within the international community.¹¹⁶ UNIDIR's addresses the disarmament of chemical weapons and biological weapons systems by providing diversified and complete data, promoting participation of disarmament efforts, and negotiating greater international securities at progressively over levels of armaments.¹¹⁷ UNIDIR focuses on elements of disarmament that relate to international security by engaging with Member States, the UN, and other stakeholders in identifying and advancing actions that contribute to a sustainable and peaceful world.¹¹⁸ The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was established in 1997 as the implementing body for the CWC.¹¹⁹ The OPCW mandate is to investigate any credible allegations of the use of chemical weapons on Member State territory of its parties or were found in violation of the provisions as laid out by the CWC.¹²⁰ These efforts relate back to the SDGs, such as SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) which focuses on peaceful and inclusive societies that allow for strong institutions creating the framework of durable and long lasting conditions for Member States.¹²¹ SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) specifies that the reduction of certain types of weapons and the establishment of an effective control of arms and weapon systems could lead to Member States develop multilateral disarmament discussions.¹²² SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) itself establishes and informs progress through the level of institutional capacity of Member States to better control weapon systems and engage in military confidence-building measures.¹²³ SDG 3 (health) also comes into play due to chemical and biological weapons causing premature death and a key source of potential injuries, disability, psychological distress, and disease.¹²⁴ These efforts of the UNIDIR include the participation of various stakeholders through advancing practical progress, facilitating dialogue between Member States, technical and experts, and the recent inclusion of private and civil society with a focus on disarmament issues.¹²⁵

UNSGM is under the direction of the UNODA which is tasked with ensuring the operational readiness to carry out a mission in response to reports from Member States.¹²⁶ The UNSGM investigates allegations of the possible use of Chemical and Biological Weapon Systems which then may constitute as violations to the 1925 Geneva Protocol and other international treaties such as the CWC and BWC.¹²⁷ The UNSGM responds to any allegations of a violation of the CWC or BWC if a Member States provides the Secretary-General with a report of such allegations.¹²⁸ This effectively allows the UNSGM and Secretary-General the authorization to launch an investigation in an objective and scientific manner by sending fact-finding teams to locations of alleged incidents and reporting the results of these investigations back to all Member States, the UNODA, and the Security Council.¹²⁹ These teams are qualified experts, consultants, and analytical laboratories that are called upon by the UNSGM are in accordance with the guidelines and procedures endorsed by General Assembly resolution 45/57C.¹³⁰ The Security Council established these teams in a 1540 Committee to oversee the implementation of these resolutions for a period of 2 years.¹³¹ Comprised of 15 Member States and assisted by a panel of experts, this 1540 Committee is given the

¹¹⁶ UNIDIR, *About Us*.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ UNIDIR, *About Us*.

¹¹⁹ OPCW, *Mission*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ UNIDIR, *About Us*.

¹²² UNODA, *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ UNIDIR, *About Us*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ UNODA, *Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons*.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ UNODA, *Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons*.

¹³¹ Arms Control Association, *Chemical and Biological Weapons Status at a Glance, 2022*.

particular task of promoting awareness of the resolution and its requirements and assisting with its implementation in Member States.¹³²

The UNODA's mission and mandate is to work with Member States through the international system and its partners in the elimination of WMDs through strict control and disarmament of conventional weapon systems.¹³³ The UNODA advocates and promotes norm-setting in the international community and multilateral agreements on disarmament by promoting arms control and non-proliferation; facilitating dialogue among stakeholders; and advocating for solutions to support sustainable peace and development.¹³⁴ The UNODA supports numerous projects and trust funds to conduct arms control initiatives that foster sustainable development around the world.¹³⁵ The UNODA has previously worked with the United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR) and the recently established Saving Lives Entity (SALIENT) and with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the Peacebuilding Fund to support agenda items such as SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions).¹³⁶ Additionally, the UNODA coordinates and supports the UN Internal Task Force (UNITF), which reports on several departments of the UN Secretariat and other UN institutions to the UNSGM and responds to requests from Member States for disarmament and dialogue.¹³⁷ The Implementation Support Unit (ISU) was established within the UNODA in 2006 after the UNODA's Sixth Review Conference to provide administrative support to meetings as agreed by the Review Conference.¹³⁸ The ISU provides comprehensive implementation and universalization of the BWC and the exchange of confidence-building measures to the UNODA through interacting with both scientific and academic institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations.¹³⁹ In General Assembly resolution 76/88, the UN continued support the inter-agency coordination processes through the Coordination Action on Small Arms mechanism, which is chaired by UNODA.¹⁴⁰

Chemical and Biological Weapon Systems in the 21st Century

It is currently estimated that 95% of the world's declared stockpiles of chemical weapons have been destroyed or decommissioned.¹⁴¹ However, several Member States are suspected of developing chemical weapons programmes despite having signed – but not ratified – the CWC.¹⁴² In 2014, there were reports of chemical weapons being used in the Syrian Conflict.¹⁴³ The Syrian Arab Republic had evaluated the CWC in 2013, after widespread condemnation, and measures had been adopted by the UN with the assistance with the OPCW to eliminate the stockpile of chemical weapons and decommission chemical weapon production in the armed conflict.¹⁴⁴ The Syrian Conflict effectively changed how compliance assessments are done by the OPCW.¹⁴⁵ An example of this was a high degree of authority and mandate the UN-OPCW Joint Mission was given in investigating the Syrian regime dismantling of its reported stockpiles and production facilities.¹⁴⁶ These efforts would ultimately lead to the OPCW being awarded the Noble Peace Prize in 2013 for its “extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons” and its oversight over the OPCW-UN Joint Mission.¹⁴⁷ The UN-OPCW Joint Mission verified the complete elimination of the Syrian stockpile of chemical weapons and the production.¹⁴⁸ Several Member States raised concerns with the declaration that Syria's regime certification was too soon, as there were reports of the use of chemical

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ UNIDIR, *About Us*.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ UNODA, *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ UNIDIR, *About Us*.

¹³⁸ UNODA, *Implementation Support Unit*.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ UN GA, Relationship between disarmament and development (A/76/88), p. 3, 2021.

¹⁴¹ UNODA, *Securing our Common Future - An Agenda for Disarmament*, p. 26, 2018.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ UN DGC, *Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2022*.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

weapons in Syria in 2014 and in 2018.¹⁴⁹ In 2022, 20 of the 24 outstanding priorities opened by the Declaration Assessment Team led by the OPCW Technical Secretariat remain unresolved on significant items such as Syria's undeclared research, production, and weaponization of unknown quantities of chemical weapons.¹⁵⁰ Following the recent chemical investigations in the Syrian Conflict, the UNODA has improved its ability to rapidly field investigation teams by enhancing its training of rostered experts and operational planning capabilities, with a focus on responding to allegations of use of biological weapons.¹⁵¹

The implementation of the BWC has been slow, as there is a lack of a formal verification mechanism or body that tracks the use of biological weapons.¹⁵² There are 183 States parties in the BWC and ten Member States have never signed or ratified the BWC.¹⁵³ In March of 2022, the Russian Federation Representative of the United Nations accused the United States of America of housing "dangerous biological weapons projects" in Ukraine.¹⁵⁴ The United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, informed the Security Council that the allegations of biological weapons programmes in Ukraine were speculative and UNODA did not have the mandate or the technical and operational capacity to investigate these allegations.¹⁵⁵ The High Representative reiterated that both the Russian Federation, the United States of America, and Ukraine are all party to the BWC which bans of the production, development, and stockpile of biological weapons systems.¹⁵⁶ Outlining possible solutions for resolving the inter-state dispute under the BWC were made possible by conducting consultative meetings under the UNODA and a briefing for the Member States.¹⁵⁷ The only authority of the BWC is the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who retains the sole independent authority and international mandate to conduct credible investigations of the allegations of use of biological weapons systems.¹⁵⁸

Case Study: Small-scale Chemical and Biological Attacks

In February of 2017, the eldest son of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea former leader Kim Jong-Il, Kim Jong-nam, was attacked by a toxic chemical which resulted in his death at Malaysia's Kuala Lumpur International Airport.¹⁵⁹ The Malaysian government had announced that the Schedule 1 nerve agent VX was used in the fatal incident.¹⁶⁰ This raised concerns within the OPCW, as there were reported links between Syria and North Korea with chemical weapons research.¹⁶¹ In 2018, Russian nationals Sergei and Yulia Skripal, residing in the United Kingdom, were poisoned by the chemical agent A-234.¹⁶² Another recent use of a chemical agent was in 2020 when Russian opposition figure Alexei Navanly was positioned by a nerve agent known as Novichok during a flight from Tomsk Oblast to Moscow.¹⁶³ The alleged assassination attempt was denied by the Russian Federation and attempts by the international community to investigate the use of chemical toxins were unsuccessful, as the CWC did not address non-state actors or smaller scale scenarios such as assassination attempts.¹⁶⁴

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ UN DGC, Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2022.

¹⁵¹ UNIDIR, *Enhancing the Management and Enforcement of Compliance in the Regime Prohibiting Chemical Weapons*, p. 27.

¹⁵² Arms Control Association, *Chemical and Biological Weapons Status at a Glance*, 2022.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ BBC, *Ukraine war: Fact-checking Russia's biological weapons claims*, 2022.

¹⁵⁵ UN DGC, Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2022.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ UNIDIR, *Enhancing the Management and Enforcement of Compliance in the Regime Prohibiting Chemical Weapons*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁹ OPCW. *Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ UNIDIR. *Enhancing the Management and Enforcement of Compliance in the Regime Prohibiting Chemical Weapons*, p. 22.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

These incidents have now posed the question to the OPCW of how to address smaller-scale attacks and chemical and biological weapons.¹⁶⁵ The OPCW added several more groups of toxic chemicals to Schedule 1 of the CWC Annex of Chemicals and subjected newer weapon systems to be banned from manufacturing and added additional CWC restrictions and verification measures.¹⁶⁶ At the time of the attacks, chemical agents like Novichok were not included in the CWC, and this has since changed.¹⁶⁷ Initially, while these chemical agents were known in the 1990s, they were not included in the CWC negotiations due to Member States fearing compromising sources and the development of these new class of nerve agents.¹⁶⁸ The CWC and OPCW added a general-purpose criterion that ensures that unscheduled and unregistered chemicals are considered chemical weapons under the Schedule 1 of the CWC Annex of Chemicals as prohibited under the CWC during the OPCW Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties in 2018.¹⁶⁹ The situation for biological weapons is very much different compared to the prospective use of them.¹⁷⁰ The BWC does not have any organization or inspectorate such as the OPCW to monitor and effectively advocate for disarmament.¹⁷¹ This has led to steps by Secretary-General to authorize the UNSGM to investigate allegations of the use of chemical, biological, and toxin weapons.¹⁷² Presently the BWC Ninth Review Conference was scheduled for 2020 but has since been rescheduled to August of 2022.¹⁷³

Conclusion

Considering the recent developments, the General Assembly First Committee has made efforts to discuss the best ways to identify and hold perpetrators accountable.¹⁷⁴ The international community has continued to use the CWC and BWC frameworks to address Chemical and Biological Weapon Systems; however, the emerging use of small-scale chemical weapons and the reappearance of these weapon systems throughout various Member States has created uncertainties within the international framework.¹⁷⁵ Due to these recent events, UNODA, General Assembly First Committee, and the Security Council held thematic discussions on the continued efforts of disarmament of conventional arms and other WMDs.¹⁷⁶ As such, the UN system has set up succession of investigative and assessment mechanisms via the UNSGM was set up to clarify the situation of chemical and biological weapon systems.¹⁷⁷

Further Research

Delegates are encouraged to consider the following questions for their research: Can the General Assembly First Committee continue supporting established UN institutions to continue the disarmament efforts of Chemical and Biological Weapons? What can the international system do to address non-state actors through international law and current treaties? How can existing frameworks and institutions approach the 21st century with laws and institutions from the 20th century?

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¹⁶⁵ UNIDIR, *Enhancing the Management and Enforcement of Compliance in the Regime Prohibiting Chemical Weapons*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Arms Control Association, *Updating the CWC: How We Got Here and What Is Next*, 2020.

¹⁶⁹ OPCW, *Decision: Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ UNIDIR, *Enhancing the Management and Enforcement of Compliance in the Regime Prohibiting Chemical Weapons*, p. 27.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² UNIDIR, *Enhancing the Management and Enforcement of Compliance in the Regime Prohibiting Chemical Weapons*, p. 4.

¹⁷³ Arms Control Association, *Chemical and Biological Weapons Status at a Glance*, 2020.

¹⁷⁴ UB DGC, *Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*, 2019.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ UNIDIR, *Enhancing the Management and Enforcement of Compliance in the Regime Prohibiting Chemical Weapons*, p. 27.

Arms Control Association. *Chemical and Biological Weapons Status at a Glance* (2022). Retrieved 13 February 2022 from: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/cbwprolif>

This short informational document by the Arms Control Association provides a starting point of understanding the topic of chemical and biological weapons. The Arms Control Association provides invaluable insight and resources to Member States weapon development and current inventory. Delegates will find useful information relating to their own research and should consider this as a starting point with understanding the topic.

Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction. *Chemical Weapons Convention* (1997). Retrieved 20 March 2022 from: https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1997/04/19970429%2007-52%20PM/CTC-XXVI_03_ocrd.pdf

The Chemical Weapons Convention of 1997 provides background information for the international community in addressing Chemical Weapons in the 21st century. Delegates will be able to find the process and definitions of Chemical Weapons within this document and to understand how the international system uses the various tools and enforcements laid out in the Convention. Additionally, the CWC provides the modern international framework where all international institutions focus its efforts on.

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). *Chemical Weapons Convention* (1997). Retrieved 13 February 2022 from: <https://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention>

The OPCW provides delegates invaluable information on the CWC alongside with recent developments of the CWC. OPCW additionally goes over the many Articles under the CWC that will help delegates understand the treaty. It is important for delegates to understand the priorities and strategies set by the CWC as well its effects to local, national, and global efforts.

United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. *Enhancing the Management and Enforcement of Compliance in the Regime Prohibiting Chemical Weapons* (2021). Retrieved 13 February 2022 from: <https://www.unidir.org/publication/enhancing-management-and-enforcement-compliance-regime-prohibiting-chemical-weapons>

The UNIDIR newest document provides insight and outlines why the international community and the UN remains focused on the enforcement and enhancement of the prohibition of chemical weapons. Delegates will also be able to find several tools and methods that the UN and international community can improve certain processes and compliance of chemical weapon proliferation.

United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. *Enhancing the Management and Enforcement of Compliance in the Regime Prohibiting Chemical Weapons*. (2021). Retrieved 20 March 2022 from: https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/WMD_Compliance_Report_V04.pdf

This publication by UNIDIR provides current event and insight in current efforts of prohibiting chemical and biological weapon systems. Delegates will find data, research, and efforts by the international community in its efforts in breaking down barriers and further providing sustainable efforts in peace and security. Delegates will additionally find information and interpretations of UN and international efforts over the decades and how to address chemical weapons in the 21st century.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Securing our Common Future - An Agenda for Disarmament* (2018). Retrieved 13 February 2022 from: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/sg-disarmament-agenda-pubs-page.pdf#view=Fit>

This Executive Summary from the United Nations Secretary General Office in 2018 provides a roadmap and addresses significant developments in disarmament within the international community. The agenda also provides an implementation plan that gives the view and actions for ensuring disarmament and why it is crucial for the UN system to pursue these objectives in the 21st century and beyond. Delegates will understand institutional details on why ensuring norms against chemical and biological weapons is still ongoing.



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2. The Relationship Between Disarmament and Development

Introduction

The connection between development and security is demonstrated throughout the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), the universal plan of action adopted by the United Nations (UN) in pursuit of a more sustainable and resilient future for all.¹⁷⁸ In its opening paragraphs, the framework makes clear of the overarching goal to build ubiquitously just and inclusive societies free from violence and fear.¹⁷⁹ The agenda further emphasizes that there cannot be sustainable development in the absence of peace, while peace cannot exist without sustainable development.¹⁸⁰ In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the 2030 deadline put forth by the agenda, every program and body within the UN system places sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda at the core of its work.¹⁸¹ While this comprehensive approach has made notable progress across each pillar of sustainability, the evolving nature of violent conflict continues to pose existential challenges to the development of affected regions.¹⁸²

The UN has broadly deployed disarmament and arms limitation measures in its role to preserve international peace and security.¹⁸³ In this context, disarmament can refer to either the physical removal of weaponry from the stockpiles of armed combatants, or the gradual elimination of an entire weapon class.¹⁸⁴ Arms limitation is a type of disarmament that focuses on regulating, rather than eradicating, conventional weaponry so to prevent illicit use.¹⁸⁵ Historically, UN disarmament programming has been given highest priority to the matter of nuclear nonproliferation, with the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs deeming nuclear weapons the most dangerous armaments on earth.¹⁸⁶ With the potential to kill millions and irreparably harm the natural environment, nuclear nonproliferation and conventional arms control are key to sustainable development.¹⁸⁷ However, the current geopolitical landscape has seen an increase in armed conflict scenarios, unveiling a critical need to align current disarmament strategies with the modern realities of armed conflict.¹⁸⁸ To do this, the concept of disarmament must be incorporated across all UN activity, much like has been done with sustainable development through the 2030 Agenda.¹⁸⁹ Violent conflict inherently prevents peace and access to justice, but nature of conflict has transformed dramatically over the last century.¹⁹⁰ While armed conflicts are less deadly, with war-related casualties declining steadily since 1945, the number of incidents are increasing.¹⁹¹ Among the commonly afflicted are low and middle-income countries with relatively strong social institutions, which complicates the post-World War II belief that socioeconomic and political advancement is the arbiter of lasting peace.¹⁹² This dominant narrative is evident throughout the 2030 Agenda, which is hinged upon a shared belief that sustainable development leaves no one behind.¹⁹³ Meanwhile, it is estimated that nearly four in five states affected by conflict will fail to achieve certain SDGs by 2030.¹⁹⁴ Relatedly, it is estimated by 2030 over half of the global population living in poverty will reside in regions with high levels of violent conflict.¹⁹⁵

¹⁷⁸ International Rescue Committee, *Sustainable Development Goals in Crisis*, 1.

¹⁷⁹ UN DESA, *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ UN DGC, *Support Sustainable Development and Climate Action*.

¹⁸² Ranah, *The Sustainable Development Goals and a Substantial Reduction in Illicit Arms Flows*.

¹⁸³ UN DGC, *Disarmament*.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ UNDP, *Sustainable Development Goals*.

¹⁸⁶ UN DGC, *Disarmament*.

¹⁸⁷ UNODA, *Nuclear Weapons*.

¹⁸⁸ UNODA, *Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, 2018, ix.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ UN DGC, *A New Era of Conflict and Violence*; Roser, et al., *War and Peace*, "Our World In Data," 2016.

¹⁹¹ ACLED, *10 Conflicts to Worry about in 2022*, 2022.

¹⁹² World Bank Group and the United Nations, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict (Executive Summary)*, 2018, xi.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ International Rescue Committee, *Sustainable Development Goals in Crisis*.

¹⁹⁵ The Brookings Institution, *Poverty and fragility: where will the poor live in 2030?*, 2021.

Another unprecedented pattern seen across conflict scenarios is the prevalence of non-state actors as combatants, such as political factions, criminal groups, and terrorist organizations.¹⁹⁶ This causes motivators behind conflict to grow in number and complexity, as combatants are prone to fracturing.¹⁹⁷ Armed conflict is also most likely to occur at scale as a result of intrastate tensions, straying from past conventions of war waged between two or more states and their militaries.¹⁹⁸

These modern trends complicate conditions allowing effective peacemaking, largely due to their threat to the afflicted regions' current and future development capacity.¹⁹⁹ The ongoing Syrian Civil War offers an example of what can occur under a conflict environment with combatants prone to fragmentation and regional violence repeatedly extending beyond borders.²⁰⁰ For instance, when fighting began 2011, the conflict was between eight separate groups.²⁰¹ Today, several thousand armed factions are considered active participants in the war.²⁰² There have been multiple instances of violent skirmishes spilling over the Syrian border into the neighboring countries Iraq and Lebanon, while regional military powers Iran and Turkey have each leveraged the conflict as proxy in pursuit of their own interests.²⁰³

International and Regional Framework

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) affirms every individual's right to life, liberty, and security, providing the basis for all subsequent work to address peace and security, development, and humanitarian issues.²⁰⁴ The *Geneva Conventions* (1949), also established in the context of post-World War II recovery, lays the foundation for modern humanitarian law through its unprecedented emphasis on protecting noncombatants.²⁰⁵ The *Fourth Geneva Convention* (1949) expressly prohibits any attack intended to harm civilians.²⁰⁶ In 1981, the *Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons* (CCW) set international precedents, addressing the use of conventional weapons to indiscriminately affect civilians and cause unjustifiable suffering.²⁰⁷ The CCW framework possesses a unique structure that provides for flexibility as new developments emerge in patterns of violent conflict and weapon technologies.²⁰⁸

In 1987, the International Conference on the Relationship Between Disarmament and Development was convened as requested by General Assembly resolution 41/422 (1986) as a multilateral forum to discuss the impact of increased military expenditures on global socio-economic development.²⁰⁹ The conference came to a consensus which agreed upon a need to align disarmament priorities with development objectives.²¹⁰ Participating Member States agreed there is no possibility for a sustainable international and political order in the presence of an ongoing arms race.²¹¹ All present UN action toward sustainable development is guided by the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, adopted in 2015 to carry the momentum from the preceding Millennium Development Goals.²¹² The path to a sustainable future as defined by the framework is operationalized by the 17 SDGs, its individual targets, and progress

¹⁹⁶ World Bank Group, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict (Executive Summary)*, 2018.

¹⁹⁷ UN DGC, *A New Era of Conflict and Violence*.

¹⁹⁸ von Einsiedel S., *Civil War Trends and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict*, 2017, p. 2

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ UN DGC, *A New Era of Conflict and Violence*.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Siccardi, *Carnegie Europe*, "How Syria Changed Turkey's Foreign Policy," 2021.

²⁰⁴ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948.

²⁰⁵ ICRC, *The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols*.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ UNODA, *The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons*.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ UN General Assembly, *Report of the International Conference on the Relationship Between Disarmament and Development*, 1987.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² UNDP, *Sustainable Development Goals*, 2022.

indicators.²¹³ These goals emphasize broad aspects of society that can be destabilized by conflict, and many SDGs can be associated with conflict prevention and arms reduction.²¹⁴ SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) relies on the connection between disarmament, conflict prevention, and creating conditions for lasting peace.²¹⁵ Four of the goal's target indicators explicitly reference disarmament as the most sustainable option to limit the impact of armed conflict on humanity.²¹⁶

The revised UN disarmament framework, *Securing our Common Future*, was launched in response to the increasing relevance of the relationship between security and sustainable development.²¹⁷ The document provides a blueprint for integrating disarmament into all UN priorities using three congruent motivators: preserving humanity, saving lives, and strengthening partnerships.²¹⁸ The framework is designed around the need for a better understanding of the role disarmament plays not only in preventing conflict, but upholding humanitarian principles and protecting civilians.²¹⁹

Role of the International System

Article 11 of the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945) provides the General Assembly the ability to address issues relating the maintenance of international peace and security, including disarmament, and non-proliferation.²²⁰ The General Assembly First Committee considers all security issues within the parameters of the Charter.²²¹ All UN development programming is operationalized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the body responsible for implementing the 2030 Agenda in addition to assisting Member States with achieving the SDGs.²²² UNDP is joined by 11 other UN entities to form the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), which supports and monitors the coordinated development operations among Member States and civil society in 162 countries.²²³

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) is responsible for providing the UN disarmament machinery and Secretary-General with substantive and organizational assistance.²²⁴ UNODA supports individual Member States by offering current resources and objective information on regionally relevant topics.²²⁵ Through three Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament, UNODA assists Member States with policy development at the national, regional, and local level.²²⁶ Due to this capacity, the 2030 Agenda tasks UNODA with overseeing progress towards SDG 16.²²⁷ For example, UNODA carries out the collection of data on the amount of seized illicit arms that have been appropriately traced and reported through existing international instruments.²²⁸

The General Assembly has established a dedicated Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) for the relationship between disarmament and development, which appraises the integrated efforts by UN bodies to promote the connection between the two.²²⁹ The GGE has collected key data on trends concerned with multilateral disarmament programming including evolving roles of security, costs and consequences of military spending, the need for resources to pursue development projects, and multilateralism in the

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Nakamitsu, *Advancing Disarmament within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2016.

²¹⁵ UNDP, *Sustainable Development Goals*.

²¹⁶ Youth 4 Disarmament Initiative, *How disarmament and arms control contribute to sustainable development*, 2021.

²¹⁷ UNODA, *Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, 2018, ix.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ UNODA, *Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, 2018, 73.

²²⁰ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

²²¹ UN DGC, *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*.

²²² UNDP, *About us: Our Mission, our goals, our mandate*.

²²³ UN Sustainable Development Group, *Who We Are*.

²²⁴ UNODA, *About Us*.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ UNODA, *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ UN General Assembly, *The relationship between disarmament and development in the current international context (A/59/119)*, 2002.

international system.²³⁰ The final report of the GGE concluded the international community must mainstream the relationship between disarmament and development by raising greater public awareness of the common themes.²³¹ The report urges Member States to promote security through greater openness, transparency, and confidence, and prioritizing a wide range of conflict-prevention measures.²³²

Jointly coordinated by the UN Department of Peace Operations and the UN Department of Operational Support, UN Peacekeeping is the primary vehicle for carrying out peacebuilding missions and promoting sustainable recovery from conflict.²³³ The program is considered to be the most public-facing of UN bodies due to the nature of its work and the integration of peacekeeping missions in local communities.²³⁴ Through partnerships with the UN Secretariat, the Security Council, and contributing Member States, 55 UN Peacekeeping operations have successfully achieved their mandate of building an environment for peace, security, and stability during and after conflict.²³⁵

Promoting Inclusive Approaches to Disarmament

As outlined in *Securing our Common Future*, the current UN disarmament agenda is dependent upon equal, full, and effective participation by all members of society in the disarmament process.²³⁶ This concept goes beyond international security priorities and instead focuses on the ways disarmament can prevent human suffering caused by armed conflict.²³⁷

One strategy for building inclusivity is elevating the voices of women and other marginalized groups.²³⁸ By acknowledging the lack of women voices throughout the disarmament process, the revised UN disarmament agenda upholds the standards set by the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which affirms the critical role of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, humanitarian response, and the recovery process.²³⁹ Consequently, the contemporary UN disarmament agenda has devoted one of its four central themes, “strengthening partnerships,” to building greater inclusivity throughout disarmament negotiations.²⁴⁰ This involves not only building engagement across government and civil society stakeholders, but also amplifying the voices of women and youth and to create a better public understanding of disarmament processes.²⁴¹

The international community has responded by developing more platforms to allow marginalized groups to participate in multilateral discussions, such as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum.²⁴² The annual forum allows youth advocates and other stakeholders to promote opportunities for greater youth participation in development.²⁴³ Member States have also accomplished this on a regional level; for example, the Organization of American States (OAS) has created the Department of Social Inclusion, which creates and implements strategies to promote social inclusion and combat inequality.²⁴⁴ The department focuses on initiatives supporting policy development and increasing living conditions for marginalized groups.²⁴⁵

²³⁰ UN General Assembly, *The relationship between disarmament and development in the current international context (A/59/119)*, 2002.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ UN Peacekeeping, *What We Do*.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ UNODA, *Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, 2018, 73.

²³⁷ *Assuring our Common Future*, “Summary of Securing our Common Future,” 2020.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ UN OSAGI, *Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security*.

²⁴⁰ *Assuring our Common Future*, “Summary of Securing our Common Future,” 2020.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² ECOSOC, *ECOSOC Youth Forum*.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ OAS, *Department of Social Inclusion*.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

Conflict, Arms Control, and the Environment

The intrinsic link between conflict and the environment has been brought to the front of multilateral discussions on preserving international peace and security.²⁴⁶ The exploitation of natural resources as well as unfair distribution practices are significant motivators behind intrastate conflict, and the threat continues to grow with climate change and environmental degradation.²⁴⁷ In other cases, conflict scenarios result directly from the looting of valuable natural resources by armed groups.²⁴⁸ Countries with weak institutions are particularly vulnerable to these situations, which are often exacerbated by existing ethnic or religious divides across state borders.²⁴⁹ For example, since 1990, 75% of civil wars taking place on the African continent have been funded by natural resource revenues.²⁵⁰ Such exploitation can result in land being prioritized for activities such as mineral mining and extraction which can have devastating effects on the environment if not regulated properly, which is difficult to do in the presence of war and violence.²⁵¹

Furthermore, war can often lead to the collapse of rule of law and cause a spike in illicit activities, such as smuggling and poaching, which can also have adverse environmental impacts.²⁵² For example, the demand for ivory has led to terrorists and militias from the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan to travel and poach elephants for their tusks.²⁵³ The revenue obtained from the illicit sale of ivory would fund armed groups in these countries and help them purchase more weapons.²⁵⁴ The result of these activities further fuels the conflict raging in these countries and risks further harm for animals that are already endangered species.²⁵⁵

Furthermore, weapons and violence can directly inhibit conservation of precious land and habitats.²⁵⁶ After the civil war in Angola came to an end, the country was left plagued by landmines and unexploded war ordnance.²⁵⁷ A dense belt of landmines was left within the Cuando Cubango province, which holds the headwaters that feed southern Africa's Okavango Delta, a previous habitat that is home to one of the world's largest elephant herd populations.²⁵⁸ The presence of these landmines made applying conservation measures within the Angolan headwaters difficult.²⁵⁹ By partnering with non-governmental organizations like The HALO Trust, the government of Angola invested resources into removing the landmines so that conservation measures can safely be applied to the Okavango headwaters.²⁶⁰

Affected states, civil society, and subject experts have long considered what is needed to adequately address the challenges presented by the environmental dimensions of armed conflict.²⁶¹ Arms control in the form of reducing military spending has been proposed as a viable path forward, as this would open up the resources urgently needed to address the effects of climate change.²⁶² To demonstrate the vast potential of climate change, estimates show just 10% of current global military spending could generously cover the costs associated with adapting to climate change in all developing countries.²⁶³ One way this

²⁴⁶ Pax for Peace, *UN Security Council discusses the protection of the environment during armed conflict*, 2018.

²⁴⁷ Planet Security Initiative, *Signs of Progress: Environment and Conflict in the UN Security Council*, 2020.

²⁴⁸ UN Secretary-General, *Remarks to Security Council on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security: The Root Causes of Conflict – The Role of Natural Resources*, 2018.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ UN DGC, *States Must Transform Natural Resources from Driver of Conflict into Development Tool to Foster Peace, Cooperation, Secretary-General Tells Security Council*, 2018.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² National Geographic, *How Killing Elephants Finances Terror in Africa*, 2015.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ The HALO Trust, *The Okavango Delta*, 2022.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Planet Security Initiative, *Signs of Progress: Environment and Conflict in the UN Security Council*, 2020.

²⁶² *Assuring our Common Future*, "Disarmament, Climate and Sustainable Development," 2020.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

disarmament proposal has been operationalized, particularly in countries lacking significant military expenditures, is through national action curtailing investment in weapons industries.²⁶⁴ In 2012 for example, Switzerland passed the Swiss War Materials Act, which led to the country divesting its state pension funds from the nuclear weapons industry.²⁶⁵

Conclusion

The connection between international security and sustainable development is established and pursued by the 2030 Agenda, with its objectives serving as qualifiers of a peaceful and prosperous society.²⁶⁶ Violent conflict not only jeopardizes peace and stability, but the overall development of the afflicted society.²⁶⁷ Modern patterns of violence are posing a major threat to sustainable development as conflict evolves beyond the capacity of prevention measures such as disarmament and arms limitation.²⁶⁸ The proliferation of various types of weapons has a very profound impact on the international community and impacts the ability of many societies to sustainably grow and prosper.²⁶⁹ Because lengthy and severe conflict scenarios are becoming the norm amid a fluctuating geopolitical landscape, the international community must revise the traditional approach to multilateral disarmament negotiations to comprehensively address the realities of modern violence.²⁷⁰

Further Research

Moving forward, delegates should consider the following questions: How can regional policy frameworks and norms regarding disarmament and armed conflict prevention be scaled at the UN level? What topics should the development and disarmament GGE consider in future meetings? What are recent developments in patterns of armed conflict that were not considered in the initial GGE report? What challenges do the rise of non-state actors pose for disarmament and how can the international community address these challenges at scale? How can environmental protection be integrated into current disarmament efforts?

Annotated Bibliography

Bonn International Center for Conversion and the United Nations Department of Peace. (2021). *The Evolving Nature of DDR: Study on Engaging armed groups across the peace continuum*. Retrieved 23 March 2022 from:

https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_study_the_evolution_nature_of_armed_groups_public_final_09.07.2021.pdf

This report is the most recent study of how DDR programs have adapted with new approaches, tools, and strategies in response to the challenges presented by modern conflict including the rise in non-state actors, more frequent and localized violence, and complex transnational criminal networks. These methods are analyzed in relation to the capacity of current DDR initiatives' capacity to meet the needs of ex-combatants, their families, and the communities they return to. Delegates will find this document useful for the questions it poses about how to continue adapting DDR programs for present need and whether there is a guaranteed future for DDR as it stands in UN peacekeeping.

Nakamitsu, Izumi. (2016). *Advancing Disarmament within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Retrieved 22 March 2022 from: <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/advancing-disarmament-within-2030-agenda-sustainable-development>

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Nakamitsu, *Advancing Disarmament within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*; UN DGC, *A New Era of Conflict and Violence*.

²⁶⁷ UNODA, *Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, 2018

²⁶⁸ Ibid; Nakamitsu, *Advancing Disarmament within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

This analysis from the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs covers various SDGs and how disarmament activities directly advance their objectives. Delegates will find this to be a key resource when thinking about the full breadth of the impact of weapons on society and creatively thinking of solutions that can be carried out by the UN system and international actors.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. (2018). *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*. Retrieved 23 March 2022 from: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/sg-disarmament-agenda-pubs-page.pdf>

This document is the most recent framework setting the standard for all UN disarmament activity and is a critical for delegates to familiarize themselves with as they begin their research. Overseen by the Secretary-General, this framework operationalizes the idea that disarmament plays an important role in the overall development agenda, serving as a blueprint for integrating forms of disarmament into development strategies. Delegates will find this document useful for developing solutions germane to current priorities and within the operational ability of current programming.

United Nations University. (2015). *UN DDR in an Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for Purpose?*. Retrieved 22 March 2022 from: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-ddr>

This report is drawn from a study conducted by the United Nations University as a part of an effort to determine how humanitarian development. It also covers how security actors must adapt to reduce conflict amid the changing nature of violence and its consequences for society. Noting the increasing reliance on DDR to reign in armed groups, the analysis provides a detailed discussion on how well DDR fits into modern conflict trends.

Youth 4 Disarmament Initiative. (2021). *How disarmament and arms control contribute to sustainable development*. Retrieved 22 March 2022 from: <https://www.youth4disarmament.org/news/how-disarmament-and-arms-control-contribute-sustainable-development>

This webpage by Youth 4 Disarmament Initiative provides a high-level and comprehensive overview of how disarmament relates to sustainable development. The page is a strong resource to gain a general understanding of how the concepts overlap. It also serves as a good starting point to explore and branch out to other sources of understanding on the topic.

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