

2022 WAMUN Committee Topics

Topic 1: Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control

With the adoption of the [Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) in 1979, the United Nations recognized the importance of complete disarmament in achieving full equality between men and women. Since then, the international community has increasingly examined the unique, nuanced and diverse ways in which armed conflict disproportionately affects women, and often in gender-specific ways. In 2019, [96 percent of conflict-related sexual violence](#) targeted women and girls. Explosive weapons also often target marketplaces, the second highest location for civilian casualties, which [disproportionately affects women](#), who are often responsible for buying food and household necessities at markets. Despite carrying many of the burdens of the consequences of conflict, women tend to be underrepresented in decisions that are made regarding disarmament, with only [three out of every 10](#) peace agreements between 1992 and 2019 including any women in their negotiation or signing. Ensuring the equitable representation of women's voices on the issues of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control is necessary to promote collective security and stability for all Member States, as research has shown that peace talks which meaningfully involve women yield a [greater likelihood](#) of lasting peace.

In 2000, the Security Council [passed a resolution](#) encouraging Member States to include the perspective of women in all fields of operations, including in peace negotiations, post-conflict reconstruction and disarmament. Subsequently, the Office of Disarmament Affairs adopted a [Gender Action Plan](#) in 2003 to explore the connection between disarmament and gender equality, incorporate gender into its ongoing work, and advocate for including gender perspectives and advocates in disarmament discussions. Progress in implementing this plan was slow and uneven; by 2004 the [Secretary-General noted](#) that women's participation in developing policies and guidelines had increased, while substantial gaps remained in directly including women in conflict resolution processes. The ad hoc nature of voluntary financial contributions for initiatives focused on increasing attention to gender perspectives, protecting the human rights of women and promoting women's participation in the arms control space have contributed to slow progress in the resolution's implementation. In 2006, the United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in 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 convened and established [concrete recommendations](#) for gender mainstreaming and including women in the implementation of the original 2001 United Nations [Programme of Action \(PoA\)](#), a foundational policy document in arms control. While the original PoA provided detailed policy recommendations, it did not discuss how the illicit small arms trade affects women or what their role is in addressing disarmament. The report created a set of guidelines focused on four areas: women's relevance in combating the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons; planning and implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; national and regional foci; and civil society and public awareness initiatives. These guidelines were reviewed again in [2010](#) and [2016](#) and have served as references for efforts moving forward.

The General Assembly passed a [resolution](#) in 2010 focused solely on women's role in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, the first of its kind, and adopted the [Arms](#)

[Trade Treaty \(ATT\)](#) in 2013, now the primary international agreement regulating the legal movement and transfer of arms. Articles Six and Seven of the ATT call on States to assess the risk of arms being used to commit violence against women and children and deny any arms transfer if there is an overriding risk that the arms may be used to commit or facilitate gender-based violence, finally formalizing the need to address gender in armed conflict. While the ATT marks a step toward progress in the women and arms control space, a lack of accountability mechanisms for States that violate the treaty, as well as the failure of many States to provide their assessed financial contributions for implementation efforts, may be [limiting the agreement's potential](#) to address gender-based violence.

With the adoption of the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) in 2015, the United Nations continued its efforts to address women's participation in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, notably through [Goal 5](#) on gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence and Goal 16 on reducing illicit arms trafficking. In 2018, the Secretary-General [reported](#) that some progress had been achieved among Member States in increasing female representation within their disarmament efforts. The United Nations has seen increased funding to the [United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women](#). Many countries have reported increased numbers of women in government and armed forces positions. Women increasingly participate in peace negotiations. The Office of Disarmament Affairs also implemented the [Women Scholarship for Peace initiative](#) to train young female professionals on peace, disarmament and non-proliferation, [leading to 170 early career female professionals](#) from the global South receiving scholarships in the program's first year. Despite this progress, [as of 2019](#), women still only account for 32 percent of the participants at disarmament meetings, and account for 24 percent of delegation heads in the General Assembly First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament and the Non-Proliferation Treaty preparatory committee meetings.

One outstanding issue is the lack of access and resources allocated to address the specific challenges facing women. [Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration \(DDR\)](#) programs provide support in many forms—including services, cash incentives, healthcare, training, travel remittance, small business grants or housing support—to halt conflict and reintegrate people and groups involved in armed conflict into society at large, contributing toward peace, security and disarmament. One barrier is that women [do not register for DDR programs](#) at a high level. Prevailing gender norms in some countries may prevent women from declaring themselves as members of an armed force out of fear for social stigma. Some DDR programs also [fail to sufficiently address the gender-specific needs](#) of either women and girls or men and boys, and how gender-specific needs fluctuate as gender norms change. Inhibiting access for women and girls to DDR support packages [makes it less likely](#) that they will make it to the negotiation table, and diminishes the likelihood that the economic and physical needs of women affected by armed conflict will be acknowledged, hindering the success of disarmament efforts.

Questions to consider from your country's perspective:

- What steps can the international community take to further implement the Arms Trade Treaty and reduce the risk of arms being used to perpetuate violence against women?
- How can the United Nations and Member States increase women's participation, at all levels, in the field of disarmament?

- How can Member States improve women’s access to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs? How can DDR programs be more responsive to the gender-specific needs of women?

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Topic 2: The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation

Consistent access to safely-managed sanitation and hygiene facilities and a sufficient supply of safe, affordable water for drinking, cooking and cleaning are fundamental human rights and universal necessities. While access to water, sanitation and hygiene has improved in the 21st century, [29 percent of the world’s population is still without access to safely-managed drinking water services](#) and [55 percent is without access to safely-managed sanitation services](#). Lack of access to these facilities also perpetuates other human rights issues, including [lack of access to education](#), [lack of safe healthcare facilities](#) and [gender inequality](#). Safe drinking water and sanitation facilities are [also frequently targeted in conflicts](#), with [forced displacement](#) during armed conflict further hindering access. Through [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 6](#), the United Nations has set the goal of achieving universal access to clean drinking water and equitable sanitation and hygiene services by 2030.

Treating access to water and sanitation as explicit human rights is a relatively recent concept, with neither right formally recognized in either the 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) or the 1966 [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#). The [final report of the 1977 United Nations Water Conference](#), the first international conference on water scarcity, was the first time the United Nations explicitly recognized water as an essential right, with “similar considerations” for sanitation. This shift led to the inclusion of language regarding water and sanitation in subsequent human rights documents, including [the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) and [the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

Recognition of the importance of access to water and sanitation grew rapidly with the turn of the century. In 2000, the United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for international development. [MDG Target 7.C](#) set the goal of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015. Two years later, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [formally acknowledged](#) that the rights to water and sanitation were implicit in the ICESCR’s articles on standards of living and health. In 2010, the General Assembly [explicitly recognized a human right to safe drinking water and sanitation for the first time](#), representing the culmination of these changes. [The Human Rights](#)

Council followed suit later that year. This also coincided with the international community [meeting the goals for water access set in MDG Target 7.C](#).

Building on these successes, the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals included SDG 6, dedicated to ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030, and setting [eight specific targets](#) for measuring progress, ranging from increased development assistance for water and sanitation facilities to greater integrated water resources management implementation. That same year, [at the urging of non-governmental organizations \(NGOs\)](#), the General Assembly recognized the right to safe drinking water and the right to sanitation as separate human rights, due in large part to [a consistent lack of focus on sanitation access](#).

In 2016, the General Assembly [declared the period from 2018 to 2028](#) as the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development,” with the goal of increasing discussion around best practices for providing universal water resources. [Numerous reports](#) and resolutions across the United Nations system have highlighted the importance of water and sanitation access and [outlined regional strategies](#) for progressive realization of SDG 6. In their commemorative report on progress made between 2010 and 2020, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation [identified three critical components](#) of a human rights-based approach to water and sanitation: assessing the root causes that drive exclusion from access to water and sanitation, incorporating the human rights framework into policy making and ensuring that people in affected communities, particularly those in marginalized groups, remain centered and protected in all decisions.

Despite notable progress and consistent attention from the United Nations and NGOs, the international community [is currently far from ensuring universal access](#) to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2030. While the United Nations continues to highlight the importance of sustainable development in meeting the need for water and sanitation access, [large development projects often fail to utilize a human rights-based approach](#), leading to further harms against the communities they are ostensibly supposed to benefit. There is also [significant competition for water use](#) in the agricultural, industrial and energy sectors, creating conflict over limited water resources. Climate change also exacerbates water and sanitation issues, further straining existing resources as access and affordability remain central challenges to securing the right to water and sanitation.

Unequal attention to the right to sanitation has also been a significant challenge to achieving SDG 6, with progress on and funding for sanitation-related goals [lagging far behind](#) those for safe drinking water. The COVID-19 pandemic [has demonstrated the inherent risks](#) of lack of sanitation and hygiene access, with lack of handwashing facilities and sanitation facilities contributing to further spread of the virus. Implementing safe, accessible, affordable and culturally appropriate sanitation and hygiene facilities alongside improving water access is necessary to meet the needs of all peoples and ensure the full enjoyment of their human rights.

Questions to consider from your country’s perspective:

- How can the United Nations help to ensure that implementation of new water and sanitation-related development projects and new technologies follow a human rights-based approach?
- How can the international community ensure that the realization of the right to sanitation is met with the same level of effort as the right to safe drinking water?
- How can the international community expand access to safe drinking water and sanitation in the face of climate change, water pollution and other threats to the water supply?
- How can the Human Rights Council help secure the rights of marginalized groups which disproportionately suffer from a lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation?

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