TOPIC A: Consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures

Practical disarmament measures attempt to control the use of small arms, particularly those illicitly traded across borders and those used in conflict areas. Unregulated arms pose many threats and are often used in organized crimes, but light munitions, firearms and single-user weaponry have been used in terrorist attacks worldwide, which adds a layer of complexity to the problem. A notable spike in small arms use occurred in 2016 in Southeast Asia, marking the spread of small arms and an increased use in terrorism. Because small arms are easy to access and hard to trace, their regulation is key to minimizing their destructive potential.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the First Committee laid the groundwork for its current debate and efforts on the issue of disarmament. Early debate surrounded defining the issue at large, including what constitutes small arms and how unregulated small arms trade and smuggling threatens international peace and security. In 1988, the Committee debated the structural issues that lead to illicit arms trade, including border security and transitioning former combatants back into society. In 1995, the First Committee explicitly stated the link between illicit arms trade and violence, stating, “arms obtained through the illicit arms trade are most likely to be used for violent purposes and that even small arms when so obtained… can pose a danger to regional and international security.” In 1996, the General Assembly established the Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures. This group, led by Germany, conducts research and discussions regarding best practices in post-conflict disarmament, with a special focus on small arms and light weapons. Its deliberations were frequently cited in First Committee debate.

In November 2000, the First Committee called for the Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, which would build upon the foundational work the First Committee and the international community had built. The Conference resulted in the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA), which lays out various goals at the national, regional and global levels to reduce arms trading. In 2005, the General Assembly adopted standards for marking and tracking small arms laid out in the International Tracing Instrument (ITI). Under the ITI, Member States are obligated to mark and track small arms within their borders. The ITI was not without flaws; many Member States were, and remain, functionally unable to live up to the ITI’s obligations. Monetary requirements, regional and domestic stability and the prevalence of crime and terrorist organizations make implementing tracking standards difficult. Without consistently implemented tracking standards, the First Committee may never meet the goals laid out in the PoA.

In the past 15 years, the focus of practical disarmament efforts has been in volatile post-conflict areas, in which the presence of small arms increases the likelihood of renewed hostilities or violent crime. Post-conflict disarmament has been closely linked to demobilization and reintegration, aiding former members of armed groups on their reentry into civilian life. In the early 2010s, the First Committee focused on promoting regional approaches to conflict resolution. Regional approaches also encourage development as a way to subvert demand for small arms, reducing conflict and crime and, therefore, illicit small arms trading. The General Assembly stressed the importance of tracking small arms by a cooperative effort between Member States. Its 2014 work noted that, in cases where there are existing peacekeeping operations, Member States may be able to leverage peacekeepers’ presence in post-conflict zone disarmament efforts.

In 2016, the Secretary-General commissioned a report on all aspects of illicit small arms trade, including post-conflict practical disarmament. This report stressed the importance of reducing surplus arms.
stockpiles, defined as “the weapons and ammunition that do not constitute an operational need.” This report also called attention to managing stockpiles in countries neighboring conflict zones, which can be vulnerable to diversion. In particular, countries neighboring conflict zones often are sources of additional small arms, and arms regulation and tracking among these Member States can be key to small arms reduction later on during post-conflict reconciliations.

Despite the recent progress in addressing the issue of practical disarmament, many challenges remain. First, the changing nature of conflict in recent years has necessitated disarmament efforts where high levels of organized violence persist, whether conducted by States, explicitly political non-state actors or criminal organizations. This means that the disarmament efforts must be protected, often by peacekeepers or the forces of the Member State. It also means that many tracking efforts are limited and suffer from a lack of resources. Second, disarmament efforts have recently begun to encompass non-state actors like terrorist groups and rebel militias that may not have an interest in a lasting peace or an obligation under international law. The presence and influence of non-state actors increases the demand for small arms and, subsequently, creates a need for situational intelligence and possibilities for corruption or co-optation of disarmament processes. Finally, disarmament efforts have become increasingly linked to development, such as to better address the root causes of the conflict in question and prevent future conflict; simply put, if a region is stable, there is significantly reduced illicit arms trade. The success of future efforts is likely dependent on the ability of the United Nations to address these challenges and opportunities.

Questions to consider

- What are the primary difficulties in your region when implementing the ITI? How can your region overcome these difficulties and what resources are needed to do so?
- How much effort should be made toward removal of small arms from active conflict zones? In such circumstances, how should the disarmament mission be protected?
- What incentives should be provided to armed groups to decommission their arms and ammunition? How can such groups be prevented from purchasing new weapons with the incentives provided for decommissioning existing stockpiles?

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TOPIC B: Education for Democracy

Democratic governance and popular representation in government are core rights identified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. To support democratization and democracy across the world, the United Nations has encouraged the empowerment of civilians and their participation in policymaking at all levels through many avenues, including recently a focus on education for democracy. Educating citizens about democratic principles, from democratic participation to the protection of human rights, builds a strong foundation to support democratic governance. At the same time, the United Nations recognizes that democracy takes many forms, so its focus has been on encouraging and developing the ideals that make a government democratic, rather than promoting one specific model of government. Even so, electoral democracies around the world have grown substantially from the 1970s onward, with both the proportion of electoral democratic governments and proportion of the world’s population living in electoral democracies rapidly increasing between 1975 and 2015, the latter more than doubling over that time period as numerous new electoral democracies emerged as the result of decolonization and the end of the Cold War.

In 1974, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) adopted the Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which proposed a structure for national education programs to instill respect and understanding of human rights. According to the most recent quadrennial report requested by the Recommendation in 2017, nearly all of the 83 Member States that responded to the UNESCO survey had included principles of peace and non-violence, cultural diversity and human rights in their national education curricula. These principles help establish an environment where democratic governance is effective by helping to define the roles of people and governments with respect to each other. The role of UNESCO in promoting education for democracy eventually culminated in the 1992 International Forum on Education for Democracy in Tunis, where UNESCO discussed the
purpose of education both in building democratic traditions in new democracies and in combating
democratic apathy in old ones.

Since the 1992 UNESCO forum, education for democracy efforts have entered into the purviews of many
United Nations organizations, each approaching the issue from different perspectives. The United Nations
Development Programme considers education and democratic ideals as development goals, particularly
given their status in the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2004 the General Assembly proclaimed the
World Programme for Human Rights Education, which built off the achievements of the United Nations
Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) and planned to improve human rights education in
phases, first targeting primary and secondary education from 2005 to 2009, then moving on to focus on
other facets of education. The United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) was founded in 2005 and funds
projects in burgeoning democracies to strengthen the voice of civil society, call attention to human rights
and facilitate the participation of all groups in democratic processes, with a large emphasis on projects
that allow for more participation by women. UN Women, founded in 2010, also uses a gendered approach
to education for democracy, seeking to increase representation of women in political systems.

The General Assembly first directly addressed this issue in November 2012 with the passage of
Resolution 67/18, Education for Democracy. In this resolution, the General Assembly tied together the
previous work done for education for democracy; the resolution encouraged Member States to integrate
human rights and citizens empowerment into domestic education systems and called upon the various
United Nations organizations to assist in sharing their expertise. This resolution also coincided with then-
Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon’s launch of the five-year Global Education First initiative to accelerate
progress on the education-related Millennium Development Goals, including fostering the democratic
ideal of global citizenship by supporting individual projects across the world that promote access to
education and civic engagement.

In its most recent resolution on Education for Democracy, the General Assembly has placed Education for
Democracy squarely in terms of Sustainable Development Goal 4, “ensuring quality education for all,”
and the Education 2030 Framework for Action for meeting this goal. In particular, the resolution ties
together education for democracy, human rights, and civic education and education for sustainable
development, and calls on Member States to integrate all of these into their education standards.

Past efforts to implement education for democracy initiatives have struggled in some developing
countries due to insufficient standard education infrastructure for these programs to build upon. This
problem is particularly exacerbated by conflict, where instability and refugee crises undermine the reach
of educational programs. The March 2018 report “It’s Her Turn” from the United Nations High
Commissioner for Refugees, revealed that refugee girls are only half as likely as their male peers to enroll
in school by the time they reach secondary education, and highlighted some of the challenges girls face
that cause this discrepancy.

Questions for Consideration:

- How does the the General Assembly participate alongside UNESCO, UN Women and other
  United Nations organizations in promoting education for democracy?
- How can democratic ideals be promoted in ways that do not conflict with social, cultural or
  political traditions?
- How does the role of education for democracy differ between established democracies and newer,
  more fragile ones?
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