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QUICK GUIDE

TO SMALL ARMS
ISSUES IN
"SECURING OUR
COMMON FUTURE"
SECRETARY-GENERAL
ANTÓNIO GUTERRES'
AGENDA FOR
DISARMAMENT





Please scan this QR Code
to access the Secretary General's
official Agenda for disarmament



THE COVER DEPICTS ORIZURU, AN ORIGAMI PAPER CRANE.

INTRODUCTION

In May 2018, the United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres, called for renewed global efforts on disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons to enhance global peace and security. He set out his reasons in a new 87-page disarmament agenda called “*Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*.”¹

The Secretary General’s Agenda is rooted in his belief that: “We are living in dangerous times. Protracted conflicts are causing unspeakable human suffering. Armed groups are proliferating, equipped with a vast array of weapons. Global military spending and competition in arms are increasing, and the tensions of the cold war have returned to a world that has grown more complex. In today’s multipolar environment, the mechanisms for contact and dialogue that once helped to defuse tensions between two super-powers have eroded and lost their relevance.”²

*My agenda for disarmament aims to be comprehensive, but not exhaustive. It proposes solutions, and it raises questions. It is not intended to replace the responsibilities of Member States, nor is it meant to impose any specific measures on them. My hope is that this agenda will reinvigorate dialogue and negotiations on international disarmament, stimulate new ideas and create new momentum.*³

The Agenda requires ‘decisive action’ on:

- **‘disarmament to save humanity’** by eliminating nuclear weapons and preventing any use of chemical and biological weapons prohibited by the international community, as well as to prevent the emergence of new and destabilizing strategic weapons, including in outer space.⁴
- **‘disarmament that saves lives’** in order to reverse the over-accumulation of all types of conventional arms, including small arms, light weapons and their ammunition, and prevent their misuse.⁵ “We must put people at the centre of our disarmament efforts, and ensure disarmament that saves lives today and tomorrow. We owe this to the millions of people killed, injured and uprooted from their homes, in the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, Mali and elsewhere.”⁶
- **‘disarmament for future generations’** because “new weapon technologies are increasing risks, including from the ability of non-State actors to carry out attacks across international boundaries. In many recent conflicts, the laws of humanity have been disregarded and prohibited weapons, such as chemical munitions, have returned to the battlefield. Conventional explosives are being used in cities with devastating impacts on civilians and their surroundings.”⁷
- **‘strengthening partnerships for disarmament’** in order to integrate disarmament and non-proliferation efforts into the priorities of the whole United Nations system, and forge greater collaboration between the United Nations, governments, civil society, the private sector and others.⁸

¹ United Nations Secretary General, *Securing Our Common Future – An Agenda for Disarmament*, Office for Disarmament Affairs, New York, May 2018, (hereafter *Securing Our Common Future*) a booklet of 73 pages electronically available in PDF and e-book formats from www.un.org/disarmament/sg-agenda

² *Securing Our Common Future*, Foreword, p. vii, para. 1 ³ *Ibid.*, Foreword, p. viii, para. 2 ⁴ *Ibid.*, Executive Summary, p. x, paras. 2-3 ⁵ *Ibid.*, Executive Summary, p. x, paras. 4-5 ⁶ *Ibid.*, Foreword, p. vii, para. 5 ⁷ *Ibid.*, Executive Summary, p. ix, para. 2 ⁸ *Ibid.*, Foreword, p. viii, para. 3

“

We are living in dangerous times. Cold War tensions are back, global military spending is at its highest **and protracted conflicts** are causing unspeakable human suffering. This is why I launched my disarmament agenda.”

António Guterres
United Nations Secretary-General



24 MAY 2018 GENEVA, SWITZERLAND UN PHOTO/JEAN-MARC FERRÉ

THE NEED FOR A NEW DISARMAMENT AGENDA

In his report, the Secretary General describes the new international security challenges:

- **Deteriorating International Security:** The re-emergence of strategic tensions between the major powers is taking place against a resurgence of civil conflict, after more than two decades of decline. Owing in no small part to the widespread and increasing availability of military-grade and improvised weapons, armed conflicts have become more frequent, longer and more devastating for civilians. Civil wars are interconnected with regional and global rivalries. They involve many actors, such as violent extremists, terrorists, organized militias and criminal elements, equipped with various types of weapons.⁹
- **Increasing Complexity of Conflicts:** Governance of the international system has also grown more complex, with a growing multiplicity of interests that are challenging consensus-based disarmament processes. Many disarmament commitments and promises entered into at the end of the cold war have gone unfulfilled, including practical steps to reduce dangers, ease international tensions, and ultimately bring us closer to a safer and more secure world.¹⁰
- **Economic Costs:** Increasing militarization is evident in many parts of the world. Global military spending has more than doubled in inflation-adjusted dollars since the end of the cold war. A 2017 study found that 12.6 per cent of the gross world product was devoted to containing all forms of violence. More than \$1.7 trillion was spent on militaries and their equipment. This is vastly disproportionate to other urgent needs.¹¹
- **The World Remains Grossly Over-Armed.** Military industries have continued high levels of production and found new markets. Massive conventional arms build-ups are continuing unabated in other parts of the world, especially in certain conflict-prone regions. While we have seen stagnation in conventional arms control at the global level, the absence of disarmament and arms control at the regional, national and local levels has been disastrous.¹²

⁹ Ibid., p. 3 and 10 ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 3 ¹¹ Ibid., p. 4 and 46-47 ¹² Ibid., p. 33

THE ROLE OF DISARMAMENT

- **Not a Simplistic or Utopian Vision:** Disarmament is at the heart of the system of collective security set out in the United Nations Charter. The purpose of this system was nothing less than the elimination of war as an instrument of foreign policy “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. Article 26 recognizes the need to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion of the world's economic and human resources to arms.¹³
- **Protecting Civilians:** Since the end of the Second World War, a central disarmament concern has been the protection of civilians from the effects of armed conflict. This has been principally achieved through ensuring that all parties to armed conflict respect and comply at all times with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law.¹⁵
- **Preventing Armed Conflict and Mitigate its Impacts:** Measures for disarmament are pursued for many reasons, including: to maintain international peace and security, uphold the principles of humanity, protect civilians, promote sustainable development, and prevent and end armed conflict. Just as the notion of security has evolved to place humans at the centre, the objectives and language of disarmament need to evolve in order to contribute
- **Multi-level Initiatives:** Measures for arms control and disarmament also play a critical role at the global and regional levels for the prevention of armed conflict, ensuring stability and ending gender-based violence. At the global level, measures are designed to ensure respect for international humanitarian and humanitarian rights law. At the national and local levels, arms control contributes to preventing armed violence more broadly.¹⁶

PREVENTING THE EXCESSIVE ACCUMULATION AND ILLICIT TRADE IN SMALL ARMS

The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition is a key enabler of armed violence and conflict. High levels of arms and ammunition in circulation contribute to insecurity, cause harm to civilians, facilitate human rights violations and impede humanitarian access. Armed violence committed with small arms tears apart communities, burdens the affordable provision of healthcare and inhibits economic investment. They are used to challenge local authority, including police activities and electoral processes.¹⁷

The Disarmament Toolbox: The international community has sought to codify and develop rules to prohibit and restrict specific types of weapons and arms transfers, to enhance public safety, prevent theft and diversion, and combat crime, including measures to:

- Eliminate inhumane weapons, such as anti-personnel landmines.
- Prohibit and restrict the use of certain types of weapons by certain types of users.
- Regulate the, trade, physical security and stockpile management.
- Enhance transparency and confidence-building through sharing information and cooperation.¹⁸

Managing Stockpiles: In many countries, arms depots are inadequately managed and located in populated areas. Unplanned explosions at munitions sites can have devastating consequences for local communities and result in high levels of casualties, injuries, displacement and environmental damage. The safe and secure management of stockpiles can help to prevent such incidents. Inadequate physical security can also result in diversion of arms to illicit markets, including to non-State armed groups, terrorists and transnational criminal organizations. Destruction of unstable and surplus arms and ammunition is the preferred and most economical long-term solution, and requires proper stockpile management.¹⁹

Gender-responsive disarmament and arms control: The ownership and use of small arms is closely linked to specific expressions of masculinity related to control, power, domination and strength. Men constitute a massive majority of the owners of small arms and young men constitute the vast majority of perpetrators of armed violence. Women, however, are more frequently the victims of gender-based violence facilitated by small arms, including domestic violence and sexual violence. Women can also bear indirect impacts of armed violence, in-

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 6

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7 and 12

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45

cluding psychological and economic burdens. All States should refrain from authorizing any export of arms, or their parts, components and ammunition if there is an overriding risk that these items will be used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence.²⁰

Need for a Holistic Approach: Efforts by the United Nations to address the problems posed by illicit small arms have been fragmented and limited. This issue has been addressed from the perspectives of peace and security, gender and equality, transnational crime, humanitarian action, counter-terrorism and trade regulation. The current paradigm of short-term and compartmentalized projects to address small arms control is not keeping up with the seriousness and magnitude of the problem.

Increased Resources: There is a clear need for the United Nations to pursue a new model for sustained and coherent funding for international assistance for the control of small arms and light weapons. To meet this need, the Secretary-General will establish a multi-partner trust facility through the Peacebuilding Fund to provide a more sustainable solution with a strong development focus. The country-level approaches will be developed in collaboration with the affected States and the support of United Nations country teams.²¹

Accurate data: Disaggregated data on the category of arms used can contribute to evidence-based dialogue to support the development of practice, policies and norms at the global, regional and national levels aimed at protecting civilians. It can also assist States in implementing Security Council-mandated arms embargoes, as well as in undertaking risk assessments applicable to transfers of conventional weapons pursuant to national export regulations and to international treaties to which they are party.²²

Effective Partnerships: Disarmament initiatives have been most successful when they involved effective partnerships between all the relevant stakeholders—Governments, the expert community and civil society organizations—as well as strong interest and support from the general public and well-functioning international negotiation forums. Civil society plays an indispensable role in all aspects of disarmament.²³

Empowering the young generation: Young people have tremendous force to bring about change in the world. Young people today are more cosmopolitan, more internationalists and more open. They are more likely to reject the xenophobia, intolerance and racism that are reappearing in many of our societies and giving popular support for fear-based military and security policies.²⁴

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 39 and 66-67 ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41 ²² *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35 ²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 61 ²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68

THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE AGENDA



DISARMAMENT TO SAVE HUMANITY

Reduce and eliminate weapons of mass destruction



DISARMAMENT THAT SAVES LIVES

Reduce and mitigate the impact of conventional weapons



DISARMAMENT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Remain vigilant regarding new and emerging weapon technologies



STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS FOR DISARMAMENT

Reinvigorate disarmament institutions and partner with Governments, experts, civil society, women and youth

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) AND DISARMAMENT

Disarmament and the regulation of arms are essential to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²⁵



SDG Target 16.1 - Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

SDG Target 16.4 - By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime



SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being.

Armed Violence is among the leading causes of premature death, and it victimizes even more people by spreading injuries, disability, psychological distress and disease. Disarmament and arms control reduce the impact of conflict on human health.



SDG 4: Quality Education. Limiting the proliferation and uncontrolled circulation of weapons in communities contributes to safe and non-violent learning environments for all. Disarmament education contributes to education on peace and non-violence, conflict resolution, sustainable development, gender equality, economic justice, human rights and tolerance of cultural diversity.



SDG 5: Gender Equality. Men and women are affected differently by the proliferation and use of weapons. Young men are overwhelmingly responsible for the misuse of small arms. While men make up most direct casualties, women are more frequently victims of gender-based violence that small arms facilitate. Regulating arms and ammunition can reduce violence against women and girls in both public and private spheres. Empowering women and ensuring their equal and meaningful participation in disarmament and arms control decision-making processes can lead to more inclusive, effective and sustainable policy outcomes.



SDG 8: Decent work and Economic Growth. Excessive military spending harms economic growth and can produce undesirable social and political consequences. Reducing military budgets can reduce

the negative effects of this spending on economic and social development. Stemming the proliferation and easy availability of arms can counter the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Opportunities to build decent livelihoods can attract young men away from armed groups or gangs. Adequate arms regulation helps prevent illicit transfers of weapons in support of human trafficking, modern slavery or forced labour.



SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities. Measures for disarmament can reduce military expenditures and redirect public resources/spending towards social and economic initiatives that can contribute to greater equality.



SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. Effective ammunition management mitigates the risk of storage depots accidentally exploding in populated areas. These explosions, when they occur, are humanitarian disasters that lead to death, injury, economic loss, displacement and destruction of infrastructure and private property. Arms control measures increase urban safety and security by curbing the uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of small arms, particularly for gang-related violence.



SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals. Mobilizing sufficient resources in support of disarmament and arms regulation is critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Increased availability of high-quality, timely, disaggregated and reliable arms-related data can inform discussions about the relationship between disarmament, development, peace and security, leading to better decisions and policies.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9

IMPLEMENTING THE AGENDA

The Secretary General's Agenda includes an implementation plan with 40 actions that will be carried out by various entities in and beyond the United Nations system. The implementation plan is a living document with a website that details activities on which no action has been taken yet, are in development, or are in progress. New steps and activities will be added as needed, and major updates will be disseminated through UNODA's social media account and its website.²⁶

Actions include:

Action 20:

Establish a dedicated trust fund on small arms. The Secretary-General will establish a facility within his Peacebuilding Fund to support government action on small arms and light weapons. Titled "Saving Lives Entity (SALIENT)," this multi-partner trust facility is part of a comprehensive approach to addressing armed violence and the diversion of weapons, and is a contribution to Target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Action 21:

Build understanding on the impact of arms on conflict management. The excessive accumulation, uncontrolled proliferation, and mismanagement of conventional arms fuels and prolongs armed conflicts. As part of the Secretary-General's ambition to put prevention at the core of the United Nations' work, activities under this action point aim at understanding and strengthening the interconnected nature of arms control and conflict prevention activities, including risk analysis frameworks.

Action 22:

Secure excessive and poorly maintained stockpiles. The United Nations, through its coordinating mechanism on small arms under the leadership of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, will promote more effective State and regional action on excessive and poorly maintained stockpiles in all available forums and through its regional centres, as well as through new and existing partnerships.

Action 28:

Encourage responsible innovation of science and technology. The Secretary-General will engage and work with scientists, engineers and industry to encourage responsible innovation of science and technology, to ensure its application for peaceful purposes, as well as the responsible dissemination of knowledge, in conformity with the principles and objectives of the United Nations.

Action 35:

Increase engagement with regional organizations. The Office for Disarmament Affairs, together with the Department of Political Affairs, will increase its engagement with regional organizations to explore new opportunities and strengthen existing platforms for regional dialogue on security and arms control.

Action 36:

Full and equal participation of women in decision-making processes. The Secretary-General calls for the full and equal participation of women in all decision-making processes related to disarmament and international security.

Action 37:

Gender parity on disarmament bodies established by the Secretariat. The Secretary-General will work to achieve gender parity on all panels, boards, expert groups and other bodies established under his auspices in the field of disarmament.

Action 38:

Establish a platform for youth engagement. The Office for Disarmament Affairs, in partnership with all interested entities, will further invest in disarmament education, including through the establishment of a platform for youth engagement. Education and training opportunities will be established to create a platform for the sustainable entry of young people into the field of disarmament. This platform will facilitate access to tools, training and networks to address problems where measures for disarmament, demilitarization and the prevention of armed violence can make a difference.

Action 40:

Integrate experts, industry and civil society in disarmament bodies. Civil society actors play a crucial role in advocating for progress in disarmament and non-proliferation. To further support these efforts, the Office for Disarmament Affairs will work to strengthen public engagement to integrate the knowledge and experience of outside experts, civil society stakeholders and industry representatives in disarmament processes.

²⁶ For a complete list of the forty action points and more details on each one, visit: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/sg-agenda/en/#actions>



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