

2026 Joint Civil Society Statement on Disarmament Education and Youth Participation

Full Written Version of Statement Delivered by Eli Shirk of Pace University's International Disarmament Institute to the United Nations General Assembly First Committee (Disarmament and International Security), New York, 15 October 2026

Thank you, Chair.

Meaningful Participation of Youth

In the past several sessions of the First Committee, this statement has focused on the role of youth in disarmament, nonproliferation and arms control.

Indeed, young people face increasing shocks of genocide, climate catastrophe, systematic destruction of schools, hospitals, housing and cultural institutions, while global military spending reaches new heights. Meanwhile, young people are often at the forefront of social movements and advocacy campaigns generating political mobilization for disarmament, human rights and peace. Young people bring into disarmament discussions lived experience from conflict or crisis settings, fresh perspectives, moral clarity, activism, creativity.

In this regard, we are impressed by the significant advancements for youth inclusion in disarmament. The 2024 Pact for the Future included commitment to “accelerate ...commitments on youth, peace and security” (Action 20) and last year, Secretary-General António Guterres’ report on youth, disarmament and non-proliferation concluded that young people play a “vital role” and “as inheritors of peace, remain indispensable to building secure futures.” UNODA’s Youth4Disarmament and Youth Leaders Fund for a World without Nuclear Weapons are innovating exciting programming. Youth have delivered statements in numerous disarmament forums. Last year, the Youth4Disarmament Forum, a biennial platform for dialogue, collaboration, and policy shaping on disarmament issues focused our attention on the risks of nuclear weapons modernization and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity.

Disarmament Education

This year, however, we want to use this joint statement to shine particular light on disarmament education. All people, both young and old, benefit from understanding the risks posed by growing stockpiles of weapons. Disarmament education is a critical tool to advance on disarmament goals. Disarmament education can also serve as an antidote to the world's multiple crises, fostering a culture of peace and disarmament that can offer people agency in the face of shock, powerlessness and hopelessness.

This year marks the 24th anniversary of the 2002 UN Study on Disarmament and Non-proliferation Education. In 2002, the Secretary-General wrote: "Education and training remain important but underutilized tools for promoting peace, disarmament and non-proliferation." Despite the progress civil society and diplomatic attention has generated, this sentiment stands true still today.

The 2002 report reminds us that disarmament education is not only education *about* disarmament, but also *for* it.

In a time of rampant misinformation, denial and historical amnesia about armed violence, war and genocide, when leaders are making casual allusions to nuclear devastation, when militaries are turning over life and death decisions to software, when schools and universities themselves are targeted, we desperately need credible information, critical consciousness, moral and ethical reasoning and public engagement to build a more peaceful world.

Investment in disarmament education is thus crucial and is most impactful when sustainable, enabling long-term vision and strategy. UNODA offers useful tools online, including the UNODA Disarmament Education website and e-learning Dashboard. But these tools are only as meaningful if they are put to use.

Educators are often forgotten in discussions of youth programming and disarmament education. But they are the first line of contact with learners – they should be engaged as key partners in delivering disarmament education. They can promote awareness about arms production and militarization, help people understand international frameworks and inspire and empower people to seek a better future. Disarmament education is delivered by a diverse range of actors including teachers, professors, activists, and the media. Enhanced connections with and among these diverse educators, including through both global and regional educator networks, will build a more robust disarmament education community.

Survivors of violence, including the hibakusha, play a crucial role in educating people on the devastating humanitarian and environmental consequences of armed violence. We

are encouraged that role of hibakusha was highlighted in the recent joint statement by 116 states on disarmament education before the recent Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons (NPT).

There are significant barriers to accessing disarmament education, with participation constrained by intersecting forms of marginalization along lines of disability, gender, sexuality, race, class, caste, national origin and Indigeneity. UNODA's 2022 Disarmament Education Strategy highlighted "a pressing need for authoritative, far reaching, and inclusive disarmament education."

Inclusion is not just about offering space to marginalized people – it makes for a more robust and comprehensive educational landscape. We encourage you to look beyond formal institutions to other ways of knowing, other ways of transmitting wisdom, including Traditional and Indigenous Knowledges. We urge States to pursue jargon-free educational resources in numerous languages, user-friendly formats, and accessible to those with a range of abilities. We must share the hard-earned progress led by hibakusha, Indigenous peoples, gender minorities, and intersectional civil society organizations. We must emphasize the ability of young people to influence change so that they feel empowered to use their education.

It is also important to acknowledge that educational institutions can sometimes exacerbate militarization and have complicity with the military-industrial complex, whether through problematic curricula, weapons research or investment in arms.

Disarmament education should not just lament the horrifying reality we live in. It must engender the courage to imagine a more peaceful, just and sustainable world – a world free of nuclear weapons, automatic rifles and minefields, a world where legacies of violence find redress and humanitarian care. Disarmament education can help people develop knowledge, skills and context to think and engage critically on how to bring such a world into being.

Recommendations

Therefore, we urge delegations to:

1) Support the Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education Resolution, strengthening it by:

- Drawing linkages to the empowerment of youth, women and other marginalized people,

- Adding language on making disarmament education accessible to people with disabilities,
- Honoring and welcoming collaboration with hibakusha, survivors, civil society, educational institutions, Indigenous Peoples, and youth to inform more inclusive disarmament education.

2) Offer robust financial support for disarmament education programs, whether through formal educational institutions, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs and other international organizations or civil society. This is particularly important in an environment of overall decreasing investment in disarmament issues.

3) Make statements in support of disarmament education, articulating the role they see it playing in disarmament processes; offering examples of their own national policies, programs and practice; announcing contributions to specific projects; and drawing linkages to other pressing issues, such as climate action, human rights, sustainable development and gender equality.

4) Provide timely and detailed national submissions to the UN Secretary-General's reports on disarmament education and youth and disarmament.

5) Strengthen and institutionalize the role of education in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control treaties and other frameworks.

Finally, it is time to **mandate a new UN study on disarmament and non-proliferation education**. Much of the world's population was born after the original 2002 study was published. Much has happened in the world since then, including in the fields of disarmament and education. We need a better understanding of how technological changes are affecting both arsenals and classrooms. We need new insights into education pathways for disarmament.

Thank you.

Drawing on consultation with partners around the world, statement drafting led by students and faculty of Pace University's International Disarmament Institute.

Supporting Organizations

1. A world without chemical and biological weapons-www
2. Actors Rwanda
3. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)
4. Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy (AIDD)
5. Anfal story's Organization
6. Canadian Voice of Women for Peace
7. Conflict and Environment Observatory
8. Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas
9. Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft – Vereinigte KriegsdienstgegnerInnen e.V. (DFG-VK)
10. Development and Ability Organization DAO Afg
11. Disability Rights and Disarmament Initiative (DRDI)
12. Frauennetzwerk für Frieden e. V. / Women's Network for Peace, Germany
13. FundiPau (Fundacio per la Pau)
14. ICAN France
15. InterAgency Institute
16. International Disarmament Institute, Pace University
17. International Peace Bureau (IPB)
18. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)
19. Kurdistan organizations Network to Abolish Nuclear and Mass Destruction Weapons-KONW
20. Kurdish organizations Network coalition for the International Criminal court (KONCICC)
21. Kurdistan without Genocide
22. Kurdocide watch-chak Kurdistan
23. Legacies of War
24. Life campaign to abolish the death sentence in Kurdistan Network
25. Manawa Organization For Martyrs & Anfal's Inquiry
26. Mines Action Canada
27. Moruroa e tātou NGO (MET)
28. Naturefiends Greece
29. Nonviolence International Canada
30. Norwegian Physicians against Nuclear Weapons
31. Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance
32. Organization against Weapons of Mass Destruction in Kurdistan
33. Organization of the Justice Campaign
34. Our House Centre for Human Rights and Relief, Lithuania & Belarus

35. Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG)
36. Pax Christi USA
37. Pax Christi International
38. Pax Christi Ireland
39. Peace Boat
40. Peace Movement Aotearoa
41. Peoples Federation for National Peace and Development (PEFENAP)
42. PolicyLab Africa
43. Project Ploughshares
44. PROTECTION
45. Qazaq Nuclear Frontline Coalition (QNFC)
46. Regional Network on Peace and Stability (RENOPS)
47. Soka Gakkai International
48. United Nations Association UK
49. Vision GRAM-International
50. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
51. Women's International League For Peace and Freedom, Ghana
52. Youth Nuclear Peace Summit