

Women, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control

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Madam Chair, Excellencies,

It is indeed an honour to speak alongside such a distinguished panel on this vital and timely issue.

UNGA resolution 65/69 is an indispensable affirmation of women's right to participate in disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation at every level. Because that is right. And because it works for peace.

Quite simply: no women, no peace.

I have met and heard the stories from women experiencing the impact of armed violence all over the world, from Jamaica to Guatemala to Kenya to South Africa to Bosnia. The political situations vary, but the way in which armed violence tears apart their lives, and with it the fabric of society is the same. Without the participation of women in peace efforts and disarmament, those efforts are unlikely to be successful. The specific needs of women and girls must be taken into account. Their specific contribution must be valued if arms control and peace-building are to be achieved.

There are several ways in which civil society can help advance resolution 65/69's vital agenda, alongside governments and the UN itself.

First, by presenting evidence from our experience and research. Every day, Oxfam sees the need for greater participation of women, as we work on the ground with civil society partners around the world. We strive to understand the realities of conflict and armed violence, and in particular the impacts on women – how the battlefield has moved into villages and towns, and how, as a result, women and girls are differently, and often disproportionately, affected. We survey civilians in humanitarian crisis, such as eastern DRC, over time, to build up a powerful base of qualitative data on women's and men's experiences and perceptions of insecurity. These have been used to inform not only our own humanitarian response, but also that of regional and multilateral actors like Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

In so much of this experience and research, we consistently see that gender-based violence is widespread, often systematic, and grossly under-reported in all regions of the world. And that the proliferation of arms helps perpetuate these atrocities. In Eastern DRC, women that I met in IDP camps consistently told me that their biggest fear was not a lack of food or shelter, but “the men with guns”. Rape at gunpoint is a systematic strategy of war in many current chronic conflicts. In addition, research has shown that often in conflict and post-conflict situations violence perpetuated on the battlefield all too easily becomes violence perpetuated in the home.

This is one of the reasons why arms control is so important – at every level from the international through to the grassroots – and why Oxfam has engaged for so many years, like many governments here today, to deliver a genuinely effective Arms Trade Treaty. We must turn off the tap of weapons flooding in to some of the world’s worst conflict zones and poorest communities. Which brings me to the second way in which NGO’s can contribute, through advocacy and campaigning.

Women activists from all regions of the world have played a prominent role in the Control Arms Coalition, as well as in other important arms control campaigns such as the Cluster Munition Coalition and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. At the global level, Oxfam has helped to facilitate the participation of a wide range of women’s groups and gender experts in ongoing UN processes and events, and we have worked with many governments throughout the ATT negotiations.

We have conducted research with the Gender Action for Peace and Security network to illustrate the steps that governments should take to embed women’s rights into the Arms Trade Treaty, and worked with partners such as the IANSA Women’s Network and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom to advocate for their inclusion. Despite the failure to adopt the Treaty this July, we were encouraged by the inclusion of language on Gender Based Violence in the draft Treaty text that emerged, and by the 75 governments that spoke in favour of including this issue.

What is vital now is to make sure that the final ATT agreed - and it *must* be agreed urgently, and it is clear that the vast majority of states are in favour of this - prevents arms transfers where there is a risk that they will be used for violations of international human rights or humanitarian law, or where the transfer of arms undermines development. And it must also prevent the arms transfers that fuel

gender-based violence around the world. And it must include small arms and ammunition that are most often used in such violence.

Thirdly, NGOs contribute by advocating for the just and vital participation of women's organisations, in peace-building and arms control. This really is the most important point. Not to find policy solutions *for* women, but to do far, far more to open the space to allow policy solutions *by* women. To enable women to assert their rights in peacebuilding at every stage and more than ever before.

In Yemen local organisations are working to push for the inclusion of women in political dialogue and ensure that they aren't left out of the transition to democracy. Oxfam's new paper on Yemen published today, *Still Waiting for Change*, says precisely that. Women have played an important role on the front line of the protests in Yemen by calling for democratic reform. They should not be sidelined in talks to build a more stable and viable future for their country. When the Friends of Yemen meet in this city on 27 September, they must discuss the need for women to be centrally involved. As one woman recently told us in Yemen: *We wanted jobs, security, an end to corruption and an improvement in services. Instead, we can't afford food, there's no electricity and there are guns everywhere.'*

In conclusion, much more needs to be done at every level, to incorporate the needs, rights and voices of women in disarmament, arms control and peace processes, by not only bringing them to the table, but ensuring they are engaged at the earliest stage. And it must be done by us all, governments, the UN, and civil society.

Words and resolutions are important. But it is practical action that we need now.

So my appeal to you all today is don't just support the resolution. Do more and make it actually happen.

Thank you.
