

2025 Joint Civil Society Statement on Youth Participation and Disarmament Education

Full Written Version for Submission to the United Nations General Assembly First Committee (Disarmament and International Security), New York, 17 October 2025

Thank you, Chair.

Let us begin with good news:

Civil society advocacy and reinvigorated diplomatic attention have generated exciting progress in the field of youth and disarmament education over the last few years, particularly in the multilateral arena.

Youth have had opportunities to address this and many other disarmament forums – from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty PrepCom to the Review Conference of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty. This shows us that change is possible and these forums can adapt to become more inclusive and responsive.

We are encouraged that the 2024 Pact for the Future included commitment to “accelerate ... commitments on youth, peace and security” (Action 20) and strengthen “meaningful youth participation” at national and international levels” (Actions 34-37).

Since 2023, the UN Youth Leader Fund for a World Without Nuclear Weapons (YLF) has educated many young people in effective ways to advocate for nuclear disarmament.

In July, Secretary-General António Guterres’ report on youth, disarmament and non-proliferation concluded that young people play a “vital role” and that “engagement and empowerment of youth, as inheritors of peace, remain indispensable to building secure futures.” This week, the first-ever UN Youth4Disarmament Forum met here in this very building.

Young people bring lived experience from conflict or crisis settings, fresh perspectives, moral clarity, activism, creativity.

Of course, disarmament education is not just a “youth thing.” Disarmament education spans across generations and into a variety of forums. Educators can foster critical thinking, ethical awareness about arms production and militarization, and help all people – young and old – understand international frameworks.

However, we also feel despair.

Our lives are threatened by some of the highest levels of armed violence since the founding of the United Nations.

We face the compounding shocks of genocide, climate catastrophe, easy access to small arms, growing inequality, online radicalization and digital dehumanization. We fear the growing autonomy in weapons systems and increasing instability from nuclear weapons.

These very conditions are used by states as excuses to avoid making progress on life-saving disarmament. Our educational institutions rarely challenge this inertia, instead cultivating complacency through historical silence and dubious theories of deterrence.

We need to move past the point of enabling states' performance of care and responsibility: too often states pretend to care and promise action, and we pretend to believe them.

We are frightened by states walking back commitments to the landmine and cluster munition ban treaties, as well as reduced efforts to address the humanitarian consequences of land contaminated by explosives, radiation and military pollution.

Youth participation in disarmament forums is also constrained by intersecting forms of marginalization along lines of gender, race, class, Indigeneity, disability, national origin and sexuality.

Funding for disarmament education and youth participation is miniscule in comparison to the US\$2,718 billion record high global military expenditure in 2024. Each of these dollars represents a diversion from education, health, climate action, and productive economic opportunities that are vital to the futures of young people.

When governments cut funding for health, education and diplomacy, young people are often most affected. Those of us in civil service positions are often cut first, lacking the job protections of our elder colleagues.

Meanwhile, our rights to protest these devastating threats to our well-being are under profound attack around the world.

Disenchantment with political processes and institutions limit young people's meaningful participation in disarmament. We suffer from a loss of hope that things can change or get better, feelings of powerlessness, outdated systems and expectations which are out of touch with the lived reality of today's young people.

What role, then, can you play in reinvigorating youth participation and disarmament education in these perilous times?

1. **Support the "Youth, disarmament and non-proliferation" resolution** here in First Committee, but strengthen it with calls for concrete efforts to protect young people from armed violence and renewed funding to further strengthen global youth and disarmament efforts.
2. **Make strong First Committee statements that draw linkages between youth, disarmament, education and other pressing issues**, such as climate action, human

rights, sustainable development and gender equality. Honor the crucial role of hibakusha, survivors, civil society, educational institutions, and youth in disarmament. Tell us about your existing efforts in this field and commit to exceed them.

3. **Support platforms for freedom of speech, academic freedom, scientific inquiry and reliable information sharing** to address misinformation and attacks on expressions of dissent. Disarmament education is not only for those in conflict zones, it is a global necessity. Educational institutions can play a key role in shaping public opinion and guiding policy and budget priorities in countries involved in weapons production, export, or import, helping to redirect them toward peace.
4. But, perhaps most importantly, **make concrete contributions to peacebuilding in areas of intensive armed violence, protecting young people through disarmament and ending the diversion of resources from health, education, climate action and other crucial priorities**. Remember the principle of nothing about us without us – encourage the meaningful participation of young people most affected by the situations you are discussing. Be sensitive to intersectional marginalization – mainstream promotion of gender equality and building capacity of poorly-represented peoples and groups, including survivors of armed violence and persons with disability. Make progress on robust instruments on nuclear weapons, killer robots and other emerging technologies.

Those of us in civil society also need to look beyond states – to social movements, to Indigenous Peoples, to voices of public conscience – to build the social and political conditions for significant change.

Yes, young people are the future, but we are also here now. Please help us to work with you to safeguard all our futures.

Drawing on consultation with partners around the world, statement drafting led by students and faculty of Pace University's International Disarmament Institute including Julia Cordova, Matthew Breay Bolton, Malaika Walker and Emma Ohlson. For delivery by Julia Cordova.

Supporting Organizations

1. A world without chemical and biological weapons-www
2. Action for Women and Children Concern (AWCC) Somalia
3. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)
4. Actors Rwanda Organization (ARO)
5. Amputee Self-help Network Uganda (ASNU)
6. Anfal story's Organization
7. Arab Human Security Network

8. beHuman
9. Cambodia Campaign to Ban Landmines and Cluster Bombs
10. Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas
11. Canadian Voice of Women for Peace
12. Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos, México
13. Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS)
14. Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia, México
15. Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft – Vereinigte KriegsdienstgegnerInnen (DFG-VK)
16. Dhesarme - Brazilian Action for Humanitarian Disarmament
17. Disability Rights and Disarmament Initiative, Cape Breton University
18. Fundación Lüvo, Colombia & Canadá
19. Global Campaign for Peace Education (GCPE)
20. International Institute on Peace Education (IIPE)
21. International Peace Research Association (IPRA)
22. JASA
23. Kuntum Ilham
24. Kurdish organizations Network coalition for the International Criminal court (KONCICC)
25. Kurdistan organizations Network to Abolish Nuclear and Mass Destruction Weapons-KONW
26. Kurdistan without Genocide
27. Legacies of War
28. Life campaign to abolish the death sentence in Kurdistan Network
29. Mines Action Canada
30. New York Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (NYCAN)
31. Nonviolence International
32. Nonviolence International Canada
33. Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and its youth initiative, Reverse the Trend
34. Nuclear Truth Project
35. Organization of the Justice Campaign
36. Organization against Weapons of Mass Destruction in Kurdistan
37. Organization of Landmine Survivors and Amputees in Rwanda (OLSAR)
38. Pace University International Disarmament Institute
39. Pathways To Peace
40. PAX
41. Pax Christi International
42. Peace Movement Aotearoa
43. Perú por el Desarme
44. Peoples Federation for National Peace and Development (PEFENAP)
45. QNFC – Qazaq Nuclear Frontline Coalition (ASQAQ Koalitsiyasy)
46. SafeGround

47. SEHLAC - Red de Seguridad Humana para América Latina y el Caribe/Latin America
Human Security Network
48. SKR_Hungary (Állítsuk meg a Gyilkos Robotokat Kampány)
49. Snake River Alliance
50. Soka Gakkai International
51. Somali Human Rights Association (SOHRA)
52. Stop Killer Robots
53. The Civil Affairs Institute
54. Vision GRAM-International
55. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
56. Women's Network for Peace, Germany / Frauennetzwerk für Frieden e. V.
57. World BEYOND War
58. Youth Arts New York
59. Youth for TPNW
60. Youth Nuclear Peace Summit