Contribution by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) to the UN Secretary General’s Report on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education for the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly
(Reporting period: June 2022 - May 2024)

Executive Summary (150 words)

Recognizing the importance of disarmament and non-proliferation education, UNIDIR provided research-based training, capacity building and educational materials to policymakers, diplomats, practitioners, and disarmament experts. Examples include the annual UNIDIR-UNODA Disarmament Orientation Course for newly arrived Geneva-based diplomats, a range of seminars, and numerous table-top exercises with regional organizations. The Institute’s activities have engaged the next generation of disarmament researchers and helped to elevate the voices of young people on peace and security. Key examples include UNIDIR’s Graduate Professional Programme talent pipeline, a youth essay competition, model UN simulations and participatory research with conflict-affected youth. UNIDIR fellowships – including the Women in AI Fellowship – and the newly launched Global Disarmament Research Network seek to harness first-rate, diverse thinking around the globe. A focus on multilingual educational and research outputs, including publications and digital tools in ten languages, has further increased the reach of UNIDIR’s work and educational offerings.

Full report

As the only UN think tank working on disarmament, arms control and global security, UNIDIR carries out research, offers advice and acts as a convener for Member States, the UN and other stakeholders. Education on disarmament and non-proliferation represents a vital, cross-cutting element of UNIDIR’s vision for a more secure world.

In recognition of the Secretary-General’s recommendation 2 to prepare, adapt and disseminate a wider range of user-friendly educational material on disarmament and non-proliferation, UNIDIR pooled its key research-based training initiatives, capacity building and educational materials within the UNIDIR Academy. Under this umbrella, it continued to provide government officials, international organizations, regional bodies, the private sector, civil society, the general public, and particularly

1 The following sections reference in parentheses which of the UNSG’s recommendations from his 2002 report “United Nations study on disarmament and non-proliferation education” (A/57/124) UNIDIR addressed through the outlined activities.
young people with tools, knowledge and evidence that will enable them to address the 21st century’s most pressing international security challenges. In order to foster a complementarity of approaches, many of these initiatives were jointly implemented or coordinated with partners from the UN-system and beyond. In 2023, UNODA and UNIDIR in particular engaged in a strategic dialogue to strengthen their longstanding cooperation and coordination across numerous areas of work, including disarmament education.

Together with UNODA, the Institute continued to conduct its annual Disarmament Orientation Course (rec 2). This course equips newly arrived diplomats with the knowledge and tools needed to properly navigate the wide array of Geneva-based disarmament and arms control negotiations and processes.

For UNIDIR’s research and resources to benefit the most geographically diverse spectrum of policymakers and practitioners possible, its staff have also provided briefings for all UN regional groups on a quarterly basis (rec 2, 4). Covering disarmament, peace and security topics, these briefings prepare participants for upcoming multilateral processes, debates and activities, keeping them abreast of the latest research findings on current disarmament issues. In a similar vein, UNIDIR and UNITAR held a two-week summer course for diplomats and policymakers from least developed countries (LDCs) and small-island developing states (SIDS) (rec 2, 4). This set of lectures and workshops focused particularly on the intersection between international law, voluntary norms of State behaviour, information and communications technologies, and artificial intelligence.

In an effort to bridge debates and practices of international and regional disarmament communities, ECOWAS and UNIDIR have organized regional seminars on disarmament and arms control (rec 2, 4). Taking place annually in West Africa, these seminars zero in on those topics most relevant to the region: from control of small arms and light weapons to gender and disarmament, from outer space security to the cyber domain. Further engagement with regional organisations included UNIDIR’s strategic regional tabletop exercises conducted with ASEAN, the OAS and the Mediterranean Forum. These exercises gave participants the opportunity to make concrete crisis-management choices in a simulated environment, as in the case of a regional cyber crisis, for instance (rec 23).

Across programmes, UNIDIR provided a broad range of advisory support and capacity building, not least through contributions to the Arms Trade Treaty Secretariat’s “train-the-trainer” regional workshops in Africa, the Americas and the Asia-Pacific.

Engaging with and creating opportunities for the next generation of disarmament and non-proliferation researchers has been a particular focus of UNIDIR’s
engagement in disarmament education, as has **elevating the voices of young people in disarmament**.

Its talent-building pipeline, the Graduate Professional Programme, helps early career professionals to explore global security and disarmament as a potential career path. Through real-world, on-the-job training, this programme contributes to the formation of future disarmament, peace and security experts (rec 13, 19, 24). In 2022 and 2023, it brought a total of 26 young researchers from 18 countries and 5 different regions to the Institute. Remote engagements were an important modality that improved accessibility and allowed for a more geographically diverse group of young scholars (rec 21).

In addition, UNIDIR’s online **Youth Disarmament Orientation Course** allows interested young people to explore the central concepts in disarmament and arms control and to get the latest insights into key topics in this area. It includes modules on why disarmament and arms control matter, weapons of mass destruction, space and missiles, small arms and light weapons, artificial intelligence and autonomy, and cybersecurity (rec 2, 21).

As well as educating young people about global security, UNIDIR also helps to amplify their voices and promote their ideas. In 2022, UNIDIR organized a **Youth Global Disarmament Essay competition** that focused on the disarmament, security, and development nexus (rec 20). Out of 121 essays by participants of 38 different nationalities, a panel of international experts and UNIDIR staff chose five winning entries that went on to be published as a compendium. The authors of the top three essays were also given awards and invited to present their work during a public UNIDIR event.

Adressing recommendations around the use of photography and participatory approaches as educational tools, including with youth in conflict-affected contexts (rec 23, 27), UNIDIR’s Managing Exits from Armed Conflict Project joined forces with War Child UK, 100cameras, UNICEF, IOM, Bridge and Progress in Peace to launch two participatory interventions for Iraqi youth reintegrating into their communities after displacement: first, a **research training programme** empowering young people to co-produce research, and second, a **transformative photography programme** enabling youth to process their emotions and share their experiences through the lens of a camera. The photographs emerging from the latter project went on to be featured as part of an exhibition and dialogue hosted by UNIDIR and its partners during the 2023 **Geneva Peace Week**. The next phase will include a unique intervention that integrates multiple media contexts and takes a comparative approach by working with young people in Iraq, Colombia, and Nigeria. Acknowledging the many benefits of simulations as an educational tool (rec 23), UNIDIR has also hosted a series of Model UN events together with Geneva International Model United Nations (GIMUN),
covering highly topical issues like lethal autonomous weapons, space security and preventing non-state groups from acquiring weapons.

All year round, and in collaboration with educational networks and partner organizations in Geneva, UNIDIR briefed delegations and student groups visiting Geneva about its work (rec 4).

To harness wide-ranging ideas and first-rate thinking from around the globe, UNIDIR offers a range of fellowships (rec 13). The Senior Fellows and Fellows joining our recently relaunched fellowship programme enrich the Institute’s intellectual life and knowledge base with diverse, original perspectives and ideas on a range of critical arms control and disarmament challenges.

In the same vein, UNIDIR’s Global Disarmament Research Network, launched in 2023, aims to convene a diverse network of experts coming from all regions of the world and encompassing a wide range of expertise, experience and insight. Its four thematic subnetworks deal with national security priorities and public spending, nuclear weapons and delivery systems, the convergence of biological and chemical weapons, and AI governance in the military domain.

Aware also of the chronic underrepresentation of women in international security processes – especially those perceived as highly technical – the Institute launched a pilot Women in AI Fellowship in 2024. This fellowship equips women diplomats with the essential knowledge, skills and resources needed to actively engage in multilateral discussions on artificial intelligence within the field of international peace and security.

Moreover, UNIDIR has remained strongly committed to reaching a diverse range of audiences, particularly those historically underserved, by providing multilingual educational and research outputs (rec 3). Publications were made available in ten languages other than English, including the remaining five UN official languages and the Southeast Asian languages Thai, Khmer, Vietnamese and Bahasa Indonesia. Various of the Institute’s online tools, such as interactive policy portals and digital hubs, are also accessible in different languages. Both the interactive Timeline and the Document Depository of the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone project are available in Arabic, Persian and Hebrew, for instance. Capitalizing on the notable diversity of its staff and its significant reach on social media, the Institute and its researchers also used a variety of platforms to communicate about their work in all of the official UN languages and many more besides.

Various of the Institute’s education-related activities that were described in previous Reports of the Secretary-General are ongoing. Detailed information on UNIDIR’s related activities are available in its annual Report of the Director and at unidir.org.