

FACT SHEET

DISARMAMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

“Civil society plays an indispensable role in all aspects of disarmament. ... Behind nearly every successful major new initiative over the past 20 years, there has been a campaign or network led by advocacy organizations and concerned global citizens.”

Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament

The Role of Civil Society in Disarmament

The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the United Nations is explicitly recognized in Article 71 of the United Nations Charter. More than 2,500 representatives of various societies and organizations took part in the Organization’s 1945 founding conference in San Francisco, where civil society participants were instrumental in drafting the first seven words of the Charter, “We the peoples of the United Nations...”

Civil society plays a vital role in raising awareness and capturing the public conscience to advance disarmament and non-proliferation. Its involvement has been instrumental in efforts to end atmospheric nuclear weapons testing; ban anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions; and adopt the Arms Trade Treaty on regulating the international trade in conventional arms. In 2017, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons received the Nobel Peace Prize for its contributions to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

NGOs have been key stakeholders in almost all intergovernmental disarmament processes, including the work of the United Nations First Committee on Disarmament and International Security as well as the review cycles of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons.

In 2018, the Secretary-General issued “Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament”, in which he committed to working with Member States to achieve greater integration of experts, industry and civil society representatives in the meetings of all United Nations disarmament bodies (<https://www.un.org/disarmament/sg-agenda/en/>).



International Action Network on Small Arms/Fred Lubang

Delegates of NGOs and Member States pose together during the Third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, held from 18 to 29 June 2018.

The Role of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs works in close partnership with NGOs to advance the cause of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. To serve this purpose, the Office, in close collaboration with civil society and academic institutions:

- Organizes consultative meetings to ensure effective cooperation between the Office and the NGO community;
- Facilitates NGO participation in and access to intergovernmental meetings via online accreditation and registration, administered in accordance with consultative arrangements made by the Economic and Social Council;
- Makes arrangements for presentations by NGO representatives when they are invited to address intergovernmental and other meetings;
- Facilitates NGO side events and exhibits at United Nations Headquarters during disarmament-related meetings;
- Organizes seminars, film screenings and exhibitions with NGO sponsors;
- Provides a platform for disarmament-related NGO materials through the Office's Disarmament Education website (<https://www.un.org/disarmament/education/>);
- Works on disarmament education/outreach projects with numerous NGOs, including Hibakusha Stories, the International Action Network on Small Arms, Mayors for Peace, Nihon Hidankyo and Peace Boat; and
- Coordinates production of an annual NGO publication, "Civil Society and Disarmament" (<https://www.un.org/disarmament/publications/civilsociety/>), as well as ad-hoc publications such as "Disarmament: A Basic Guide" (<https://www.un.org/disarmament/publications/basic-guide/disarmament-a-basic-guide-fourth-edition-2017/>).

NGO Coordinators

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs works with the following coordinators on civil society-related matters, including the facilitation of NGO statements to disarmament-related conferences at the United Nations:

For meetings concerning nuclear weapons issues:

Ms. Ray Acheson, Reaching Critical Will project, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

For meetings concerning conventional weapons issues:

Ms. Rose Welsch, International Action Network on Small Arms

Civil Society Participation at Major Disarmament Meetings

- 631 representatives from 96 NGOs participated in the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference held in April and May 2019, New York.
- 230 representatives from 75 NGOs registered for the Third Review Conference for the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms in June 2018, New York.

For more information: www.un.org/disarmament