

5 Weapons, War and Military Spending

Disarmament Is Fundamental for Human Security and Sustainable Development

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The UN Charter and Its Unfulfilled Promises

Disarmament for sustainable development and a more secure world should be a self-evident goal in our complex, interconnected world. We have been talking about globalisation and its impact on people and the planet for decades. Climate change is recognised to be at a crisis point, but lacklustre responses to meeting the challenges facing us all have brought us to a catastrophic tipping point that puts all life on Earth at serious risk.

Diseases such as HIV/AIDS, SARS, Ebola and the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate that borders cannot keep people safe from multiple health threats, nor can all the weapons in the world.¹ The Internet has made it possible for people to communicate easily with each other domestically and internationally, with positive and/or negative results. Cybersecurity and cyberattacks are now part of the vernacular. The climate crisis is affecting all life on the planet, and instead of moving towards nuclear disarmament, these weapons that can destroy us all are being ‘modernised’ while new weapons and other methods of death and destruction continue to be developed and used.

Instead of determined multilateral cooperation and action to ensure safety and security for all, those terms are still being defined by an anachronistic national security state system with roots in two treaties that brought about the Peace of Westphalia, ending the Thirty Years’ War in 1648.² The treaties laid out important elements of the international system still in place today, one which is not capable or willing to address our common 21st-century threats. These include the concept of national sovereignty, with each state solely responsible for law, order and control over the populations living in their territories. Every state also has the right to decide on its own internal political and religious systems.

The Westphalian national security framework focuses on the ability of a government to defend the apparatus and power of the state itself rather than prioritising the core needs that dignify people’s lives and allow them to live free from want and fear. Neither the two world wars fought in the first half of the 20th century nor the birth of the United Nations at the end of World War II have put much of a dent in the ongoing power struggles among states clinging to an outdated world view.

The following lofty words of the Preamble of the Charter that established the United Nations on October 24, 1945, have not played out to end the ‘scourge’ of war in the almost eight decades since the Charter was agreed upon. The promise of its Article 26, to divert resources from weapons development and production for our common benefit, did not even make it out of the starting gate. The Preamble reads,

WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

AND FOR THESE ENDS to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS.

(United Nations n.d.-a.)

The words are inspiring, but it has always been clear that there was no real interest, euphemistically referred to as ‘political will’, to create the world described in the Charter. That vision never had a chance. The beginnings of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union were brewing even as the United Nations was being established. Already by 1949, the United States and its allies had formed NATO, and the United States had troops stationed in Europe. The USSR’s Warsaw Pact was subsequently founded in 1955. The Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Cuban Missile Crisis only heightened tensions between the East and the West and reinforced the belief that it was only military might that made nations safe.

That does not mean that there have not been some advances over the decades in dealing with human rights in the continuing push for gender equality and promoting social progress—depending on one’s definition of progress—and better standards of life in some parts of the world. However, using ‘international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of **all peoples**’ [emphasis added] remains out of reach.

The 2022 World Inequality Report, produced by the World Inequality Lab, offers one sobering measure of the inequality in the world by looking at the distribution of global income and global wealth among individuals. The top 10 per cent of the world’s population captures 52 per cent of global income, while the bottom 50 per cent earns only 8 per cent. The middle 40 per cent makes 39 per cent. In terms of wealth, the richest 10 per cent controlled 76 per cent of the world’s wealth in 2021. The bottom 50 per cent owned a mere 2 per cent and the middle 40 per cent owned 22 per cent. Finally, between 1995 and 2021, the top 1 per cent of the population captured 38 per cent of the growth in global wealth and the bottom 50 per cent just 2 per cent in that same period (Chancel *et al.* 2022).

The implementation of Article 26 of the Charter, which could have been an important tool for disarmament and moving resources from weapons to foster sustainable development, went nowhere, as noted earlier. It reads,

In order to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources, the Security Council shall be responsible for formulating, with the

assistance of the Military Staff Committee referred to in Article 47, plans to be submitted to the Members of the United Nations for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments.

(United Nations 2023)

Reaching Critical Will (RCW), the disarmament programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the oldest women's peace organisation in the world, analysed the intent of Article 26 and the impact of the UN Security Council's five permanent members' failure to implement it. It noted that the Article gave 'evidence of assumptions made about this new institution and how nations united and working together could actually prevent conflict and deliver peace and security, not just talk about it ... a task it has neglected entirely'.

Further, it directly challenges and addresses militarism—the concept that international relations and national security can only be determined through the threat of military force, as well as continuous preparation and readiness for armed conflict. ... [It] demands disarmament and reduced military expenditures as a precondition for increased security, development, and peace.

But instead of implementing the Article, 'the permanent members of the Security Council have engaged in weapons profiteering and arms races. ... In so doing, they have failed to fulfil a mandate of the UN Charter' (Reaching Critical Will n.d.). The billions and billions of dollars spent on weapons contracts and earned with arms sales and transfers are far more important than the lives destroyed with the weapons of war.

We cannot seem to escape the death, destruction and trauma caused by war, as countries continue their quest for military dominance and the power and so-called national security that comes with it. The staggering drain on resources results in multiple negative impacts on us all.

Human Security and Humanitarian Disarmament Is Possible

Thinking beyond weapons, war and violence to envision a different kind of world and work towards creating sustainable development and enduring peace is a challenge.³ Meeting that challenge requires a different way of thinking about what makes us all secure. The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 1994 *Human Development Report* introduced the concept of human security 'which equates security with people rather than territories, with development rather than arms'. It posited 'a new paradigm of sustainable human development, capturing the potential peace dividend, a new form of development cooperation and a restructured system of global institutions' (United Nations Development Programme 1994).

The human security framework has continued to gain traction over the almost 30 years since its introduction, yet it has often been challenged as vague, unworkable and a 'do-gooder' vehicle for programmes inspired by idealists who do not grasp the realities of the dangerous world in which we live. Especially in times of military crisis, such as after the attacks of 9/11 and the U.S.-led wars resulting from them, and Vladimir Putin's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, with his accompanying nuclear threats, it is not difficult to push the concept of human security into the background behind militaristic national security thinking.

At the same time, as the world order continues to shift, multilateralism continues to decline, the climate crisis worsens, socio-economic inequalities grow and pandemic health

concerns show little sign of abating, increased feelings of insecurity will not be allayed by massive military arsenals, an increasing number of nuclear states, or high-tech weapons powered by artificial intelligence with little to no involvement of human beings in the target-and-kill functions of these machines.

When asked what would make people feel secure in today's world, most would not answer weapons, war or increasingly bloated military budgets. Some of the fundamental elements to address human security needs include meaningful work with living wages, access to education for all, decent housing and good health care— including equal access to COVID-19 vaccines and other successful means of treatment for global pandemics. People would call for a more level socio-economic playing field, for turning around environmental destruction and for reversing climate change and the decimation of the other species that inhabit the planet.

In its 2022 special report on human security, the UNDP broadened the concept beyond the security of individuals and communities to include 'the interdependence among people, and between people and planet, as reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. The United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are goal-posts to measure progress towards meeting the 2030 Agenda, which is an action plan for people, the planet and prosperity for all.⁴

That report also introduced the 'Index of Perceived Insecurity', which is based on population-representative data covering more than 80 per cent of the world's people. The Index found that globally fewer than one in seven people felt secure or relatively secure and that over 50 per cent felt a very high level of human insecurity, as outlined in the Index. Feelings of perceived insecurity have increased over time, even in countries with very high Human Development Index levels (United Nations Development Programme 2022a).

Additionally, for the first time ever, and following on the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNDP's Human Development Index value declined for two years in a row (United Nations Development Programme 2022b). Reversing these harrowing trends not only requires that countries disarm but also that people recognise that disarmament is a humanitarian imperative and that being able to live in a peaceful world is a basic human right enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations n.d.-b).

But systematic, planned disarmament is a difficult task, given that the UN Charter's Article 26 never went anywhere and the 'disarmament machinery' of the United Nations is largely dysfunctional, rendering itself irrelevant. Created in 1978, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) replaced previous UN disarmament bodies. It was meant to be the 'single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community' (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs 2001), but the last treaty the 65-member body successfully negotiated was the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1996. That treaty has not entered into force (Arms Control Association 2022).

Despite the failure of the CD, civil society-led disarmament and arms control campaigns have demonstrated that shifting the focus from a national security framework towards one based on human security is possible. While not the only successful effort, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) was the first, and its ripple effect has been significant.

When the campaign was launched in October 1992, arms control and disarmament discussions were anything but people focused. They were always recognised as struggles among nations vying for power and advantage in terms of their weapons and their own national security. The sacrosanct conference rooms at the United Nations, whether in

New York, Geneva or Vienna, where weapons negotiations take place, were off limits to civil society. A variety of arguments were used to keep the doors to the kingdom of weapons negotiations locked. Two reasons in particular carried the weight of limiting and prohibiting participation by representatives of civil society.

First, as touched upon earlier, since the nation state is the guarantor of security, only national governments should be involved in talks about weapons and war. A second is that nuclear bombs and increasingly high-tech weapons such as killer robots—also known as lethal autonomous weapons systems—are so complex themselves that only experts can begin to understand them, how they fit in modern war scenarios and how ‘security’ would be affected by restricting their use or banning them outright. Thus, complicated and delicate negotiations involving such weapons should be left to the experts, and the experts are governments—or so the argument goes.

But does a person have to understand how to build an atomic bomb in order to know that they have no place on the planet? Are the moral and ethical dimensions of human beings who decide to create weapons, which, once released into the modern battlespace, can target and kill people on their own, off limits in discussions about such weapons? National security-centred disarmament might give lip service to these concerns before moving on to deal with the weapons from a realist point of view.

The effort to prohibit landmines grew from a non-governmental organisation (NGO) campaign into a movement that included pro-ban governments, UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other international institutions and organisations as well. It was, and still is, the cooperation and joint efforts of the various partners of the ban movement that have made the Mine Ban Treaty so successful and have also helped shape other campaigns working on a variety of weapons and/or how they are used. But without the NGO campaign, often called the engine of the landmine ban movement, recognising the long-term problem caused by landmine proliferation and deciding to take action to get rid of them, nothing would have happened to bring about the changes brought about through the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT).

Despite the fact that the Ottawa Process and the MBT it produced sent shock waves through the diplomatic world along with the desire of many governments and diplomats alike to see the whole thing as a one-off, stand-alone success with a rapid return to status quo ante, the model that evolved out of the work to ban antipersonnel landmines took root as a new approach to disarmament and arms control. The successful work of the ICBL, then the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) demonstrated that the ‘diplomats only’ approach to weapons negotiations is illusory.

Not only were the ICBL and the CMC able to breach the walls ‘protecting’ such negotiations, they also were able to build enough support with governments to see that trying to ban landmines and cluster munitions inside the United Nations was not possible and were able to take the negotiations outside of the UN process to ban landmines (1997) and cluster bombs (2008). ICAN and like-minded governments achieved the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons inside the United Nations General Assembly in 2017.

Work to ban antipersonnel landmines, cluster munitions, nuclear weapons, and killer robots, for example, have been efforts that put human needs above the lust for ‘newer, better, faster’ weapons of war with little concern about their devastating effects on people and the planet. The campaigns to ban nuclear weapons and killer robots, in particular, brought serious discussions of morality and ethics in the means and methods of warfare into sharp relief both inside and outside diplomatic conference rooms.

What has come to be called ‘humanitarian disarmament’, a young and developing field, was born out of the work to ban antipersonnel landmines and has continued to develop with other disarmament and arms control campaigns. This approach to addressing weapons focuses on the impact of weapons on people, on civilian populations. As stated on the Humanitarian Disarmament website, its aims are ‘to prevent and remediate arms-inflicted human suffering and environmental harm through the establishment and implementation of norms. This approach to disarmament is people-centred in substance and process’ (Humanitarian Disarmament n.d.). It seeks not only to shift the focus but also to broaden the range of stakeholders involved in the conversation.

Disarmament Is Fundamental to Human Security: Meeting the SDGs

It has long been recognised that meeting the SDGs is inextricably linked to nuclear disarmament because nuclear war negates and makes irrelevant all questions regarding human security and life on this planet. Yet from the start, as noted previously, the UN Security Council failed completely to implement the UN Charter’s Article 26 to divert resources away from weapons and towards establishing peace and security in the world. It failed not because it was an impossible task. It failed because the countries who won World War II had no interest in disarming—on the contrary.

Not only was developing a plan to divert resources away from armaments to address social ills and inequalities never taken seriously, but few other issues ever put a dent in military spending. Governments stress the need for weapons and strong militaries to keep their people safe, when, in fact, armies and their weapons are symbols of a country’s power and prestige, and governments and weapons industries make vast fortunes from the sale of weapons.

Not surprisingly, the world’s largest arms dealer is the United States. According to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the United States controlled 38.6 per cent of weapon sales between 2017 and 2021, an increase from 32.2 per cent between 2012 and 2016. In the 2017–21 period, the United States supplied weapons to over 100 countries. Of the eight largest exporters, five are permanent members of the UN Security Council. For the profit motive alone, it is easy to understand why the ‘perm five’, with their veto powers, are not particularly interested in disarmament.

Even as the world continued to reel from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, then in its second year, SIPRI reported that world military expenditures exceeded \$2 trillion for the first time that year. And that was the seventh year in a row of increased military spending. According to Dr. Diego Lopes da Silva of SIPRI’s Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme, ‘Even amid the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, world military spending hit record levels. There was a slowdown in the rate of real-term growth due to inflation. In nominal terms, however, military spending grew by 6.1 per cent’ (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2022).

According to SIPRI, between 2017 and 2021, the eight largest arms exporters in the world were the United States, with 39 per cent of global exports; Russia with 19 per cent; France with 11 per cent; China with 4.6 per cent; Germany with 4.5 per cent; Italy with 3.1 per cent; the United Kingdom with 2.9 per cent; and South Korea with 2.8 per cent. The five biggest importers of weapons in that same time period, together accounting for 38 per cent of global imports, were India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Australia, and China (Wezeman, Kuimova and Wezeman 2022).

The United States not only dominates the weapons market, but it also continues to outspend the next nine countries combined on defence. Additionally, relative to other countries, U.S. defence spending increased significantly between 2020 to 2021 (Peter G. Peterson Foundation 2023). Looking at a U.S. discretionary spending budget provides an interesting snapshot of the impact of military spending on meeting the day-to-day needs of the U.S. taxpayers who fund the budget.

While the United States is the most egregious in the amounts it allocates to defence, weapons and war, considering how any government allocates its resources is an instructive exercise. Because well more than half of the discretionary spending budget of the United States goes to defence, it is no surprise that areas important to the well-being of its citizens, such as education, health care, housing, infrastructure, transportation, suffer as a result.

And this is before considering the 8 per cent increase in military spending for fiscal year 23 passed by the U.S. Congress on December 15, 2022. The defence authorisation bill for fiscal year 2023 totalled \$858 billion, or \$45 billion more than had been requested in the Biden budget (Zengerle 2022). In addition, the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) allocation is \$21.4 billion, which will 'allow NNSA to deliver the safe, secure, reliable, and effective nuclear deterrent the nation requires and continue NNSA's progress in modernising key production capabilities' (National Nuclear Security Administration 2022). This totals a staggering \$879.4 billion.

Comparing this amount to the \$60.4 billion allocated to the State Department, of which one half goes to U.S. AID programmes, it is clear that the Pentagon dominates foreign policy issues. The war and weapons budget is more than 14.5 times larger than that of the State Department! For meeting the human security needs of its citizens, the budget allocates \$237.3 billion for health and human services, \$88.3 billion for education, \$71.98 billion for housing and urban development, \$26.8 billion for transportation, \$37.7 billion for the justice department, and \$14.6 billion for the labour department to name just a few (National Nuclear Security Administration 2022).

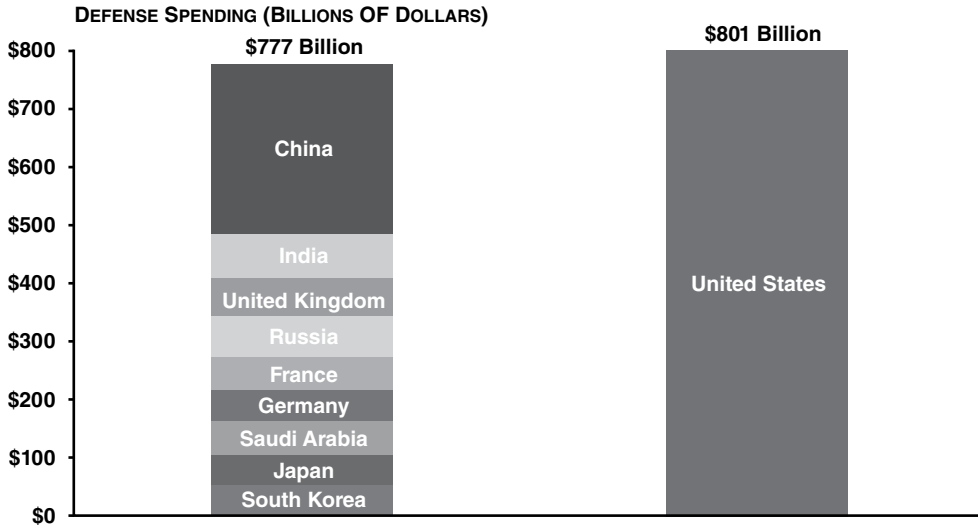
What if the budgetary focus was on human security and not on weapons and war? What might the United States look like? What if some of those resources were diverted to meeting the UN SDGs? What might the world look like? What if even half of the \$2 trillion of world military expenditures were spent on achieving the SDGs instead of fuelling wars around the world? What might the world look like then?

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) there are over 100 armed conflicts in the world today. The impact of the fighting is exacerbated by ongoing changes to the climate, coupled with increasing food and energy costs (International Committee of the Red Cross 2022). Some of the conflicts have been going on for decades yet are largely ignored unless one is a fighter or a victim in one of the conflicts or is profiting from weapons sales, the fighting itself or in some way benefitting from the destruction/reconstruction war brings. One of the conflicts had been taking place since 2014 in Eastern Ukraine with Russian-supported proxies fighting to split the country apart. 2014 also saw Russia's annexation of Crimea.

That early fighting was considered a low-level conflict, unless, of course, you were somehow caught up in the fighting—until, on February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of the country. Not long after ordering his 'special military operation' against Ukraine, Putin began threatening the use of nuclear weapons to defend Russian territory, and a year into the invasion, the nuclear threats only increased.



The United States spends more on defense than the next 9 countries combined



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Figure 5.1 The United States spends more on defence than the next nine countries combined.

Notes: Figures are in U.S. dollars converted from local currencies using market exchange rates. Data for the United States are for fiscal year 2021, which ran from October 1, 2020, through September 30, 2021. Data for the other countries are for calendar year 2021. The source for this chart uses a definition of defence spending that is more broad than budget function 050 and defence discretionary spending.

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Military Expenditure Database*, April 2022.

This is not the first time Putin has made nuclear threats. In 2014, during its invasion of Crimea, Russian leaders talked openly about putting nuclear weapons on alert. Then in 2015, Russia threatened Danish warships with nuclear weapons if that country joined NATO’s missile defence system. But neither of those threats rattled the world the way Putin’s nuclear threats over Ukraine have, including the possibility of dropping Russia’s policy of no first use of nuclear weapons (Lister 2022). Upping the ante again on March 25, 2023, Putin announced his decision to station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus and said that ten Russian planes capable of carrying tactical nukes had already been moved there (Ellyatt 2023).

While people have not had to endure another world war, some argue that the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the ensuing war and the actions of the West in arming and providing other support to Ukraine portend a move in that direction. The invasion is described as having ‘triggered the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War Two and the biggest confrontation between Moscow and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis’ (Faulconbridge 2022).

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists issued its 2022 nuclear year in review, declaring that the global nuclear order was ‘in shambles’ (Diaz-Maurin 2022). Among many issues, the piece cited the following major concerns: military attacks on nuclear reactors and

nuclear facilities in Ukraine; the possibility that North Korea is preparing for a nuclear test after launching more ballistic missiles in a single year than ever before; Iran beginning construction of its underground nuclear complex again, while disconnecting the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) surveillance cameras and speeding up its uranium enrichment programme; and Saudi Arabia continuing to move towards enriching uranium while refusing to allow inspections by the IAEA (Diaz-Maurin 2022).

In 2022, there were no meaningful results from efforts at nuclear disarmament or nonproliferation, and days before the first anniversary of his February 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine, Putin announced that Russia was suspending its participation in the New START nuclear arms control treaty. With this announcement, he effectively put the last nail in the coffin of the entire arms control architecture, according to NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg. In any case, that treaty does not cover the battlefield tactical nuclear weapons that Putin has periodically threatened to use against Ukraine (Trojanovski *et al.* 2023).

Not only have nuclear weapons come to the fore again because of the war, but Ukraine, like other armed conflicts, is also a testing ground for new weapons and the ongoing development of military doctrine. Advances in technology and training are being closely monitored for the ways they are shaping combat. Two years before Putin's invasion, at a NATO conference held in Norfolk, Virginia, in October 2020, Ukraine's vice prime minister and minister of digital transformation, Mykhailo Fedorov, said, 'Ukraine is the best test ground, as we have the opportunity to test all hypotheses in battle and introduce revolutionary change in military tech and modern warfare'. Then he added, 'in the last two weeks, we have been convinced once again the wars of the future will be about maximum drones and minimal humans' (Jakes 2022).

The ultimate outcome and long-term impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine remain to be seen, but Putin's ongoing nuclear threats alone should cause the world to pause and rethink the belief that weapons make us safe. Actually, it has long been held that nuclear *disarmament* is inextricably linked to achieving sustainable development.

Humanitarian Disarmament for Sustainable Development Is Possible

Despite the mostly disheartening state of disarmament efforts, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and Putin's continuous nuclear threats, progress was made in 2022/23 in dealing with some weapons and issues related to their use. These successes are the result of the same model of government, civil society and international institutions working together to make humanitarian disarmament work and change happen.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

The TPNW was also the result of a decade of work spearheaded by ICAN, in partnership with like-minded governments; the ICRC; and other international organisations. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the treaty on July 17, 2017. It entered into force on January 22, 2021, with its 50th ratification, and as of December 5, 2022, it had been ratified by 91 countries. For its groundbreaking work, ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017.

Despite Putin's threats, the TPNW is a critically important piece of disarmament law. As described on ICAN's website,

Prior to the treaty's adoption, nuclear weapons were the only weapons of mass destruction not subject to a comprehensive ban, despite their catastrophic, widespread and persistent humanitarian and environmental consequences. The new agreement fills a significant gap in international law.

(ICAN n.d.)

The treaty's obligations include prohibitions on

developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory. It also prohibits them from assisting, encouraging or inducing anyone to engage in any of these activities.

(ICAN n.d.)

Both possessors of nuclear weapons and nations that host them on their territory can join the treaty. Possessors must destroy the weapons according to a legally binding, time-bound plan, and hosts must remove them by specific deadlines. Victims of the testing and use of nuclear weapons must be provided with assistance and environmental contamination must be remediated. The treaty's preamble recognises the harm that nuclear weapons cause, 'including the disproportionate impact on women and girls, and on indigenous peoples around the world' (ICAN n.d.).

While the TPNW offers the possibility of ridding the world of nuclear weapons, no one has any illusions that reaching that goal will be an easy task. No possessor nation or host country has had the courage to join the treaty. French diplomats have publicly stated that France will never give up its nuclear weapons because if it were to do so, no country would pay any attention to it—an immoral and horrifyingly cynical reason to hold on to nuclear weapons.⁵ Despite these formidable roadblocks, work continues to eliminate the doomsday weapons.

From June 21 to 23, 2022, Austria hosted the First Meeting of States Parties (1MSP) to the TPNW. Prior to this meeting, ICAN hosted a two-day ban forum on 18–19 June in Austria and then on June 20, 2022, the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. The 1MSP resulted in the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and a 50-point Vienna Action plan to press ahead on work to eliminate nuclear weapons (ICAN n.d.). It also scheduled 2MSP to take place in New York City from November 27 to December 1, 2023.

The Declaration unequivocally condemned 'any and all nuclear threats, whether they be explicit or implicit and irrespective of the circumstances' and concluded that

[i]n the face of the catastrophic risks posed by nuclear weapons and in the interest of the very survival of humanity. ... We will not rest until the last state has joined the Treaty, the last warhead has been dismantled and destroyed and nuclear weapons have been totally eliminated from the Earth

(ICAN n.d.).

Words on paper without a concrete action plan to back them up are irrelevant. The Dublin Action Plan is a testament to the dedication of those working to eliminate nuclear weapons. The 50 points seek to advance the treaty itself as well as to carry out the commitments made in the Declaration. It includes

actions on universalisation; victim assistance; environmental remediation and international cooperation and assistance; scientific and technical advice in support of implementation; supporting the wider nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation regime; inclusion; and implementation of the treaty's gender provisions.

(ICAN n.d.)

Finally, concrete decisions to press universalisation of the treaty included the following:

Establishment of a Scientific Advisory Group, to advance research on nuclear weapon risks, their humanitarian consequences, and nuclear disarmament, and to address the scientific and technical challenges involved in effectively implementing the Treaty and provide advice to states parties.

Deadlines for the destruction of nuclear weapons by nuclear-armed states joining the treaty: no more than 10 years, with the possibility of an extension of up to five years. States parties hosting nuclear weapons belonging to other states will have 90 days to remove them.

Establishment of a programme of intersessional work to follow the meeting, including a coordinating committee and informal working groups on universalisation; victim assistance, environmental remediation, and international cooperation and assistance; and work related to the designation of a competent international authority to oversee the destruction of nuclear weapons.

(ICAN n.d.)

The Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

Over a decade's worth of work to deal with the horrific issue of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas culminated in an official ceremony in Dublin on November 19, 2022, in which 82 countries officially endorsed the Political Declaration of the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (Government of Ireland Department of Foreign Affairs n.d.; INEW 2022a). It is the first formal international recognition of the urgent need to directly tackle the impact of the weapons.

These weapons are the leading cause of civilian casualties in armed conflict, and if there has ever been any doubt about the impact of such weapons on human beings and the infrastructure of a country subjected to war, Russia's assault on Ukraine and its people reveals the stark reality of such attacks. In the case of their use by Russia in Ukraine, many of the attacks have been called war crimes and crimes against humanity (BBC News 2023).

The work on these weapons was led by a coalition of NGOs: the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), the ICRC and the United Nations and nearly three years of diplomatic negotiations led by Ireland (INEW 2022b). The resulting political declaration pushes for stronger standards to protect civilians and calls on states which endorse it to implement it by changing their national policies and practices, including military policies and operational rules of engagement.

A political declaration is not binding international law; thus those determined to see it work must be ever vigilant to help create the political will to make it function and thus make a difference in people's lives. Those involved in the process noted that the declaration is only a starting point, not the end game. INEW noted that there must be a robust implementation process, and various governments talked about the need to share good

practices and collaborate to make sure the declaration makes a real difference on the ground. For that to happen, the implementation phase must be as open, transparent and inclusive as the negotiations were (INEW 2022b).

Parliamentarians involved in the process issued their own Parliamentary Call to Action, already endorsed by 100 parliamentarians. They urge all countries to adopt and implement the declaration rapidly and effectively. Their statement notes correctly the important role parliamentarians can play in disarmament work, stating that

parliamentarians from different countries and backgrounds have a crucial role to play. As legislators, our role is central to the implementation of international agreements at the national level. In several of our countries, an active parliamentary process took place over several years, with the support of civil society, to call on our governments to urgently address this critical issue.

(INEW 2022b)

In their Call to Action, they committed to nine concrete actions to speed the process of universalisation and implementation of the Dublin Political Declaration, including a call to create a ‘group of friends of the EWIPA political declaration’ in national parliaments for working in and outside their governments on implementation, via hearings, public questions, resolutions, media outreach, and public awareness-raising. Finally, the statement also called for collaboration among parliamentarians at the global level to exchange information about good practices.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots (Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS))

Another collaborative effort that is seeing results—despite their use in the war in Ukraine as a testing ground for new weapons and ways to use them—is the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. Launched in April 2013, the campaign has endured a decade of repetitive discussions about the weapons in diplomatic meetings of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) held at the United Nations in Geneva.⁶ By the beginning of 2023, the CCW had not taken any action to ban or restrict weapons that can function autonomously and on their own carry out target-and-kill operations with no human intervention.

The CCW is uniquely suited to seeing that nothing happens regarding weapons which producers/exporters or importers/users do not want to see banned or restricted. The rule that requires all decisions related to CCW negotiations be made by consensus continues to have a stranglehold on any meaningful progress in Geneva. But as was the case in the work of the ICBL and the CMC, for example, those meetings have been fertile ground for work among governments, the ICRC and other international organisations, and civil society that do want action to ban killer robots.

As a result of diplomatic consultations in New York and Geneva, on February 24, 2023, at a regional conference hosted by Costa Rica and in a ‘significant act of political leadership’, 33 governments from Latin America and the Caribbean issued a historic Communiqué calling for ‘the *urgent negotiation of an international legally binding instrument on autonomy in weapons systems*’ (Ousman 2023). In order to ban landmines in 1997 and then cluster munitions in 2008, it proved necessary to abandon the CCW and negotiate those two treaties in stand-alone processes outside the United Nations. The February Communiqué should be the first step towards such a process to ban killer robots.

Back to the Future

The UN Charter describes an unfulfilled future. As described earlier, what would make us safer in our crumbling world would be a major diversion of funds from military spending towards meeting human needs and solving the global crises we face together, rather than staying the course to meet the demands of power-hungry governments and their militaries and the money-lust of weapons producers and dealers. Despite the chaos of the beginning decades of the 21st century and predictions of apocalyptic doom on our horizon, those who believe in the promise and possibilities of a future defined by human security and a better planet for all refuse to accept that nothing can be done to achieve a future as described by the UN Charter—and more.

Visions and descriptions of such a future abound. Governments, international organisations and bodies and civil society working together have demonstrated that positive change is possible, based upon the model of cooperative partnership to achieve the goals of humanitarian disarmament. Resources diverted by such efforts can and must be used to achieve the UN SDGs as soon as possible. Every single person is capable of contributing in their own way to helping transform our world. Collective and individual contributions are fundamental to change. Our possible future depends on it.

Notes

- 1 As of March 31, 2023, the reported number of deaths in the United States from COVID-19 was 1,125,277, almost twice as many as military deaths in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War combined (616,640), which speaks to the relevance of a human security framework as compared to the prevailing national security framework ('Track COVID in the U.S'. 2023; see also Statista 2023).
- 2 The two treaties forming the basis of the Peace of Westphalia were the Treaty of Münster and the Treaty of Osnabrück, signed in October and May of 1648 (Patton 2019).
- 3 Information in this section first appeared in Williams 2020.
- 4 The 17 SDGs are no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clear energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals.
- 5 I attended two public events, one hosted by the ICBL-CMC in Paris on January 16, 2013, and the other at the United Nations in Geneva not long before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. At the first event, while speaking on a panel, French Diplomat Frédéric Journès, without hesitation, stated that France would never give up nuclear weapons. At the second, a different French diplomat was talking about nuclear disarmament and when she finished, I mentioned how shocked I'd been by her colleague's comments at which point she said she stood behind his statement.
- 6 The full name of the CCW is the Convention on Prohibition or Restriction on Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs 2001).

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