



**Conference on Disarmament Plenary Meeting  
“Women’s Participation and Role in International Security”**

**Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu  
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

Check against delivery



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Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Madam Secretary-General of the Conference,  
Distinguished co-panelists,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address the Conference today at this very important and timely event to consider women's participation and role in international security.

In line with the Secretary-General's priorities and pledges for gender parity, and as a proud International Gender Champion, I have made it part of my mission as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and participation in all decision-making processes related to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

Ensuring the full and effective participation of women in disarmament is not only the *right* thing to do, but it is also the *smart* thing to do. In his Agenda for Disarmament, the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres outlines how ensuring gender parity in disarmament is both "a moral duty and an operational necessity". International frameworks such as the landmark UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and the UN General Assembly resolution on Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, represent the global recognition of the critical role that women play in decision making processes related to international peace and security.

Despite global acknowledgement of the importance of the equal participation of men and women in multilateral fora, the reality remains one of women's underrepresentation. In most international disarmament Conferences, only one third of delegates are women and even fewer are Heads of Delegation. In the entire history of the 75 sessions of the First Committee, only *one* Chair has been a woman.

There is clearly an urgent need to bring this scale to equilibrium.

As I already told the First Committee last year, it is time to accelerate progress for gender parity in our disarmament meetings, and I call on all participating States to set standards and ensure accountability in reaching the target of 50/50 parity.

Excellencies,

Rising tensions and distrust have eroded the disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control regime that the international community had so painstakingly constructed. As we collectively endeavor to revive the work of this Conference, it is clear that the inclusion of diverse voices who bring new ideas is crucial. Crucial to preserve the relevance and effectiveness of the work of the Conference and the disarmament architecture more broadly. And crucial to ensure that the outcome of this work is fit for purpose to respond to current and future realities.

The Conference on Disarmament has already taken up the issue of gender in disarmament. I welcome these efforts, undertaken by several presidencies throughout the years and most recently by Argentina and today by Chile.

I also commend the recent proposals of the Australian and Canadian Presidencies for a technical update to the Conference's rules of procedure to reflect the equality between women and men. While these discussions did not lead to the change that many had hoped for, I find it nonetheless positive that the conversation started and that the Conference was able to have a frank exchange on the participation of women in this body. Ultimately, these discussions can lead to a systemic change in our approach to participation that tackles not only structural barriers to equal opportunities for entry, but also other biases that hinder the participation of diverse stakeholders in disarmament fora and beyond.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference meets today in a hybrid format, taking advantage of new virtual conferencing platforms. This year, the Conference benefitted from virtual presentations by diverse stakeholders, representing academic institutions, think tanks and youth champions. I hope that the Conference will continue to take advantage of the opportunity to invite new voices and diverse perspectives into its substantive discussions.

Excellencies,

The Secretary-General has been very clear that gender equality is a question of redistributing power. It takes commitment from all men and women, and many simultaneous efforts, to succeed. We must also keep in mind that progress towards gender equality can never be taken for granted. Hard-won rights can easily be eroded if they are not protected, especially in conflict and crisis contexts.

In tandem with our efforts to enable meaningful participation of women in disarmament, we must systematically consider the gendered impact of conflict and weapons of all types. The disproportionate impact on women and girls of ionizing radiation from nuclear weapons, the implications of gendered biases in the development of emerging technologies and weapons systems, such as in the field of artificial intelligence, are but a few examples. In order to be able to negotiate disarmament instruments that apply to all segments of our population, Member States must consider the gender dimensions when substantively engaging on core agenda items in pursuit of these instruments' mandates.

Excellencies,

Ensuring the equal participation of women, and systematically considering the gendered impacts of weapons will require a shift towards a more people-centered approach to peace and security. Security is experienced differently by people depending on their gender and other factors such as location, disability and age.

We must insist that all voices, particularly of those most impacted by war and conflict, are given the platform to be heard. We must first understand, then tear down, the structures and tackle the driving forces of systematic exclusion of women and other under-represented stakeholders. We must ensure that we *Leave No One Behind* in our decision-making, policies and programmes.

These actions are imperative for the realization of a more effective and inclusive disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

Before I conclude, I would like to echo the statement made by the distinguished delegate of Australia a few weeks ago – that the participation of women should not be accepted “as a matter of practice, but as a matter of principle”.

If there is one single principle to agree on today, I hope that it can be that the voices of women globally are not worth any less than those of men, and that all girls deserve the same opportunities as boys to build our common future. The UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remind us that this is not a privilege but a fundamental human right. As long as half of the population, women and girls, do not enjoy the same rights as men, we cannot call our world a free and equal one.

I thank you very much for your attention and wish you a fruitful discussion.