

General Assembly First Committee (Disarmament and International Security)

Topics

- Consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures
- Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction

The [General Assembly First Committee](#) addresses the disarmament of conventional weapons, weapons of mass destruction and related international security questions. The First Committee makes recommendations on the regulation of these weapons as they relate to international peace and security. The First Committee does not consider legal issues surrounding weapons possession nor does it address complex peace and security issues addressed by the Security Council. The First Committee also adheres to the purview guidelines of the General Assembly as a whole.

Topic A: Consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures

Courtesy of American Model United Nations

Consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures primarily refers to promoting peace and security by implementing methods to reduce and control conventional weapons. The need for “practical” measures refers to the fact that these methods must be agreed upon by states with vastly different military capabilities and goals. Modern efforts towards this goal precede the United Nations, with efforts to disarm States of conventional weapons beginning with the [Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907](#). These conventions found some success in establishing various procedures regarding warfare, but no meaningful progress was made towards the disarmament of armies.

Between the First and Second World Wars, some limited efforts towards disarmament were made. The [Washington](#) (1921-1922) and [London](#) (1930) Naval Conferences focused exclusively on naval arms limitations. The various [Geneva Conferences between 1927 and 1934](#) attempted to address disarmament, but largely failed to address any conventional disarmament measures. The Geneva Conferences found much less success than the preceding [Geneva Protocol of 1925](#) which limited biological and chemical weapons, however the Geneva Conferences did lay out ideas that later United Nations bodies would pursue, such as limitations on military spending and regional disarmament measures.

Following the Second World War, attention within the sphere of disarmament was mainly directed at the emerging threat of nuclear weapons. The first major step towards conventional disarmament was taken in 1978; the [First Special Session on Disarmament](#) (SSOD-I) established the [Conference on Disarmament](#) (CD) which codified a long term agenda and goal for disarmament. [SSOD-II](#) (1982) and [SSOD-III](#) (1988) mainly revisited the agenda set in SSOD-I to review progress. SSOD-II established the [United Nations Office on Disarmament Affairs](#) (UNODA) while SSOD-III formally introduced confidence building measures for conventional arms control, which encourages States to be transparent with their arsenals and force postures. UNODA was [reformed in 1998](#) to better facilitate the disarmament agenda following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and has since stressed the need for compliance and verification measures for conventional disarmament.

UNODA has largely taken over conventional disarmament actions, being the primary facilitator and resource for the [Ottawa Treaty](#) (Mine Ban Treaty, 1997), the [Convention on Cluster Munitions](#) (CCM, 2008) and the [Arms Trade Treaty](#) (ATT, 2013). These three treaties work in conjunction with the [Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons](#) (CCW, 1980), which banned various weapons deemed particularly egregious, including incendiary weapons, mines and certain fragmentation weapons.

In the present day, UNODA has taken more actions on trust and [confidence building measures](#) as a practical method of reducing risk of international conflict and consolidating peace. UNODA pursues disarmament through multiple data based transparency initiatives, including the [United Nations Register of Conventional Arms](#) (UNROCA), the [Repository of Military Confidence-Building Measures](#) and the [Military Expenditure](#) (MilEx) databases. These tools of modern disarmament were created with the goal of reducing military expenditure and development of new weapons among Member States. In their current iterations, they primarily serve as tools to increase transparency and confidence in peace between States. This assists in reducing tensions and risk of escalations, thereby consolidating peace.

The measures laid out by the MilEx, UNROCA, and UNODA in general form a more open ended, modern approach to augment historical bans on specific weapons and tactics, such as cluster munitions and mines, that States may be less likely to adopt. [Emerging military technologies are being addressed within the framework of initiatives like the UNROCA](#) and the Repository, alongside efforts to ban particularly problematic systems.

Future United Nations actions regarding consolidation of peace and practical disarmament are necessary to meet goal 16 of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). Future actions could accommodate the aforementioned emerging military technologies as well as

existing threats to peace. Ongoing global conflicts demonstrate the need for increased transparency surrounding lethal autonomous weapons systems, specifically [artificial intelligence being incorporated into lethal drones on the ground, in the air and at sea](#). [New laser weapons systems also threaten to upend the current military operational environment](#), causing substantially decreased stability of peace amongst States with disparities in capabilities.

Approaches may focus on building confidence and transparency between State militaries. State militaries have come back into focus due to recent conflicts. However, the threat of non-State actors procuring quantities of conventional arms is still present. Revisiting the ATT and enhancing it with new technologies and greater cooperation to deny non-State actors access to weapons could form the basis of potential United Nations initiatives.

Questions to Consider

- How can the threat of lethal autonomous weapons use be countered to maintain peace and stability?
- How can new technologies like satellite footage and drone surveillance be incorporated into existing confidence building measures?
- How should a State's right to defend itself be balanced with the need to preserve and consolidate international peace?

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Topic B: Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction

Courtesy of American Model United Nations

[A Chemical Weapon is a chemical, or any equipment designed to weaponize chemicals, used with intention to cause harm or death through its toxicity.](#) During the First World War, large and organized use of chemical weapons was introduced. The chemical agents employed included choking agents (chlorine, phosgene), blistering agents (nitrogen & sulfur mustard), and riot control agents (tear gas, pepper spray) collectively resulted in over one million casualties. The post-war period witnessed the [enactment of the Geneva Protocol in 1925](#), marking a significant milestone in international law by proscribing the use of chemical weapons in armed conflicts, albeit permitting their manufacture and accumulation.

Following the First World War and Geneva Protocol, new and more dangerous chemical weapons such as nerve agents (VX & G-series agents) were invented. Nerve agents are the most dangerous chemical weapons that present a [current threat to international peace and stability](#), as they are colorless, odorless, and require only the most minimal contact with an individual to cause catastrophic damage to a person's physiology. Chemical weapons of any of the four main categories (choking, blistering, riot control and nerve) have been used infrequently in warfare.

Between 1925 and 1992, [few actions were taken by the United Nations and international community](#) in general on the issue of chemical weapons. As nuclear disarmament dominated discourse, chemical weapons were only briefly touched on by disarmament groups such as the 1960 [Ten Nation Committee on Disarmament](#) and the 1962-1969 [Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament](#). Those bodies and their general cooperation on chemical, biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) disarmament paved the way for the [Conference of the Committee on Disarmament \(CCD\)](#). The CCD met between 1969-1979, and successfully established that herbicides and non-toxic gasses were definitionally chemical weapons.

[Succeeding all of these bodies was the Conference on Disarmament \(CD\), established in 1979.](#) This body continued efforts to promote chemical weapons disarmament, culminating in its 1992 annual report, containing the [Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction \(CWC\)](#). The CWC, which came into force in 1997, binds all States Parties to agree not to use chemical weapons, destroy their stockpiles of chemical weapons and

disable or convert any factories that may produce them. The CWC also provides a verification mechanism following the model of [the biological weapons convention \(BWC\)](#), adopted 21 years prior. Unlike the Geneva Protocol, the CWC and BWC grant States Parties the ability to ensure stockpiles are destroyed, factories are no longer usable and that compliance is maintained over time. [All but four United Nations Member States have ratified the CWC.](#)

The CWC is supported and maintained by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the independent and autonomous international organization that promotes [peaceful use of chemicals](#), preparing [responses to usage of chemical weapons](#), and ensures [national and international implementation](#). The OPCW led an investigation in 2013 that confirmed the [use of sarin in an August 2013 attack](#) in Ghouta. As result of this investigation and OPCW efforts to enforce and expand ratification of the CWC, the Syrian Arab Republic ratified the CWC in December 2013. [As of December 2014, 98 percent of all Syrian stockpiles had been destroyed.](#)

Five reviews of the CWC have been held since its enactment, in 2003, 2008, 2013, 2018 and 2023. Each conference saw continued reduction in chemical weapons stockpiles and shifted to providing administrative and strategic direction to the CWC. [By the fifth conference](#) in 2023, topics discussed included preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons, maintaining readiness to respond to deployments of chemical weapons and promoting peaceful usage of chemistry.

In defiance of United Nations and OPCW oversight of the CWC, unconfirmed reports have continued to emerge regarding suspected usage of chemical weapons in modern warfare and espionage. Alleged use of chemical weapons in both [covert](#) and [overt](#) State actions have elevated international concerns of escalation. While these cases of chemical weapon use do merit consideration, the CWC has largely been successful in preventing large scale use of chemical weapons in combat. [As of 7 July 2023, 100 percent of chemical weapons stockpiles declared by CWC member states have been destroyed.](#) Today, 98 percent of the global population lives under the protection of the Convention, and 100 percent of declared chemical weapons production facilities have been destroyed or converted as well.

While ensuring compliance with the CWC has remained a priority of the review conferences, recent conferences have also focused on [preparations to respond to chemical attacks by non-state actors](#). Since 1970, [383 terror attacks have involved some use of chemical weapons](#), frequently chlorine, tear gas, and cyanide.

The international response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria was swift and effective, however the threat of chemical weapons still lingers in regional conflicts, particularly in [Eastern Europe](#) and the [Middle East](#). These lingering concerns as well as ongoing pursuit of [Sustainable Development Goal 16](#) prompt further action. Further action could include the final ratification of the CWC and closing of loopholes involving precursor chemicals. Israel, South Sudan, Egypt and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remain outside of full ratification of the CWC, leaving the potential for chemical weapon use in State conflicts a possibility. [Dual-use chemicals present a serious challenge](#) to monitoring and enforcement mechanisms as States may legally trade for chemicals normally used in peaceful manners, but can be combined with other chemicals to create deadly weapons. [Non-state actors' ability to produce chemical weapons also create a need for preparedness and international mechanisms](#) for countering their chemical weapons threat.

Additional verification methods are available today that were not widespread at the inception of the CWC. [These methods include the incorporation of satellite monitoring and precursor chemical import controls](#). These methods can assist with preventing both State and non-state actors' use of chemical weapons. While the CWC provides a valuable foundation for countering the threat of chemical weapons, modernization of the agreement is critical in ensuring continued disarmament and international stability.

Questions to consider from your country's perspective:

- How can the United Nations and the international community prevent the acquisition and use of chemical weapons by non-State actors?
- How can the United Nations increase confidence that all chemical weapons have been declared and are subject to international monitoring?
- What methods can be deployed to allow the peaceful usage of chemicals by States and non-State actors while preventing chemical weapons development?

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