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The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Working paper submitted by Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Namibia, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, the Philippines, Spain, Sweden, Thailand and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)

Summary: This paper outlines the relevance of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, highlighting linkages with nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. It encourages all States Parties to consider practical ways to promote women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in the NPT, as well as to integrate WPS priority topics into nuclear policymaking.

The Women, Peace and Security agenda turns 25

1. The year 2025 marks the 25th anniversary of the UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). At the core of this landmark resolution is the assertion of women's right to participate in all matters of international security. Likewise, SCR 1325 (2000) acknowledges that conflict disproportionately affects women and girls and, therefore, peace, security, crisis management, humanitarian and development responses need to take account of the specific needs of all women and girls.

2. Since 2000, the Security Council has adopted nine additional resolutions on WPS, collectively forming the basis for what is referred to as the WPS agenda. This agenda is commonly defined as having four interconnected pillars:

- Meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels and in all aspects of international security;
- Prevention of violence against women and girls and of any violation of their rights;
- Protection of women and girls from all forms of violence and from any violation of their rights;

- Relief and Recovery, that is, ensuring that the voices and concerns of women and girls are accounted for when creating the structural conditions necessary for sustainable peace.

3. The linkages between the WPS agenda and arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament have been the subject of extensive research and dialogue within multilateral fora. For example, every two years, the General Assembly adopts a resolution on “Women, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control”. In 2024, the General Assembly recognized the “critical role of women in all aspects of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control efforts, including those related to weapons of mass destruction”. It urged States to take action to support and strengthen the full, equal, meaningful and effective participation of women in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.¹

4. The previous and current Review cycles showed there is strong support for gender equality in the NPT, as the Chair’s summaries and several working papers underlined the importance of promoting the full, equal, meaningful and effective participation and leadership of both women and men in the nuclear field, as well as the need to recognize the disproportionate impact of ionizing radiation on women and girls.²

5. The 2025 NPT Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) offers an opportunity to build on previous efforts and use the WPS agenda as a blueprint for mainstreaming gender considerations in the NPT.

¹ UN General Assembly, “Women, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control”, [A/RES/79/57](#)

² See, for example, “Taking Forward Gender Mainstreaming Efforts in the NPT” (NPT/CONF.2026/PC.I/WP.25). Working paper submitted by Australia, Canada, Ireland, Mexico, Namibia, Norway, Panama, Philippines, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, and United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research to the 2023 2019 Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT, 27 July 2023. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/221/32/PDF/N2322132.pdf>; “From pillars to progress: gender mainstreaming in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons” (NPT/CONF.2020/WP.54). Working paper submitted by Australia, Canada, Colombia, Ireland, Mexico, Namibia, Panama, the Philippines, Spain, Sweden and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research to the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT, 17 May 2022. <https://undocs.org/NPT/CONF.2020/WP.54>; “Gender in the Non-Proliferation Treaty: recommendations for the 2020 Review Conference” (NPT/CONF.2020/PC.III/WP.48). Working paper submitted by Ireland to the 2019 Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT, 7 May 2019. <https://undocs.org/NPT/CONF.2020/PC.III/WP.48>; “Integrating gender perspectives in the implementation of the Treaty on the Non- Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons” (NPT/CONF.2020/PC.III/WP.27). Working paper submitted by Australia, Canada, Ireland, Namibia, Sweden and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research to the 2019 Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT, 18 April 2019. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3801155?ln=en>; “Improving gender equality in the Non-Proliferation Treaty review process” (NPT/CONF.2020/PC.III/WP.25). Working paper submitted by Australia, Canada, Ireland, Namibia, Sweden and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research to the 2019 Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT, 18 April 2019. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3800951?ln=en>; “Impact and empowerment: the role of gender in the Non-Proliferation Treaty” (NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.38). Working paper submitted by Ireland to the 2018 Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT, 24 April 2018. <https://undocs.org/NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.38>; “Gender, development and nuclear weapons” (NPT/CONF.2020/PC.I/WP.38). Working paper submitted by Ireland to the 2017 Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT, 10 May 2017. <https://undocs.org/NPT/CONF.2020/PC.I/WP.38>.

Advancing women's meaningful participation in the NPT

6. The WPS agenda asserts women's equal right to participate and lead in all areas of international peace and security. Nonetheless, women remain underrepresented, including notably across arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament discussions.

7. During the 2024 NPT PrepCom, 33% of registered participants were women, compared with 30% who comprised heads of delegation, and 29% of speakers.³

8. Challenges are even greater at the leadership level; it is rare to see a woman chairing multilateral processes on nuclear weapons. Between 1975 and 2025 there have been 47 Chairs of the sessions of the Preparatory Committee and of the Review Conferences, 45 of whom were men and 2 were women.

9. Improving gender equality in participation and leadership in the NPT review process is highly desirable, as it has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of NPT processes and their outcomes. Diverse teams are more innovative, more effective in resolving impasses, and can achieve more sustainable outcomes.

10. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that men and women have different attitudes towards nuclear weapons, which underlines the importance of demographic diversity in nuclear weapons policymaking and decision making. A review of academic articles and opinion polls from 1990 to 2023 and covering 47 states showed that women tend to be more opposed to nuclear proliferation than men and express greater discomfort about the existence of nuclear weapons, though this can vary geographically. Women also tend to view nuclear weapons as hazardous and have more concerns about the consequences of use when compared with men, who tend to view them more as a security guarantee.⁴

Preventing conflict and protecting women and girls from the disproportionate impacts of ionizing radiation

11. The WPS agenda seeks the prevention of conflict, as well as the prevention of and protection from all forms of violence that affect women and girls.

12. The detonation of a nuclear weapon in a populated area is known to cause devastating harm: it can kill thousands of people indiscriminately. The mid- and long-term health impacts from radiation exposure can differ among women, men, girls and boys.

13. Research based on data gathered from atomic bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed that women and girls are more vulnerable to the effects of ionizing radiation that result from a nuclear attack. Women face higher risks of cancer, heart disease, and stroke from radiation than men.⁵

14. Radiation following a nuclear attack or a nuclear weapon test can impact reproductive and maternal health. Pregnant women exposed to nuclear radiation face a greater likelihood of delivering children with physical malformations or resulting in stillbirths.⁶

³ Data compiled by UNODA.

⁴ Ellen Willio and Michal Onderco, "Public opinion on nuclear weapons: is there a gender gap?". In Dalaqua, Renata H. (Ed) From the Margins to the Mainstream: Advancing Intersectional Gender Analysis of Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, UNIDIR.
<https://unidir.org/publication/from-the-margins-to-the-mainstream-advancing-intersectional-gender-analysis-of-nuclear-non-proliferation-and-disarmament/>

⁵ Amanda M. Nichols and Mary Olson. Gender and Ionizing Radiation: Towards a New Research Agenda Addressing Disproportionate Harm. Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2024.
<https://unidir.org/publication/gender-and-ionizing-radiation-towards-a-new-research-agenda-addressing-disproportionate-harm/>

⁶ Dimmen, Anne Guro. 2014. "The Humanitarian Impacts of Nuclear Weapons from a Gender Perspective", ILPI-UNIDIR Vienna Conference Series, paper No 5. ILPI-UNIDIR. p. 2.
<https://unidir.org/publication/gendered-impacts-the-humanitarian-impacts-of-nuclear-weapons-from-a-gender-perspective/>

15. Girls aged 0–5 are the most at-risk group, with the highest lifetime risk of cancer and other health consequences from radiation exposure.⁷

16. There are also widespread gendered social stigmas associated with exposure to radiation. Women survivors of nuclear weapon tests and use reported stigmatization and discrimination, as they were deemed “contaminated”. This negatively impacted their perceptions of self-worth, as well as prospects of marriage and motherhood.⁸

17. Several States Parties have expressed support for recognizing and addressing the disproportionate impacts that ionizing radiation has on women and girls, a point that has been reiterated in NPT Chair’s summaries.⁹

The contribution of peaceful uses of nuclear energy towards prosperous societies

18. The peaceful uses of nuclear energy can contribute to recovery efforts after conflict and ultimately support human development and prosperous societies, which are also goals of the WPS agenda. In particular, gender-responsive capacity building, education and technical cooperation in the nuclear field can advance economic and social progress.

19. It is crucial to ensure that both women and men can benefit from the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and have equal access to education and training in nuclear science and engineering, among other relevant fields.

20. Despite notable achievements in increasing representation, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency achieving gender parity in 2025 (up from 30% in 2019), women remain underrepresented in the nuclear workforce. For instance, only 30% of the members the World Institute for Nuclear Security are women.¹⁰

21. It is important to ensure that age, sex and gender considerations inform radiation research and radiological protection. Nuclear regulators and research institutions have a role to play in fostering knowledge on the differential impact of low-level radiation on women and men.

22. Thus far, epidemiological studies on effects of exposure to low-level radiation – typical of most nuclear applications today – have not considered sex differences in past research. Studies have usually looked at groups of men from male-dominated industries, such as uranium mining or nuclear power.¹¹ More research is needed to refine our knowledge of how low-level radiation can affect women and men differently.

⁷ Amanda M. Nichols and Mary Olson. Gender and Ionizing Radiation: Towards a New Research Agenda Addressing Disproportionate Harm. Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2024.
<https://unidir.org/publication/gender-and-ionizing-radiation-towards-a-new-research-agenda-addressing-disproportionate-harm/>

⁸ John Borrie, Anne Guro Dimmen, Torbjørn Graff Hugo, Camilla Waszink, and Kjølve Egeland (2016). "Gender, Development and Nuclear Weapons: Shared Goals, Shared Concerns", International Law and Policy Institute (ILPI) and UNIDIR, Geneva. <https://unidir.org/publication/gender-development-and-nuclear-weapons-shared-goals-shared-concerns/>

⁹ Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Chair’s summary. NPT/CONF.2026/PC.II/WP.44
<https://undocs.org/en/NPT/CONF.2026/PC.II/WP.44> ; Reflections by the Chair of the first session of the Preparatory Committee on potential areas for focused discussion at the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons NPT/CONF.2026/PC.I/WP.38
<https://undocs.org/en/NPT/CONF.2026/PC.I/WP.38>

¹⁰ <https://www.wins.org/document/annual-report-2023/>

¹¹ Rumina Velshi, “Gender Equity and the Nuclear Sector: a Canadian Perspective”
<https://unidir.org/gender-equity-and-the-nuclear-sector-a-canadian-perspective/>.

Moving forward

23. At this Preparatory Committee meeting, States Parties have the opportunity to mark the 25th anniversary of SCR 1325 (2000) by advancing considerations related to the WPS agenda in the NPT.

24. As a first step, NPT States Parties should ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women in all decision-making processes related to the Treaty review process, including in informal discussions and also in more formal settings.

25. This PrepCom should consolidate and build on the discussions and conclusions on gender from the previous review cycle, and the 11th Review Conference should decide to:

- a) Recall the working papers, statements, joint statements and side events on gender in the context of the tenth review cycle and to call for continued engagement on the issue;
- b) Recognise the importance of and commit to ensure the equal, full and meaningful participation and leadership of women in the implementation and review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty;
- c) Call for the further integration of gender perspectives in all aspects related to implementation of the Treaty.

26. Additionally, States Parties should:

- a) Request for the Secretariat to collect, track and publish gender-disaggregated data and statistics on gender balance in delegations, including at the Head of Delegation level;
- b) Promote dedicated research, dialogue and capacity-building efforts that consider intersectional and compounding factors in radiation harm;
- c) Encourage the incorporation of gender perspectives in NPT-related capacity-building technical cooperation programmes;
- d) Support initiatives to further develop gender analysis in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy;
- e) Encourage the Chairs of all PrepComs and RevCons to organize informal briefings, calling for ideas on how to improve gender equality, including the equal and effective participation and leadership of women, and provide a space for a specific discussion on the issue and should include these issues in their outreach and communication;
- f) Foster collaboration among NPT delegates and WPS focal points through joint side events, statements and national initiatives, including National Action Plans on the implementation of SCR 1325 (2000).