



CD Informal Plenary on ‘Women and Disarmament’

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Statement by Ambassador Patricia O’Brien

Permanent Representative of Ireland

Madam President,

It is a pleasure to take the floor today, when the CD addresses this critical issue which is not always given appropriate attention: Women’s role in disarmament, both as victims of armed violence and as powerful agents for change, is an issue to which Ireland attaches great importance. I would like to thank and commend Pakistan for organising this informal session.

I thank the panellists for their insightful, thought-provoking and impressive presentations. The aspects I will touch upon are also addressed in the consultation paper that was commissioned by Ireland and prepared by the Chatham House entitled ‘Nuclear Disarmament: The Missing Link in Multilateralism’. As most of you will be aware, this paper was presented at the OEWG meeting last week and received broad recognition. I start by echoing the words of DG Møller in emphasising the role of women in the context of the SDGs.

Ireland has, since the ground-breaking Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons, actively engaged in creating awareness of the gendered impact of nuclear and conventional weapons. We were pleased to co-host a side event in this respect at last year's NPT Review Conference, and have also addressed this question at the February and May meetings of the Open Ended Working Group, including in our Working Paper entitled 'Nuclear Disarmament in Context: A Global Governance Issue'. Ireland will be hosting a side-event on gender and disarmament at the upcoming First Committee next October.

We recognise that one aspect of gender and disarmament is that of the differing impacts which armed conflict and possible use of nuclear and conventional weapons have on women and on men. There has in fact been welcome recognition of this in recent times in relation to conventional weapons. The Arms Trade Treaty, one of the international community's recent success stories, includes specific provisions recognising the impact of the arms trade on women (and children) - a major innovation in an international treaty of this kind. In addition, the Small Arms and Light Weapons Security Council Resolution adopted in 2013 explicitly recognises the role played by small arms in the commission of sexual and gender-based violence.

When it comes to nuclear weapons, research findings are even more striking. In the context of awareness raising and disarmament education, we have been focussed on the gendered impact of ionising radiation. A nuclear detonation of any size will impact hugely on all human beings exposed to its radiation, but more so on women than on men, and on girl children more than boy children.

Ireland believes it is crucial to continue raising awareness and contributing to knowledge around this hitherto little appreciated aspect of nuclear weapons use. The gendered aspect of these weapons needs greater visibility. Bearing in mind Ms Gandenberger's cautionary words about over-emphasising the vulnerability of women: -Nevertheless, because women are in fact biologically more vulnerable than men to the harmful effects of radiation, we believe they have distinct issues to raise in negotiations – issues that may not otherwise be placed on the negotiating table.

This leads me to the other aspect of this issue, namely that of empowerment and of agency. Women have been, and continue to be, a powerful force for change in relation to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control affairs. Indeed the first two women to receive the Nobel Peace Prize were advocates for peace and disarmament, and the roll call of women Nobel Peace Prize winners' shows what can be achieved when women are empowered and gain agency in disarmament and peace-making processes. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 recognises this and calls for women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and for the incorporation of gender perspective in all areas of peace-building.

Madam President,

We believe that womens' knowledge, experiences, perceptions of threats to security and their perspectives should be factored into all disarmament activities. For this reason, we strongly support efforts to increase the numbers of women who are active in policy-making, planning and implementation processes related to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

If I may give an example from the Conventional weapons field, experience in landmine and ordnance clearance was far more successful as soon as women were engaged with clearance actors, rather than, as was the case initially, only men. Why? Because in communities where women collect water and engage in other agricultural activities, they can provide more accurate information on where the minefields begin and where they end. Studies show that by including women in information-gathering in rural Africa, mine clearance has been accelerated hugely.

It is our firm belief that empowering women in the disarmament field will bring us closer to our goals, in particular that of a world free of nuclear weapons. We therefore look forward to exploring how gender and disarmament can be integrated into our work in the Conference on Disarmament.

Thank you.