

Women and multilateral disarmament forums: Patterns of underrepresentation

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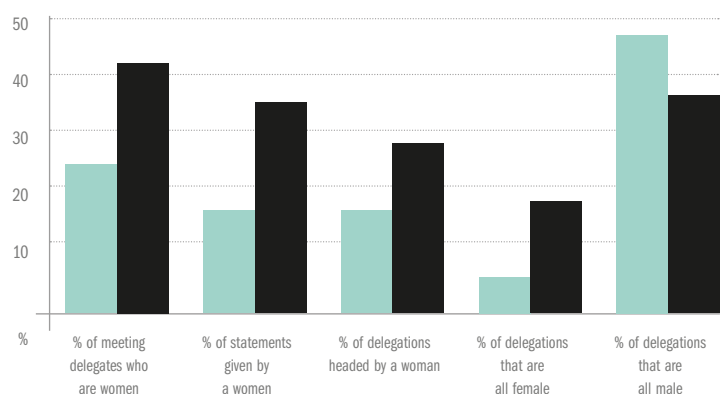
This discussion paper is part of a project to map and analyse low-income country participation across a range of multilateral disarmament forums. The first discussion paper of this project, on the underrepresentation of low-income countries at nuclear disarmament forums, was published in May 2015.¹ The project complements current work by the International Law and Policy Institute (ILPI) to examine data on a selection of disarmament processes and improve inclusiveness based on this analysis.² It also draws substantially on data and analysis compiled by Reaching Critical Will.³ The analysis in this paper is provisional, and intends to provide a basis for discussion and qualitative investigation of the factors behind the patterns reported.

Women are inadequately represented at the meetings of international treaties and processes that address disarmament and weapons issues, including those concerning conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction. At any given meeting of the forums studied for this paper, only around a quarter of official country delegates are likely to be women, and less than a fifth of statements are likely to be given by a woman. Almost half of all country delegations at any of these meetings are likely to be composed entirely of men.

This paper examines patterns in the underrepresentation of women in 13 international forums⁴ at meetings between 2010 and 2014, concentrating on attendance, leadership of delegations and the delivery of statements or expert presentations. It looks at patterns in participation among both states and civil society - which includes academic institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other organisations such as religious groups.⁵ Though civil society performs somewhat better than states across the available data, the equal participation of women and men⁶ in these processes is far from being achieved by either.

For the meetings where data was available across the forums studied, on average less than half of the civil society delegates were women, and over a third of civil society delegations were likely to be all male at any given meeting. In contrast, on average only 16% of delegations were all female. However, women headed roughly twice as many civil society delegations as state delegations on average, and female speakers gave on average more than twice as many interventions for civil society as states, across the available data (Fig. 1).⁷

Fig 1.
Participation of women in multilateral disarmament meetings on behalf of states and civil society: average rates across 13 forums, 2010-14



These patterns are significant from a number of perspectives. The findings of this paper represent one aspect of the relative marginalisation of women in international decision-making forums, despite global recognition of the need to address this issue. The UN Security Council's landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace and security urges member states to ensure the increased representation of women in "mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict". It stresses the importance of women's "equal participation and full involvement in

all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security”.⁸ The recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals reaffirm the need to ensure women’s “full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership” within political processes, as one target within their gender equality goal.⁹

The UN General Assembly has, since 2010,¹⁰ adopted resolutions on women, disarmament, proliferation and arms control specifically. These recognise that the full and effective participation of men and women is essential, and highlight the need to facilitate women’s representation and participation. “Member States, relevant subregional and regional organizations, the United Nations and the specialized agencies” are urged to “promote equal opportunities for the representation of women in all decision-making processes with regard to matters related to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control” in the latest resolution from 2014.¹¹ A number of countries reported to the UN Secretary-General in 2013 on their policies relating to meeting the aspirations of these resolutions, with some drawing attention to the promotion of women’s participation in international meetings as well as broader issues related to gender and disarmament.¹² The outcome of the latest biennial states’ meeting of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons also highlighted the need to ensure the participation and representation of women,¹³ as have recent Security Council resolutions on small arms and light weapons.¹⁴

Civil society has made efforts to draw attention to and help address women’s underrepresentation, and gender issues in disarmament more broadly, through research, analysis and other activities.¹⁵ In an initiative that has drawn a considerable amount of attention within the space of international meetings, civil society campaigners have been publicly highlighting the problem of all-male panels in disarmament and global policy forums, and called on men to commit to refuse to participate on such panels by signing up to a public list.¹⁶ These efforts followed a meeting of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in May 2014 at which all 17 expert speakers invited to contribute during a plenary session on autonomous weapons were men.

The underrepresentation of women among civil society and states at multilateral disarmament meetings is only one of the ways in which gender intersects with disarmament and development related issues. Gendered discourses on violence and weapons, which for example frame certain weapons as symbols of masculine strength, while framing women as being in need of male protection, can shape how disarmament issues are addressed, as well as exacerbating women’s exclusion.¹⁷ Women, men, boys and girls can also be exposed to different patterns of violence, and affected differently by specific weapons and practices.¹⁸

Though essential, ensuring the equal participation of men and women in delegations at multilateral disarmament meetings would not necessarily fundamentally challenge the framing of international discussions or the treatment of women within them, nor necessarily facilitate the promotion of progressive disarmament initiatives by both women and men. It would also only address one aspect of marginalisation within these forums. As such, whilst crucial, ensuring the equal participation of women and men at multilateral disarmament meetings should be accompanied by a range of other measures to these ends. For example, ensuring the meaningful participation of those who have been most affected by the weapons and issues under discussion, addressing the underrepresentation

of lower income countries, and ensuring the consideration of humanitarian perspectives, are important policy objectives that states and organisations should embrace.

The remainder of this paper explores in more depth some patterns in data related to women’s participation and concludes by considering next steps.

Gender balance within delegations

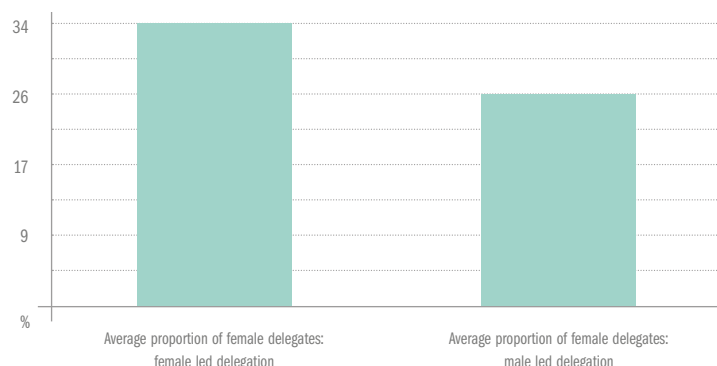
For the meetings between 2010 and 2014 of the 13 forums examined, concerning gender balance within country delegations, only 10 out of the 195 countries and territories for which we gathered participation data had equal numbers of men and women on their delegations on average. Overall 160 countries’ delegations had more men than women on average. Five countries did not include women on any delegations for the meetings where data was available (Fig. 2). Of the 143 civil society organisations for which gender information was available on delegations, 17 had equal numbers of men and women on their delegations on average. 42 had more women than men on their delegations on average, including 29 whose delegations were always all female. 54 civil society organisations sent only men to the meetings they attended.

Proportionally more civil society organisations than states had equal numbers of men and women in their delegations therefore, and men were overrepresented within the delegations of proportionally fewer civil society organisations than states. More civil society organisations than states sent either only men or only women to all the meetings they attended – though this should be seen in the context of the fact that around two fifths of the civil society delegations recorded in the data were single delegates. The overall picture starkly illustrates the general overrepresentation of men within delegations, even more than within the total number of delegates attending any given meeting.

Fig 2.
Gender balance in country delegations
(average across all meetings)



Fig 3.
Proportion of female delegates in female- and male-led state delegations (excluding delegation heads)



Focusing again on country delegations, there was a clear relationship across all meetings between the head of delegation's sex and the proportion of women on a delegation. There were on average considerably more women on female-headed delegations compared to those led by a man. Fig. 3 shows the average proportion of women in female- and male-headed delegations across all forums and years (the figures exclude the delegation heads themselves). Where a delegation was led by a man, around a quarter of the remaining delegates were likely to be women; where a delegation was led by a woman, this rose to around a third. There was some variation between meetings in these percentages, but the overall correlation was strong.

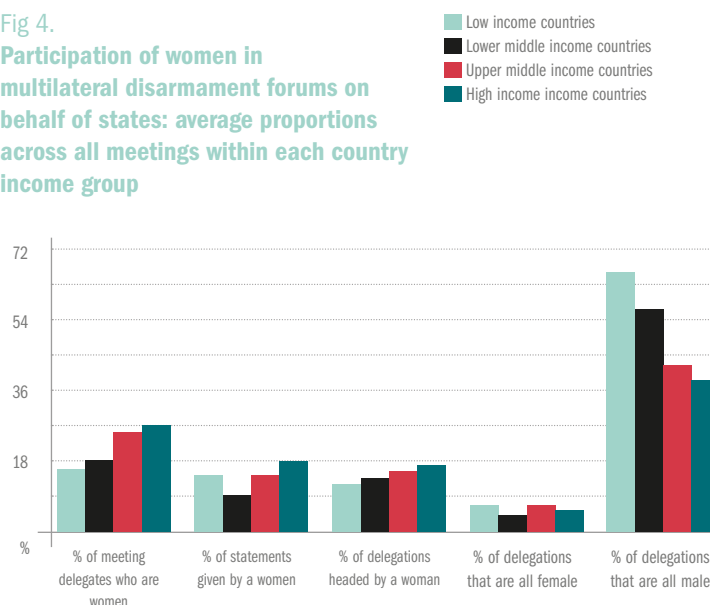
This data suggests that female leadership increases women's inclusion within delegations, though it cannot reveal by what mechanism, nor if any broader impact towards equal participation beyond female-led delegations may result. Given that on average only 15% of country delegations at any given meeting across the period were likely to be led by a woman (Fig. 1), increasing women's leadership of country delegations could have a significant impact on women's representation within disarmament forums overall.

Women's representation according to region and country income level

There were variations in the representation of women within country delegations between regional groups and country income groups. Taking average overall data, countries in lower income group¹⁹ tended also to have a lower proportion of women delegates. The proportion of delegations likely to be headed by women, out of all country delegations in the income category, also decreases with income group. The proportion of delegations likely to be all male on the other hand increases the lower the country income group. There was little variation in the percentages of all women delegations between country income groups. Data on statements does not show so clearly the pattern of increased women's participation with greater country income (Fig. 4).

The data collected for this study shows that lower-income countries are underrepresented in multilateral disarmament forums. Preliminary analysis of nuclear disarmament forums for example showed that lower-income countries were less likely to attend and speak at these meetings than richer countries with an equal right to participate.²⁰ Why lower-income countries have lower average rates of women's participation – alongside the patterns of these countries' overall marginalisation – cannot be concluded from this data, though the data may give some indications. For example, the overall data set shows that lower-income countries will field smaller delegations to meetings on average. The visibility of broader structural inequalities may be emphasised where there is a smaller pool of individuals attending, or available to attend or lead delegations, at different meetings. The combined patterns of the underrepresentation of low-income countries and women suggest the usefulness of considering how different forms of marginalisation may interact, in addressing these issues.

Fig 4.
Participation of women in multilateral disarmament forums on behalf of states: average proportions across all meetings within each country income group



Examining patterns by region (using UN General Assembly group), significant variation in women's representation appears across the available data. Regarding the proportion of delegates who were women within a regional group's delegates, African and Asia-Pacific countries had the lowest average percentages. These regional groups similarly had the lowest proportions of women-led delegations on average, and the highest proportions of all male delegations. Beyond this, regional patterns were mixed.

Eastern European and Latin American and Caribbean countries were more likely to field all-female delegations than other regions. Latin American and Caribbean countries also had the highest proportion of female delegates within their overall numbers, and the highest proportion of delegations headed by women. The Western European and Others Group had the lowest proportion of all-male delegations on average, but only the third highest proportion of female-headed delegations out of all regional groups. These different patterns suggest the potential usefulness of regionally focused initiatives to improve women's participation.

Differences in women's participation between forums and over time

Comparing women's representation according to the broad topics covered by the different forums studied for this project, there was variation between processes covering weapons of mass destruction (WMD), conventional weapons, and forums whose scope covers both. Focusing on delegation data for countries (data on statements and for civil society was more limited for this level of analysis), the highest levels of women's representation were found in WMD-focused meetings (the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), meetings on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention). Meetings with broader mandates had lower levels of representation (UN General Assembly First Committee, Conference on Disarmament, UN Disarmament Commission) and those covering conventional weapons the lowest (Arms Trade Treaty, UN Programme of Action on Small Arms, Mine Ban Treaty, Convention on Cluster Munitions, Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons).

The extent of the difference between these types of forums varied: women were likely to make up 25% of delegates at any given meeting concerning WMD and 22% at meetings on conventional weapons; 18% of delegations at WMD-focused forums were likely to be led by a women, compared to 14% for conventional; and 42% of delegations at meetings dealing with WMD were likely to be all male, compared with 51% for those focusing on conventional weapons.

Across the data as a whole, there are some, not necessarily conclusive, indications of an increase in women's participation on country delegations between 2010 and 2014. The average proportion of delegations led by women increased by 6% between 2010 and 2014 in the data. The average proportion of delegates overall who are women at any given meeting increased marginally. However, the average percentage of delegations that are all male dropped in 2012 and 2013, but otherwise remained static. Data on statements given is mixed (which may be due to the more limited data available on statements).

Studies using similar data to examine women's participation on country delegations over a longer period of time suggest a general upward trend in representation. NPT Review Conference data shows an increase in the proportion of representatives who are women from 17.8% in 2005 to 27.2% in 2015.²¹ Analysis of women's attendance in country delegations at Review Conferences of the BWC also shows a relatively steady increase in the percentage of women in state delegations, from less than 10% in 1980 to over 25% in 2011.²² These trends suggest however that achieving the equal representation of women and men, leaving aside the question of whether this would ensure full and meaningful equal participation, could still take decades if the current rate of progress is maintained.

Conclusions and ways forward

The data collected for this project indicate that overall women are significantly underrepresented in multilateral forums addressing disarmament and weapons issues, both among states and civil society. A necessary first step towards addressing the particular issue of women's attendance and delivery of statements is the consistent monitoring, publication and analysis of this information, including examining the interaction of gender with other forms of marginalisation in multilateral disarmament discussions, in order to address these issues. The data collected by Article 36 for this study had various limitations, and sex-disaggregated data, particularly regarding speakers, was often hard to find and time consuming to extract for analysis. States and others should support the consistent collection, publication and monitoring of participation data – as well as research into the impact of measures to address underrepresentation – whether the work is done by international or official bodies or civil society monitoring organisations. Raising awareness of and highlighting such patterns – and the lack or inadequacy of steps to address them – can be a first step towards encouraging more concerted action, as well as a way of measuring progress.

The achievement of the equal representation of men and women at meetings however would not necessarily guarantee that women's voices were heard equally, or that other problematic aspects within disarmament forums related to gender issues would be addressed. In the further qualitative work Article 36 will conduct as part of the broader study of which this paper is a part, we will be examining the steps currently being taken by the actors involved to address women's underrepresentation at these meetings, and the measures that could be most effective in order to address gender-related and other forms of marginalisation in multilateral disarmament forums.

Appendix: Note on methodology and terms

The forums from which the data discussed in this paper were gathered are the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; international conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons; meetings on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; the Biological Weapons Convention; the Chemical Weapons Convention; the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons; the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention; the Convention on Cluster Munitions; the Arms Trade Treaty; the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons; the UN General Assembly First Committee; the Conference on Disarmament; and the UN Disarmament Commission. Information on delegations and statements was collected for all meetings where available between 2010-14 inclusive. Data was gathered from publicly available lists, collected either from the UN documents archive, archives collated by Reaching Critical Will (www.reachingcriticalwill.org), or from websites created for particular meetings, by the organisers or associated organisations.

The number of women on delegations was recorded by counting the number of delegates with a female title (Mrs, Mme etc.). Where titles were not given on participant lists, gender data was not collected for those meetings. The head of delegation was assumed to be the first name on the delegation list. A speaker's gender was recorded based on her/his title. Where no title was given, the name was referenced against the participants list. A statement with no speaker's name was assumed to be given by a man if the delegation was all-male, and by a woman if the delegation was all-female. If the speaker's gender could not be determined in any of these ways, or by searching for a named speaker in other sources, the gender was recorded as 'unknown'.

Participant lists with gender-specific titles were available for the majority of meetings for state delegations, though not for all – in particular, some expert and inter-sessional meetings did not have this data. For NGOs, participant lists with delegate titles were not available at all for 6 out of the 13 forums, and not available for every meeting of the remaining 7. Information on the gender of speakers was inconsistently available, and for states' statements was unusable for analysis for 6 forums, due to the high number of speakers whose gender was unknown. For NGOs, data was usable from 11 out of 13 forums, but did not cover all meetings. The patterns observed are therefore not based on a complete set of data. This paper has worked with averages across the still considerable amount of data that was available, as an approach to this information deficit.

One recommendation of this study is that better and more consistent recording of this data should take place, in order to facilitate monitoring, including of women's representation. We note that participant lists are imperfect as a data source and will not necessarily reflect actual attendance at meetings (given that some registered delegates will not attend and some will be added to delegations subsequent to the production of lists) or how individual sessions were attended.

The country income categories used in this paper ("low-income", "lower-middle-income", "upper-middle-income", "high-income") are based on the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) list of Official Development Assistance (ODA) for 2012/2013.²³ Using this list, countries with a per capita GNI of less than \$1005 in 2010 ('Least Developed Countries' and 'Other Low Income Countries') were grouped into "low-income", and countries not appearing on the list of ODA recipients were classified as "high-income".

For regional analysis, membership of UN General Assembly voting groupings were used, to represent existing blocs and to permit more meaningful analysis (given the North America geographical region contains only two countries). The groups are: African Group, Asia-Pacific Group, Eastern European Group, Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), and Western European and Others Group (WEOG) (which contains states from Western Europe and North America as well as Australia, New Zealand and Israel).²⁴

END NOTES

1. Article 36 (May 2015) 'The underrepresentation of low-income countries in nuclear disarmament forums', available at: <http://a36.co/1KmGqGC>
2. Torbjørn Graff Hugo & Kjølv Egeland (December 2014) 'Jumping the Hurdles: Obstacles and Opportunities for Inclusive Multilateral Disarmament', Background Paper No. 13/2014, International Law and Policy Institute, available at: http://nwp.ilpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/BP13_2014-Obstacles-to-South-Participation1.pdf
3. See <http://reachingcriticalwill.org>
4. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; international conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons; meetings on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; the Biological Weapons Convention; the Chemical Weapons Convention; the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons; the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention; the Convention on Cluster Munitions; the Arms Trade Treaty; the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons; the UN General Assembly First Committee; the Conference on Disarmament; and the UN Disarmament Commission.
5. See the note on methodology and terms for more information on the data used for this paper, and its limitations
6. Article 36 acknowledges gender diversity beyond the binary categorisation of 'men' and 'women'. These are used in this paper as the categorisations available in the source data.
7. Which has limitations particularly in relation to speaker data – see the the note on methodology and terms for more detail
8. United Nations Security Council (2000) 'Resolution 1325', S/RES/1325
9. United Nations (2015) 'Sustainable Development Goals', available at: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
10. UN General Assembly (2010) 'Resolution 65/69. Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control', A/RES/65/69
11. UN General Assembly (2014) 'Resolution 69/61. Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control', A/RES/69/61
12. See UN General Assembly (2013) 'Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control: Report of the Secretary-General', UN Document A/68/166, available at: <http://www.un.org/disarmament/gender/>

13. UN General Assembly (2014) 'Report of the Fifth Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects', UN document A/CONF.192/BMS/2014/2, available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.192/BMS/2014/2

14. See UN Security Council (2013) 'Resolution 2117', UN document S/RES/2117, available at: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2117\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2117(2013)) and UN Security Council (2015), 'Resolution 2200', UN document S/RES/2200, available at: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2200%20\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2200%20(2015))

15. See for example Reaching Critical Will (2014) 'Critical issues: Gender and disarmament' available at: <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/fact-sheets/critical-issues/4741-gender-and-disarmament>. Gender was the focus in 2014 of an annual forum run by a wide community of disarmament NGOs, at which organisations meet to build community knowledge and skills. See Reaching Critical Will (15 October 2014) 'WILPF to co-host third annual humanitarian disarmament campaigns forum', <http://reachingcriticalwill.org/news/latest-news/9195-wilpf-to-co-host-third-annual-humanitarian-disarmament-campaigns-forum>

16. The list is currently hosted by Article 36. See 'Say no to #ManPanels', <http://www.manpanels.org>

17. Reaching Critical Will (2014), above note 11

18. See for example: Reaching Critical Will (2014) 'Women and explosive weapons' available at: <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/WEW.pdf>; Article 36 and Reaching Critical Will (2014) 'Sex and drone strikes: Gender and identity in targeting and casualty analysis', available at: <http://a36.co/1N1E4fR>; Reaching Critical Will (2015) 'Gender-based violence and the Arms Trade Treaty', available at: <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/publications-and-research/publications/10112-gender-based-violence-and-the-arms-trade-treaty>

19. Countries and territories are divided for this project into "low-income", "lower- middle-income", "upper-middle-income" and "high-income", based on the OECD-DAC list of Official Development Assistance. See the note on methodology and terms for further details.

20. See Article 36 above note 1

21. Mothepa Shadung, (2015) 'In the debate towards nuclear disarmament, where are all the women?' ISS Africa, available at: <https://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/in-the-debate-towards-nuclear-disarmament-where-are-all-the-women>

22. Kathleen Danskin and Dana Perkins (2014) 'Women as Agents of Positive Change in Biosecurity', Science and Diplomacy, Vol. 3 No. 2 available at: <http://www.sciencediplomacy.org/perspective/2014/women-agents-positive-change-in-biosecurity>

23. OECD, 'DAC List of ODA Recipients', available at: <http://www.oecd.org/investment/stats/daclistofodarecipients.htm>

24. 'United Nations Regional Groups of Member States', available at: <http://www.un.org/depts/DGACM/RegionalGroups.shtml>