



**Open-ended Working Group taking forward
multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations¹****Geneva 2016**

Item 5 of the agenda

Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations**Youth: A necessary stakeholder in nuclear disarmament
processes****Submitted by Amplify - Generation of Change****Introduction**

1. In his closing remarks at the first formal meeting of the 2016 Open-ended Working Group taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations the chair, Mr. Thani Thongphakdi, stressed the importance of reaching out to youth,² as States, civil society and all other stakeholders move together toward achieving a world without nuclear weapons. As a network of young people working for nuclear disarmament, Amplify agrees with Mr. Thongphakdi, Ambassador of Thailand, and calls on states to engage youth in processes to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament and to increase the levels of youth participation in the Open-ended Working Group.

2. Youth not only have the right to be informed of this multilateral process, but also we are stakeholders who should play an active role in these critical discussions. Above all, our future is at stake when nuclear disarmament negotiations stall. The Open-ended Working Group will benefit from including the voices of youth from around the world. Youth are innovators. We have the ability to envision what a world without nuclear weapons will be like; plus we have the courage to work to make it a reality. The Open-ended Working Group was convened due to concerns that current approaches to nuclear disarmament are at a standstill; therefore, it is important to bring in fresh ideas, new voices and innovative approaches.

¹ Established pursuant to resolution 70/33 of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

² Remarks during the Final Session by H.E. Mr. Thani Thongphakdi, Chair of the Open-ended Working Group taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations

[http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/54C97C779C5A7C36C1257F68005D7A28/\\$file/Chair+260_2.pdf](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/54C97C779C5A7C36C1257F68005D7A28/$file/Chair+260_2.pdf).



3. This working paper will discuss the benefits of involving youth in nuclear disarmament processes, highlight existing initiatives where youth are making contributions, and suggest ways in which organizations and governments could engage youth.

Why youth should be engaged

4. There are a record 1.8 billion young people in the world today. We make up 25 per cent of the global population and that figure is growing.

5. Today's youth have never lived in a nuclear weapons-free world. We have inherited the burden of a heavily armed world where security is defined narrowly to the security of the State and not the security of humanity. The world spends resources to build, renew and maintain nuclear weapons that could be utilized to strengthen education, economic development, and social institutions. In short, the maintenance and modernization of nuclear arsenals has a long-term impact on youth by diverting funding from activities that could make our future better to one that poses a real and concrete threat to humanity.

6. But youth are not just the future; we are current leaders in governments, international organizations and civil society. As digital natives, youth are not only up to date with the changing world but we are the ones building it. Young people are designing how we all interact and how information is shared through technology. In this rapidly changing and increasingly connected world, governments are working to become more open and to engage their citizens directly. Openness and direct engagement are two things that we expect from our leaders but so far has not been very evident in discussions on nuclear disarmament.

7. In 2002, the United Nations Secretary-General released the "United Nations Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education." Its findings highlight the importance of empowering young individuals to contribute to achieving disarmament and non-proliferation measures and, ultimately, complete disarmament under effective international control. The report states that the need for more youth involvement in disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations has never been greater, as "changing concepts and perceptions of security and threat magnify the urgency for new thinking to pursue disarmament and non-proliferation goals."³

8. Including youth in these processes should not be viewed as tokenism or a photo opportunity; young people have valuable expertise that can contribute to achieving our shared goal of the abolition of nuclear weapons. Youth should not be confused with inexperience or lack of expertise. Youth already involved in nuclear disarmament are often passionate and highly informed on the topic.

9. Once youth are involved, they often stay involved. Youth who are interested in health, human rights, the environment, disaster management and of course, international affairs can apply their expertise and contribute to nuclear disarmament.

10. Lastly, even when the decades-old goal of nuclear disarmament is reached, the human knowledge of how to make such inhumane weapons cannot be erased. The current efforts for multilateral disarmament negotiations can be sustainable only if we engage youth, who are now or will one day be decision makers and government leaders. It is of

³ "United Nations Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education" (A/57/124, 30 August 2002), see: <http://www.un.org/disarmament/HomePage/ODAPublications/DisarmamentStudySeries/PDF/SS-30.pdf>.

necessity that youth are involved, so that the world would never repeat the mistake of producing or using nuclear weapons.

Existing initiatives on youth

11. Numerous efforts are currently taking place to involve youth in disarmament and peacemaking processes. The Open-ended Working Group can look to the examples below of such existing initiatives as possible maps to increasing youth engagement.

A. Security Council resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security (2015)

12. In December 2015, the Security Council adopted a historic resolution on youth, peace and security⁴ which “for the first time in its history focuses entirely on the role of young men and women in peacebuilding and countering violent extremism.”⁵ The resolution urges Member States to provide youth with ways to express a greater voice in decision-making on peacemaking processes at the local, national, regional and international level. It further calls on all relevant actors, to take into account the participation and views of youth in occasions such as negotiating and implementing peace agreements.

13. It is recognized in the resolution that youth account for many of those civilians adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and displaced persons. The resolution comes at a time when concerns for the rise of radicalization to violence and violent extremism among youth are growing more than ever. Such circumstances require that youth be part of the prevention and resolution of conflicts and actively engage in peacemaking processes.

14. The resolution’s operational paragraphs on prevention highlights “the importance of creating policies for youth that would positively contribute to peacebuilding efforts” and calls on youth involvement in peace-related negotiations. The elimination of nuclear weapons is a global peacebuilding effort and for that reason, youth should be involved in all negotiations and international discussions on the issue. Youth involvement in peace and security does not mean youth involvement when others deem it is appropriate but instead youth involvement in peace and security issues that affect them and that matter to them. Nuclear disarmament fits into both categories.

B. The Humanitarian Initiative on the Impact of Nuclear Weapons

15. Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Oslo, Nayarit, and Vienna enjoyed a higher level of participation by young people that was more visible than the average disarmament conference. The widespread involvement of civil society in the humanitarian initiative has given youth more opportunities to participate. It has provided an entry point for young people to engage in discussions on nuclear disarmament by enabling us to go beyond the language of Realpolitik and assess the vulnerability of today’s threat-based security system in the light of its potential harms of human life, health, and the environment. The threats that nuclear weapons pose to humanity and this planet are concepts that the vast majority of people can understand without intensive education in security studies and cold war politics. It is also a point that all stakeholders can agree – that use of nuclear weapons would cause tremendous human suffering.

⁴ For the full text of the resolution, see:

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250(2015)).

⁵ Office of the Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, “United Nations Security Council adopts historic resolution on youth, peace and security,” <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/12/un-security-council-adopts-historic-resolution-on-youth-peace-and-security>.

16. By opening up discussions about nuclear disarmament beyond a narrow definition of security, the Humanitarian initiative has found a way to engage young people more effectively in nuclear disarmament than we have seen in the recent past. This reframing of the issue allows youth to engage with nuclear disarmament at the grassroots level, the national level and the international level. It has taken an abstract problem, thought by many to be dealt with generations ago, and made it real again, made it human, made it relevant, and made it an issue that draws our attention.

17. Young people can easily approach their peers and talk about a topic that used to be limited to those who had advanced studies in security issues. Concerns about humanitarian assistance, food security, the climate and health are all issues in which youth are interested. Peer to peer education is necessary for the expansion of public support for nuclear disarmament among the younger generations. By putting humanity at the centre of discussions about nuclear weapons, the Humanitarian initiative has created a new path for youth to be involved in nuclear disarmament.

C. International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition and the “Youth Pledge”

18. A steering committee composed by youth from different international NGOs organized an “International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition” in Hiroshima, in August 2015 marking the 70th anniversary of the bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The International Youth Summit gave the younger generation of leaders the opportunity to experience first-hand about the atrocities that took place 70 years ago and to commit to abolishing these horrific weapons. Additionally, the event helped preserve the living memories of hibakusha, and further inspired youth to ensure that the future is free from nuclear weapons.⁶

19. The Summit’s goal was to build and enhance the network of the younger generation of leaders in the field of nuclear abolition and to create opportunities for future collaborations transcending strategic differences. Participants engaged in a two-day working session. On the third and final day of the Summit there was a public forum, where over 250 participants deepened their understanding of the issue, discussed what actions they can take in their own communities and heard from the United Nations Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi. The youth leaders also developed a Youth Pledge for Nuclear Abolition (see annex) and a one-year action plan, with the awareness that the Summit is just a starting point for their future action.

20. The Youth Pledge reads in part:

“We, youth seek human security and sustainability, which are impossible to achieve fully in the presence of nuclear weapons. Youth see the potential for a world without nuclear weapons – we see the potential for security not to be based on fear and more militarism, but on diplomacy, cooperation and trust. Abolishing nuclear weapons is our responsibility; it is our right and we will no longer sit by while the opportunity of nuclear abolition is squandered. We, youth in all our diversity and in deep solidarity pledge to realize this goal. We are the Generation of Change.”

21. Since the completion of the International Youth Summit and based on the needs and desire from the participants to continue working together towards our shared goal, we decided to organize ourselves and thus an international network of youth dedicated to nuclear abolition entitled “Amplify - Generation of Change” was created.

⁶ For more on the summit, see: <http://internationalyouthsummit.org/>.

Recommendations to engage youth

22. There are many ways in which governments and civil society can engage youth in their efforts toward nuclear disarmament. Since the work of the Open-ended Working Group is already underway, the following recommendations can be applied to the Open-ended Working Group as well as to other forums where nuclear disarmament is discussed. The following list includes concrete steps that can be taken by stakeholders, it is by no means exhaustive:

- (a) Sessions on engaging diverse groups including youth, disarmament education and awareness-raising at the May OEWG can be held.
- (b) Measures to increase the participation of civil society (including youth) can be employed in all disarmament forums.
- (c) Briefings can be provided prior to and during the disarmament forums.
- (d) Youth representatives can be included in government delegations.
- (e) At the national level, parliamentarians and other decision makers can increase their availability to young people in person and online.
- (f) Mentoring programs for youth can be provided by experienced campaigners and diplomats.
- (g) Resolution 2250 can be fully implemented in order to give youth meaningful ways to engage in peacemaking processes including nuclear disarmament efforts.
- (h) Disarmament and peace education in both formal and non-formal settings can be available to all youth.

23. Relevant information, documents and digital tools on disarmament issues can be available and accessible, in an easy-to-use format.

Conclusion

24. The Open-ended Working Group emerged from a desire to find ways to do nuclear disarmament differently, and one way to do that is to engage youth in the work of this body in a substantive and meaningful way. Youth can make a number of meaningful contributions to the work of the Open-ended Working Group and to efforts to bring nuclear disarmament forward but states must first recognize that youth are stakeholders to be listened to and engaged.

25. Discussions taking place in this Open-ended Working Group will shape the future of our global community. It is not acceptable for such critical decisions to be made without us.

26. If the Open-ended Working Group's goal of advancing nuclear disarmament is to be achieved, the process should be as inclusive as possible. The Open-ended Working Group and all subsequent actions towards the outlaw and elimination of nuclear weapons need to hear youth voices as well as survivors and victims, women, indigenous persons and persons with disabilities.

27. Changes will need to be made to how nuclear disarmament is done not only to facilitate youth engagement but also to help adapt nuclear disarmament discussions to the 21st century. The idea that decisions about weapons that could eliminate all life on the planet are being made behind closed doors without consultation with us does not fit into the globalized, connected, open, transparent and humane world we are building.

Annex

Generation of change: A youth pledge for nuclear abolition

1. Nuclear weapons are a symbol of a bygone age; a symbol that poses eminent threat to our present reality and has no place in the future we are creating.
2. Seventy years have passed since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and yet the existence of nuclear weapons continues to threaten every single person with the prospect of a cruel and inhumane death. For 70 years speeches have been made, statements issued and endorsed saying “never again,” and yet we are still held hostage by nuclear weapons. We, youth around the world, are mustering the courage to stand up and fulfil these decades-old promises of abolition. We need to eliminate this threat to our shared future and we urge you to join us, the Generation of Change.
3. It is time to take action.
4. We, youth seek human security and sustainability, which are impossible to achieve fully in the presence of nuclear weapons. Youth see the potential for a world without nuclear weapons – we see the potential for security not to be based on fear and more militarism, but on diplomacy, cooperation and trust. Abolishing nuclear weapons is our responsibility; it is our right and we will no longer sit by while the opportunity of nuclear abolition is squandered. We, youth in all our diversity and in deep solidarity pledge to realize this goal. We are the Generation of Change.
5. The continued existence of nuclear weapons is unacceptable and action must be taken to protect our shared future. Therefore, as the Generation of Change, we pledge to:
 - (a) Continue to educate and empower ourselves in order to better spread this awareness amongst our peers;
 - (b) Recognize that diversity in this work is important and work to educate ourselves on how gender impacts disarmament
 - (c) Take action, raise our voices and pursue nuclear abolition in our communities and our countries;
 - (d) Share our knowledge about the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and the experiences of hibakushas and survivors of nuclear weapons tests;
 - (e) Encourage others to join the nuclear abolition movement and establish a strong unity among all nuclear abolition campaigners;
 - (f) Call upon every State to start negotiations on an international treaty for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons;
 - (g) Call on our elected representatives to adopt national legislation prohibiting and criminalizing the manufacture, investment in, testing, deployment, threat or use of nuclear weapons.
6. We, the Generation of Change, invite you to join us as we raise our collective voice to call for action; we refuse to stand by while nuclear weapons continue to threaten our lives and future generations. Join us, take action and create change!