

UNODA Occasional Papers, No. 44, March 2025

# Empowering You(th)

10 Stories of Turning (Disarmament)  
Ideas into Action



**United  
Nations**



OFFICE FOR DISARMAMENT AFFAIRS  
Occasional Papers, No. 44, March 2025

## Empowering You(th)

### 10 Stories of Turning (Disarmament) Ideas into Action



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# Foreword

IN TODAY'S RAPIDLY EVOLVING WORLD, THE ROLE OF young people's participation in decision-making spaces is more critical than ever. Yet, far too often, their expertise is underestimated and limited to narrow (and usually stereotypical) perceptions of what they can contribute to.

As the youngest senior official in the United Nations system, I have witnessed first-hand the enormous potential of young people's contributions. The innovative ideas, diversity of voices and solutions brought by youth drive positive change and address global, regional, and country-level challenges, inspiring hope for the future. This vital participation makes youth a cornerstone of the multilateral system, ensuring that global priorities are shaped by their voices, experiences and aspirations.

Meaningful youth participation is also embodied in the creation of the United Nations Youth Office, a powerful testament to the transformative potential of youth leadership. Challenging traditional institutional norms, the Office places young people at the core of global decision-making, driving meaningful change. The recently adopted Pact for the Future reinforces this commitment, positioning youth participation as central to its vision for a sustainable, peaceful and just future. At the Youth Office, this Pact is viewed as a road map for a more inclusive and effective multilateral system.

Moving into the future, 2025 will be a year of significant anniversaries celebrating

key milestones in peace and security. These include the tenth anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) on youth, peace and security, and marking 80 years since the catastrophic use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The tragic events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki serve as a stark reminder of the devastating consequences of uncontrolled power, reinforcing the need for disarmament and cooperation. For our global community, including young people, these anniversaries are a call to action: to advocate for peace, promote dialogue, and work towards a peaceful world free from the threat of nuclear weapons and conflict. One example of such ongoing efforts is the #Youth4Disarmament programme, led by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). This dynamic platform plays a crucial role in fostering intergenerational and multi-stakeholder dialogue, education and advocacy, empowering young people to engage in disarmament issues.

As I reflect on my journey within the United Nations system, I am deeply encouraged by how young leaders, such as the Youth Champions for Disarmament, are reshaping the global narrative. They challenge us to think differently, act boldly and remain dedicated to our commitment to equality, inclusivity and justice.

During my official travels, I have had the privilege of engaging with diverse young people from all corners of the globe. Across

these discussions, one common theme has emerged: a deep concern for the state of our world. The escalating conflicts, the climate crisis and the imminent consequences of these existential threats are all at the forefront of their minds. Young people are not only worried about their future, but they are also demanding sustainable and inclusive peace. Their participation in

shaping this future is, therefore, not just a principle but also a necessity for achieving the inclusive, peaceful and sustainable world we aspire to build.

**Felipe Paullier**

Assistant Secretary-General for  
Youth Affairs

**“ As I reflect on my journey within the United Nations system, I am deeply encouraged by how young leaders, such as the Youth Champions for Disarmament, are reshaping the global narrative.**

# Preface

THE MOVING STORIES OF THE DIVERSE YOUNG LEADERS featured in this publication truly embody the spirit of global disarmament advocacy. To highlight the unique approaches and varied stages of engagement from alumni of UNODA youth programmes, the publication was organized around three key themes:

- **Initial spark:** Focusing on recent alumni who are just starting their advocacy journey, full of passion and a strong desire to contribute to disarmament.
- **Empowered to educate:** Highlighting individuals who have created impactful educational projects, demonstrating how knowledge can drive meaningful change.
- **Taking direct action:** Featuring alumni who have turned their ideas into action by launching projects, establishing organizations and even building diplomatic careers – all inspired by UNODA youth programmes.

Coming from Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe, these individuals have

taken inspiration from UNODA programmes into their communities and professional endeavours, creating a far-reaching and impactful global wake of change.

Having participated in several UNODA youth-focused initiatives, I have personally witnessed the profound impact of meaningful youth engagement. Beyond the educational benefits, these programmes have given me a vital sense of community. In a field that can often feel disconnected, UNODA is bringing young people together, showing us that we are not alone in our disarmament efforts. *United*, we have the power to create lasting change.

As I reflect on my role in leading the development of this publication as a UNODA Consultant from 2024 to 2025, I consider it a true privilege. I hope the stories of these young change-makers inspire you as much as they continually inspire me and my UNODA colleagues.

**Vanda Prošková**

Communications and Outreach Consultant,  
UNODA

# Acknowledgements

THROUGH ITS UNANIMOUS SUPPORT OF ITS BIENNIAL **resolution on youth, disarmament and non-proliferation**, the United Nations General Assembly reaffirmed the important and positive contribution that young people could make in sustaining peace and security. The resolution was first adopted in 2019 (76/45) and recently on 4 December 2023 (78/31).

In the resolution, the General Assembly requests specific measures to promote the meaningful and inclusive participation and empowerment of youth on disarmament and non-proliferation issues, including through the effective utilization of the dedicated digital platform #Youth4Disarmament and token grants and awards supported by voluntary contributions.

These UNODA youth engagement efforts would not have been possible without financial support from the following entities and countries:

- **Youth for Biosecurity** has been supported by the European Union and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with in-kind contributions from Switzerland.
- The **Youth Champions for Disarmament** were supported by Germany.
- The **Leaders4Tomorrow** were supported by the Republic of Korea.
- The **Youth Leader Fund for a World without Nuclear Weapons** has been supported by Japan.



An activity during the Youth Leader Fund for a World without Nuclear Weapons study visit in Japan in 2024 (Credit: UNODA/Vanda Prošková).



# Introduction

# Introduction

I AM DELIGHTED TO INTRODUCE THIS INSPIRING compilation of stories from ten remarkable young advocates and professionals whose efforts exemplify the power of youth-driven action in advancing the cause of disarmament. These individuals have drawn upon their unique experiences with UNODA youth engagement initiatives.

The authors' contributions to this publication attest to how participating in UNODA youth engagement initiatives has deepened their understanding, stimulated creativity for innovative advocacy strategies and supported the forging of powerful partnerships. These combined efforts could ultimately generate innovative solutions to address some of the world's most pressing challenges. Furthermore, their journeys reflect the transformative potential of youth engagement, education and empowerment – the cornerstone of the UNODA approach to inclusive youth participation in global disarmament efforts.

Through these pages, you will witness how these young change-makers have not only embraced the principles of disarmament but also enriched their advocacy by linking it to other critical global challenges. Their work spans an impressive array of fields – from biosecurity to nuclear disarmament, and from conventional arms control to community-level peacebuilding – demonstrating how disarmament intersects with public health, climate action, gender equality and sustainable development.

The stories presented here further underscore the importance of inclusion and diversity in addressing global challenges.

You will read stories of UNODA alumni from different regions, genders and backgrounds, highlighting how the disarmament agenda resonates across cultures and communities. Whether through creating innovative educational tools, mobilizing grass-roots movements or establishing new organizations, these young leaders demonstrate how UNODA programmes have sparked tangible impacts that transcend borders.

None of this would have been possible without the generous support of our donors, which has enabled UNODA to partner with exceptional youth, to inspire action for progress on disarmament. On behalf of the entire UNODA team, I extend my deepest gratitude to these partners for their unwavering commitment to our shared mission.

As you explore these stories, I encourage you to reflect on the profound potential of young people to shape a world free of the threats posed by armed conflict and proliferation. Their determination and creativity are a testament to the power of collaboration and a reminder of why investing in youth is an investment in a more peaceful future. Let these stories inspire us all to continue supporting the next generation of disarmament advocates as they work tirelessly to turn aspirations into achievements and create a world where peace and security are realities for all.

**Izumi Nakamitsu**  
Under-Secretary-General  
and High Representative  
for Disarmament Affairs



# Initial spark

# The DeclarACTION and emerging challenges in nuclear disarmament

*Brandon Mata Aguilar*

THE YOUTH LEADER FUND FOR A WORLD WITHOUT Nuclear Weapons is a programme led by UNODA with the financial support of Japan. This programme is aimed at youth dedicated to fostering a safer world through nuclear disarmament. Participants are trained in topics such as nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control principles.

In August 2024, 50 participants were selected for the first phase convened in Hiroshima, Japan, to hold the inaugural Youth Leader Conference, where they adopted the [DeclarACTION for a World without Nuclear Weapons](#). The DeclarACTION has three different pillars: (a) hibakusha and community engagement; (b) youth participation in political and intergovernmental processes; and (c) research and academia. This paper considers some thoughts on the third pillar of the DeclarACTION based on my experiences working on emerging technologies issues and visiting Japan to learn about the consequences of the nuclear bombing.

## **Emerging technologies and nuclear weapons**

We are in a period of rapid technological advancement posing challenges for disarmament, non-proliferation and compliance with international humanitarian law. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous weapons systems, information and communications technologies, missile technologies and space-based technologies

should be discussed to foresee how their application might accelerate nuclear weapons development at uneven rates among States, potentially undermining multilateral disarmament efforts and non-governmental initiatives.

It is reasonable to predict that emerging technologies will change how armed conflicts occur. Actors should, therefore, seek to better understand how the application of new technologies may impact nuclear weapons production or use.

## **Addressing the importance of intersectional approaches**

In its third pillar, the DeclarACTION remarks on the need to consider a multisectoral approach to promoting education and research for peace. It calls for partnerships and synergies between multisectoral stakeholders “to enhance the importance of an intersectional approach to nuclear issues, including ... emerging technology threats such as artificial intelligence [and] prioritizing human control in nuclear systems”.

The implications of using emerging technologies in nuclear weapons development are unknown and complex. Because such technologies are still under development, there is no certainty about their real consequences, especially when applied in uncontrolled environments or armed conflicts.



The author poses at a certificate ceremony concluding the Youth Leader Fund study visit in Japan in August 2024 (Credit: Brandon Mata Aguilar).

Predicting these consequences requires multisectoral consideration, underscoring the importance of the partnerships and synergies suggested in the DeclarACTION. The implications of emerging technologies for the nuclear weapons field could be considered a “technical” issue, but it is important to consider the potential impacts in other areas, such as legal frameworks, international security and the disarmament field.

- **Legal frameworks:** The implementation of emerging technologies in nuclear weapons must comply with the existing international humanitarian law framework without condition. It is, therefore, critical to understand how advancements in nuclear-weapon capabilities achieved through emerging technologies could impact the development of armed conflict and its resulting humanitarian impacts. In this context, every weapon that may be used, especially those with nuclear potential, must comply with international humanitarian law and its principles.
- **International security:** All parties and stakeholders must support and contribute to international security. It follows that applications of emerging technologies in nuclear weapons must account for the dangers of, for example, initiating a new arms race and facilitating nuclear-weapon possession or use by non-State actors.
- **Disarmament field:** At the United Nations and some regional forums, Member States, international organizations, academia and civil society organizations have discussed and worked together to contribute to disarmament and promote a more peaceful and secure world. If any of the potential setbacks

ultimately manifest, such cooperative efforts might become stuck due to a lack of cooperation or trust.

## Conclusion

It is essential to shape the future consequences of emerging technologies through today's nuclear disarmament efforts. Such technologies could accelerate nuclear weapons development and destabilize historical disarmament efforts and agreements. Multilateral action is therefore necessary to regulate their application in accordance with international humanitarian law and its principles, as well as with disarmament objectives.

The DeclarACTION underscores the critical need to implement intersectional strategies that address legal, international security and technological considerations. This can be achieved through integrated responses to disarmament challenges from emerging technologies, in particular its applications in the nuclear sector.

In their DeclarACTION, the inaugural Youth Leader Fund participants demonstrated the transformative potential of youth in advancing nuclear disarmament. Through their emphasis on education, research and community engagement in enabling young people to lead global efforts against nuclear threats, they reinforced the Youth Leader Fund's role as a vital platform for empowering a new generation of advocates dedicated to fostering a culture of peace.

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- United Nations, Regional Information Centre for Western Europe. [Youth Leader Fund for A World without Nuclear Weapons](#).
- [Youth Leader Fund Participants Adopt DeclarACTION](#). *UNODA Update*, 5 September 2024.

# Unity for disarmament

*Yathisa Arunoprayoch*

## **Rise up!**

WHAT IF WE COULD WIPE AWAY THE SHADOWS OF history? The Youth Leader Fund for a World without Nuclear Weapons is an initiative to sound the wake-up call for humanity, especially younger generations, on the profound and lasting effects of nuclear weapons on our planet.

The stories of the atomic bomb survivors came alive for me in an unforgettable way during our study visit to Nagasaki and Hiroshima in August 2024. Their experiences, pain and resilience were not just historical facts but breathing narratives weaving the past into the present.

In insightful presentations, the mayors of the two cities showed how each one rose from ashes, rebuilding infrastructure while nurturing emotional recovery and collective healing. My other favourite part was an intriguing, immersive virtual reality experience that allowed me to witness the devastation from a perspective that words and pictures alone could not describe.

While walking through the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, I found a [poem](#) that quickly became my favourite piece of literature from the trip. It was written by Sankichi Toge, who suffered the atomic bombing in Midori-machi, just three kilometres from the hypocenter:

**Give back my father, give back my mother  
Give grandpa back, give grandma back  
Give me my sons and daughters back.**

**Give me back myself.  
Give back the human race.**

**As long as this life lasts, this life,  
Give back peace  
That will never end.**

Every step of our study tour resonated as a call to action. I went to these two historic cities as a visitor but left as an inspired messenger on a mission to spread the hope of peace.

### **Empower to lead!**

Inspired by the [declaration](#) that we adopted at the Youth Leader Conference on 29 August 2024 in Hiroshima, my national advocacy plan, “Unity for Disarmament”, successfully secured an initial sponsorship from the Department of International Development of the United Kingdom. My primary aspiration is to promote Thailand as one of the leading nuclear disarmament advocates in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations by engaging with young people, local communities and policymakers on the importance of nuclear disarmament and gender equality. Achieving this goal will

involve facilitating interactive educational workshops and cultivating collaborative partnerships.

Local advocacy is the foundation for long-term disarmament. After discovering that many Thai municipalities had yet to join Mayors for Peace – a global network of thousands of cities launched by Hiroshima’s mayor decades ago – I launched a campaign to engage local leaders. The goal for the first phase is to secure the membership of at least ten Thai mayors by the end of March 2025, enhancing Thailand’s bilateral relationship with Japan and contributing to a broader framework for regional security.

Another flagship of my advocacy is a comprehensive educational toolkit that equips Thai youth with an understanding of the critical importance of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We



Youth Leader Fund participants engage with atomic bomb survivors during a reception at Nagasaki Nisshokan (Credit: Yathisa Arunoprayoch).

have developed the first board game prototype as an edutainment tool. Imagine Thai students gathering around a table, concentrating on a board or card game – not just playing for fun, but simulating nuclear disarmament negotiations and immersing themselves in the complexities of global decision-making.

By the end of 2026, over 150 Thai high school and university students will complete a comprehensive and impactful online training programme. A pilot study will strategically target five institutions in each of Thailand's six regions, aiming for a 30 per cent improvement in participant knowledge and an 80 per cent satisfaction rate. The programme explores the history of nuclear weapons from their development through pivotal events, examining atomic bombs'

effects on individuals and communities, including long-term physical health impacts like radiation sickness, burns, tumours and genetic mutations. Psychologically, survivors often experience post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety after losing families, homes and livelihoods. Entire communities are displaced, cultural heritage is destroyed, and economic development stagnates for decades. All these impacts humanize the call for disarmament and foster an empathetic, trauma-informed approach among youth participants and policymakers alike.

### **Unite for peace!**

Establishing the Gender Equality and Nuclear Disarmament Alliance marks a significant milestone, as it will bring together

Youth Leader Fund participants pose with Kazumi Matsui, Mayor of Hiroshima, at the International Conference Center Hiroshima (Credit: UNODA/Vanda Prošková).



partners from across Asia and the Pacific to form collaborative platforms integrating both disarmament and gender equality. A key project of this alliance will be the “Global Peace Message Exchange”, where participants will create and share virtual peace messages and artwork with the aim of setting a Guinness World Record for the largest online collection of peace messages gathered within a defined time frame.

Evidence shows that inclusive approaches to peacebuilding provide more sustainable outcomes, including at the intersection of gender equality and disarmament (Müller, Harald and Carmen Wunderlich). At the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+30 Review (2024) and young feminist forums, I advocated for women’s empowerment alongside nuclear disarmament. My academic research into the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons through a gender lens strengthens this commitment.

This is just the beginning. Unity for Disarmament strives for nothing less than a world where collaboration triumphs over division and hope drowns out calls for destruction. The mission is clear, and our time is now. Together, we can forge a legacy of peace, transforming the vision of an inclusive, nuclear weapons-free world into an enduring reality.

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# Advocating for disarmament and preserving history

*Khalid Ibrahim*

HARGEISA, THE CAPITAL OF SOMALILAND, HAS A unique charm. It's a place where the past and present coexist in such a fascinating way. Somaliland itself is this resilient, unrecognized territory. It's bordered by the Gulf of Aden, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia. It has a sprawling coastline of over 850 kilometres, and despite its small international footprint, it holds a key strategic position in the Horn of Africa. I've always felt proud of this region. Somaliland may have declared independence in 1991, but its fight for recognition continues to this day. Yet, despite that, it has built its own government, military and currency – a testament to the strength of its people.

## **Remembering the tragedy of the 1980s**

I can't talk about Hargeisa without mentioning the painful history we've endured. Between 1988 and 1991, during the Somali Civil War, the city was devastated. The destruction was beyond comprehension – 70 per cent of the city was wiped out by aerial bombardments. I've heard the stories, seen the photographs and spoken to survivors. It's impossible to ignore the trauma of losing 40,000 to 60,000 civilians and watching 800,000 people displaced (Human Rights Watch). It wasn't just buildings that were destroyed, but lives, dreams and futures.

Even now, when I walk through certain parts of Hargeisa, I can still see the traces of that devastation. It's hard to forget. But

there's also a sense of hope, of rebuilding, that runs through the city. It's a reminder that, no matter how dark things get, there's always a chance to start again.

## **Contextualizing the atrocities**

What happened in Hargeisa wasn't just about the war – it was rooted in years of political and ethnic tensions. Mohammed Siad Barre's regime, which started in 1969, marginalized the Isaaq clan in northern Somalia, stripping away rights and opportunities. It's no wonder that the Somali National Movement emerged, advocating for justice and equality. The Government's response was brutal and indiscriminate, targeting civilians and reducing entire neighbourhoods to rubble. The war marked a turning point, not just for Somaliland but also for our understanding of the human cost of conflict.

Whenever I reflect on these events, I feel a deep sadness and a renewed commitment to fight for peace. It's easy to get lost in numbers and statistics, but behind each figure is a human life – a family, a community, a future cut short.

## **Lessons from Japan: a model of resilience and advocacy**

Visiting Japan in August 2024 was a deeply moving experience for me. I had the chance to visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and I'm not exaggerating when I say it changed me. Standing in Hiroshima, looking at the



The author meets with hibakusha in Nagasaki, Japan, during the Youth Leader Fund study visit in August 2024 (Credit: Khalid Ibrahim).

peace memorials and listening to survivors share their stories – it really hits you. The resilience of the Japanese people, their commitment to disarmament and peace, is something I'll carry with me forever.

In a way, it reminded me of Hargeisa. Just like Hiroshima, we've faced unimaginable devastation, but there's an undeniable strength in our communities.

Japan's ability to turn its painful history into a platform for peace advocacy is something we can learn from. It's not just about remembering the past but also about using it as a foundation to create a better future.

### **A diplomatic action plan for disarmament and advocacy**

So, where do we go from here? Well, I believe education plays a critical role in peacebuilding. If we can teach future generations about the tragedies of Hargeisa, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they'll grow up understanding the importance of dialogue, empathy and non-violence.

But I also think we need more spaces to preserve our history. Imagine a museum in Hargeisa where people could come to learn about our past and reflect on what it means for our future. The city's scarred structures aren't just buildings; they're bridges between generations.

International cooperation is key, too. Working with global organizations like the United Nations and bringing in regional voices can help us tackle these issues on a larger scale. And it's not just about high-level diplomacy. Engaging with young people and empowering them to become advocates for peace are essential. I've seen first-hand how passionate the youth in Somaliland can be, and they have the power to drive real change.

At the end of the day, we all share the same goal – a world free from conflict, where future generations can thrive without the shadow of war hanging over them. And I truly believe that, if we weave together history, education and international cooperation, we can achieve that dream.



**Empowered  
to educate**

# A “Compass for Peace”: adapting human rights education methodology for disarmament

*Mihajlo Matković*

WE LIVE IN AN ERA MARKED BY PERSISTENT armed conflict and threats in almost every corner of the world; what the United Nations Secretary-General termed the “triple planetary crisis” of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss; and the polarization and radicalization of youth. Against this background, it is discouraging that Governments invest minimal resources in the preventive work of education – and even less in disarmament. Governments tend to prefer addressing potential conflicts by mobilizing military resources under euphemistic “security and safety” narratives rather than by addressing the root causes of such disputes.

Illustrating this, Serbia recently increased its military spending substantially, from \$1.72 billion in 2022 to \$2.14 billion in 2023. When public debate began over acquiring new military equipment and reintroducing compulsory military service for young men, youth activists and peacebuilders raised their eyebrows. Two mass shootings in May 2023 devastated Serbia and shocked the region, but many continued to believe that greater military spending could make their daily lives safer.

## **From weapons to words of wisdom**

Born, raised and educated in the Balkans, with extensive experience in regional civil society organizations, I became

accustomed to terms my peers often considered buzzwords, like “peacebuilding”, “human rights” and “intercultural dialogue”. Yet there was never any mention of disarmament or non-proliferation, which is ironic, given that our Governments are leading participants in arms proliferation.

This is where the #Youth4Disarmament initiative came into play. The Youth Champions for Disarmament programme, in particular, has been eye-opening – positively world-shattering, in fact. Most importantly, it has been implemented with care and a genuine belief in a world without conflicts. I immediately sensed those values in the team behind the initiative, and my trust in them gave me hope for the future.

Trust is as important in any sort of youth work as it is in diplomacy, but it is unfortunately not enough when it comes to ensuring peaceful societies and a world without nuclear threats. By its very nature, trust is preceded by knowledge. That’s why we need more systematic, methodological and sustained educational initiatives such as #Youth4Disarmament. The world, often a scary place, needs more disarmament champions to advocate for desired changes and influence decision-makers and policies in their respective communities. That’s why I envisioned a more methodological approach based on what I learned in a comprehensive



The author leads his workshop  
(Credit: Mihajlo Matkovic).

series of online workshops and expert-led seminars throughout 2024.

My “Disarming Violence, Empowering Voices” project in Serbia demonstrates how disarmament education can be tailored to address specific local contexts. By exploring issues such as the history of conflict in the Balkans, the impact of small-arms proliferation and the country’s recent debate over compulsory military service, the project made disarmament issues relevant and tangible for youth who had never interacted with such ideas, topics or concerns. By the same token, it illustrated clear connections between disarmament issues and other topics such as climate change, shrinking civic space and new and emerging technologies.

### **Empowering voices, defusing conflict**

Drawing inspiration from established human rights education models like the Council of Europe’s [Compass manual](#) and my background as a trainer in human rights education, my disarmament education initiative aims to empower youth with knowledge, skills and opportunities to become “multipliers” and advocate for a world free from the dangers of weapons proliferation.

My recent project served as a pilot for disarmament education activities incorporating my own multidisciplinary approach. A day-long event brought together young leaders from 21 cities across Serbia to explore the intersections of disarmament, peacebuilding and youth advocacy from various angles, like popular culture, sustainable development and history. Significantly, some 90 participants agreed on the urgency and overarching potential of such an approach – unilaterally. Similar to the Council of Europe’s approach

to human rights education, disarmament education can benefit from a structured methodology that combines theoretical knowledge with practical skills and is based on mutual trust. The Compass manual, which has been instrumental in shaping human rights education across Europe for decades, still offers valuable insights that can be adapted for disarmament education, providing a comprehensive resource for educators and youth workers.

Such a manual should cover a wide range of topics, from the history of nuclear weapons to community impacts of small-arms proliferation and how firearms are reflected (or even propagated) in news, pop culture, the arts and more. Disarmament

education should employ participatory learning techniques and be learner-centred. Similarly, establishing a “training of trainers” programme could help create a network of skilled disarmament education facilitators. Lastly, with the help of the United Nations Youth Office and relevant stakeholders, we should aspire to integrate disarmament education into existing youth programmes and curricula, mainstreaming these issues in formal and informal education settings.

## Reference

- [Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People](#), second ed. Budapest: Council of Europe, 2023.

# Futureproofing our shared vision

*Monalisa Hazarika*

IN AN ERA OF SERIOUS CHALLENGES, FROM ARMED violence to mistrust between nations, youth are leading the way towards positive change through dialogue, accountability and cooperation. Making up a quarter of the world's population, young people are bridging divides – using their creativity, adaptability and mobilization skills to infuse critical global discussions with needed hope and energy. Youth-led initiatives are catalysing reconciliation, driving innovative solutions to worldwide problems and uniting communities in pursuit of shared goals. Their work gives people the confidence to question old divisions and prejudices, helping create a more inclusive and resilient global security framework.

I became involved with the #Youth4Disarmament initiative of UNODA in 2022 through the [#Leaders4Tomorrow](#) programme and continued with its 2023 [Leaders to the Future](#) (#Leaders2Future) series and, more recently, the 2024 [Youth Champions for Disarmament](#) programme. Participating in its flagship activities like [#YouthinAction](#), [#StepUp4Disarmament](#) and the [Disarming Arts](#) campaign has been an inspiring experience, profoundly enhancing my personal and professional development.

## **Disarmament education for all: my journey “across the Chicken Neck”**

Disarmament education cultivates critical thinking and global citizenship, enabling individuals to challenge militarization and advocate for policies that prioritize human security and cooperation

over conflict. It is essential for fostering a culture of peace, because it is about empowering people with knowledge and tools to understand the complex dynamics of international agreements and the critical role of arms control in ensuring global stability.

As part of my work to [engage with, educate and empower](#) young people, I created an online educational programme, “Across the Chicken Neck: Exploring Disarmament from Indigenous Perspectives”. The course highlights how disarmament and arms control intersect with other peace and security issues, focusing on the indigenous communities of North-East India. In weekly interactive lectures and presentations, I linked disarmament with armed conflict, gender, race, climate change and the illicit small-arms and narcotics trades.

Under the five-week programme, 34 participants from 16 countries met every Saturday. The attendees included students, researchers and young leaders from fields such as nursing, journalism, law, academia, civil society and business. Through discussions with expert speakers and open dialogue between participants, we explored the human impact of weapons and violence, complex disarmament concepts and practical actions youth can take. Each week, participants received access to a shared online library of introductory and advanced reading materials, which remained available after the programme ended.



FOR MORE, Visit: [youth4disarmament.org](http://youth4disarmament.org)  
Instagram: @acrossthechickenneck

"Across the Chicken Neck" programme announcement (Credit: Monalisa Hazarika).

The project provided a space to share ideas and concerns, cultivating solidarity across cultural and geographical boundaries. In their feedback, participants said they left with a stronger interest in disarmament and a deeper understanding of how arms control impacted their lives and how they could advocate for peace.

### **The broader significance of youth-led educational initiatives**

The #Youth4Disarmament initiative provided the foundational knowledge and inspiration for my project. Through webinars, readings and mentorship opportunities, I explored the complexities of disarmament and arms control and found ways for young people to make a difference. Most importantly, #Youth4Disarmament gave

me a platform to connect with like-minded individuals and organizations working for peace.

I learned three key lessons from running my educational programme:

1. Youth are not just beneficiaries of peace efforts but also active contributors and leaders.
2. Digital tools, art and storytelling can make disarmament accessible by humanizing its abstract concepts and showing how they are relevant to real people's lives.
3. Young people who engage with disarmament issues early are more likely to advocate for peace and security throughout their personal and professional lives.

## **Looking ahead**

Working with the UNODA youth initiative has been transformative both professionally and personally. I developed expertise in project design, community engagement and advocacy even as I managed logistical and administrative aspects, adapting to challenges and refining the curriculum to create an effective, empowering educational experience. On

a personal level, it has been profoundly rewarding to see how my work resonated with young people around the world. The connections I've made with other youth leaders and professionals have helped me explore where I can best contribute to this field.

Let's all keep building on this momentum for peace – one project, one story and one youth leader at a time.

# Promoting biosecurity education through the handbook initiative: a project by the Nigerian Youth for Biosecurity cohorts

**Judith Chukwuebinim Okolo**

THE FIELD OF BIOSECURITY AIMS TO PREVENT theft, loss, misuse or intentional release of “valuable biological materials”. It is a topic that merits broad awareness, especially as rapid developments in science and technology contribute to evolving biothreats with implications in areas as diverse as the economy, the environment, agriculture and human health.

While various organizations and agencies focus on promoting biosecurity awareness among young adults, fewer such initiatives cater to populations below the age of 18. This gap is particularly notable in light of the growing science literacy within this age group, owed in part to the emphasis, in secondary school curricula, on exposing students to hands-on research and principles through science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

To help bridge this gap, bolster awareness and advance the integration of biosecurity and biosafety education in schools, our group of Nigerian participants\* in the Youth for Biosecurity Fellowship programme developed a helpful primer on biosecurity and biosafety concepts for a new generation of scientists beginning to



Copies of the printed Handbook on display.

explore, understand and conduct research with potential valuable biological materials.

The [Biosafety & Biosecurity Handbook for Students in Nigeria](#) lays out practical steps that young scientists can take to carry out their work in a safe and ethical manner. It also provides guidelines for students seeking to engender a culture of responsibility in their school laboratories around the handling of biological materials.

\* The other authors of the handbook were Maryam Sani Lawal, Ifeoluwa Alabi, Augusta Zuokemefa, Fatima Dantanko and Faith Adebayo.



### **The handbook initiative and its implementation**

The Handbook was an outcome of workshops organized by UNODA and the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit for the 2021 and 2022 cohorts of the Youth for Biosecurity initiative, a project funded by the European Union. These workshops not only gave us opportunities to network but also paved the way for us to make a positive impact on biosecurity practices in our home country.

After drafting the Handbook, a virtual launch event held under the auspices of the Youth for Biosecurity Fellowship brought together seasoned biosafety and biosecurity experts who affirmed our publication's importance. These experts from around

the world credited our effort not only with empowering youth but also with raising awareness about how younger scientists can more actively advocate for biosafety and biosecurity. In the following phase of our project, Nigeria's 2023 Youth for Biosecurity fellows supported the production and distribution of the Handbook to secondary school libraries and students across Nigeria.

To demonstrate its commitment to global security and promote international cooperation and safe practices in the life sciences, UNODA funded the production of 1,000 print copies of the Handbook, in addition to uploading the electronic version on its website. The logistical support of Health Security Partners, an international development non-profit organization, was



Participants from several events held across Nigeria to promote and distribute the Handbook.

instrumental in delivering the Handbook to those who could most benefit from it.

### **Achievements and key accomplishments**

Our group of Nigerian Youth for Biosecurity participants oversaw the distribution of 1,000 print copies of the Handbook across four of Nigeria's geopolitical zones. We engaged with diverse student groups, extending to undergraduates and interns at multiple schools. In one of the informational activities on biosafety and biosecurity issues, students practised putting on and removing personal protective equipment.

### **Conclusion**

The Handbook beneficiaries received the project well, with schools requesting additional copies of the Handbook for both students and teachers. Through the Youth for Biosecurity programme, we addressed a long-standing gap in biosafety and biosecurity education. By introducing key concepts to secondary school students and university undergraduates and teaching responsible scientific practices, we supported the integration of a new generation of scientists into the global biosafety and biosecurity community.

# Creating change through synergy: a disarmament guide for youth

***Santiago Yarahuán Dodero***

HOW EFFECTIVELY ARE WE ADDRESSING DIFFERENT sources of greenhouse gas emissions to combat climate change? This question guided my involvement in the UNODA #Youth4Disarmament initiative, where I explored the intersection of climate change and disarmament. Through two of its programmes, I developed the [Comprehensive Guide for Youth to Address Climate Change through Disarmament](#), an educational initiative to inspire youth-led local and global action by raising awareness about the carbon footprint of the world's militaries.

In this chapter, I focus not on the Guide's content but on the story of its development and how both UNODA and my personal journey shaped the project. My interest began in high school, where my passion for disarmament issues found its outlet through the Model United Nations programme. Later,

as an undergraduate, my focus shifted to climate change, and I became determined to work with other young people on local climate action and sustainable development. When I discovered the #Leaders4Tomorrow programme of UNODA, those interests converged, rekindling my earlier passion for disarmament.

The programme exposed me to unexpected aspects of disarmament, particularly its link to climate change. I vividly recall a workshop where a United Nations expert explained that militaries worldwide were major greenhouse gas emitters yet faced no binding international obligations to reduce or report their emissions, let alone reduce them. This blind spot in climate advocacy, especially among youth activists, struck a chord with my own experience in climate discussions.



Santiago presents his educational initiative at a side event of the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly in October 2022 (Credit: UN Web TV).



Santiago presenting the Guide to a group of Japanese students in Vienna (Credit: UNODA/Ana Moruja Nigro).

The path forward became clear: I would develop a project to address the military carbon footprint, leveraging my prior experiences in local and global action. I decided on a digital guide format, inspired by one of the resources shared by UNODA. In 2022, I introduced the project at an event on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly session during the #Leaders4Tomorrow study trip. I made the big announcement before an audience of stakeholders and fellow participants and generated enthusiasm and potential partnerships.

The project quickly gained momentum. I outlined a clear action plan for the Guide's creation and partnerships, receiving strong support along the way from UNODA, my university, Tecnológico de Monterrey, and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC). Their guidance and connections proved invaluable. Friends from the UNODA youth programme also contributed significantly, with Juliana Pinho contributing stunning

artwork that enhanced the Guide's visual impact.

The Guide was launched in May 2023 after months of development, with a panel event featuring speakers from UNODA, UNLIREC and other key allies. Sharing the access link with the dozens in attendance made the Guide a tangible reality and signalled the beginning of its impact.

This project highlights how collaboration drives meaningful outcomes. The Guide emerged through the inspiration and support of many individuals and organizations, especially the #Youth4Disarmament initiative. The momentum continued after publication – through the #Leaders2Future programme, I travelled to Vienna to share my project with Japanese students and engage in enriching discussions.

For young people interested in disarmament, I strongly encourage seeking collaboration with UNODA. You will find not just support but a network of friends and allies to champion your efforts.



# **Taking direct action**

# Building a more just and peaceful future

**Sofia Polishchuk**

**WHEN STATES WAGE WAR, INDIVIDUALS OFTEN** feel powerless. But these are precisely the moments when courage and action are needed most.

Through the #Leaders4Tomorrow and the #Leaders2Future programmes, UNODA equipped me with the knowledge and skills to work towards a more just and peaceful world. Along with dozens of young people across the globe, I received training in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control to enhance our understanding and create change within our communities. We accessed diverse resources, including monthly expert webinars and interactive peer discussions. Together, we explored how disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control intersect with nine key areas: multilateralism, new and emerging technologies, outer space, environment, gender, diversity, education, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace.

These programmes inspired me not only to pursue a legal career in global security but also to address local challenges using my new-found knowledge. In a report recently published by the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, I documented the transnational experiences of Ukrainian children displaced by the Russo-Ukrainian war, seeking to raise awareness of conventional weapons' impact on youth populations. Through dozens of interviews, I captured the stories of 63 children who had been uprooted from their homes, forced to navigate unfamiliar environments and left to confront physical or psychological

trauma. Their collected testimonies paint a heartbreaking picture of loss, endurance, adaptation and hope, underscoring the importance of addressing root causes of conflict to protect future generations from similar fates.

Recognizing the urgent need to alleviate immediate suffering caused by the war, I expanded the operations of the Children of Ukraine Foundation, a 501 (c) (3) public charity I established in 2020 to provide humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian children. We have delivered over 60,000 lbs of aid to families, orphanages and grass-roots organizations since the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. We have also organized dozens of events to support Ukrainian children's emotional needs through



UNODA's #Leaders2Future take part in a study visit to the United Nations Office in Vienna (Credit: Sofia Polishchuk).

rehabilitative, social and other activities. Children are among the most vulnerable in war, and our foundation is dedicated to providing the specialized support they need to recover and rebuild their lives.

Although documenting and mitigating the consequences of war do not address its root causes, participating in United Nations conferences with UNODA provided invaluable insights into our international system and ways I can effect meaningful change on a larger scale. Along with 24 other #Leaders4Tomorrow, I attended meetings of the General Assembly First Committee in New York, and with nine other #Leaders2Future, I joined the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in Vienna. There, we witnessed States addressing some of the most pressing issues facing the world, and we engaged with high-level United Nations and government officials guiding these deliberations.

During these multilateral forums, UNODA provided us with a platform to address participants directly. During the First Committee, I presented my research on Ukrainian displaced children's experiences to illustrate the human cost of policy decisions at the individual level. At the Preparatory Committee meeting, I presented youth insights on strengthening the disarmament machinery, urging States parties to prioritize several critical issues during their deliberations. While young

people often face significant obstacles in influencing global governance, UNODA gave us a seat at the table and empowered us to contribute meaningfully to the discussion.

Now equipped with these tools and skill sets, I will dedicate my legal career to promoting peace, justice and a cooperative world order. Taking part in UNODA programming not only deepened my understanding of the complexities of global security but also enabled me to share this knowledge with others. I joined a vast network of like-minded individuals who share my passion for positive impact, and together, we will continue applying our insights from these programmes to build a better future for our communities.

Through the generous funding of the Republic of Korea and the dedicated efforts of Soo Hyun Kim, Radha Day, Marykate Monaghan, Vanda Prošková and others, UNODA initiatives have positively influenced thousands of young people worldwide. Yet the work continues. Sustainable investment is needed to further engage with youth, educate them on the immediate, real-world impact of disarmament issues and inspire them to become agents of change. By investing in youth empowerment, we can cultivate a new generation of peacemakers who will build a more just and secure future for all.

Change may be a slow and difficult process, but it always starts with the courage to take the first step.



Activities of the Children of Ukraine Foundation  
(Credit: Sofia Polishchuk).

# Beyond policy: why peace requires creativity, outreach and youth

*Juliana Müller*

I WAS JUST A FRESHMAN IN COLLEGE WHEN I WAS accepted into the #Leaders4Tomorrow programme, carrying little knowledge of disarmament but a powerful motive: a deep hatred for war. Just months earlier, I was studying at the Eastern Mediterranean International School, a peace-focused boarding school in Tel Aviv dedicated to fostering dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. There, I witnessed first-hand the impact of armed violence, which cemented my belief in education as a bridge for peace. My interest in disarmament was fuelled by the dream of seeing my friends

live normal lives, in a world free from machines designed for destruction.

Upon joining the programme, I found myself surrounded by an incredible cohort – individuals with PhDs and years of experience in policymaking, nuclear research and activism. At first, I felt like my admission was a mistake: I clearly did not have even 10 per cent of my peers' knowledge. I lacked more than expertise in conventions, policies and protocols – I had to ask in my dormitory's group chat if I could borrow professional heels for the trip. I naively thought crop tops could be stretched to work as a formal outfit (final verdict: they cannot).

#Youth4Disarmament programme participants pose at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in October 2022 (Credit: Juliana Müller).



In the balcony of one of the most influential organizations in the world, I stood out as an out-of-place teenager.

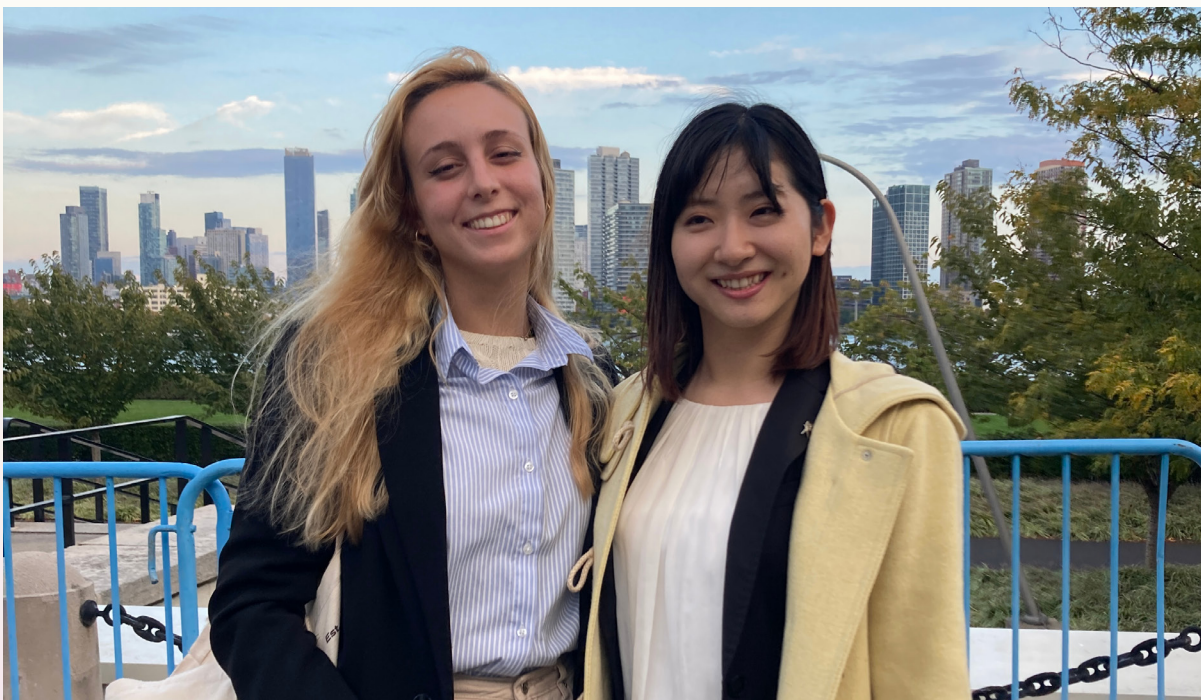
Yet, despite my inexperience, I had passion. The programme's online workshops and lectures from world-renowned experts gave me the foundation I needed to prepare for the in-person week in New York. And there, I finally understood why I was chosen. Change doesn't happen solely within the confines of United Nations offices: it requires outreach, creativity and education to engage everyday people like me. The programme's mission wasn't just to train experts – it was to empower us as catalysts for impact beyond institutional boundaries. Perhaps I was not so out of place after all; I was an integral part of the process.

During the programme, I connected with extraordinary leaders whose projects profoundly shaped my perspective. Kasha Sequoia Slavner was doing no office work – quite the opposite. She was travelling the world

producing a documentary (*1.5 Degrees of Peace*) about the link between armament and climate change while shining a light on community advocates and professionals in the field. Shizuka Kuramitsu combined her studies in non-proliferation and terrorism with her creativity, designing Japanese lunchboxes (@Disarmabento on Instagram) to raise awareness about nuclear weapons. Both projects made me realize that I could use my own skills in video production and animation to make a difference, especially since I already had a platform on YouTube.

Growing up in Brazil, I created educational videos to provide resources for students (@HISTORiarTE on YouTube), particularly those with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and underprivileged backgrounds. Making a video on the history of nuclear weapons, connecting it to the urgency of disarmament, felt like a natural step to apply the knowledge I gained in #Youth4Disarmament. My fellows Santiago

The author, left, poses with Shizuka Kuramitsu in New York City (Credit: Juliana Muller).





Yarahuán Dodero and Mariana Larissa Roa Vargas from Mexico played pivotal roles in this process, offering insights to tailor the content for a Latin American audience.

However, the implementation of my project was not without challenges. From the moment of writing to posting the video, it took me almost two years. Balancing academics, work and production was overwhelming. It wasn't until a summer break spent at my grandmother's house that my brother, Felipe Müller, and I

finally brought the vision to life. Sitting at a small plastic table with our laptops, we meticulously planned every frame, determined to convey such a complex and sensitive topic in an engaging and accessible way.

Weeks later, the [15-minute, fully animated video](#) in Portuguese was complete. Since its launch, it has garnered over 4,000 views and 61 comments. The feedback has been deeply gratifying, and I'm incredibly thankful for the opportunity to



An image from the video, "Armas nucleares: o fim da humanidade".

share my project and the knowledge gained through #Youth4Disarmament with the world. I feel like I have started a discussion in Brazil, a country where disarmament and nuclear policy are rarely part of everyday conversations, especially among students. And I do hope that at least one of these viewers will be personally impacted to advocate for the end of nuclear weapons.

The fight for disarmament and peace requires contributions from people of all skill sets and backgrounds. Policymakers and researchers play a crucial role, but

so do educators, artists, storytellers and everyday citizens (including 20-year-olds in crop tops). Effective change isn't just about writing treaties; it's also about reaching hearts and minds. To truly address the complex challenges we face, decision-making spaces and outreach efforts must reflect the diversity of the world they aim to impact. By welcoming voices from all demographics and skill sets, we can create more innovative solutions and ensure that the call for disarmament resonates with people everywhere, leaving no one behind.

# Empowering a science-diplomacy interface

**Muhammad Adeel**

AS BOTH A SCIENTIST AND DIPLOMAT BY TRAINING, I have a special affinity for initiatives that integrate science policy and diplomacy through interdisciplinary platforms. In 2021, I joined the Youth for Biosecurity Fellowship, which became a transformative milestone in my professional development in disarmament and science diplomacy. The fellowship enhanced my participation in several Biological Weapons Convention meetings, including the ninth Review Conference in 2022.

The Fellowship provided an immersive learning experience, combining expert knowledge from scientists and diplomats with opportunities for interaction through simulations and scenario planning. This training format successfully facilitates skill transfer between scientists, policy practitioners and diplomats. Conventional biosecurity education in universities focuses on scientific knowledge, and the Fellowship helps bridge the resulting epistemic divide.

Youth and early-career researchers are ideally positioned to benefit from opportunities like Youth for Biosecurity. As they pursue cutting-edge research and monitor new developments in their fields, they need to better understand the complex global frameworks that affect their work, including disarmament treaties and relevant international regulations.

## **Science and the Biological Weapons Convention**

Science is at the heart of the Biological Weapons Convention, and scientists' involvement is crucial for its effective

implementation. The evolution of treaties with scientific elements depends on the successful application of science diplomacy. Effective dialogue, coordination and idea-sharing between scientists and diplomats are critical to keeping the Convention current with rapidly evolving technologies. Treaties can suffer from institutional drift when regulations lag behind technological advances, and the Convention is no exception.

Building on my Youth for Biosecurity experience, during the second Meeting of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention, I highlighted the role of science diplomacy. It is an approach that involves engagement between technical and policy stakeholders to leverage scientific tools in addressing global challenges. Treaty regimes are one such platform for instrumentalizing solutions through evidence-based regulations, aligned commercialization and trade procedures, reviews of scientific and technological development and formal pathways for international cooperation.

In my own journey as a science diplomat in the Convention's processes, I have observed a need for stronger coordination between science-based treaty regimes. For instance, the biological sciences (and biotechnology) are regulated under several United Nations-based processes, including both the Biological Weapons Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity. While these Conventions feature science-policy interfaces and advisory



The author participates in a meeting of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention (Credit: Muhammad Adeel).

structures, their impact could be further optimized.

In this context, there is a clear need to develop mechanisms for effective collaboration between scientists and diplomats. Scientists are both driven and impacted by policy discourse, making their advocacy and advisory roles vital to sustaining the Biological Weapons Convention and similar biology-focused multilateral agreements. Initiatives such as Youth for Biosecurity and particularly its alumni network are excellent templates for how to strengthen this participation interface.

The [Tianjin Biosecurity Guidelines](#), a voluntary model code of conduct for biological scientists, demonstrate how meaningful engagement between scientists and diplomats can produce tangible, useful outcomes within the Biological Weapons Convention framework. Pakistan played a key role in developing and later promoting the Guidelines.

Since scientists and diplomats typically work in separate educational and professional silos, it is vital to bridge this gap among youth professionals by conferring

transferable skills and shared capacities. After participating in the 2021 Youth for Biosecurity programme, I contributed expert support for the three subsequent cohorts, where I identified a strong interest in science policy engagement among the youth participants. Their enthusiasm further highlights the need to update biosecurity curricula with interdisciplinary perspectives.

## Conclusion

The Youth for Biosecurity programme is an excellent platform for training young professionals in disarmament and science policy, providing a foundation for impactful careers in biosafety and biosecurity policy. As the biosecurity field rapidly evolves, including through artificial intelligence and other technological convergences, effective regulation will continue to require diverse expertise and organizational competencies that often extend beyond traditional career paths in science or international relations. It is essential to further scale up initiatives like Youth for Biosecurity to develop a generation of young professionals equipped to tackle and regulate these interdisciplinary risks.



# Annex

## About the authors

**Brandon Mata Aguilar** is a graduate of International Relations at the National University of Costa Rica, currently serving as a Project Officer at la Fundación para la Paz y la Democracia, implementing international cooperation projects across Central America. Applying his expertise in disarmament and emerging technologies, he has contributed to monitoring the development and implications of lethal autonomous weapons systems within United Nations frameworks. As a participant in the Youth Leader Fund for a World without Nuclear Weapons of UNODA, he gained hands-on experience in global disarmament initiatives. He is dedicated to fostering regional development, international collaboration and ethical governance of advanced technologies for sustainable and peaceful progress.

**Yathisa Arunoprayoch** is a government scholar at Waseda University specializing in Asia-Pacific Studies. With a background in Counselling and Clinical Psychology, she is committed to youth mental health and well-being through Orygen Global, an initiative of Australia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. She is currently advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment as a fellow of Women of the South Speak Out. She represented Thailand in the Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Program, aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and building meaningful cross-cultural relationships for a united future.

**Khalid Ibrahim** is a Somali peace and security advocate from the Horn of Africa. As a recent Youth Leader Fund for a World

without Nuclear Weapons graduate, he focuses on promoting peace and security through international cooperation, conflict prevention and expanded access to quality education. He also manages Somaliland's first public library, the Silanyo National Library in Hargeisa, a vital hub for knowledge, culture and community development.

**Mihajlo Matković** is a youth worker and trainer in human rights education based in Serbia. His areas of focus are non-formal education, peacebuilding and sustainable development. In addition to participating in the #Youth4Disarmament initiative, he has been a United Nations Youth delegate of Serbia and a youth representative in the Council of Europe's Congress, where he explored the intersections of diplomacy, disarmament, the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights. He holds a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature and is pursuing a master's degree in postcolonial literature at the University of Novi Sad, which has informed his multidisciplinary approach to disarmament education.

**Monalisa Hazarika** is an early-career professional specializing in conventional arms control. Her areas of expertise and research include small arms and light weapons – especially non-industrial weapons and their trends in illicit manufacture and trade – transnational organized crime, narco-insurgency and the nexus between emerging technologies and conventional weapons. She was formerly part of the #Leaders4Tomorrow, #Leaders2Future and Youth Champions for Disarmament programmes.

**Judith Chukwuebinim Okolo** is an alumna of the 2022 Youth for Biosecurity programme. She is an Assistant Chief Research officer at the National Biotechnology Development Agency of Nigeria. A certified biorisk management professional of the International Federation of Biological Safety Associations, she serves on various biosafety and biosecurity committees both locally and globally. As part of the pioneer cohort of African Women Leaders, she is working on the frontiers of biosecurity and biosafety to prevent the next pandemics. She co-authored a handbook on biosafety and biosecurity for Nigerian students with other Nigerian Youth for Biosecurity participants.

**Santiago Yarahuán Dodero** is a lawyer specializing in international law and a graduate of Tecnológico de Monterrey. He served as Mexico's Youth Delegate to the seventy-eighth United Nations General Assembly, delivering an intervention on weapons of mass destruction during the First Committee session. Recognized by UNODA as a #Leader2Future and #Leader4Tomorrow, Santiago developed the Comprehensive Guide for Youth to Address Climate Change through Disarmament. Currently, he works in the Legal Advisory Office for International Trade Law of the Secretariat of Economy, participating in the defence of Mexico in investment arbitration cases.

**Sofia Polishchuk** is a Juris Doctor candidate at the George Washington University Law School, specializing in national security and public international law. She serves

as the Director of the Children of Ukraine Foundation, a 501 (c) (3) public charity providing humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian children. She also interns in the political section of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations. She has completed post-graduate training at Harvard University, Oxford University and the Hague Academy of International Law.

**Juliana Müller** is a Brazilian student of Cognitive Sciences at Rice University. She is passionate about peace education, videomaking and applying research findings to daily life.

**Muhammad Adeel** is a career diplomat with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, currently posted in Brussels covering the European Union, Belgium and Luxembourg. A scientist and diplomat by profession, his academic work has examined agricultural biotechnology, including the science-diplomacy interface of regulations. While serving in Islamabad as Assistant Director for Science Diplomacy, he created valuable bridges between scientific and diplomatic communities. In 2019, he initiated a series of science and diplomacy training workshops in Australia for early-career researchers, winning the "Education Initiative of the Year" award from the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations. Prior to joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, he was the Manager of Pakistan Biotechnology Information Centre at Forman Christian College University in Lahore, Pakistan, supporting science policy and communication linkages for biotechnology applications.



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