

The United Nations works  
for disarmament and the security  
and welfare of children by:

- Promoting follow-up to the Programme of Action of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, including any initiatives that directly affect children
- Advocating the need to reduce military budgets and allocating more resources to development, health, education and environmental protection, thus contributing to the achievement of the goals set forth in the Convention of the Rights of the Child
- Promoting disarmament education in a culture of peace, and supporting the hopes of young people for a safer world with no weapons of mass destruction, reduced proliferation of small arms and the complete elimination of landmines
- Cooperating with civil society engaged in raising awareness among youth and children through information and education programmes on disarmament, conflict resolution and peace
- Engaging children through schools and youth groups in support of community-wide weapons collection and weapons for development programmes
- Cooperating with other agencies to ensure that the special needs of children, girls and boys, in post-conflict situations, including those of child soldiers, are considered in disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, repatriation and resettlement programmes (DDRRR)
- Advocating and engaging in consciousness-raising activities about landmines. The United Nations is taking a lead role in developing materials that stigmatize the use of landmines and support a global ban

## USEFUL ADDRESSES

[www.un.org/Depts/dda](http://www.un.org/Depts/dda)

A comprehensive review of the work and structure of United Nations disarmament activities

[www.un.org/Depts/dda/education](http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/education)

Disarmament and non-proliferation education resources, including the Secretary-General's study on the subject (Fall 2002) and results of the survey of disarmament and peace education programmes

[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

The website for UNICEF includes information on children and small arms, child soldiers and landmines (See also Machel Report on A/51/306 of 26 August 1996)

[www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict](http://www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict)

Official website of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. (See also Security Council Resolution 1314(2000))

[www.un.org/Depts/dpko/mine](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/mine)

This website describes the main tasks of the United Nations Mine Action Service

[www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/peace](http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/peace)

A peace education resource for teachers and students

[www.un.org/Depts/dda/gender.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/gender.htm)

A UN publication giving gender perspectives on major disarmament issues

*Photo courtesy of Nora Kushti, UNDP*

*Children of Gramsh, Albania handing in guns to UN arms collectors in 1999*

## DISARMAMENT and children



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Protection  
Education  
Advocacy

The United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (New York, 9 to 20 July 2001) was a milestone in the fight against the illicit flow of small arms. In the adopted Programme of Action, States undertook to address the special needs of children affected by armed conflict, in particular reunification with their families, reintegration into civil society and appropriate rehabilitation. They also decided to promote dialogue and a culture of peace by encouraging education and public awareness programmes. The official website of the conference is [www.un.org/Depts/dda/CAB/smallarms](http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/CAB/smallarms).

The General Assembly mandated a group of governmental experts to prepare a United Nations Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education to promote teaching and training of disarmament to children at the primary and secondary levels and to devise strategies to introduce disarmament and non-proliferation education for children into post-conflict situations as a contribution to peace-building. The report will be presented to the 57th session of the Assembly in 2002. See [www.un.org/Depts/dda/education](http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/education).

The Department for Disarmament Affairs and UNICEF produced an exhibit "Taking aim at small arms: defending children's rights" about the dangers of the excessive proliferation and availability of small arms to children. The exhibit, designed for travel, can now be visited virtually at [www.unicef.org/smallarms/exhibit](http://www.unicef.org/smallarms/exhibit). It is also available for travel and States and organizations are encouraged to display it.

The Department for Disarmament Affairs is partnering with the Hague Appeal for Peace in education for disarmament action pilot projects that offer young people alternatives to the use of weapons and promote non-violent behaviour. Starting in Albania, Cambodia, Niger and Peru, the projects aim to sustain community efforts for weapons collection for development programmes.

Practical disarmament measures are designed to assist States with small arms proliferation through weapons collection and weapons for development programmes. With the help of children, these programmes offer an opportunity for communities to reclaim their towns and villages from illicit guns and gain in investments in schools, public services and community health. See [www.un.org/Depts/dda/CAB](http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/CAB).

***"Let us at least make sure that the next generation understands, better than ours has done, or at least mine has done, that human security is as much about governance, human rights, and social justice, as it is about arsenals."***

**Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General**

Today's tools of war and conflict—nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, battleships, fighter aircraft, tanks, small arms, light weapons and landmines—take a special toll on children. While it is true that the defence of a nation is a special duty of every government, guaranteed by the United Nations Charter, it is equally true that the security of each child is a special responsibility of each nation, as solemnly prescribed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Disarmament at the United Nations contributes to the security of the child through various means, such as UNICEF, the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and the United Nations Mine Action Service. The Department for Disarmament Affairs coordinates its efforts with those offices and agencies and makes a direct contribution to the effort through advocacy, information and education for balanced military spending, the end of nuclear dangers, a curb on illegal gun trading and the elimination of landmines.

#### *Increased military expenditures*

Global military expenditures have begun to increase and are conservatively estimated at US\$780 billion per annum. Meanwhile, the world spends US\$21 billion to maintain and improve health and to cope with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This type of disproportionate spending runs contrary to the aims of the Charter of the United Nations to seek ways for the "least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources". This has a direct result on the resources allocated to each nation's children, their nutrition, health, education and welfare.

#### *Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction*

The children who survived the atomic blasts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki continue to bear witness to the horrors of that event.

Children today are the survivors of the nuclear arms race of the cold war. They face a risk that 30,000 nuclear weapons, still active in the arsenals and military plans of a handful of major states, can be used by accident or by design. Since the end of the cold war, the nuclear-weapon States have ceased nuclear testing and dismantled or destroyed quantities of nuclear weapons. To preserve future generations from the consequences of future nuclear testing or a potential nuclear exchange, today's children must learn about extant nuclear dangers. They need information to understand the legacy they have inherited and its inherent risks. They need guidance to bear the responsibility to maintain the momentum, reduce nuclear weapons irreversibly and eventually to eliminate them altogether.

#### *Small arms in small arms*

A thriving and lucrative illegal trade in small arms and light weapons, the weapons of choice in 47 of the 49 conflicts of the last decade, is a grave danger for children, many of whom are at immediate risk. Two million were killed in the last decade's conflicts, six million disabled, twenty million fled from their homes and more than 300,000 forced to fight. The abundance of cheap and easy to use small arms made it easier to induce youth and children to take up arms. They proliferated in conflict-prone areas and among civilian populations in a vicious cycle of violence at ever-higher levels. In many places, conflict, gun violence, organized crime and trade in illegal substances are inter-woven. A global programme of action, calling for nations to work at the international, national and regional levels, was agreed by the first United Nations conference on the subject and special attention to the needs of children was called for.

#### *Landmines – bearers of death and barriers to development*

During conflict, but especially after it, landmines are weapons with unique dangers for children. Because of children's natural instincts of curiosity and play, these small, hidden and at times colourful weapons are attractive to small hands. Because children are small, the toll these weapons take on them is more devastating than on adults. These weapons become silent killers andcrippers, barriers to children's freedom of movement, to attend school, to work or play in the fields, to climb a tree, or to make one's way to a health centre. Progress in all areas of mine action—mine clearance, destruction of stockpiles, development of technology, mine awareness, advocacy for a global ban—contributes to protecting mine-affected children.