

## **General and Complete Disarmament: The Other Side of Article 6**

### **Non-paper by the Strategic Concept for the Removal of Arms and Proliferation (SCRAP)**

#### **Introduction**

The need for progress and innovation in disarmament is an unfulfilled mantra of the UN. Disarmament has become an imperative and most urgent task facing the international community. No real progress has been made so far in the crucial fields of reduction of armaments (SSODI para 17). This paper offers ideas for a renewed holistic approach building on best practice and taking inspiration from Article VI of the NPT, which mandates negotiations “in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective control.”

The principal goals of disarmament are to ensure the survival of mankind and to eliminate the danger of war, in particular nuclear war, to ensure that war is no longer an instrument for settling international disputes and that the use and the threat of force are eliminated from international life, as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations. Progress towards this objective requires the conclusion and implementation of agreements on the cessation of the arms race and on genuine measures of disarmament, taking into account the need of States to protect their security. (SSODI para 19). Among such measures, effective measures of nuclear disarmament and the prevention of nuclear war have the highest priority. (SSODI para 20).

1. In 1959, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 1378—its first to be co-sponsored by all Member States—which placed GCD on its agenda, where it has remained ever since. In 1961, the Soviet Union and United States issued the McCloy/Zorin Joint Statement, outlining their agreement on the basic framework for a future GCD treaty. In 1978, the General Assembly—meeting in its first special session on disarmament—agreed by consensus that “general and

complete disarmament under effective international control” would be the world community’s “ultimate objective”, with nuclear disarmament as its highest priority.

2. Over the years, GCD has appeared in a dozen multilateral disarmament and arms control treaties, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological and Chemical Weapons conventions, and the treaties establishing four of the five regional nuclear-weapon-free zones.
3. At the UN, GCD continues to provide the institutionalized framework for multilateral disarmament deliberations in the General Assembly’s First Committee. The UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, has underscored its importance at a General Assembly side event on GCD held on 18 October this year.<sup>1</sup>
4. GCD has rarely received serious attention in the preparatory and review processes of the NPT, despite its presence both in the Treaty’s Preamble and Article VI. It has not been the focus of any Working Paper in recent decades and is a subject that is typically addressed only in passing. The consensus Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Process did not mention GCD. A debate on GCD, therefore, would build on the Treaty’s stated goal of review conferences of “assuring that the purposes of the Preamble and the provisions of the Treaty are being realised”. (Article VIII(3))
5. GCD continues to offer a potentially attractive means to overcome some of the perennial obstacles in the multilateral disarmament machinery, including the NPT review process. It remains the only fully comprehensive approach to disarmament that explicitly aims at integrating the various strands of disarmament, arms control, non-proliferation, and peace-building into a coherent, unified framework. It also has significant potential in forging a new consensus on disarmament initiatives, by approaching disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control not as rival approaches or alternatives, but as mutually reinforcing means of advancing both national and collective ends.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Remarks at a General Assembly side event on “Contextualizing General and Complete Disarmament”, United Nations, New York, 18 October 2017. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/hr-remarks-gdc-side-event-18-oct-2017-as-prepared.pdf>

## **I. What GCD seeks to accomplish**

6. Deliberations in the UN disarmament machinery typically focus on specific issues on the various agreed agendas. The GCD approach is intended not to replace but to complement and reinforce those deliberations, by enabling the consideration of synergies between issues and by clarifying how disarmament serves to strengthen international peace and security. It allows for steps to be taken in a parallel multi-track strategy. By approaching both disarmament and arms control together and simultaneously, states can gain a mutual benefit, and avoid the perceptions of unfair advantages, double standards, and competitive advantage that have led to and perpetuated our current disarmament stalemate.
7. As the term has evolved at the UN in three past special sessions of the General Assembly and in countless General Assembly Resolutions, GCD encompasses the following objectives: (a) the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons and all other weapons adaptable to mass destruction, especially biological and chemical weapons, and the means of their delivery; (b) the limitation and regulation of conventional armaments and the reduction of military spending while recognizing and preserving the sovereign right to self-defence; and (c & d) measures to strengthen mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of disputes and to promote compliance with the UN Charter's fundamental norm against the threat or use of force.
8. It is this ambition that constitutes disarmament's real contribution to international peace and security overall. It seeks not just to reduce the risk or frequency of major wars or the use of weapons of mass destruction. It seeks to make such uses not only unlikely, but impossible. This goal is fully consistent with the primary aim of the UN Charter to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" (Preamble).
9. In essence, GCD is a means to make sense of the multitude of issue-specific deliberations that take place in bilateral, regional, and global arenas. Indeed, twenty-first century GCD can build on a range of concrete and verified treaties and mechanisms that were unavailable and even unimaginable when the NPT was negotiated. In this light, GCD is an inherently dynamic concept that is continually adapting to new political and technological circumstances. All states, large and small, have contributions to make in deliberating and implementing the integrated elements of GCD.

## **II. How the NPT review process can contribute to GCD**

10. Due to various differences, the 2015 NPT Review Conference was unable to reach a consensus substantive Final Document. Among these differences, one of the most persistent has related to contrasting stances on the relationship of nuclear disarmament to what is often called the “wider security environment”. Some parties argue that peace and security are prerequisites for disarmament to occur, while others argue that without nuclear disarmament, neither peace nor security can be sustained.
11. The NPT review process provides a superb opportunity for the states parties to consider the various ways that progress in disarmament and non-proliferation serve to strengthen international peace and security, at literally all levels: national, regional, and global. Such progress helps to prevent or limit arms races, improve regional stability, build trust and confidence, reduce incentives to expand military spending, and limit the risk of catastrophic terrorist acts. These are only a few of the security benefits that flow from disarmament agreements that satisfy long-agreed multilateral criteria of verification, irreversibility, transparency, and universality in law.
12. We take note of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs for recently publishing an Occasional Paper devoted to GCD.<sup>2</sup> We fully agree that the time has come to revive the GCD approach to disarmament and we believe that the NPT offers a complementary arena for reinforcing efforts underway in the General Assembly to achieve this worthy goal.

## **III. GCD and the UN Charter**

13. GCD is a key part of the UN peace and security architecture.– It enables the UNGA and UNSC to fulfill their respective responsibility under Articles 11 and 26, thereby contributing to the realization of the purposes and principles of the Charter under Articles 1 and 2 with respect to the maintenance of international peace and security, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the

---

<sup>2</sup> UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Rethinking General and Complete Disarmament in the Twenty-First Century*. Occasional Paper 28 (New York: UNODA, October 2016), at <https://www.un.org/disarmament/publications/occasionalpapers/no-28/>.

prohibition of the threat and use of force in international affairs.

### **Recommendations for the 2020 review cycle**

14. We recommend the inclusion of GCD as a prominent substantive issue in any Final Report emerging from the 2020 NPT Review Conference.
15. We propose that the 2020 Review Conference dedicates specific time within the subsidiary body in Main Committee 1 to the elaboration of approaches for GCD.



SCRAP is an academic research project adopting a comprehensive approach to disarmament based on past best practice.

It comes from the initiative and work of students, alumni and staff of the Centre for International Studies & Diplomacy at SOAS University of London, and is actively supported by a committee of advisors<sup>3</sup>:

General Sir Hugh Beach – Former General, British Army

Amb. Sergey Batsanov – Former Soviet and Russian Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament

Matthew Bolton – Assistant Professor, Pace University

Martin Butcher – Adviser, Oxfam International

---

<sup>3</sup> The organisation affiliations are given for identification purposes only, and does not imply that these organisations necessarily endorse the SCRAP project

Pierce Corden – Former Director of International Security Negotiations Office, US State Department’s Arms Control Bureau

Jayantha Dhanapala – Former UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Marc Finaud – Former French Diplomat and Current Senior Adviser at GCSP

Andrew Futter – Senior Lecturer, University of Leicester

Hector Guerra – Coordinator, International Action Network on Small Arms

Peter Herby – Advisor, Norwegian Red Cross

Angela Kane – Former UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Paul Meyer – Former Canadian Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament

Dan Plesch – Director, Centre for International Studies & Diplomacy at SOAS University of London

Tariq Rauf – Former Director, SIPRI’s Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Programme

Nick Ritchie – Lecturer, University of York

Felicity Ruby – WILPF

Randy Rydell – Former Head of Strategic Planning Unit, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

Oliver Sprague – Programme Director, Amnesty International

### **Additional Information**

Our website <http://www.scrapweapons.com/>

Our facebook <https://en-gb.facebook.com/scrapweapons/>

Our twitter <https://twitter.com/scrapweapons?lang=en>

Or Contact:

Dr Dan Plesch - [dp27@soas.ac.uk](mailto:dp27@soas.ac.uk)