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The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) is the global community’s chief authority on the issues of weapons reduction. Among its responsibilities, UNODA acts as the U.N. Secretary-General’s liaison in fulfilling the obligations established by both the Ottawa Convention and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. The Office for Disarmament Affairs’ Geneva branch oversees these activities and is responsible—according to the Ottawa Convention—for collecting Article 7 reports, maintaining the list of Article 8 experts and organizing meetings of States Parties, as well as organizing meetings pertaining to the CCW.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

Gender and Disarmament

For the last decade, the UNODA has been committed to the incorporation of gender dimensions into its work. A 1997 letter to all heads of departments by the U.N. Secretary-General stated that the process of gender mainstreaming “is the responsibility of all and not just gender experts or isolated units,” and called specifically for reports on gender dimensions in all respective areas of work, along with policy recommendations and concrete strategies for gender mainstreaming. Following this directive and a series of other mandates set forth by the United Nations, UNODA published Briefing Notes on Gender Perspectives on Disarmament, which was followed by a gender mainstreaming action plan two years later.

Briefing Notes on Gender Perspectives on Disarmament, published in collaboration with the Office of the Special Adviser of Gender Issues and the Confederation of Women, assesses the relevance of gender dimensions in disarmament issues and identifies strategic implications for promoting gender equality and disarmament. In a speech on 14 March 2001, then Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs Jayantha Dhanapala said of disarmament, “For too many years, the two noble causes of disarmament and gender equality have been pursued on separate but parallel tracks.”

In 2003, the U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs released its Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan, which synthesized the research compiled for the Briefing Notes with strategies for effective implementation of gender mainstreaming in the field. The Action Plan’s purpose was “to facilitate progress on disarmament through the integration of gender insights into disarmament debates, decision-making and actions, and through more equitable participation by women in decision-making.” It also identified four sub-goals:

1. To examine the linkage between gender equality and disarmament promotion;
2. To enhance departmental capacity to incorporate gender perspectives into its work;
3. To advocate the importance of gender perspectives on disarmament; and,
4. To reach out to gender equality actors, women’s organizations and others to engage in the continuing dialogue on disarmament issues.

In his opening remarks, Caughley reaffirmed the commitment of the UNODA to advancing gender equality, saying that, although there has been significant progress in recent years, “more needs to be done to fully integrate women and gender perspectives into all aspects of security and disarmament work around the globe.”

The U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs’ commitment to the promotion of the mutual interests of gender equality and disarmament is evident in its weapons-reduction initiatives, from small arms and light weapons to weapons of mass destruction. Briefing Notes on Gender Perspectives and Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan provide a preliminary framework from which parties with a vested interest in peace can benefit. See Endnote, page 113

Conclusion

The U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs’ commitment to the promotion of the mutual interests of gender equality and disarmament is evident in its weapons-reduction initiatives, from small arms and light weapons to weapons of mass destruction. Briefing Notes on Gender Perspectives and Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan provide a preliminary framework from which parties with a vested interest in peace can benefit.