UNIDIR

UNIDIR Roundup and Outlook 2024

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2023 was a year of crisis upon crisis. Armed conflicts exacerbated grave socio-economic and environmental challenges. Nuclear weapons made an unwelcome return to the global spotlight. The wonders of transformative digital technology brought growing fears over powerful but poorly understood risks. With military expenditure worldwide climbing to USD 2.2 trillion, it is no surprise that the Doomsday Clock now stands at just 90 seconds to midnight – as close as humanity has ever come to its self-destruction.

But there were also glimmers of hope.

The Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace outlines a workable vision of multilateralism for a world in transition. Its recognition of the interlinked nature of the challenges we face is complemented by concrete recommendations, making this an effective aid in navigating today's complex global security landscape.

Such a vision allows us at once to promote responsible innovation and counter the weaponization of emerging domains while also remaining mindful of the huge human costs of conventional weapons and setting out a new vision for peace operations.

UNIDIR's Space Security Programme provides support and advice to the OEWG on Space Threats. © 2022, UNODA.

The 78th General Assembly was able to **adopt more than 50 resolutions and decisions** emerging from its First Committee, on everything from nuclear to conventional weapons, from outer space to regional arms control.

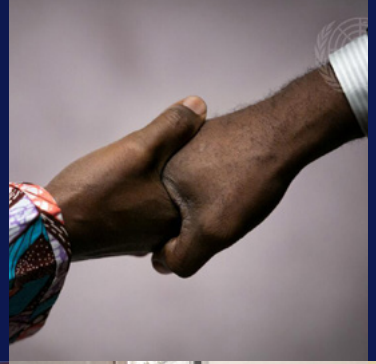
Open-Ended Working Groups and Groups of Governmental Experts **continued to take up the challenge of emerging technologies** by advancing common understanding and proposing viable solutions in areas like cyber, space and lethal autonomous weapon systems.

By adopting the Global Framework for Through-Life Conventional Ammunition Management, the General Assembly **took a vital step towards cutting off the oft-neglected oxygen that enables conflict the world over**: diverted, illicit and misused ammunition.

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) is **the only UN think tank that focuses on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation.** In 2023,

- we worked to mitigate existential risks, from weapons of mass destruction to advances in AI, biotechnology and space;
- we helped save lives by keeping guns out of the wrong hands and boosting preparedness for dealing with improvised explosive devices;
- we reinforced trust and transparency, building bridges between diverse and divided stakeholders;
- we shaped disarmament policy by feeding research, ideas and advice into arms control and disarmament processes;
- and we promoted inclusion and diversity across the board, mainstreaming gender in all our work and integrating disarmament into the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

148
EVENTS



OVER
11K
PARTICIPANTS

96
PUBLICATIONS

193
COUNTRIES DOWNLOADING OUR RESEARCH

66
FULL-TIME PERSONNEL

33
COUNTRIES

58%
WOMEN

67%
UNDER AGE OF 40

Reflecting the key priorities of today's global security environment, our programmes cover weapons of mass destruction, security and technology, conventional arms and ammunition, and space security, while our gender and disarmament programme both produces standalone research and continually intersects with these four other programmes.

UNIDIR is also home to the Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project, whose unique evidence base on journeys into and out of armed groups helps practitioners prevent armed group recruitment and support exits from conflict. The Middle East WMD-Free Zone project, meanwhile, promotes WMD non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament in the Middle East through policy-relevant research, capacity building and dialogue.

Our activities in 2023 were enriched by partners from every corner of the globe. Our annual ECOWAS-UNIDIR Regional Seminar stimulated debate on gender perspectives amongst West African States. Workshops in Africa and Latin America brought in innovative local narratives on space security and made space a more pressing issue in regional disarmament conversations.

Capacity-building sessions boosted capabilities for dealing with improvised explosive devices across Southeast Asia, and a three-day conference in South Asia catalysed ideas in the vanguard domains of cyberspace, AI and autonomy. Collaborative participatory research pilots amplified the voices of young conflict-affected Iraqis while enhancing their skills and reinforcing their networks. **Our global partnership network continues to expand across all six continents.**

Participants in MEAC's photography programme pilot with young people in Mosul, Iraq.

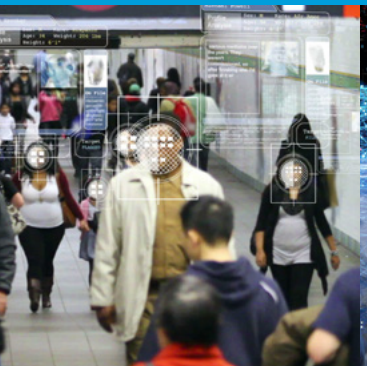
This year’s Disarmament Orientation Course in Geneva was taken up by diplomats from 38 different countries.

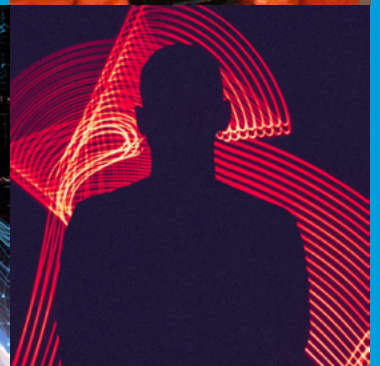
We delivered annual flagship conferences at the frontiers of international security: artificial intelligence in the military domain, outer space security and the applicability of international law to information and communications technology.

Our commitment to strengthening disarmament fora led us to organize a high-level retreat in June that produced clear proposals for revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

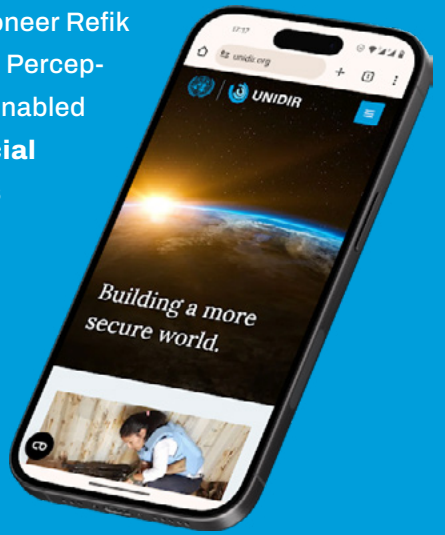
And we once again worked closely with UNODA to deliver the Disarmament Orientation Course to those newly arrived diplomats who will shape disarmament and arms control in years to come.

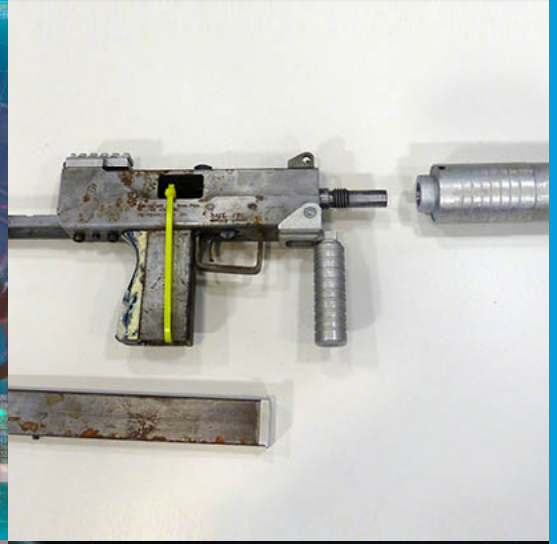
Our suite of accessible, interactive digital tools expanded at pace, with the addition of the Artificial Intelligence Policy Portal, the Space Security Portal, the Cyber Policy Portal Database and the BWC National Implementation Measures Database. These tools **build trust and common understanding** while also allowing up-to-the-minute data to inform and improve our research and advisory work.





Launching **a newly redeveloped website further boosted the reach and impact of our work.** And bringing in the inventive visual interpretations of local and international artists, photographers and researchers – from generative AI pioneer Refik Anadol to the field-leading Robotics and Perception Group at the University of Zurich – enabled us to **remind our audience of the crucial relevance of disarmament to today's global security environment.**





In 2024, UNIDIR will delve further into Responsible AI in the military domain, with our Women in AI Fellowship sharpening our existing focus on the gendered aspects and impacts of new technologies. We will examine enabling technologies, from semiconductors and nanotechnology to next-gen connectivity and quantum computing. Flagship annual conferences in New York and Geneva will unpack key cyber threats, drive progress towards greater security in outer space, and examine radical implications of developments in science and technology.

On the ground, we will explore novel risks from craft-produced weapons and help partners keep guns out of the wrong hands through better management of weapons and ammunition. We will analyse how armed group activity and recruitment is linked to climate change, sexual violence and youth. Well-established work on nuclear risk reduction will increasingly consider threats from converging technologies, and our biorisks research will look in-depth at verification so as to better support the work of the Biological Weapons Convention Working Group.

The UNIDIR Futures Lab and our continuous integration of foresight methodologies across the board **allow us to keep pace with the rapidly evolving global security environment well beyond 2024.**

Of course, as an institution that relies on voluntary contributions to support 90% of our activity, **none of this would have been possible without the generous and steadfast support of our growing number of donors and partners** from across the globe. We are profoundly grateful to each and every one of you.

As we move into 2024, we look forward to working with you to address the key challenges, to create spaces for inclusive dialogue, to develop new solutions – and **to build a more secure world for all.**

UNIDIR Director Robin Geiss opens the 2023 Innovations Dialogue on the impact of artificial intelligence for future battlefields. © 2023, Antoine Tardy/UNIDIR.

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1211 Geneva, Switzerland

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