

UN Special Session on Disarmament: JPIT Briefing

Methodist Conference resolution, June 2023:

“The Conference supports the call for a fourth UN Special Session on Disarmament at a future UN General Assembly.”

What is a UN Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD)?

A Special Session of the UN General Assembly (GA) can be called at the request of the Security Council, or by a majority of UN member states. Typically, special sessions have been called by the GA. A special session brings together heads of state and Government ministers to exclusively discuss one topic - typically producing actionable outcome documents.

At the end of 2021, the UN GA adopted [resolution 76/38](#) that encourages Member States to consult on a fourth special session on disarmament. The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres has included a UN Special Session on Disarmament as one of the policy recommendations within the [New Agenda for Peace](#) and Brazil has offered to host a Preparatory Committee meeting to get the process underway. However, political will is required to set the date of the fourth special session and instigate the necessary preparations.

Why are we calling for one?

In the 35 years since the last SSOD, arms control measures have been abandoned whilst conflict and rising confrontations have returned. Yet, treaties restricting or banning certain weapons with the focus on protecting civilians have continued to emerge.¹ There are demonstrable successes of arms control and disarmament. Building on these in a new SSOD will reduce the harm done by conflict whilst also reducing the likelihood of conflict.

Particularly in the UK, we are seeing military spending soar whilst living standards fall. This is a policy choice primarily motivated by international security concerns. Concrete decisions on disarmament would not only protect civilians from war but also liberate resources desperately needed in other sectors.

Nuclear disarmament cannot be discussed entirely in isolation, with frequent mixing of nuclear and non-nuclear systems. [SCRAP weapons](#) aims to agree a mandate to negotiate a Treaty on General and Complete Disarmament - using this framework.

Why is this the right time?

The context of the war in Ukraine has left many Governments less willing to engage in discussions about disarmament. This is a mistake. Without the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty², Russia would have had thousands of more devastating missiles it could have used against Ukraine.³ Arms control has a rich history of success and protecting civilians - Ukraine only illustrates the absolute necessity of going further with disarmament. The military supremacy of NATO allies is unparalleled. Both fear and the idea of negotiating from strength have been key motivators for positive action on disarmament.

Arms control plays a role in reducing fear and uncertainty. There is a growing appreciation of the need to address the interlinkages between climate, security and peace. Strengthened multilateralism is vital in addressing common threats and consequently the long-awaited fourth SSOD is a matter of urgency.

¹ Activating a UN Special Session on Disarmament: Scrap Weapons and the Inter-Parliamentary Union: <https://scrapweapons.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Information-Pack.pdf>

² Although unfortunately this treaty no longer operates following recent US withdrawal.

³ Plesch, D. ‘Zero Missiles: Building On The Precedent That Helps Ukraine Today’, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/zero-missiles-building-on-the-precedent-that-helps-ukraine-today/>