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Author(s): Candace Singh

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Arsenal of Peace: Feminist Reflections on Gender-Responsive Disarmament and the Challenges of International Law's Framework for Security

By Candace Singh

Introduction

In *The Boundaries of International Law: A Feminist Analysis*, Hilary Charlesworth notes the role of women and international legal responses to women:

*“Although women are in a disadvantaged position worldwide, they have not been passive victims of discriminatory structures but have used international fora to air their concerns for the last 150 years.”*²³¹

This statement provides a useful starting point for analysing United Nations General Assembly Resolution 79/57 on women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, and for identifying discrepancies within international law. On 2 December 2024, the General Assembly of the United Nations recalled General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on issues concerning women, peace, and security.²³² On the table for discussion was the adoption of the Pact for the Future, which describes the promotion of efforts to “achieve gender equality, women’s participation and the empowerment of all women and girls, including in conventional disarmament and arms control”,²³³ alongside other initiatives intended to increase women’s involvement in arms-control processes. However, it is important to discern that whilst ostensible progress may be occurring in some areas of this mission, other areas, particularly efforts to challenge the predominantly masculine framework underpinning armament, remain neglected. By focusing on this UNGA resolution, I argue that the international legal frameworks’ lacking strategic implementation of A/RES/79/57 reflects two structural issues: first, the militarised and masculinised logic of state security, which resists feminist disarmament norms; and second, the reduction of women’s participation to symbolic inclusion that affords them insufficient authority to challenge that logic.

The position adopted without a vote by the General Assembly prompts this exploration.²³⁴ In a modern international policy landscape, nation-states have adopted feminist foreign policies as a step towards signalling support for a new international order, one where women’s rights hold equal value to men’s.²³⁵ Gillian Youngs describes this phenomenon in feminist international relations, where “the work of feminist political and economic theory” is built upon the masculinism inherent in political, economic, military, and governmental institutions.²³⁶ Victoria Scheyer and Marina Kumskova further assert that traditional approaches to security are divided into two

²³¹ Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin, *The Boundaries of International Law: A Feminist Analysis* (Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 14.

²³² UNGA Res 79/57 (2 December 2024) UN Doc A/RES/79/57.

²³³ UNGA Res 79/57 (n 232).

²³⁴ UNGA Res 79/57 (n 232).

²³⁵ Victoria Scheyer and Marina Kumskova, “Feminist Foreign Policy: A Fine Line between ‘Adding Women’ and Pursuing a Feminist Agenda,” *Journal of International Affairs* 72, no. 2 (2019), p. 57.

²³⁶ Gillian Youngs, “Feminist International Relations: A Contradiction in Terms? Or: Why Women and Gender Are Essential to Understanding the World ‘We’ Live In,” *International Affairs* 80, no. 1 (2004), p. 76.

categories: either adding women into a determinate system or applying gender structures that embed equality and justice within themselves.²³⁷ Scheyer and Kumskova contend that gender cannot be separated from, and is integral to, international systems. Elizabeth Minor suggests that gender intersects with arms-related issues in myriad ways, one example being the underrepresentation of women at diplomatic meetings.²³⁸ The “gendered discussion of violence and weapons, which may frame certain weapons as symbols of masculine strength and women as being in need of male protection, can shape how disarmament issues are addressed, as well as exacerbate women’s exclusion from these processes.”²³⁹ There is a consensus within disarmament policy that further progress is needed in integrating gender considerations into arms control.²⁴⁰ Whilst nation-states can unanimously agree on acknowledging the gendered lens, what prevents the gendered perspective from being implemented in practice? In his review of feminist security theory scholarship, Eric Blanchard notes that answers to this central question can be found; his analysis helps to explain why international law’s framework for gendered security lacks an effective model for implementing gender-responsive disarmament.²⁴¹

Richard Steinberg notes that “the state remains a central actor in international law, international law is largely shaped and constrained by state power, and international law has a limited capacity to constrain the behaviour of powerful states.”²⁴² This, in part, reveals the marginalised position that gender-responsive disarmament has fallen into; many states operate according to a masculinised conception of security that is militarised and offensive in character, and therefore cannot fully comprehend a feminist perspective that centres women and children, including the full implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, adopted in October 2000 by the UN Security Council.²⁴³ Robert O. Keohane develops this idea further by emphasising the nature of political power: “emphasizing power as the ability to act in concert would call attention to areas of world politics in which human beings seek to collaborate to cope with collective problems [...]”²⁴⁴ The legal significance of the assertion lies in this understanding of collective power. As a result of the adopting body’s absence of necessary powers, although peripheral effects may emerge from unanimous decisions, a rhetorical veneer of participatory progress is the abiding system.²⁴⁵

Evidently, there emerge many points of tension within a feminist perspective. Understanding feminist methods, including their critiques of law and approaches to legal reform,²⁴⁶ is critical to understanding why such claims should be regarded as legitimate.²⁴⁷ Through emphasising the gaps in international law, which invite

²³⁷ Scheyer and Kumskova, “Feminist Foreign Policy,” p. 59.

²³⁸ Elizabeth Minor, “Missing Voices: The Continuing Underrepresentation of Women in Multilateral Forums on Weapons and Disarmament,” *Arms Control Today* 47, no. 10 (2017), p. 15.

²³⁹ Minor, “Missing Voices,” p. 15.

²⁴⁰ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Gender and Small Arms Control.”

²⁴¹ Eric M. Blanchard, “Gender, International Relations, and the Development of Feminist Security Theory,” *Signs* 28, no. 4 (2003), p. 1290.

²⁴² Richard H. Steinberg, “Overview: Realism in International Law,” *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law* 96 (2002), p. 260.

²⁴³ United Nations Development Programme, *Parliaments as Partners Supporting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: A Global Handbook* (2019).

²⁴⁴ Robert E. Keohane, “International Relations Theory: Contributions of a Feminist Standpoint,” in *Gender and International Relations*, ed. Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Newland (Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 43.

²⁴⁵ Marko Divac Öberg, “The Legal Effects of Resolutions of the UN Security Council and General Assembly in the Jurisprudence of the ICJ,” *European Journal of International Law* 16, no. 5 (2005), p. 881.

²⁴⁶ Katharine T. Bartlett, “Feminist Legal Methods,” *Harvard Law Review* 103, no. 4 (1990), p. 830.

²⁴⁷ Bartlett, “Feminist Legal Methods,” p. 831.

inaction, this article illustrates the demand for a legal precedent that aligns with the UN Charter. I argue that states' maintenance of a militarised standpoint further foregrounds the foundational nature of gendered violence and undermines UNGA Resolution 79/57's consistent implementation within the international community. Firstly, I examine the consequence of international law's state-centric and militarised understanding of security which obstructs the full implementation of gender perspectives, including the WPS agenda, in the international framework. Secondly, I assert that representation and inclusionary politics, including gender-inclusive language, limit the resolution's capacity to support compliance with legally binding obligations such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace, and Security).

1. Militarisation and Gender Perspectives in the International System

Current perspectives regarding disarmament can be understood as reflective of power dynamics in the international community, or, in Paul Higate's terms, as cognisance of the "malestream tenets" that reflect the masculinised logic of the social world order.²⁴⁸ Gender-responsive disarmament responds to this dynamic by recognising women's roles in "all aspects of disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control efforts", whilst also welcoming "full, equal, and meaningful participation of women [...] to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit transfer of small arms."²⁴⁹ The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) reinforces that whilst progress has been made, namely in seizing weaponry, a stronger framework is required to integrate gender perspectives, as agreed upon in the Programme of Action (PoA) on small arms and light weapons (SALW) and the ATT. UNODA further asserts that Member States are now also detailing their respective steps in considering gender perspectives when implementing the PoA, including the reporting of "sex-disaggregated data."²⁵⁰

The PoA was adopted in 2001 following a governmental agreement to improve the regulation of small arms, to bolster stockpile management, to validate reliably marked weapons, to improve cooperation in weapons tracing, and to foster national and international cooperation and assistance.²⁵¹ Since then, the database for the PoA has been active; every two years, countries submit national reports on their implementation of the UN PoA.²⁵² Whilst this has been established as a programme, it lacks widespread international cooperation. The database records data concerning every state's national coordination infrastructure, manufacture, international transfer, brokering, stockpile management, collection, marking and record-keeping, international tracing, international cooperation and assistance, and gender and additional information related to SALW trade. This data was drawn from Germany's entry in the database; Germany has expressed extensive support for the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, and the Federal Government has given the WPS agenda special focus in German foreign

²⁴⁸ Paul Higate, "Men, Masculinity and Global Insecurity: Fighting for and against Islamic State," in *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security*, ed. Caron E. Gentry, Laura J. Shepherd, and Laura Sjöberg (Routledge, 2019), p. 71.

²⁴⁹ UNGA Res 79/57 (n 232).

²⁵⁰ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Gender and Small Arms Control."

²⁵¹ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons—Eighth Biennial Meeting of States," 2022.

²⁵² United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Country Profiles," *Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons*.

policy.²⁵³ However, no entry has been made in the gender category; instead, the database reports “no information available on whether disaggregated data are collected on gender and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons”.²⁵⁴ According to the OECD regarding international assistance on reintegration and SALW control, Germany provided US\$1.7 million in 2023 to eight projects.²⁵⁵ No information has been reported since. Whilst Germany reportedly commits to full implementation of the WPS agenda and to incorporating gender perspectives into its foreign policy, this is not reflected in its arms-related reporting. This data indicates that states with formal WPS commitments still fail to implement gender perspectives in arms reporting, demonstrating the gap between rhetorical endorsement and structural change.

Many states share this non-reportage; China, Denmark, France, Italy, India, Morocco, Poland and the United Kingdom are examples of such states that do not collect disaggregated data on gender, despite the unanimous vote on the WPS agenda. Other states, such as Canada, Argentina, Portugal, Mexico, the USA and Australia, do collect disaggregated data on gender. In cases like the United States, while gender is considered as part of SALW control, the export value of over 200 million small arms, and the import of over 50,000, suggest that the commitment remains superficial. As Paul Esau notes, many states’ implementations of feminist foreign policy in their respective national policies act as a cover for “the risk of human rights violations”.²⁵⁶ In Canada, military exports to Saudi Arabia since 2017 have violated Canadian military export policy and Canada’s adherence to the ATT. After considerable pressure from the public, the Canadian government released an internal report stating that Saudi Arabia was violating international humanitarian law and human rights law but argued that the specific equipment supplied by Canada may not have aided these violations.²⁵⁷ Furthermore, in the United States in 2023, President Biden released an updated “Conventional Arms Transfer Policy” which newly defined the alleged standard used to prohibit a sale. In effect, it significantly relaxes the “evidentiary threshold for refusing arms sales to dictators, human rights abusers, and other unsavoury customers”.²⁵⁸ This connotes a challenging pattern of approving military sales to autocratic regimes and to states with recognised human rights violations. This is consistent with the militarised logic of state security, which resists feminist disarmament norms, and thus hinders a formal, universal implementation of gender-based perspectives and practices.

A majority of the states listed, including others that have not been listed, operate under a masculinised, patriarchal view of security where arms are considered essential to prevent disorder and maintain peace. As Ann-Dorte Christensen argues, it is the military institution that is constructed as a “masculinity maker”.²⁵⁹ Its purpose is formed and maintained to wage war, and thus a militarised masculinity denotes traits typically associated with masculinity that can be acquired through military service and combat.²⁶⁰ Wars have historically been justified as

²⁵³ Federal Foreign Office, “No Peace Without Women: Women, Peace and Security Agenda,” January 21, 2022.

²⁵⁴ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Country Profiles.”

²⁵⁵ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Country Profiles.”

²⁵⁶ Paul Esau, “Conventional Arms Transfer Policies Weaponize Ambiguity and Ignore Risks,” *Inkstick*, June 29, 2023.

²⁵⁷ Esau, “Conventional Arms Transfer Policies.”

²⁵⁸ Esau, “Conventional Arms Transfer Policies.”

²⁵⁹ Ann-Dorte Christensen and Morten Kyed, “From Military to Militarizing Masculinities,” *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies* 17, no. 1 (2022), p. 1.

²⁶⁰ Maya Eichler, “Militarized Masculinities in International Relations,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 21, no. 1 (2014), p. 81.

being fought to protect women, and a feminist perspective asserts that military violence only exacerbates insecurities for women.²⁶¹

Jacklyn Cock declares this the feminist challenge to a militaristic framework; policy solutions that work to rectify participation and inclusivity “ignore the plurality of such institutions and social relations with which the state must engage.”²⁶² Even though traditional constructions of militarisation and masculinity have been reproduced to include a gendered aspect, namely through the introduction of women’s participation in matters related to armament, they are still operative according to Christensen, and have emerged in new forms, such as in arguments for “Western military international intervention.”²⁶³ This leaves little room for establishing lasting peace for women. As Cock posits, “weaponry and war are not fixed topographical features of the social landscape. Armies are not essential to the existence of a nation-state, as the experience of Costa Rica demonstrates; private gun ownership is not essential to citizenship. The diverse examples of Japan and Botswana suggest a gun-free society is a ‘real utopia’.”²⁶⁴ Without idealising this ‘utopia’, what is the purpose of the UN’s unanimous vote for A/RES/79/57? How is it expected to impart a lasting effect on vulnerable populations, populations in which gender-based violence was reported ‘severe’ or ‘extreme’ in 22 of 25 countries that experienced humanitarian crises in 2024 alone?²⁶⁵ Ignoring certain factors that exacerbate the likelihood of small-arms-related conflict reveals a gap in the logic behind unanimous decisions. In this way, international law’s framework is left vulnerable to cherry-picking politics, where states work on the implementation of agendas and resolutions that accord with their own political priorities. This notion will be elaborated upon in the next section.

2. Inclusionary and Representational Politics and Their Effects on Vulnerable Populations

In chapter 3 of A Global Study on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, conducted by UN Women, gaps in the implementation of participatory commitments in international law’s framework are highlighted. Titled “Participation and a Better Understanding of the Political”, the publication breaks down the numbers: “since the adoption of resolution 1325, there has been a substantial increase in the frequency of gender-responsive language in peace agreements and the number of women, women’s groups, and gender experts who serve as official negotiators, mediators, or signatories. Nonetheless, in many contexts, women’s official participation may be temporary, their delegated roles may be more symbolic than substantive, and their capacity to influence may be directly resisted by cultural norms.”²⁶⁶ This statement directly correlates to the findings of the study, as the investigation relates to peace agreements and peace processes signed in countries like Colombia (from 1998-2002), Moldova (from 1992-2005), and Cyprus (from 1999-2004), where no agreement was reached due to lack of influence from women in the process, versus countries like Yemen (from 2011-2014),

²⁶¹ Eichler, “Militarized Masculinities,” p. 83.

²⁶² Jacklyn Cock, “The Feminist Challenge to Militarism,” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 36 (1997), p. 37.

²⁶³ Christensen and Kyed, “From Military to Militarizing Masculinities,” p. 2.

²⁶⁴ Cock, “Feminist Challenge to Militarism,” p. 38.

²⁶⁵ UN Women, “Facts and Figures: Women, Peace, and Security,” October 20, 2025.

²⁶⁶ UN Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (UN Women, 2015), p. 111.

South Africa (from 1990-1997), and Northern Ireland (from 2001-2013), where an agreement was reached and implemented due to a strong influence from women. In cases like Fiji, however, the data is incongruent, with a strong influence of women in the process, yet no agreement was reached from 2006-2013.²⁶⁷ This is attributed to cultural resistance to women's empowerment and gender equality.²⁶⁸ It is evident that societal and cultural influences inherent to respective nations are significant factors in the implementation of peace processes, including the data on the PoA on SALW, explored in the prior chapter, which suggests a similar pattern.

As the Global Study explains, an “analysis of 40 peace processes since the end of the Cold War shows that in cases where women were able to exercise a strong influence on the negotiation process, there was a much higher chance that an agreement would be reached than when women's groups exercised weak or no influence. In cases of strong influence of women an agreement was almost always reached.”²⁶⁹ This does not, however, negate the cultural influence at play; as the Global Study notes, “In 15 of the 16 national dialogues examined for this Study, it was found that decision-making was left to a small group of male leaders.”²⁷⁰ Although nation-states recognise that many United Nations resolutions lack binding force, they may exploit that weakness and obstruct implementation where the resolutions would benefit women.

As Manuel Mesa observes, whilst UN Resolution 1325 “transformed the view of women in conflicts, from passive victims to key actors in peacebuilding [...], its impact remains limited in everyday life.”²⁷¹ This is due to the regulatory framework remaining insufficient to positively affect the lives of women in conflict settings. Mesa states that sexual violence prevails with impunity, and women's participation in peace processes continues to be limited. Furthermore, where National Action Plans have been implemented, whilst they improve intergovernmental and civil-society coordination, they suffer from insufficient political commitment, inadequate dedicated budgets, and uneven reach and effectiveness. These limitations differ across contexts but overlap in important respects when these areas are evaluated. Mesa describes this as the “clearest shortcoming in implementing the WPS agenda”, as there is an evident gap between “declared ideals” and “actual action”. It can be further asserted that this is an additional shortcoming in PoA SALW implementation.

The analysis of the implementation of peace processes as supported by the UN Women's Global Study and Mesa's enquiry can reasonably be applied to the PoA on SALW, and similar entries submitted into the database informing implementation status. “Too often, gender perspective is still seen merely as the inclusion of women, without questioning or transforming the structures of inequality and power that perpetuate exclusion.”²⁷² In this context, the structure of inequality and power to which Mesa refers is principally patriarchal. Patriarchy as a system of power is an idea expressed by bell hooks.²⁷³ When CEDAW entered into force in 1981, its states parties

²⁶⁷ Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Thania Paffenholz, “Women's Participation and a Better Understanding of the Political,” in *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (UN Women, 2015), p. 42.

²⁶⁸ O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz, “Women's Participation,” p. 42.

²⁶⁹ O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz, “Women's Participation,” pp. 41–42.

²⁷⁰ O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz, “Women's Participation,” p. 48.

²⁷¹ Manuel Mesa, “The Challenges of the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda on Its 25th Anniversary,” *Latinoamérica21*, October 1, 2025.

²⁷² Mesa, “Challenges of the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda.”

²⁷³ bell hooks, “Understanding Patriarchy,” *The Anarchist Library*, December 2004.

undertook to protect women's equal human rights and to take the steps necessary to guarantee gender equality.²⁷⁴ They further agreed to address and subsequently dismantle “social, religious, and cultural structures which foster the subordination of women by men”.²⁷⁵ The CEDAW Committee assumes this to include religious, “traditional and customary beliefs, ideas, rules and practices”, whilst not explicitly stating the word ‘patriarchy’, demonstrating the “problematic distinction between non-western and non-European states, versus western and European states.”²⁷⁶ The CEDAW Committee is “concerned at the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deeply-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women in the family and in society.” In observations concerning Pakistan, Syria, Kyrgyzstan, Cameroon and Uganda, the Committee identifies “harmful traditional practices” such as female genital mutilation, honour killings, early and forced marriage, and violence against women generally.²⁷⁷ Mudgway presents the argument that these practices could be associated with patriarchy and could serve as direct indicators of it, as they correlate to men's comprehensive power and the oppression of women. This supports the argument advanced in this section; due to bureaucratic authority and the predominance of men in power, the implementation of the PoA on SALW cannot be fully absorbed into every nation's framework or culture, thereby creating vulnerabilities for women and girls and leaving them at risk of abandonment by structures that are in dire need of systemic reform.

This notion is directly connected to legally binding obligations such as the ATT and CEDAW. Put simply, in the case of the PoA on SALW and A/RES/79/57, since certain states remain selective regarding full implementation of the Resolution on Women, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation, and Arms Control, they act contrary to obligations under legally binding treaties, under which States Parties are required to evaluate and report the risk of conventional arms exports being used to commit serious acts of harm and gender-based violence (GBV).²⁷⁸ Risk assessment cannot be completed under the ATT without collecting and reporting sex-disaggregated data. At the Eleventh Conference of States Parties to the ATT, held in August 2025, states agreed to establish Gender Focal Points to thoroughly integrate a gendered perspective across all treaty processes and support its implementation.²⁷⁹ Further to this, CEDAW is a legal instrument that instructs countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls and works in tandem with the ATT and the PoA on SALW. General Recommendation No. 30, adopted in 2013, specifically guides States parties on “the implementation of the obligation of due diligence”, in particular “protecting women's human rights at all times, advancing substantive gender equality before, during and after conflict and ensuring that women's diverse experiences are fully integrated into all peacebuilding, peacemaking, and reconstruction processes.”²⁸⁰ Under CEDAW, there is a legal requirement for states to report the steps they have taken to protect women and girls from systemic harm and

²⁷⁴ Cassandra Mudgway, “Smashing the Patriarchy: Why International Law Should Be Doing More,” *Women, Peace and Security*, October 7, 2019.

²⁷⁵ Mudgway, “Smashing the Patriarchy.”

²⁷⁶ Mudgway, “Smashing the Patriarchy.”

²⁷⁷ Mudgway, “Smashing the Patriarchy.”

²⁷⁸ Asociación para el Análisis de Políticas Públicas, “Judicial Sentences as Evidence for Gender-Responsive Small Arms Control: Contributions to UNPoA Monitoring and ATT Article 7(4) Risk Assessments” (2026).

²⁷⁹ Asociación para el Análisis de Políticas Públicas, “Judicial Sentences as Evidence for Gender-Responsive Small Arms Control.”

²⁸⁰ CEDAW Committee, ‘General Recommendation No 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations’ (18 October 2013) UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/30, paras 2–3.

violence. As such, the discrepancies in reportage of sex-disaggregated data underline a gap in implementation. Without data on the differentiated impacts of armed violence on women and girls, states cannot fulfil their assessments of the risk of gender-based violence under the ATT.²⁸¹ This reflects two problems: first, a militarised and masculinised approach to security, as states do not honour their commitments, possibly because full reporting would require the acknowledgement of human-rights violations; and second, the absence of women from the process, allowing a single perspective to prevail without challenge.

Conclusion

Feminist legal theory identifies potential reforms that can aid in closing the gap between the formal adoption and practical implementation of A/RES/79/57. Firstly, Katharine T. Bartlett asserts what she calls a fusion of a “classic Aristotelian model of practical deliberation” and the “feminist focus on identifying and taking into account the perspectives of the excluded.”²⁸² This can yield the desired outcome of widespread implementation across the global landscape, because it considers alternative perspectives including those shaped by different cultures and societal norms. As Bartlett states, “practical reasoning approaches problems not as dichotomized conflicts, but as dilemmas with multiple perspectives, contradictions, and inconsistencies.”²⁸³ This method supports innovative ways to integrate and reconcile implementation whilst acknowledging specified context. For instance, this method may be of use in the case of Sudan, where Sudanese women’s groups appealed to the States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in 2025. As the appeal notes, since 2022, “Serbia has exported massive quantities of small arms and light weapons, including assault rifles and ammunition, despite clear indication that these arms are being used in the conflict.”²⁸⁴ China and the United Arab Emirates have also been implicated in the perpetuation of violence in Sudan; China has reportedly provided military equipment and technology, while the United Arab Emirates has reportedly facilitated the transit of arms shipments, thereby circumventing international oversight. Further to this, Sudanese women’s groups have expressed the “human cost” of illicit SALW, including the subjection of women and children to sexual violence and indiscriminate attacks, “accelerating the breakdown of the social fabric.”²⁸⁵ Should a practical reasoning approach have been taken in this case together with Sudan’s report on gender considerations in the PoA SALW database, Sudanese women’s groups’ pleas for reform could have been heeded. Practical reasoning does not address circumstances in advance based on predictability.²⁸⁶ Rather, it recognises that facts are often varied and unpredictable, making it difficult for lawmakers to “frame determinate rules”.²⁸⁷

²⁸¹ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Chapter 6: Gender and Disarmament,” in *United Nations Disarmament Yearbook*, vol. 48 (2023).

²⁸² Bartlett, “Feminist Legal Methods,” p. 850.

²⁸³ Bartlett, “Feminist Legal Methods,” p. 851.

²⁸⁴ Peace for Sudan Platform, “Sudanese Women Groups Appeal to the Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty,” August 2025, p. 1.

²⁸⁵ Peace for Sudan Platform, “Sudanese Women Groups Appeal,” p. 2.

²⁸⁶ Bartlett, “Feminist Legal Methods,” p. 853.

²⁸⁷ Bartlett, “Feminist Legal Methods,” p. 853.

The Agency for Peacebuilding recommends gearing towards substantive participation and proposes “confronting entrenched gender hierarchies and embedding women’s authority into formal peacemaking processes.”²⁸⁸ As it stands, women’s participation in peace and security processes and decisions has often been confined to “peripheral or subsidiary positions: observer roles, advisory positions, or symbolic appointments” that only address visibility and representation.²⁸⁹ Because these positions often hold little weight with regard to influencing decision-making or gaining authority in international fora, participation has become a numbers game, and thus gender-based resolutions and decisions cannot make substantial progress. Women’s representation is further limited across the Horn of Africa, in Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia, where embedded gender structures restrict women’s access to formal decision-making areas. Only by challenging patriarchal structures in these regions, but indeed, across the globe, can the WPS agenda “fulfill its promise of transforming peace and security for all”.²⁹⁰

The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific held an event in Geneva in August 2023 on the margins of the ninth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty. Co-moderated by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the event emphasised gender-based considerations for national arms exports and transfers.²⁹¹ I propose that this step be extended into the domestic legal systems of individual states; the UN PoA guidelines should transition into binding laws by introducing a “National Small Arms and Light Weapons Gender Act”, which would require national law-enforcement agencies in all states to record the sex of victims and perpetrators in firearm registries. This would rectify inconsistent practices in reporting sex-disaggregated data by embedding policy into states directly. As many causes of the lack of consistent reportage are due to the underfunding of data architecture and national agency data silos, this implementation would make law-enforcement agencies responsible for collecting and recording the data, thereby feeding into a database accessible to international organisations.

This recommendation should be accompanied by updates to national law-enforcement data-collection systems to ensure that they are compatible with the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC), which is a module-based system that translates the objectives of key global agreements on SALW.²⁹² By doing so, individual states would adhere to their legal requirements under the ATT and CEDAW and contribute to a downward trajectory in illicit flows of SALW and GBV by tracking the data and causes. This would challenge the patriarchal perspectives of state security by exposing the data reflecting violence against women and girls. It would also decrease reliance on individual agencies and increase data reportage, by embedding policy into many governmental agencies. Further, I propose using the UN PoA Biennial Meetings of States to resolve gaps in reportage, by introducing a peer-review system that can address compliance with gender-based data submission.

As states continue to push forward a militarised patriarchal agenda, A/RES/79/57 and the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons are heavily hindered. Implementing these suggestions may promote

²⁸⁸ Alexa Marsh, “Participation vs. Power: Women’s Persistent Exclusion from Peacemaking Processes,” Agency for Peacebuilding, February 24, 2026.

²⁸⁹ Marsh, “Participation vs. Power.”

²⁹⁰ Marsh, “Participation vs. Power.”

²⁹¹ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Chapter 6: Gender and Disarmament.”

²⁹² United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Modular Small-Arms-Control Implementation Compendium.”

fuller international cooperation on a resolution that would benefit the broader human population. A meaningful implementation of A/RES/79/57 can result in greater peace and security for women and children.

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