



Florence Foster (seated second right) presenting closing remarks at the Geneva NA4P 2023 consultation where QUNO ensured a session was dedicated to the role of the regulation of conventional weapons

Arms control, human rights, and corporate responsibility towards just, peaceful and inclusive societies

QUNO Geneva's Peace & Disarmament program has a long history of supporting and working towards **fostering stricter arms control and sustained disarmament efforts, resisting all war** and preparations for war anchored in the belief that the deliberate killing of others denies their humanity.

Today, we focus on raising awareness of the harm done by conventional weapons on communities and the governance gaps that exist in that regard. We work to highlight the arms-related risks to human rights and to tackle the challenges in addressing these risks by building effective arms controls at the international level. We do this by working in various spaces such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), or the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Business and Human Rights, an expert mechanism of the Human Rights Council (HRC).

Background—Where is the gap?

With the implementation of many arms control and disarmament frameworks, agreements and treaties being undermined by politicization and commercial interests as well as the lack of a human rights dimension in arms control decision-making, we have sought to address that gap as well as leverage a diverse range of policy spaces including the UN human

rights bodies to complement these shortcomings.

With numerous policy spaces addressing arms control as a technical or commercial topic, we bring a peace and justice voice into these spaces. We broaden the conversation to also try and understand not only the impacts of armed violence, but what the drivers of that violence are and why people use weapons in the first

place. In doing so we highlight that guns do not simply kill but also violate a wide range of human rights and affect social cohesion.

Furthermore, we remind the private sector of their responsibilities in relation to human rights, as they all have remained insulated from the discussion on responsible business conduct even though this issue of responsible business conduct has seen important developments over the past decade. It is working to close this governance gap that we find our added value as QUNO, in questioning and highlighting the way in which businesses in the arms industry put in practice their own responsibilities and ensure that they have engaged in processes to prevent, mitigate, and address the adverse impacts of their business models and trade.

How do we promote this work?

QUNO works behind the scenes, building trust by bringing together people from a range of backgrounds including diplomats, UN officials, staff of non-governmental organizations, academics, experts, and practitioners. By creating space for quiet dialogue, we help shape UN and other international priorities, and we bring attention to issues that are not yet on the international agenda. The reputation and atmosphere of our Quaker Houses allow for the emergence of more reflective and inclusive responses to difficult issues; ideas which might not be heard in more formal settings. The scale of international negotiations can feel challenging, but the trusting environment we provide, informed by Quaker methods, remains key to our work.

We bring these approaches to numerous processes, such as HRC mechanisms in Geneva or the ATT processes – often bridging institutionalized silos together to advocate for policies and practices that support our holistic vision of arms control and disarmament, and to strengthen a holistic understanding of armed violence.

This approach is also evidenced by our role in the co-convening of numerous interest groups, including a community of practice on Business & Conflict hosted by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (GPP), and more informal discussions amongst civil society from across the business, human rights and arms control communities of practice.

Recent QUNO Geneva achievements.

Understanding arms-related risks to human rights.

We have engaged at the HRC as a platform to build the policy link and evidence base for arms-related risks to human rights, as well as governance gaps with regards to the private sector. Over time, we have successfully ensured that language reflected and evidenced root causes and business responsibilities. Indeed, HRC resolutions and pursuant reports by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on civilian acquisition of firearms and of arms transfers on human rights now include those important elements. We have also been involved in the development of an information note on [‘Responsible business conduct in the arms sector’](#)

by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights.

Engagement with the ATT on responsible business conduct.

QUNO Geneva recently revived the spirit of the Geneva Forum – a previously co-facilitated community of practice on small arms, development and conflict between QUNO / United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research / Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding - by facilitating regular informal conversations with arms control diplomats, exposing them to different expert discussants to better inform their work. This has focused on ensuring that norms and standards on responsible business conduct are better understood for those involved in arms transfers. Importantly, this has positioned us as experts in this cross-cutting area of business, human rights and arms control - gaining QUNO access to informal processes ahead of the Conference of States Parties to the ATT, with the theme in 2023 as ‘The Role of Industry in Responsible International Transfers of

Conventional Arms.’ We continue to voice the importance of civil society inclusion, human rights due diligence and corporate responsibility in these privileged spaces.

The GPP – a platform for holistic conversations on prevention.

QUNO Geneva, being one of the founding organizations of the GPP, supported the development of a Geneva Consultation on the ‘New Agenda for Peace’ process, a process that hopes to address the contemporary challenges whose outcome will be presented at the Summit of the Future in September 2024. QUNO ensured a session was dedicated to the role of the regulation of conventional weapons. This ensured both the arms control community and civil society were included and gave voice to the impact and importance of conventional arms control in relation to peace – that are all too often overshadowed by the urgent need to also address new technologies and nuclear weapons. QUNO was also instrumental in building a Business & Conflict community of practice hosted by the GPP.

Quaker House, Geneva



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Florence Foster, speaking at Ireland Yearly Meeting 2023

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