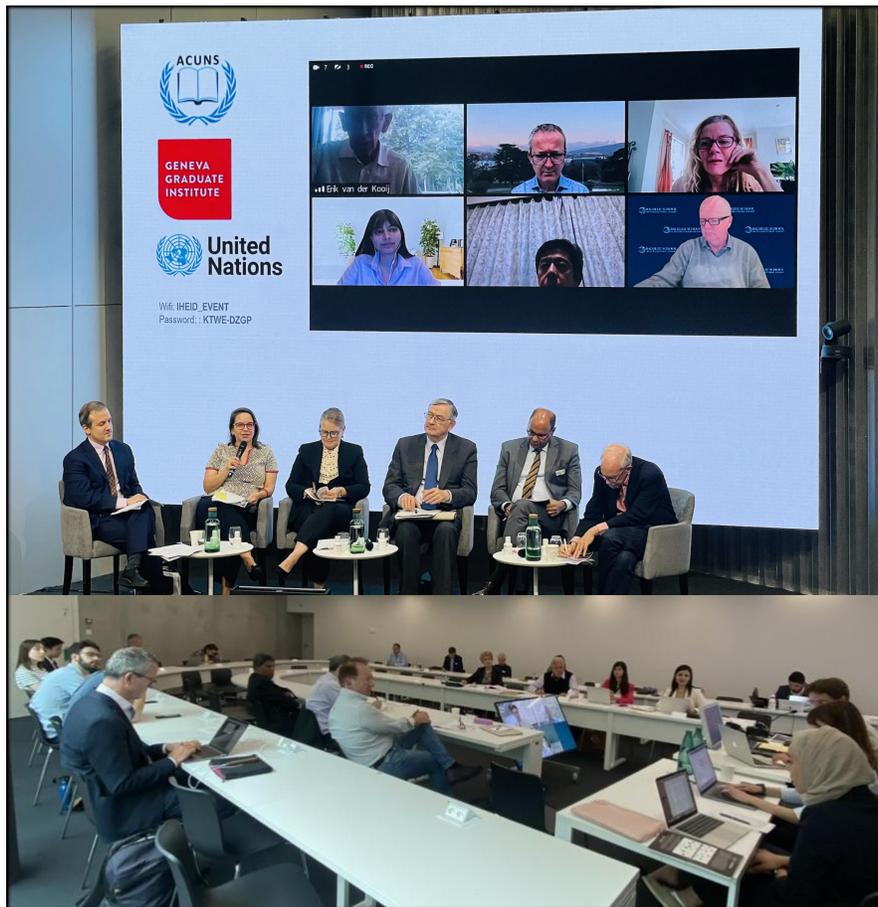


Global Policy Dialogue on Evidence-Based Solutions and the Road to 2023: Strengthening Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, Sustainable Trade & Disarmament Cooperation

24 June 2022, Geneva, Switzerland



Summary of Major Findings and Recommendations

Introduction

As an integral part of the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Academic Council on the UN System (ACUNS), the Global Governance Innovation Network (GGIN)—a project of ACUNS, Plataforma CIPÓ, Leiden University, and the Stimson Center—convened with the Club de Madrid, UN University Centre for Policy Research, the Global Challenges Foundation, and the Institute for Economics & Peace, on 24 June 2022 in Geneva, a Global Policy Dialogue (GPD) on “Evidenced Based Solutions and the Road to 2023: Strengthening Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, Sustainable Trade & Disarmament Cooperation.”

The ACUNS-Geneva GPD organized “breakthrough group” discussions around human rights, humanitarian action, sustainable trade, and disarmament. In connection with the broader themes tackled by the ACUNS Annual Meeting, the GPD considered ways to strengthen the channels between science/expertise and the UN; to strengthen the UN's early warning and early responses to global catastrophic risks; and to improve how the UN communicates its science-based messages. Scholars and policy practitioners thus contributed to rigorous analysis, creative, evidence-based solutions, and informed debate toward making the global governance system more fit to tackle current and over-the-horizon threats and challenges.

The Global Policy Dialogue further gave special consideration to the UN Secretary-General's, [Our Common Agenda](#) report proposal: a Summit of the Future, timed to coincide with the General Assembly's high-level week in September 2023. As such, the breakthrough group discussions sought to build consensus around a shared understanding of a particular global problem-set, in addition to analyzing and critiquing the present status quo response. The latter half of each discussion group centered around debating and elaborating on at least one *Our Common Agenda* reform proposal and at least one idea beyond *Our Common Agenda*, in response to a particular global problem-set(s) identified and related gaps in global governance—whether of an institutional, legal, policy, normative, or operational nature.

Concrete ideas and analysis from the individual breakthrough groups were presented for feedback from four world-class experts during the GPD's Plenary Session, which was also held under the Chatham House Rule. As detailed in this summary report, the Plenary provided an opportunity for the discussants to both challenge and help to further refine the proposals considered in the earlier four breakthrough group discussions. Dr. Danilo Türk, President of the Club de Madrid and member of the UN Secretary-General's [High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism](#) (HLAB), provided lead-off remarks during the Plenary Session, noting in his personal capacity the intention of the HLAB to produce, by early 2023, “implementable” and “people-centered” proposals for improved global governance. In doing so, it will seek to enrich the idea of inclusive and networked multilateralism, both by bringing in external stakeholders, while also ensuring that the UN system works in a more organized and modern way. A key aim of the HLAB could thus be, for instance, to put forward proposals on equitably financed public goods, thereby necessitating changes in the international financial architecture and better connecting the private sector with global financial markets.

Human Rights and Global Governance

Challenges

At the outset, this breakthrough group reflected on a shared understanding of the global problem-set, with participants noting key issues surrounding a general “loss of confidence in multilateralism”, alongside the perceived rise in human rights violations, increasing corruption, disinformation, and the challenges posed by authoritarianism. Noting that “fundamental threats to all human rights are going to become increasingly present”, participants discussed how this places considerable obstacles toward the implementation of human rights treaties, especially when combined with the loss of confidence in multilateral action. They also highlighted “worrying trends” in the increased prioritization of defense and security expenditure, often at the expense of investments in economic and social safety. Here, the imbalance of security versus human rights was raised as an issue, with one participant noting how the “securitization of governance overtime leads to a diminution of human rights.”

The group suggested that while new proposals toward strengthening human rights protection abound, “the fundamental tension” between sovereignty and underlying issues of individual freedoms remain unresolved. Some noted the “western-centricity” of the human rights agenda more broadly, while highlighting the need for measuring progress on human rights on a more holistic and development-based tool. When discussing the *Our Common Agenda* report, participants highlighted that human rights are “everywhere and nowhere” in the report, being covertly mentioned in proposals such as a “new social contract”, a “right to a healthy environment” and “digital rights”, but missing the opportunity to call for a specific initiative linked to the UN human rights machinery, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). As such, this led to questions of whether proposals such as the new social contract were “the right framing for human rights at a global level”.

Proposals

Given the absence of clear and specific proposals relating to human rights in the *Our Common Agenda* report, participants noted that “digital rights are the sleeper cell in the OCA”, deserving “flashing lights” between now and the Summit of the Future in 2023. Discussions, therefore, focused on the proposed **Global Digital Compact**, whereby the Secretary-General António Guterres suggests “outlining shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all.” The group agreed that this proposal needed to be “more community service oriented”, accounting for a good balance between the interests of the private sector and the needs of the poor. This unearthed a discussion surrounding data privacy and protection—noting the need to “regulate access to data” in order to provide global public protection against the abuse of data, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, participants stressed the need to identify a leading champion on the Global Digital Compact’s implementation and to address vertical inequalities, highlighting in particular, the need for adequate funding free of government and political interference. Moreover, discussion

emphasized the need to frame a workstream on “data as a global public good”, ensuring that the compact emphasizes the rights of communities in the Global South to access, and be funded to access (through intellectual property rights), technology, especially green technology. This would allow more developing countries to leap-frog development, while “adding some actual impact to the human rights discourse.” Finally, it was agreed that the Global Digital Compact should enshrine the right of all individuals to access the internet, ensure data protection, and the regulation of artificial intelligence.

Participants noted the need to “read the OCA in relation to a call to action”, particularly for the UN to create synergies (within and across the entire UN system) for safeguarding human rights. One particular opportunity to take human rights to the next level, as expounded in the OCA was the development of a “**new social contract.**” Participants noted the need to not repeat what has already been proposed, but instead to use this as an opportunity to “address inequality and socioeconomic participation” through a framing of “common human security”, which could be at the heart of the proposed new social contract.

Beyond the *Our Common Agenda* report, participants also suggested adopting a “**capabilities approach**” as a kind of rights-based approach to development, which refers to the actual capability of persons to achieve their well-being, as opposed to their right to do so. In doing so, we can address the “fundamental ethical foundations behind the idea that each human being has rights.” To address the issue of increasing global securitization, the group suggested starting at the level of local communities, while introducing a **right to peace** beyond existing frameworks, such as introducing a “right to objection to military service” and introducing legal obligations upon governments. Participants raised key concerns surrounding the “right to truth”. They noted the increasing spread of disinformation, often deliberate, and easily fast multiplied by the social media tools. They asserted that individuals should have a “right not to be misled by politicians” and a “right to scientifically embedded information.”

Plenary Discussion

The expert discussants during the plenary dialogue noted how neither markets nor states are sufficiently effective on their own to deal with the promotion and safeguarding of human rights. Therefore, the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism may wish to prioritize this fundamental challenge in global governance. Discussants highlighted the need for a combination of “traditional and forward-looking approaches” to hold states accountable in their legal responsibility to respect human rights. Improvements in human rights treaty bodies could strengthen and make clear the responsibilities of states, which could be supervised by a single international body. The discussants further raised the question “what guarantees the way to the truth?”, and they suggested that next year’s thirtieth anniversary of the 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights could serve as a useful forum for discussion of this question. It was further noted that the issue of intellectual property rights is a “complex picture which must not be abandoned.” Finally, the expert discussants concluded that there is considerable global fragmentation among approaches to defend human rights, in part due to technology such as advanced algorithms that impose the “real truth” and create social bubbles.

Humanitarian Action and Global Governance

Challenges

Struck by the paradox that a best-case scenario for global humanitarian action (HA) would be no need for action at all, this breakthrough group began scoping out the challenges for HA—especially in regards to the Secretary-General’s *Our Common Agenda* report and the proposed Summit of the Future in 2023—across three key dimensions. *First*, the question of scale, and balancing the prevention of, and assistance towards, humanitarian crises (or equally investment versus aid additionality). Participants considered the challenges of creating institutional or action-oriented synchronicity between a financial, security-based, and human-rights oriented global architecture. While in the long-run these global governance systems would need to work symbiotically to prevent the “man-made” crises which often result from the frictions of global systems, we equally need reflexive platforms to kick into action while working to rejuvenate system-wide preventative tools. In other words, what we need to see at the Summit of the Future and beyond, is “both a marathon and a sprint” in addressing the well-being of both present and future generations.

Second, participants had a frank discussion on the differences in resource mobilization across various HA programmes, as seen through the prism of today’s on-going conflicts, which brought forth the question of political will. Upon identifying four categories which pose challenges to HA, namely “malevolent actors, self-interested actors, benign neglect actors, and leaders of countries agreeing on alternative facts”, a consensus emerged on the clear need for some form of standing structure in support of Humanitarian Action that would move past, and account for, differences in political will and incentives by setting a baseline level of engagement.

Third and finally, the discussion of political will circled back to “man-made versus natural humanitarian crises,” with the former for example being the situations in Syria or Yemen, and the latter the 2004 tsunami in India. Ultimately, concluded participants, man-made needs for humanitarian action are a result of failure in global governance. However, increasingly, the line between man-made and natural has blurred, given the cross-sectional repercussions of climate change, shifting technologies, and miss-management of the global commons. Therefore, the changing nature of global governance frictions and crises must be reflected in an evolved HA response.

Proposals

Amongst its several recommendations, the *Our Common Agenda* report proposes creation of an **Emergency Platform**, which the Secretary-General proposes will serve the need for “pre-negotiated ways to convene relevant actors in the event of a global crisis.” This spoke to the multi-stakeholder, multi-mandated, and intersectional challenges identified by the participants above. The group thus proceeded to flesh out this proposal, acknowledging first that this is a responsive solution for better coordinated HA and not part of the “marathon” towards prevention.

Such a platform would constitute a predetermined set of metrics, which would trigger the convening of high-level representatives from Member States, the UN system, key country groupings, international financial institutions, regional bodies, civil society organizations, the private sector, and subject-specific industries or research bodies—each relevant in responding to the crisis. This platform would then be dissolved upon moving past the emergency-stage of a crisis as determined by the convening parties. Through its non-permanent nature, and unlike an institutional structure, participants proposed that the *platform* be a series of protocols and statements of procedure (SoPs), amounting to—in its simplest form—a document that commits the global system to come together in time of crisis. Moreover, given the response mandate, it would not seek to replace structures such as the Security Council, or the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OHCA), which have emergency response mandates, in any way. Rather, the platform would convene on emergency issues where high-level decision making and funding fora does not exist, such as the looming famine driven by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Known by several names in the past from a UN Rapid Reaction force, a UN Protection Service, or as adopted by this breakthrough group, a **Standing Civilian Protection Service**, participants revisited the age-old idea of having a new, permanent but mobile operational mechanism to reinforce existing UN peacekeeping and political missions, as well as the emergency platform. In discussing this *beyond the OCA* proposal, the group considered aspects of funding, rapid resource mobilization, and the extensive training required to establish such a service. Some of these challenges, suggested participants, might be tackled through innovative blended finance and global funding compacts. Ultimately, in reflecting back on the challenge of reflexive and malleable political will, the group suggested that some form of standing emergency structure would go a long way in setting a baseline of commitment to emergencies and HA.

Such a service need not only include military-based action but also a wider range of potential civilian-led capabilities such as, for example, the deployment of personnel at the country level for vaccine administration during Covid-19. Overtime, as UN operational bodies renewed their response and prevention capabilities, it may indeed be true that such a standing service could be dissolved, concluded participants.

Plenary Discussion

In response to the proposals above, the four expert discussants pointed out that HA is often a last resort for many when they do not have the capabilities to avail their own basic rights and needs. It is, therefore, striking that funding for HA at the UN is not mandatory and relies entirely on voluntary mechanisms. Thus, an important precondition to the proposals above would be re-opening a discussion on the need for assessed dues in support of HA financing. The panel went on to stress the importance of improving preventive diplomacy (to avert a potential crisis), especially by learning from past prevention failures, but also to consider the transition from humanitarian assistance to development following a crisis period. Finally, the discussants noted that the HLAB report feeding into the Summit of the Future should go beyond re-hashing challenges of the past and effectively appeal to the necessary shifts in political will needed to see through innovative proposals for a more agile and responsive UN system.

Sustainable Trade and Global Governance

Challenges

The Sustainable Trade Breakthrough Group focused initially on identifying the problem and related opportunities associated with sustainable trade worldwide, while considering state and non-state actors that may pose difficulties to overcome attendant challenges and opportunities. A key issue highlighted by participants pertained to the fragmented nature of governance mechanisms for trade. In particular, despite the achievement of the Geneva package at the MC12 in June 2022, there is still a lack of progress in certain issues by the World Trade Organization (WTO) members. Furthermore, other notable obstacles are the absence of enforceability and accountability of its dispute settlement mechanisms, and “deficient trust and cooperation amongst certain WTO members”, thereby allowing “countries with more trading power to play the game.” It was noted that while developed countries typically call for engagement with sustainable trade, “they do not often practice what they preach”, reinforcing the existing “colonial” nature of terms of trade, which “remain as unfair today as they were in the 1960s” and “have not sufficiently benefited developing countries as much as they have benefited the Global North.” This can have deleterious effects, including, for example, cross-cutting dangers to biosecurity through the spread of invasive species and diseases. Furthermore, it was noted that China plays a major disruptive role in the trade arena.

Participants further questioned the viability of the economic model upon which trade practices are based, noting their propensity to create emissions and damage the environment, highlighting that we are on a “collision course” with mother nature. They identified “industrialized economies subsidizing carbon heavy sectors” as key spoilers towards sustainable trade, while stressing how subsidies can cause other unfair “distortions” in the economy. Additionally, the fragmented production structure of supply chains means the thinning of responsibility and accountability. Finally, Russia’s war against Ukraine was identified as a new spanner in the works of progress towards sustainable trade, as it has led to the “weaponization of trade” given the economic sanctions applied against Russia, combined with Russia impeding food shipments from Ukraine. Moreover, the sanctions applied to Russia such as impeding the exportation of gas and fertilizers lead to a chain reaction, having negative consequences on, for example, energy insecurity, leading some countries to “restar[t] coal mining and production.” This, as well as food shortages can, in turn, set back any progress toward achieving a more sustainable environment.

Proposals

While the breakthrough group’s discussion centered primarily around proposals beyond the *Our Common Agenda* report, participants did consider the idea of an **Emergency Platform**, as proposed by the UN Secretary-General, to help the international community respond better to complex global crises. In considering ideas for this new multi-functional body beyond those considered above by the Humanitarian Action Breakthrough Group, the Emergency Platform would enable representatives—from Member States, the UN system, key country groupings, international financial institutions, regional bodies, civil society organizations, the private sector,

and subject-specific industries or research bodies—to come together once triggered by benchmarks of a crisis on sustainable trade (e.g., related to deficient access to food, water, and other critical natural resources). Whilst the platform would be deactivated once the “emergency” has subsided, it could potentially lead to greater effort and multilateral cooperation on the issue of sustainable trade.

A major proposal *beyond the OCA* report suggested by participants relates to the idea of using “**Border Carbon Adjustments**” and other diplomatic tools. Typically, border adjustments are taxes on imports and rebates on exports accounting for varying carbon pricing policies across multiple countries. This allows countries to move forward with their climate policies without losing their economic competitiveness. Participants suggested the creation of an “adaptation fund that is funded by different countries according to their carbon footprint”, and supporting this further by creating cross-border and multilateral agreements on “green materials and trade in environmental goods.” A key aspect of this would, therefore, be to enforce mutual accountability.

Noting food insecurity as an additional issue, breakthrough group participants highlighted the importance of promoting **food sovereignty through increased “regional efforts” and promoting “Global North-South cooperation.”** Discussions emphasized the need to deepen cooperation amongst governments as part of the solution going forward, rather than further criticizing the UN system. The need for **greater data collection and data transparency** through digital tools, and complying with agreements that promote these values such as the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement was also proposed as a further suggestion, especially for tracking trends related to the present debt crisis in many countries and other socioeconomic knock-on effects from the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the difficulty in focusing on “legacy debt”, solutions should encompass a discussion of ameliorating “future debt”, particularly for developing countries. Finally, the breakthrough group considered the proposal of a **Responsibility Chain Task Force**, which would explore pathways to create an action plan for a multi-stakeholder process to address socio-environmental and economic human rights violations linked to key commodity chains.

Plenary Discussion

The experts discussants during the plenary debate stated that the *Our Common Agenda* report does not consider the new international economic order, but voiced the need for the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism to bring it to the center of its deliberations. They further reinforced the breakthrough group’s concern for the current fragmentation of the world trading system, noting how countries have reverted to “on-shoring” rather than “off-shoring”. While some participants were enthusiastic about the concept of “networked multilateralism”, a participant raised the question of whether the concept belongs in the UN, a Member State led organization, and cautioned against “going back to a redistributive model” of trade, due to concerns about this leading to a “zero sum game” which redistributes existing wealth without generating new wealth. The discussants further noted how we may have “missed the good old days when the pie was increasing for everybody else”—noting that “redistribution is important, but it should not come at the expense of continued growth, whilst also keeping in mind the planet’s limits.”

Disarmament and Global Governance

Challenges

With growing global tensions and distress between and within nations, disarmament becomes ever more important. Often exacerbating these poor political, socioeconomic, and environmental conditions, there are around half a billion military-style small arms and light weapons worldwide, which are contributing factors for between an estimated 300,000 to half a million deaths per annum. Despite the Arms Trade Treaty coming into force in 2014 with ratifications by 111 States Parties, the international trade of conventional arms is still weakly controlled and marked by a significant lack of transparency. Meanwhile, nuclear risks seem greater than they have been for decades, with a major power recently hinting at the possible use of nuclear weapons. Against this backdrop, the sixty-five parties to the (ratified only last year) Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons held its first meeting, in June 2022, in Vienna.

In addition, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence enabled autonomous weapons systems raise important concerns with respect to human control and judgment over the use of force. They also pose serious humanitarian, security, ethical, and legal challenges. After nine years of discussions at the UN, at least 70 states, the UN Secretary-General, the International Committee of the Red Cross, thousands of experts in technology and AI, and hundreds of civil society organizations around the world are all calling for a legally binding treaty on autonomous weapons systems. Moreover, sanctions are simultaneously both overused and underutilized tools of governments and the United Nations (i.e., they are not used strategically, nor is there often sufficient communication when multiple sanctions are being applied in a particular situation).

Proposals

The Disarmament and Global Governance Breakthrough Group focused its main recommendation, in the run-up to next year's anticipated Summit of the Future, on an enhanced disarmament pillar within UN Secretary-General António Guterres' proposed **New Agenda for Peace**. In his *Our Common Agenda* report, the Secretary-General emphasizes the need to "reduce strategic risks" as one of six core areas for a suggested New Agenda for Peace. This updated vision for disarmament would seek to "guarantee human, national and collective security, including through broader support for non-proliferation, a world free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, effective control of conventional weapons and regulation of new weapons of technology."

Specific ideas from within the group to enhance this updated peace agenda's disarmament pillar included highlighting that the UN's disarmament agenda must prioritize the effective implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty and ensure that the international trade of arms is transparent and guided by even stronger legal and ethical standards. Participants additionally suggested that the relatively new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons represents progress in the area of nuclear disarmament, and the *New Agenda for Peace* should build upon its momentum, by seeking to advance the long-term goal of making nuclear weapons

unacceptable from moral, humanitarian, and legal vantage points. Other suggestions included reducing strategic risks by addressing directly aspects of the “nuclear dilemma”, which entails understanding both the benefits and risks of nuclear technology, as well as employing measures to reduce nuclear risks and broader political tensions. Finally, participants underscored the need to raise awareness about the peace and security implications of specific technology innovations, such as AI enabled systems and autonomous functions in weapon systems.

In addition, the breakthrough group recommended that the proposed Summit of the Future’s Pact for the Future give special attention to disarmament-related priority of **Lending support for a new Treaty on Lethal Autonomous Weapons**. While certain states have so far shown reluctance to adopt new law as they continue to heavily invest in autonomous technology, a principled international legal framework would provide the necessary durability and certainty around use of autonomy in weapons systems to overcome the risk of their widespread proliferation and use around the world. The *New Agenda for Peace* could help identify the way forward for dealing with problems associated with lethal autonomous weapons, including by facilitating the start of negotiations toward a legally binding treaty aimed at ensuring that life-or-death decisions will never be delegated to machines and the use of force will always remain under meaningful human control. This could be pursued through the introduction of a resolution in the UN General Assembly’s First Committee on Disarmament and International Security, or, alternatively, through (initially) a parallel process outside the United Nations, led by several like-minded states and learning from the past mine ban treaty and convention on cluster munitions.

Participants also suggested **viewing sanctions as a disarmament tool**. Sanctions regimes must be applied more strategically as an innovative tool for influencing steps toward nuclear (and other weapons of mass destruction) and conventional weapons disarmament. Besides the threat and actual introduction of sanctions to compel a nation to behave in a certain way, sanctions relief could be applied as an instrument of remediation. In cases such as Iran, which is not part of the UN sanctions architecture, steps should be taken to ensure sufficient communication when multiple sanctions are being applied in a particular country. Moreover, more countries and concerned actors should leverage the UN Sanctions App, which tracks all UN sanctions regimes and resolutions, and identifies where gridlock might occur between Member States and even a panel of experts with respect to specific proposed sanctions.

Plenary Discussion

During the Cold War, the arms control framework emphasized transparency and verification; today, there is no consensus around these core principles. Moreover, sanctions are insufficient for punishing a country that violates the UN Charter. The discussants agreed that we must extend the regulatory framework into new weapons systems, of which cyber and lethal autonomous weapons are the most important. The current debate on lethal autonomous weapons focuses on whether you are going to have effective norms with few adhering or loose norms / code of conducts with more countries engaged. Regrettably, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva has not agreed on a specific program for thirty years and, consequently, disarmament remains underappreciated.

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