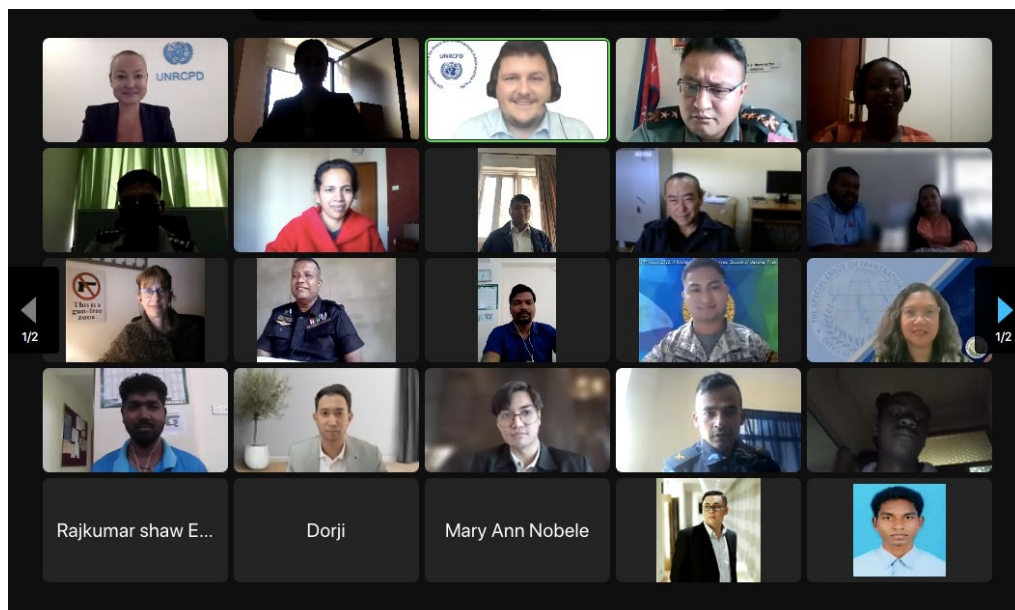


UNRCPD brings together government officials and civil society representatives from Asia-Pacific to receive hands-on training on gun-free zones

On 7-8 November 2022, the [United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific \(UNRCPD\)](#) conducted a practical training webinar on supporting the establishment and maintenance of gun-free zones (GFZs) in Asia-Pacific. The event was a follow-up to activities conducted earlier in the year, which had introduced delegates from regional countries and organisations to the main concepts behind GFZ initiatives, based on frameworks outlined in the 2014 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs publication [Guidelines – How to establish and maintain gun-free zones](#). The aim of this most recent webinar was to deepen the previously imparted knowledge by focusing on practical examples and encouraging participants to consider context-specific factors in the distinct stages of GFZ programming.

The webinar marked the end of UNRCPD's *Supporting the Establishment and Maintenance of Gun-Free Zones in Asia-Pacific* project, funded by the Government of Sweden, with the aim of generating the foundations to guide and inspire real-world initiatives in target countries. The webinar drew over fifty registrations from Bhutan, Fiji, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, alongside representatives from relevant organizations in Burundi and South Africa, majority of whom also participated in various activities of the event.



Government officials, security sector officers and civil society representatives from seven countries joined UN and civil society experts for an online training on gun-free zones.

Participants were welcomed to the training with opening remarks delivered by Mr. Aaron Junhoung Yoo, the Deputy Director of UNRCPD. Mr. Yoo highlighted the aims of the gun-free zones project and briefed participants on the origins and motivations behind the initiative, noting particularly the need to fill knowledge gaps on GFZs and the webinar's role in shifting the debate from theory to practice. The opening session also included the presentation of written remarks sent from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, which underlined the negative impacts of armed violence across the region, and the need for finding mechanisms and sharing best practices for tackling these issues at the local level.



Mr. Aaron Junhoung Yoo, Deputy Director of UNRCPD, delivering opening remarks and welcoming participants

The first presentation of the day was given by Mr. Steven Humphries, the Gun-Free Zones Project Manager at UNRCPD, and introduced participants to the aims and practicalities of the two-day webinar. After introducing the moderators and staff, Mr. Humphries went on to highlight the foundational role of the 2014 publication [*Guidelines – How to establish and maintain gun-free zones*](#), after which he clarified the position of the day’s activities in helping fulfil commitment under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically [*SDG 16*](#), targets 16.1, 16.4 and 16.7. Further, Mr. Humphries presented some basic statistics on the effects of armed violence and illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW) trafficking in the Asia-Pacific region, based on a baseline assessment conducted by UNRCPD in 2019. He proceeded by listing the project’s objectives, main activities and expected outcomes, and concluded by expanding on the ways in which GFZ programming can and should mainstream gender across all activities.

At a Glance

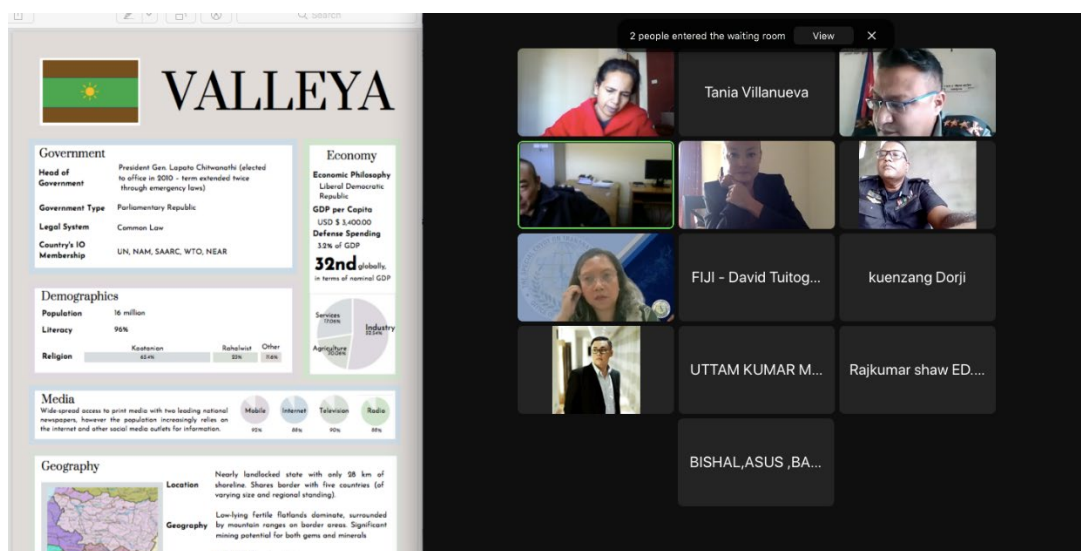
- Based on the 2014 UNODA publication: “Guidelines – How to Establish and Maintain Gun-Free Zones”
 - Link: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/publications/more/gfz-guidelines/>
- Purpose:
 - to familiarize law enforcement, local authorities and civil society with the rationale, purposes and principles of GFZ and build their capacity to undertake these initiatives in their communities
 - build capacity of civil societies and local authorities to collaborate in developing measures to reduce gun violence and thus contribute to their peaceful and sustainable development.
- SDGs: This Project directly responds to targets:
 - 16.1 (to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere)
 - 16.4 (to develop effective accountable and transparent institutions at all levels)
 - 16.7 (to ensure positive inclusive participatory and representative decision-making at all levels)

An image from the presentation delivered by Mr. Steven Humphries, GFZ Project Coordinator at UNRCPD, highlighting the relevance of GFZ programming to SDG 16

The following presentation was led by Ms. Elli Kytomaki, Research Associate of the Gun-Free Zones project. She opened by reminding participants of the definition and characteristics of gun-free zones, designated as “geographically limited spaces where the carrying or possession of firearms is prohibited for civilians” which can be enforced to cover areas such as schools, municipal buildings, parks, stadiums or even entire communities. These zones can be enacted in pursuit of one or more of the following three aims: to reduce instances of crime-related armed violence, to reduce the risk of armed

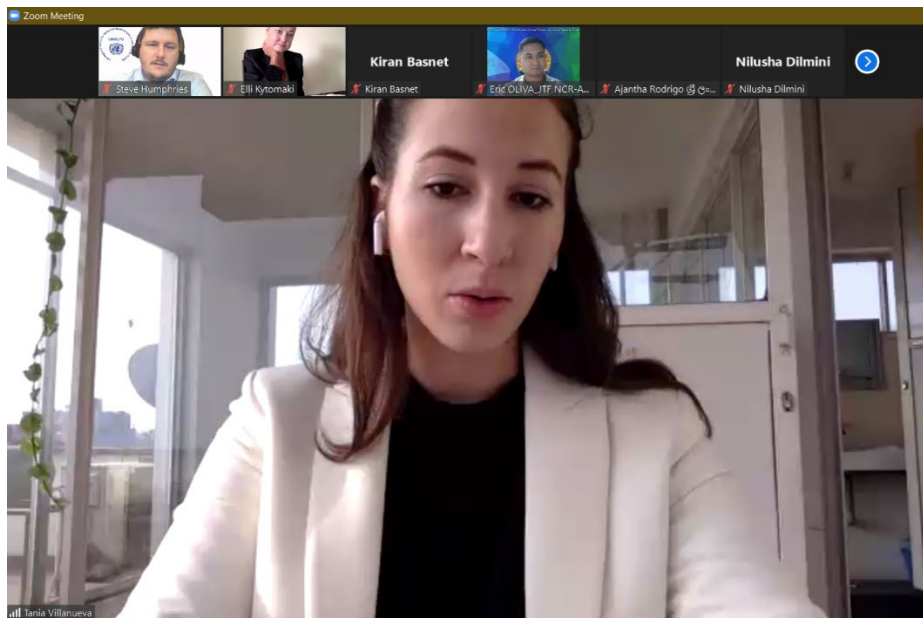
violence after conflict, and to prevent electoral violence. Ms. Kytomaki went on to highlight some of the many advantages of GFZ initiatives, particularly focusing on the relative simplicity of implementation and the potential for improving relations with target communities. She proceeded by turning to some of the limitations of GFZ programming, including the importance of strict enforcement and the necessity of supplementary measures to tackle the root causes of armed violence.

After a short break, Ms. Kytomaki introduced participants to the major Day 1 activity: the small group analysis of two fictional case studies. She began by looking at some of the particularities of diverse types of GFZs, to prepare participants conduct in-depth analysis and make context-derived suggestions. She highlighted that GFZs can differ in terms of duration, type of restrictions and the extent of geographical coverage, and mentioned some of the institutional frameworks that are required to effectively implement GFZs, such as the rule of law and functioning law enforcement agencies. Ms. Kytomaki went on to list the distinct phases initiatives should be broken down into, namely planning, programming, implementation and evaluation. She finished by introducing the two fictional case studies participants would be asked to consider in the following activity, both of which presented issues with armed violence but had not yet undertaken GFZ initiatives.



Breakout room discussions on the possible implementation of a GFZ in the fictional country of Valleya. Session moderated by Ms. Elli Kytomaki, GFZ Research Associate at UNRCPD.

Participants were then separated into two pre-assigned groups and asked to discuss their respective case studies guided by a series of previously-circulated questions. The discussions, which lasted about an hour, encouraged the meaningful participation of attendees and allowed participants to consider in a very practical way the types of decisions stakeholders face when considering starting a GFZ initiative, while accessing the perspectives of diverse actors on the possible pros and cons of different approaches. Upon concluding, all attendees were brought back to the main room and participants took turns presenting the answers and discussion points to the group. This concluded the programming for Day 1.



Ms. Tania Villanueva Heredia, Political Affairs Intern at UNRCPD, presenting a summary of the first day's programming.

The webinar's second day took a similar approach to the first; after a brief welcome and a summary of the first day's events, Ms. Kytomaki introduced two further fictional case studies to be explored during the second day. This time, the participants were introduced to scenarios where, for diverse reasons, GFZs had already been introduced. They were asked to evaluate the execution of various stages on a wide variety of criteria. After an hour and a half of fruitful discussion, participants were left with a better understanding of the advantages and limitations of different approaches and became more convinced of the importance of proper planning, of the meaningful inclusion of a wide array of stakeholders, of appropriate funding and human resource allocation and, finally, of conducting a thorough and honest evaluation.

Upon return to the main room, participants were asked to undertake one final activity: the collaborative drafting of a sample National Action Plan, mapping the stages of distinct phases, and including details on stakeholder inclusion, funding and timing at various points of programming. This activity was deliberately left as the culmination of the webinar, as it asked participants to employ all of the knowledge and insight gathered through the group case studies discussions and apply it to drafting a real-world document considering their own specific country and community contexts.

Mr. Steven Humphries closed the webinar with brief concluding remarks, and attendees were encouraged to provide feedback through an anonymous online survey. Participant evaluations of the activity were overwhelmingly positive, with over 90 per cent reporting the webinar satisfied or exceeded their expectations, and the same number noting they would be interested in further collaborating with UNODA/UNRCPD on national GFZ programming.

The webinar was made possible through funding from the Government of Sweden in support of the regional project on *Supporting the Establishment and Maintenance of Gun-Free Zones in Asia-Pacific*.