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Interview with Guy Feugap

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Summary:

This interview highlights Guy Feugap's extensive work as a peace activist and organizer, particularly focusing on nuclear disarmament. He describes his career transition from WILPF to World Beyond War, advocating for the elimination of nuclear weapons through programs like the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Feugap emphasizes the dangers of nuclear weapons, the need for global cooperation, and the critical role of civil society in creating awareness and influencing policy. He concludes by stressing the importance of implementing resolutions and fostering trust in multilateral diplomacy to achieve meaningful progress in disarmament. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

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Robin Möser: Hello, this is Robin Möser, I'm talking today to Guy Feugap for the project "Civil Society and Nuclear Risk". Guy is a teacher, writer, and activist from Cameroon, based in Cameroon, and he works with young people teaching them about the issues of peace and security and disarmament, raising awareness in his community. Since 2014, he has been working for the Cameroon section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, WILPF Cameroon, where he has been in charge of communication and disarmament and also touching on issues such as small arms and light weapons, autonomous weapons systems and nuclear weapons. He's also the Director and founder of the Cameroonian chapter of World Beyond War. And he's working on a program called "Peace Education and Action for Impact" in order to enlarge the youth capacities, and engage local communities in peacebuilding processes. And I'm very curious to hear more about his work. And Guy, I will just start off this interview by asking you: How did you personally get to the position you're in now and what is your academic background? Just tell me how you ended up at WILPF. Thank you.

Guy Feugap: Okay, thank you, Robin, for having me here for this discussion. Yes, introduction you just made needs some update. Before January this year, I was still the Director of Programs for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in the Cameroon section. In the meantime, in my work, I get to start the chapter of World Beyond War in Cameroon. Yes, so since January, this year 2024, I am the Africa organizer for World Beyond War. So though I keep my membership at WILPF, I still have some time to support work of the WILPF here in Cameroon and at global level. But my time is mostly with World Beyond War, mobilizing and organizing for peace in Africa. So this, I want to come back again about to my career. I'm activist and interested in the topics of disarmament, disarmament and peacebuilding. These are my main focus. And it is important for me as I joined World Beyond War, because World Beyond War is working globally to put an end to all wars. We at World Beyond War believe that we can definitely put an end to wars and put an end to the system of war and we work on that. So, these issues on disarmament very fit very well in the advocacy work that I do to have a safer world. This is what I do, particularly in the area of the nuclear weapons. This was an interest for me since 2016, 2017, when WILPF at a global level was mobilizing together with ICAN, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons to have the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons adopted. In Cameroon, at that moment we organized a lot of actions to show to other civil society actors and the government what are the potential risks of nuclear weapons, and show the need for regulation and why they should adopt the Treaty to prohibit the nuclear weapons. And we were happy that the demonstration that we supported here and outside the country were useful as the Treaty was finally adopted in 2017. I started to become involved in the nuclear issue of disarmament when I was working for WILPF. So when I joined World Beyond War I continued the same work

Robin Möser: I also saw you participated in the nuclear ban week in Vienna, in 2022. Could you tell me more about this, how you were involved? Who approached you to be a speaker? These kinds of things interest me.

Guy Feugap: Yes. So in 2022, in Vienna, Vienna hosted the first Conference of the State Parties to the TPNW. And as part of this international event, there were other civil society teams campaigning who created events that were held prior to the conference, the meetings of State Parties itself. And I was at these meetings, it was 2022, because I'm campaigning as part of the ICAN in Cameroon, I'm campaigner from ICAN in Cameroon. And we wanted to use this event, to show the efforts that we have been doing in Cameroon and in Africa at large, to make the world nuclear free. What we've been doing in the advocacy field, the policy field, to have a safer world without nuclear weapons. So, I was

particularly speaking on what we have contributed in doing so far, to make the people, the government, any stakeholders to know, what are the potential risks of the nuclear weapons and justify why we should ban the nuclear weapons.

Robin Möser: So you were working on the ground for ICAN in Cameroon? Was WILFP Cameroon their focal point or partner? Did you in this process also engage with other civil society organizations in West Africa, in the ECOWAS region? Did you team up with think tanks?

Guy Feugap: Yes, in Africa, there are many organizations working together, working as a coalition. Like ICAN. "ICAN coalition", it's not their name, but I can put it like that for understanding purposes. There are campaigners from ICAN in several parts of Africa, either in Central Africa, in West Africa, in East Africa. So, those campaigners met all together in the meeting in Vienna two years ago. And on a daily basis, they are all strategizing together, what you can do to foster more addition to the TPNW. With this dynamic, a lot of progress so far, because we have brought many governments to sign and ratify the Treaty, that you want more states to be part of it. You don't have all the states there yet, but we work as a group, as a team, as a coalition to share what is working in our context, to share what works in different parts, so that we can use these experiences in our own context to bring more states to sign and ratify the TPNW.

Robin Möser: I see. We will come back later to your to your work experience, but right now I would be interested in how do you see the role of nuclear weapons in current world politics? Do you think they have any sort of value like a stabilizing factor? Do you think they matter? So, I would be interested in the your perspective on nuclear weapons presently.

Guy Feugap: So, the nuclear weapons just to say it like this: Danger, danger for humanity, yes. Last year in 2023, I worked on the policy field with a group of other young professionals on disarmament, the nuclear field particularly, on the anthology initiated by BASIC's Emerging Voices Network. I was part of the anthology, which was written last year. It focused on the existential threats, challenging identity, power and inclusivity in the nuclear policy. So, I was, I was working as group co-chair, and we dedicated time to see what are the challenges to break down the silos, as we were saying, within the nuclear policy field. So, the result was the anthology report that was published with a number of policy recommendation, providing values and insight into the challenges that we identified and the issues concerning emerging researchers and young professionals in the nuclear policy field. So what we did was we focused on examining, or looking at the nuclear weapon issues and social justice. Yes, we did that.

Robin Möser: The nexus?

Guy Feugap: Yes, we explored what are some of the intersections between nuclear weapons, social justice and social injustices. And in the context of nuclear weapons, we see that it's imperative for disadvantaged communities that do not play a role on the discussions about social justice. We saw that the nuclear weapons benefits nuclear countries, on the detriment of the vulnerable communities. They are usually exploited and exposed to the dangers of nuclear power. That was what I said at the beginning that nuclear weapons are dangerous for the humanity, looking at this example of people exposed to the exploitation of uranium, uranium mining that's used for the nuclear weapons. But we should recognize that uranium mining has some potential benefits, including providing a reliable source of energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. But it is closely tied to the weapons industry.

So that is why we have to see the issue of nuclear weapons as a problem. The problem is, for instance, in various African countries, uranium mining companies are accused of human rights violations, of environmental degradation in order issues like exploitation of local population. So, the social justice concerns surrounding uranium mining stems from the fact that the negative impacts are often borne by indigenous communities, who historically have been unfairly targeted for the siting of hazardous waste facilities and other polluting industries. So this, this is what we did. We analyzed these type of issues in our policy document that was drafted last year. Yes. So, to stay on your question, the world is now very unsafe because of the presence of nuclear weapons. So, I mentioned the aspect of uranium mining with its consequences. But there is this aspect of nuclear weapons that exist that are hosted by those key power states that we know, who threatened to use them in warfare. That is what makes the world unsafe. In my perspective, my opinion is that until we've done full implementation of the TPNW, the world will not be the safe, because those states who have nuclear weapons have not yet ratified the TPNW. So, it makes it difficult to be sure that in the years to come, there will not be a mass destruction of the world with the nuclear weapons that are being developed continually by those states.

Robin Möser: And where do you think the focus of the civil society should be - on total elimination? And what do you consider practical steps to achieve this goal?

Guy Feugap: Yes, we should aim at total elimination, this should be definitely our ultimate goal. But to be honest, to be honest and realistic, I think how the war dynamics are playing now in the world, to be realistic, we should not expect in the few years coming that we have this total elimination. That is why the civil society has a critical role at this point, because I remember when we were in Vienna two years ago, the importance of the civil society was based on the fact that civil society was making a lot of noise around the issue of nuclear weapons. And this noise is generally not good for those actors playing with the nuclear weapons. So, the civil society has this critical role, as they have to raise awareness on dangers of the potential and the potential risks of the use of nuclear weapons. The civil society is also important, because the civil society actors provide information, they provide and share information with the larger public that make most of the people know or being aware of what is happening in the in the nuclear industry. And they will let the government's or the industry's, every stakeholder is concerned, know what are the dangers if the proliferation continues to flow. So this is what we have to do now.

Robin Möser: I'm fully with you. I'm with you on this one, that we need more awareness on the issue. So closely related question would be: what do you see as the biggest failure in the field of nuclear non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament since the end of the Cold War?

Guy Feugap: Yes, the big failure to me is that between these stakeholders, there is no trust. I mean, there is no trust between political actors, between the states, between the civil society and the different groups interacting in this field. Because there is no synergy, there is no synergy of action. And because there are a lot of interests around this, so these interests make it difficult for a nuclear country, for example, to put down its nuclear armament. Just because we are calling for a safer world, there is no trust because they have the agendas, which make these efforts difficult. Yes, that is why the absence of trust has been missing the most. And on the other side, the growing insecurity in the world with the proliferation and the advent of many terrorist groups, the advent of many conflict fronts in several parts of the world. So it makes the nuclear powers feel like they have to keep developing the

nuclear armament in the event that they are attacked, or in the event that they might want to get it. That is what they feel like, they have to develop these weapons, because there is no security at all in the world.

Robin Möser: I was just curious, would you attribute the failure of trust to lack of multilateral diplomacy? Do you think there should be more work in that area?

Guy Feugap: Yes, indeed. If you have multilateral diplomacy that is missing a lot in the nuclear field, that we don't have this type of conversation that should happen. Yes, because the nuclear issue should help in development of energy as I mentioned, but not in war. But since there is a lot of preparations of war everywhere, it makes difficult for a state to drop down their nuclear armament or to abandon the idea of developing nuclear weapons. So, what is happening now is that more countries will be likely to be interested in developing nuclear weapons or having nuclear weapons, which is because the world is not safe, because there is lot of insecurity, nobody trust anyone.

Robin Möser: So what would you then see that the most important milestones for the field? Bringing back trust into multilateral talks? Or maybe do you have other ideas how we can bring the field to developing? What would be your take on this?

Guy Feugap: Yes, as I mentioned, I expect that we can focus really on multilateral diplomacy. And for that to happen, we will have to create more spaces. For example, the civil society forum that was organized at the margins of the first meeting of the State Parties, and the other was organized in New York last year. I was not there, but there was also a very great platform for civil society to talk and meet with other political stakeholders. It is important, because at least when we have these meetings and talk with people, the new states who joined the TPNW. And in this space, there are some actors who have the chance then to understand very well, what are the risk of nuclear weapons, because until we have testimonies of people, victims of these weapons, nobody will understand because this is something very strange, very far from the realities. In particular, from the African countries perspective, who has not been so much affected by the nuclear weapons, they will not understand that what we are stressing, what we are trying to raise, is really actual and urgent. So, that is when we have these spaces to meet with others, it's good that we talk about and bring in the victims. And these parts has been for me the ones that work better so far, bringing in victims to have the floor and speak about what happened, what are the consequences in their lives when surviving. And these testimonies are what works best so far to convince more actors to accept that there is indeed a greater risk that we should be aware of. And work accordingly, taking into account when we develop policies and when we call ban on the nuclear weapons.

Robin Möser: I see. And now coming back to civil society organizations in Africa, because you worked for WILPF and World Beyond War. I was wondering if these nuclear non-proliferation issues for the broader population are somewhat detached or out of their radar? Maybe that is one of the reasons why there's not so much awareness and you have to create awareness and publicity to work on these issues. How is your assessment of this?

Guy Feugap: Yeah, I will say that from the African perspective, yes. The issue of nuclear disarmament is just becoming more important since a few years only; and the example of South Africa that hosted the Pelindaba meeting. And from that meeting in Pelindaba, many African states understood that it is important for them not to be involved in the nuclear proliferation. And there is another factor that is

underdevelopment of many African countries, that some people will believe that it is because Africa is already very underdeveloped, that they wouldn't have the means to build nuclear plants and things like that. But I, in my understanding is that in Africa, we people really only want peace. People really want to have science at the service of development at the service for peace, because there are not enough a sufficient means to have this development happen in short time. But the culture of peace is in Africa. And this culture of peace is what is bringing more African states to join the TPNW for I remember when we organized the first meetings in Cameroon to raise awareness on the use of nuclear weapons There was a question from participants, because participants were representatives of government and other civil society actors. The question was, why are we supposed to be interested in this issue of nuclear weapons since we don't develop them. And we are even not likely in the position to be exposed to the nuclear weapons. And it was WILPF's understanding during the discussion, that even if in Africa there is no country developing nuclear weapons, it is important to use the voices that African states have at the multilateral forums to contribute to ending the nuclear weapons by adopting a treaty and by voting for any decision in favor of the elimination of the nuclear weapons. So, African countries contribute to world peace by presence in multilateral forum, by exposing the sectors that will be affected if the nuclear war is to happen. Because if there is a nuclear war happening far from Africa, Africa will have the consequences of that. Just to mention the example of the war in Ukraine. That has had a lot of impact. In Africa, food prices increased, like some doubled their price, other products tripled just because of this war-torn country Ukraine. So just to imagine if we have to deploy nuclear theory within this war and other wars that may happen, it will be catastrophic for Africa, a catastrophe for Africa. Because we in Africa are reliant on many, many products and services from outside. And if this chain has to be interrupted because of war, it will be catastrophic.

Robin Möser: I see. Thank you for that view. And now the next question is directed to both of your work positions. What were the five closest partners you and your organization worked with? Could you please name them and describe the cooperation that was going on, because as you earlier said, in Africa, often the advocacy work is done in a coalition. Maybe you can dwell a little bit more on that? Thank you!

Guy Feugap: Yes, the coalition around ICAN, in Africa, there is no formal name for the coalition. But it's a group of civil society organizations from different countries that together, we have a platform, a WhatsApp group where we, for instance, learn from what is happening in different countries. There are many organizations within the platform; I don't have the names list of organization right now. But maybe I can find the names of some services that are actually part of this platform and share with you after this talk.

Robin Möser: So ICAN sort provided an umbrella for you and other civil society representatives to start reaching out to one another?

Guy Feugap: Yes. In Uganda, for example, we worked with Moses Owang. In Ghana, we have Ayo (Ayo Ayoola-Amale), we have in Central African Republic a lady working there who is also with WILPF called Bernice Ndakala-Ouango, in Togo we have Charlotte Kalanbani, who is part of World Beyond War.

Robin Möser: Thank you, this gave me an impression. And I would also be interested in how do you perceive other actors such as academics or think tanks? And have you worked with them? And if so, how do you engage with academics and think tanks and do you find their work useful?

Guy Feugap: Yes, the work is useful. Just to take the example of the government of Cameroon. All the meetings that we have had here in Cameroon about the nuclear weapons, they have been facilitated by the presence of academics. Their presence has been highly appreciated, because they help people to understand what do we mean when we talk of nuclear weapons. Yes, they help to understand and break down the definition of the nuclear weapons for stakeholders to understand what we are really talking about. And their presence is also critical, because it helps to understand the history around the nuclear weapons and potential risks in the near future, if some actions are not taken. So their perspective is more like more scientific that helps to understand what is in play and what is happening. So people do understand really well.

Robin Möser: So do you also read publications and studies done by think tanks and academics, which will then inform your advocacy work? Is that the case?

Guy Feugap: Yes, our advocacy work can't be done if you don't have updated information in the area of science around the nuclear issues, including uranium and nuclear weapons, which can inform our policy. Yes, as I was saying, their contributions have been the basis of our advocacy work, because the documents that we have produced or have used for our advocacy, were informed by the scientific analysis of these experts, not from civil society, but who have a good way of explaining what are the nuclear weapons, what are the potential risks and how do we link the history and the near future, they justify why we should act now to eliminate or to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons. And their importance in our advocacy is also because they help to explain to the stakeholders, particularly the government, the state, what can be the positive use of nuclear energy. Yes. What they can use for the hospitals, what they can use for several other sectors, the energy.

Robin Möser: So you regard academics and think tanks as supportive and helpful in your daily advocacy work, correct?

Guy Feugap: Yes.

Robin Möser: Okay. Great. And do you think, having working at WILPF earlier, that the debate about global nuclear disarmament is recognizing the gendered impact that nuclear weapons and uranium mining have?

Guy Feugap: Yes, I think this has been the main role of WILPF within this Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, because WILPF really produced a lot of material. I even contributed into that, in how women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of nuclear weapons. And looking at the example of Japan, during the Second World War, when the Hiroshima and Nagasaki were attacked, we could find still, till today, that there are women who give birth to children who have some disabilities. So the impact on women should be seen, particularly, because we are in Africa. This is one example that we usually use in our meetings here in Africa, that women are those who give life, as we say, and the impact of the nuclear weapons has lots of effects on their reproductive systems. So, if we are not careful, life may stop if they have to bear the consequences of these nuclear weapons. That is why we also show what are the effects and the impact on women.

Robin Möser: Thank you very much. And do you feel that your institutions voice, WILPF as well as World Beyond War, is heard and represented in ICAN's decisions on the TPNW campaign? And do you think through your engagement, the visibility of your organization has increased as well?

Guy Feugap: Yes, just to mention the example of me being invited to Vienna to speak on a site event. It is a recognition that what we have been doing on the ground, is something important that it's worth sharing with the larger public. So, ICAN for instance, have been providing space for local society actors to bring up what are the expectations of the people. Because not everyone will go to the UN to say what is happening. But the civil society organization representatives have this capacity and are given that space to speak on behalf of the large number of people, who are usually affected but who can't say anything, or who usually want to see things change, but who don't have the chance to do that. So this is a lesson that organizations are there to fill this gap and to make voices of the local communities being heard at the decision-making level.

Robin Möser: Okay, and now I'm coming to two bigger questions. The first one would be concerning your work, how do you define impact in your field and can you give a concrete example of impact by your organization and how you achieved it?

Guy Feugap: Yeah, I'm taking the example of Cameroon. At the beginning, when we are advocating to the authorities to have Cameroon sign and ratify the TPNW, the topic was like, civil society should not involve in this area, it is military, it's about the defense sectors and like, it is a reserved domain for administration and defense sectors, that civil society organizations should not be interested in that. But what we have done was to explain that they, the government, is ruling for people, and those people have a say in what are the policies, if the policies are being made to be peaceful. So, the work that we have done has helped to break this understanding, this interpretation in two. Even now the government rely on what we have to say, before they even prepare their presentation for the international meetings, because they know that what we are doing has some potential and is good to us as well. So just to summarize here, that the work that we have been doing as civil society organization is being understood now and taken into consideration by the authorities, which was never the case before we engage into that.

Robin Möser: Okay. And a related question then would be: how would you define success? And can you give, maybe from Cameroon, a concrete example of the success you achieved in the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament field? And how did you know it was a success?

Guy Feugap: Yes, I will share a success maybe at the personnel level, because I was invited by BASIC to contribute to the Antology I mentioned before. And I was recommended by someone who met me speaking in one of these events at the global level. But if I was recommended to be part of this antology, it means the person knew that I'm doing something that I can contribute to change. And the results was me joining this policy making team to work with this group as a co-organizer, let me put it like that, to draft this policy paper. So this policy, the publication of the policy paper, for me, is the testimony that the work we are doing is having some concrete recognition and that it's worth talking about.

Robin Möser: So that would be, in a nutshell, success for you?

Guy Feugap: Yes.

Robin Möser: And with this, we arrived at my very last question: What are your personal expectations for the future of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation field? Where do you expect the nuclear field to go to in the next 5, 10 or even 50 years?

Guy Feugap: Let's start with the next five years. What I expect is that we have to realize that the existence of nuclear weapons is a threat to world peace. Just the existence of the nuclear weapons, even if they are not used. So, if within the five years we could work to make every stakeholder understand this, that will be a first good start, because from my understanding and from my experience so far, it seems like we are just talking about something that do not exist or we are talking about something that is ephemeral. The fact that it is real, that the nuclear weapons are there and a lot of military groups are equipped in the countries means that at any time they can be used to destroy the world. So, this is something that we have to make clear for everyone, that we are at risk living in the same world with nuclear weapons. That is the first thing I can say, but to go further after this, we have, from our understanding, if we have already understood that globally, that the nuclear weapons are a problem, we will surely go to the implementation, the full implementation of the TPNW, because for me the TPNW is a really comprehensive framework that can help put an end to the nuclear the nuclear weapons. So, if you have to work on that perspective, by five years as I said, all states should have ratified the TPNW. And if you have all state rights fit into that framework in the future years. Now let's see the world the next 20 years: we will be by that time working on eliminating progressively the nuclear weapons in the way they exist. And those states who have those weapons will have the time to do it, because they usually use the argument that they use the weapons to protect themselves in case they are attacked. They will have the time to find what are the other non-violent or other peaceful ways we can use between countries to be safe and to explore what are the non-violent methods, what are nonviolent means that we can use not to go into war? How do we prevent war? And we already know what are the root causes of the war, the war in the world today. So, working the next 20 years towards addressing the root causes of the wars that are ongoing will be also a good step to go towards a safer world without nuclear weapons. And still on our personal expectations, as I said, you have to trust each other, you have to discuss in the event of a problem, you have to create more multilateral spaces to talk about problems between states. That will be also a good way to be sure we are ending the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Robin Möser: I see. Thank you very much. This sort of concludes my questions. Do you have anything to add or to clarify on what we have discussed up until now?

Guy Feugap: Okay, thank you. Yes, I just like to summarize by my points. As civil society actors, we are key today to contribute to having a better world. Civil society actors are crucial and should therefore be given more spaces to share, to shed light on what is happening in the field, because they know what is happening. They hear from people everywhere and can bring out their voices, bring their voices to a larger number of people with their interventions and their testimonies, participants at different important events, the synergy between civil society actors is one aspect that should be built on to make this happen. But there is another level that any actor having a particularly impact, if they knew the nuclear field, must be also connected. These are not always civil society organizations, there are industries who are there, there are representative of states, the diplomats who are there, and with all those people meeting, discussion have to be honest, because sometimes I feel like we meet to talk, we go out with lots of good recommendations, but they are not implemented. So, we have to make good use of these spaces that are created, because we don't have much of them. So, the space that we can have, has to be used well, that any recommendation during the meetings, can inform resolutions that come. But when we meet in future meetings, there are some of the same things that are being discussed. Again, it makes this difficult. A clear example of this is with another campaign to stop the

autonomous weapon systems that I remember in 2019 when I attended a governmental expert meeting in Geneva. During the meeting, we were talking about what are the autonomous weapon system, they was discussion around what should be a good definition of the autonomous weapon system. That's in 2019, five years ago. I was last week in Vienna at another meeting organized by the Austrian government to discuss the autonomous weapon system. And there was still discussions around the definitions of the lethal autonomous weapon system. So, since 2019, the advocacy has been to adopt a treaty to ban the killer robots, the autonomous weapons system, but five years later, there are discussions around the same issues and the same topics. What should be entailed in the international humanitarian law? What is the definition? What do you understand by human control? What should be the level of autonomy in weapons? These were also the issues five years ago. And they are coming every year on the discussion tables. But what we want to have is a treaty that bans the lethal autonomous weapons that bans the autonomous weapon systems. So that's what I'm saying, we have to use the spaces that we have effectively if we discuss about an issue. You have to implement the resolutions, there are a lot of resolutions, but at the end we come back again doing the same, so that is why it takes too much time to end. It will take too much time to end the nuclear race because some stakeholders around they really have their interest in the way things are going. So that is why we shouldn't keep talking without implementing, so that we come back 10 years or 50 years later to be speaking about the same thing and the humanity is still at risk, because they have these weapons

Robin Möser: Okay, thank you very much Guy, this was very insightful.