One of the main questions raised in regards to the Middle East and talks towards a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction is - what should come first: regional peace and stability or talks for regional disarmament. Is it even possible to start with the most volatile topic of them all before there is even peace in the Middle East? True – the Middle East is a region saturated with wars and conflicts. Failing states and non-state actors are changing the face of the Middle East and creating new realities in which weapons of mass destruction are falling into the hands of actors who answer to no international watchdogs nor to treaties, codes or the international law. Moreover – there is no effective way to deter them from using such weapons.

The Middle East is exactly where one should extract from the equation weapons of mass destruction regardless of any peace talks and peace agreements that are hard to imagine in the near future.

Not only is it possible to achieve a WMD free zone in the Middle East without a prior peace agreement – joint work by experts and diplomats from the region, with international support – can reduce regional tensions and even increase the chances for peace.

Those of us who believe in the need and feasibility of such a zone in the Middle East – watching the talks or “non-talks”, the states’ declarations in varied international forums and who
hear mainly repetitive discourse revolving in endless circles around the same obstacles devoid of good will and the flexibility needed to find paths towards regional solutions.

We have also seen that civil society from the region is almost never present in this discourse. That is why about two years ago we started a round table process to map the obstacles standing in the way of any agreement. We decided that it is our role, as civil society, to stop viewing these obstacles as a threat but rather as a challenge.

We consulted, asked many experts many questions, we did some research and eventually found that it is possible that obstacles that seemed to be constant may be solved.

We suspect that the missing ingredient in the talks so far was good will or good faith. Either due to a lack of belief in the possibilities or lack of desire to change the current situation. The unwillingness of the few to do the responsible act for numerous people they represent – those who live in the Middle East and desire what every woman in the world wishes for: life, health, security, and prospects for a better future.

The first product of our work is a primary draft treaty for a WMD free zone in the Middle East and their means of delivery. This draft is only one possible treaty out of many other options to achieve the possible – a regional agreement and even a regional body to supervise it. The process is long and hard because there are hardly any options for us in the Middle East to talk freely to each other. I invite those of you who desire a free zone in the Middle East to think creatively with us about ways to sit and work together: regional and international experts, academics, civil society and diplomats in order to
achieve a comprehensive treaty and together start taking steps that could reduce regional tensions and the risk of proliferation or use of these dangerous weapons.

Installation of red phones in the capitals of states parties to the future zone, joint seminars for regional experts as capacity building for future regional inspectors and other expertise needed to create such a zone, ratification of at least one WMD related treaty by all states in the region and the ratification of the CTBT are just a few of the many steps states and others should take in order to promote official talks.

Today the majority of the states in the world are working together towards a nuclear ban. This is the time to start looking at the nuclear states and thinking together about ways to invite them to the negotiation table. Naturally, I am looking at Israel. I would like to believe that the government of Israel will decide to join the negotiation because it is the right thing to do for all of mankind. However, just like the US will not disarm without Russia - and India without Pakistan – it seems that Israel will also need a regional solution.

We understand that it will not happen tomorrow. We also understand that weapons of mass destruction can be deployed tomorrow. And then the whole world will be shaken. Even those states that are struggling here and now for keeping their right to possess or host nuclear weapons. And to them I would like to say: You are talking about what is happening in Syria and rightly so, while you refuse to introduce a time table for disarming a weapon that is far more dangerous and has global implications. It seems like negotiation for a nuclear ban is a greater threat than the ones posed by those weapons. You are
putting the future of humanity at risk while talking about responsible behavior and investments of dozens of billions of dollars in a weapon you can never use. This is the behavior of those who separate the security of the state from the security of its citizens. This is irresponsible behavior. It shows that many interests that have nothing to do with our security, rights and future come before even our right to exist. It is not too late. However – we are talking about nuclear weapons, and one day it might be too late.

We in the Middle East are not just a map of interests with oil, weapon sales and the opportunities presented by our great location between three continents. We are not separate from the world and any progress towards nuclear disarmament, or even just the ratification of the CTBT, will affect us as well. However – the only way to achieve real progress in the Middle East must start with the belief that it is achievable. Good will and the desire to find solutions provides us with an excellent starting-point.

Thank you,