

Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone

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Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

The idea of a Middle East NWFZ, and later, a Middle East WMDFZ, has existed for thirty-five years. In principle, all states in the region have expressed support for a multilateral regional nonproliferation framework, but in practice, no progress has been made.

Given the pressing challenges we face, the continuation of politicking and point-scoring on the issue of the establishment of a Middle East WMDFZ cannot be allowed to continue.

Too much time has been wasted and we are now facing a situation where proliferation risks are mounting with no discernible progress, either towards establishing the basis for the universality of the Treaty or in laying the groundwork for arms control negotiations. Compounding this is the lack of progress on implementing the 1995 Middle East Resolution.

A WMDFZ in the Middle East should be strongly supported as an important contribution to global security and the nonproliferation regime. In the past, nuclear weapons free zones have proved a useful way to address such challenges.

In promoting a regional WMDFZ, it is essential that all regional states' programs should be in compliance with ratified NPT commitments, as a building block to future arms control agreements. The failure of some regional states to report ongoing or past nuclear development is a blow to the integrity of the Treaty and its necessary universalization and acts as a proliferation spur.

In order to move forward, the lesson from the failure of the ACRS must be learned—arms control mechanisms cannot be effectively established without parallel and substantive progress in peace negotiations and in healing diplomatic rifts. Without parallel negotiating tracks that bring all regional states into disarmament talks the success of peace talks is undermined and pressure for arms control moves evaporates.

New thinking is required that promotes Israeli engagement through parallel peace and disarmament negotiations that, allows progressive movement towards program transparency.

The Arab and Israeli positions are not mutually exclusive - there cannot be peace without security, or security without peace. Therefore, we call on regional state delegations to make a clear commitment to parallel peace and arms control tracks, in principle, ahead of negotiations.

Nuclear weapons states also have a responsibility to ensure global security and the maintenance of the nonproliferation regime. It is imperative that NWS live up to their commitments under the Middle East Resolution, "to extend their cooperation and exert their utmost efforts with a view to ensuring the early establishment by regional parties of a Middle East zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems."

Here, the US, Russia, and the United Kingdom, as Depositary States and sponsors of the Resolution, must take a proactive role in initiating negotiations and providing security assurances to regional parties.

To this end, the EU has proposed that a seminar on Middle East security, disarmament and nonproliferation be convened, including all concerned parties. We recommend that the US, EU, and Russia work jointly to organize a seminar to consider practical confidence building measures such as small-scale scientific and civil society exchanges.

Here, it is important to recognize that the wider failure of nuclear weapons states to fulfill their NPT commitment to disarm is an invitation for certain non-NPT member states to develop and maintain their nuclear weapons stocks.

Significant international support will be required in fomenting progress towards developing regional disarmament mechanisms and bodies and in providing disinterested monitoring, verification and compliance services once these are in place. However, it is important to underline that the international community should play a facilitating but not determinant role in progress towards a Middle East WMD free zone, which is primarily the responsibility of regional states.

Here, it is time for Middle East states to back rhetoric with action and to take calculated risks together in promoting the steps necessary to the development of a WMD free zone.

Recommendations

International civil society recommends consideration of the following as potential steps to build momentum for a Middle East NWFZ:

- Israel's taking steps to unofficially bring its program into line with NPT provisions and deeper involvement in related international bodies would signal to Arab states its desire to conform to international nonproliferation and disarmament norms.
- Establishing a Middle East No First Use of WMD agreement should be considered and explored.
- Work to promote parallel Arab-Israeli peace negotiations and wider disarmament talks.
- Regional states should consider negotiations on comprehensive negative security assurances, backed by non-use pledges by all NWS.
- NFU declarations by Middle East regional parties would be useful confidence and security building measures and would signal their intent to develop momentum towards a WMDFZ.
- Freezing of sensitive nuclear fuel cycle activities leading to the establishment of a fuel cycle free zone could be considered as food for thought. While we recognize the difficulties facing this in the short-term, regional enrichment and reprocessing activities increase fears and act as a potential proliferation prompt.
- Work to secure progressive sign on to the CTBT, and other WMD-related treaties by all states in the Middle East, with each state to make clear that these constitute confidence measures prior to full MEWMDFZ negotiations.

We encourage active cooperation between governments and civil society and strongly urge all regional states to participate in civil society workshops and conferences in an effort to promote common positions and establish relations of trust and amity.

A Middle East WMDFZ should not be about power, or politics, or inalienable rights, but rather should

be viewed as a crucial step in achieving the primary goal of the Treaty - a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons. Any delay in its establishment may have a disastrous impact on regional and global security and the nonproliferation regime itself.

The NGO community looks forward to helping to move this process forward through our collective experience and activism.