



Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East Convene the Conference!



The 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference mandated the UN to call a conference in 2012 to establish a "Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction". Such a treaty would require that all countries of the region, including Israel which is not a party to the NPT, would agree to give up any prohibited weapons and submit to the strictest international inspections. The removal of all WMD's from the Middle East would be a step towards regional security and reduce the risk of war.

We urge President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry to reaffirm the importance and urgency of the Conference and to help set a date without delay. We ask them to advance the dialogue towards a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction and to insist that all parties come to the table.

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Can you imagine a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction? It is more probable than you may think! Here's why...

- ❖ Thirty-eight years ago in 1974, Egypt and Iran (under the Shah) submitted a resolution to the UN General Assembly for a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East. Such a zone would ban the use, production, storage and transport of nuclear weapons within the Middle East and would work to create shared regional stability, trust and security.
- ❖ All Arab nations and Iran have supported the NWFZ from the beginning. Israel first voted for it in 1980 allowing it to become official UN policy supported by all members.
- ❖ In 1990, Egypt took this initiative further, and proposed a regional Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone to include nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. In 1995 the resolution became official UN policy. Iran and all the Arab nations still support it
- ❖ Israel, however, has not yet ratified. All Arab states and Iran still support it as well as other UN member nations. Israel's explanation of its negative vote on resolution L.1 "The Establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East," was that they don't believe this treaty could be "realistically addressed within the regional context."
- ❖ Israel has supported the concept of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone since 1980, allowing it to become an official UN policy. However government representatives have long stated that there must be peace in the Middle East before it can become possible. Arab states counter that peace will never be possible until all nations in the region work together to eliminate weapons of mass destruction. Of course questions of borders and respect for national sovereignty are among the other issues that must be addressed, but negotiations on a WMDFZ can be a positive first step.
- ❖ So far, twenty-two states in the Middle East have ratified the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), pledging to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. The only state in the region that has not ratified the Treaty is Israel, although a nuclear arms race there could threaten Israel's security.
- ❖ Almost half the globe has established nuclear free zones. Governments ban the production, stationing or transport of nuclear weapons in their countries. Some also ban nuclear power.
- ❖ Antarctica was the first such zone established under the United Nations. Emily Green Balch, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work with WILPF, is credited with laying the foundations for this first treaty. Now Latin and South America, the Caribbean, the South Pacific, South-East Asia, Africa, and Central Asia all have established themselves as regional nuclear weapons free zones. Mongolia and Austria have banned nuclear weapons as individual nations even without a regional agreement.
- ❖ In May 2010, the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference was held in New York. Discussing the promise of a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East was a high priority for the NPT. Egypt proposed a high level conference to explore establishing such a zone, and all 187 parties to the NPT agreed that such a conference was to be held in 2012. The Conference was set to take place in Helsinki, Finland in December 2012 and was supposed to be convened by the U.S., U.K. and Russia.
- ❖ In November 2012 the conference was postponed, with the three convening nations giving different explanations of the reasons for postponement and next steps. Israel had evidently refused to attend. The Geneva NPT Preparatory Conference in April-May 2013 is expected to be the scene of further discussions necessary to bring all parties to the table.

Written by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section. Updated and distributed by Massachusetts Peace Action.



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