

Draft submission to the UN SG's report: resolution 79/241 "Comprehensive study of the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones in all its aspects"

BASIC (British American Security Information Council)

Nuclear Weapon Free Zones (NWFZs) are widely recognised as a key component of international disarmament architecture. They play an indispensable role in strengthening peace and security, and are especially important in ensuring the security of non-nuclear weapon states. NWFZs serve as, and complement other, measures for non-proliferation, nuclear risk reduction, and the peaceful uses of nuclear technologies, offering a concrete step towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

The establishment of NWFZs should be led by relevant regional states and achieved by consensus, in consultation with nuclear weapon States (NWS) recognised under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and other relevant States external to the region, and should include consideration of the role of nuclear-armed States not party to the NPT.

NWFZs express the right of States, as reaffirmed in Article VII of the NPT, to ensure their regions remain free of nuclear weapons. Such zones play an increasingly vital role, as the Treaty faces concerns around its credibility and effectiveness.

As such, efforts should be made to strengthen existing, and establish new, NWFZs, including enhanced coordination between existing zones as a capacity-building measure. NWS should ratify the relevant protocols in established NWFZs, and UN members should consider whether and how these protocols might be extended to cover all nuclear-armed States, including those not party to the NPT.

Civil society and observer organisations play an important role in assisting and advising on the establishment and maintenance of NWFZs. They should therefore be consulted and encouraged to continue playing an active role in these regards, including in the Middle East, as recognised by consensus at the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

Establishing a NWFZ in the Middle East is an integral objective of the 1995 NPT indefinite extension package. At the 2000 Review Conference, States Parties extended this to include all weapons of mass destruction. Thus, tangible progress towards a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East (WMDFZME) is imperative to support the credibility and effectiveness of the NPT and ensure wider peace and security.

Rising geopolitical tensions, regional instability, and conflicts underscore the importance of establishing a WMDFZME. Since full participation in this process is crucial to ensuring its effectiveness, non-participating stakeholders should actively engage in the process by attending the November Conference as a confidence-building measure. UN members and civil society should support the Conference and its efforts to maintain strong political commitment to establishing the WMDFZME.