



**UNIDIR**

**Submission on United Nations General Assembly resolution 79/241  
“Comprehensive study of the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones  
in all its aspects”**

United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)

**Executive Summary**

Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZs) play a crucial role in reinforcing non-proliferation and disarmament by ensuring the absence of nuclear weapons in designated regions. Beyond prohibiting nuclear arms, NWFZs foster trust among regional states, enhance security, and promote cooperation on peaceful nuclear technology, contributing to broader international stability. Their integration with global non-proliferation frameworks strengthens compliance with bans on nuclear weapons and testing. Additionally, NWFZs serve as instruments for nuclear risk reduction, limiting the potential for regional arms races and encouraging confidence-building measures.

Given the escalating geopolitical tensions and rising nuclear rhetoric, strengthening established NWFZs, as well as pursuing the creation of new ones, has become increasingly vital for preventing conflict spillovers, mitigating global security risks, and advancing disarmament. Reinforcing existing NWFZs requires addressing several issues. One issue is the incomplete ratification of protocols to NWFZs. While all five recognized NWS—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—have ratified certain NSA protocols, others remain unratified or unsigned. Moreover, some include reservations or interpretive statements that weaken their effectiveness. A second issue is that cooperation between existing zones has been limited. Although the Conference of NWFZs and Mongolia provides a potential platform for coordination, it has convened inconsistently, limiting opportunities for structured engagement. A third issue is resource constraints, which affect the ability of NWFZ secretariats to fully implement treaty obligations and opportunities. Fourth, at this current juncture, global geopolitical tensions could further erode the credibility and effectiveness of these zones, particularly in regions experiencing active conflict or shifts in nuclear policies among major powers.

In terms of the creation of new zones, the Middle East continues to be a region of concern regarding the possession and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Research by UNIDIR and others illustrates that efforts to establish a WMD-Free Zone face significant challenges, including: a lack of adherence to WMD-related treaties, violations of existing non-proliferation commitments, differing views on objectives and sequencing of the establishment of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (ME WMDFZ), and

pervasive mistrust within the region. This is compounded by increasing rhetoric within the region about the use and acquisition of WMD and the absence of a key regional state from the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Recommendations to enhance the established NWFZs include engaging in dialogue within and among NWFZ member states and NWS to ensure full participation, as well as full ratification of outstanding protocols and addressing reservations and ambiguities in NWS commitments. Enhancing cooperation among NWFZs through knowledge sharing and regular meetings of the Conference of NWFZs and Mongolia would further support coordination efforts. Additionally, expanding financial and institutional support for zone secretariats and bodies would enable more effective treaty implementation. Technical cooperation among NWFZs could also improve verification mechanisms and compliance monitoring. Engaging civil society within these processes will help enhance the effectiveness of these regimes.

Furthermore, since most NWFZs were established after the initial UN 1976 study, there is a rich set of lessons and best practices that are important to capture in order to build knowledge of NWFZs establishment and implementation. As such, the forthcoming comprehensive study of the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones or a commissioned paper should document the negotiating history of each zone to inform the conditions, procedures, processes, format, and substantive aspects of each treaty. It should also acknowledge the evolutionary nature of NWFZs and how more recent zones build upon previous obligations, contributing to and advancing the non-proliferation regime. Furthermore, it should consider revisiting the established guidelines and principles for NWFZ creation to assess whether changes are needed to reflect the current global geopolitical and security landscapes.

UNIDIR's research on the ME WMDFZ has identified lessons learned from past experiences, including verifying disarmament and implementing nuclear safeguards, as well as the role of extra-regional states in other NWFZs that could promote regional security, non-proliferation, and disarmament relevant in the Middle East context. Recommendations include sustaining inclusive dialogue, holding national and subregional talks with diverse stakeholders, and promoting the zone's security value through threat reduction, confidence-building measures, and regional cooperation. Expert and scientific engagement can enhance institutional expertise and promote cooperative measures in the peaceful applications of nuclear, chemical, and biological domains.

Establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East is a long-term endeavor requiring sustained commitment and incremental progress. Maintaining the momentum of the General

Assembly-mandated Conference and addressing persistent challenges is crucial. Conference members should uphold inclusivity, constructiveness, and consensus, fostering dialogue that addresses concerns and legitimate interests of all States of the region equally, and should identify and promote full participation. Transparency within the process could be of great value to the Conference, as it increases confidence and opens opportunities for States, civil society, and the international community to contribute in their various roles to the process. Technical expertise from regional and international organizations, as well as established NWFZs, can help address outstanding issues.

Direct dialogue among Middle Eastern states is essential to bridging gaps and advancing negotiations. Revitalizing regional diplomacy, engaging all states on challenges, and reinforcing incentives for a ME WMDFZ require intensified efforts. States should avoid rhetoric and threats related to the development or use of WMD, instead promoting trust through transparency, ratification, adherence, and compliance with relevant treaties.

## **Introduction**

1. United Nations General Assembly resolution 79/241 requests:

The Secretary-General to seek the views of existing nuclear-weapon-free zones, regional organizations, organizations of the United Nations system with a special competence in disarmament and non-proliferation, disarmament and peace-related institutes and relevant non-governmental organizations to communicate their views on the issues that belong to the scope of the aforementioned study and submit a report thereon before the end of the seventy-ninth session of the General Assembly.<sup>1</sup>

2. The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) submits this paper in response to the request of the Secretary-General for submissions from United Nations organizations with a special competence in disarmament and non-proliferation. The paper draws on the Institute's research and activities in the field of nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs), including the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ), and its extensive engagement with the disarmament community on these topics.
3. UNIDIR is an autonomous, voluntarily funded research institute within the United Nations system, established by the General Assembly to undertake independent research on disarmament and related issues in the field of international security. In

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, "Comprehensive Study of the Question of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones in All Its Aspects", A/RES/79/241, 2024, <https://docs.un.org/A/RES/79/241>.

accordance with its statute, UNIDIR aims to promote informed participation by all States in disarmament efforts.

4. UNIDIR's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programme, as well as the Middle East WMD-Free Zone Project, which was established in 2019, have undertaken research activities and engaged experts on various aspects of NWFZs in general, including the five existing NWFZs, as well as the process to establish a Middle East WMD-free zone.
5. This submission aims to review the status of the five existing NWFZs and the potential for establishing new ones. It also provides practical options and recommendations for strengthening existing zones and establishing new ones.

### **Definition, principles, and objectives of NWFZs**

6. The 1976 comprehensive study by the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament defines a nuclear-weapon-free zone as

a treaty or convention whereby:

(a) The status of total absence of nuclear weapons to which the zone shall be subject, including the procedure for the delimitation of the zone, is defined, and

(b) An international system of verification and control is established to guarantee compliance with the obligations deriving from that status.<sup>2</sup>

7. The 1999 report of the Disarmament Commission, building on the principles agreed upon during the First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD-I) in 1978, outlines a set of principles guiding the establishment of NWFZs. Specifically, the report indicated that such zones must be established, "on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned"; and that "[t]he initiative to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone should emanate exclusively from States within the region concerned and be pursued by all the States of that region"; and that "All the States of the region concerned should participate in the negotiations on and the establishment of such a zone on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned."<sup>3</sup>

8. The report also states that:

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, "Comprehensive Study of the Question of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones in All Its Aspects" Special Report of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament, A/10027/Add.1, 1976, [https://docs.un.org/A/10027/Add.1\(SUPP\)](https://docs.un.org/A/10027/Add.1(SUPP)), paragraph 21.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Disarmament Commission, A/54/42 (Supplement No. 42), 1999, [https://docs.un.org/A/54/42\(SUPP\)](https://docs.un.org/A/54/42(SUPP)), paragraphs 20, 21, 23.

The nuclear-weapon States should be consulted during the negotiations of each treaty and its relevant protocol(s) establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in order to facilitate their signature to and ratification of the relevant protocol(s) to the treaty, through which they undertake legally binding commitments to the status of the zone and not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against States parties to the treaty.<sup>4</sup>

This latter principle has proved to be important: NWFZs have emerged as the only legally binding mechanisms to secure assurances against the use of nuclear weapons (also termed negative security assurances, NSAs) by the five nuclear-weapon States (NWS) recognized under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

9. United Nations General Assembly resolution 3472 (XXX) B outlines the principal obligations that NWS shall undertake, through legally binding instruments, towards an NWFZ and its member States. These include respecting the statute of total absence of nuclear weapons defined in the treaty; refraining from contributing to any violation of the treaty; and refraining from using or threatening the use of nuclear weapons against the States of the zone (i.e., an NSA).<sup>5</sup>
10. The right of States to conclude regional treaties to ensure the absence of nuclear weapons in their territories is also confirmed by Article VII of the NPT, and has been recognized by various General Assembly resolutions.
11. The establishment of an NWFZ can serve several objectives. It aims to build trust among the States of a region, to strengthen regional security, and to enhance regional cooperation on peaceful uses of nuclear technology. They also contribute, by extension, to enhancing international peace and security by advancing progress towards the ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, reinforcing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament norms, and complementing global efforts.
12. The complementarity of NWFZs with the nuclear non-proliferation regime and other relevant regimes prohibiting nuclear weapons and their testing is recognized as NWFZs advance universalization of these regimes and strengthen compliance with them.
13. An NWFZ can also serve as an important measure for nuclear risk reduction and nuclear restraint by seeking to mitigate regional nuclear arms races, build confidence, and constrain the use of nuclear weapons by NWS. Today's heightened tensions and strategic competition between major powers have increased the importance of

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations, A/54/42, paragraph 25.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, "Comprehensive Study of the Question of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones in All Its Aspects," A/RES/3472(XXX), 1975, [http://docs.un.org/A/RES/3472\(XXX\)](http://docs.un.org/A/RES/3472(XXX)).

strengthening existing nuclear-weapon-free zones and establishing new ones, as most States seek means to mitigate the risks of conflict spillover into their respective regions amid deteriorating threat perceptions.

### **Current status of NWFZs**

14. There are five established NWFZs in inhabited area globally, all of which have entered into force: the 1967 Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco); the 1985 South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Rarotonga); the 1995 Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (Treaty of Bangkok); the 1996 African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Pelindaba); and the 2009 Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia.<sup>6</sup>
15. All States of the relevant regions have ratified their respective zone treaties, with the exception of the Treaty of Pelindaba, which still lacks the ratification or accession of 11 States (including 10 states that have signed the treaty).
16. Ratification of the protocols by the NWS has varied. All five NWS have ratified the NSA protocol to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, and four of the five have ratified the protocols of the Treaties of Rarotonga, Pelindaba, and Central Asia. In contrast, the protocol of the Bangkok Treaty has not yet been opened for signature, partly due to concerns that the NWS intended to issue reservations or interpretative statements. The States Parties of the Bangkok Treaty and the NWS have held consultations to address these concerns. Ratification of non-NSA protocols also falls short in the case of the Treaty of Pelindaba: one of the two extra-zonal States that control territories within the African NWFZ has not ratified the protocol regarding the observance of certain treaty obligations in those territories due to concerns over sovereignty.
17. Some NWS have submitted declarations or interpretive statements when adopting the protocols. These include limiting the application of the NSA protocols in cases of self-defence or breaches of the treaty, as well as other scenarios under which NWS have limited their NSA commitments.
18. Some believe the variation in the adoption of the protocols, the disparity between the commitments under the protocols, and the reservations and interpretive statements undermine the credibility of the NWFZs, weaken the effectiveness of the ratified protocols, and prevent the full implementation of these treaties.

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<sup>6</sup> Additionally, special nuclear-weapon-free statuses exist for non-habitual zones, including Antarctica, Outer Space, and the ocean floor. Mongolia also holds a unique status as a single-state NWFZ, recognized by a UN General Assembly resolution.

19. Cooperation and coordination between NWFZs have so far fallen short. Obstacles to cooperation include divergent priorities and resource limitations, as well as a lack of mechanisms and forums for fostering cooperation. Enhanced cooperation could unlock opportunities to negotiate the full ratification of protocols and implementation of the treaties. It could also support technical collaboration between specialized bodies under the treaties, facilitate the exchange of experiences and lessons learned relevant to the successful implementation of treaties, and contribute to the establishment of new zones.
20. The only venue for States Parties to the NWFZs to convene and discuss ways to enhance cooperation between the zones and their respective bodies, to promote the implementation of the treaties, and to consult on common objectives has been the Conference of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones and Mongolia. Three sessions have been held since 2005. A fourth session, which was planned for 2020, was postponed and has yet to take place.
21. Regional workshops can provide another avenue for considering ways to enhance cooperation among NWFZs. The 2024 workshop, co-organized by Kazakhstan and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA), for instance, discussed recommendations for enhancing consultation mechanisms between NWFZs. These included the establishment of a consultative group on zonal activities to coordinate among the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of NWFZ States Parties.

#### **The establishment of a new zone in the Middle East: Current status and opportunities**

22. WMD continue to pose a serious challenge in the Middle East. It is home to one State that is not a party to the NPT and is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is unable to conclude that the nuclear programme in one NPT State Party is exclusively for peaceful purposes due to unresolved issues under a safeguards agreement that verifies compliance with the Treaty. The IAEA is also engaged in discussions with another state regarding unresolved safeguards issues. Additionally, two other Middle Eastern States have previously been found by the IAEA to be in non-compliance with their safeguards agreements.
23. Two States from the region are not party to the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and four are not party to the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). Over the last decade, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has asserted that there are “reasonable grounds to believe” that one State has perpetrated chemical attacks in the region, in violation of the CWC. Moreover, shortcomings have been identified with that State’s initial declaration of its chemical

weapon programme when it ratified the Convention.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, non-State actors in the region have pursued WMD and used chemical weapons.

24. Recently, there has also been an increase in nuclear rhetoric in the region that advocates for the development of nuclear weapons, their use in conflict, or the targeting of nuclear infrastructure. This has heightened the risk of nuclear weapons in the Middle East and increased the urgency of the establishment of a WMD-free zone. This reality, coupled with the stagnation of regional arms control diplomacy and further worsened by the ongoing Hamas–Israel war and its spillovers, highlights the need to promote regional security, non-proliferation, arms control, and disarmament dialogue and to build channels for regional engagement.<sup>8</sup>
25. Support for establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMD in the Middle East has long received support from a wide range of States in various forums such as the United Nations General Assembly and the NPT Review Conferences.
26. Several attempts have been made in the past to initiate formal negotiations on establishing the zone. Among these are the formal multilateral Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS), which convened in 1991–1995; and the informal multilateral consultations in Glion and Geneva in 2013–2014, which met in fulfilment of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East and the 2010 Action Plan adopted by NPT Review Conferences.
27. General Assembly resolution 73/546 entrusted the United Nations Secretary-General with convening, on an annual basis, a conference for negotiating a legally binding treaty on an ME WMDFZ. The resulting Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction has now had five sessions, all of which have reached consensus on a final report.<sup>9</sup> All States of the region, except one, and all invited observer States, except one, have attended the sessions.
28. The Conference adopted a political declaration on negotiation principles and the adoption of rules of procedure based on the guidelines adopted in 1999 by the

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<sup>7</sup> Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Executive Council, “Progress in the Elimination of the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme,” Report by the Director-General, EC-109/DG.9, 23 May 2025, [https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025/05/ec109dg09\(e\).pdf](https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025/05/ec109dg09(e).pdf)

<sup>8</sup> On the impact of the evolving regional environment and options to promote and enhance the security value of the ME WMDFZ, see Abdolrasool Divsallar, *Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East: The Role of the WMD-Free Zone Initiative* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2025), <https://www.doi.org/10.37559/MEWMDFZ/2025/CombatingWMD>.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction”, UNODA Meetings Place, <https://tinyurl.com/ybfune2a>.



Disarmament Commission. At its second session, in 2021, the Conference established a working committee that provides an opportunity to take substantive work a step forward by engaging States in focused thematic meetings during the intersessional period. It also provides technical briefings and engages with invited regional and international experts, as well as international organizations, specialized regional organizations, and academia.

29. At its fifth session, held in November 2024, the Conference identified several topics for further discussion and action. It discussed options to engage States from the region that are absent from the Conference, including establishing a contact group to communicate with these parties and encouraging successive presidencies to work on this with the United Nations Secretary-General. Additionally, the Conference explored proposals for strengthening its work, including improving substantive reporting to enhance institutional memory and the depth of discussions; documenting agreements; and seeking advice from former Conference presidents on promoting structured discussions and progress in future sessions.<sup>10</sup>
30. The potential value of the Conference lies in providing the only formal and inclusive forum under which all States in the region are invited to engage in direct talks about the future WMD-free zone. The process continues to contribute to enhancing regional arms control dialogue and maintaining formal channels for exchanging perspectives. The Conference also contributes to laying the procedural, technical, and political foundation to support future regional efforts. The Conference has also facilitated regional consultation and coordination on relevant multilateral processes such as the NPT Review Conferences and meetings of the First Committee of the General Assembly. This could positively enhance regional engagement and produce favourable outcomes in these processes.
31. UNIDIR has actively supported and promoted the ME WMDFZ initiative through numerous activities, particularly its dedicated project on the zone. Launched in 2019 with funding from the European Union, the project has convened many expert dialogues and capacity-building events, including the first side event on the margins of the fifth session of the Conference, in 2024. It has produced over 15 publications on various topics related to the zone and has developed several online tools to support

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, “Report of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Work of its Fifth Session”, A/CONF.236/2024/3, 26 November 2024, <https://docs.un.org/A/CONF.236/2024/3>, and Almontaser Albalawi, “Will There Ever Be a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East?”, *Arms Control Today*, January/February 2025, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2025-01/features/will-there-ever-be-wmd-free-zone-middle-east>.

negotiations (see the Annex for a list of UNIDIR's digital tools, activities, and publications related to NWFZs in general and the Middle East zone in particular). The project has also supported the Conference's Secretariat in various capacities throughout the annual sessions and the Conference's intersessional work.

32. The project's publications have identified several factors that have had an impact on the progress towards the establishment of a WMDFZ. Some of them are long-lasting, such as the lack of adherence to WMD treaties, violations of existing non-proliferation commitments, differing positions on the objective and sequencing of a ME WMDFZ agreement on a zone, and the prevalence of mistrust in the region. Other factors include the changing and complex regional political and security dynamics, as well as global geopolitical tensions.
33. Past efforts reveal critical lessons. Disagreements over the terms of reference, inadequate record-keeping, vague objectives, a lack of continuity within negotiation teams, insufficient senior leadership, as well as expert-level engagement, and an unclear role for extra-regional actors have created room for misinterpretation, weakened trust among negotiating parties, reinforced rigid positions, and deepening suspicion.
34. Additional research has identified lessons learned from past experiences that could promote regional security, non-proliferation, and disarmament. These past experiences include verifying disarmament and implementing nuclear safeguards, as well as lessons from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and the role of extra-regional states in other NWFZs relevant to the Middle East context.
35. Recommendations arising from these experiences include sustained dialogue, with national and subregional talks engaging diverse stakeholders to build capacity and inform policy, as well as promoting the security value of the Zone by strengthening its threat reduction, confidence-building, and regional cooperation functions. Such initiatives involving experts and scientists enhance expertise and promote cooperative and risk-reduction measures regarding the peaceful application of nuclear energy, chemical and biological technologies, delivery systems, and emerging technologies. These dialogues and confidence-building measures could maintain momentum, fostering discussions to bridge gaps despite regional challenges.

#### **Way forward and recommendations**

36. The sustainability of the existing NWFZs should not be taken for granted. The effectiveness of an NWFZ depends on its full implementation by its States Parties, NWS ratification of protocols, and the resolution of outstanding issues, including

negotiations over reservations and interpretive statements. It also requires the continuous support of the international community to strengthen existing NWFZs and establish new ones.

37. NSAs are a central pillar of NWFZs and a key driver for establishing them. The sustainability and effectiveness of NWFZs are directly linked to the credibility of NSAs. Given the rise of nuclear threats and great power tensions, the NWS should recognize that the credibility of their NSAs is undermined by the increase in nuclear rhetoric, along with their reservations and interpretative statements on the protocols. The NWS should pay greater attention to reaffirming their commitment to the NSA protocols by ratifying the remaining protocols and revisiting their declarations. The NWS and the member States of NWFZs are encouraged to engage with one another to enhance transparency and resolve conditionalities and ambiguities for the NWFZ's protocols and globally.
38. Regional and subregional consultations among NWFZ States Parties, which also involve the five NWS, can be an effective approach to better understanding the issues and experiences regarding protocol ratification and promoting the review and withdrawal of reservations. Addressing these issues within the context of regional dialogue on risk reduction could also encourage NWS engagement. Two examples of such engagement are the Nuclear Risk Reduction Workshop of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, which was held in Brisbane on 22–23 March 2023 and co-hosted by Australia and the Philippines, and the Western Hemisphere Nuclear Risk Reduction Workshop, which was co-hosted by Mexico and the United States in 2024.<sup>11</sup>
39. Cooperation and coordination between existing NWFZs (both among member States and their respective organizations) to consult on and identify solutions for their common challenges, including developing cooperation mechanisms, building capacities, sharing best practices, and furthering the benefits of the NWFZ treaties, are timely and should be encouraged. For example, the Conference of NWFZs and Mongolia has proven to be a constructive and inclusive venue; therefore, it is recommended that the convening of this conference continue, with participation open to all United Nations Member States.

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<sup>11</sup> Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, “PH Underscores Urgency of Nuclear Risk Reduction at ASEAN Regional Forum Workshop”, 30 March 2023, <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/dfa-releasesupdate/32101-ph-underscores-urgency-of-nuclear-risk-reduction-at-asean-regional-forum-workshop>; US Department of State, “Nuclear Risk Reduction in the Hemisphere”, Foreign Press Center Briefing, 24 April 2024, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/briefings-foreign-press-centers/nuclear-risk-reduction-in-the-hemisphere>.

40. States should encourage and support NWFZ-focused education, research, and knowledge-transfer activities involving academia and civil society in order to retain knowledge and institutional memory, enhance understanding of region-specific issues, and capture best practices and lessons learned from existing NWFZs. These efforts directly support ongoing initiatives to identify solutions for challenges faced by existing NWFZs and to establish new NWFZs. Civil society, researchers, and experts should be actively engaged in relevant NWFZ meetings and processes. This exposure enables them to make more effective contributions to ongoing efforts to identify solutions for NWFZs.
41. Most NWFZs were established after the conclusion of the first United Nations study on the question of NWFZ in 1976. This means that many rich lessons and practices could be captured by a new United Nations study. This study would expand the understanding of experiences in establishing NWFZs by drawing on lessons learned and best practices from established NWFZs. It will also be important to capture the negotiating history for each zone, either in the study or through a commissioned paper, in order to inform both the conditions that facilitated the negotiations of each treaty and the procedures, processes, format, and substantive aspects of each treaty. The study should also acknowledge the evolutionary nature of NWFZs and how the most recent ones build upon and expand upon the obligations and commitments of previous ones, as a significant way in which they contribute to and advance the non-proliferation regime as a whole.
42. The new United Nations study should also revisit the established guidelines and principles for establishing an NWFZ and consider whether changes are necessary to reflect the current global geopolitical and security landscapes.
43. Establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East is a long-term goal that relies on sustained commitment and incremental progress. It is important to maintain the progress made so far by the General Assembly-mandated Conference and provide support to address the standing challenges that impede progress. The Conference's members are encouraged to maintain the principles of inclusivity, constructiveness, and consensus. The Conference should also encourage dialogues aimed at understanding the concerns and legitimate interests of all States of the region equally and should identify and promote means for full participation.
44. Transparency could be of great value to the Conference, as it increases confidence and opens opportunities for States, civil society, and the international community to contribute in their various roles to the process, to identify solutions, and to provide recommendations. Technical advice and support – including from specialized regional

and international organizations such as the IAEA, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU), the OPCW, UNIDIR, and established NWFZs – could contribute to resolving issues that require technical expertise and past experiences.

45. Establishing and maintaining direct dialogue among all States of the Middle East is an important step in bridging the gaps and advancing negotiations. This will require intensifying efforts by the international community to revitalize regional diplomacy, engage all States of the region about challenges, and reinforce incentives for establishing the ME WMDFZ.
46. Middle Eastern States should refrain from actions and policies that undermine progress and impede advancing negotiations. This includes rhetoric and threats to develop or use WMD, which fuel mistrust and create disincentives for engagement. Instead, these States should promote trust and confidence-building measures, including ratification, full adherence, and compliance with all relevant treaties.
47. Early engagement of NWS, within and outside the General Assembly-mandated Conference, and learning from the protocols and experiences of existing NWFZs, can inform the Middle East WMD-free zone process. Success will rely on creative diplomacy, building consensus among various regional actors, resolving differences between the national policies of Middle Eastern States that could clash with those of NWS, and involving NWS in a manner that highlights common interests.<sup>12</sup>
48. Reintroducing the issue of establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East and broader arms control issues onto the agendas of bilateral and regional political and security talks offers new venues for advocacy and revitalization of the zone. It could also provide opportunities for engaging absent parties and promoting full participation.

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<sup>12</sup> For an analysis on lessons learned of NWS policies in other NWFZs and relevant insights for the Middle East, see Chen Zak Kane and Sarah Ruth Opatowski, *The Role of Extra-Regional States in the Middle East WMD-Free Zone* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2025),

## **Annex. Relevant activities, tools, and publications of UNIDIR**

UNIDIR has worked on NWFZ issues for many years. In particular, the ME WMDFZ Project held numerous research, dialogue, and capacity-building activities in support of the establishment of the WMD-free zone in the Middle East, including regional meetings that engage officials, experts, and members of civil society. See below for a non-exhaustive list.

### **Digital tools**

- The Middle East WMD-Free Zone Compass: Mapping Official Statements (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2024), <https://compass.unidir.org>
- The Middle East WMD-Free Zone Timeline (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2023), <https://app.unidir.org/timeline>
- The Middle East WMD-Free Zone Documents Depository (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2020), <https://app.unidir.org/wmdfz-documents>

### **Publications**

- Chen Zak Kane and Sarah Ruth Opatowski, *The Role of Extra-Regional States in the Middle East WMD-Free Zone* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2025), <https://www.doi.org/10.37559/MEWMDFZ/2025/ExtraRegRole>
- Abdolrasool Divsallar, *Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East: The Role of the WMD-Free Zone Initiative* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2025), <https://www.doi.org/10.37559/MEWMDFZ/2025/CombatingWMD>
- Nasser bin Nasser, *The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Regional Security, Threat Perceptions and the Middle East WMD-Free Zone* (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.37559/MEWMDFZ/2025/ZoneAI>
- Middle East WMD-Free Zone Project, *Understanding the Middle East WMD-Free Zone Conference* (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2024), <https://unidir.org/publication/understanding-the-middle-east-wmd-free-zone-conference/>
- Tomisha Bino and Chen Zak Kane, *Middle East WMD-Free Zone Project: Final Report* (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.37559/MEWMDFZ/2023/FinalReport>
- Farzan Sabet, *Narratives of the Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Drivers, Themes, and Historical Accounts* (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.37559/MEWMDFZ/2023/narratives>
- Sarah Ruth Opatowski, *Addressing Chemical and Biological Weapons Challenges through the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone* (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.37559/MEWMDFZ/2023/CBW>

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## Events (selected)

- Side event to the PrepCom for 2026 NPT RevCon “Exploring the role of extra-regional States in the Middle East WMD-Free Zone,” 28 April 2025, <https://unidir.org/event/exploring-the-role-of-extra-regional-states-in-the-middle-east-wmd-free-zone/>
- Virtual launch of the publication “The impact of artificial intelligence on regional security in the Middle East, threat perceptions and the ME WMDfz,” 26 February 2025, <https://unidir.org/event/the-impact-of-artificial-intelligence-on-regional-security-in-the-middle-east-threat-perceptions-and-the-me-wmdfz/>
- Side event on “UNIDIR tools for supporting the Middle East WMD-Free Zone,” 19 November 2024, <https://unidir.org/event/unidir-tool-for-supporting-the-middle-east-wmd-freezone/>
- Side Event to NPT PrepCom on “Forging a Path Towards a WMD-Free Middle East: The WMD-Free Zone Compass,” 24 July 2024, <https://unidir.org/event/forging-a-path-towards-a-wmd-free-middle-east-the-wmd-free-zone-compass/>
- Briefing event on “Preparing for the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference,” 21 May 2024, <https://unidir.org/event/preparing-for-the-second-session-of-the-preparatory-committee-for-the-2026-non-proliferation-treaty-review-conference/>
- Side Event on “Digital Tools for Disarmament: An Overview of UNIDIR Portals and Databases,” 18 October 2023, <https://unidir.org/event/digital-tools-for-disarmament-an-overview-of-unidir-portals-and-databases-side-event/>
- Side event on “Perspectives on the Middle East WMD-Free Zone,” 3 August 2023, <https://unidir.org/event/perspectives-on-the-middle-east-wmd-free-zone/>
- Final Report Launch on “UNIDIR Middle East WMD Free Zone Project,” 26 June 2023, <https://unidir.org/event/unidir-middle-east-wmd-free-zone-project-final-report-launch/>
- Side Event on “Means of Delivery: A Complex and Evolving Issue in the Middle East WMD-Free Zone Initiative,” 3 November 2022, <https://unidir.org/event/means-of-delivery-a-complex-and-evolving-issue-in-the-middle-east-wmd-free-zone-initiative-first-committee-virtual-side-event/>
- NPT Side Event on “Narratives on the Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Historical accounts, drivers, and themes,” 10 August 2022, <https://unidir.org/event/npt-side-event-narratives-on-the-middle-east-wmd-free-zone-historical-accounts-drivers-and-themes/>
- Report Launch on “Perspectives, Drivers and Objectives for the Middle East WMD Free Zone,” 30 March 2022, <https://unidir.org/event/perspectives-drivers-and-objectives-for-the-middle-east-wmd-free-zone/>

- Panel discussion on “The Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Reflecting on the Past and Looking to the Future,” 11 January 2022, <https://unidir.org/event/the-middle-east-wmd-free-zone-reflecting-on-the-past-and-looking-to-the-future/>
- Discussion on “Advancing the role of women in international security: Views from the Middle East,” 27 October 2021, <https://unidir.org/event/advancing-the-role-of-women-in-international-security-views-from-the-middle-east/>
- Launch event on “From the Iran nuclear deal to a Middle East Zone? Lessons from the JCPOA for the ME WMDFZ,” 27 May 2021, <https://unidir.org/event/from-the-iran-nuclear-deal-to-a-middle-east-zone-lessons-from-the-jcpoa-for-the-me-wmdfz-2/>
- Virtual launch of a policy paper on “Nuclear verification in a Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Lessons learned from past verification cases,” 26 January 2021, <https://unidir.org/event/nuclear-verification-in-a-middle-east-wmd-free-zone-lessons-learned-from-past-verification-cases/>
- Launch event of the “Examining Modalities in Nuclear Disarmament in the Middle East WMD-Free Zone Treaty” report (2023) <https://unidir.org/publication/examining-modalities-for-nuclear-disarmament-in-the-middle-east-wmd-free-zone-treaty/>
- Side event during the Tenth NPT Review Conference on “The Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Reflecting on the Past and Looking at the Future” (2022), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Up\\_AST6YV54](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Up_AST6YV54)