



LOCAL ZERO

Toward a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East

A Decade for Disarmament

From 1970-1999, as the Cold War began to thaw and finally drew to a close, the United Nations was responsible for introducing three consecutive Disarmament Decades.ⁱ A Fourth Disarmament Decade has not been adopted, due to apathy and even political opposition in the General Assembly.ⁱⁱ The failure of the General Assembly to carry out even this nominal measure is indicative of the difficult situation faced by the international community in disarmament issues.

The 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (hereafter: NPT Review Conference) took place from 27 April- 22 May 2015. This review conference provided an opportunity for states to collectively make substantial progress in disarmament. There is widespread support. Many governments and intergovernmental institutions, such as the European Union, civil society organisations, and many more, support global zero. EU Member States Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Germany, together with Norway, advocated for zero nuclear weapons within the framework of the review of the NATO Strategic Concept. Significant effort should also be made toward shorter-term disarmament, specifically on a regional level.

Nuclear disarmament is of particular importance in the Middle East. Political and religious tensions make the Middle East a tumultuous region, and its connectedness to also-precarious South Asia exacerbates the tension. Nuclear abolition in the Middle East would not solve the political and civil unrest rampant in the region, but it would lower the stakes of conflict considerably, removing the existential threat of any confrontation and allowing parties to negotiate peace without the threat of total annihilation. In this contribution, regional security in the Middle East is considered, and the processes by which a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) could be created in the Middle East are examined.

Nuclear Disorder

The progress of international nuclear disarmament went into decline following the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in 1998. Years later, the world has started to move towards nuclear abolition once again. The 2015 NPT Review Conference presents the international community with an opportunity to achieve substantial progress on nuclear disarmament in the Middle East.

Increasing regional security by eliminating nuclear weapons in the Middle East would be a pivotal moment in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Terrorism and war in the region would not stop immediately, of course, but total regional nuclear disarmament would be a trust-building measure that would allow political solutions to flourish.

Such progress is necessary. The current global nuclear order is extremely fragile, threatened by North Korea's expanding nuclear weapons programme, Iran's nuclear ambitions and possible counter measures taken by Saudi Arabia and probably also Egypt, and Pakistan's increasing instability combined with its deteriorating relationship with India.

In 2004, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1540 in which state obligations have been formulated covering all weapons of mass destruction, their delivery means and related materials. The resolution is concerned with preventing the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons to non-State actors. Effective implementation requires constant attention and adaptation where needed, including taking account of the rapid evolutionary changes in science, technology and commerce among others.

The NPT entered into force in 1970, exactly 45 years ago. With the 2015 NPT Review Conference, the international community faces a window of opportunity on nuclear disarmament, and this opportunity must not be squandered. The next review conference will not occur until 2020, and five years is a substantial period in the timeline of this tumultuous region.

US President Barack Obama accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on 10 December 2010, awarded in part for his efforts to draw attention to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. During his acceptance speech, he referred to the nuclear disorder:

*"... it is also incumbent upon all of us to insist that nations like Iran and North Korea do not game the system. Those who claim to respect international law cannot avert their eyes when those laws are flouted. Those who care for their own security cannot ignore the danger of an arms race in the Middle East or East Asia. Those who seek peace cannot stand idly by as nations arm themselves for nuclear war."*ⁱⁱⁱ

It is the collective responsibility of the international community – of all those who seek peace – to make progress toward a NWFZ in the Middle East. A NWFZ in the Middle East is not a utopian ideal. It is a necessity, and one that is attainable within the context of the NPT.

The Under-Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, Monsignor Antoine Camilleri, was addressing the 58th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, September 2014.^{iv}

"A world free of weapons of mass destruction is the final aim of this process of disarmament. The task is one which is all the more pressing for people who suffer the dire consequences of war and terrorism. It is also widely recognized that nowadays the risk of nuclear weapons being used is growing throughout the world due to three factors: the first, proliferation of such weapons; second, the vulnerability of nuclear command and control networks to cyber-attacks or human error; third, the possibility of nuclear weapons being accessed by non-state actors, terrorist groups in particular. My delegation considers it necessary for governments and politicians to do all that is within their power to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East Region."

Arms Control and Regional Security in the Middle East

Nuclear proliferation has two dimensions. Horizontal proliferation is the geographical spread of nuclear arms, whereas vertical proliferation is the improvement of existing arsenals. Over

the last decade, international attention has been directed primarily at horizontal proliferation. Several factors have contributed to this trend:

1. Fear that so-called "rogue states" (i.e. Iraq, Iran, North Korea, etc.) might acquire nuclear weapons, or general concern that the nuclear weapons club might be widened;
2. Concern that terrorist organisations or other non-state actors might acquire nuclear materials and the capacity to create a nuclear device; and
3. The desire of the established nuclear powers to deflect attention from their own failure to make significant progress in nuclear disarmament.

These factors are relevant to the current situation in the Middle East. Three states with significant recent security issues related to weapons of mass destruction are considered here: Syria, Israel, and Iran.

Syria

In August 2013, the Assad regime indiscriminately attacked civilians with sarin gas. This action was a grave contravention of international law. International legal frameworks were insufficient to prevent this breach of human rights. This situation underscores the need for creativity in creating any Weapons-of-Mass-Destruction-Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was responsible for the stigmatization of chemical weapons, and for this accomplishment the organization received the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize. Despite this considerable progress, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Assad regime has included chlorine gas cylinders in recent barrel bombings of residential areas. Each type of WMD presents unique challenges, but the chemical weapons situation in Syria highlights the need for an enforceable, verifiable programme to ensure a WMDFZ in the Middle East. During the NPT of 2015, Syria was urged to work closely together with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in order to be transparent and in line with the obligations as party of the NPT.^v

Israel

Although Israel officially denies the existence of an Israeli nuclear arsenal, SIPRI estimates that it currently possesses 80 warheads.^{vi} Further estimates indicate that 50 of these weapons are intended for launch by means of Jericho II medium-range ballistic missiles, while the 30 remaining weapons are gravity bombs to be deployed by aircraft. The *2013 SIPRI Yearbook* expresses concern that Israel may possess submarines carrying cruise missiles, which would provide a means of storing and launching nuclear weapons for which the risk of pre-emptive attack would be negligible. These missiles are Israel's invulnerable – and opaque – nuclear deterrent. Israel is not party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and is thus not subject to any international inspection regime.

Possession of nuclear weapons in the Middle East and fear of regional proliferation influence security decisions, often leading to irrational actions. The 2007 Israeli attack on the Syrian nuclear facility Al-Kibar is evidence. It is clear that the Israel–Palestine conflict needs to be solved, and that a sustainable peace for both sides must be reached. Diplomatic negotiations could take place much more easily in a Middle East free of nuclear weapons. Israel was an observer state at the NPT Review Conference 2015.^{vii} Palestine became the 191st member of the NPT Review Conference in 2015.^{viii}

Palestinian Christians and Nuclear Weapons

On 26 April 2015, the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem waved goodbye to nuclear weapons by ringing its bells and calling on people to reflect on the nuclear weapons threat and hope for a nuclear-weapon –free world. The Bethlehem Christmas Church is less than 100 kilometres from Dimona, where Israel's suspected nuclear weapons are stored. The parish is active in the initiative to establish a Middle East Zone free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

Bethlehem, a Palestinian city located in the central West Bank, holds special significance to religious communities including Jewish, Muslim and Christian. The Hebrew Bible identifies it as the city David was from and where he was crowned as the king of Israel. The New Testament identifies Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus. However, it has also been caught up in Middle East conflicts in particular the conflict arising from the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The Bethlehem Christmas Church has served as a beacon of hope for peace and reconciliation in the region.

The Bethlehem Christmas Church *Wave goodbye to nuclear weapons* is one of many waves being done by religious and faith-based communities around the world as part of Global Wave 2015, starting with a wave at an Interfaith Convocation held opposite the United Nations in New York on 26 April 2015 in which delegates of Pax Christi International participated.

Israeli whistle-blower

Mordechai Vanunu^x (born 14 October 1954), also known as John Crossman, is a former Israeli nuclear technician who, citing his opposition to weapons of mass destruction, revealed details of Israel's nuclear weapons program to the British press in 1986. He was subsequently lured to Italy by a Mossad agent, where he was drugged and abducted by Israeli intelligence agents. He was transported to Israel and ultimately convicted in a trial that was held behind closed doors.

Vanunu spent 18 years in prison, including more than 11 in solitary confinement. Released from prison in 2004, he became subject to a broad array of restrictions on his speech and movement. Since then he has been arrested several times for violations of those restrictions, including giving various interviews to foreign journalists and attempting to leave Israel. He says he suffered "cruel and barbaric treatment" at the hands of Israeli authorities while imprisoned, and suggests that his treatment would have been different if he had not converted to Christianity from Judaism.

In 2007, Vanunu was sentenced to six months in prison for violating terms of his parole. The sentence was considered unusual even by the prosecution who expected a suspended sentence. In response, Amnesty International issued a press release on 2 July 2007, stating that: "The organisation considers Mordechai Vanunu to be a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate and unconditional release." In May 2010, Vanunu was arrested and sentenced to three months in jail on a charge that he met foreigners in violation of conditions of his 2004 release from jail. Vanunu has been characterized internationally as a whistle-blower and by Israel as a traitor. Daniel Ellsberg has referred to him as "the preeminent hero of the nuclear era".

Iran

Iran is a state party to the NPT. Its programme is under international inspection by the IAEA. Despite this apparent legitimacy, there is still a great need for transparency, and the Iranian nuclear programme has been a constant source of political contention since its beginning. Currently operating Iranian nuclear facilities include one civilian nuclear power plant and multiple research reactors. The Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, a light water civilian nuclear reactor with Russian-supplied fuel, has been in operation from 2011.^x Iran is home to a number of research reactors, many of which have historically been the setting for illicit or undeclared nuclear activities. As of May 2014, Iran has 19,000 centrifuges installed, which are capable of enriching uranium to weapons-grade uranium with a high concentration of the U-235 isotope. Presumably, it is for the research reactors that the uranium is being enriched – the Bushehr reactor is moderated by light water, and thus runs on unenriched uranium.^{xi}

Iran claims its nuclear ambitions are for peaceful purposes, yet there have been concerns that Iran has ulterior motives. The enriched uranium used to fuel the research reactors is or could easily become weapons-grade material. Additionally, heavy water reactors such as the Iranian research reactors produce plutonium, which could also fuel nuclear weapons. Iranian claims of peaceful uses for its nuclear facilities have been met with widespread scepticism. Hatred against Israelis within Iran is very strong, and a nuclear attack against Israel has been feared by some. Some have speculated that Iran might make nuclear weapons and transfer some of them to third parties, e.g. terrorist organizations, for use against Israel. Iran remains the chief supporter of Hamas and Hezbollah, and both groups would like to see the end of the Jewish state.

On 20 January 2014, the EU Joint Plan of Action^{xii} (JPA) entered into force, outlining a number of voluntary measures Iran was to take in order to place its nuclear facilities increasingly under IAEA monitoring. A March 2014 report from the IAEA Director General indicated that Iran had successfully fulfilled its promises to undertake these voluntary measures, *inter alia*, to cease certain uranium enrichment activities, not to operate cascades in centrifuge facilities in an interconnected manner, and to dilute certain quantities of enriched uranium. The IAEA also confirmed that Iran had not made any progress on the Arak IR-40 reactor, nor had it engaged in fuel manufacturing or testing for that reactor. Reprocessing activities had also ceased at the Tehran Research Reactor and at all other facilities accessible to the IAEA. In April 2014, Iran announced that it would redesign the Arak heavy water reactor in order to minimize the amount of plutonium produced. Discussions between the IAEA and Iran are ongoing, and progress is being made.^{xiii}

An IAEA report published on 23 May 2014, following a series of Iran-IAEA negotiations, further confirms that Iran has been complying with its obligations under the Joint Plan of Action. The IAEA cited progress on several practical measures concerning Iranian nuclear activities and relevant information exchange. Olli Heinonen of the Harvard Kennedy School, in an analysis of the negotiations, affirms the progress made but notes that the IAEA currently does not have full monitoring capabilities in non-declared nuclear sites. Heinonen emphasizes that there is still quite a long way to go toward eliminating all opacity in Iran's nuclear energy program.^{xiv} Another round of talks was scheduled to begin on 16 June 2014 in Vienna.^{xv}

Towards an agreement with Iran^{xvi}

After 36 years of hostility between Iran and the West, 12 years of nuclear negotiations initially between Iran and the European Troika (Britain, France and Germany), followed by talks

between Iran and the P5+1, finally the two sides have agreed on 2 April 2015 on a framework for a final, comprehensive agreement before the end of June 2015.

Iran agrees to cut the number of its centrifuges from about 19,000 to 6,100 (5,060 in operation). Rather than export its 10,000 kilogram stockpile of enriched uranium, Iran agrees to shrink it to 300 kilograms. As was expected, no facilities are to be destroyed, but the underground enrichment facility at Fordow, of particular concern because it is impervious to most bombing, will be converted to a research centre. No enrichment will take place there for at least 15 years. The plutonium-producing reactor at Arak will be permanently reconfigured, and Iran has committed "indefinitely" not to process spent fuel, the process that separates out the pure plutonium needed for a bomb.

It is clear that this agreement falls short of both side's maximum expectations. It will be strongly opposed by the hardliners in Iran who believe that, as an NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) member, Iran is entitled to the full range of nuclear activities and, therefore, they will accuse the Iranian negotiators of a sell-out. On the other hand, the Israeli Prime Minister and his supporters in the US Congress, who are not satisfied with any agreement with Iran short of the cessation of all forms of nuclear enrichment in Iran, even at the cost of a war, will blame the Obama Administration of appeasement. It is also clear that both sides have achieved their minimum demands. The West can be sure that Iran will not be able to produce nuclear weapons, not only for the next ten or fifteen years, but even long after that, because Iran will be under constant IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) supervision for decades to come. All paths to the production of the necessary amount of enriched uranium or plutonium for the production of a single bomb have been blocked. Making a bomb requires weaponization, miniaturization and above all testing. Any of those activities would be easily detected. Furthermore, what use would a single bomb be for Iran when faced with hundreds of nuclear bombs by Israel and thousands of nuclear bombs by the United States?

As an NPT signatory Iran should have been able to have access to the full range of nuclear activities for peaceful purposes. Iran has accepted the most stringent regime of inspection, more than any applied to any other NPT member. On the other hand, Iran has achieved its main demand of being able to have limited enrichment on its soil and to be able to continue engaging in research and development in the field of nuclear technology.

By agreeing to the conditions, Iran has also succeeded to get the sanctions that had been imposed on the country by the Security Council, the EU and the United States to be lifted, although it is not yet clear to what extent and according to what time frame.

This agreement should be welcomed as the first sign of rapprochement between Iran and the West. It has shown that the two sides can negotiate with each other instead of constantly using the language of force. The main task now is to make sure that it can be translated into a comprehensive agreement by the end of June. It will ease some of the sanctions, and will open the door to more commercial activities between Iran and the outside world, and as a result, will bring about some improvement in the lives of hard-pressed Iranians. It enables Iran to play a more active role in regional politics, which may resolve some of the complicated problems, especially the curse of terrorism that has gripped the entire region. It may lead to greater collaboration between Iran and other Middle Eastern countries with the aim of averting a disastrous Shia-Sunni conflict. Above all, it has prevented the alternative, namely a disastrous war that would have endangered Iran and the entire world.

Certainly, some warmongers may still try to sabotage this deal and prevent a final agreement, but now the momentum is with those who wish to resolve this conflict through diplomacy. It has also shown that for the first time a major dispute on proliferation has been resolved not by the threat or the use of force, but through talks and negotiations and by each side making some concessions for reaching an agreement. It should encourage them to push for peace, diplomacy and negotiations in future occasions too and to remain confident that their voices count, even in the face of enormous opposition by vested interests.^{xvii} During the 2015 NPT Review Conference the agreement of the P5 + 1 and Iran has been appreciated very much in most of all the statements delivered and it is hoped that the final agreement can be reached on 30 June 2015.^{xviii}

In April 2015, Pax Christi International formulated its policy in the following way:

This agreement should be welcomed as the first sign of rapprochement between Iran and the West. It has shown that the two sides can negotiate with each other, improve security and bring about some improvement in the lives of hard-pressed Iranians. It enables Iran to play a more active role in regional politics and may lead to greater collaboration between Iran and other Middle Eastern countries with the aim of averting a disastrous Shia-Sunni conflict. Above all, it has prevented the alternative, namely a disastrous war that would have endangered Iran and the entire world.

Creating a Middle East Free of Nuclear Weapons

Historical attempts to create a NWFZ in the Middle East

The entire southern hemisphere is a zone free of nuclear weapons. States that are parties to NWFZs commit themselves not to manufacture, acquire, test, or possess nuclear weapons. Each NWFZ treaty includes a protocol to be signed and ratified by nuclear weapons states, in which states pledge to respect the nuclear weapon free status of the zone. The effectiveness of a NWFZ, which in part depends on the strength of state commitments, differs markedly from zone to zone. Steps have to be taken to institutionalise cooperation between NWFZs. To this end, states should offer to host international meetings of all NWFZ member states.

It is not only outside actors who wish to see a NWFZ in the Middle East. Iran and Egypt proposed the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East in 1974 and that proposal goes back to the 60s. The long-standing proposal for a NWFZ in the Middle East includes a United Nations General Assembly resolution, which was first introduced that year, and has been adopted every year since then. The resolution holds that, pending and during the establishment of such a zone, states in the region declare solemnly that they will refrain, on a reciprocal basis, from producing, acquiring, or in any other way possessing nuclear weapons and nuclear explosive devices. They will also refrain from permitting the stationing of nuclear weapons on their territory by any third party. Additionally, they agree to place all of their nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, to declare their support for the establishment of the zone, and to deposit such a declaration with the UN Security Council for consideration. There is no doubt that the creation of such a zone would benefit all parties. Despite the best of intentions on the part of some states, subsequent UN General Assembly resolutions endorsing the idea of a NWFZ in the Middle East have not been met with great success. This is due in large part to opposition by Israel, generally believed to

possess nuclear weapons, and reluctance from the United States, a long-time supporter of Israel.

In April 1990, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak went further and proposed the establishment of a Middle East free of all types of weapons of mass destruction. However, serious obstacles continue to stand in the way of establishing such a zone. Israel's nuclear weapons capabilities and its refusal to join the NPT, along with continued political and strategic tensions in the region have blocked progress toward this goal. While Egypt and other Arab nations insist on Israel's accession to the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state, Israel maintains that there must first be a comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbours before it can ratify the NPT. An additional problem concerns the demarcation of the zone due to some uncertainty in the precise geographic reach of the Middle East itself. Geographically, the NWFZ in the Middle East may partially overlap with the NWFZ in Africa, because Egypt and other states in North Africa are located within the area covered by the Treaty of Pelindaba. Such an embarrassment of riches, the overlapping of NWFZs, would be a delightful problem to have.

Focus on WMD issues in the Middle East increased following the discovery of a clandestine nuclear weapons program in Iraq after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Shortly after the war, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 687,^{xix} which emphasized the importance of Middle East denuclearization to promote regional security. At the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, which brought together Israel, the Palestinians, and many other Middle Eastern stakeholders, participants agreed to take a multilateral track towards regional arms control and security. They established a working group on Arms Control and Regional Security in the Middle East (ACRS)^{xx}. However, due to dissent between Israel and Egypt over the WMD free zone, the ACRS has not held a formal meeting since September 1995.

Progress within the framework of the UN Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

The NPT provides a framework for progress to be made on controlling nuclear threats. At the NPT Review Conferences in 1995, 2000, 2010 and again in 2015, clear support was expressed for the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East. The Resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference called for all states in the region to join the treaty and put all nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. Although Israel was not named directly, it is the only state in the Middle East not party to the treaty. The resolution also required all states in the region to work toward a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons, as well as other weapons of mass destruction, and called on all NPT state parties, in particular the nuclear weapons states, to support this goal. The implementation of the 1995 resolution in the Middle East requires establishing a reporting mechanism within the NPT review process.

Nuclear disarmament in the Middle East is complementary to other diplomatic efforts. It is imperative that nuclear disarmament in the Middle East is pursued in parallel with other efforts. The Middle East peace process is also an important mechanism in building regional security, and the dispute between Israel and its neighbours is the most significant impediment towards the establishment of the zone. Israel is not likely to give up its nuclear deterrent capability until it feels that its national security is no longer threatened. Israel's neighbours, on the other hand, argue that the mere existence of Israel's nuclear program threatens their security. For these reasons, political solutions in fora other than the NPT negotiations should be sought simultaneously.

While tensions over Israeli nuclear weapons and Iran's nuclear program continue to thwart progress toward a zone free of WMDs, other nuclear concerns in the region came to an abrupt end in 2003. Concerns about a possible resumption of Iraq's nuclear weapons program was used as justification for Operation Iraqi Freedom, which removed Saddam Hussein from power in April 2003. However, subsequent searches by coalition forces failed to find evidence of efforts to restart Iraq's nuclear weapons program, confirming earlier IAEA conclusions. In December 2003, Libya, long suspected of developing nuclear weapons, announced that it was terminating all its WMD programs. Additionally, Libya and Iran have both signed additional protocols to their respective IAEA safeguards agreement. While these developments have alleviated some proliferation concerns in the region, continuing conflict in Iraq and instability throughout the region dim the prospects for establishing a zone free of WMDs in the Middle East in the near future.

The 2010 and 2015 Review Conference reinforced the significance of the 1995 resolution. There was widespread support for a NWFZ in the Middle East, including support from Iran and Lebanon. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon specifically called on the 2010 Review Conference to make progress towards a regional Middle East NWFZ. In response, the Conference endorsed the creation of a conference in 2012 to be convened on the topic of a Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction. This conference would have provided a significant space for negotiation among Middle Eastern countries and other stakeholders, possibly resulting in real, tangible progress toward a Middle East NWFZ. The United States of America indefinitely postponed the conference in November 2012.^{xxi} It was to have occurred one month later. The official US State Department ironically cited "present conditions in the Middle East" as prohibitive to the convening of the conference.

In January 2013, the European Parliament issued a resolution deploring the cancellation of the conference. Similar sentiments are broadly present. In response to the cancellation of the Helsinki conference, the Haifa Conference for a Nuclear Weapons and Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East was held from 5-6 December 2013. A representative of the Emil Touma Institute, whose mandate is to improve Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, explained the justification of the conference: "If official Israel will not come to Helsinki, it remains the task of the peace and progressive forces, in Israel and abroad, to bring Helsinki to Israel."^{xxii} Although by no means an official forum for debate the conference marked openness to discussion. Nevertheless, this conference was not widely attended by diplomats or official state actors, and it did not replace the cancelled Helsinki conference. The conference originally endorsed by the 2010 Review Conference should occur as soon as possible.

Subsequent to the 2010 Review Conference, after a customary one-year hiatus on official negotiations, three Preparatory Committees took place. During the three Preparatory Committees for the 2015 NPT Review Conference, the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East was a recurrent subject of states' working papers. Nevertheless, the establishment of the NWFZ in the Middle East remains a difficult issue, and progress is impeded by differing national interests. The Arab states denounce the refusal of Israel to sign on to the NPT and the backing of the position of the Israeli state by nuclear powers (the USA), whereas Israel repeats its point of view that Middle East nuclear issues should be dealt with in the full context of the peace process. There is still a long way to go.

Priorities for the 2015 NPT Review Conference

At the 2015 NPT Review Conference, States parties evaluate the implementation of the Treaty's provisions since 2010, and identify the areas and means through which further

progress can be made. The 9th Review Conference discusses also the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East.

Implementation of the 1995 Middle East NWFZ resolution should continue to be a priority at the 2015 Review Conference. Additionally, political barriers to the convening of the Helsinki conference should be addressed so as to allow the conference to occur. The “present situation in the Middle East” cited by the US as a prohibiting factor is precisely what the conference is intended to ameliorate. Indeed, there has been speculation that Arab states may walk out of 2015 NPT negotiations if a Middle East conference does not take place in advance of the Review Conference. But that did not happen.

A Call for Courageous Leadership

Bold steps must be taken toward reducing nuclear arsenals to zero, especially in the Middle East. In order to achieve this, states need trust and security. NWFZs are the best example of trust, confidence, and affirmation that peace and security are possible without the possession of nuclear weapons. Such trust is most needed in the Middle East. As Archbishop Mamberti said to the Security Council on the eve of the 2010 Review Conference,

“Today’s world demands a courageous leadership in reducing those arsenals to a complete zero. In order to achieve this, states need trust and security. Nuclear-weapons-free zones are the best example of trust, confidence and affirmation that peace and security is possible without possessing nuclear weapons. The Holy See thus encourages states which possess nuclear weapons to ratify all the protocols to the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone treaties and strongly supports efforts to establish such a zone in the Middle East.”^{xxiii}

Likewise, Pax Christi International encourages those states with nuclear weapons to ratify all the protocols of the NWFZ treaties and strongly supports efforts to establish such a zone in the Middle East.

Pax Christi International is present during the 9th Review Conference on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) that is held in New York, 27 April – 22 May 2015. Participating governments will discuss nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy with a view to arrive at a consensus on a number of issues. Pax Christi International is focusing on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, as well as pleading for a total ban on these weapons. We firmly hope that during the NPT Review Conference concrete steps will be taken toward regional disarmament in the Middle East, with the ultimate goal of freeing our planet from nuclear arms.

The role of Pax Christi International is vital to not let hope die, to not let cynicism and realpolitik take over. Pax Christi International believes that an ethic rooted in solidarity and peaceful coexistence is necessary for the future of humanity. Peace and security is a public good.

Bethlehem, 15 May 2015

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END NOTES:

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- ^{iv} http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/09/23/holy_see_calls_for_a_world_free_of_nuclear_weapons/1107151
- ^v <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/statement-2015-review-conference-parties-treaty-non-proliferation-nuclear-weapons-npt>
- ^{vi} SIPRI Yearbook 2013: *World nuclear forces*, <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2013/06>.
- ^{vii} <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/26/us-nuclear-un-conference-israel-idUSKBN0NH0H420150426>
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- ^{ix} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mordechai_Vanunu
- ^x Associated Press, 29 January 2008, "Iran Reports Receiving Nuclear Fuel from Russia," *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/29/world/middleeast/29iran.html>.
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<http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infcircs/2013/infcirc855.pdf>.
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- ^{xiv} IAEA Board of Governors, 20 January 2014, "Status of Iran's Nuclear Programme in relation to the Joint Plan of Action: Report by the Director General," <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2014/govinf2014-1.pdf>. IAEA Board of Governors, 20 March 2014, "Status of Iran's Nuclear Programme in relation to the Joint Plan of Action: Report by the Director General," http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/JPA_update_IAEA_20Mar2014.pdf. Olli Heinonen, 24 March 2014, "Takeaways from the IAEA report on the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action," http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/24039/takeaways_from_the_iaea_report_on_the_implementation_of_the_joint_plan_of_action.html?breadcrumb=%2Fexperts%2F2107%2Folli_heinonen.
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- ^{xvi} Here is a link to the [text of the agreement that was presented by the EU](#)
- ^{xvii} Here the larger background and details on [Wikipedia](#).
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