The Way Forward

Participants at "The Middle East without Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Way Forward - Civil Society Input" conference, meeting in Helsinki 14-16 December 2012, strongly welcome the agreement at the NPT Review Conference in 2010 that the "Secretary- General of the United Nations and the co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution, in consultation with the States of the region, will convene a conference in 2012, to be attended by all tates of the Middle East, on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear eapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of arrangements freely rrived at by the States of the region, and with the full support and engagement of the uclear-weapon States" and the annual consensus resolution at the UNGA on the stablishment of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East Region (A/RES/67/28).

Attendees at this civil society conference are outraged at the decision to 'readjust the timing' of the Conference. Given the fact that there are already threats of outright war and forms of warfare aimed at Iran, the postponement of the Conference is a serious threat to peace in the Middle East.

We recognise that the Conference and a process to establish a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction would have a tremendous benefit for the security of the people of the region, and the peace process.

The existence of weapons of mass destruction in the region, and especially the possession of nuclear weapons by Israel cannot be maintained, and make the Conference vitally important.

The Conference would be of historical significance for the future of the region and for world peace and must, therefore, take place as soon as possible.
We believe that the dialogue necessary to create such a zone will help to prevent conflict, and to be successful cannot be entered into coercively or under threat of war or attack.

This gathering offers the following recommendations to support this process:

To the Conference Convenors: The Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, The United Nations Secretary-General and the United States:

1. *We urge a date to be set without delay and announced publicly, even if not every state has declared their intent to participate. Setting a date and sending out invitations increases positive pressure for all States to attend.*
2. *We urge that global support for the Conference be reaffirmed through a resolution at the UN General Assembly, thereby bringing it fully under the auspices of the UN.*
3. *We call on all convenors to aid the process of arbitration by refraining from any action that would isolate any particular country in any process.*

To the Conference Facilitator, Ambassador Jaakko Laajava:

1. *We thank you for your continued and untiring efforts to facilitate the Conference.*

2. *We urge you to consult further with regional civil society as stakeholders, demonstrating the necessity of transparency in your preparations.*
3. *We urge you to hold preliminary working meetings (at a senior diplomatic level) to gain agreement on conference modalities and facilitate participation of all states in the region at the Conference. We urge you to add a place for civil society during those meetings*.

To the States of the region:

1. *We urge that all States attend the proposed Conference in good faith and engage in discussions that are held in the spirit of reciprocity, mutual accommodation and mutual benefit.*
2. *We urge all States to declare, without reservations or pre-conditions, their commitment to the establishment of a zone and to work constructively towards the realisation of the Conference.*
3. *We call for increased transparency on nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the region.*

To Civil Society:

1. *We urge global civil society to mobilise public opinion, parliaments and governments in their own countries to ensure the immediate convening of the Conference and to recognise the idea of a WMD Free Zone as the peaceful alternative to the spectre of regional war in the Middle East.*
2. *We urge global civil society and academia to continue holding track two dialogues and promoting unofficial dialogues among those in the region to promote security and cooperation in the region. We urge civil society members to post reports, analysis, events, and recommendations, for the creation of a zone to a centralised location.*
3. *We welcome and support the rise of civil society organisations and initiatives working in the region, including the movement in Israel for a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone.*

We urge all stakeholders to provide practical and financial support for civil society in the region in their on-going efforts. And emphasize the need for all states to respect international law, the United Nations charter, the comprehensive implementation of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention as well as the 990 General Conference Resolution of the International Atomic Energy Agency on the prohibition of all armed attacks against nuclear installations.

Finally, we recognise that tensions are not created or resolved in a vacuum. Chemical and iological weapons are each the subject of a specific convention that sets a universal, fully comprehensive and non-discriminatory norm against their development, acquisitionpossession or use. We urge all countries to support a legally binding global ban on nuclear eapons. We believe that multilateral negotiations on a nuclear weapons treaty would encourage and facilitate the development of a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in he Middle East.