

Plenary Session
Eliminating WMD in the Middle East

Opening Remarks by
Sergio Duarte, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
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Paul Valéry once wrote that “Politics is the art of preventing people from taking part in affairs which properly concern them.”¹

It is difficult to imagine how anybody could deny that the presence of weapons of mass destruction—nuclear, biological, or chemical—anywhere, would not be regarded with concern, elsewhere. Yet this is an issue that is often very difficult to discuss, let alone negotiate, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the Middle East.

After all, there are now five regions that have been able to exclude nuclear weapons—Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central Asia. And there have been efforts to prohibit all weapons of mass destruction in certain sub-regions, including parts of Latin America.²

Can this goal be accomplished in the Middle East? A negative answer begs the question, why not? A positive answer invites us to ask: how?

We have today three experts on this issue to share their views. I have worked together with all three on different occasions and jobs, and I deeply admire their professionalism and talent.

First, Ambassador Wael Al-Assad, who serves as the Director of the Disarmament and Multilateral Relations Department in the League of Arab States.

Second, Ambassador Jeremy Issacharoff, the Deputy Director for General Strategic Affairs in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

And third, the Deputy Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Khalid Shamaa, of Egypt, the country that co-sponsored the first General Assembly resolution to establish a nuclear-weapon free zone in the region in 1974.

Gentlemen, today is not an occasion to reiterate national policies. Today is a day to find out what is needed to achieve this great goal of a zone free of WMD in the Middle East.

I invite your recommendations.

¹ *Tel Quel 2 (1943)*.

² Political Declaration of MERCOSUR, Bolivia and, Chile as a Zone of Peace,
<http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/70988.htm>.