

Remarks at the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction

António Guterres

It is a pleasure to address the first session of this Conference on the establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Thanks to the vision of so many Member States around the globe, the world enjoys five regional nuclear-weapon-free-zones – in Latin America and the Caribbean; Africa; Central Asia; Southeast Asia; and the South Pacific.

Over the years, many Member States have supported regional nuclear-weapon-free-zones for a variety of reasons.

First and foremost, such zones put a permanent end to the possibility of nuclear conflict in a given region.

They also provide tangible security benefits by giving their members assurances against the use, or threat of use, of nuclear weapons. At the same time, these zones can provide additional assurance to the global community of the peaceful nuclear intentions of the countries in these regions.

Second, such zones have offered a means for States to take the initiative and work together to advance their own common regional security.

Third, these zones have enabled groups of States to make independent contributions to the elaboration of global norms and facilitate progress in general negotiations on disarmament.

All these motives are salient to the region of the Middle East, where the overall situation remains a serious concern for the entire world.

Complex civil wars rage on, involving well-equipped non-state armed groups and terrorist organizations as well as regional and international military powers.

Civilians are paying a devastating price.

Meanwhile, concerns over nuclear programmes persist and continue to drive tensions.

We have yet to see meaningful accountability for the use of chemical weapons.

There are signs of active arms competition, including the acquisition and use of new weapon technologies.

Serious deliberations on a Middle East zone free of nuclear, chemical and other weapons of mass destruction would be an opportunity for the States of the region to engage in direct dialogue on arrangements that could address their security requirements.

And, of course, the significance of a prospective Middle East zone extends far beyond the region.

I therefore hope this Conference will serve as the start of an inclusive process in which all the States of the region can participate.

In accordance with universally agreed principles, a Middle East zone will need to be a product of the specific circumstances of the region and strengthen the security of all States.

Numerous consensus resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on this matter have invited “all parties to consider the appropriate means that may contribute towards the goal of general and complete disarmament and the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the region of the Middle East.”

I hope all participants in this Conference heed this invitation, which should provide a basis to consider the concerns of all States.

We can take inspiration from the first successful proposal for a denuclearized zone – in Latin America and the Caribbean – which was tabled in the First Committee just weeks after the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Despite the tensions and politics of the Cold War, countries of the region persevered and in 1967 established a flexible and durable arrangement, which has served as a model for all such successive zones.

Let us be guided by their experience – and those of other regions – as we advance in all of our efforts across the disarmament agenda.

I wish you all the best for a successful Conference. Through my High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, I remain at your disposal to assist in this important effort.

Thank you.