

ACHIEVING THE POSSIBLE

A draft treaty for a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone
in the Middle East: Vision, Process, the UN General Assembly and the 2018 Round Tables

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A project has been established at UN House in Scotland to offer support for an initiative towards a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Middle East and the Scottish Government's contribution to this. The initiative is under the care of British American Security Information Council (BASIC), and led by individuals from within the Middle East; Scotland's involvement with it has arisen through informal collaborative disarmament activity and long-standing commitment to peace in the Middle East.

Scotland will facilitate an international closed door meeting under the Chatham House rule; The Edinburgh Preparative Conference.

Following lack of progress towards a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Free Zone in the Middle East (ME) at the 2010 NPT, in November 2013, the Israeli Disarmament Movement (IDM), alongside British and American Security Information Council (BASIC) and PAX, with support from Green Cross, held a round-table in Tel Aviv to consider ways forward and learn about the language, rhetoric, and fears of Israeli officials and others on this topic. The round-table was held with Israeli and international experts, Israeli foreign ministry staff, representatives of the Finnish, Swiss and Norwegian diplomats. It was the first time civil society hosted such an event in Israel.

After a second, shorter round table in Washington DC a year later, it was suspected that the stagnation in talks arises from lack of good will and an inability to see beyond the provenance of suggestions to their actual content. Utilising an exercise of visualising what the region would look like, and how behaviours would change if the treaty existed, a draft proposal for a WMD Free Zone in the ME was written, without attribution, so that its contents could be considered on their merits regardless of where they came from or who had written them. This enabled the possibility of identifying solutions to well aired difficulties, and highlighted a need for dialogue as an alternative to focusing on the obstacles.

A skeleton draft treaty, along with an outline for an organization in the zone – The Middle East Treaty Organization (METO) - was delivered to international and regional experts in 2017 with the proposal that discussions take place outside of the region so that venues could be seen as neutral. During 2017, UN-sponsored meetings for the nuclear ban treaty provided opportunities to do this.

Bill Kidd, MSP, Co-President of Parliamentarians for Non proliferation and Nuclear Disarmament, (PNND) and supporter of Nobel Peace Award laureate, the International Campaigner to Abolish nuclear Weapons (ICAN) convenor of the Scottish Parliament Nuclear Cross Party Group (NDCPG) has consistently represented the Scottish perspective to diplomats and civil society at UN disarmament talks as well as hosting innumerable international and Scottish meetings and events on the topic at the Scottish Parliament. Scotland is now seen as somewhere with a Parliament and Government that is interested in international peace and security, and although not at this time a UN member state it is without policies or political agenda on security doctrines in the Middle East. The Scottish Government were thus approached to usefully contribute to the process.

In a New York UN discussion with BASIC, the Irish delegation at the TPNW Conference, the Israeli Disarmament Movement and the American Iranian Council the suitability of Scotland as a location outside of the region for initial discussions of the "Achieving The Possible" was raised. The Scottish Government gave its imprimatur, and the event, named The Edinburgh Preparative Conference, was agreed as a possible way forward in a seemingly intractable situation.

Civil society organisations along with academics working together with both retired and active diplomats, has been a highlight of the UN's success in negotiating the TPNW, and is reflected in the process here. "Achieving The Possible" has the purpose of stimulating a positive, constructive conversation and keeping alive at the First Committee the vision of a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East. The draft is not intended for negotiation but as a stimulus to positive, constructive suggestions.

The Irish delegation at the United Nations General Assembly in New York hosted a Side Event for diplomats there in October to launch the process, and a modest grant from Nuclear Non-proliferation Research specifically allowed Scottish civil society to be there and report back to Scotland. It included input from BASIC, Israeli Disarmament Movement, and an Iranian policy adviser.

The Edinburgh based UN House – established in 2012 through cooperation between civil society UNA Scotland/Edinburgh Branch and UN Agencies has supported awareness raising on nuclear non proliferation, peace, security and disarmament. In 2013 UNA Edinburgh took a lead on the International Conference on a WMD Free zone in ME, and high level diplomatic presence from Finland and Russia and input from Israel and Palestine, hosted by Bill Kidd MSP. UN House is a partner organisation in ICAN and a member of the Scottish Parliament ND CPG.

The Edinburgh Preparative Conference will take place according to Chatham House Rules behind closed doors. Scottish Government Ministers will meet and greet participants. Any follow-up media release will be issued from the Scottish Government office. A reception at the parliament followed by a Burns Night at nearby Serenity cafe will allow appropriate cultural exchange with participants.

This step may ensure that by the time of the 2020 NPT Review Conference, there will be enough constructive attention and official negotiation to ensure the states in the region do not take negative dramatic steps such as leaving the NPT or claiming that WMD Free zone in ME is impossible. In May 2018 a new draft treaty can be presented to UN members at the NPT Preparatory Committee.

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