

# 2012 Conference on a Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction (MEW MDFZ)

## Press Statement

### Victoria Nuland

Department Spokesperson, Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

November 23, 2012

As a co-sponsor of the proposed conference on a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction (MEW MDFZ), envisioned in the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference Final Document, the United States regrets to announce that the conference cannot be convened because of present conditions in the Middle East and the fact that states in the region have not reached agreement on acceptable conditions for a conference.

The United States will continue to work seriously with our partners to create conditions for a meaningful conference. We are particularly grateful for the tireless efforts of Ambassador Jaakko Laajava, the appointed facilitator, supported by the United States, the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation and the UN Secretary General, to lay the groundwork for a successful conference against the backdrop of turmoil and dramatic political change taking place in the Middle East and Iran's continuing defiance of its international nonproliferation obligations.

The United States believes that a deep conceptual gap persists in the region on approaches toward regional security and arms control arrangements. These differences can only be bridged through direct engagement and agreement among the states in the region. Outside states cannot impose a process on the region any more than they can dictate an outcome. The mandate for a MEW MDFZ must come from the region itself. That principle must underlie any serious undertaking on this issue.

Looking ahead, we encourage states in the region to take a fresh look at the obstacles standing in the way of convening a conference and to begin to explore terms for a successful meeting. This will require that all parties agree on the purpose and scope of a conference and on an agenda and process that takes into account the legitimate security interests of all states in the region. We believe that this conference should discuss a broad agenda that covers regional security and all WMD issues, and that it must operate solely on the basis of consensus among regional parties.

These are appropriate guidelines for official dialogue on security issues in the Middle East where none currently exists. They provide the necessary assurance that states can attend a conference on an equal footing. We would not support a conference in which any regional state would be subject to pressure or isolation.

The United States will continue to work with our partners to support an outcome in which states in the region approach this issue on the basis of mutual respect and understanding and with acknowledgement of the challenges inherent in advancing regional security and arms control. A conference handled this way, with direct engagement of the regional states, will enjoy the greatest prospects for success.

The United States fully supports the goal of a Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction and we stand by our commitments. We further note our view that a comprehensive and durable peace in the region and full

compliance by all regional states with their arms control and nonproliferation obligations are essential precursors for the establishment of such a zone.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/11/200987.htm>