

**COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2023/1306****of 26 June 2023****in support of a project on a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East (ME WMDFZ) in an evolving regional security environment**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on European Union, and in particular Article 28(1) and Article 31(1) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,

Whereas:

- (1) The 2016 European Union Global Strategy for the Union's Foreign and Security Policy as well as the 2003 European Union Strategy against the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) are founded on the conviction that a multilateral approach to security, including disarmament and non-proliferation, provides the best way to maintain international order.
- (2) The Union's policy, therefore, is to uphold, implement and strengthen the implementation and universalisation of existing disarmament and non-proliferation treaties, agreements, and norms and to cooperate with and assist third countries in the fulfilment of their obligations under multilateral conventions and regimes.
- (3) The Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean of 13 July 2008, which established the Union for the Mediterranean, reaffirmed the common aspiration to achieve peace as well as regional security, as set out in the Barcelona Declaration adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of 27-28 November 1995, *inter alia*, by adhering to international WMD Treaties and Conventions, as well as by means of regional arrangements such as zones free of nuclear weapons.
- (4) The 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference emphasised the importance of a process leading to the full implementation of its 1995 Resolution on the Middle East (the '1995 Resolution'). To that end, the 2010 NPT Review Conference endorsed practical steps, *inter alia*, consideration of all offers aimed at supporting the implementation of the 1995 Resolution, including the offer of the Union to host a follow-up seminar related to the one organised in June 2008.
- (5) The 2010 NPT Review Conference further recognised the important role played by civil society in contributing to the implementation of the 1995 Resolution and encouraged all efforts in that regard.
- (6) In his Agenda for Disarmament 'Securing our Common Future' presented on 24 May 2018, the United Nations Secretary-General pledged to work with UN Member States to strengthen and consolidate nuclear-weapon-free zones, including by supporting further establishment of such zones, including in the Middle East.
- (7) The Union has continuously expressed its readiness to assist in the process leading to the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East (ME WMDFZ) by supporting confidence-building processes, in particular through Union seminars and workshops such as those held in 2008, 2011 and 2012, as well as through the Union-supported project from 2019 to 2023 by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) on confidence-building measures leading to such a zone, pursuant to Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/938 <sup>(1)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/938 of 6 June 2019 in support of a process of confidence-building leading to the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East (OJ L 149, 7.6.2019, p. 63).

- (8) The Union wishes to continue to support a process leading to a ME WMDFZ by continuing to support work by UNIDIR to that effect,

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

*Article 1*

1. For the purpose of advancing the Union's commitment to establishing a ME WMDFZ, the Union shall support a project by UNIDIR with the following overarching objectives:
  - assisting in mitigating regional WMD proliferation trends;
  - encouraging regional security arrangements and arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament norms and processes;
  - developing a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between the ME WMDFZ and current regional and international developments; and
  - promoting an effective, verifiable, inclusive, and sustainable ME WMDFZ.
2. A detailed description of the project is set out in the Project Document in the Annex.

*Article 2*

1. The High Representative ('HR') shall be responsible for the implementation of this Decision.
2. The technical implementation of the project referred to in Article 1(1) shall be carried out by UNIDIR, which shall perform this task under the responsibility of the HR. For that purpose, the HR shall enter into the necessary arrangements with UNIDIR.

*Article 3*

1. The financial reference amount for the implementation of the project referred to in Article 1(1) shall be EUR 2 099 969.
2. The expenditure financed by the amount set out in paragraph 1 shall be managed in accordance with the rules and procedures applicable to the general budget of the Union.
3. The Commission shall supervise the proper management of the expenditure financed by the amount referred to in paragraph 1. For that purpose, it shall conclude a contribution agreement with UNIDIR. That agreement shall stipulate that UNIDIR is to ensure visibility of the Union contribution, appropriate to its size.
4. The Commission shall endeavour to conclude the contribution agreement referred to in paragraph 3 as soon as possible after the entry into force of this Decision. It shall inform the Council of any difficulties in that process and of the date of conclusion of that agreement.

*Article 4*

1. The HR shall report to the Council on the implementation of this Decision on the basis of 12-monthly narrative reports prepared by UNIDIR. Those reports shall form the basis for the evaluation by the end of the project carried out by the Council.
2. The Commission shall provide information on the financial aspects of the implementation of the project referred to in Article 1(1).

*Article 5*

1. This Decision shall enter into force on the date of its adoption.
2. This Decision shall expire 36 months after the date of the conclusion of the contribution agreement referred to in Article 3(3). However, it shall expire six months after its entry into force if no financing agreement has been concluded by that time.

Done at Luxembourg, 26 June 2023.

*For the Council*  
*The President*  
J. BORRELL FONTELLES

---

## ANNEX

**Project in support of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East (ME WMDFZ) in an evolving regional security environment**

The Middle East is witnessing changes and an increase in instability, sources of insecurity and in the acquisition and use of conventional weapons and concerns over further use and proliferation of non-conventional weapons. As a result of the latter and other global events, the regional security environment is undergoing significant changes which could have lasting implications for regional and international WMD proliferation. UNIDIR's proposed project will promote WMD nonproliferation, arms control, and disarmament norms and objectives in the Middle East by supporting the ME WMDFZ initiative and regional security relevant processes through policy-relevant research, capacity building, and dialogue.

**Context and Rationale**

Globally, the nonproliferation regimes are in the midst of a crisis. Over the last two decades, these tools have weakened as geopolitical interests have been prioritized over nonproliferation, arms control, and disarmament measures. The failure to adopt a Final Document for the second consecutive NPT Review Conference is only one example but a clear demonstration of the crisis the regimes are currently undergoing. Against this broad geostrategic backdrop, the security environment of the Middle East is also undergoing major changes. Domestically, social unrest or civil war resulted in continuous instability, which caused the displacement of populations, hereby affecting security and stability in neighboring regions. Ongoing instability also affected the capacity of governments in the region to address foreign policy issues, such as participating in multilateral and regional initiatives to counter WMD proliferation. Regionally, alliances have shifted, upending longstanding regional power balances and imbalances. In addition, actions taken by extra-regional actors such as military presence, activities, and support, along with military withdrawals have also shaken the security environment in the region.

The combination of domestic and regional instabilities resulted in two parallel processes that potentially have lasting implications for regional and international WMD proliferation. On the one hand, the region witnessed an increase in the acquisition and use of conventional and potentially non-conventional weapons, as well as the adoption (or threat of adoption) of nuclear hedging capabilities, which are taking place against the backdrop of existing WMD capabilities. On the other hand, regional states have displayed enhanced readiness to address their regional security problems through regional and sub-regional negotiations, as exemplified by the Abraham Accords, the Yemen ceasefire, Israel-Lebanon maritime demarcation agreement, Iranian-Saudi and Iranian-Emirati dialogues, and the ongoing efforts to negotiate a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone at the United Nations. While these two trends may seem contradictory in terms of their implications for WMD proliferation, they may well—and most probably will—continue to take place in parallel.

**Project objectives**

The proposed project will have four overarching objectives:

- Assist in mitigating regional WMD proliferation trends.
- Encourage regional security arrangements and arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament norms and processes.
- Develop a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between the ME WMDFZ and current regional and international developments, and
- Promote an effective, verifiable, inclusive, and sustainable ME WMDFZ.

**Project Approach**

The project will enact a holistic approach, tackling all the components of research, collecting ideas, generating new proposals, capacity building, and dialogue, and working to reach out and include diverse participants and audiences. The proposed project will achieve these by implementing three workstreams (outcomes) and their associated outputs:

- Workstream 1: Deepen understanding and appreciation of the causes, motivations, and risks associated with regional WMD proliferation to identify solutions to enhance regional security and promote regional solutions to WMD proliferation in the Middle East. Workstream 1 aims to increase awareness and understanding of the factors driving the spread of WMD in the Middle East region. The goal is to identify the root causes of WMD proliferation, including strategic, political, or other motivations, as well as the associated risks and consequences. The ultimate overall objective of this workstream is to identify practical solutions to enhance regional security and prevent WMD proliferation in the Middle East. This includes promoting ongoing and new regional security processes as well as the ME WMDFZ initiative, which would prohibit the possession, production, and use of WMD in the region and promote disarmament and nonproliferation efforts. By deepening understanding of the challenges and exploring potential solutions, Workstream 1 aims to support the development of a more secure and stable Middle East.
- Workstream 2: Build regional capacity to enhance understanding of the problems and ability to identify solutions related to the negotiations and implementation of the ME WMDFZ. The objective of this Workstream 2 is to increase the capacity of Middle Eastern countries to engage effectively in the negotiations and implementation of regional security processes in general, and in particular, the ME WMDFZ. This includes strengthening the ability of regional actors to understand the complexities of the WMD proliferation problem, as well as developing their capacity to identify and implement practical solutions. Activities in these workstream will involve providing training and capacity-building programs for government officials, experts, and other relevant stakeholders, as well as supporting the expansion of the targeted audience in the region. The overall goal is to create a more informed and engaged regional community that is better equipped to address the challenges of WMD proliferation and promote regional security. By building regional capacity and enhancing understanding of the issues, this workstream aims to support the effective negotiation and implementation of ongoing and new regional security process, including the ME WMDFZ, and by extension, encourage other regional security arrangements and arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament processes.
- Workstream 3: Support an effective, verifiable, inclusive, and sustainable ME WMDFZ. In order to ensure that the ME WMDFZ is comprehensive, effective, and verifiable, workstream 3 will also focus on supporting technical and legal aspects related to the negotiations and implementation of the zone. Ultimately, the goal of this workstream is to promote an ME WMDFZ that is attainable and sustainable, i.e. it can be achieved and will endure over time and continue to serve as a key tool for enhancing regional security and preventing WMD proliferation in the Middle East.

### **Project Activities and Expected Outputs**

The project will conduct activities, hold events, and publish reports to promote the four overhaul activities throughout the three workstreams.

Workstream 1: Deepen understanding and appreciation of the causes, motivations, and risks associated with regional WMD proliferation with the aim of identifying solutions to enhance regional security and promote the ME WMDFZ as one of the solutions to WMD proliferation in the Middle East. Under this workstream, the project will:

- Convene two or more roundtables to discuss current regional and international developments and their impact on regional threat perceptions. This will involve bringing together experts, government officials, and other relevant stakeholders to exchange views and perspectives on regional security challenges and to discuss ways to enhance regional cooperation and stability.
- Conduct research mapping regional threat perceptions, review of the toolkit for achieving arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament as well as regional security, and identifying how regional security processes as well as the ME WMDFZ can address these challenges. This research will involve a comprehensive analysis of the factors driving WMD proliferation in the region, as well as an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of existing regional security processes and mechanisms.
- Publish a paper that summarizes the findings of the research and identifies ways to mitigate the causes, motivations, and risks associated with regional WMD proliferation. This paper will provide policy takeaways for enhancing regional security processes and promoting the ME WMDFZ as one of the key tools for preventing the spread of WMD in the Middle East.

By convening roundtables, conducting research, and publishing a paper, these efforts aim to increase understanding of regional threat perceptions and to identify practical solutions for enhancing regional security and preventing WMD proliferation in the Middle East.

Workstream 2: Build regional capacity to enhance understanding of the problems and ability to identify solutions related to the negotiations and implementation of the ME WMDFZ. Under this workstream, the project will:

- Create networks of individuals and institutions who work on and promote regional security including on the ME WMDFZ to strengthen understanding of the issues with the objective that they can inform their national policies and engage in ongoing and future discussions. This will involve establishing partnerships with existing organizations and initiatives, as well as supporting the development of new networks and alliances dedicated to promoting the ME WMDFZ. The goal is to establish, strengthen and integrate existing efforts to promote the ME WMDFZ and to maximize its impact on regional security.
- Organize at least two capacity-building workshops for regional officials and experts to enhance understanding of issues related to regional security, proliferation of WMD and efforts to address these, including on the negotiations and implementation of the ME WMDFZ. These workshops will provide training and educational opportunities for participants to deepen their knowledge and skills and to develop practical negotiation and implementation solutions.
- Maintain and enhance the ME WMDFZ online tools on the UNIDIR website. This will involve updating existing resources and materials, as well as developing new online tools and resources to support the promotion and implementation of the ME WMDFZ.
- Translate at least three publications into regional languages. This will help the development of terminology in the local languages and by extension the understanding by current and future regional experts, increase access to information and resources related to the ME WMDFZ among regional audiences and to promote its visibility and understanding in the region.

By creating networks, organizing capacity-building workshops, maintaining, and enhancing online tools, and translating publications, these efforts aim to promote regional security efforts and the ME WMDFZ and to enhance regional capacity to effectively engage in their negotiation and implementation.

Workstream 3: Promote an effective, verifiable, inclusive, and sustainable ME WMDFZ.

- Publish at least three policy papers addressing issues that are challenges in the negotiations and/or implementation of the ME WMDFZ. These papers will address a range of issues related to regional security, disarmament, and non-proliferation, and provide implications and options for addressing these challenges. They will provide a comprehensive and informed analysis of the key challenges facing the ME WMDFZ and contribute to its successful negotiation and implementation.
- Convene at least two public events to discuss issues pertinent to the negotiations and implementation of the ME WMDFZ. These events will bring together experts, government officials, and other relevant stakeholders to discuss and exchange views on the challenges and opportunities related to the ME WMDFZ.
- Provide briefings and offer support to ongoing ME WMDFZ efforts related to its implementation and to other regional security processes. This will involve providing support and advice to relevant stakeholders.

By publishing policy papers, convening public events, and providing briefings and support, these efforts aim to contribute to the negotiations and implementation of the ME WMDFZ and to address key challenges that may arise during these processes.

### **Intended audience**

The proposed project will contribute to arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation efforts both regionally and internationally. The intended audience includes three overlapping groups:

- Policymakers and diplomats in the region working on arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation as well as regional security issues. This includes also regional officials and experts, and those who work in regional and multilateral fora, including the NPT, CWC, BWC Review Conferences, and the ME WMDFZ Conference. A special focus will be placed on reaching out to less represented groups such as young policymakers, experts, women, and scientists from the region who are often absent from conversations.

- International security policy makers, diplomats, and researchers, particularly those with a focus on arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their delivery systems in the Middle East as well as the ME WMDFZ and regional security, or emerging technologies.
- Middle East scholars and practitioners who seek to track and understand the rapidly changing dynamics of the region, its Member States, and its populations, the implications of shifting alliances and capabilities on regional security, and the prospects of preventing and mitigating current and future sources of tension, conflicts, and proliferation.

### **Project Time frame**

The project is expected to begin in mid-July 2023 and continue for 36 months. It is expected to conclude in July 2026. The final project narrative and financial reports will be produced by late 2026.

### **Project governance and oversight**

This project will be undertaken under the auspices of United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). UNIDIR is an autonomous institution within the framework of the United Nations established in 1980 for the purpose of undertaking independent research on disarmament and related problems, particularly international security issues. Located in Geneva, it has a global reputation and longstanding expertise on WMD issues, including a significant institutional memory and archive of disarmament processes, including NPT and nuclear weapons free zones around the world, and a substantial publications record, all of which is publicly accessible and available online free of charge.

An important component of UNIDIR's functions is to convene and facilitate informal dialogue among diverse experts on disarmament issues ranging from WMD issues to new and emerging weapons technologies. UNIDIR, therefore, has a wide network on which to draw and experience in organizing meetings in Geneva and elsewhere, and preparing summary reports and follow up.

UNIDIR is governed by a Board of Trustees that also serves as the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, to which the Director of UNIDIR reports. The Board of Trustees brings together a diverse group of experts from around the world, all of whom serve in their personal capacity and who meet twice a year to review UNIDIR's substantive and financial activities. The Board of Trustees reports annually on its work to the UN Secretary-General. The UNIDIR Director is responsible for the organization, direction, and administration of UNIDIR, including its substantive research outputs as well as its financial and administrative processes.

While UNIDIR is an autonomous organization, it follows UN Financial Rules and Regulations, and its finances are subject to audit by the UN Board of Auditors. All project finances are administered and managed through Umoja and are subject to quarterly review. UNIDIR reports on individual project progress and finances to relevant donors on at least an annual basis and up to a quarterly basis, depending on the requirements of the individual donor.

---