

### *Brief report on the issue of strengthening the NWFZ regime*

Establishing a Zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and a Northeast Asian NWFZ, strengthening of established zones and of P5 security assurances to NWFZs and their states have been discussed at different fora, including at the latest NPT Revcon and Prepcom. I would like to focus your attention on the issue of single-State zones.

Blue Banner, Mongolian NGO dedicated to promoting non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament had undertaken a study on the strengths and weaknesses of the current NWFZ regime mindful of Mongolia's extensive experience in promoting the country's nuclear-weapon-free status and acquiring a joint P5 declaration pledging that they would respect its status and would not contribute to any act that would violate it. The study has demonstrated that the current concept and practice of establishing NWFZs "on the basis of arrangements agreed upon by the states of a region concerned" leave out many states that due to their geographical location, valid political and legal reasons cannot be part of the current NWFZ regime. The conclusion was that the current definition and concept of establishing NWFZs need to be made inclusive since various political blind spots and large grey areas are emerging that would become the Achilles' heel of the regime. As is well known, any system is only strong as its weakest link. The NWFZ regime is not an exception.

The study has also revealed that there are nearly two dozen states, including neutral states, states in the region where its most influential states have become *de facto* nuclear weapon states as well as numerous small island states situated on strategically important military and trade routes with extensive and rich exclusive economic zones (EEZs) cannot form part of the current regime. Cumulatively the number of these states and territories they cover are larger than some established zones. Thus for example Papua New Guinea with a land territory of nearly 460.000 km<sup>2</sup> has an EEZ of nearly 2.7 mln km<sup>2</sup>.

The role of individual states in this increasingly integrated world is growing, making each state not only a beneficiary of the current international order but also a potential contributor to global stability and security based on its comparative advantage. On the other hand, great power rivalry, which did not cease with the end of the last cold war, does not rule out or even implies making use of the non-committed states in their rivalry as seen in Europe and western Pacific.

Time, space and technology are becoming major geopolitical factors. The nuclear arms race is increasing vertically and can easily do so horizontally; nuclear weapon states are trying to use their weapons as political instruments of pressure and blackmail not only against other nuclear weapon states (NWSs) but also non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWSs). Therefore inclusion of individual NNWSs in the NWFZ regime is acquiring vital importance. Knowing well the global ambitions of NWSs, their inclination to address international issues first and foremost from their own narrow interests and their forsaking providing viable security assurances to NWFZs, Blue Banner had concluded that there should also be a softer version of the NWFZ regime reflecting

the realities of the post-cold war era. Thus individual NNWSs could adopt national legislations or make statements banning the use of their territory, including their EEZs to the detriment of interests of other states. In return the P5 until, NFWF is established, could make a joint declaration to respect the legislations and policies of such states and not to contribute to any act that would violate them, i.e. a *security assurances lite* like it was in Mongolia's case. These understandings need to be duly supported by the IAEA or by establishing inclusive regional verification mechanisms reflecting the specific cases. However, it should be pointed out that it is up to every individual state to decide whether to make use of such political and legal protection to be established or find other ways to promote its security interests.

If the right of individual states to political or legal protection is recognized and supported internationally, besides eliminating the Achilles' heel these individual states would form natural indispensable building blocks of the NWFZ regime and contribute to establishing a nuclear-weapon-free world (NFWF). UN Secretary General António Guterres in 2022, mindful of Mongolia's experience had declared it as an inspiring example of positive contribution that individual states can make towards a NFWF.

Based on initial [positive responses, to this issue Blue Banner is ready to work with interested NGOs and think tanks to promote this issue of making NWFZs inclusive as a their contribution to global common good.

***J. Enkhsaikhan*** on behalf of Blue Banner NGO  
***Ulaanbaatar, February 2024***