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Nuclear-free Middle East

Conference needs an urgent go-ahead



The proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction represents one of the most serious threats to international stability and security, particularly in the region of the Middle East. With momentum for a conference on a nuclear-weapons-free Middle East being lost, the Greens/EFA group took a stand to ensure the decision for the conference made in 2010 is followed through. The European Parliament (EP) voted today on a resolution by Green MEP and group spokesperson on security and defence, Tarja Cronberg, regretting the postponement of the 2012 Conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, and calling for a new date to be set as soon as possible. The Greens/EFA group wanted to take a stand on the planned conference on a nuclear free Middle East because there is the risk that the decision taken in 2010 on a conference to be held in 2012 is losing its momentum. More than ever - with the crisis around the Iranian nuclear programme and the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria - there is the urgent need to hold such a conference. In today's resolution, the EP urges the UN, the EU and its member states, as well as Russia, and the US, to make sure that the Conference, which was supposed to take place in Helsinki last December, will indeed take place as soon as possible in 2013. The issue is urgent, with continued tensions over the Iranian nuclear programme, and a Syrian government that still controls one of the most powerful and dangerous chemical weapons arsenals in the world. The speedy establishment of a Middle East zone is a priority step towards building trust and dispelling the spectre of war. Commenting on the resolution, draftsperson Tarja Cronberg (Finland) said: *"There is a need for confidence building measures and the EU should play a key role in these using all its diplomatic power to break the current stalemate in the process. Russia has before called for the conference to be organised before April 2013 and I would like the EU to*

commit to this timetable." "The highest security priority is preventing the governments in the region from obtaining or using nuclear weapons, as well as reducing existing stockpiles" adds Cronberg." The Middle East would not be the first nuclear-weapon-free-zone. A number of such zones already exist for other regions of the world, for example Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa and Central Asia.

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