

**STATEMENT OF WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE
AND FREEDOM – UNITED STATES SECTION – ON IRAN
AND SUPPORT FOR A WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION FREE ZONE
IN THE MIDDLE EAST**



We in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section (WILPF US) are dismayed by current drumbeats for war and calls for increased sanctions on Iran. This is reminiscent of build up to the Shock and Awe invasion of Iraq in 2003. Fear of nuclear weapons development is again given as the rationale. This time there are major differences and alternatives that could move us toward the global abolition of nuclear weapons. The way will not be easy but is infinitely preferable to the dangerous war that will inevitably be the result of current policies. It is time to lift the sanctions^{1, 2} and to stop the war talk.³ We need to open the way to future peace and stability in the Middle East. We urge women and men committed to a world of peace, human rights and security for all to participate significantly in coming negotiations.

The Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMD FZ)^{4, 5} is a positive alternative to war and military actions for which United Nations (UN) member states have been working through the UN since 1980. At the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference all 187 nations party to that treaty, including the United States, agreed unanimously to hold a high-level conference among the Middle Eastern states to establish a WMD Free Zone. This year, for the first time, it is possible to begin the negotiations on the proposed WMD Free Zone treaty. Helsinki was chosen as the site for this high-level conference (the "2012 Helsinki Conference") in which all Middle Eastern States are invited to participate. The goal is to ban nuclear, chemical and biological weapons use, production, stationing, stockpiling or transport in the Middle East.

The United States (US) approved the 2012 Helsinki Conference; however, there is little discussion of a diplomatic alternative to military aggression. Almost half the world is already united in nuclear weapons free zones and movements are underway in most of the remaining regions to universalize this approach.

Few realize that Iran, with Egypt's support, first introduced the Middle East Nuclear Free Zone Resolution to the United Nations in 1974. In 1990 Egypt introduced an expansion of the Resolution to the current Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone, an approach which Iran has continued to support. Many US citizens however do not yet know about nor understand the long history and significance of the proposed WMD Free Zone.⁶

While 64% of the Israeli public believe a WMD-Free Zone should exist in the Middle East, the Israeli government disagrees.^{7, 8} Israel instigated the current furor over development of a nuclear capability by Iran. The only nation in the region possessing nuclear weapons, conservatively estimated at over 200 nuclear warheads, Israel is also the only nation in the region refusing to sign the NPT.

The US government recently allocated \$3.075 billion to Israel for military usage,⁹ up over \$75 million from fiscal year 2011. It is purportedly for defensive use, but other nations in the region – both Arab states and non-Arab states such as Iran – perceive it as offensive in nature. Unless there are signs of peace between Israel and the neighboring countries there is little chance that an agenda promoting peace and security in the region will move forward.

Iran regularly submits to the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) and other inspections of its nuclear facilities yet receives a steady barrage of threats from Israel. Iran's domestic nuclear energy program, authorized under the NPT as are those of dozens of other countries, thus far does not appear to IAEA inspectors to have a weapons component. Along with Israel's refusal to be inspected, the threat of an Israeli attack on Iran is very real. The US government, disregarding reports by nuclear inspectors and relying on accusations made by Israel, has ramped up its verbal attacks, specifically against Iran's nuclear site at Natanz which Iran has agreed to allow to be inspected.¹⁰

The aggressive Israeli and US stance is counter-productive and does not constitute diplomacy. The US should, instead, encourage Israel to cease its threatening language, to make peace with its neighbors and to join other nations in the region to create a zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction. Both sides – Israel and Iran – have taken rigid positions, but could benefit from sitting together at the peace table, lowering the level of verbal assaults and reassuring one another of their intentions to maintain peace in the region.

The United States has a responsibility to make the 2012 Helsinki Conference happen and to contribute to a positive outcome. Most of us can recognize as recipes for disaster shortsighted goals of war to secure resources and profits. It is recognized that oil has as much or more to do with the long-escalating enmity¹¹ between Iran and the United States than the threat of currently non-existent nuclear weapons or hyperbolic verbal threats against Israel.

The US, Britain and Russia will be expected to join the conference as depositories of the NPT which has called for this meeting. The US should be able to work closely with all the participants in the 2012 Helsinki Conference.

The way to peace is difficult. We believe it demands more courage and wisdom than the ways of war, death and destruction. We call on everyone to work in the direction of a just peace. Civilians, particularly older people, women and children, are casualties of economic sanctions and military interventions. War brings intolerable suffering on everyone, threatens global ecosystems, and the survival of future generations. WILPF US strongly urges the equal participation of women in the Helsinki Conference and in all decision-making processes related to Middle East peace agreements as mandated in Security Council Resolution 1325.¹²

NOTE ABOUT RESOURCES REFERENCES: If you are viewing this document electronically, all of the references marked with hyperlinks will take you to the sources we have identified – you may need to hit “Ctrl” and a mouse click to make this work but maybe just a click will work. If you are viewing this document on paper and do not have access to the document online, but you have access to a computer, you may manually type in the address bar any of the “tinyurl.com” shortcuts shown below (use the entire set of letters and symbols within each parentheses pair) and you will be taken to the sources we have identified.

¹ [Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 \(H.R. 2194\)](http://www.tinyurl.com/HR-2194) (www.tinyurl.com/HR-2194)

² See the [Iran Toolkit](http://www.tinyurl.com/Toolkit-Iran) of WILPF’s *Reaching Critical Will* project on possible unintended consequences within Iran of US sanctions and aggressive posturing toward Iran over its nuclear program (www.tinyurl.com/Toolkit-Iran)

³ WILPF US is an endorser of the [United for Peace and Justice \(UFPJ\) “No War on Iran” Statement, 3/15/12](http://www.tinyurl.com/UFPJ-NoIranWar) (www.tinyurl.com/UFPJ-NoIranWar)

⁴ Originally envisioned as the Middle East *Nuclear Free Zone* (*emphasis added*). See material at footnotes 5 and 6

⁵ [Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone](http://www.tinyurl.com/MEWMDFZ) (www.tinyurl.com/MEWMDFZ)

⁶ [Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone](http://www.tinyurl.com/MEWMDFZ) (www.tinyurl.com/MEWMDFZ)

⁷ In an article by Richard Falk, Al Jazeera, of February 2, 2012, “A Nuclear-Free Middle East” published on www.readersupportednews.org, Falk reiterates the results of this poll by Shirley Telhami of Israeli citizens and talks further about the possibility of not just a WMD Free Zone but a Nuclear Free Zone in the Middle East. See [Falk on a Nuclear Free Middle East](http://www.tinyurl.com/Falk-020212) (www.tinyurl.com/Falk-020212). The New York Times article by Telhami and Kull (January 15, 2012) is here: [Peaceful ME Nuclear Free Zone?](http://www.tinyurl.com/Telhami-Kull-NYTimes) (www.tinyurl.com/Telhami-Kull-NYTimes)

⁸ See [Telhami 2011 Public Opinion Poll](http://www.tinyurl.com/Telhami-Brookings) (www.tinyurl.com/Telhami-Brookings) reported out by the Brookings Institute; the poll results themselves are here: [Telhami Poll Maryland 2011](http://www.tinyurl.com/TelhamiPollResults) (www.tinyurl.com/TelhamiPollResults)

⁹ *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, March/April 2012, p. 31 ([WRMEA ME appropriations 2012](http://www.tinyurl.com/WRMEA-31)) (www.tinyurl.com/WRMEA-31)

¹⁰ WILPF US is an endorser of the Iran Pledge of Resistance campaign. See <http://www.iranpledge.org/> for more information and text of the pledge and what situations that would trigger implementation of the promise to take action

¹¹ A succinct but not particularly deep description of this history is offered in a 2009 student newspaper article from the University of Georgia on the topic, here: [US-Iran History Highlights](http://www.tinyurl.com/US-IranOverview) (www.tinyurl.com/US-IranOverview). Independent research can provide many detailed histories of these events with analyses

¹² United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (see text at [UN SCR 1325 Text](http://www.tinyurl.com/1325text)) (www.tinyurl.com/1325text) (see analysis and history by WILPF’s *PeaceWomen* project at [UN SCR 1325 Analysis-History](http://www.tinyurl.com/1325analysis)) (www.tinyurl.com/1325analysis)