



**United Nations Office
for Disarmament Affairs**

**Keynote Remarks at “Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones:
From the Comprehensive Study to Practical Cooperation”**

**Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

As delivered



23 October 2026
New York

Excellencies,

Your Excellency, Ambassador Umarov,

Distinguished colleagues and friends,

It's a pleasure to be here today, and, obviously, I thank the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan for convening this Forum in partnership with us – the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

As you know, I am regularly here at the Kazakh Mission and also at this Forum. It has been very useful informal platform where we could come together and have interesting and substantive discussions. Today's Forum marks two important milestones: the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia, and the completion of a new comprehensive United Nations study on nuclear-weapon-free zones, the first such study in fifty years – it was an important initiative.

These achievements remind us that progress in nuclear disarmament depends not only on global negotiations, but also on the decisions States take together to strengthen their security.

Just over twenty years ago, on 8 September 2006, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan signed the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon Free Zone Treaty in Semipalatinsk. The choice of location, as you can imagine, was deeply symbolic, given the legacy of nuclear testing at the nearby former test site, which had been closed fifteen years earlier from the signing date. Through their collective efforts, the five Central Asian States established a legally binding framework to keep their region free of nuclear weapons, with the Treaty entering into force in 2009.

That achievement is significant not simply for its commitments, but because it demonstrates that the persistence and cooperation required to reach agreement can deliver meaningful results and enhance regional and also international peace and security.

Nuclear-weapon-free zones do not emerge by default. They are the result of deliberate political choices by the States concerned, informed by their security interests and sustained through continued dialogue. And today, they encompass over 100 States and nearly 40% of the world's population. Each has been the product of different historical and security circumstances, but all reflect a common desire to make progress towards a world without nuclear weapons.

For this reason, the significance of nuclear-weapon-free zones extends well beyond the regions that they cover. In a narrow sense, the States that are part of these zones have agreed to exclude nuclear weapons from their own regions and have sustained that commitment over time.

But in doing so, they have made a tangible contribution towards global nuclear disarmament as well. They have reinforced the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. And they have become living examples, if you will, of the value of regional cooperation.

Such achievements are particularly important – and increasingly scarce – in today's challenging international security environment. For this reason, we must work together to amplify the zones' contributions, through closer cooperation and coordination among them, through sustained engagement with nuclear-weapon States, including on treaty protocols and also negative security assurances and by applying the lessons drawn from decades of experience in establishing and maintaining such zones.

Excellencies,

The first comprehensive study on nuclear-weapon-free zones was completed in 1975. At the time, the Treaty of Tlatelolco had established an important precedent, but the international community had only limited experience from which to draw.

Nonetheless, that study addressed foundational issues: the defining characteristics of a zone; the responsibilities of its members; and the verification arrangements and assurances that might be needed to make it effective. It helped provide a framework for later efforts that took different forms around the world and in different places.

Today, we have more extensive experience in negotiating nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties, implementing them, developing institutions and engaging with nuclear-weapon States. And we have learned what challenges remain after a treaty is signed. Protocols, negative security assurances, and the needs of treaty implementation institutions – all demand continued commitment and also consideration.

Against this background, the Qualified Group of Experts adopted the new Comprehensive Study on Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones, by consensus, in July. The Study was published in late September, and I hope that you all had an opportunity to take a look at it.

At a time when any agreement on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation issues is difficult to reach, the Group's consensus adoption of the study, I think, is an achievement in itself. Yet the study's lasting value will depend on what follows. The experts have provided a comprehensive assessment and identified possible ways forward. It is now for the international community and for all of us to consider how best to build on this outcome.

In this sense, the study represents a passing of the baton, if you will, from the experts to the States parties and institutions of the existing zones, interested Member States, including nuclear-weapon States, and the United Nations.

Not all recommendations require the same approach or will move forward at the same pace either. Some offer opportunities for practical progress in the near term. More regular exchanges among existing zones, and Kazakhstan has already helped to do that in the past by organizing very important workshops that you hosted. That could help strengthen institutional cooperation, facilitate the sharing of experience and address challenges of common concern.

Other recommendations will require sustained political engagement, particularly those concerning treaty protocols and negative security assurances. Continued dialogue will be essential to addressing outstanding questions, building confidence and identifying possible ways forward.

Looking further ahead, the experience accumulated by existing zones and by Mongolia, of course, is valuable to States considering new arrangements. While each region has its own political and security circumstances, there are common lessons to be learned from negotiating, establishing and maintaining nuclear-weapon-free zones. These can help inform future efforts.

For its part, we at UNODA stand ready to facilitate cooperation, where appropriate, encourage dialogue and provide support to interested stakeholders and relevant institutions as well.

This is where I see value in today's Forum, discussions we are going to have. Beyond reflecting on the study's findings, we have an opportunity to consider which recommendations could be taken forward, how more regular cooperation among the zones might be sustained, and where further engagement with nuclear-weapon States could help advance outstanding issues.

I hope that our discussion will help identify some of the concrete priorities and practical steps for the period ahead.

Now, as we mark the twentieth anniversary of the Central Asian Treaty, and welcome the completion of the new comprehensive study, we are reminded that nuclear-weapon-free zones remain a practical and proven contribution to international peace and security.

The anniversary offers an opportunity to reflect on a notable achievement. The study, of course, provides guidance for the future.

Together, they underscore the importance of not only sustaining, but also strengthening, this important pillar of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation architecture.

I am confident that today's Forum will help take our work forward and it's a very important and very useful pillar of nuclear disarmament.

I am looking forward to the conversations, and thank you very much for your attention.