



**United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs and James Martin Center
for Nonproliferation Studies joint webinar on the Southeast Asia
Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty**

**Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

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Virtual Event
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Distinguished panelists,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to participate in this event co-organized with our dear friends and colleagues from the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies.

The purpose of today's event is to refocus the spotlight on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, also known as the Bangkok Treaty. Negotiated in 1995, the Bangkok Treaty was the third nuclear-weapon-free zone to be established and takes its roots from the 1971 declaration by ASEAN States on the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality.

Yet more than a quarter of a century after its negotiation, the Treaty remains unable to fulfil its potential, largely due to the ongoing impasse related to the signature and ratification of the Treaty's Protocol by the nuclear-weapon States (NWS).

This is unfortunate, because the Treaty of Bangkok is an essential element of the wide array of cooperation modalities and agreements in Southeast Asia, all united under the umbrella that is the comprehensive ASEAN framework. Preserving Southeast Asia as a region free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction has remained a consistent priority for ASEAN Member States and has been duly reflected as such in the corresponding Plans of Action for the full implementation of the Treaty's provisions.

Those provisions fully reinforce the three pillars of the NPT – nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy – and reflect its States Parties' strong support for the NPT as the centerpiece of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

The relationship between nuclear-weapon-free zones and the NPT is a mutually-reinforcing one as provided for under Article VII of the latter. It is a relationship that plays a key role in

fulfilling the NPT's purpose – pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons – and is reflected in the fact that nuclear weapon-free zones, such as Southeast Asia, are invited by NPT States Parties to provide updates on their activities to the NPT's Review Conference.

More recently, ASEAN States have played a leading role in efforts to highlight the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and in the negotiation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Both are consistent with the Bangkok Treaty's commitment to the complete disarmament of nuclear weapons. ASEAN States have played key roles in preparations for the Treaty's first Meeting of the States Parties.

The Treaty of Bangkok is an indispensable tool for advancing global efforts to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world and enhance global and regional peace and security. It is, therefore, urgent to find a way to bridge the divergent positions between ASEAN and the NWS regarding the signature and ratification of the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Protocol.

Ratification of the Protocol would allow the zone to achieve its full potential. It would improve the security not only of States Parties but also the NWS as it would both ensure that Southeast Asia would not be a theater of nuclear competition and help to reduce nuclear risks in the region. Given the current geopolitical climate – one in which NWS are engaged in increasingly dangerous patterns of behavior that have driven nuclear risks to heights not seen since the 1980s – these would be welcome benefits indeed.

Of course, the issues related to signature and ratification of the Protocol are complicated and the prerogative of States Parties and the NWS. However, I hope that parties will both continue their current dialogues and find ways to accelerate them. As always, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to help however it can.

To that end, UNODA remains committed to supporting nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties, including by strengthening communication and cooperation between them to leverage each of their individual strengths. UN Secretary-General Guterres, in his Agenda for Disarmament, *Securing Our Common Future*, recognized the zones as “landmark instruments” that

represent an excellent example of the synergy between regional and global efforts towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

I wish you a most productive discussion at this webinar and I hope that it will provide impetus and generate new ideas on how to advance the objectives of the Bangkok Treaty.

I thank you very much for your attention.