**Strengthening participation of Middle Eastern countries in the BWC Review Conference Process and CBM submissions**

**July 7, 2016**

By Chen Kane, PhD

Good morning and let me take this opportunity to thank Jennie Gromoll for organizing the event and including an entire panel that recognizes the role and importance of non-state actors in the BWC RevCon process.

The specific activities I will discuss is of MENACS, the Middle East Next Generation of Arms Control Specialists Network. The group was established in 2010 with the objective of identifying and mentoring emerging experts from the Middle East to develop and promote region-based approaches to arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament through capacity building, training, regional dialogue, knowledge dissemination and teaching.

Members of the group work in academia, think tanks, governments, and international organizations.

The group is unique on several levels:

* It is open to any emerging nonproliferation expert from the region;
* It is the only forum where every young nonproliferation expert can meet and discuss nonproliferation issues with his/her neighbors;
* The network has been proven sustainable – it has existed for over 6 years with over 25 members;
* And most importantly – the group identifies, fundraises and executes projects proposed by its members.

In 2015, the group initiated a project aimed at strengthening participation of Middle Eastern countries in the BWC Review Conference Process and CBM submissions.

The perspective I bring today has one major aspect in common with the two other speakers of this panel – the objective of increasing awareness, participation and capacity among non- government officials, and in particular young and emerging experts in the BWC process. But it is also unique given I am working mainly with Middle Easterners.

The region is unique not only from the perspective that biological weapons program may still exist and regional non-state actors tried to pursue them, but also due to lack of interest as well as capacity to actively participate in the BWC process.

For example, only seven countries from the Middle East of the 22 regional states submitted declarations in 2016, none of which are publicly available. Also, only 6 countries have submitted their CBMs more than 4 times since 2010. Usually, Middle Eastern delegations are not present during the plenary meetings, or when they are, they not as attentive to the discussions. They are rarely actively participating by reading national statements or offer substantive inputs on the topics discussed.

The reasons for lack of interest and capacity are multiple:

* BW is not a policy priority for regional states;
* Mostly there is no technical capacity and expertise in capitals to back informed discussions and policy recommendations (the countries that have those, are not BWC members); and
* the officials in Geneva usually cover all UN international organizations, not only the CD.

Members of the Network, attended in Dec. 2016 the BWC annual Meeting of State Parties (MSP) and [offered](https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://www.wmd-course.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CNS-BWC-Statement-Final.pdf&hl=en_US) to assist Middle Eastern delegations and observer states in their preparation toward and during the BWC Review Conference.

MENACS members have also assisted by providing [translations](http://www.wmd-course.com/menacs-provides-arabic-translation-for-bwc-meeting-reports/) of daily summary reports into Arabic of the first session of the BWC PrepCom that took place in April 2016.

The initiative was welcomed and was supported by many Middle Eastern delegations, the League of Arab States mission in Geneva, the US State Department, the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU), and other relevant BWC member states.

We are in the process of identifying potential funding so we can continue the project before and during the Nov. 2016 RevCon. The Network plan is to among other activities to:

1. Distribute factsheet briefings before and after the BWC meetings in English and Arabic to Middle Eastern delegations about the main objectives of each meeting, issues discussed and contentious issues. CNS has been in contact with the ISU and LAS delegation in Geneva to assist in distributing these briefings to relevant delegations.
2. Distribute daily summaries of the November 2016 Review Conference daily meetings in Arabic.
3. Offer assistance to regional countries in writing their national and other relevant statements and speeches.
4. Offer assistance to regional countries in preparation for CBM declarations.

There are some challenges that are common among all our panel presentations and projects and some that are unique. The common is the acute state of funding of the CW/ BW field. I think it is telling that only one of the main foundations in our field is here (despite being invited), and that none of them are funding bio related work—even governments are shy to do so.

With the Middle East there are also couple of unique challenges:

* It is hard to identify experts in the region with scientific background;
* Young people are reluctant to join the field because the government has full control on the job market and freedom of ideas and opinions is limited by some governments;
* Lastly, the job market is almost does not exists outside government, and even they are few and far between.

Thank you and I am looking forward to our discussion.