

Eyeing ballistic missile threat, experts press for adherence to voluntary countermeasures

KATHMANDU, Nepal, 18 December (UNRCPD): Intensifying regional arms races could fuel the spread of ballistic missile technology in the absence of committed international action, experts said at a webinar hosted in December by the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD) and the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, a French think tank.

Because there is not yet a legally binding instrument to explicitly regulate ballistic missile proliferation, the international community must uphold and strengthen existing measures such as the Hague Code of Conduct Against the Proliferation of Ballistic Missiles (HCOC), according to participants. The virtual event for select Asia-Pacific States drew 15 government officials from three countries, as well as 5 international experts from the Austrian Government and the two co-organizing groups.

Speakers underscored the urgent, continued threat from ballistic missiles, which can deliver either conventional payloads or weapons of mass destruction. The UN Security Council has addressed the latter danger through measures such as resolution 1540 (2004), requiring action by all governments to prevent non-State actors from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, their components or their means of delivery.

The presenters aimed to provide an overview of missile proliferation dynamics in Asia and the Pacific; the benefits and responsibilities of joining the HCOC; the role of the Code as a transparency and confidence-building measure among States; and how the Code and other non-proliferation instruments—including the Missile Technology Control Regime and resolution-1540 (2004)—can support one another. In the ensuing discussion, one delegation said the country it represented had not joined the Code, in part, because it required subscribing States to notify others in advance of planned launches. The delegation added, though, that it was willing and ready to continue exchanging ideas and communicating with the subscribing States while carefully monitoring developments related to the Code.

Another State indicated that it was strongly considering subscribing to the Code, pending internal review, and its delegation asked several questions about the requirements and costs of joining. The HCOC is open to all States completely free of charge, the panelists responded, adding that its reporting burden is considerably low.

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