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Item 101 of the preliminary list*

The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East

Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to General Assembly decision 73/546, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to convene annual sessions of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, the fourth session was held from 13 to 17 November 2023 at United Nations Headquarters. In its decision, the Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to report annually on developments in that regard. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

2. Pursuant to decision 73/546, the Secretary-General sent notes verbales to all Members to the Conference,¹ inviting them to participate in the fourth session of the Conference. Invitations were also sent to the three co-sponsors of the resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,² the other two nuclear-weapon States³ and the relevant international organizations⁴ to attend the fourth session as observers.

3. The President-designate of the fourth session of the Conference, the Permanent Representative of Libya to the United Nations, Taher M. T. El-Sonni, convened

* [A/79/50](#).

¹ Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (see [A/CONF.236/2023/1](#)).

² Russian Federation, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.

³ China and France.

⁴ International Atomic Energy Agency, Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit.



informal consultations ahead of the session to discuss various issues related to the preparations for the Conference, including both substantive and organizational matters, such as the agenda and programme of work, a decision on the timing of the endorsement of each presidency (see paras. 8 and 9 below) and the topics to be addressed during the thematic debate of the Conference.

II. Conference proceedings and outcomes

4. The fourth session of the Conference was opened on 13 November 2023 by Hadi Hachem (Lebanon) on behalf of the presidency of the third session of the Conference. In accordance with the decision taken at the first session on the Conference's rotating presidency ([A/CONF.236/DEC.4](#)), the Conference endorsed by acclamation Libya as President of the fourth session of the Conference and invited Mr. El-Sonni (Libya) to preside over the Conference. The President of the General Assembly and the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs (on behalf of the Secretary-General) made statements at the opening of the session. Relevant international organizations, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations were invited to attend the public meetings of the fourth session as observers ([A/CONF.236/2023/DEC.1](#) and [A/CONF.236/2023/DEC.2](#)).

5. In the general debate that followed the opening meeting, participating States, observer States and invited international organizations addressed various aspects of the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and reconfirmed their commitment to and support for achieving the objective of such a zone. Many representatives expressed grave concerns over the crisis in Gaza and the possibility of a spillover to the wider region.

6. The participating States expressed deep concern over two recent nuclear threats made by high-ranking Israeli officials and condemned these as irresponsible statements and deplored the severe risk they pose to regional and international peace and security. They underscored that these nuclear threats highlighted the urgent need to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. They emphasized the necessity of Israel to accept the annual invitation extended by the Secretary-General to participate in the Conference, pursuant to decision 73/546.

7. During the subsequent thematic debate, representatives of participating and observer States, as well as the relevant international organizations, exchanged views on the following topics: (a) peaceful uses and technical cooperation; (b) nuclear verification; and (c) topics identified in previous sessions of the Conference requiring further discussion (see [A/CONF.236/2023/4](#)). The final report adopted by the Conference (*ibid.*) contains a summary of the deliberations held during the thematic debate.

8. With a view to improving the effectiveness of the working committee, the Conference discussed and adopted decision [A/CONF.236/2023/DEC.3](#), by which the Conference decided to adjust the timing of the endorsement of the incoming President from the beginning to the end of each annual session, starting with the President of the sixth session, who will be endorsed at the closing of the fifth session of the Conference.

9. To facilitate the implementation of the aforementioned decision, Members to the Conference decided that Mauritania, as the incoming President of the fifth session, and as a one-time transitional measure, would serve together with the President of the fourth session, as co-facilitators to conduct jointly the intersessional work of the Conference, including of its working committee.

10. Members to the Conference agreed that the working committee could address the following topics: (a) nuclear verification; (b) peaceful uses and technical cooperation; and (c) an index of the list of topics to be addressed by future sessions of the Conference. It was also agreed that Members to the Conference could propose other topics, including to follow up on topics addressed in previous sessions, as needed. In accordance with the decision to establish the working committee ([A/CONF.236/2021/DEC.3](#)), the committee may decide to report on its work to the Conference at its subsequent annual session.

11. In line with the decision of the Conference, adopted at its first session ([A/CONF.236/DEC.3](#)), the Conference decided that its fifth session would be held from 18 to 22 November 2024 at United Nations Headquarters.

III. Observations

12. The Secretary-General is encouraged by the continuous commitment of successive Presidents and participating States of the Conference to maintain the momentum and to advance this process, with a view to realizing the long-sought goal of establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. The ongoing crisis in Gaza, and its impact throughout the wider Middle East region, only highlight the importance of this commitment. The Secretary-General recognizes that progress towards achieving such a zone in the Middle East will enhance regional and international peace and security and commends the efforts of participating States to engage in dialogue and multilateral diplomacy to that end.

13. The Conference process is an integral part of a broader effort to build a regional peace and security framework in the Middle East. The Middle East zone should be established on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned. The Secretary-General reiterates his call that all States in the region should participate in this process, and that the international community should provide full support for this important endeavour.

14. Any threat to use nuclear weapons is inadmissible. Such threats illustrate the importance of the work of the Conference in its efforts to achieve the objective of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

15. The Secretary-General is fully committed to fulfilling the mandate entrusted to him in General Assembly decision 73/546 and reaffirms that the realization of such a zone in the Middle East would be a significant contribution to international disarmament and non-proliferation efforts and to regional and international peace and security.