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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. In its decision 73/546, the General Assembly entrusted the Secretary-General with convening, no later than 2019 at United Nations Headquarters, a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. In the decision, the Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to convene annual sessions of the Conference, for a duration of one week, at United Nations Headquarters, until the conference concluded the elaboration of a legally binding treaty establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. The Assembly further requested the Secretary-General to report annually to it on developments in this regard. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

2. Pursuant to decision 73/546, the Secretary-General sent notes verbales to “all States of the Middle East”,¹ inviting them to participate in the Conference. Notes verbales 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 in the light of their responsibility for the implementation of that resolution, the other two nuclear-weapon States³ and the

* [A/75/50](#).

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 the report by the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency on the application of Agency safeguards in the Middle East (GOV/2018/38-GC(62)/6)).

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

³ China and France.



relevant international organizations”,⁴ inviting them to attend the Conference as observers.

3. At an informal consultation convened by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, the participating States informally endorsed Jordan as the President of the first session of the Conference. The participating States also agreed to hold the first session of the Conference from 18 to 22 November 2019. Subsequently, the Permanent Representative of Jordan to the United Nations, Sima Sami I. Bahous, convened informal consultations with participating States on 10 October and 12 November 2019 to discuss various issues related to the preparation of the first session of the conference, including organizational matters, such as the agenda, the programme of work and the rules of procedure.

II. Conference proceedings and outcomes

4. The conference was opened on 18 November 2019 by the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu. The Conference elected by acclamation Jordan as President of the Conference and invited the Permanent Representative of Jordan to the United Nations, Sima Sami I. Bahous, to preside over the Conference at its first session. The Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly made statements at the opening of the Conference. Member States, relevant international organizations, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations were invited to attend the opening meeting. Nineteen of the participating States made statements at the opening meeting. During the general debate, statements were made by the representatives of 15 participating States, 4 observer States and the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit. In the ensuing thematic debate, representatives of participating States had an initial exchange of views on a range of issues related to a future legally binding treaty on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, including principles and objectives, general obligations regarding nuclear weapons, general obligations regarding other weapons of mass destruction, peaceful uses and international cooperation, institutional arrangements, and other aspects.

5. Pursuant to General Assembly decision 73/546, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit provided background documents. These and other documents of the conference are available online (www.un.org/disarmament/topics/conference-on-a-mezf-of-nwadowomd).

6. The Conference adopted a political declaration at its 9th meeting, on 22 November (see annex). In the declaration, the participating States declared their intent and solemn commitment to pursue, in accordance with relevant international resolutions, and in an open and inclusive manner with all invited States, the elaboration of a legally binding treaty to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by consensus by the States of the region; expressed their belief that the Conference, through the elaboration of a legally binding treaty establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, could contribute to building regional and international confidence therein and that the establishment of a verifiable Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction would greatly enhance regional and international peace

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

and security; and requested the continued efforts of the Secretary-General and relevant international organizations and the strong support of the international community towards the success of the Conference in establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

7. The Conference adopted several decisions on organizational matters, including decisions pertaining to its future sessions. Regarding the dates of its future sessions, the Conference decided that its second session would be held from 16 to 20 November 2020 at Headquarters. It also decided that its annual sessions should be held for a duration of one week, starting on the third Monday of November of each year, unless otherwise decided (see [A/CONF.236/DEC.3](#)).

8. Regarding the presidency of the Conference, it was decided that the presidency should be held by each of the participating States for a period of one year, following the English alphabetical order of the names of the participating States, starting from Jordan as the President of the first session (see [A/CONF.236/DEC.4](#)).

9. The Conference agreed that the President, in consultation with participating States, should undertake efforts to prepare for the second session. It was agreed that representatives of existing nuclear-weapon-free zones organizations should be invited to share good practices and lessons learned with respect to the implementation of treaties establishing such zones prior to the second session of the Conference.

III. Observations

10. The first session Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction and its outcomes marked an important step forward in the efforts by the States of the Middle East, with the support of the international community, to achieve their long-sought objective of establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. The Secretary-General welcomes this positive development and recognizes that the progress made towards achieving such a zone in the Middle East could enhance regional and international peace and security.

11. The political declaration adopted at the first session of the Conference conveyed a clear message by the participating States to the international community on their genuine political will, renewed commitment and determination to pursue the achievement of establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

12. The Secretary-General believes that this conference process provides a valuable opportunity and a meaningful framework for the States in the Middle East and all other stakeholders to engage in dialogue and to build confidence in a joint effort to address all the issues of concern with respect to establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the region. In this regard, the Secretary-General commends the constructive, transparent and inclusive approach adopted by the participating States with respect to the conference process and encourages all States in the Middle East to participate in the process.

13. The Secretary-General hopes that the successful outcome of the first session of the Conference will have a positive impact on the 2020 Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

14. The Secretary-General is fully committed to fulfilling the mandate set out in General Assembly decision 73/546 and stresses that the realization of such a zone in the Middle East would be of significant value to disarmament and non-proliferation efforts, and to regional and international peace and security.

Annex

Political declaration adopted at the first session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction

We, the representatives of participating States at the first session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, having met at Headquarters from 18 to 22 November 2019, pursuant to General Assembly decision 73/546:

(a) Welcome all initiatives, resolutions, decisions and recommendations on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction;

(b) Believe that the establishment of a verifiable Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction would greatly enhance regional and international peace and security;

(c) Declare our intent and solemn commitment to pursue, in accordance with relevant international resolutions, and in an open and inclusive manner with all invited States, the elaboration of a legally binding treaty to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by consensus by the States of the region;

(d) Call upon all States of the Middle East and all other States to refrain from taking any measures that preclude the achievement of the objectives of the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction;

(e) Convinced that the realization of this long-standing goal would be facilitated by the participation of all States of the Middle East, extend an open-ended invitation to all States of the region to lend their support to the present declaration and to join the process;

(f) In that spirit, believe that the Conference, through the elaboration of a legally binding treaty establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, could contribute to building regional and international confidence therein;

(g) Commit to undertaking efforts to follow up on the declaration and on the outcomes of the Conference and to engaging in preparations for the second session of the Conference, commend the efforts of the Secretary-General in convening the first session of the Conference, and request his continued efforts and those of relevant international organizations and the strong support of the international community towards the success of the Conference in establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.