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

Fifth session

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**Inclusivity versus self-isolation: the pressing issue of the
United Nations Conference on the Establishment of a
Middle East Zone free of Nuclear Weapons and Other
Weapons of Mass Destruction**

Working paper submitted by the Russian Federation

1. On 22 December 2018, the General Assembly adopted decision 73/546 on convening a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD-free zone). The decision contained an invitation to all States of the Middle East region to join the negotiations as full participants, and the five nuclear-weapon States were also invited to join the conference as observers. Unfortunately, since the first session in 2019, the seats of one regional state (Israel) and one observer (the United States of America) have remained vacant in this forum's conference room. This significantly undermines the principle of inclusivity contained in decision 73/546. The refusal of Israel and the United States to participate in the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction seems irrational.

In this working paper, we would like to review the reasons why we believe both States should reconsider their negative attitude towards the Conference. At the same time, Russia is well aware that current events in the Middle East make such a prospect highly unlikely in the near future. However, we believe that establishing a WMD-free zone remains a relevant issue.

2. In 2013–2014, for the first time since the Madrid process of the early 1990s, Israel participated in the informal consultation process, in Glion and Geneva, on the possible convening of a conference on a WMD-free zone.

The idea of holding informal consultations with the participation of all countries in the region in preparation for a conference on a WMD-free zone, to follow up on the decisions of the 2010 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, belonged to Russia. After more than a year of intense diplomatic



efforts, the countries of the region, including Israel, met at the same negotiating table for the first time in more than 20 years. Five rounds of meetings were held. At a certain point, the participants almost came to an agreement on the date of a future conference on a WMD-free zone and its organizational arrangements. Unfortunately, however, it was not possible to come up with concrete solutions.

Although the Glion-Geneva process did not yield practical results, it demonstrated that dialogue among the countries of the region, including Israel, is possible, and that meaningful progress towards the establishment of a WMD-free zone can only be achieved in this way.

In our view, if Israel has already participated once in the WMD-free zone process without any prejudice to itself, there is nothing to prevent it from doing so again – naturally, if it is in the mood for dialogue rather than confrontation.

Taking such a step is supported by the fact that, at the first session of the United Nations Conference on a WMD-free zone back in 2019, participants agreed that all decisions of the forum, whether procedural or substantive, would be taken solely by consensus. In this way, the needs of any participant in the negotiations are securely protected. Israel has the opportunity to engage in the process of defending and advancing its interests without fear.

It is important to emphasize that the New York forum plays an important trust-building role. Over its four sessions, the United Nations Conference on a WMD-free zone has established itself as a credible and constructive platform for dialogue that is ready at any moment to welcome those who have so far refrained from participating. It is to be hoped that Israel will eventually realize that this process does not pose a threat to it and will abandon its policy of self-isolation.

It cannot be ruled out that at some point the countries of the region will develop an interest in broadening the range of issues to be discussed in New York to include wider regional security issues of importance to Israel and other States. In any case, the United Nations Conference on a WMD-free zone gives all participants the opportunity to raise specific issues of concern.

After all, nothing is preventing Israel from sending an observer to the Conference as a first step. In practical terms, this would give Israeli counterparts the opportunity to reassure themselves that the discussions in New York are not taking place behind their backs and are not aimed at isolating Israel.

3. Among the nuclear powers, only the United States of America did not accept the invitation to join the United Nations Conference on a WMD-free zone. This is astonishing and inexplicable, given that the United States of America co-sponsored the 1995 resolution on the Middle East that allowed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to be extended indefinitely without a vote. Since the 1995 Middle East resolution remains in force until its goals and objectives are fully realized, the responsibility of its co-sponsors also has no statute of limitations. All three countries that co-sponsored the resolution – Russia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – are bound by a commitment to support its implementation. The efforts of the United States of America to shirk this responsibility do significant damage to the interests of nuclear non-proliferation. Washington should carefully analyse the situation and make the only correct decision by joining the negotiation process as an observer, as the People's Republic of China, Russia, the United Kingdom and France have done.