STATEMENT

by Ambassador Mikhail I. Ulyanov

Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation

at the First Session
of the Preparatory Committee
for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties
to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

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

Vienna, May 10, 2017
Mr. Chairman,

Colleagues,

The establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction (WMDFZ) remains on the agenda of the NPT Review process and is likely to be a central issue of the current Review cycle. Unfortunately, we see no tangible progress here. Moreover, over almost three years there has been mainly an overall stalemate in this area except for the NPT Review Conference held in May 2015, when we nearly agreed on quite a strong and promising solution. Further lack of progress on this track risks to complicate an already fragile situation in the framework of the NPT. Thus, it is crucial to prevent bringing the situation to the boiling point before or during the 2020 Review Conference, and to that aim to hold at the current session a constructive discussion on ways to resume a dialogue on convening a WMDFZ Conference that remains a relevant and feasible objective in the context of implementing the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East.

As food for thought, the Russian Federation has prepared and submitted a working paper that outlines our vision on further possible steps on a WMDFZ. While working on it, we sought to account different views and existing concerns in order to ensure early convening of the Conference with the participation, if possible, of all countries of the Middle East region.

The main points of our proposal are as follows.

We assume that the 2010 mandate to convene a Conference on a WMDFZ is basically valid. To ensure a successful outcome of the event, thorough preparation is essential. It should aim to reaching an agreement on organizational modalities of the Conference: its drafts of agenda, rules of procedure, and the final document which would outline a way towards establishing a WMDFZ.

In our view, the preparation for the Conference should be conducted in the form of preparatory meetings, which preferably would be attended by all States of the region without exception. These meetings should be held on a regular basis as frequently as required.
A venue of such meetings could be Geneva and/or Glion as it was the case during the previous NPT Review cycle when the Swiss Government offered to host consultations. As an alternative, we suggest to consider holding preparatory meetings in Cairo back to back with the sessions of the League of Arab States Committee of Senior Officials in order to ensure high representation of the Middle East countries, both in terms of its level and membership. We are ready to host one or two preparatory meetings in Moscow if States of the region express such an interest.

We are convinced that all substantive decisions taken within the preparatory process and at the Conference should be consensus-based. It was already agreed back in Glion. In our view, the consensus principle is key to ensure the participation in the working process of all States of the region as well as to achieve balanced and mutually acceptable solutions.

Taking into account the sensitive nature of the discussions on a WMDFZ, the preparatory process should be well structured. Any possible progress in discussion or alignment of positions should be properly recorded. It is also preferable to streamline the preparatory work with a program of work approved in advance.

Particular attention should be given to the agenda of the Conference. We believe that the Conference should provide an opportunity for a focused and comprehensive discussion on the establishment of a Middle East WMDFZ. At the same time in the interest of consensus and in order to take into account the views of all stakeholders, we find it appropriate to dedicate one session of the Conference to a discussion of several specific aspects of regional security. These aspects should be within the context of a Middle East WMDFZ and be agreed in advance by States of the region.

It is evident that a single organizational and coordination framework is required for preparing and convening of the Conference. Unfortunately, the appointment of a facilitator seems to be not an easy task. But we are not sure that the “troika” of the co-sponsors is capable of playing the role of a “collective facilitator”. We believe the UN Secretariat could perform those functions. In our view, the UN Secretariat would primarily be in charge of organizational work. Besides, it is a prerogative of potential participants of a WMDFZ to be responsible for reaching agreements. Russia would
be ready to work closely with the UN Secretariat.

Our working paper also addresses financial aspects that need to be taken into consideration. Experience of the previous NPT Review cycle showed that financial issues could be very acute. Apparently, the assistance of donors both from States of the region and beyond will be required.

Given the complexity of the issue, it is critical to allocate enough time for preparatory work. However, this process cannot evidently last forever. We should seek that the Conference on a WMDFZ take place prior to the 2020 NPT Review Conference, preferably no later than in a couple of years. In this regard, the preparatory work should begin as soon as possible. We believe that the first meeting could be held in the near future. We are ready to work for that purpose with the other co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution, the UN Secretariat and, of course, the countries of the region.

We expect that our proposals will be found relevant and encourage a serious talk on further steps regarding a WMDFZ.

Thank you.