

**Address by Sergey Lavrov,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation,
to the High Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament
(Geneva, 24 February 2021)**

Mr. President,

Colleagues,

I appreciate the opportunity to address this authoritative forum.

2020 was a difficult year in all respects. It saw a growing destructive trend toward the collapse of the existing international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation regimes, an increasing tension and lack of trust between UN Member States. Unfortunately, the United States continued taking steps to substitute some global "rules-based order" imposed by Washington for international law and the central role of the United Nations. After withdrawing from the JCPOA in 2018 and dismantling the INF Treaty in 2019, the United States decided, in 2020, to withdraw from the Treaty on Open Skies, thereby undermining international security.

The Coronavirus pandemic was another factor that made work at all multilateral fora, including the Conference on Disarmament (CD), even more challenging. It actually paralyzed all traditional channels for diplomatic communication and interaction.

It is only now in 2021 that we begin to observe some encouraging developments. First of all, I refer to the recent extension of the New START Treaty, which remains an essential element of maintaining strategic stability and international security. This ensures the adequate level of predictability for the next few years in relations between Russia and the United States – the two

countries possessing the largest nuclear arsenals. Moreover, foundations were laid for further negotiations on arms control with due consideration of all factors affecting strategic stability.

Maintaining restraint in the missile sphere following the termination of the INF Treaty remains a top priority. Our proposal is still on the table: we will not deploy ground-based intermediate- and short-range missiles in any given region unless US-made missiles are deployed there. We urge NATO countries to take similar reciprocal steps. Our specific proposals regarding mutual verification measures are well known.

There is a growing threat of an arms race in Outer Space. The US and its allies have embarked on a policy towards the use of the near-Earth space for combat operations (including offensive ones) and deployment of strike weapon systems. Russia is committed to the obligations on the non-discriminatory use and exploration of Outer Space for peaceful purposes. There is still a chance for us to come up with generally acceptable legally binding measures to prevent violent confrontation in Outer Space. The Russian-Chinese draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects, submitted here, at the CD, could serve as a good basis for that.

Russia will continue to make its substantial practical contribution to the nuclear missile disarmament. Further progress in this area requires the involvement of all States possessing military nuclear capabilities, particularly the United Kingdom and France. Russia is open for multilateral dialogue, which should be held on the basis of consensus and respect for the legitimate interests of all sides, as well as upon their consent.

We have been consistently advocating for recommitment by Russia and the US, as well as by other P5 States, to the fundamental formula that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. I once again put this proposal forward during our telephone conversation with Secretary of State

Antony J. Blinken this February 4.

Our position is that NATO's continuing practice of "nuclear sharing", which runs counter to the NPT, is inadmissible. American nuclear weapons must be returned to the territory of the United States, and the foreign infrastructure for its deployment must be dismantled.

The NPT Review Conference, with the NPT being the key international legal instrument for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament and one of the pillars of the existing world order, is expected to be the central event of the year. All States Parties to the NPT should do their best to make sure that the Review Conference contributes to the strengthening of the Treaty. We need to join our efforts in order to consolidate all the three elements of the NPT (non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful use of nuclear energy), ensuring their balanced interconnectedness.

In the context of the NPT review, a constructive approach is also required for the creation of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, as well as for addressing the situation with Iran's nuclear programme. We call on all stakeholders, first of all the new US administration, to step up efforts on these tracks, which are critical for the world community.

The current situation at the OPCW needs to be rectified. We oppose the vicious practice of using the Organization to exert pressure on "unwanted" states through sanctions based on unsubstantiated allegations of the use of chemical weapons. We advocate for objective and professional dialogue based on the honest fulfillment of CWC provisions by the Technical Secretariat, not on some conspiracy theories in the spirit of "highly likely."

We consider the strengthening of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) regime as a priority task for the international community. We are ready for constructive work aimed at preparing and efficiently holding the BTWC Review Conference scheduled for 2021. We call on all parties to

support Russia's initiatives aimed at consolidating the BTWC institutional framework.

In our efforts the UN and its disarmament machinery have a central role. At the Conference on Disarmament, we intend to further contribute to agreeing on a comprehensive and balanced program of work in accordance with the CD's negotiating mandate and with respect for its fundamental operating principles, first of all the consensus rule, remaining inviolate. In order to reach a consensus, we urge all parties again to consider in the most responsible manner the Russian initiative to develop at the CD an international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism.

There is an urgent need to resume the work of the UN Disarmament Commission by effectively addressing organizational issues, including that of providing representatives of all Member States with unfettered access to New York for participation in UN events.

We all are in desperate need of a constructive dialogue to prevent further deterioration of the international arms control architecture. Given its unique status as a single negotiating forum on disarmament, the Conference on Disarmament can significantly contribute to bringing the current challenging situation in the sphere of international security back to normal as well as building confidence among States.

I wish participants at the Conference fruitful work.

Thank you.