THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREE ZONE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. Chairman,

Israel joined the consensus on resolution A/61/57/L.28, entitled "The Establishment of a NWFZ in the ME" as it has done for the last 20 years, notwithstanding substantive and important reservations regarding certain elements in the resolution.

Mr. Chairman,

The policy of Israel has always maintained that the nuclear issue as well as all regional security issues, conventional and non-conventional, should be dealt within the full context of the peace process. Israel supports the eventual establishment of a mutually verifiable NWFZ in the ME that should also be free of chemical and biological weapons as well as ballistic missiles. Israel believes that the political realities in the Middle East mandate a practical step by step approach. This should begin with modest CBM's followed by the establishment of peaceful relations and reaching reconciliation, and possibly, complemented by the conventional and non-conventional arms control measures. This process could eventually lead to more ambitious goals, such as establishing a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction.

As the international community has recognized, the establishment of a NWFZ should be based on arrangements freely arrived at among all the states of the region concerned. Israel believes that such a zone can only be established through direct negotiations between the states of the region, after they recognize each other and have established full peaceful and diplomatic relations between them. It cannot be established other than by the parties themselves, nor can it be established in situations where some of the states maintain that they are in a state of war with each other, refuse in principle to maintain peaceful relations with Israel or even recognize its right to exist.

In this context it should be recalled that in the ME, unlike other regions in the world where a NWFZ has been established, there are continuing threats by elements in the region and beyond against the very existence of one state in the region, Israel. This has a critical impact on the region's ability to establish such a zone.

Mr. Chairman,

In view of the present reality, our efforts in the context of this resolution should be focused on the creation of a stable environment of peace and reconciliation in the Middle East. Israel will continue to dedicate all its efforts to achieve this goal. We call upon our
neighbors to do the same.

Thank you Mr. Chairman