Statement by
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First Committee
General Debate

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Mr. Chairperson,

At the outset, let me congratulate you on assuming the position of Chair of the First Committee and assure you of my delegation’s full support and cooperation in steering our deliberations forward and reaching a successful outcome.

Mr. Chairperson,

Israel has consistently viewed the regional context as the primary and essential framework to advance critical arms control measures in the Middle East. Comprehensive and durable peace in the area is essential in this respect. The foundations of peace and stability in the region must be based on an historic reconciliation, which should embody such notions as compromise, mutual trust and respect, safe and recognized borders and good neighborliness. Effective arms control measures can only be achieved and sustained in a region where wars, armed conflicts, terror, political hostility, incitement and non-recognition cease to be features of everyday life. Israel firmly believes that the political reality in our region mandates a practical step-by-step approach.

The achievement of a comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbors should be accompanied and followed by confidence building measures and arrangements regarding conventional weapons, culminating in the eventual establishment of a mutually verifiable zone free of ballistic missiles and of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. This zone should emanate from — and encompass all — the states in the region, by virtue of free and direct negotiations amongst them. We have a long and complicated journey ahead of us, and even modest steps forward can play a vital role towards progress.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Middle East has become neither more peaceful nor safer since the 2007 deliberations of the First Committee. In particular, Iran’s nuclear program has not been halted despite compelling evidence as to its military nature and despite four UN Security Council resolutions. The claim that this program is of a legitimate nature, in the quest for nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes, can no longer be put forward in a credible manner. Iran’s nuclear activities are in contravention of Security Council resolutions, IAEA demands and its international legal obligations. This nuclear program represents a clear threat to the stability and security of the region as a whole and presents an urgent challenge for global peace and stability. Iran’s hostile policies and statements, its aggressive pursuit of missile technology and its active involvement and support of terrorism further exacerbate the situation in the region. Israel, in particular, has consistently been the target of calls made by the Iranian President for its destruction. These have been accompanied by vicious anti-Semitic remarks, as the United Nations witnessed only a short time ago at the General Assembly’s general debate.
The international community should not overlook the fact that the vast majority of non-compliance cases with the NPT — 3 out of 4 widely acknowledged cases — have taken place in the Middle East and a fourth case is under investigation. In this regard, the renewal of interest in nuclear energy for peaceful purposes must be accompanied by extensive efforts aimed at ensuring that such programs will not be misused for proliferation purposes. Particular care should be taken in volatile regions such as the Middle East.

Mr. Chairperson,

Iran's nuclear program is by no means the only cause of concern in the Middle East. The situation in other areas of the region has not improved. The conflict that erupted in the summer of 2006 — with the aggressive attacks of the Hezbollah terror organization — has shown that MANPADS, UAVs, missiles of various types and ranges, as well as very short range rockets, are not outside the reach of terrorists. The Hezbollah, which is supported first and foremost by Iran, has not ceased to arm itself since 2006, a course of action taken similarly by the Hamas terror organization.

In the past year, the Hezbollah has entrenched itself further, both with regard to its position vis-à-vis the Lebanese political sphere as well as the breadth and sophistication of its arsenals. The transfers of arms from Iran and Syria to Hezbollah have continued unabated, in contravention of UNSCR 1701. The smuggling of arms plays into the hands of those who wish to ignite conflict in the region, and has been facilitated by states turning a blind eye and sometimes even encouraging this phenomenon.

It is Israel's view that the prevention of transfers of arms to terrorists should be addressed as a matter of high priority by the international community, and that a clear norm banning such transfers should be created and concrete steps taken against its continuation. In our view, nothing can justify the practice of some states condemning terrorism while at the same time condoning the transfer of arms to terrorists group.

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite the grim regional backdrop, Israel attaches great importance to the prevention of non-conventional weapons proliferation, as well as the unauthorized transfers of conventional weapons and dual use items. Israel has taken extensive efforts to bring fully achieve all of the non-proliferation regimes. On 31 December 2007, the new Export Control Law entered into force. This law regulates control over the Munitions List of the Wassenaar Suppliers regime. It augments the Export Control Order of January 2007 which regulates control over dual use items and technologies based on the dual-use list of the Wassenaar arrangement, and the Import and Export Control Order (Chemical, Biological and Nuclear Exports) of 2004. Taken together, these laws and regulations ensure that the robust control over exports exercised by Israel meets the standards and criteria as established by the NSG, AG, MTCR and the Wassenaar Suppliers Regimes.

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Mr. Chairperson,

The world today faces the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction — weapons that pose a threat to all nations, large and small. Israel believes that it is critically important that the international community take all necessary measures to ensure that terrorists do not acquire the world's most deadly weapons, including nuclear, biological, chemical and radiological weapons, as well as their means of delivery. Accordingly, Israel welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) and the extension of 1540 committee mandate by the terms of resolution 1810 (2008).

Israel shares the concern of the international community pertaining to the need to strengthen the safety and security of nuclear materials and facilities and to prevent illicit trafficking. In this spirit, Israel has joined several conventions and codes of conduct in the field of nuclear safety and security. It has joined the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials (CPPNM). It has also signed the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism and is preparing for its ratification. In addition, Israel has joined the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT), the Container Security Initiative (CSI), the U.S Megaport Initiative and the Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI). Israel also supports the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

Mr. Chairperson,

This year has seen significant developments with respect to the creation of a norm on the use of cluster munitions. The Certain Conventional Weapons Convention (CCW), which is widely acknowledged as the most relevant and professional forum to address issues within the field of conventional weapons, has conducted serious, in-depth negotiations in order to conclude a new protocol on cluster munitions. These negotiations aim to achieve an appropriate balance between humanitarian concerns and military necessities which could be implemented by all relevant states.

Further negotiations are scheduled for the month of November. It is our conviction that with continued seriousness on the part of all participants an agreed protocol on cluster munitions could be achieved by the end of this year. Israel trusts and hopes that those CCW member states, which were also involved in other negotiations on cluster munitions, will continue to exert their best efforts in order to achieve an agreement on the CCW.

Significant developments have also occurred on the Small Arms Light Weapons (SALW) scene. A successful outcome has been achieved in the BMS, which hopefully indicates that previous differences of opinion will no longer impede the important work undertaken in this field. Nevertheless, Israel regrets the inability to reach a consensus on the final document due to difficulties mounted by Iran on the last day of the conference. Ironically, Iran — the country that blocked the consensus — is the most heavily involved in the transfer of arms to terrorists in our region.
Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, Israel will continue to play an active and responsible role in furthering non-proliferation goals and in the enhancement of norms aimed at the prevention of arms from reaching irresponsible and unauthorized hands.

Thank you.