Statement by Mr. Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, before the First Committee, General debate on all disarmament and international security agenda items, sixty-third Session, New York, 14 October 2008

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, allow me to convey my delegation’s congratulations to you and your country Honduras for your election as Chairman of the First Committee. We extend our best wishes to the Bureau as well, and express our confidence that the Committee will successfully conclude its important work under your able stewardship. My delegation wishes also to express its appreciation to Ambassador Paul Badji of Senegal for his commitment and hard work during the past session.

I also wish to state that Palestine aligns itself with the important statement made by Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In the interest of time, we will keep our additional comments brief.

Mr. Chairman

Palestine believes that disarmament efforts must be done in a manner that upholds and supports the principles of international humanitarian law. In this regard, Palestine affirms that any serious international effort on disarmament must be directly related to relevant international law instruments, particularly international humanitarian law. We must not waver in ensuring that this discussion and international effort must be kept in context -- the only acceptable context -- which is the standing legal obligation of member states to respect and abide by international law in all their endeavors.

In this regard, we believe that all member states have a duty to stop the transfer of arms to states that seriously violate international humanitarian law, including committing grave breaches identified in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. This is particularly relevant to occupying Powers that do not respect their obligations under international law and who have been proven to use indiscriminate and excessive force against civilian populations.

Mr. Chairman,

Combating and preventing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is another important goal, which the international community needs to address. Palestine also believes that member states should afford due attention to official state arming and forming of militias that resides unlawfully in an occupied land, committing aggressions that terrorize and harm the civilian population. These militias own state-sanctioned and funded small arms, which feed conflicts and perpetuate human rights violations.
Additionally, we must address the use of certain conventional weapons which have indiscriminate and excessive effects, especially cluster munitions, anti-personnel landmines, and ammunition containing depleted uranium. The long-term and devastating effects of these weapons on civilian populations have been proven beyond any doubt. In South Lebanon for example, the civilian population, particularly children, continues to be tormented by these weapons, which claims the lives and limbs of scores of innocents every year. That is why we support all the Conventions, protocols and efforts that prohibit, ban and tackle the humanitarian risks caused to civilians as a result of using such indiscriminate weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

The proliferation of nuclear and non-conventional weapons represents the most serious threat to humanity’s survival. Hence, it is imperative for the international community to spare no effort in ridding our world of these weapons of mass destruction.

Unfortunately, a nuclear-weapon-free zone has yet to be established in the Middle East, and Israel, remains the only state in the region that has neither become nor stated its intention to become a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons - thus representing the only obstacle to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region. Israel has clearly declared through its Prime Minister on 12 December 2006, that it is a nuclear-weapon State. Such a declaration must be particularly alarming to all concerned; especially in light of the reality that Israel, as an occupying Power, a state proven to act with utter disdain towards international law has been repeatedly immune from international accountability for its repeated infringements upon other states' sovereignty and territory.

But we must warn against selectivity in our efforts to rid the Middle East of nuclear arms. For nothing can be more dangerous than turning a blind eye to states that have spent decades stockpiling and developing non-conventional and nuclear weapons while refusing to submit to international inspection. It is illogical and counterproductive to exert such extraordinary efforts and pursue a member state on the basis of suspicion as well as prevent non-nuclear-weapon states from pursuing their "inalienable right" to peaceful nuclear activity while at the same time allowing another, member state, which openly admits to possessing and producing these non-conventional weapons, to remain belligerent in refusing so much as inspection or oversight.

We believe that the only road towards realizing the universalization of the treaty in the Middle East, is by pressuring Israel to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons - without delay - in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions including resolution 487 (1981) and paragraph 14 of resolution 687 (1991), as well as other resolutions on the establishment of a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East, which have been constantly adopted by consensus by the General Assembly since 1980.

Mr. Chairman,

Establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons in the Middle East is an indispensable condition to stability and peace in the region for generations to come. It also will no doubt greatly contribute to solidifying hopes for peace in the region. However such a pivotal goal must not be tied to any pre-conditions, including on going efforts to reach peace through ending the belligerent occupation that Israel has maintained for over four decades. Such a connection is nothing but a disingenuous attempt that will only allow the region's only nuclear power to buy more time to continue producing and stockpiling nuclear and non-conventional weapons; hence drawing us away from our stated goal.
Furthermore, we must express our alarm at statements made by certain powers that not only ignore the reality in our region but also encourage the belligerence of a member state. Statements like those made on 6 October 2008 by NATO's Secretary General are equally troubling as he excused Israel from abandoning its nuclear arsenal and destructive potential.

In this regard, we believe that it is vital to push for the implementation of the package deal on the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1995 NPT Review Conference, in particular the resolution in the Middle East. Ignoring the implementation of the resolution could lead to a nuclear arms race in the region; a prospect too devastating to ponder. The 13 practical steps towards nuclear disarmament, adopted in the 2000 NPT review conference must also be respected in order to maintain the credibility of the Treaty. We hope that member states take the necessary practical measures that would ensure the success of the 2010 Review Conference and further consolidate the framework of the treaty and its indefinite extension.

Finally Mr. Chairman,

We believe the devastating and long-term effects of foreign occupation, underdevelopment and poverty are directly linked to our efforts on disarmament around the world. These situations induce violence, radicalism, and hopelessness, providing fertile grounds for a host of illicit trades, which this Committee must address comprehensively and responsibly. We must confront the undeniable fact that deadly conflicts and illicit arms trade will continue unless we treat the root causes of conflicts. Equally important is our necessary commitment to combat — comprehensively — the efforts of some states to fuel conflicts in exchange for economic profit from illicit or illegal arms funding, hence ensuring the perpetuation of violent conflict and immeasurable suffering of the peoples affected.

We have an obligation to treating the causes, rather than symptoms as doing otherwise will only fan the flames of violence and illicit arms trade. At a time when the world is banding together to lift economies out of potential disaster, we must show equal determination to save millions of defenseless civilians, who have suffered the scourges of war, violence, and grinding poverty for far too long. For nothing can protect our future generations from the real threats under discussion than prosperity and a life of dignity, liberty, and freedom.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.