67th SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Statement by
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First Committee

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Mr. Chairperson,

At the outset let me join previous speakers in congratulating you on your election as Chair of the First Committee and assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation as you steer our deliberations towards a successful outcome.

Mr. Chairperson,

Israel's perspective and policy in the field of regional security and arms control has always been a pragmatic and realistic approach. It is rooted in its belief that all security concerns of regional members should be taken into account and be addressed within the regional context. The disturbing realities in the Middle East mandate a practical step-by-step approach, bearing in mind the goal of achieving peaceful relations and reconciliation among all the States in the region. This process is inherently an incremental one. It can only realistically begin with modest arrangements for confidence and security building measures in order to build the stable infrastructure and the necessary trust for more ambitious cooperative security undertakings.

Mr. Chairperson,

At present, no regional dialogue exists in the Middle East, nor is there a forum to develop confidence-building measures and defuse tensions. The Middle East countries have no regional forum in which all can directly communicate with each other and have a dialogue on core issues that affect their security. In the beginning of the nineties, the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) talks were the appropriate forum to promote confidence and address security issues and challenges in the area. Such a mechanism is lacking today in that there is no channel for direct discussion between the states in the Middle-East. No majority vote and one-sided resolutions in international fora can be a substitute for a broad regional dialogue and cooperation. Our vision of what we can do in the space between aspiration and reality begins with
the need to establish confidence-building measures and genuine efforts to reduce tensions in the area with our neighbors through greater dialogue.

Mr. Chairperson,

The region of the Middle East is undergoing historic and significant transformational changes. The current turmoil in the Arab world gives a clear example how fragile and unstable is the region today. Unfortunately, Israel does not enjoy peace with the region as a whole and at times we feel that our existence and survival are put into question. Countries in the area like Iran, that threaten to wipe Israel off the map, and terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hizbollah that do not accept Israel's right to exist and continuously engage in a massive acquisition of rockets and missiles, still pose fundamental security threats. Any regional security dialogue has to focus on actual threats, like rockets and missiles, which are a vital component of any regional disarmament.

Despite the current situation, Israel has positively engaged in July 2011 in the EU Seminar convened in Brussels titled “promoting confidence building in support of a process aimed at establishing a zone free of WMD and means of delivery in the Middle East”. Israel is planning to participate in the second EU Seminar which will convene in Brussels early next month. Israel also participated in the IAEA Director General's Forum in November 2011, "in which participants from the Middle East and other interested parties could learn from the experience of other regions including in the area of confidence building relevant to the establishment of a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone". This stems from our understanding that only direct dialogue between the parties could move us to a more stable architecture of regional security.

Mr. Chairperson,

Israel attaches great importance to non-proliferation and over the years has demonstrated a consistent policy of responsibility. Israel has made great efforts to abide by and respect global non-proliferation norms, including in the field of export controls and enhanced cooperation regarding the various supplier regimes.
These efforts constitute an important component of the overall determination to improve the regional security climate. It was in this spirit that Israel signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in 1995 and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996, right before joining the CD that same year. In addition, in 2004 Israel adopted the Export and Import Order (Control over Chemical, Biological and Nuclear Exports). This Order prohibits the export of equipment, technology and services designated for weapons of mass destruction programmes, and establishes a control system for dual-use items in the nuclear, chemical and biological domain.

By adopting this Order, Israel implemented its policy of adherence to the Australia Group and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Israel's export control legislation on missiles and related material reflects Israel's adherence to the Missile Technology Control Regime. It is incorporated in the 2008 Defense Export Control Act and in related secondary legislative instruments. Israel is also an implementer de facto of the Wassenaar Arrangement on conventional arms. Israel abides by these regimes without having the benefits of full membership in these groups.

Mr. Chairperson,

Israel has never challenged the non-proliferation regimes, or adopted a policy to undermine them. However, there are other countries in the Middle East that are not members of other non-proliferation treaties like the Chemical Weapons Convention or the Biological Weapons Convention. In the Middle East, chemical weapons have been used as well as many conventional weapons and missiles. In this context, the Syrian chemical weapons threat continues to cause extreme concern to Israel and the region as a whole. These and other weapons are the weapons that threaten people's immediate sense of security and need to be addressed no less than the threat of nuclear proliferation. The volatile situation in Syria is a fresh reminder of the need to work together to secure nuclear and chemical materials and to prevent illicit trafficking and terrorism.
Mr. Chairperson,

For many years now, the agenda of the First Committee includes two resolutions regarding the Middle-East. The first deals with establishing a nuclear weapons free zone in the region. This resolution has commanded consensus for almost thirty years, and although Israel has substantive reservations regarding certain elements of the resolution, we do support the annual endorsement of this visionary goal.

In stark contrast to this spirit of cooperation, the Arab League is tabling a second resolution item, titled the "Risk of Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East". This is a contentious resolution that seeks to divert attention from the activities of some regional states, like Iran and Syria, which constitute flagrant violations of international obligations undertaken in the disarmament and non-proliferation sphere. The tabling of this resolution constitutes an annual declaration by its sponsors that they prefer to continue trying to alienate and isolate Israel, rather than engage Israel in a cooperative manner. The decision of its sponsors to add, in the past two years, a paragraph on 2012 regional conference in this particular resolution, raises profound questions regarding the real motivation of the Arab states with regard to this idea. This distinguished Committee would do well to foster and encourage initiatives of a conciliatory nature designed to reduce and lesser regional tensions rather than aggravate them. Belligerent resolutions do not move us forward. They only re-enforce us in our suspicion, and suspicion is the enemy of progress. It is in this context that we call upon UN Member states to reject this approach and vote against this resolution.

Mr. Chairperson,

The region of the Middle East embodies and reflects many of the arms control and disarmament challenges faced by the international community. It is no coincidence that four out of the five major violations of the NPT have occurred in the Middle East - Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Libya, Syria and Iran, whilst the fifth case, namely the DPRK, has been deeply involved in nuclear proliferation to the Middle East. The nuclear activities of Iran and Syria are under continuous investigations of the IAEA,
while both countries withhold cooperation and place every possible difficulty in the way of the IAEA inspections and investigations. Syria has not yet declared the nuclear fuel destined for the nuclear reactor built by the DRPK at the Deir al Zour site and its whereabouts in Syria remain a mystery.

Mr. Chairperson,

One of the most central threats today in the Middle East is Iran's hostile policies and statements, its pursuit of nuclear weapons, the aggressive development of missile technology and Iran's active involvement in supporting, supplying and training of terrorist organizations. Israel has consistently been the target of Iran's vicious anti-Semitic campaign, including statements made even in recent weeks by Iran's President calling for the elimination and destruction of Israel. It is clear that without halting and reversing the Iranian military nuclear program, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to promote an international or regional agenda aimed at strengthening the prevailing non-proliferation regime.

Mr. Chairperson,

Israel has been stressing for several years that the prevention of transfers of conventional and non-conventional arms to terrorists and non-state actors should be addressed by the international community as a matter of priority. In this context, Israel welcomes the successful outcome last month of the Second Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. Israel attaches great importance to this Programme and views its effective implementation as critical for combating the illicit trade of SALW at the national, regional and global levels.

Such implementation is more relevant than ever. The turbulence in the Middle East poses great challenges, which should prompt the international community to work together to prevent illicit trafficking and terrorism. In this context, Israel has emphasized its deep concern about the illicit proliferation of MANPADS and short-range rockets. In the past year, several sources have claimed that thousands of
MANPADS are missing in Libya. These weapons present a serious threat to civil aviation when they fall into the wrong hands. The international community should allocate the necessary resources to address this grave danger effectively. We must focus on concrete steps - through legal, political and practical measures - to prevent these weapons from reaching terrorists and non-state actors.

Mr. Chairperson,

Israel supports the Arms Trade Treaty negotiation conference, aimed at addressing standards in international arms trade. It is our hope that further negotiations in the near future would eventually lead to the creation of a consensual legally-binding instrument.

Mr. Chairperson,

Israel aspires to achieve peace and security for all the peoples of the Middle East. We hope that the day will come when a regional security framework encompassing all countries of the area will provide a cooperative multilateral response to all the security problems of the region.

Let me wish Member States, their delegates here present, and the Secretariat, fruitful deliberations during this session, and full success of the UN First Committee in its activities, which benefit us all.

Thank you.