Statement by Mr. Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, before the First Committee, general debate on all disarmament and international security agenda items, 64th Session, New York 12 October 2009

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, allow me to convey my delegation's congratulations to you and your country, Uruguay, for your election as Chairman of the First Committee. We extend our best wishes to the Bureau and express our confidence that the Committee will successfully conclude its important work under your able stewardship. My delegation also wishes to express its appreciation to Ambassador Marco Antonio Suazo of Honduras 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 as well as the important statement delivered by Sudan on behalf of the Arab Group.

Mr. Chairman

Palestine believes that disarmament efforts must be done in a manner that upholds the principles of international humanitarian law particularly Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. This is why any serious international disarmament effort must be done comprehensively and in line with relevant international law instruments, particularly international humanitarian law. This is the only acceptable context for any serious effort or discourse on this issue. Otherwise, we risk allowing those States who violate the rules of war while illicitly stockpiling weapons of mass destruction to escape accountability and remaining intransigent in the face of international will.

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 belligerent 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. Israel’s abhorrent conduct during the war on Gaza is a clear example.
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 reside unlawfully in an occupied land, committing aggressions that terrorize the civilian population. These militias own State-sanctioned and funded small arms, which feed conflicts and perpetuate human rights violations. The routine illegal Israeli settlers’ violence against the Palestinian civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is a clear example of such situations.

Additionally, we must address the use of certain conventional weapons which have indiscriminate and excessive effects, especially when used illegally against civilians like cluster munitions, anti-personnel landmines, fiachette missiles, the so-called dense inert metal explosive (DIME) munitions, and ammunition containing depleted uranium. Additionally, we must seriously consider the illegal use of weapons that are not proscribed as illegal under International Law, such as white phosphorous. States proven to perpetually violate the laws of war must not be allowed to use these weapons as they will undoubtedly repeat their illegal use against innocent civilians, wreaking havoc, wanton destruction, and death.

The long-term and devastating effects of these weapons on civilian populations have been proven beyond any doubt. Recently, several international and UN reports, including the "Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict", headed by the Honorable Judge Richard Goldstone, have documented Israel’s use of such weapons against civilians and their devastating consequences.

South Lebanon is another example. There, the civilian population, particularly children, continue to suffer from Israeli cluster munitions, which have claimed the lives of scores of innocents every year and limbs of many others. That is why we support all the Conventions, protocols and efforts that seek to 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. This is why it is placed, and rightly so, high on the international agenda. But this renewed international commitment must be accompanied by concrete actions.

We regret that the Middle East has yet to become a nuclear-weapon-free zone, and that Israel remains the only State in the region that has neither become nor stated its intention to become a party to the Treaty on
Conference, in particular the Resolution on the Middle East. Anything else will prove devastating and could trigger a nuclear arms race in the region. We are certain this is a possibility no one wants to face.

We believe 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. In this context, we call on all Member States to ensure the success of the 2010 Review Conference. We call on all concerned to ensure objectivity and avoid selectivity in order to preserve the NPT credibility.

In this regard, we wish to reiterate that the resolution adopted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) General Council in its 54th session entitled Israeli nuclear capabilities, constitutes a step in the right direction. But implementation and adherence is key to the success of the international community’s efforts to combat proliferation of nuclear weapons. Failure to do so would only further undermine the single most important multilateral nuclear arms control agreement, The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and with it the efforts of the international community, exerted over the past 41 years.

Finally, Mr. Chairman,

We believe the devastating and long-term effects of human rights violations, impunity, foreign occupation, underdevelopment and poverty are directly linked to our efforts on disarmament. These conditions induce violence, radicalism, and hopelessness, providing fertile grounds for a host of illicit trades, which this Committee must address responsibly. It is our responsibility to endorse the reality that deadly conflicts and illicit arms trade will continue so long as the root causes of conflicts continue unresolved. Equally important is our necessary commitment to unanimously combat the cynical exploitation of some States of on-going conflicts in exchange for blood money, through illicit or illegal arms funding. Such actions perpetuate conflicts and increase suffering, hence hampering our efforts.

We cannot deny our collective responsibility in eliminating the causes, rather than managing the symptoms of conflicts. This moral and political responsibility should take center stage in our efforts. At a time when the world community is cooperating to overcome economic and environmental dangers, we must show equal determination to work collectively on stopping the scourges of needless and senseless wars. Millions of defenseless civilians, who have long suffered senseless violence and grinding poverty, count on us to do that. Only then do our future generations stand a chance at living a prosperous life, free of the worst nightmare humanity can face; nuclear arms race and unchecked violations of human rights.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.