Statement by Mr. Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, before the First Committee, general debate on all disarmament and international security agenda items, General Assembly 65th Session, New York 08 October 2010

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, allow me to convey my delegation's congratulations to 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.

I also wish to state that Palestine aligns itself with the important statement made by Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Chairman

Palestine believes that disarmament efforts must be done in a manner that upholds the principles of international humanitarian law, particularly the 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. In effect, any discourse or effort outside this context would not only be counterproductive but also allow those states violating 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 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 issue, which the international community needs to address. Additionally, 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 have State-sanctioned and funded small arms, which feed conflicts and perpetuate human rights violations. The continued illegal Israeli settlers' violence against the Palestinian civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is a clear example of such situations. In this regard, we voice our grave concern about reported plans
by Israel to further relax the lenient regulations on the acquisition and bearing of arms by
Israeli settlers.

Additionally, we must address the indiscriminate effect of certain conventional weapons,
especially when used illegally against civilians, like cluster munitions, anti-personnel
landmines, flakette missiles, the so-called dense inert metal explosive (DIME) munitions, and ammunition containing depleted uranium. Moreover, 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 own these weapons and use them against innocent civilians.

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
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 and limbs of
scores of innocent civilians every year. That is why we support all the Conventions,
protocols and efforts that seek to prohibit these munitions and address the unnecessary
humanitarian risks caused to civilians resulting from the use of such indiscriminate weapons.

Finally on this issue, we wish to reiterate that States responsible for laying mines and similar
weapons outside their territories must be made to fully bear the responsibility of clearing
them, including through cooperation with affected countries. Moreover, these States must
adhere to their legal responsibility to compensate the victims of these mines and explosive
remnants. These responsibilities are clearly outlined in the Protocol on Explosive Remnants
of War as well as the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-personnel Mines.

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 and consistent actions.

In this regard, 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 the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In
fact, we have been alarmed by its worrying declaration stating a clear intent not to comply
with any future arrangements, including the practical steps adopted in the 2010 Review
Conference. We believe this is an undeniable expression of the true obstacle standing in the
way of ridding the region of these weapons of mass destruction.

Israel has clearly and repeatedly declared 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, is a State proven to act with utter disdain towards international law. Unfortunately, it has also brazenly boasted international immunity from accountability or oversight with relation to this and other breaches.

That is why efforts to rid the Middle East of nuclear arms must be comprehensive, rather than selective. We maintain that turning a blind eye on a State that is stockpiling and developing nuclear weapons while refusing to submit to international inspection is gravely dangerous and alarming. Otherwise, the good will we agree on will be wasted and the credibility of our aims will be damaged. More dangerously, the credibility of the very system that regulates our relations will also be severely undermined.

In this regard, we believe international efforts in the region must start with serious measures and concerted pressure on Israel to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a non-nuclear State - 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.

Finally on this issue, we wish to underscore that encouraging cooperation between States cannot possibly be achieved by twisting the will of the vast majority of States to suit the preferences and appease the violations of a single member State. The exact opposite is true in fact. Moreover, we believe it serves this august assembly well to make absolutely clear that repeating fallacies and hollow accusations does not achieve results; they increase tensions. A single State in the Middle East has violated the rules of war, used weapons indiscriminately and illegally more times than one can count. Such consistent policy of belligerence should be countered, not because of a rejectionist attitude but rather, in the interests of regional and world peace.

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. In this regard, we contend that any attempt to pre-condition international accountability in this regard is a disingenuous pretext to escape adherence.

In this regard, we believe that it is vital to push for the implementation of the package deal on the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons of 1995 NPT Review 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 practical steps adopted in the 2010 Review Conference. 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, extremism, 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.

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 defenceless and innocent 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; a nuclear arms race and unchecked violations of human rights.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.