Statement by
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To the United Nations

First Committee

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Mr. Chairperson,

Allow me to 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. I would like to assure you of my delegation's fullest cooperation in the days and weeks ahead.

Mr. Chairperson,

Israel’s perspective and policy in the field of arms control and regional security has always been a pragmatic and realistic approach. It is rooted in the belief that all security concerns of regional states should be taken into account and addressed within the regional context. Disturbing realities in the Middle East mandate a practical step-by-step approach, bearing in mind the ultimate goal of achieving stability, peaceful relations and reconciliation among all States in the region. This process is inherently incremental. It can realistically begin with modest arrangements of confidence and security building measures in order to build the necessary trust for more ambitious cooperative security undertakings. Effective arms control measures can only be achieved and sustained in a region where war, armed conflict, terrorism, political hostility and incitement are not features of everyday life, but sadly they remained features of everyday life in Israel.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Middle East has some of the most daunting challenges to arms control and disarmaments faced by the international community. The region is undergoing historic and significant transformational change. The current turmoil in the Arab world, the continuing instability within several states in the area and the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against its own people, demonstrate how fragile and unstable the region continues to be. In addition, during the last two years conventional weapons have killed more than 100,000 people in the conflict in Syria.
The brutality of the Syrian regime merits the strongest condemnation of all members of the international community, and further underline the recognition that regional security problems are not one dimensional, but rather are multifaceted.

Mr. Chairperson,

Given this complexity, it will not be a simple task to create a mechanism that can enable all the regional parties to handle the multitude of problems we face in the region. We need an infrastructure of peace, co-existence and mutual recognition that will serve as vital precursors to any arms control measures in the region. However, with respect to international conventions and despite the harsh regional realities, Israel signed the CWC in 1993 and the CTBT in 1996 and has been party to other multilateral efforts to enhance non-proliferation, regional security and existing export control regimes.

In the Middle East it is not only a matter of acceding to treaties and conventions, it is also a matter of complying with treaties. It is no coincidence that four out of five violations of the NPT have occurred in the Middle East - Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Libya under Ghaddafi, Syria and Iran, whilst the fifth case, namely the DPRK, has been deeply involved in nuclear and missile proliferation to the Middle East. The nuclear activities of Iran and Syria remain under investigation by the IAEA. Both countries continue to withhold cooperation and place every possible obstacle and difficulty in the way of the Agency. Syria has yet to disclose the location of 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. Iran continues to disregard six mandatory Security Council Resolutions and withhold cooperation with the IAEA in addressing questions relating to activities in the military nuclear area.

Mr. Chairperson,
Unfortunately, Israel does not enjoy peace with the region as a whole – at times we believe that our very existence is called into question. Countries in the area such as Iran, Syria and terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah, reject Israel's right to exist. And they continue to stockpile large amounts of rockets and missiles that pose fundamental threats to the security of Israel. These threats must be withdrawn or neutralized before Israel can feel that its national security is adequately safeguarded.

Mr. Chairperson,

No strategic regional dialogue exists between the states in the Middle East, nor is there a forum to develop confidence-building measures that could defuse tensions and enhance trust between the states in the region. This type of regional forum would enable direct communication between the regional states on core issues affecting regional security and stability. In the early nineties, the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) talks provided the appropriate forum to promote confidence and address security issues and challenges in the area. Such a mechanism is lacking today – and although many countries in the Middle East share mutual threats, there is no channel for direct discussion between the states of the region.

Mr. Chairperson,

A significant conceptual gap exists between the states of the region on fundamental strategic security concepts. We believe that the countries of the Middle East should try to bridge this gap through direct dialogue, and reach agreements by consensus. A successful direct multilateral dialogue could send a strong signal that the regional partners are capable of working together towards the shared vision of a more secure and peaceful Middle East, free from conflicts, wars and weapons of mass destruction.

In this spirit, Israel positively engaged in July 2011 and November 2012 in the EU seminars convened in Brussels for “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 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 belief that only wide ranging and genuine dialogue between the parties in the region can move us towards a more stable architecture of regional security.

Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to inform the First Committee that for the past two years Israel has conducted numerous and lengthy discussions with Ambassador Laajava, Under Secretary of State of Finland, as well as, with many other representatives of relevant countries. We have outlined in great detail our views and positions regarding the challenges of regional security in the area. Israel has demonstrated a positive commitment to participate in a direct consultation with our Arab neighbors based on the principle of consensus. If no progress has been made to date, it has not been because of any lack of effort on our part, but because our Arab partners have made no efforts to engage with Israel directly on this issue and seek a consensual approach. At this time, our Arab neighbors have to decide whether they are interested in regional cooperation or confrontation.

Mr. Chairperson,

For many years now, the agenda of the First Committee has included two resolutions on the Middle East. The first deals with establishing a nuclear weapons-free zone in the region. This resolution has achieved consensus for almost thirty years, and although Israel has substantive reservations regarding certain elements of the resolution, we support the annual endorsement of this visionary goal.
In stark contrast to this spirit of consensus, the Arab League is tabling a second resolution item, titled the "Risk of Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East". This is a contentious one-sided resolution that seeks to divert attention from the proliferation activities of regional states like Iran and Syria that flagrantly violate international obligations undertaken in the disarmament and non-proliferation sphere.

Tabling this resolution constitutes an annual declaration by its sponsors that they prefer to continue trying to alienate and isolate Israel, rather than engaging Israel in a cooperative manner. The decision of its sponsors in the past three years to add a paragraph on a 2012 regional conference in this particular resolution raises profound questions about the real motivation of the Arab states with regard to this issue. This distinguished Committee would do well to foster and encourage initiatives of a conciliatory nature designed to reduce and diminish regional tensions rather than aggravate them. Belligerent resolutions do not move us forward. They only reinforce our suspicions, 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. Such a vote would be a vote for regional cooperation and regional common-sense.

Mr. Chairperson,

Israel welcomes the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty. This treaty is an important step in the international community's fight against illegal trade in arms including the transfer of arms to terrorists and other non-state actors. Israel believes that this Treaty strengthens international norms and national tools for arms trade control, while taking into consideration national security concerns. Israel has taken an active role in the negotiation of the ATT and voted in favor of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution in April 2013 which adopted the Treaty. Currently, we are in a final stage of an internal review process with the goal of considering favorably the signature of the Treaty.

Mr. Chairperson,
Israel aspires to achieve peace and security for all 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 security problems in the region.

I would like to conclude by quoting Psalms, Chapter 122, Verse 7:

"יד שָׁלוֹם בְּהֵמָּה, שָׁלוֹם בַּכָּרוֹתֵיהּ."

"May there be peace in your dwellings, tranquility in your palaces".

Thank you.