Statement by H.E. Ambassador Eshagh Al Habib
Deputy Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
Before the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly
On Regional Disarmament and Security
New York, 24 October, 2017

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation associates itself with the NAM statement delivered by Indonesia.

Middle East continues to be one of the volatile regions of the world. Despite all new sources of insecurity, yet the first, oldest and chronic threat to the security of the Middle East stems from the expansionist and interventionist strategies, aggressive and warmongering policies, and offensive and brutal practices of the Israeli regime.

Invading all its neighbors and even countries beyond the region, waging over 15 wars, and repeated commissioning of all core international crimes, are only a small portion of its vandalism in this region.

This regime is the only one in the region that has nuclear weapons and unsafeguarded nuclear facilities and activities whilst brazenly rejecting continued international calls to join the NPT.

This regime's nuclear weapons along with its hypocritical policy of "strategic ambiguity" is the main obstacle of the longstanding international demand for establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

In addition, Israel possesses other weapons of mass destruction and stubbornly rejects international calls to become party to international instruments banning such weapons.

Possession of a large arsenal of offensive sophisticated conventional weapons and skyrocketing increase in military expenditure of Israel are among other sources of its threat.

For instance, Israel's military expenditure grew by 19 per cent between 2007 and 2016 and it was one of the largest military spenders in the world in 2016.

This is yet separate from about 3.5 billion dollars in annual military aid from the U.S.. It is worth mentioning in this regard that, according to the U.S. documents, Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of military assistance from the United States since World War II and to date, the United States has provided Israel 127.4 billion dollars in bilateral assistance. Almost all of such amount is in the form of military assistance, which has been designed to maintain Israel's so-called “qualitative military edge” over other countries in the region. This is despite the fact that Israel itself is one of the top global arms suppliers.

Mr. Chairman,

The fact that combined total military expenditure of the Middle East countries in 2016 showed a 19 per cent increase compared with 2007 and their military spending as a share of GDP, averaged 6.0 per cent in 2016 -- almost triple the global average of 2.2 per cent -- and that roughly 25 per cent of all arms trade are destined for the Middle East, indicates how grave and alarming the increasing military expenditure in the Middle East is.
This situation, in addition to high military expenditure of the Israeli regime, is also due to manifold increase in the military spending of two Persian Gulf States, whom, together with Israel, were among the top 15 countries with highest military expenditure in the world in 2016.

For instance, only a surge in weapons purchases by a certain oil-rich Persian Gulf State helped to push global arms sales up by more than 10 per cent in 2015, and placed that country at the top of the list of biggest arms-importing countries in the world. Though that country was the fourth biggest spender in arms in 2016 -- mainly due to decrease in oil prices --, but even that year, it was by far the largest military spender in the region. In 2017, that country signed a 110 billion dollar weapons deal with the U.S., which is yet separate from a ten-year, 350 billion dollar arms deal that this country signed separately with the U.S. This country had been increasing its military spending year-on-year since 2002.

The next example is another oil-rich Persian Gulf State, which was the third biggest arms importing country globally from 2012 to 2016. This country, with a smaller population has been developing an assertive and aggressive foreign policy over the years, pursuing power projection policy by intervening militarily in some other countries and even establishing a military base in Africa. This country has been the fifth largest arms importer of the last 20 years and is the destination of 19 per cent of all U.S. arms exports.

In recent years, these two oil-rich Persian Gulf States have used many of their weapons for death and destruction in Yemen.

Mr. Chairman,

To restore security and stability to Middle East, the elimination of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction of Israel and its accession to related international instruments is crucial including for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in this region.

Likewise, a sharp decrease in military expenditure and arms import of Israel and certain Persian Gulf State is essential.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite being surrounded and affected by such a situation, the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to have one of the lowest levels of military expenditure in this region.

In comparison to the 19 per cent increase in military expenditure of the Middle East countries from 2007 to 2016, Iran’s military expenditure decreased by 7.3 per cent during that period. This fact alone indicates how Iran exercises maximum restraint in responding to skyrocketing challenges of its security environment.

Likewise, as a party to all major treaties banning weapons of mass destruction, Iran continues to fulfill its respective obligations and will continue to seriously take its responsibility in contributing to the preservation of peace and security in this sensitive region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.