

State of Israel

Explanation of Vote on The Establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East

*Mr. Joshua Zarka
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Jerusalem, Israel*

Madam Chair,

Israel has once again joined the consensus on resolution L.1 entitled "The Establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East", notwithstanding our substantive reservations regarding certain elements of the resolution. We have done so since Israel remains committed to a vision of the Middle East developing into a zone free of Chemical, Biological and Nuclear weapons as well as ballistic missiles. Yet we are also realistic enough to know that in the current realities of the Middle East, this noble vision is not going to materialize any time soon. We welcome the return of the consensus spirit which was regrettably absent in the recent IAEA General Conference.

Madam Chair,

Israel has always maintained that the nuclear issue, as well as all regional security issues, conventional and non-conventional alike, could only be realistically addressed within the regional context.

Israel believes that current political realities in the Middle East mandate a gradual process **based on a step by step approach**. This process should begin with modest CBM's carefully selected so as not to detract from security margins of any regional state, followed by the establishment of peaceful relations, reconciliation, mutual recognition and good neighborliness, and complemented by conventional and non-conventional arms control measures. This could, in due course, lead to more ambitious goals, such as the establishment of a mutually verifiable Nuclear Weapons Free Zone.

Such a process is also grounded in the vast experience gained in other regions. As the international community has recognized, the establishment of a NWFZ should emanate from the region. It can only be based on arrangements freely arrived at through direct negotiation between the states of the region and those directly concerned. Such a zone can not be imposed from the outside nor can it emerge before the conditions for it has ripened. Moreover, since the ultimate goal in the Middle East, as in other regions, is regional peace and security, the process of arms control negotiations should adequately address the threat perceptions of all participating states and must not hamper the security of any given party. This process clearly cannot

begin in situations where some of the parties concerned still maintain a state of war with each other, refuse in principle to maintain peaceful relations with Israel or even recognize its right to exist.

In this context it should be recalled that in the Middle East, unlike other regions in the world where nuclear weapons free zones have been established, there are continuing threats in the region and beyond against the very existence of one state, Israel. These threats are significantly exacerbated by the irresponsible behavior of certain states concerning the export of WMDs and WMD-related technologies and the discrepancies between their commitments and their actual behavior.

These circumstances and the poor track record of non-compliance with international obligations by several states of the region have a critical impact on the ability to embark on a joint process of regional security building that could eventually lead to a NWFZ in the ME. Let us bear in mind that three out of the four recognized cases of non-compliance in the NPT have taken place in the Middle East.

Madam Chair,

Israel has reiterated its vision of promoting regional peace and stability. Regrettably, last year's events did not bring us closer to this vision. We harbor no illusions: Progress towards realizing this vision cannot be made without a fundamental change in regional circumstances, and not least, without a significant transformation in the attitude of states in the region toward Israel.

It is therefore our view that efforts in this context should be directed on the creation of a stable environment of peace and reconciliation in our part of the world.

Israel will continue to dedicate all its efforts to achieve this goal. We call upon our neighbors to do the same.

Thank you Madam Chair.