Statement by
Dr. Eyal Propper
Deputy Head
Division for Strategic Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

General Debate
First Committee of the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly

United Nations, New York
8 October 2014

(Check Against Delivery)
Mr. Chairperson,

At the outset please allow me to congratulate you on your election as Chair of the First Committee and assure you of my delegation's full cooperation and support in the fulfillment of your duties. We are confident that your able leadership will steer our work to a successful conclusion.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is widely recognized that the Middle East is a region fraught with instability, conflict and hostilities. A region that faces unique security challenges which, if left unchecked, have the potential to destabilize not only the region but well beyond. This has become a region in turmoil where states disintegrate and are overtaken by extremists bent on disseminating their convictions and beliefs by violent coercion directed primarily against innocent civilians. This is an area where certain states and terror organizations cooperate in the acquisition of strategic weapons, and where these state supporters of terror continue to procure weapons of mass destruction in the nuclear and chemical field.

Additionally, there are terror organizations that have come to possess arsenals of rockets and longer range missiles with increasing accuracy that far exceed arsenals possessed by regional states. These missiles and rockets are manufactured, smuggled and proliferated by the tens of thousands, in many cases in clear contravention to UNSC resolutions adopted under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter such as 1373 and 1747. These short to medium range missiles and rockets have the ability to threaten and disrupt major civilian population centers and can assume strategic significance in military terms. These terrorist groups have also acquired weapons such as UAVs, advanced air defense
systems and cutting-edge anti-ship missiles. Put together they cast a dark shadow over the ability of countries to conduct daily existence.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Middle East also sorely lacks in mechanisms that could foster dialogue and greater understanding between regional players. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the refusal to recognize Israel, there are no processes that could contribute to the building of confidence, de-escalation of tensions and conflict resolution as a whole. There is no forum in which direct communication between regional states can address core security issues and encourage the attainment of solutions in a cooperative and forthcoming manner.

Unfortunately the Middle East has also distinguished itself over the years by the blatant violation and lack of respect for formal treaty obligations. Respect for treaty obligations has always been considered one of the pillars of any international discourse and the principle of \textit{pacta sunt servanda} an essential tenet in the relations between states. Legally binding obligations undertaken in accordance with international law have been easily put aside by several regional states determined to pursue clandestine military programs or greater regional hegemony. Within the context of the NPT, 4 out of 5 gross violations of the treaty have occurred in the Middle East, namely Iran, Syria, Libya and Iraq, whilst the fifth case, DPRK, has been deeply involved in proliferation to the region.

Mr. Chairperson,
Against this daunting backdrop, some continue to argue that a regional security discussion is not an essential component in the alleviation of regional tensions and the building of greater understanding and cooperation between regional partners. However, this is the basis that could contribute to the achievement of peace and security in a Middle East free from wars, conflict and all weapons that cause mass destruction or disruption.

Israel unequivocally states that only a pragmatic and realistic approach to regional security challenges can bring about a desired outcome of greater peace and stability. Security concerns of all regional states must be taken into account and addressed within the context of our present regional reality and challenges. This can only start with modest arrangements of confidence and security building measures and only once such measures are in place, have taken root and have shown to be durable and conducive, can more ambitious undertakings be considered.

Mr. Chairperson,

Israel has participated at senior and authoritative level during the last year, in five rounds of consultations convened by the Finnish Under-Secretary Lajavaa, to discuss regional security and the conditions necessary for establishing a Middle East free of WMD and means of delivery. Israel has already stated its willingness to participate in a sixth round of consultations and has communicated this willingness to Under Secretary Lajavaa.

Regretfully a significant conceptual gap exists between regional states on fundamental strategic security concepts. While Israel has based its position on
the elementary, and even self-evident, concept that discussions between regional partners must be direct and based on consensus, our neighbors have yet to adopt this pragmatic and necessary approach. They stipulate their demand to establish a MEWMDFZ in fora where not all regional partners participate and without it being based on arrangements freely arrived at by the states of the region. The Arab states try to impose this mechanism on the region instead of reaching out to Israel in order to build greater understanding. Furthermore, the Arab countries have not made the slightest attempt to engage Israel directly and establish a mutually acceptable basis to convene a conference in Helsinki. Some have refrained from participating altogether, namely Iran and Syria. If indeed this is such an important issue for the Arab group, why not even try and engage Israel in a way that can facilitate progress and even a breakthrough towards greater regional peace and security.

Mr. Chairperson,

Unfortunately, it is clear that the Arab group has not chosen the path of conciliation but rather that of confrontation. They claim to be forthcoming, while at the same time pursue anti-Israeli resolutions aimed at singling Israel out. Such was the case in the 58th General Conference of the IAEA with the Group of Arab State's "Israeli Nuclear Capabilities" draft resolution which was clearly rejected, and this is the case in this year's UN First Committee where the draft resolution "Risk of Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East" is once again brought up in a useless attempt to deflect attention from the real security threats facing the region. Israel, for its part, remains committed to a process aimed at the establishment of a more secure and peaceful Middle East, free from conflicts, wars and all weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Chairperson,
Iran remains the cardinal threat to the security of the region and beyond. Iran continues its unrelenting pursuit of a nuclear weapons' capability, its support for terror organizations by providing weapons, financial support and training and advancing its regional ambitions. The election of the so-called moderates in Iran should not lead one to underestimate the threat Iran still poses even with the emergence of ISIS. Iran's negotiations with the EU3+3 regarding the nuclear issue, as well as the protracted negotiations with the IAEA, are at the end of the day designed to assist Iran's long term strategic goal of acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. Iran participates in these processes in order to alleviate pressures and buy more time for its military program. There is still no clear indication of any Iranian intention to roll back these capabilities as demanded by several mandatory UN Security Council resolutions. If anything, the opposite is true.

Mr. Chairperson,

The removal from Syria and destruction of the declared chemical weapons is indeed an important achievement with significant regional security ramifications. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the work has still not been concluded and the threats emanating from Syria, including those pertaining to residual chemical capabilities, are still valid in many respects. Taken together with the attempts by terrorist groups like Hezbollah and other Jihadist groups to acquire advanced conventional weapons and also chemical weapons capabilities, it's clear that many security challenges remain ahead of us with regard to Syria.

I thank you.