



# Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## Israel's Approach to Regional Security, Arms Control and Disarmament

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### ► DISARMAMENT AFFAIRS AND REGIONAL SECURITY

## Israel's Approach to Regional Security, Arms Control and Disarmament

Statement by H.E. Mr. Eytan Bentsur

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before the Conference on Disarmament

Geneva, 4 September 1997

Mr. President,

Let me begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

With your long experience, we are assured of skillful steering of the work of the Conference, as it moves towards the General Assembly.

At the same time, I would like to express our thanks to your predecessor, Ambassador Maria Krasnohorska of Slovakia.

I also take the opportunity to acknowledge and express our appreciation to the Secretary General of the Conference, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, and to his Deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, for their effective support.

Mr. President,

In days of old, the Prophets of Israel gave voice to a message of universal peace and disarmament, to which the Jewish people have held fast and which is now Israel's heritage.

"They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine

and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid." (Micah, chapter 4, verses 3-4)

The goal to which Israel constantly aspires is to live in a region where comprehensive and lasting relations of peace prevail, based on reconciliation between peoples, good neighbourliness, open borders, and trust among nations.

Israel wishes to see the whole region come around to these fundamental principles and norms, which should govern relations between states and have been the backbone of transition from war and conflict to peace and reconciliation in other regions.

An agreement on these principles and norms in our region will provide a catalyst to the peace process and moreover pave the way for arms control and regional security arrangements.

The basis for co-existence between Israel and Arab States was laid in the peace treaties between Israel and its Egyptian and Jordanian neighbours. The Madrid Conference, to which I had the honour of contributing, also bears the special emblem of the "pioneers of peace," to whom the present Government of Israel is direct heir.

Mutual Israeli-Palestinian recognition and the firm commitment of the present Israeli Government to honour the Oslo Accords, are also closely tied to peace realities forged with our close neighbours, Egypt and Jordan. One should not forget that in parallel with the political negotiations to achieve and promote comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, the partners to peace should also have the will and capacity to contain the dangers and enemies of peace.

Mr. President,

#### *General Principles*

In its pursuit of peace, the Government of Israel is guided by a number of principles, which I would like to elaborate:

First - peace must come with security.

Peace must enhance security for all concerned. Security is neither an obsession nor a blind belief. It touches upon our very existence in a region where threats and instability still prevail, to the detriment of a peaceful and cooperative regional relationship.

The present political process, which reflects a growing recognition of the futility of the use of force as a means to advance political goals, has not yet fundamentally and irreversibly changed the basic strategic setting or, more correctly, the general state of threat in which Israel - and not only Israel exists and operates. The willingness to renounce the threat, or use of force, as well as the obligation to settle conflicts by peaceful means is not yet shared by all our neighbours. War and violence are still considered, and indeed advocated by some, as legitimate instruments of policy. Limitations inherent in arms control regimes are deemed by some to be marginal obstacles to be ignored or, worse, as convenient loopholes to gain access to technologies necessary to produce weapons of mass destruction and their means of

delivery. Israel is confronted with heavily armed regimes, which profess various degrees of hostility toward it and which possess conventional and non-conventional arsenals.

In this geo-strategic setting, Israel finds itself small in size with no strategic depth. It is entirely dependent on outside sources of energy and is also poor in other natural resources, including water. The density of its population and industrial centres make Israel especially vulnerable to attacks. Massive quantities of bombs and missiles, capable of indiscriminate damage and injury to civilian population, are certainly defined by us as weapons of mass destruction.

Israel's national security doctrine and capabilities are designed to offset these strategic vulnerabilities and disadvantageous disparities.

Second - it is imperative to preserve the peace process, free of terrorism and violence.

Terrorism is supported, financed, encouraged and practised by radical regimes in our region. It has assumed many forms, which are designed to disrupt the daily life of the civilian population, to undermine its resolve and to damage the economy. Above all, terrorism aims at derailing the peace process which the Government of Israel and others in the region and beyond, are striving to advance.

Third - regional cooperation as well as economic and social development are critical factors in ensuring peace and stability over the long run.

Israel wishes to share, as an equal partner, in the creation of regional cooperation. We do not seek to impose economic cooperation on our neighbours, nor do we wish to oblige them to cooperate with us. Still, we firmly believe that the evolution of cooperation and normalization across Arab-Israel boundaries is essential, not only to move the region to a more peaceful environment and to give true meaning and deep roots to relations of peace, but also to give Israel and the other parties a genuine sense of security that will, in turn, facilitate more ambitious arms control undertakings.

Fourth - peace and normalization are one and indivisible.

Normalization is the natural product of conflict resolution. Consequently, the logic of peace and dialogue dictates that reconciliation and normalization will not be held hostage to other ends. Reconciliation between the peoples of the region and normalization among its countries must cease forever the residue of ideological negativeness and negation.

Mr. President,

#### *Regional Approach*

Israel aspires to achieve peace and security for all the peoples of the Middle East, with a life free of threats and from the use of force. In this context, we hope that the day will come when a regional security framework encompassing all countries of the Middle East, as the region shall be defined, will be realized to provide a cooperative multilateral response to all the security problems of the Middle East.

The advantages of the regional approach are several - in the first instance, as a means of building trust and confidence, and thereafter of putting arms control and disarmament mechanisms into place. They by far outweigh the global approach, which cannot provide a response to the unique security problems of the Middle East in general, and to those of Israel in particular. For this reason, Israel welcomed the establishment of the Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS), in the context of the multilateral talks within the framework of the Middle East Peace Process initiated in Madrid. This group is, in our view, an essential pillar to support the peace process as a whole and an integral part of it.

In this respect, the Middle East could certainly learn from the experiences of other regions - Europe, Latin America, Africa and the Pacific, where genuine efforts on the regional level have created mutually beneficial regional security frameworks.

In its approach to this process, Israel is guided by the need to set ambitious objectives, the pursuit of which should be conducted in a pragmatic and realistic manner. Progress should be sought wherever and whenever possible - and its pace should be determined by conditions prevailing in the region. After peaceful relations and reconciliation are established among all states in the region, Israel will endeavour to establish in the Middle East - through direct negotiations among all its members - a zone free of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, as well as ballistic missiles, based on mutual and effective verification.

No other fora, that lack the unique regional features of the Madrid Multilateral Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security, can bring about meaningful progress in realizing such an ambitious arms control agenda.

Until that hoped-for-time, Israel will strive, as first steps, to conduct a regional security dialogue and to implement confidence-building measures that will increase openness and build trust and cooperation - thereby making a significant contribution to ease tensions, reduce the prospects of surprise attacks, diminish the levels of suspicion and prevent armed conflict. The trust that will be built, and the parallel progress in the bilateral peace process between Israel and its neighbours, will enable the beginning of negotiations on more ambitious arms control measures.

Mr. President,

#### *Basic Premises*

In its concept of, and thinking on, arms control and a regional security framework, Israel is guided by several premises:

First - the arms control and regional security process should enhance the security of each and every one of the states taking part in it, thereby contributing to the stability and security of the region as a whole.

Second - all steps and measures to be adopted throughout the arms control and regional security process must be designed so as to increase the overall stability of the region. At no point should they diminish the

security of any state, nor should they allow, at any stage of the process, any state or group of states to abuse them in order to acquire a military advantage over the others.

Third - each state is entitled to an equally high level of overall security, defined as freedom from threats to its existence and well-being. Thus, structural vulnerabilities should be compensated for by offsetting capabilities. Requirements of self-defence and deterrence of aggression are the only legitimate needs that should be taken into consideration in the arms control and regional security process.

Fourth - every state in the region has the right to define the threat it considers relevant to its own security. All states of the region will be called upon to do so with a view to having the arms control and the regional security process provide adequate responses to them.

Fifth - the process and the agreements that may be achieved should take into account not only threats and capabilities from individual states (and non-state entities), but also threats and capabilities deriving from coalitions and treaties as well as from political and regional military alliances and accords between states of the region.

We regret that the promising discussions and activities of the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group have been brought to halt by a few, who would wish to impose certain conditions and an extraneous agenda on its work. We are hopeful of an early resumption of the Group's work and look forward to that.

#### *Process Guidelines*

Against this background, let me expand on some process guidelines of our arms control and regional security approach as outlined above:

First - the primacy of the Peace Process, and the eventual peace which is to be durable and comprehensive. All regional security and arms control issues should be dealt with in this context.

Second - the Peace Process is a regional one and must embrace every country of the region. Within this regional framework, confidence-building and security measures have to be developed. Only on such a basis can regional arms control arrangements be achieved.

Third - a step-by-step approach is required. Any attempt to advance items on the overall agenda, which can only be addressed at a later stage in the process, will be self-defeating.

Fourth - ultimately, it is the progress achieved in the transformation of the region into a more peaceful, stable and secure environment that will govern the pace and scope of arms control measures that will be negotiated and effectively implemented in the region.

Mr. President,

#### *Israel and International Disarmament Efforts*

As I have indicated, Israel, when assessing its own situation, attaches primacy to regional arrangements which attempt to provide an answer to security and stability problems in the entire region. At the same

time, this approach has not prevented Israel from supporting or taking part in the concerted effort of the international community to curb proliferation of either conventional or nonconventional weapons and ballistic missiles and, where appropriate, to endorse global agreements which could complement those to be established at the regional level.

Indeed, Israel has been actively supporting and participating in efforts of the international community to prevent the proliferation of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, not least through export control mechanisms, inspired by those of the Nuclear Suppliers Guidelines (NSG), the Australian Group (AG), and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), of which Israel is an adherent.

#### *NPT*

With its commitment to non-proliferation in mind, Israel voted in favour of UN General Assembly resolution 2373 of 1968, adopting the

NPT. It is satisfied with the indefinite extension of the Treaty. At the same time, for the reasons I have elaborated, Israel does not find in the NPT an adequate response to its own security problems and regional concerns - and that without mentioning violations of NPT obligations by a regional party to the Treaty.

#### *CWC*

Israel joins the community of nations in welcoming the entry into force of the Convention banning the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and mandating their complete destruction. Israel is proud to have been one of the original, founding signatory states of the Convention.

Our signature of the Convention and subsequently active role we took in the joint endeavour to craft it into workable mechanisms, reflect in general Israel's vision of the world in which it wishes to exist and prosper. In particular, its continuing interest, which is shared by many other countries, to preserve the Convention's core balance between a state's duty to demonstrate compliance and its right to protect itself from intrusive and abusive encroachment on its security and its commercial and proprietary interests.

By signing the Convention, Israel signaled its hope that others in its region will soon follow suit.

Israel belongs to those member states which have not yet ratified the Convention. This should come as no surprise to the world community cognizant of the unique strategic and political environment in which Israel still operates today. At the signing ceremony in Paris in 1993, Israel's Foreign Minister openly stated Israel's position that "the Chemical Weapons Convention must refer to our region and that the region at large must adhere to its principles." In that context, Israel then made it clear that it would seek to ratify the Convention subject to regional concerns as well as to its constitutional constraints and legislative timetable.

These considerations remain no less valid today. Israel is aware of, indeed it welcomes, the fact that certain Arab states have signed, and that some have even ratified the Convention. However, it is

unfortunately also a well-known reality that none of the CW-capable or suspect CW-armed Arab states have signed, let alone ratified, the Chemical Weapons Convention. Indeed, key non-signatory Arab states have indicated collectively that they would not change their position even if Israel ratifies the Convention. Among them are countries which in the past have resorted to actual use of chemical weapons and which are believed to be developing capabilities in this field, even as the world is pledging to forsake and eradicate forever all chemical weapons. From Israel's perspective, not only have CW threats against it not receded in recent years, but they have even gained in saliency and acuteness. What I have described, therefore - to use the Convention's parlance - must not necessarily be construed as prejudging the outcome of a future Israeli decision on the matter of the ratification, or of the continued Israeli support for the Convention. Favourable changes in the security climate will, of course, favourably affect Israel's attitude on the ratification issue.

#### *CCW*

Israel is a party to the Convention on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be Excessively Injurious or have Indiscriminate Effects (commonly known as the "CCW"). Israel ratified this Convention in March 1995, and participated in the Review Conference, which amended Protocol 11 of the Convention on Land Mines and adopted a new Protocol IV on Blinding Laser Weapons. Israel is presently reviewing the Revised Land Mines Protocol and the new Blinding Laser Protocol. Moreover, we support the efforts being made to extend the accession to the CCW by as many states as possible, particularly in the Middle East region.

#### *Anti-personnel Land Mines (APL's)*

Israel has declared a moratorium on the exportation of anti-personnel land mines and has recently extended it for a further three year period (until 1999). Israel has joined efforts by the international community in clearing land mines in Angola. We are presently evaluating the possibilities of using Israeli expertise in mine clearance in other parts of the world.

Due to Israel's unique situation in the Middle East, involving an ongoing threat of hostilities from neighbouring and regional states, as well as terrorist threats and actions along its borders, Israel is still obliged to maintain its ability to use anti-personnel land mines as necessary, for self-defence in general and along the borders in particular. Any such use of anti-personnel land mines is in accordance with the requirements of the CCW. Accordingly, Israel is unable, at this juncture, to commit itself to a total ban on the use of anti-personnel land mines until effective alternative measures are available to ensure the protection of civilians threatened on a daily basis by terrorists, and to ensure the protection of Israeli Defence Forces operating in areas of armed conflict. At the same time, Israel supports a gradual process in which each state will undertake to cease proliferation of anti-personnel land mines, accept restrictions on possible use, and - once circumstances permit - a ban on the production and use of anti-personnel land mines.

Israel would like to give its assurances that within the constraints mentioned above, it will continue to be a part of the global effort to reduce the need for, and the use of, anti-personnel land mines.

#### *Register*

Israel welcomes the continuing operation of the UN Register of Conventional Arms and the recent report by the Secretary General on the Register. Israel has responded on a year-by-year basis since the inception of the Register to the request, contained in relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, to provide data on its imports and exports of arms. A similar attitude by all regional parties in the Middle East would certainly contribute to confidence and trust-building in the region.

#### *CTBT*

Israel's decision to sign the CTBT is another manifestation and extension of its long-standing non-proliferation policy as described today. We joined the PTBT as early as January 1964, and we are now moving forward on the CTBT.

In this context, I would like to recall my country's contribution, politically and conceptually, to the negotiations and to the drafting of the CTBT. Although the CTBT language does not satisfactorily address some of our major concerns, we supported the final text. We co-sponsored the resolution at the United Nations General Assembly and were among the first to sign thereafter. Israel also attaches great importance to the attitude of its regional neighbours to the Treaty. Their decision to become a party to the Treaty will play a supportive role at a regional level and will contribute to peace and security in the Middle East. In considering the issue of ratifying the CTBT, Israel will take into account inter alia developments in our region, including the adherence to the Treaty by key states.

By adopting these steps and policies, Israel has demonstrated its willingness to be involved in a responsible and serious manner in the efforts of the international community to prevent the spread of conventional as well as nonconventional weapons.

Mr. President,

#### *Other Disarmament Efforts*

Israel welcomes the agreements signed in recent years between the Russian Federation and the United States regarding their strategic weapons. These agreements, which reflect the new and promising climate in relations between those two states and their intensive dialogue on strategic issues, constitute a major guarantee for peace and security in the world today.

Israel also welcomes those bilateral and regional developments in different parts of the world which contribute to national security as well as to the regional arms control and stability of those concerned.

We are hopeful that the political and security environment in our own region will further improve so as to allow similar achievements.

Mr. President,



*Israel and the CD*

Israel was recently admitted as a member of the Conference on Disarmament. We waited for some years for membership in this important body - the "single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum" of the family of nations.

We appreciate the efforts and the tenacity of many delegations and governments to achieve the recent expansion of the CD.

We agree with all those who urge the CD to keep the issue of its membership under constant and renewed scrutiny, in order to better reflect changing international and regional realities and the desire of others to contribute to the work of the CD.

We did our apprenticeship as an observer - and, in effect, as an active nonmember state - in the CD for several years and especially throughout the CTBT negotiations, which was beneficial to us and, if I may say so, was proof of our earnestness. We believe that CD membership carries with it heavy responsibilities and we pledge to do our utmost in discharging our duties as a new member.

On the issue of the programme of work of the CD, Israel is of the view that the CD agenda has to strike an appropriate balance between the desirable and possible.

Since 1990, the CD has successfully negotiated the CWC and the CTBT and for that it deserves our appreciation.

In the context of the CD programme of work, it must be remembered that the millions who have perished as a result of wars, armed conflict and civil strife since 1945 bear witness to the sheer and utter destructiveness of weapons classified as "conventional." The problems, therefore, lie with the reckless use of arms, of all categories, by irresponsible regimes.

As the tensions which reflected the Cold War era give way to growing global confidence and cooperation, the international community should now turn more of its attention and energies towards many as yet unresolved regional conflicts, which are characterized by unprecedented conventional arms buildups and in some instances also by clandestine pursuit of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Apparently, Iraq and North Korea are the recent examples in this regard, but surely not the only ones - nor the last. Iran is another example of a state which is currently engaged in acquiring nonconventional capabilities, in a manner which is not consistent with its international obligations. Israel calls upon the international community to prevent such dangerous developments which will further destabilize the Middle East and pose a grave threat to many countries.

In view of their heavy responsibilities, CD members should strive, in our view, to set a correspondingly realistic and pragmatic programme of work, the pursuit of which will make our world more (rather than less) secure, stable and peaceful.

The CD cannot assume the tasks of other frameworks - bilateral, multilateral, regional or otherwise. It cannot dictate nor impose either agenda items or contents or timetables. The CD should continue to freely

negotiate by consensus.

Those treaties to be negotiated and concluded in the CD should be subject to truly universal adherence and should not remain legally binding instruments to which only like-minded states subscribe.

Mr. President,

One more principle, that should guide our future work in the CD, has to do with the verification mechanism of treaties. We should maintain a careful balance between verification regimes that are reliable and effective to assure compliance, and the need to protect vital national security interests or industrial-commercial concerns. Likewise, we should not lose sight of the absolute necessity to complement effective verification with reliable enforcement to ascertain that arms control obligations are not taken lightly and countries that behave otherwise, are punished rather than rewarded.

We hope that members of the CD will be able to bridge their differences and soon embark on constructive and effective work, which has been the hallmark of the CD for some years. By so doing, the CD will rise to the main challenge of the 21st century - namely, that of making our globe a much more peaceful and secure place for all mankind.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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