



*Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine
to the United Nations*

29 November 2021

Statement by H.E. Dr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Representative of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, before the Second Session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. President,

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you on the assumption of your duties as the President of the Second Conference and for your remarkable efforts in guiding our work. I would also like to seize this opportunity to express our appreciation to Jordan for their able leadership of the first session of the Conference and to commend the Secretary General and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs for their continuous support.

Mr. President,

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not only a horrific page of history, they are a stark reminder of the existential threat humanity remains under.

We made a commitment then, that we have failed since to honour: we pledged to rid our world from nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, the very first resolution adopted by the General Assembly sought to ensure “*the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction*”.

Weapons of mass destruction are, by their very essence, indiscriminate and inhumane. We reiterate that there are no circumstances in which their use can be justified. They are, have always been, and will always be, illegal.

Mr. President,

The NPT was supposed to ensure a parallel track towards honouring a reciprocal commitment. Nuclear-weapon states would get rid of their nuclear arsenal, and non-Nuclear Weapon States would commit not to acquire such weapons. Nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are therefore intimately linked, and failure to achieve the former has already and will continue compromising the achievement of the latter.

It was recognized that nuclear weapon free zones at the regional level strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime, enhance global and regional peace and security, and contribute to reaching the objective of nuclear disarmament.

The objective of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction has featured prominently on the international agenda for decades. The resolution on the Middle East was an integral part of the package extending indefinitely the NPT. This is a recognition of the significance of this region, given its history and geography, and the conflicts it is a witness to. In these conditions, the presence of such weapons, in such a region, are a recipe for disaster.

Therefore, the advancement of a Middle East Zone free of nuclear weapons has always been a shared undertaking, by States of the region, the three co-sponsors of the 1995 resolution who bear a particular responsibility in ensuring its implementation, the two other Nuclear Weapon States and the United Nations.

Mr. President,

One country in our region claims for itself what it denies others, ignoring both international law and international will. Israel has illegally developed nuclear weapons, refused to join the NPT and continues to actively obstruct the prospect of the Middle East free zone. It is the only country in our region refusing to attend this Conference.

This undertaking however remains open to all, and the decisions of this Conference will be adopted by consensus. Nobody was excluded, but one party has decided for now to exclude itself, because it believes it can play by other rules without consequences. These attitudes of exceptionalism only fuel disregard for international law, compromise everybody's security, and undermine efforts to advance regional and global peace and security.

The State of Palestine is fully committed to realizing a world free of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction. The State of Palestine is proud to have acceded to all relevant instruments and to have participated in the elaboration of the landmark Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons.

Mr. President,

Peace and security cannot be achieved by the threat of mutual destruction. Nor can some claim for themselves the possession of weapons that they deny others. There is no justification for prolonging the exceptional status enjoyed by nuclear weapons among weapons of mass destruction. Nothing can justify what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The very existence of these weapons to this day is an insult to those who perished and to those who survived.

At this Conference today, we proclaim that we do not want to be remembered for our capacity to destroy, but by our capacity to build and prosper. We commit to a Middle East free of nuclear weapons, not because of the identity of those possessing them in our region, but because we have a duty towards future generations to preserve them from such a threat. We commit to a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction for the good of our people and all peoples. We make this commitment as a contribution to the world we hope to see emerge tomorrow, free of such weapons.

This is the collective pledge we made 75 years ago after witnessing the horrific impact of these weapons. Honouring this pledge in our region and worldwide is long overdue.