

**Remarks by the H.E. Mr. Dennis Francis, President of the General Assembly
at the Fourth Session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East
Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and
Other Weapons of Mass Destruction**

[As Delivered]

Video link: <https://youtu.be/MrUVh-c68jA>

13 November 2023

*Mr. President of the Conference, Excellency Mr. Taher El-Sonni, Ambassador and
Permanent Representative of Libya,*

*Madame High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu,
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,*

Over **four decades** have passed since the General Assembly's tenth special session recommended the establishment of a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East.

Yet, the ardent hope for a safer future has not been lost to the sands of time.

Only two weeks ago, the First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) reaffirmed its **unflinching support** for the establishment of this zone – calling for urgent and practical steps to implement this recommendation.

This level of international support for any one issue – let alone global disarmament – is one of the unique and exceptional intergovernmental occurrences in advancing our collective security.

Clearly, the overwhelming majority of Member States agree that keeping the region free of the most destructive weapons ever created by humanity is an important precursor to peace and stability in the Middle East.

Indeed, there can be no lasting peace without also comprehensively addressing the issue of nuclear weapons.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

This hopeful eye to the future is set against the dark veil of unbearable suffering that has descended upon the Middle East with crushing weight over the last month.

With each day, we witness terrifying scenes of the widespread loss of civilians – countless innocent lives of women and children lost.

We mourn each of them.

The ongoing hostilities are amplified by worries about escalation of nuclear programmes – stark reminders that the real threat of nuclear annihilation, which cannot be dismissed as farfetched from the bygone era.

Not for the Middle East. Not for the world.

The perennially unresolved issue of **developing and stockpiling** nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction places yet another burden on an already fraught political and security environment.

Hence, the message of the General Assembly is unequivocal and forthright: **nuclear weapons pose an existential threat to all of humanity.**

We therefore **all** have a responsibility to bring an end to the dangerous political standoff preventing progress on disarmament.

Excellencies,

Our footsteps will one day fade from this planet.

We owe it to the generations who will follow to embark **today** on a path of sustainable peace in the Middle East.

I therefore call on all actors to cooperate urgently and fully with the IAEA, and to diligently ensure that transparency measures are in place for any nuclear programmes.

This – along with absolute adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as the linchpin of nuclear disarmament – will go a long way to rebuilding trust.

I urge all parties to declare support for a nuclear-free zone and avoid **any** action that obstructs the goal of complete and total nuclear disarmament.

Above all, I call for restraint.

It is incumbent upon us **all** to prioritize the sanctity of human life and uphold international law, including international humanitarian law.

Mr. President, I would like to read that sentence again.

It is incumbent upon **all** of us to prioritize the sanctity of human life and uphold international law, including international humanitarian law.

All actors in the region must return to dialogue and the diplomatic path in good faith.

The potential for **unity and solidarity** resides here – among you, esteemed Conference participants.

Imagine the Middle East joining the five other regions that have banned the testing, stationing, development and use of nuclear weapons inside their territories – bringing us one giant step closer to a truly global zone of peace from Latin America and the Caribbean to the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa and Central Asia, covering nearly all of the Southern Hemisphere.

As President of the General Assembly, I stand firmly in support of any and all initiatives aimed at making progress on this existential issue.

Life is not a matter of milestones, but rather, of moments.

Let us seize ours, today.

I thank you.