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Plenary

Record of the Eleventh Meeting

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President: Mr MARAFI (Kuwait)

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The composition of delegations attending the session is given in document GC(65)/INF/14.

¹ In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference decided that delegations so wishing could attend in a virtual manner using the Interprefy IT platform or make their statements by means of a pre-recorded video.

² GC(65)/25

Abbreviations used in this record

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSA	comprehensive safeguards agreement
EU	European Union
imPACT	integrated missions of PACT
IT	information technology
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NPT Review and Extension Conference	Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NPT Review Conference	Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NWFZ	nuclear-weapon-free zone
Pelindaba Treaty	African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty
PMO	Policy Making Organ
TPNW	Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
WMD	weapon of mass destruction

12 Appointment of the External Auditor (GC(65)/6 and Add.1)

1. The PRESIDENT said that, as the tenure of the Agency's current External Auditor would end with the completion of the audit of the Agency's financial statements for 2021, an External Auditor must be appointed to audit the Agency's statements for the financial years 2022 to 2027.
2. The matter had been considered by the Board of Governors at its meeting in June 2021, but the Board had not made a recommendation to the Conference. He understood that, with no agreement, there remained eight candidates for the post, as set out in documents GC(65)/6 and Add.1.
3. The External Auditor would therefore be appointed by election. Pursuant to Rule 79, he had decided to hold a secret ballot.
4. Delegates were requested to indicate on the ballot paper their preference for one candidate by writing either the name of that candidate or that of the State concerned. The required majority was a simple majority of members who were present and voting. Delegates wishing to abstain should either leave a blank or, preferably, write the word 'abstention'. There should be no more than one name on the ballot paper; those papers marked with more than one entry would be invalid. Furthermore, in accordance with Rule 74 of the Rules of Procedure, explanations of voting would not be allowed before or after the vote.
5. He took it that the Conference agreed to begin the voting process.
6. It was so decided.
7. A vote was taken by secret ballot.
8. At the invitation of the President, Mr Powell (Australia) and Ms Maurer-Neuman Matto (Uruguay) acted as tellers.
9. The PRESIDENT proposed that the General Conference take up item 21 while the votes were being counted.

21 Application of IAEA safeguards in the Middle East (GC(65)/14)

10. The PRESIDENT said that item 21 had been included in the agenda pursuant to resolution GC(64)/RES/15. The Director General had accordingly submitted the report set out in document GC(65)/14, which had also been considered by the Board of Governors the previous week. Document GC(65)/L.1 contained a draft resolution submitted by Egypt.
11. Mr ELMOLLA (Egypt) said that ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons was crucial to the security of all States and the future of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Since the entry into force of the NPT half a decade earlier, Egypt and other States conscious of the pivotal importance of the issue had striven to encourage the international community to take practical and serious steps to achieve that goal through numerous initiatives and resolutions that it had submitted to the United Nations and other international forums, and to the General Conference.

12. All of those resolutions had been adopted either by consensus or with a significant majority, yet none had been implemented owing to a lack of political will. The resulting stalemate undermined the legitimacy of the non-proliferation regime and called into question the sincerity of certain Member States which, despite professing their commitment to ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in various international forums, in reality adopted irrational positions towards genuine efforts to achieve that goal.

13. Although more than 25 years had passed since the adoption by consensus of the resolution on the Middle East — which had served as the basis for the indefinite extension of the NPT, to which all remaining Arab States had since acceded — the international legal commitment set out in that resolution was far from being met. For the current stalemate to be overcome, Member States must work together to support the initiatives called for in the resolutions on the application of safeguards in the Middle East proposed by Egypt to the General Conference each year, which were based on agreed goals regarding universalization of the NPT and safeguards agreements. The implementation of such initiatives would be an important step towards the establishment of a verifiable NWFZ in the Middle East and would build confidence among the international community.

14. In 2021, Egypt was again submitting to the General Conference a draft resolution on the application of safeguards in the Middle East. The text reflected the will of the international community and provided a strong basis for strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime and establishing an NWFZ in the Middle East, without excluding any party. Egypt encouraged consultations between the Director General and Member States in the region with a view to ensuring the implementation of the resolution. Egypt also expected the Secretariat to give due attention to ensuring the universalization of the comprehensive safeguards regime and the application of comprehensive safeguards to nuclear facilities in the Middle East, in particular those not subject to any verification or monitoring measures.

15. There was no justification for simply accepting the status quo. Member States had a duty to address the challenges faced and prevent any serious repercussions for international peace and security. Failure to vote in favour of the resolution demonstrated a lack of respect for States' obligations to support the non-proliferation regime and for ongoing efforts in that regard. Egypt therefore hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted with the greatest possible majority.

16. Ms MAMMADOVA (Azerbaijan), speaking on behalf of NAM, welcomed the report set out in document GC(65)/14 and said that NAM was committed to its principled position on the application of Agency safeguards in the Middle East.

17. NAM strongly believed that stability could not be achieved in a region where a continuing massive imbalance in military capabilities, in particular owing to the possession of nuclear weapons, allowed one party to threaten its neighbours and others in the region. In its conviction that the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East would be a positive step towards global nuclear disarmament, NAM reiterated its support for the establishment of such a zone in accordance with the relevant UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Moreover, NAM remained convinced that the effective and efficient application of Agency safeguards in the Middle East promoted greater confidence among States in the region. Achieving the universality of comprehensive Agency safeguards in the Middle East was the first practical step towards building confidence and was necessary for establishing an NWFZ in that region.

18. NAM welcomed the fact that its members which were parties to the NPT had concluded CSAs with the Agency as non-nuclear-weapon States and noted that all States of the Middle East region except Israel were parties to the NPT and had undertaken to accept comprehensive Agency safeguards. It highlighted the accession of Palestine as a State Party to the NPT in February 2015 and welcomed the signing in June 2019 of a CSA between Palestine, as a non-nuclear-weapon State, and the Agency.

19. NAM regretted Israel's continued insistence that Agency safeguards could not be addressed in isolation from the regional peace process. There was no automatic sequence which linked the application of comprehensive safeguards to all nuclear activities in the Middle East to the prior conclusion of a peace settlement, and the former would, in fact, contribute to the latter.

20. NAM noted with regret that the Director General had not been able to make further progress in fulfilling his mandate pursuant to resolution GC(64)/RES/15 regarding the application of comprehensive Agency safeguards covering all nuclear activities in the Middle East. It urged all Member States to participate actively in promoting the universality of comprehensive Agency safeguards in the Middle East region in particular.

21. NAM noted that the Director General would continue consultations in accordance with his mandate regarding the early application of comprehensive Agency safeguards on all nuclear activities in the Middle East region. It welcomed his efforts to encourage the development and consideration of new ideas and approaches that could help in that regard, requesting that he continue to brief Member States regularly on such efforts.

22. Recalling the decision reached by consensus in the Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference on convening, in 2012, a conference on the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs, NAM State Parties to the NPT reiterated their profound disappointment that the 2010 Action Plan had not been implemented, as that ran contrary to the letter and spirit of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, which constituted the original terms of reference for establishing the zone, and violated the collective agreement reached at the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

23. NAM States Parties to the NPT regretted that, despite intensive consultations, at the 2015 NPT Review Conference it had not been possible to reach agreement on the draft Final Document, which could have a negative impact on the NPT regime.

24. NAM requested that the Director General continued his efforts and consultations with all Member States on arrangements conducive towards the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs in the Middle East.

25. NAM again welcomed the convening of the 2019 Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and other WMDs, in accordance with General Assembly decision 73/546 (2018) and its Political Declaration. It looked forward to the second session of the Conference under the presidency of Kuwait, and called upon all States of the region, without exception, to participate actively in the Conference, negotiate in good faith and bring to a conclusion a legally binding treaty on the establishment of the zone. NAM had appreciated the participation of the Agency in the first session, including through the presentation of a background paper, and requested that the Director General participate in the second session as mandated by the decision of the General Assembly.

26. NAM stressed that the resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference and other decisions on the subject adopted within the context of the Review Conferences remained valid until the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East was achieved. Implementation of General Assembly decision 73/546 (2018) was without prejudice to the validity of the resolution and decisions and should not be construed as their replacement.

27. Lastly, noting that NAM was fully committed to cooperating with the Director General and supporting his efforts in implementing resolution GC(64)/RES/15, she said that it expected all other Member States to do likewise. Moreover, NAM endorsed the draft resolution submitted by Egypt.

28. Mr MEZGHANI (Tunisia), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said that all countries in the Middle East region, apart from Israel, were party to the NPT and had concluded CSAs. Efforts to

universalize those two instruments, which represented the legal standard of Agency safeguards according to its Statute, therefore needed to be consolidated.

29. The Group regretted that no progress had been made on the implementation of resolution GC(64)/RES/15, despite its adoption by a majority vote. The Agency must do more to implement that resolution, including through additional consultations, to break the deadlock on the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East. Such action would support the non-proliferation regime and would be consistent with the outcomes of NPT Review Conferences, in particular the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, which had laid the legal foundations for the indefinite extension of the NPT.

30. The Group welcomed the successful outcomes of the first session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, held in New York in November 2019 under Jordan's presidency, and looked forward to the second session, to be presided over by Kuwait.

31. UN General Assembly decision 73/546 on the annual convening of the conference would join the existing library of reference documents on the topic, which included the 1995 resolution on the Middle East and the Final Documents of the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences. The Group called on all States that had not voted in favour of that decision to reconsider their positions and to participate in the conference in future, thus avoiding double standards in dealing with international instruments on non-proliferation and disarmament.

32. The first session of the conference had complemented the work of the Preparatory Committee for the forthcoming NPT Review Conference. Praising the States that had supported the 2019 conference, the Group emphasized that all concerned States must participate effectively in the next one, as it provided an opportunity to revive international action to rid the Middle East of nuclear weapons and other WMDs.

33. Concerning the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs, the Group welcomed the first session of the conference on that subject, held in November 2019 pursuant to UN General Assembly decision 73/546, in addition to the conference's resulting political declaration and the associated report of the UN Secretary-General issued in February 2020.³

34. Given the connection between the conference and the Agency's verification and monitoring work as mandated in General Assembly decision 73/546, the Group thanked the Agency for participating in the session as an observer and providing the requested documents. Commending those States that had supported and participated in the first session, the Group conveyed special thanks to the Russian Federation and the UK as two of the three NPT depository States and sponsors of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, and to China and France, which had attended as nuclear-weapon States. The Group urged those States that had been invited but had not attended — the remaining sponsor of the 1995 resolution and one State in the Middle East — to reconsider their positions and take part in future sessions of the conference, especially because the process had demonstrated that it did not exclude, isolate or impose conditions or restrictions on any State in the region.

35. Thanking Jordan for its able presidency of the first session, the Group looked forward to the second session, under Kuwait's presidency. The Group affirmed its full support for Kuwait in working for a successful conference in which all sponsors of the 1995 resolution actively participated and a substantive discussion on drafting a treaty on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs was launched with the participation of all States in the region.

³ A/75/63

36. Held almost 25 years after the adoption of the 1995 resolution, the conference had been the first practical step taken in reviving the process for establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs. It was therefore important to capitalize on the opportunity, especially in view of the upcoming NPT Review Conference, which faced many challenges. General Assembly decision 73/546 had joined the library of reference documents on the topic, among them the Final Documents of the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences.

37. Lastly, the Group called on the Agency and the Director General to support the work of the conference in line with General Assembly decision 73/546 and requested that developments concerning the conference be reported in the Director General's subsequent report on the application of safeguards in the Middle East.

38. Mr ROUZBAHANI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the issue of the universality of the NPT, and specifically nuclear weapon capabilities in the Middle East, should be addressed without prejudice. His country believed that overlooking such an important issue directly affected regional and international peace and stability. It challenged the established global arms-control norms and architecture, and damaged the credibility and viability of the Agency and its safeguards regime. Iran stressed that ignoring the continued and dangerous presence of unsafeguarded nuclear facilities and activities of the Israeli regime was no longer sustainable.

39. Since all in the Middle East region, except the Israeli regime, were parties to the NPT and had undertaken to accept comprehensive Agency safeguards, the Israeli regime's acquisition of a clandestine nuclear capability, in complete disregard of international law, posed an ongoing serious threat to the security and stability of its neighbouring States and beyond. The situation also provided a compelling reason for the region's States to seek the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East, which was part and parcel of the 1995 agreement on the unlimited extension of the NPT.

40. His country reiterated that the current nuclear crisis in the Middle East would be remedied only if the Israeli regime promptly and unconditionally acceded to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and placed all its nuclear capabilities, materials and installations under comprehensive Agency safeguards.

41. The Agency undoubtedly played a distinct role in implementing decisions and resolutions of the General Conference and was well aware of what its professional work entailed. As such work was based on Agency reference documents and decisions taken by the PMOs, the Agency's mandates should not be affected by any political circumstances. Professional rationale required the Agency to take measures with the objective of implementing safeguards throughout the Middle East, as requested in the General Conference resolutions, and to provide the Member States with independent and impartial assessments and reporting on who, how, why and to what extent the professional work of the Agency was impaired.

42. He concluded by stating that nuclear weapons posed a serious threat to security in the Middle East and globally. Ignoring the facts no longer served the best interests of the region and the international community in their desperate aspiration for peace and security. The legal norms on nuclear disarmament, and the prohibition and proliferation of nuclear weapons, should therefore be upheld so that world peace and security could be strengthened.

43. Mr HUSSEN (Iraq) recalled that General Conference resolution GC(64)/RES/15 affirmed the urgent need for all States in the Middle East to accept the application of full-scope Agency safeguards to all their nuclear activities as an important measure to build confidence within the region and as a step in enhancing peace and security in the context of the establishment of an NWFZ.

44. All States in the region were party to the NPT and had concluded CSAs — except for the Israeli entity, which maintained its claim that the safeguards system and NPT were insufficient to guarantee

security. Agency safeguards and other security issues could not be addressed independently of efforts to establish the conditions for regional stability. To act otherwise was to intentionally hinder the establishment of a much needed NWFZ in the Middle East.

45. His delegation had hoped that progress would be made in implementing resolution GC(64)/RES/15 and held on to that hope, especially as the resolution had been adopted by a majority vote. Iraq called for greater efforts to be made and further talks to be held to implement the resolution. His country called on the three depository States of the NPT, and the international community as a whole, to take the necessary steps to implement all resolutions on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs in the Middle East, especially those adopted by the NPT Review Conference in 1995 — forming the legal framework for the indefinite extension of the Treaty — and the outcomes of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, including a roadmap and principles for moving towards the establishment of such a zone.

46. Iraq praised the efforts already made towards establishing such a zone, in particular the first session of the 2019 Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. Iraq had participated, but the Israeli entity had continued to make excuses for remaining outside the non-proliferation regime. Affirming its support for Kuwait's presidency of the upcoming second session, Iraq looked forward to the participation of all relevant parties. Lastly, he reiterated his country's support for the efforts of the Secretariat and the Director General to execute the mandate given by the General Conference.

47. Mr CHACÓN ESCAMILLO (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the effective and efficient application of Agency safeguards in the Middle East promoted greater confidence among States in the region. Achieving the universality of comprehensive Agency safeguards in the Middle East was the first practical step towards that goal and was necessary for establishing an NWFZ in the region.

48. In that respect, Venezuela expressed regret that no further progress had been made in fulfilling the Director General's mandate under resolution GC(64)/RES/15 concerning the application of the comprehensive Agency safeguards to all nuclear activities in the Middle East. As establishing an NWFZ would improve peace and stability in the region, efforts to ensure the application of the resolution should be stepped up. His country considered, moreover, that establishing such a zone was a positive step towards global nuclear disarmament, and reiterated its support for the creation of such a zone, pursuant to the Resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference.

49. At a number of international forums, Venezuela had stressed the urgent need for Israel to accede immediately to the NPT, place its nuclear facilities under Agency safeguards in order to dispel any existing doubt about its nuclear programme and contribute to the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East.

50. His country highlighted the importance of the 2019 Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, in which all States in the region, except Israel, had participated and had demonstrated a willingness to reach an agreement. Venezuela hoped that Israel would participate in the second session.

51. Venezuela welcomed the intention of the Member States participating in the conference to commit to developing a legally binding treaty to establish, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions and working with all States in an open and inclusive manner, a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by the States of the region.

52. Venezuela concluded by stressing that the Resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, together with other decisions adopted at the NPT Review

Conferences, remained valid until such time as a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs had been established.

53. Ms REDONDO FALCÓN (Cuba) said that her country had supported the establishment of NWFZs around the world, as part of the efforts to strengthen nuclear non-proliferation and achieve the goal of nuclear disarmament. Latin America and the Caribbean was the first of the world's densely populated regions to have declared itself an NWFZ through the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean. Cuba was convinced that the establishment of internationally recognized NWFZs strengthened the non-proliferation regime, enhanced international peace and security, and contributed significantly to nuclear disarmament.

54. It was regrettable that a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs had not yet been established in the Middle East, despite calls from the international community and the many resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Conference and the UN General Assembly.

55. Besides contributing significantly to nuclear disarmament, the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East would be a momentous step in the region's peace process. As the only State in the region not to be party to the NPT, and having failed to declare its intention to accede to the NPT, Israel must respond, without delay or constraints, to the justified calls of the international community: it must renounce its possession of nuclear weapons, accede without delay to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and subject all its nuclear facilities to comprehensive Agency safeguards.

56. Mr TAMALA (Indonesia) said that it was regrettable that resolution GC(64)/RES/15 could not be fully implemented, with no further progress made in the Director General's mandate to ensure the application of Agency safeguards to all nuclear activities in the Middle East. In that connection, Indonesia called on all States in the region to adhere unconditionally to comprehensive safeguards.

57. Indonesia was seriously concerned that progress remained elusive in the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs, a key factor in ensuring security and stability in the region. It hoped that the NPT Review Conference due to be held in 2022 would provide the required momentum to support the aim of a Middle East free from nuclear weapons.

58. Lastly, Indonesia urged the countries of the Middle East to reach agreement among themselves on the substance and modalities of establishing an NWFZ, which would be an important step to bolstering peace and security in the region and beyond.

59. Mr NUSBAUM (Israel) said that, in the past, his country had joined the consensus on the General Conference resolution on application of IAEA safeguards in the Middle East, reflecting a shared vision for regional stability and security. However, the language of the draft resolution currently under discussion implied that adherence to the NPT was a means of enhancing peace and security in the Middle East. Such a concept was inherently flawed as it did not take regional realities into account. While Israel had repeatedly expressed its commitment to the non-proliferation regime, four States in the region — Iran, Iraq, Libya and Syria — had failed to comply with their obligations under the NPT. Violations included the development of covert nuclear weapon programmes and the covert construction of a military nuclear reactor in Syria. Accordingly, while Israel shared the vision articulated by the draft resolution, the lack of a solid foundation for adherence to agreements in the region, coupled with an absence of mutual recognition and trust, led to the conclusion that the text lacked the required balance, given the regional circumstances.

60. Israel attached high importance to the non-proliferation regime and shared its goals. Nevertheless, the geopolitical situation in the Middle East clearly demonstrated that the NPT did not provide a remedy for the unique security challenges of the region, especially considering the repeated violations of the NPT by several States Parties. Accession to the NPT was not a goal in and of itself. Calls for universal

accession to the NPT must also be judged against the views held by some in the region concerning the State of Israel, the existence of which was not recognized by several Arab States, and the position of Iran, which had openly and explicitly called for Israel's destruction.

61. Lessons learned from other regions had shown that a regional security framework could stem only from the shared political will of all regional parties to engage directly with each other and to take into consideration the security concerns of each and every State on the basis of consensus. A comprehensive and durable peace in the Middle East and full compliance by all States of the region with their non-proliferation obligations were prerequisites for the establishment of a zone free of all WMDs. The current regrettable situation in the Middle East and the manifold threats, conventional and non-conventional alike, justified Israel's approach.

62. Such a resolution should therefore be uncontroversial rather than disputable. Until the current situation changed, Israel was obliged to vote against paragraph 2 of the draft resolution and to abstain on the draft resolution as a whole; he accordingly requested that separate votes be taken on paragraph 2 and on the draft resolution as a whole.

12 Appointment of the External Auditor (resumed)

63. The PRESIDENT announced the result of the ballot for the selection of the External Auditor.

64. In the selection of the External Auditor, the result was as follows:

<u>Ballot papers returned:</u>	125
<u>Invalid votes:</u>	0
<u>Abstentions:</u>	2
<u>Valid votes:</u>	123
<u>Required majority:</u>	62

Votes obtained

Accountability State Authority of the Arab Republic of Egypt	20
German Supreme Audit Institution	36
Comptroller and Auditor General of India	30
Board of Audit and Inspection of the Republic of Korea	2
Commission on Audit of the Republic of the Philippines	7
Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation	11
Turkish Court of Accounts	9
National Audit Office of the United Kingdom	8

65. The PRESIDENT said that, since no candidate had obtained the required majority of votes, a second ballot would be taken the following morning. Pursuant to Rule 80 of the Rules of Procedure, the

second ballot would be restricted to the two candidates who had obtained the largest number of votes in the first ballot: the German Supreme Audit Institution and the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

66. He took it that the Conference approved of the proposed procedure.

67. It was so decided.

21 Application of IAEA safeguards in the Middle East (resumed)

68. Mr KHADDOUR (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, since the adoption of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East — the basis for the indefinite extension of the NPT — no practical steps had been taken towards the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs in the region. Israel had frustrated every initiative in that endeavour by continuing, with the full backing of its allies, to defiantly refuse to accede to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State.

69. The first session of Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction in New York had been an opportunity to reaffirm the adopted terms of reference and to break the stalemate on the implementation of the 1995 resolution. Syria looked forward to the second session of the conference, to be held in New York later in 2021. The zone would be a positive and effective contribution towards achieving non-proliferation and creating a safe and stable world and could only be established if Israel acceded to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and subjected its nuclear facilities to a CSA.

70. The only non-party to the NPT in the Middle East, Israel flouted the international and regional will to free the Middle East of all WMDs by refusing to participate in the conference, which was being held under the banner of the United Nations and with the participation of all international organizations and agencies specialized in WMD prohibition. Despite being a sponsor of the 1995 resolution, the USA had hindered every step to implement it. The country had sought to subvert the conference and prevent the achievement of its goal by refusing to participate and calling for meetings of other working groups to be held instead.

71. Syria would vote in favour of the draft resolution and invited all Member States to do likewise.

72. Mr ULYANOV (Russian Federation) said that his country once again, as in previous years, fully shared the ideas contained in the draft resolution in the belief that the issue was an important element of the Agency's agenda.

73. In presenting its views on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear and other WMDs in the Middle East, the Russian Federation noted that it had already presented those views at the meeting of the Board of Governors earlier in September 2021, but, as the membership of the Board was limited, it was important also to convey its views to all members of the Agency.

74. The resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference remained in force until all its provisions were fully implemented. Accordingly, the establishment of a zone free of nuclear and other WMDs in the Middle East would remain a permanent item on the agenda of the review cycles of the NPT.

75. The first session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other WMDs, held in 2019 and actively promoted under the auspices of the UN General Assembly, had been the first genuine step in 24 years towards achieving such a zone. It had concluded

with the adoption of a strong political declaration in which all States parties reaffirmed their commitment to the notion itself and their willingness to continue working towards its implementation.

76. The Russian Federation hoped that the second session, originally planned for 2020 but rescheduled for late 2021, would breathe new life into the process and allow for a move closer to agreeing the guiding principles and specific steps required to establish the zone.

77. Although the States of the Middle East were currently at the beginning of a difficult process, it was clear that all Conference participants understood that they themselves bore the responsibility for the fate of their region. The full establishment of a zone free of nuclear and other WMDs in the Middle East was impossible without the participation of all countries in the region. It was therefore of utmost importance that the initiators of and participants in the process deliberately left the door open to Israel, allowing it to join the Conference when it deemed that possible.

78. Recalling that the representative of Israel had spoken of the need to involve all countries in the region and work on the basis of consensus, he noted that those needs were in line with the procedures of the Conference, where all substantive decisions were taken on the basis of consensus. All countries in the region therefore, including Israel, had the power of veto over all substantive matters such that the interests of every country in the Middle East, including Israel's if it decided to join the process, would be duly upheld. Participation in the conference would also give Israel an opportunity to discuss all regional security-related issues, an area raised as one of concern by the representative of Israel.

79. The first session of the Conference had demonstrated that the initiators were not aiming to impose the idea of establishing the zone on any State in the region but to make progress through mutually acceptable decisions; such a frank and responsible approach should be lent full support.

80. The Russian Federation stood ready to assist in creating favourable conditions for the implementation of the goals of the conference. It was important for it, together with the USA and the UK, to act as observers, as they had been the co-sponsors of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, and therefore bore a special responsibility for the implementation of the resolution, as noted in a joint statement made in 2014.

81. Disappointed by the refusal of the previous US Government to participate in the conference, the Russian Federation hoped that the current US Government would demonstrate a more responsible and constructive approach by joining the process as an observer.

82. Mr HUSSEN (Iraq), responding to comments made by Israel about his country, said that citing Iraq's past as a pretext for disregarding the safeguards regime was a flimsy argument that did not relieve the Israeli entity of its obligation to ratify and join the NPT as soon as possible, as all other States in the Middle East had already done. Noting that the Agency firmly rejected attacks against any peaceful facility under the safeguards regime, he recalled the Israeli strike on Iraqi nuclear facilities under Agency safeguards on 7 June 1981.

83. Iraq called on the international community to shoulder its moral and professional responsibility to ensure that all Israeli nuclear facilities were placed under comprehensive safeguards, pursuant to paragraph 5 of UN Security Council resolution 487 (1981).

84. Mr ELGHFFA (Libya) said that his country had always reminded nuclear-weapon States of their responsibilities and had discouraged their use, or threat of their use, against others. Given its proximity to a region of high tension and international concern, Libya called on the global community to provide the necessary assurances for the security of non-nuclear-weapon States.

85. Libya had fulfilled all its nuclear obligations under the relevant international agreements. All nuclear activities in the region must be placed under reliable and effective safeguards to prevent the

production of nuclear weapons and the risks associated with other radioactive materials. It was of deep concern that Israel's nuclear military capabilities continued to grow while it refused all calls for its accession to the NPT and the establishment of a Middle East NWFZ.

86. The PRESIDENT recalled that Israel had requested that a separate vote be taken on paragraph 2 of the draft resolution set out in document GC(65)/L.1.

87. At the request of Egypt, a roll-call vote was taken.

88. Estonia, having been drawn by lot by the President, was called upon to vote first.

89. The result of the vote was as follows:

In favour⁴: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Chad, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe.

Against: Israel

Abstaining: Burkina Faso, Canada, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Honduras, India, Lesotho, Rwanda, Togo, United States of America.

90. There were 111 votes in favour and 1 against, with 9 abstentions. Paragraph 2 of the draft resolution was adopted.

91. Ms TEWARI (India), speaking in explanation of vote, said that her delegation had abstained because it believed that paragraph 2 of the draft resolution contained elements that were extraneous to the Agency.

92. Mr MARIOTTE (France), speaking in explanation of vote also on behalf of Germany and the UK, said that all three countries had supported the resolution in the same spirit as at previous sessions. They viewed it exclusively in the context of the NPT and the Agency. The word "relevant" in paragraph 3 clearly related solely to the application of safeguards, in line with the title of the resolution. France, Germany and the UK continued to support efforts to promote a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs and their delivery systems.

⁴ Ireland later advised the Secretariat that, had it been present, it would have voted in favour.

93. The PRESIDENT noted that Israel had requested a vote on the whole of the draft resolution contained in document GC(65)/L.1.

94. At the request of Egypt, a roll-call vote was taken.

95. Guyana, having been drawn by lot by the President, was called upon to vote first. In the absence of a representative of Guyana and of Haiti, the voting started with the Holy See.

96. The result of the vote was as follows:

In favour⁵: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Holy See, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe.

Abstaining: Canada, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel, Lesotho, Rwanda, Togo, United States of America.

97. There were 113 votes in favour and none against, with 7 abstentions. The draft resolution was adopted.

98. Ms DYE (South Africa) speaking in explanation of vote, said that her country had consistently supported the important resolution, which was an important step towards non-proliferation in the Middle East region and the rest of the world. The universalization of the NPT was the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation regime and of global peace and security, and therefore South Africa urged all the States of the region to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which underscored and strengthened the NPT and global non-proliferation.

99. South Africa invited Israel in particular not only to become a State Party to the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state but to also commit to the TPNW, which declared nuclear weapons illegal. Such steps would contribute significantly to establishing and maintaining peace and security globally and improve safety in the Middle East. Ratifying the NPT would also bring Israel into the Agency's global safeguards system, a key step towards achieving the long-standing goal of establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. It was essential that Israel signed a CSA and additional protocol and assuaged the concerns of its neighbours and the international community as to the nature of its nuclear programme.

⁵ Ireland later advised the Secretariat that, had it been present, it would have voted in favour.

100. As a State Party to the Pelindaba Treaty, which had established the entire African continent as an NWFZ, South Africa was a strong proponent of establishing the entire world as an NWFZ, which could only be done if those evil weapons were totally eliminated from the face of the earth. South Africa therefore welcomed the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, and encouraged Israel to join the process, noting that the Member States of the region had committed and recommitted to the inclusive nature of the Conference, thereby strengthening and enhancing the security of all the States in the region.

101. Lastly, she reaffirmed South Africa's long-standing position that global peace and security could be achieved only with the total prohibition and destruction of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs.

102. Mr BONO (United States of America), speaking in explanation of vote, said that his country continued to support many of the goals outlined in the resolution, including the long-term goal of a Middle East free of WMDs and their delivery systems, along with comprehensive and durable regional peace. The USA was committed to working with the States in the region in their pursuit of that important goal in an inclusive, consensus-based manner that took into account the legitimate regional security concerns of all those States. The USA strongly endorsed a number of key elements outlined in the resolution, including the importance of confidence- and security-building measures, the need for adherence by States of the region to existing non-proliferation obligations, and the necessity of pursuing those goals in the context of broader regional peace efforts.

103. The USA welcomed the resolution's recognition of the importance of Agency safeguards as a tool for verifying the exclusively peaceful nature of nuclear activities in the region. With the significant expansion of nuclear energy in the region, the additional protocol was an essential tool for States to demonstrate a commitment to the strongest non-proliferation standards and to provide the international community with important assurances regarding the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities. The USA encouraged all States in the region that had not yet done so to sign and bring into force an additional protocol without further delay and encouraged the three States that had not yet done so to modify or rescind, as appropriate, their outdated SQPs. The USA urged all States in the region to cooperate fully and in a timely manner with the Agency in fulfilling their obligations under their CSA.

104. For many years, the General Conference resolution on safeguards in the Middle East had been adopted by consensus pursuant to a mutually agreed approach among States in the region. Unfortunately, that approach had been abandoned in recent years in favour of the submission of a draft resolution that could not command regional consensus and which was pursued alongside a divisive and politically motivated agenda item aimed at isolating one State in the region. The USA urged the sponsors of the resolution to re-engage with their regional neighbours to return to a consensus-based approach to such issues, so that they could be addressed in a more collaborative and productive manner.

105. The USA remained convinced that efforts to advance a WMD-free zone in the Middle East must be pursued voluntarily on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by all States in the region and would therefore support any regional initiative that garnered consensus among all States in the region and was based on direct and inclusive dialogue.

106. Mr ELMOLLA (Egypt) called on the States that had abstained in the vote to reconsider their positions in 2022. They should stand on the right side of history in support of the world's conscience and the collective will of the international community to achieve the lofty goals and concepts laid out in the resolution and to shape a new reality in the Middle East.

22 Israeli nuclear capabilities (GC(65)/1/Add.1; GC(65)/15)

107. The PRESIDENT said that item 22 had been included in the agenda at the request of Arab States that were members of the Agency. It was covered by an explanatory memorandum contained in document GC(65)/1/Add.1 and by document GC(65)/15.

108. Ms MAMMADOVA (Azerbaijan), speaking on behalf of NAM, said that the Group strongly believed that stability could not be achieved in a region where a continuing massive imbalance in military capabilities, in particular owing to the possession of nuclear weapons, allowed one party to threaten its neighbours and others in the region.

109. NAM welcomed the fact that its Member States that were parties to the NPT had concluded CSAs with the Agency as non-nuclear-weapon States and noted that all States of the Middle East region except for Israel were parties to the NPT and had undertaken to accept comprehensive Agency safeguards.

110. In its conviction that the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East would be a positive step towards global nuclear disarmament, NAM reiterated its support for the establishment of such a zone in accordance with the relevant UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

111. NAM noted with concern that the selective approach to the issue of nuclear capabilities in the Middle East had undermined the viability of the Agency's safeguards regime and had resulted in the continued and dangerous presence of Israeli nuclear facilities and activities that were not subject to comprehensive Agency safeguards, despite repeated calls on Israel to sign a CSA.

112. NAM expressed great concern regarding the acquisition of nuclear capability by Israel, which posed a serious and continuing threat to the security of its neighbouring and other States, and the continuing provision of access for Israeli scientists to the nuclear facilities of one nuclear-weapon State.

113. All Member States should cooperate to rectify that unacceptable situation and achieve the universality of comprehensive Agency safeguards in the Middle East, firstly by implementing resolution GC(53/RES/17).

114. NAM regretted Israel's continued insistence that Agency safeguards could not be addressed in isolation from the regional peace process. The Group emphasized that there was no automatic sequence which linked the application of comprehensive safeguards to all nuclear activities in the Middle East to the prior conclusion of a peace settlement, and the former would, in fact, contribute to the latter.

115. NAM reiterated its call for the total and complete prohibition of the transfer of all nuclear-related equipment, information, material and facilities, resources or devices and the extension of assistance in the nuclear-related scientific or technological fields to Israel.

116. NAM further noted that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, in his letter to the Director General attached to his previous report as contained in document GC(64)/14, had stated that Israel valued the non-proliferation regime, acknowledged its importance and had, over the years, demonstrated a responsible policy of restraint in the nuclear realm. Regrettably, the official records of the Agency were testimony to the contrary. NAM recalled the various resolutions issued by the General Conference before 1994 regarding South Africa's nuclear capabilities in which it had recalled various UN General Assembly resolutions concerning relations between Israel and South Africa and military and nuclear collaboration with South Africa, which had strongly condemned the extensive collaboration between Israel and the then racist regime of South Africa, especially in the military and nuclear fields, in defiance of UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

117. Mr JENKO (Slovenia), speaking on behalf of the EU, said that it welcomed the Arab States' decision not to table a resolution on Israeli nuclear capabilities at the current session of the General Conference but was disappointed that the issue had again been included on the agenda. It was a divisive political issue that should not affect the work of a technical organization such as the Agency. The EU remained convinced that a consensus approach, as set out in the action plan adopted at the 2010 NPT Review Conference, was the only way to make progress towards the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East.

118. Mr MEZGHANI (Tunisia), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said that for more than four decades the Arab States had striven to voice their concerns about nuclear material, programmes and facilities that were not under international safeguards and thus posed a threat to their security and stability. The Arab States had chosen to join the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime rather than a regional arms race that could be disastrous for international peace and security.

119. With a view to promoting dialogue and cooperation among the international community, the Arab States had acceded to the NPT, believing that all other Parties were seriously committed to achieving universality of the Treaty and mutual security for all States without discrimination, by implementing clear obligations concerning verification and monitoring. They welcomed Palestine's signing of a CSA with the Agency, following its accession to the NPT in early 2015. Such a development would further bolster efforts to strengthen regional and international peace, safety and security.

120. As Israel was still the only State in the region that refused to accede to the NPT and to place its nuclear programmes and facilities under comprehensive Agency safeguards, the Arab States had appealed to the NPT Review Conferences, the Agency, and the UN General Assembly and Security Council to take action to encourage Israel's accession to the NPT and to ensure compliance with the Agency's norms and regulations in furtherance of international peace and security.

121. In all those forums, the Arab States had repeatedly said that they would strive to rid the Middle East of WMDs through an initiative to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs, as a comprehensive approach to achieving security for all States in the region. The adoption by various international bodies of dozens of resolutions supporting that initiative had regrettably proven to be merely rhetorical, owing to the lack of international will to ensure their implementation. Among them was the 1995 resolution on the Middle East adopted at that year's NPT Review and Extension Conference, part of the deal that had led to the indefinite extension of the NPT. The Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference had adopted a specific mechanism to begin implementing the 1995 resolution. Furthermore, the General Conference had adopted a number of resolutions since the 1980s calling on Israel to accede to the NPT, the most recent being resolution GC(53)/RES/17 on Israeli nuclear capabilities, adopted in 2009.

122. As implementation of the 1995 resolution was a top priority, its co-sponsors had a responsibility to ensure that it was achieved. Attempts by any party to delay its implementation must be rejected. The Arab States emphasized adherence to the outcomes of the 1995, 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences, especially those concerning the Middle East.

123. Israel had categorically refused to implement the aforementioned resolutions, deliberately debasing the NPT and describing it as ineffective in the Middle East. The country's refusal to accede to the NPT constituted a threat to regional and global peace and security, above all in the light of its development of nuclear weapons, the existence of which had been acknowledged by numerous Israeli officials and discussed in many international reports.

124. The unprecedented protection that certain international powers provided to Israel, enabling it to flout international law without fear of being called to account, had undermined and weakened the global

non-proliferation regime. While the international community inexplicably remained silent, Israel extracted concessions and received technical and military support that was denied to NPT States Parties.

125. It was critically important for Israel to accede to the NPT because of the significant security and safety risks stemming from the lack of Agency oversight over Israel's ageing nuclear facilities, in particular the Dimona nuclear reactor, which had the potential to cause a nuclear accident with catastrophic repercussions for the entire region.

126. The Group considered that such treatment of an issue that adversely affected security and stability in the Middle East was unacceptable. The Arab States were indignant that the 2015 NPT Review Conference had been scuppered in order to safeguard the interests of a non-party to the NPT. It was a core responsibility of the General Conference to request States to accede to the NPT and to place their nuclear facilities and programmes under comprehensive safeguards; any attempt to stifle such requests undermined the credibility of the NPT and the non-proliferation and disarmament regimes.

127. Faced with continuous attempts to thwart its efforts to achieve regional balance by establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East, the Arab Group was continuing consultations on ways to facilitate the successful adoption of a draft resolution on Israeli nuclear capabilities and thanked those Member States that had supported the draft resolution at previous sessions. While the Group had refrained from submitting a draft resolution at the current session of the General Conference, that did not mean that no such resolution would be submitted in the future.

128. The international community, in particular the three co-sponsors of the 1995 resolution, should shoulder their responsibilities and support efforts at the Tenth NPT Review Conference to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East.

129. The item fell squarely within the Agency's purview and should remain on the General Conference agenda for as long as Israel refused to accede to the NPT.

130. Mr ROUZBAHANI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that it was regrettable that the NPT was far from being universalized, which posed a serious danger to the integrity and credibility of the arms control and disarmament architecture. Following the devastating failure in 2015 to reach a final agreement at the Review Conference, the 2021 NPT Review Conference would be a litmus test of whether a multilateral approach could be taken to arms control and disarmament. Considering the increasingly complex dynamics within international relations, where extreme nationalist factors were rising up above established international preferences, Iran believed that maintaining multilateralism should be imperative for all, in the interests of humanity as a whole.

131. All States in the Middle East except for the Israeli regime were parties to the NPT and had signed a CSA. The Israeli regime's clandestine nuclear capability, acquired in complete defiance of international law, was a continuing, serious threat to the security and stability of the region and the rest of the world.

132. If anyone developed any sort of nuclear explosive device, that should be a cause for alarm, be condemned promptly and without any prejudice or discrimination. Iran wished to reiterate that the Israeli regime's swift and unconditional accession to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and the placement of all its nuclear materials, activities and installations under comprehensive safeguards were the only steps that could remedy the current nuclear crisis in the Middle East.

133. Iran underlined that nuclear weapons posed the most serious threat to security worldwide — including in the Middle East — and ignoring the facts on the ground in the region did nothing to counter that threat. The legal norms on nuclear disarmament and the prohibition on the proliferation of nuclear weapons therefore had to be upheld.

134. The international community must apply sustained pressure on the Israeli regime to accede to the NPT promptly and unconditionally as a non-nuclear-weapon State and to place all of its nuclear activities and installations under Agency comprehensive safeguards.

135. Mr ELMOLLA (Egypt) said that his country set much store by the goals of non-proliferation and the universalization of the CSA, the fundamental instrument underpinning the Agency's work on verifying the peaceful nature of nuclear materials and facilities.

136. Israel's refusal to accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive Agency safeguards undermined efforts to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East, especially as the other States in the region had acceded. The lack of progress towards the universalization of the comprehensive safeguards system, in particular in the Middle East, was disappointing. Efforts must be stepped up — maintaining the status quo would harm the credibility of the non-proliferation regime.

137. In view of the support provided by the Agency to develop the safeguards system, Egypt had hoped that it would give similar priority to the universalization of the comprehensive safeguards system before considering that of the additional protocol. Implementation of the safeguards system was a confidence building measure in the region and an important step towards establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the region.

138. In exchange for approving the indefinite extension of the NPT, participants in the 1995 NPT Review Conference had adopted, by consensus, a resolution calling for the Middle East to be rid of nuclear weapons and other WMDs. Although Egypt and the other Arab States had striven to implement that resolution, no significant progress had been made owing to unjustified resistance. Nevertheless, the persistent efforts of the Arab States to establish an NWFZ in the Middle East had led to a pivotal development, namely the holding of the first session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction in New York in 2019.

139. Expressing its appreciation to all the parties that had participated in and contributed to the success of that conference, Egypt noted that the places of the two States that had not attended had been left empty to symbolize that their invitation still stood. Egypt looked forward to the participation of all relevant States in the second session of the conference from 27 November to 3 December 2021, under the presidency of Kuwait, to build on the success of the first session of the conference and launch substantive discussions regarding a treaty on establishing an NWFZ in the Middle East.

140. At meetings of the Board of Governors, some delegations had emphasized that direct regional dialogue was the only means of establishing an NWFZ in the Middle East. Egypt pointed out that States in the region had attempted to hold such dialogue within various frameworks and forums since the 1990s only to be met by an absence of political will and irrational excuses for shunning that goal.

141. Israel should reconsider its position and participate in the second session of the conference. It would be a serious opportunity to hold the direct dialogue that the country had always called for, in order to address all relevant concerns through an inclusive process over which all parties had ownership.

142. With the postponed Tenth NPT Review Conference on the horizon, it was increasingly important to take practical steps towards establishing an NWFZ in the Middle East. Progress would contribute to the success of the Review Conference, which required combined efforts to universalize the comprehensive safeguards system, apply it to all nuclear activities in the Middle East and bolster the credibility of the non-proliferation regime.

143. Lastly, the present item was a core responsibility of the Agency, as the fundamental pillar of the global non-proliferation system and a pivotal element in the application of the safeguards system.

144. Mr HUSSEN (Iraq) said that, as his Government had stated in various international forums where disarmament was discussed, double standards were practised when applying the principles underpinning the non-proliferation regime to the Middle East. Although the NPT was the cornerstone of the regime, the Israeli entity was alone in the region in not acceding to it — and was allowed to do so with impunity. The 2015 NPT Review Conference had failed as a result of the Israeli entity's refusal to cooperate.

145. Iraq urged the international community to shoulder its moral and political responsibility to persuade the Israeli entity to accede to the NPT so that it would be required to apply the Agency's comprehensive safeguards and enable the Agency to verify and inspect all its nuclear activities. The Israeli entity's accession would be the first step towards building confidence — a goal demanded by the Israeli entity itself — in order to advance the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all WMDs in the Middle East.

146. A Middle East free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs was vital for regional security and stability. It was equally vital to convene further sessions of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, in accordance with the 2010 NPT Review Conference Action Plan and the resolution adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. That would have positive effects, in political and security terms, on the region.

147. Given the clear justification, Iraq requested that the item remain on the agenda of the Agency's PMOs and that the international community, through its various forums, assume its moral and professional responsibility to implement paragraph 5 of UN Security Council resolution 487 (1981), calling on the Israeli entity to place all its nuclear facilities under the comprehensive safeguards system.

148. Mr AZZAM (Lebanon) said that the item's inclusion yet again on the agenda of the General Conference clearly reflected the continuing threat that Israel's nuclear capabilities posed to the Middle East and would remain necessary as long as Israel remained outside the international legal and regulatory framework. The hope was that keeping the discussion alive would encourage Israel to accede to the NPT and place its nuclear facilities under Agency safeguards, in line with the numerous international resolutions on the matter, in particular resolution GC(53)/RES/17 and UN Security Council resolution 487 (1981).

149. Stressing its commitment to the objectives of the NPT, in particular disarmament, Lebanon believed that the Treaty's success and effectiveness lay in its universalization. It noted with concern, however, that Israel was the only non-party to the NPT in the Middle East region. Israel's nuclear capabilities were consequently a destabilizing factor in that region and beyond.

150. The noble goal of ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons had been endorsed by the international community through a number of UN General Assembly resolutions and NPT Review Conferences, in particular that of 1995 allowing for the Treaty's indefinite extension. Israel's nuclear capabilities remained the primary obstacle to the achievement of that goal

151. The second session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction would be held in November 2021, pursuant to UN General Assembly decision 73/546. Recalling that Israel had been the only party in the region to boycott the first session, Lebanon reiterated its support for the completion of the process to rid the Middle East of WMDs entirely and called on all States to take part in order to promote regional and global security and peace.

152. Ms REDONDO FALCÓN (Cuba) welcomed the Arab Group's initiative to include the item on the agenda of the General Conference once more. It was a sensitive subject with serious implications for regional and international peace and security.

153. She reaffirmed her country's support for the prompt establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs, which would contribute significantly to the peace and security of all the peoples of the region.

154. Israel remained the only country in the Middle East not to have acceded to the NPT, despite the international community's repeated calls to do so. Such inaction posed a serious obstacle to creating a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East. Establishing such a zone would represent a considerable step towards nuclear disarmament and contribute to the peace process in the region. It was also essential to comply with all General Conference resolutions on that subject.

155. Transforming the Middle East into a zone of peace and security for all required genuine political will, the elimination of double standards in nuclear-related matters, the rejection of the indulgent attitude towards Israel shown by a number of States and unanimous insistence on the destruction of Israel's nuclear arsenal, under international supervision.

156. Mr TAMALA (Indonesia), underlining that nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation remained high on his country's agenda, said that Indonesia believed that the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation was complete disarmament under strict and effective international control. Furthermore, efforts to achieve nuclear non-proliferation should be made in parallel to those for nuclear disarmament. The universality of the NPT was an important element in that regard.

157. Indonesia strongly supported the speedy establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East, in accordance with UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The establishment of such a zone would enhance peace and stability in the region and contribute to the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons.

158. Indonesia considered that permitting a country to develop nuclear weapon capabilities outside the NPT and to keep its nuclear material and facilities outside the Agency's comprehensive safeguards regime was tantamount to betrayal of the commitment to nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East, and endangered peace and stability in the region.

159. Mr BONO (United States of America) said that his country regretted that the item had once again been included on the agenda. Israel had not violated any agreements with the Agency and was a substantial contributor to the Agency's technical work.

160. While it welcomed the Arab Group's decision not to submit a resolution on Israeli nuclear capabilities, the USA regretted that there continued to be contentious discussions on the issue at the Agency and in other multilateral forums. Many of the statements delivered under the item were counterproductive to the shared goal of a Middle East free of WMDs and their delivery systems, only serving to perpetuate the lack of trust among States in the region and to detract from the important technical work of the Agency. The USA urged the States concerned to refrain from divisive statements and to engage directly with neighbours in an inclusive and cooperative manner to address regional security concerns.

161. Mr KHADDOUR (Syrian Arab Republic) said that Israel had secretly been strengthening its nuclear military capabilities, away from international oversight for decades. Certain Western States had provided Israel with the Dimona reactor, along with the nuclear technology and materials required to gain possession of a massive arsenal of nuclear warheads and their means of delivery. It was regrettable that several Member States — primarily the USA — contradicted the Agency's non-proliferation stance, flagrantly applying double standards and turning a blind eye to Israel's expanding nuclear capabilities while ensuring that it remained beyond the sphere of international accountability.

162. UN Security Council resolution 487(1981) called on Israel to immediately place its nuclear facilities under Agency safeguards, while General Conference resolution GC(53)/RES/17 called on

Israel to accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive Agency safeguards. Israel, however, had persistently ignored those calls. Israel continued to possess nuclear capabilities, remaining outside the framework of the NPT and the CSA, posing a serious threat to the non-proliferation regime. Its rejection of all initiatives to establish an NWFZ in the Middle East, and its refusal to place all its nuclear facilities under Agency safeguards, undermined regional and international security and stability. Israel was therefore in no position to make accusations of non-compliance with the NPT.

163. The time had come for the international community to take a stand against Israel's dangerous practices and aggression. It should make a clear decision and take serious practical steps to compel Israel to accede to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and to unconditionally subject all its nuclear facilities to inspection by the Agency. Syria requested that the item remain under deliberation in the Agency's PMOs.

164. Ms KITSELL (United Kingdom) said that her country was deeply disappointed that the issue of Israel's nuclear capabilities had again been included in the agenda, as it was a divisive political issue that should not affect the work of a technical organization such as the Agency. The UK remained fully committed to the establishment of a zone free of all WMDs and their delivery systems in the Middle East and had long held the view that all processes relating to such a zone should be based on consensus and be freely arrived at by all the States of the region.

165. Ms SÁNCHEZ MONCADA (Honduras) said that, while it welcomed the Arab Group's decision not to submit a resolution on Israeli nuclear capabilities, her country regretted that the issue had been included on the agenda, as the issue was purely political and not an appropriate item for discussion at the General Conference.

166. Honduras reaffirmed its commitment to the aims and principles of the United Nations in the belief that it was only through dialogue that understanding could be reached — in turn guaranteeing the protection of fundamental human rights and achieve international peace and security.

167. Mindful that Israel had always been willing to collaborate with the Agency, Honduras urged that discussions continue so that all States in the Middle East could continue to work towards peace in the region.

168. Honduras requested that the issue not be discussed further at the current or future sessions of the General Conference. It was a political issue on which consensus could not be reached by a technical body such as the Agency and such discussions had a negative impact on progress in the region.

169. Mr NUSBAUM (Israel) said that it was extremely regrettable that the item was repeatedly raised by the Arab States at the General Conference; the issue was completely unrelated to the agenda of the General Conference and beyond the scope of the Agency's mandate. It politicized the Agency to a significant extent, undermined its professional integrity and diverted attention from the real problems and challenges faced by the Agency and the non-proliferation regime. It was also regrettable that, instead of uniting forces against the continuing challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, some States were still invoking an agenda item totally unrelated to the General Conference.

170. By rejecting unconstructive draft resolutions containing political bias under the agenda item in the past, Member States had reaffirmed their position that politically motivated initiatives aimed at singling out any Member State had no place at the General Conference and that direct dialogue among States in the region was the only way to progress where security or arms control arrangements were sought. That outcome should also send a clear message to the sponsors of the draft resolution that the only way to advance regional security in the Middle East was through direct dialogue and consensus among all States of the region.

171. Trust and confidence were essential building blocks of regional security which would not be achieved by avoiding the challenge that lay ahead and by opting instead to single out Israel for political reasons. While a draft resolution had not been tabled under the agenda item that year, Israel regretted the inclusion of the item on the General Conference's agenda once again at the Arab Group's request.

172. Israel wished to live in a safe, secure and peaceful region and believed that its neighbours shared that vision. The path to safety and security could not be paved with continuous resolutions and active denunciations of Israel. His country called upon the Arab Group to honour the will of Member States, cease its obstructive behaviour and refrain from the item's inclusion at future sessions of the General Conference.

173. Certain representatives had referred to another anti-Israeli initiative that had been imported from New York — but it was worth noting that Vienna was not New York. Israel's position on the issue, which was well known and had been elaborated at the relevant UN forums, was that such an initiative would only succeed in undermining regional confidence and trust, including those in the non-proliferation realm. Israel hoped that the Arab Group would become interested in direct dialogue within the region, rather than in New York or Vienna, to create a constructive plan to promote confidence and security in the region, rather than singling out Israel and playing into the hands of Iran.

174. Mr ABDEL SHAFI (Palestine) said that, in addition to flouting all international resolutions on ending its occupation and brazenly violating the principles of international law and international humanitarian law, the occupying State had nuclear facilities not subject to the comprehensive safeguards regime and, according to numerous credible reports, possessed a large nuclear arsenal. That posed a direct threat to the security of the people of Palestine, the region and the rest of the world.

175. Of grave concern were Israel's growing military nuclear capabilities and its continued refusal to accede to the NPT and place its nuclear programmes and facilities under comprehensive safeguards, as all other States in the region had already done. The denial of Israel's military nuclear capabilities by certain States was unacceptable and inconsistent with the reality of its hostile behaviour in Palestine and elsewhere. His country, one of the first signatories of the TPNW in 2017 had acceded to the NPT in 2015 and signed a CSA in 2019, assuming its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security and signalling to the international community the importance of establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

176. Emphasizing its strong commitment to the Agency's safeguards mandate and role in strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime, Palestine deemed it legally and morally questionable to deny the existence of Israel's nuclear programme and treat the country as if neither the law nor the universalization of the NPT applied to it.

177. He concluded by stating that the item's inclusion on the agenda of the Agency's PMOs was an additional diplomatic effort by Arab States to compel Israel to comply with the non-proliferation regime and UN Security Council resolutions dealing with the country's nuclear issue. Israel must end its occupation of the territories of the State of Palestine if it wished to achieve the regional safety and security that it had been calling for.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.