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**Sixty-eighth regular session**

# Plenary

## Record of the Eighth Meeting

*Held at Headquarters, Vienna, on Thursday, 19 September 2024, at 3.10 p.m.*

**President:** Mr HAM Sang Wook (Republic of Korea)

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<sup>1</sup> GC(68)/21

**Abbreviations used in this record**

CSA	comprehensive safeguards agreement
CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty
ICJ	International Court of Justice
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
PMO	Policy-Making Organ
Tlatelolco Treaty	Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean
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

## **19. Application of IAEA safeguards in the Middle East** (GC(68)/14; GC(68)/L.1)

1. The PRESIDENT said that the item had been included in the agenda pursuant to resolution GC(67)/RES/13, adopted by the General Conference the preceding year. Pursuant to paragraph 13 of that resolution, the Director General had submitted the report set out in document GC(68)/14, which had also been considered by the Board of Governors the previous week. Document GC(68)/L.1 contained a draft resolution submitted by Egypt.

2. Mr NASR (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 more than half a century 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 the numerous initiatives and resolutions that they had submitted to the United Nations, the General Conference and other forums concerned with matters of non-proliferation and disarmament.

3. All those resolutions had been adopted either by consensus or by a significant majority, yet none had been implemented, owing to a lack of political will. The resulting stalemate undermined the credibility 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 fell back on flimsy excuses not to engage with genuine efforts to achieve that goal.

4. Almost 30 years had passed since the adoption by consensus of the Resolution on the Middle East at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. That resolution had served as the basis for the indefinite extension of the NPT, to which all Arab States had since acceded. However, 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 the universalization of the NPT and the safeguards regime. 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.

5. Commending the State of Palestine on the ratification of its CSA in 2023, Egypt hoped that Israel — the only country in the region that had not acceded to the NPT or concluded a CSA — would be inspired to follow suit, thus universalizing the two instruments in the Middle East.

6. In 2024, 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.

7. Egypt encouraged consultations between the Director General and Member States in the region with a view to ensuring the implementation of the resolution. It 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.

8. There was no justification for simply accepting the status quo. Member States had a duty to address the challenges being faced and prevent any serious repercussions for international peace and security.

9. Failure to vote in favour of the draft 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 by the greatest possible majority.

10. Ms KUTESA (Uganda), speaking on behalf of NAM, said that stability could not be achieved in a region where a continuing massive imbalance in military capabilities — in particular the possession of nuclear weapons — allowed one party to threaten its neighbours and the region. The establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East would be a positive step towards global nuclear disarmament and should be undertaken in accordance with relevant UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

11. NAM was convinced that the effective and efficient application of Agency safeguards in the Middle East would promote greater confidence among States in the region. The universal application of comprehensive safeguards in the Middle East was the first practical step towards building confidence and was necessary for establishing an NWFZ in the region.

12. For those of its members that were NPT States Parties, NAM welcomed their conclusion of CSAs with the Agency as non-nuclear-weapon States in fulfilment of their obligations under Article III of the NPT. Noting that all States in the Middle East, except for Israel, were party to the Treaty and had undertaken to accept comprehensive Agency safeguards, NAM highlighted the accession of the State of Palestine to the NPT in 2015 and welcomed the conclusion of its CSA in 2019.

13. 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 that linked the application of comprehensive safeguards to all nuclear activities in the Middle East with the prior conclusion of a peace settlement; the former would, in fact, contribute to the latter.

14. NAM noted with regret that the Director General had not been able to make further progress in fulfilling his mandate under General Conference resolution GC(67)/RES/13, regarding the application of comprehensive Agency safeguards covering all nuclear activities in the Middle East. All Member States should work together to rectify that unacceptable situation and were encouraged to participate actively in promoting the universality of comprehensive Agency safeguards in the region as a matter of priority.

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

16. Recalling the decision reached by consensus in the Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference on the convening, in 2012, of a conference on the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs, NAM member States party to the NPT reiterated their profound disappointment that the 2010 action plan had not been implemented. That ran counter to the letter and spirit of the Resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, which constituted the original terms of reference for establishing such a zone, and violated the collective agreement reached at the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

17. NAM member States party 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, a failure that could have a negative impact on the NPT regime.

18. NAM requested that the Director General continue his efforts and consultations with all Member States on arrangements conducive to the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East.

19. NAM welcomed the convening of the fourth session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction in November 2023, in accordance with UN General Assembly decision 73/546, and the political declaration issued at the first session. It looked forward to the convening of the fifth session under the presidency of Mauritania and called on all States of the region, without exception, to participate actively and negotiate in good faith to conclude a legally binding treaty on the establishment of such a zone. Appreciative of the Agency's participation in the fourth session, NAM requested that the Director General participate in the fifth session in accordance with the General Assembly decision.

20. The 1995 resolution, and other relevant decisions adopted at the NPT Review Conferences, would remain valid until a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs had been established. The implementation of General Assembly decision 73/546 was without prejudice to the validity of the 1995 resolution and other relevant decisions, and should not be construed as their replacement.

21. NAM was fully committed to cooperating with the Director General and supporting his efforts to implement General Conference resolution GC(67)/RES/13. All other Member States were expected to do the same.

22. Mr MOFADAL EL NOUR (Sudan), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said that the Group welcomed the successful outcomes of the fourth 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 2023 under Libya's able presidency, pursuant to UN General Assembly decision 73/546. Given the relevance of the Conference to the Agency's mandated verification and monitoring work, the Group thanked the Agency for participating in the session as an observer. It commended those States that had supported and participated in the previous sessions of the Conference and conveyed special thanks to the Russian Federation and the UK as two of the three NPT depositary States and sponsors of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, and to China and France, which had attended as nuclear-weapon States.

23. The Group urged those States that had been invited but had not attended — the other sponsor of the 1995 resolution and the remaining States in the region — to reconsider their positions and take part in future sessions, given the progress that the Conference had made thus far. The conference process had demonstrated that it did not exclude, isolate or impose conditions or restrictions on any State in the region, especially as consensus had been adopted as the only method of decision making.

24. The Group looked forward to the active participation of all sponsors of the 1995 resolution at the fifth session of the Conference, to be held in November 2024 under Mauritania's presidency, and to objective discussions involving all States in the region on drafting a treaty on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East.

25. More than 25 years since the adoption of the 1995 resolution, the convening of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction had marked the first practical step in reviving the process for establishing such a zone in the Middle East. It was therefore important to capitalize on the opportunity, especially in view of the failure by the Tenth NPT Review Conference to reach agreement on a Final Document. General Assembly decision 73/546 had joined the library of reference documents on the topic, alongside the outcome documents of the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences. In that connection, the Arab Group looked

forward to the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 NPT Review Conference, to be held in July 2025 in Geneva, and to an outcome document that reflected the Group's aspirations and concerns.

26. The Arab Group called on the Agency to continue supporting the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction and requested the Director General to include developments in that regard in his future reports on the application of safeguards in the Middle East.

27. All countries in the Middle East region, apart from Israel, were party to the NPT and had concluded CSAs. It was essential to consolidate efforts to universalize those two instruments, which represented the legal standard for the Agency's safeguards system in accordance with its Statute.

28. The Group welcomed the entry into force of the CSA between the Agency and the State of Palestine, which reflected that country's commitment to all legal frameworks relating to the NPT.

29. The Group regretted that no progress had been made on the implementation of resolution GC(67)/RES/13, despite its adoption by a majority vote. The Agency must do more to implement that resolution, including by holding additional consultations, in order to break the deadlock on the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East. It was not enough to continue simply updating the technical reports on the matter. The implementation of the resolution would strengthen the non-proliferation regime and would be consistent with the outcomes of the 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. Mr SANTANA NUÑEZ (Cuba) said that his country had supported the establishment of NWFZs in various regions as part of efforts to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime and achieve the goal of nuclear disarmament. Noting that the early establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East formed part of the resolution adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, he expressed regret that, almost 30 years later, the resolution, as well as the related action plan agreed at the 2010 NPT Review Conference, had still not been implemented.

31. Cuba supported the convening of the fourth session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction and encouraged all States in the Middle East to participate in good faith in negotiations to conclude a treaty on the establishment of such a zone, which would help achieve the goal of nuclear disarmament and mark a significant step forward in the regional peace process.

32. Israel — the only country in the region that had not acceded to the NPT or announced its intention to do so — must relinquish its nuclear weapons, accede to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and submit all its nuclear facilities to comprehensive Agency safeguards, unconditionally and without delay, in line with the calls of the international community.

33. Cuba was proud that Latin America and the Caribbean, through the Tlatelolco Treaty, had been the first densely populated area in the world to be declared an NWFZ. The establishment of internationally recognized NWFZs strengthened international peace and security and the non-proliferation regime and made an important contribution to achieving nuclear disarmament.

34. Mr TAMALA (Indonesia) said that his country appreciated the efforts made by States in the Middle East to achieve the universal application of comprehensive Agency safeguards in the region. It was regrettable that resolution GC(67)/RES/13 could not be fully implemented, the Director General having as yet been unable to make further progress in fulfilling his mandate thereunder. Indonesia was concerned by the delay in the implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East and urged the

sponsors of that resolution to take all necessary measures for its full and swift enforcement. All States in the region were urged to contribute actively towards the universal and unconditional application of comprehensive Agency safeguards.

35. Indonesia strongly supported the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs in the Middle East. In that regard, it welcomed UN General Assembly decision 73/546 and the constructive outcomes of the four sessions of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. It called upon all States of the region, without exception, to participate actively in the Conference and negotiate in good faith to conclude a legally binding treaty on the establishment of such a zone. As the only State in the region that had not acceded to the NPT or declared its intention to do so, Israel must renounce its possession of nuclear weapons, accede to the Treaty without preconditions or further delay and promptly place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive Agency safeguards.

36. The establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East was an important step towards bolstering peace and security in the region and beyond.

37. Mr LI Song (China), conveying his country's support for the draft resolution, said that no region should be threatened by nuclear weapons. WMDs had been a persistent cause of mutual distrust in the Middle East, undermining regional peace and stability. The establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs would help to curb their proliferation, safeguard the authority and effectiveness of the international non-proliferation regime and guarantee the region's long term peace and stability.

38. China called upon the countries of the Middle East and nuclear-weapon States to shoulder their responsibilities and participate in the process for establishing such a zone within the UN framework. In addition, all countries in the region should accede to the NPT and sign and ratify a CSA and additional protocol as soon as possible.

39. Ms SHAVROVA (Russian Federation) said that, even as the terrible catastrophe in the Gaza Strip and the unprecedented escalation in the region continued to unfold before the eyes of the international community, the work towards the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East had lost none of its relevance. Among other things, the dialogue launched in 2018 under the auspices of the United Nations within the framework of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction was an important means of building confidence among Middle Eastern countries. The Conference had already firmly established itself as a non-confrontational forum for direct communication among the States of the region, where each participant was protected by the rule of consensus in decision making on any issue. Once the acute phase of the conflict in the Middle East had passed — something that had to happen sooner or later — the issue of the WMD-free zone would take on added significance.

40. Unfortunately, Israel still failed to recognize the value of the process. The discussions held at the Conference, including at its fourth session in November 2023, which had taken place at an extremely difficult moment for the region, continued to demonstrate that the participants were counting on Israel's involvement in the process — even if there was currently no prospect of that. Her country therefore hoped that, sooner or later, Israel would reconsider its attitude to the process, which was undoubtedly in the interests of all States in the region. The same applied to the USA, which had so far avoided participating in the work of the Conference despite its status as a co-sponsor of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East. The Russian Federation welcomed the fact that China, France and the UK were also participating in the Conference as observers.

41. In closing, she said that her country would vote in favour of the draft resolution.

42. Mr MOLEKANE (South Africa) said that his country supported the draft resolution, firmly believing that it would help advance the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East. That was especially pertinent given the continued violence, destruction and acts of genocide being committed in the Gaza Strip by the occupying power, Israel.

43. The establishment of NWFZs in various regions would make a significant contribution towards achieving a world free of nuclear weapons and enhancing global peace and security. The draft resolution was an integral step towards reaching that goal and strengthening the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

44. The 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference had adopted a firm and unequivocal resolution calling on States in the Middle East to take tangible steps towards the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the region. Regrettably, 30 years later, no progress had been made. South Africa called on the State of Israel to accede to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and subject its nuclear programme to the scrutiny of the safeguards regime by signing and ratifying a CSA and an additional protocol. It also called on the sponsors of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East to honour their commitments and support the region in the establishment of such a zone.

45. South Africa reiterated its long-standing belief that global peace and security could be achieved only with the total elimination of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs and the assurance that such weapons would never be produced again. The time had come to call for the removal of all WMDs from the territories of all non-nuclear-weapon States, in order to move towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

46. Ms SALERNO CALDERA (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the effective 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.

47. Venezuela regretted that no further progress had been made in fulfilling the Director General's mandate under resolution GC(67)/13. The establishment of a verifiable zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs would be a positive step towards global nuclear disarmament and would greatly enhance regional and international peace and security. Reiterating its support for the creation of such a zone pursuant to the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, her country underlined the importance of the four sessions of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction held since 2019.

48. Venezuela 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 actively to the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East.

49. The 1995 resolution, together with related decisions adopted at NPT Review Conferences, remained valid until a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs had been established.

50. Mr NAZIRI ASL (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the Israeli regime's continued possession of nuclear weapons and unsafeguarded nuclear facilities posed a grave threat to regional and international peace and security in general and to the NPT regime in particular. Collective, immediate and tangible measures were essential to address that serious threat. It was a matter of concern that the double standards applied by the USA and certain Western countries continued to jeopardize global efforts to universalize the NPT and establish an NWFZ in the Middle East. The overwhelming majority of NPT States Parties, particularly those in the region, supported the establishment of such a zone — a noble goal initiated by Iran in 1974 and co-sponsored by Egypt.



51. In addition to the landmark action plan agreed in its Final Document, the 2010 NPT Review Conference — like the 2000 NPT Conference — had emphasized the significance of the historic 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, the urgency of universalizing the NPT in the Middle East, and the need for the Israeli regime to accede to the Treaty and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive Agency safeguards.

52. The Israeli regime's continued aggression, including its killing of Palestinian civilians, underscored the threat that it posed to regional and international peace and security. Following a number of threats of nuclear annihilation over the past decade, several high-ranking Israeli regime officials had recently threatened Iran and the population of the Gaza Strip with a nuclear attack. There was an urgent need to curb that threat.

53. Such statements were shocking. The international community overwhelmingly condemned such provocative action, which would undoubtedly jeopardize international efforts towards universalizing the NPT. The Israeli regime's irresponsible policies and its clandestine nuclear weapon programme persistently blocked any progress towards the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East, which, along with the generous material and diplomatic support provided by the USA — a self-proclaimed guardian of the non-proliferation regime — was a matter of regret and concern for all Member States.

54. Establishing a Middle East NWFZ was not just a noble cause but a strategic imperative. As long as the issue of the Israeli regime's nuclear arsenal remained unaddressed, the risk of further nuclear proliferation in the region would persist, and enduring peace and stability would remain elusive. The systematic blocking of the implementation of the 1995 resolution and the 2010 action plan ran counter to the unequivocal commitment made at the NPT Review Conferences, which required that all States, including nuclear-weapon States, make every effort to establish an NWFZ in the Middle East. In the same vein, any further derogations from the decisions adopted to pave the way for the creation of such a zone must be avoided. The integrity of the NPT regime and the credibility of the Agency must be upheld in the face of the systematic erosion of the commitments made.

55. Iran was unequivocally committed to establishing an NWFZ, which could enhance global and regional peace and security. To achieve that goal, political will and collective action were needed to reinvigorate the commitments made in other international forums.

56. Mr LATROCH (Algeria), calling for the universalization of the safeguards agreement, which was the fundamental legal tool for verifying the peaceful nature of nuclear activities, said that his country warned of proliferation threats in the Middle East, especially those arising from murky nuclear activities that were not covered by the NPT or the Agency's safeguards system and that posed a primary obstacle to the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East.

57. The Agency must stand firm against the threat of nuclear weapon use in the Gaza Strip. Such dangerous threats — the inevitable result of the ambiguity and lack of commitment to obligations inherent in the occupying entity's nuclear policy — ran counter to the spirit and purpose of the NPT and the CTBT and blatantly challenged international peace and security, thereby reinforcing the consistent position of the Arab Group and many other countries regarding the importance of universalizing the NPT and the Agency's safeguards system.

58. All parties must engage actively, unconditionally and in good faith in efforts to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East. Algeria reiterated its call on the Director General, the Board of Governors and Member States to take a clear and pragmatic stance in that regard and to deal unrelentingly, objectively and indiscriminately with all dangerous practices that were inconsistent with the relevant international instruments, resolutions and standards.

59. Mr SHOJA'AADIN (Yemen), calling on Israel to accede to the NPT and conclude a CSA — both of which were vital instruments — said that the draft resolution was an important contribution towards regional and international peace and security.

60. Mr SHAUL (Israel) said that, in the past, his country had joined the consensus on the draft resolution, reflecting a shared vision for regional stability and security. However, Israel could not support the unilaterally revised wording of the draft resolution set out in document GC(68)/L.1, which 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 lacked the proper context and did not take regional realities into account.

61. 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 clandestine 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 legally binding agreements in the region, coupled with an absence of mutual recognition and trust, had led it to conclude that the text lacked the required balance, given the regional circumstances.

62. Israel attached high importance to the non-proliferation regime and shared its goals. Nevertheless, the geopolitical situation in the Middle East demonstrated more clearly than ever that the NPT did not provide a remedy for the unique security challenges of the region, especially considering the repeated violations of that instrument by several States Parties. Accession to the NPT was not a goal in and of itself. Calls for universal accession to the Treaty 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 and actively supported terrorist organizations around the world.

63. Lessons learned from other regions had shown that a regional security framework could stem only from the shared political will of all parties in the region to engage directly with one another 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, which seemed a very distant prospect, 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, including the unprecedented attacks on Israel by Hamas and by Iran and its proxies, justified Israel's approach.

64. Israel would therefore be obliged to vote against paragraph 2 of the draft resolution and to abstain on the draft resolution as a whole; it accordingly requested that separate votes be taken on paragraph 2 and on the draft resolution as a whole.

65. The PRESIDENT noted that Israel had requested that a separate vote be taken on paragraph 2 of the draft resolution set out in document GC(68)/L.1.

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

67. Senegal, having been drawn by lot by the President, was called upon to vote first.

68. The result of the vote was as follows:

69. In favour: Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Holy See, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia,

Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Namibia, Nepal, Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, 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, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Türkiye, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe.

70. Against: Israel

71. Abstaining: Angola, Bahamas, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, India, Paraguay, United States of America.

72. There were 112 votes in favour and 1 against, with 7 abstentions. Paragraph 2 of the draft resolution was adopted.

73. Mr KUMARAN (India), speaking in explanation of vote, said that his delegation had abstained because it believed that paragraph 2 of the draft resolution contained elements that were extraneous to the Agency.

74. Mr SIAM (Bangladesh), speaking in explanation of vote, said that his country was deeply committed to the nuclear non-proliferation and safeguards regime and strongly supported a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and WMDs. The credibility of the rules-based global order depended on the universal application of international instruments, including the NPT. It was therefore only fair that multilateral institutions and the international community promote the non-proliferation and safeguards regime for each country on an equal basis. Bangladesh had voted in favour of the draft resolution to ensure the transparency of the Israeli nuclear programme by bringing it under Agency oversight. Bangladesh would continue to uphold the Agency's nuclear non-proliferation and safeguards mandate.

75. The PRESIDENT noted that Israel had requested a vote on the whole of the draft resolution contained in document GC(68)/L.1.

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

77. The Holy See, having been drawn by lot by the President, was called upon to vote first.

78. The result of the vote was as follows:

79. In favour: Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Holy See, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Namibia, Nepal, Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, 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, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Türkiye, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe.

80. Abstaining: Angola, Bahamas, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Israel, Madagascar, Paraguay, Togo, United States of America.

81. There were 112 votes in favour and none against, with 9 abstentions. The draft resolution was adopted.

82. Ms HOLGATE (United States of America), speaking in explanation of vote, said that her country continued to support many of the overarching goals outlined in the resolution, in particular 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 to advance 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 supported a number of key elements in the resolution, including the importance of confidence- and security-building measures, the need for compliance by States of the region with their non-proliferation obligations, and the necessity of pursuing those goals in the context of regional peace efforts.

83. 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 Middle East. With the anticipated significant growth of nuclear energy in the region, including reported interest in nuclear fuel cycle activities, the additional protocol was an essential tool for States in the Middle East 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 States that had not yet done so to modify or rescind, as appropriate, their outdated small quantities protocols. It also urged all States in the region to cooperate fully and in a timely manner with the Agency in fulfilling their obligations under their CSAs.

84. For many years, the General Conference resolutions 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 2006 in favour of the submission of a draft resolution that could not command consensus and was pursued alongside an unconstructive 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 and return to a consensus-based approach so that such issues could be addressed in a more collaborative and productive manner in the future.

85. Mr BOHN (Germany), speaking in explanation of vote also on behalf of France 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 on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among all the States of the region concerned.

86. Mr PINDER (Bahamas), speaking in explanation of vote, said that his country associated itself with the statement made by the USA.

87. Mr NASR (Egypt), expressing sincere thanks to the States that had supported the resolution, called on the States that had abstained in the vote to reconsider their positions in 2025. 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.

## 20. Israeli nuclear capabilities (GC(68)/1/Add.1; GC(68)/13)

88. The PRESIDENT said that the item 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(68)/1/Add.1 and by document GC(68)/13.

89. Ms KUTESA (Uganda), speaking on behalf of NAM, said 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.

90. For those of its members that were party to the NPT, NAM welcomed their conclusion of CSAs with the Agency as non-nuclear-weapon States in fulfilment of their obligations under Article III of the Treaty. All States in the Middle East, except for Israel, were party to the NPT and had undertaken to accept comprehensive Agency safeguards.

91. 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.

92. NAM noted with concern that the selective approach to the issue of nuclear capabilities in the Middle East 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.

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

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

95. 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 that linked the application of comprehensive safeguards to all nuclear activities in the Middle East to the prior conclusion of a peace settlement. The former would, in fact, contribute to the latter.

96. 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 nuclear-related scientific or technological fields to Israel.

97. NAM further noted that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, in his letter to the Director General attached to document GC(54)/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 domain. Regrettably, the official records of the Agency were testimony to the contrary: the multiple General Conference resolutions issued before 1994 on South Africa's nuclear capabilities had recalled various UN General Assembly resolutions concerning relations between Israel and apartheid South Africa, and military and nuclear collaboration with apartheid South Africa. Those resolutions had strongly condemned the extensive collaboration between Israel and the then racist regime of apartheid South Africa, especially in the military and nuclear fields, in defiance of UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

98. Mr MOFADAL EL NOUR (Sudan), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said that the Group condemned, in the strongest terms, the genocide that the Israeli occupier had been waging against the Palestinian people for 11 months. Together with the Israeli occupier's policy of starvation and deprivation of basic necessities as a means of collective punishment, in violation of all international norms and laws, the genocide had claimed the lives of more than 40 000 Palestinians, injured more than 100 000 and led to the disappearance of tens of thousands more.

99. Despite the urgent need for aid in the Gaza Strip, the occupation authorities had deliberately prevented the entry of humanitarian aid trucks and had even gone so far as to bomb them and target defenceless civilians who had congregated to receive desperately needed humanitarian aid. In a further violation of the rights of the population of the Gaza Strip, they had also targeted a camp and other gatherings of displaced Palestinians in Rafah and had recently bombed a school for displaced persons in Gaza City, killing nearly 100 civilians, most of whom were women and children.

100. The Arab Group called on the international community to provide international protection for Palestinian civilians; prevent their forced displacement; and exert pressure on Israel to comply fully with the relevant UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, end its siege of the Gaza Strip and allow the immediate and safe entry of essential humanitarian aid.

101. The Group welcomed the advisory opinion issued by the ICJ in July 2024 with regard to the legal consequences arising from Israel's practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and called on all States and international organizations, including the Agency, not to recognize as legal the situation arising from Israel's unlawful presence in that territory.

102. Applauding the Security Council's efforts to secure an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, the Group noted the provisional measures ordered by the ICJ, including the request that Israel immediately cease its military operations in Rafah and facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, as repeatedly called for by all other States, UN agencies and aid organizations.

103. Israel's continued refusal to comply with those orders or respond to the international community's collective will highlighted the threat that its atrocious and destructive actions posed to international peace and security. That situation was exacerbated by the continuation of its murky nuclear programme in spite of numerous international resolutions adopted in that regard over the preceding decades.

104. The Group reiterated its strong condemnation of the Israeli Minister of Heritage's unprecedented and utterly unacceptable suggestion that the current situation in the Gaza Strip could be resolved by dropping a nuclear bomb. That suggestion was a flagrant violation of international law and a direct threat to regional and international peace and security. Such public incitement to the continued violation of international humanitarian law and the use of WMDs to commit genocide was alarming. Such an undeniably serious threat should be dealt with firmly and without double standards.

105. The Group recalled that, in September 2009, the General Conference had adopted resolution GC(53)/RES/17, expressing concern about Israeli nuclear capabilities and the threat posed by nuclear proliferation to stability and security in the Middle East, and calling on Israel to accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive Agency safeguards.

106. In their Final Documents, the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences had emphasized the importance of Israel's accession to the NPT and of embarking on a process leading to full implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East. The 2010 NPT Review Conference had decided to call on the UN Secretary-General and the sponsors of the 1995 resolution, in consultation with the States of the region, to convene a conference in 2012 on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other WMDs. The Group regretted the failure to convene the conference in 2012 and the failure of the convening parties to fulfil the mandate issued to them by the

2010 NPT Review Conference. The international community ought to shoulder its responsibilities and abide by its obligation to rid the world — and the Middle East region in particular — of nuclear weapons and other WMDs.

107. The 2015 NPT Review Conference had failed to reach consensus on its draft Final Document, despite immense efforts by the President of the Conference, owing to the objection of three States. That resistance had hindered progress towards establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs and had obstructed efforts to universalize the NPT in the region. The 2022 NPT Review Conference had also failed to produce a Final Document, thus making it impossible to review and build on the implementation of obligations during the preceding review cycles, especially in connection with the Middle East.

108. The Group regretted the continued lack of progress in the implementation of the 1995 resolution, which had set back international efforts to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs. Further international efforts to implement the resolution must not be allowed to fail. Having served as the basis for the indefinite extension of the NPT, the resolution would remain in effect until its objectives had been achieved.

109. Israel's nuclear capabilities, negative nuclear practices and refusal to conclude a CSA had been a source of concern for many States in the region and worldwide and had been discussed in many international bodies over the preceding decades. Moreover, a long list of resolutions — notably UN Security Council resolution 487 (1981) — calling on Israel to accede to the NPT and place all its facilities under the comprehensive safeguards system had been adopted by various international organizations. Israel had categorically refused to implement those resolutions, preferring to downplay the importance of the NPT, labelling it as ineffective in the Middle East. Israel's failure to accede to the NPT impeded regional efforts to strengthen peace and security and establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs, especially since its development of nuclear weapons had been acknowledged by Israeli officials and mentioned in a number of international reports on the subject, and it had recently threatened to use them.

110. Along with the crimes that it was committing daily in the Gaza Strip, Israel had continued to relentlessly pursue policies hostile to Arab States and peoples and to occupy their territories. The Group's concern over Israel's possession of nuclear weapons was heightened by the latter's failure to exercise self-restraint, by its indiscriminate use of force against unarmed civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and by its flagrant and systematic violations of international law — especially international humanitarian law — in the Gaza Strip.

111. The Group believed that peace efforts were served by any initiative to establish an NWFZ in the Middle East, in particular the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. Israel's refusal to participate in such positive initiatives and its repeated attempts to impose a new order of priorities so as to remain outside the NPT indefinitely were a source of serious concern to the Group. Action to prevent nuclear proliferation in the Middle East was a core task assigned to the Agency and a fundamental obligation, in view of the nuclear threat posed by Israel not only to stability in the Middle East, but also to international peace and security.

112. The Group regretted that, within the Agency's PMOs and at other relevant conferences and forums, some Member States, including nuclear-weapon States, continued to contradict their publicly stated positions and to disregard the principle of the universality of the NPT when it came to Israeli nuclear capabilities and unsafeguarded nuclear facilities, thus clearly demonstrating their double standards. The Group considered that the item concerning Israeli nuclear capabilities should remain on the agenda of the PMOs.

113. Speaking on behalf of the 22 member States of the League of Arab States, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Colombia, Cuba, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nicaragua, the Russian Federation, Türkiye, Venezuela and Zimbabwe, he reiterated the concerns and calls set out in resolution GC(53)/RES/17, which must be implemented as a matter of regional and global peace and security.

114. Those concerns had been addressed by many international bodies over the preceding decades, including the UN Security Council through resolution 487 (1981). Moreover, in their Final Documents, the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences had reaffirmed the importance of Israel's accession to the NPT and of embarking on a process leading to full implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East. The group of countries regretted the continued lack of progress in establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the region pursuant to that resolution and urged the international community to uphold its responsibilities and honour its commitments to rid the Middle East of such weapons without further delay.

115. Israel categorically refused to implement the 1995 resolution and consistently undermined the significance of the NPT, dismissing it as inapplicable to the Middle East. In light of Israel's refusal to accede to the NPT, the Israeli nuclear threat — demonstrated most recently by an Israeli minister's call to drop a nuclear bomb on the Gaza Strip — was alarming. Such statements were a flagrant violation of international law and a direct threat to regional and international peace and security.

116. All initiatives aimed at establishing an NWFZ in the Middle East — in particular the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction — contributed to peace efforts in the region. The Conference was not, however, a substitute for the implementation of the 1995 resolution, which would remain valid until its goals and objectives had been fully achieved, nor did it relieve the sponsors of the resolution of their inherent responsibility in that regard. The group of countries supported the conference process as an inclusive path and a serious opportunity for direct and honest dialogue among all stakeholders and sponsors to address all concerns regarding the establishment of an NWFZ. All stakeholders and sponsors were encouraged to actively participate in the fifth session of the Conference.

117. Horrified by the appalling situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially in the Gaza Strip, and by Israel's military escalation and the unprecedented settler violence in the West Bank in recent months, the group of countries called for an immediate ceasefire, the unrestricted delivery of humanitarian aid to the people of the Gaza Strip and the immediate implementation of the relevant UN resolutions and ICJ orders.

118. The group of countries welcomed the ICJ's advisory opinion, issued on 19 July 2024, on the legal consequences arising from Israel's policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and called on the international community to take the necessary action and put pressure on Israel to implement its obligations reflected in that opinion. Addressing nuclear proliferation in the Middle East was a core responsibility of the Agency and a necessary commitment in order to manage the proliferation risks in the region.

119. Mr SALEH AZZAM (Lebanon) recalled that Member States and the wider international community had made repeated attempts — including through General Conference resolution GC(53)/RES/17, Security Council resolution 487 (1981) and the Final Documents of the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences — to warn of the dangers posed by Israeli nuclear capabilities to regional peace and security and to encourage Israel to accede to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and place its nuclear facilities under Agency safeguards. Israel, however, had consistently rejected and obstructed those efforts so as to perpetuate inequality in the legal rights and obligations applicable to itself and other States in the region and to remain outside international oversight. Lebanon rejected the status quo — such structural inequalities needed to be rectified not only for their own sake but also



because, in the current deteriorating geopolitical climate, they were increasingly likely to have serious repercussions for regional and international peace and security. The Israeli Minister of Heritage's direct and explicit threat to use Israel's military nuclear capabilities against the population of the Gaza Strip revealed that the issue was not merely a theoretical anxiety, but a clear and present danger.

120. The goal of ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons had been endorsed by the international community through a number of international instruments, in particular those of the 1995, 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences. However, owing to Israel's intransigence, the UN General Assembly, through its decision 73/546, had established a parallel process — in the form of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction — to achieve that goal.

121. Lebanon called on all States concerned to assume their responsibilities and engage in that process, including by attending the fifth session of the Conference in November 2024, in order to rid the region of all WMDs. Until that aim was achieved, Israel's nuclear capabilities would remain a source of deep concern for the region and the world, and those seeking peace and security in the region would remain determined to keep the item on the General Conference's agenda.

122. Mr SURYAWANTO (Indonesia) said that efforts towards nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation must go hand in hand in order to achieve the ultimate goal of complete disarmament under strict and effective international control. The universality of the NPT was of paramount importance in that regard.

123. Indonesia was greatly concerned at Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapon capabilities, which posed a serious and continuing threat to the security of neighbouring countries and the Middle East in general. Allowing a State 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 global commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and endangered peace and stability in the region.

124. Ms YUE Ping (China), voicing her country's support for the inclusion of the current item on the agenda, said that the Middle East should not be threatened by nuclear weapons. Developments over the past year had heightened the concerns of the international community and countries in the region over Israel's nuclear capabilities, increasing the urgency of establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs. The issue of Israeli nuclear capabilities deserved greater attention and serious discussion within the framework of the NPT and the Agency.

125. The current round of conflict between Israel and Palestine had been dragging on for nearly a year. Despite the international community's strong, repeated calls for a ceasefire, Israel had continued its military operations, killing 41 000 Palestinian civilians and a number of UN staff members. China urged Israel to immediately cease all military operations in the Gaza Strip, de-escalate the situation in the region and stop obstructing efforts to achieve a ceasefire. It also urged countries with significant influence to act sincerely, fairly and responsibly by pushing Israel to cease its military operations in the Gaza Strip and stop killing civilians.

126. China stood ready to work indefatigably with the international community to bring an early end to the fighting in the Gaza Strip, alleviate the humanitarian disaster, implement a two-State solution and achieve long term peace and security in the Middle East.

127. Mr MOHD IBRAHIM (Malaysia) extended his country's deepest condolences to the grieving Palestinian people, who continued to be severely affected by the ongoing brutal conflict in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Malaysia strongly condemned the genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity that Israel continued to perpetrate with impunity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Those acts were

in flagrant violation of the relevant UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, and of the ICJ's advisory opinion issued in July 2024, in connection with which the General Assembly had adopted, on 18 September 2024, resolution ES-10/24 reflecting the strong sentiment of UN member States regarding the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

128. Malaysia condemned in the strongest possible terms the threats by the Israeli leadership regarding the potential use of a nuclear bomb against the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, which had exacerbated the already extremely dire situation in the region. Such apocalyptic nuclear rhetoric and uncivilized sentiments constituted a direct threat to international peace and security and were testament to the need for the international community to redouble its efforts towards the ultimate goal of general and complete nuclear disarmament.

129. In that regard, Malaysia recalled the ICJ's unanimous conclusion, in its 1996 advisory opinion concerning the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons, that there existed an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control. Further, General Conference resolution GC(53)/RES/17 had expressed the international community's concern about Israel's nuclear capabilities, and the threat posed to security and stability in the Middle East by nuclear weapon proliferation, and had also called on Israel to accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive Agency safeguards.

130. Malaysia reaffirmed the need for the prompt establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East. Moreover, it called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, the unrestricted delivery of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip, and Israel's swift implementation of the relevant UN and Agency resolutions and the ICJ's July 2024 advisory opinion.

131. Mr SAJJADI (Islamic Republic of Iran) recalled that in 1995, as part of the package for the indefinite extension of the NPT, the States Parties had adopted the Resolution on the Middle East, which called for an NWFZ to be established in the region with the ultimate goal of consolidating efforts towards regional peace and security by strengthening global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament norms. Furthermore, under the action plan agreed at the 2010 NPT Review Conference, all States Parties had committed themselves to work towards the establishment of such a zone.

132. That goal had yet to be achieved, with certain nuclear-weapon States having regrettably boycotted the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. Such a biased and unconstructive approach continued to jeopardize the establishment of that zone, undermining the NPT and the outcomes of the NPT Review Conferences and emboldening the Israeli regime to continue to acquire WMDs and develop its nuclear weapon programme without hesitation.

133. In the three decades since the adoption of the 1995 resolution, the Israeli regime's military nuclear programme — fully supported by certain nuclear-weapon States — had persistently blocked any progress towards establishing an NWFZ.

134. The NPT regime was under unprecedented strain, as the fundamental norms of international law prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons were being challenged. The reality had become even darker when certain officials of the Israeli regime or other States had suggested — with chilling indifference — the need for the Israeli regime to resort to nuclear weapons.

135. The concerns raised by the Israeli regime's continued occupation of Palestine and its long-standing nuclear weapon development programme had been further exacerbated by the shocking statement that it would use nuclear weapons against the defenceless people of the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, by arming the Israeli regime with sophisticated weapons, including bunker busters, its

supporters were attempting to destroy the foundations of the rule of law and international humanitarian law.

136. The international community was still suffering from the Israeli regime's policy of holding the concept of an NWFZ in the Middle East hostage and refusing to allow it to be established. For more than 50 years, the Middle East had been threatened by a single non-party to the NPT in the region. The Israeli regime's disregard for the outcome documents of several NPT Review Conferences and for General Conference and UN General Assembly resolutions was a matter of serious concern. Furthermore, the regime was continuing to develop its offensive nuclear weapon programme with impunity, supported by the self-proclaimed guardians of the non-proliferation regime, namely the USA and its allies.

137. The international community should exert maximum pressure on the Israeli regime to persuade it to stop developing its nuclear weapon programme and place all its nuclear activities and installations under comprehensive Agency safeguards. That was the only way to remedy the current nuclear crisis in the Middle East and to pave the way for the establishment of an NWFZ in the region.

138. Ms SABRI (Iraq) said that all States in the region were party to the NPT and had concluded CSAs — except for the Israeli entity, which maintained its tenuous claim that the safeguards system and NPT were insufficient to guarantee regional security and stability. Efforts to strengthen and universalize those two instruments, which represented the legal standard of Agency safeguards according to its Statute, therefore needed to be consolidated.

139. The Israeli entity's accession to the NPT would be the first step towards confidence-building — a goal that it had itself demanded — in order to advance the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East.

140. It was vital to persist with efforts to convene 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 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, given its potential positive impact in both political and security terms for the sensitive Middle East region.

141. Responding to earlier remarks by the representative of the Israeli entity regarding Iraq's compliance with its NPT obligations, she reaffirmed her country's full commitment to all treaties and agreements on non-proliferation and to international efforts aimed at universalizing those instruments. 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 accede to the NPT as soon as possible. Noting that the Agency denounced all attacks against any peaceful facility under the safeguards regime, she recalled the Israeli strike on Iraqi nuclear facilities under Agency safeguards on 7 June 1981 — which the Director General at the time had labelled an attack on the Agency's safeguards regime — and the resolutions adopted in that regard by the Board of Governors on 12 June 1981 and the General Conference in September 1981 condemning that unjustified action as a clear violation of the UN Charter and the norms of international conduct.

142. Iraq called on the international community to shoulder its moral, legal and professional responsibility to implement paragraph 5 of UN Security Council resolution 487 (1981), which called for all Israeli nuclear facilities to be placed under comprehensive safeguards.

143. Ms SALERNO CALDERA (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that her country was concerned by Israel's nuclear capabilities and its refusal to accede to the NPT, which represented a serious threat to peace and stability in the Middle East.

144. Venezuela urged Israel to comply with its obligations under international law, including the urgent need for it to accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under Agency safeguards.

Israel's serious lack of transparency hindered international efforts to establish an NWFZ in the Middle East.

145. Venezuela strongly rejected the statements made by Israeli officials, such as the Minister of Heritage, whose suggestion of using nuclear weapons against the Gaza Strip was an explicit admission that Israel possessed such weapons. Those irresponsible and aggressive threats, along with similar past statements, demonstrated Israel's readiness to use nuclear means against the Palestinian people. Such statements violated international law, created a climate of instability and endangered the lives of millions of people and humanity as a whole. Venezuela urgently called on Member States to insist that Israel comply fully with its obligations and place its nuclear facilities under Agency safeguards.

146. Unlike Israel, a nuclear-weapon State that was not party to any international disarmament or non-proliferation instruments, the State of Palestine had shown that it was a responsible member of the international community by acceding to international disarmament and non-proliferation instruments, in particular the NPT and the TPNW, and by concluding a CSA. Given its demonstrated alignment with the Agency's goals, objectives and principles, the State of Palestine should be allowed to participate fully in the Agency in line with General Conference resolution GC(67)/RES/14.

147. As a UN system organization, the Agency should welcome the historic UN General Assembly resolution adopted the previous day with the support of 124 countries, in which the international community had demanded that Israel withdraw its forces from the Occupied Palestinian Territory no more than 12 months from the adoption of the resolution. That clear and firm call underscored the pressing need to end the decades-long illegal occupation, marking a crucial step towards peace and justice in the region. The fact that the State of Palestine had introduced the draft resolution bolstered its fight not only to recover its territory but also to fully exercise its rights at the United Nations, including at the Agency. The global support for the resolution reaffirmed the commitment of all States to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and respect for international law. The Agency could not turn a deaf ear to the United Nations. Peace in Palestine was fundamental to peace in the Middle East and could not be achieved while Israel maintained a nuclear arsenal outside international regulations.

148. Venezuela reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to the Palestinian cause and to the promotion of a lasting peace in the region based on justice, nuclear disarmament and respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people from the river to the sea.

149. Mr OTHMAN (Syrian Arab Republic) said that General Conference resolution GC(53)/RES/17 on Israeli nuclear capabilities was a reflection of the international community's grave concern regarding the threat posed to security and stability in the Middle East by the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Through that resolution, the General Conference had delivered the clear message that Israel should accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive Agency safeguards.

150. Israel's aggressive conduct in the region and continued possession of nuclear capabilities covered by neither the NPT nor a CSA posed a serious risk to the non-proliferation regime and threatened regional and international peace and security. As Israel not only refused to join the NPT or any other treaty on WMD disarmament but also possessed significant nuclear capabilities, it had no moral right to criticize cases of non-compliance with the NPT.

151. Israel had secretly been strengthening its nuclear military capabilities, away from international oversight, since the 1950s. Certain States in the West had provided Israel with the weapons-producing Dimona reactor, along with the nuclear technology and materials required for it to gain possession of a massive arsenal of nuclear warheads and their means of delivery, including ballistic missiles and submarines. Those States had also helped deflect international attention from Israel's nuclear capabilities in international forums.

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

153. Israel had persistently ignored calls to implement those resolutions, however. It was supported in that action by several nuclear-weapon States that practised double standards by defending Israel in the Security Council — including through their veto powers — and in other international bodies, thereby jeopardizing the universalization and credibility of the NPT and undermining efforts to achieve non-proliferation and complete nuclear disarmament.

154. Israel's refusal to accede to the NPT and subject all its nuclear facilities to Agency oversight posed a serious threat to the non-proliferation regime, and its rejection of all initiatives to establish an NWFZ in the Middle East undermined regional and international peace, security and stability.

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

156. Egypt vigorously condemned the Israeli Minister of Heritage's suggestion of dropping a nuclear bomb on the Gaza Strip. Such a suggestion was a violation of international law and reflected the extent of Israel's persistent violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The current situation had dangerous and unprecedented repercussions for regional and international security. No effort must be spared to overcome the current stalemate in the implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East and to universalize the CSA.

157. 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 all other States in the region had acceded to the NPT. The continued lack of progress towards the universalization of the CSA, in particular in the Middle East, was disappointing and would harm the credibility of the non-proliferation regime.

158. In view of the support provided by the Agency for the development of the safeguards system, Egypt hoped that the Agency would give similar priority to the universalization of the CSA, as the main verification standard under the NPT, before considering that of the additional protocol. The implementation of the CSA was a confidence-building measure in the Middle East and an important step towards the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the region.

159. In exchange for approving the indefinite extension of the NPT, participants in the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference had adopted, by consensus, a resolution calling for the Middle East to be rid of nuclear weapons and other WMDs. Although Egypt and 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 four successful sessions of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction in New York since 2019.

160. Expressing its appreciation to all the parties that had supported, participated in and contributed to the success of the four sessions of the 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. His country looked forward to all countries concerned participating in the upcoming fifth session in order to build on previous progress and begin a substantive discussion on the provisions of an NWFZ treaty.

161. At meetings of the Board of Governors, various delegations had emphasized that direct regional dialogue was the only means of establishing an NWFZ in the Middle East. Egypt pointed out that, since

the 1990s, States in the region had been attempting to hold such dialogue within various frameworks and forums only to be met by an absence of political will and by irrational excuses for shunning that goal. Egypt therefore urged Israel to reconsider its position and participate in the upcoming session of the Conference, which represented an important opportunity for holding the direct dialogue that Israel itself had consistently called for, and for addressing all relevant concerns through an inclusive process over which all parties had ownership.

162. With preparations already under way for the 2026 NPT Review Conference, including the holding of two sessions of the Preparatory Committee in 2023 and 2024, it was increasingly important to take practical steps towards establishing a Middle East NWFZ, as progress in that area would contribute to the success of the Review Conference. To that end, concerted efforts were needed to universalize the CSA and subject all nuclear activities in the Middle East to the comprehensive safeguards system, thereby strengthening the credibility of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

163. He concluded by reiterating that the item on Israeli nuclear capabilities was at the core of the Agency's work and mandate, given the Agency's key role in the global non-proliferation regime and in the application of the safeguards system. The argument that the issue was beyond the Agency's scope was merely an attempt to shirk responsibility and avoid serious engagement in long-overdue discussions to establish a Middle East NWFZ.

**The meeting rose at 6 p.m.**