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*Statement by Mr. Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, before the First Committee,
General debate on all disarmament and international security agenda items,
62nd Session, New York 16 October 2007:*

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, allow me to convey my delegation's congratulations to you and your country Senegal upon your election as Chairman of the First Committee. We extend our best wishes to the Bureau as well, and express our confidence that under your able stewardship the Committee will successfully conclude its important work. My delegation wishes also to express its appreciation to Ms. Mona Juul for her commitment and hard work during the past session.

I also wish to state that Palestine aligns itself with the important statement made by Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In the interest of time, I will make my comments brief and limit them to a few important issues that we believe deserve the attention of the First Committee.

Mr. Chairman

Palestine affirms that any serious international effort on disarmament must be directly related to relevant international law instruments, including International Humanitarian Law, as this discussion and international effort must be kept in context – the only acceptable context – which is the standing legal obligation of Member States to respect and abide by international law. The irresponsible transfer of arms to states that are proven to act with utter disdain towards International Law and to gravely violate the rights of other peoples must be at the heart of this Committee's attention, as the continued arming of such rogue states is tantamount to an assault on the violated peoples' rights and

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lives as well as an action that exposes any statements professing respect for international law as a sham. A clearer and more decisive action, including an all-out ban, by the international community against such transfer is required.

In this regard, we believe that all Member States have a duty to avoid transferring arms and aiding states that seriously violates international humanitarian law, including grave breaches identified in the Fourth Geneva Conventions of 1949. This is particularly relevant to occupying Powers who do not respect their obligations towards international law and who use excessive force against the civilian population.

Mr. Chairman,

Combating and preventing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is another important goal, which the international community needs to address. Palestine believes that the issue of human suffering, whether caused by the weapons of regular or irregular forces, is one that also deserves our attention and commitment; since the suffering caused by either is real and usually devastating. In this regard, allow me to remind the august assembly that small arms and light weapons are just as devastating when used by a regular army against a civilian population and in contravention of international law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We must also point out that official state arming and protection of militias that resides unlawfully in an occupied land, committing aggressions that terrorize and harm the civilian population, must be addressed as these militias own small arms that are state-sanctioned and funded. In turn, these weapons only feed the conflict and perpetuate the occupation. Hence, we believe that Member States should afford due attention to this issue.

Mr. Chairman,

The proliferation of nuclear and non-conventional weapons is a threat to world security. Hence, it is imperative for the international community to ensure that the Middle East stays free of these weapons of mass destruction. However, this must be a comprehensive, rather than a selective effort. For what adds to this existential threat is the turning of a blind eye by some world powers towards states that have spent decades stockpiling and developing non-conventional and nuclear weapons while refusing to submit to international inspection. It is illogical and counterproductive to exert such extraordinary efforts on singling out and pursuing a Member State on the basis of suspicion as well as prevent non-nuclear-weapon States from pursuing their inalienable right

to peaceful nuclear activity while another, neighboring and hostile Member State, which openly admits to possessing and producing these unconventional weapons, remains immune from so much as inspection or oversight.

Unfortunately, a nuclear-weapon-free zone has yet to be established in the Middle East, and Israel, remains the only non-signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty in the Middle East. Israel, the occupying Power, is a State proven to act with utter disdain towards international law and to violate the rights of other peoples. Hence, the occupying Power, which has been repeatedly immune from international accountability for its repeated infringements upon other States' sovereignty and territory, must not be allowed to violate the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Instead, it must be pressured and called on to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons without delay in order to realize the universalization of the treaty in the Middle East. Such a step will not only contribute to solidifying hopes for peace in the region, it is an indispensable condition to stability and peace in the region for generations to come.

In this regard, we believe that it is vital to push for the implementation of the outcome of the 1995 Review Conference on the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, together with the 13 practical Steps towards nuclear disarmament, adopted in 2000.

Finally Mr. Chairman, we believe it is of crucial importance to review the real and devastating implications of key issue like foreign occupation, underdevelopment and poverty on disarmament around the world as they induce violence, radicalism, and hopelessness – which are key ingredient to raging conflicts across the world. The social and economic conditions produced by occupation, underdevelopment and abject poverty also produce fertile grounds for a host of illicit trades, which this Committee must address comprehensively and responsibly. Such treatment must no doubt consider the undeniable fact that deadly conflicts and illicit arms trade will continue unless we treat the root causes of conflicts and combat comprehensively the efforts of some States to fuel conflicts in exchange for economic profit from illicit or illegal arms funding, hence ensuring the perpetuation of violent conflict and immeasurable suffering of the peoples affected. Treating the symptoms, rather than causes, will undoubtedly prove a deadly failure. The millions of defenseless civilians suffering from the scourges of war and grinded by imposed poverty and deprivation have their hopes and dreams attached to the responsible consideration of our committee. It is our legal duty and obligation not to let them down any more to give them hope that their children can enjoy a life free from the unnecessary and senseless suffering and death they have had to endure.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.