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**STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GUATEMALA TO THE
UNITED NATIONS IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE: THE SITUATION
IN THE MIDDLE EAST INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE**

(24 January, 2012)

Mr. President,

Thank you for convening this open debate. We extend our appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. We have also listened carefully to the statements made by representatives of Israel and Palestine.

In the past two years, the situation in the Middle East has taken up increasing attention in the agenda of the Security Council, and also of international public opinion. Events have evolved at breath-taking speed, and with contradictory trends. The so-called “Arab Spring” has inspired many who call for societies that are more democratic, participatory and tolerant, and where social justice prevails. However, as was foreseeable, the concrete expression that these popular demands take varies from one country to another, and has so far resulted in differing outcomes. In the midst of fresh and stimulating winds, there also appear signs of growing tensions, within countries and between states. Seen from the perspective of the purview of this Council – preserving international peace and security – we have the obligation of following events with great attention, fully conscious that the primary responsibility for finding resolution to intra-state conflicts falls on the citizens of the concerned country.

In the spirit of Chapter VI of the Charter, we favor that any action assumed by the Council to accompany the parties directly involved in processes which involve conflict should be addressed primarily through measures of preventive diplomacy. For us, invoking Chapter VII is a last recourse. In addition, in the spirit of Chapter VIII of the Charter, we favor working very closely with regional and sub-regional entities; in this particular instance, the League of Arab States.

Mr. President,

I will only allude to some specific issues in this vast region. Regarding Lebanon, we applaud Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s recent visit there and the productive meetings he held with authorities of the Government and the principal political actors in that country. We commend the Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA) for organizing the High Level Meeting on “Reform and Transition to Democracy”.

We urge the Government of Lebanon to continue meeting all of its international obligations, especially those related to the Special Tribunal and those derived from Resolution 1701 (2006). We support the efforts to maintain security and also stress the need

for incursions in Lebanese air space to cease; these, in our judgment, are unacceptable.

I now turn to what is possibly the most urgent topic that the Council has before it in the Middle East: the situation in Syria. We favor demanding that all parties cease immediately the use of force, and adopt concrete measures which would lead to reconciliation. However, “the parties” is an abstract concept. We are of the view that popular demands made in a pacific manner cannot be equaled to a Government using force in response to those demands. This type of situation, as we learned too well in many Latin American countries, tends to inevitably spill over into human rights violations of the civilian population, with a high risk of falling into a dynamic where repression is met with armed resistance, leading to a spiral of violence with unforeseeable consequences. Indeed, this is precisely the situation that the Secretary General of the League of Arab States describes in his Report of January 22 addressed to the Council of said Organization. We trust that the presence of monitors of the League of Arab States and the search for what is called an “Arab solution” to the situation, will help Syria come back from the brink of the precipice, and we support the agreements of the Council of the League of Arab States during its meeting of last Sunday. This will no doubt require some type of collective pronouncement on the part of the Security Council.

I would now like to allude to the secular dispute between Israel and Palestine, always a background to the tensions that affect the Middle East. For our part, we favor the creation of a viable, sovereign and independent Palestinian State, living in peace and harmony behind secure and defensible borders next to the State of Israel. We understand that the implementation of this vision falls on both parties – Israel and Palestine – through negotiations of all outstanding issues. In supporting the direct negotiation between Palestinians and Israelis as the only way possible to resolve the differences between them, we welcome the direct meetings between the parties that have taken place in Amman, Jordan in the past weeks, the first of this kind in more than a year and a half. Further, we believe that the Council must continue supporting the actions of the Quartet, and at the same time guarantee that the peace process moves forward, and that the parties can achieve a definitive solution.

However, we also note an increasing divergence between the orientations offered by the Quartet and the political realities on the ground. Therefore, the Council must address these obstacles, which include, among others, the illicit activities of expanding the settlements in the occupied territories, which greatly complicate progress in the peace process. Indeed, our position on the settlements is that they are illegal in accordance with international law, and that they constitute a serious obstacle for peace, undermining the requirements for a two-state solution. At the same time, we are cognizant of the need to address the legitimate security concerns expressed by Israel.

In conclusion, in each of the unique situations we face in the Middle East, it behooves us to call on the opposing parties to renounce the use of violence and to search for negotiated solutions to their differences. For this to occur, the demands welling up from the grass roots of the different societies must be heard and addressed. Finding peaceful outcomes to the different points of tension in the region – each one with its unique characteristics -- is of interest not only for the region, but for the whole world.

Thank you.