Sixth Committee

Agenda Item: Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism

Speech of Israel

October 5

ISRAEL: Thank you, Madame Chair. Allow me to warmly congratulate you on your election as Chairperson of this Committee together with the members of the Bureau and to express our appreciation for your work in preparing this session.

Many of today's terrorists are obscure, private individuals operating in the shadows of states without a fixed address and with invisible hands, often indistinguishable from the civilian population within which they operate. In global networks, they train operatives, trade expertise in death, and cooperate in the perpetration of atrocities. They often wield state-like power. They thrive both on state sponsorship and active support as well as on state inaction whether it stems from unwillingness or inability.

As such, they constitute a new kind of threat which demands new and innovative thinking. International law has an important role to play in this challenge by providing effective tools in promoting accountability, as no state can claim the right of serenity without accepting the responsibilities it imposes to prevent any terrorist activities within or from their territory.

The visible reminders of the faceless plague of terrorism are its victims across borders and cultures, carrying terrible wounds that bear testimony to the atrocities they have suffered. A mark of the cynical brutality of terrorists in our region is the fact that suicide bomber belts have been designed not simply to kill but to maximize the number of living wounded, scared for life, to bear witness to the terrorist's vicious attacks.

These victims are the ultimate reminder that no cause or grievance justifies terrorism in any form or disguise without exception or excuse. Human rights are a central pillar in any counterterrorism strategy. Preserving the rule of law including the rights of terrorists reinforces the notion that sometimes a democracy must fight with one hand tied behind its back. Nonetheless, in the words of Israel's supreme courts, democracy has the upper hand.

At the same time, however, no less important are the human rights of the victims of terrorism: their inherent right to life and body, to security and to live without fear. In this regard, counterterrorism strategies as a priority must be sensitive and devoted to assisting the victims of terrorism as also stipulated by the UN global counterterrorism strategy.

In this regard, the universal declaration on human rights as well as the international covenant on civil and political rights have long recognized that nothing in those instruments may be interpreted as implying for any state, group or person any rights to engage in any activity or to perform any acts aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth in those documents.

Madame Chair, perhaps the most fundamental challenge in the struggle against terrorism is the task of striking a delicate balance between the conflicting values of human rights concerns and security considerations. Israel supports the UN counterterrorism strategy and UN Security Council Resolution 1373 as a vital framework in confronting terrorism. We believe that increased partnerships among states as well as regional groups are essential. We are committed to being a dedicated partner in the global efforts to counter terrorism in the international, regional and bilateral spheres. As a party to the core UN conventions on terrorism, Israel has enacted effective legislation to implement its international obligations and has devoted a unique body of knowledge and capabilities in the field of counterterrorism. Through our technical cooperation and support of projects and initiatives, including through different UN agencies, we seek to share our best practices and expertise and to contribute professionally to global counterterrorism efforts.

Madame Chair, state sponsorship and financing of terrorists including the transfer of weapons, training and funds as well as hosting headquarters create a toxic cocktail in which groups that have no respect for any humanitarian or human rights principles are empowered with state-like military capabilities. It is crucial that the international community address not only active, but also passive support for terrorist groups. In this regard, the recruitment of individuals to carry out terrorist attacks and especially suicide terrorism is integrally linked to the phenomenon of incitement. Terrorism begins with words and thoughts of hate when individuals dehumanize others and glorify martyrdom in a culture of death. Too little attention has thus far been paid to the role played by incitement in fostering the kind of culture in which terrorism can flourish.

The international community has a duty to prevent incitement in schools, houses of worship, the media and elsewhere. As Israel has cautioned time and again, the calls to address the underlying causes of terrorism are too often a poorly disguised attempts to justify the unjustifiable. Any such candid discussion must address the problems of incitement, fundamentalism, intolerance and the lack of democracy which feed a culture of hate that glorifies murder as martyrdom.

In closing, let me reiterate that with respect to a definition of what constitutes terrorism we should not sacrifice effectiveness and principles to a false image of consensus. The definition of terrorism should not be compromised with exceptions that in effect voided and stripped the term of any meaning. Inasmuch as we wish to see the comprehensive convention concluded at the earliest opportunity possible, it should not come at the cost of diluting the principles that stand to make it an effective tool in the fight against terrorism.

Madame Chair, before I conclude, and unlike a certain delegate from a neighboring country, who preached us about terrorism in the context of this debate and who chose to launch political accusations which have no place in this hall, out of respect for the professional legal work of this Committee, I will refrain from commenting in substance to these accusations in the hope that the important responsibility of this Committee will be respected by all. Instead I urge all delegations to conduct the debate in the future in a professional spirit which its subject matter demands. I would like to think that in this regard I am expressing the views shared by most delegations in this hall. Thank you.