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Your Excellency Ambassador Luiz Filipe de Macedo Soares, Secretary-General of OPANAL, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues,

It is with great pleasure for Egypt to be present here today, witnessing, as an observer, how OPANAL member States continue to contribute to regional and international security in a manner that inspires other regions on how they can also advance their security and contribute to the advancement of international stability. Regardless of how far geography may distance us apart, the utmost priority to achieve nuclear disarmament forges an unquestioned bond that surpasses any distance. Indeed, today's meeting is a true reflection of such common will in our quest to achieve a world free from Nuclear Weapons.

In our view, OPANAL is far more than a body where 33 member States of the Treaty of Tlatelolco review the implementation of that important Treaty. OPANAL is rather an institutional structure embodying the success story that the Tlatelolco experience represents.

Egypt is here today as a signatory of the Pelindaba Treaty, establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa. Egypt hosted the signing ceremony of this important African Treaty in April 1996 and considers it a witness to the African commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world and an essential African contribution to international peace and security. While Egypt is an African nation, it also represents a central element in Middle East geography. This has dictated a linkage between what Egypt wishes to do in terms of ratification of Pelindaba on the one side, and on why the timing of such action should be carefully considered, in order to avoid an even wider gap in commitments in the nuclear field that currently exists in the Middle East.

We have thus strongly pushed towards the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, and represented initiatives in this regard as early as 1974. The Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone has proven to be a priority for the international community for over four decades, mainly featuring as the thrust of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, which represents a major pillar of the indefinite extension package of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995. However, forty years later, little progress has been achieved to take even basic practical steps towards the sought zone.

To date, one State in the region insists on defying its neighbors and the world, refusing to follow suit the commitment every other State in the region has displayed joining the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon States. This one country has also insisted on conducting un-safeguarded nuclear activities while its neighbors have all concluded Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Our efforts continue to aim at convincing Israel to join its region in its efforts to move forward on the zone, and create legally binding

commitments in this regard and effective verification mechanisms acceptable to all.

We continue to rely on the strong support of Latin American and Caribbean nations in advancing the objective of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Your experience and dedication are inspirational instruments we depend on.

It only adds to the importance of our meeting today that Nuclear-Weapon States continue to rely on nuclear weapons as a pivotal pillar in their military doctrines, and even continue to place such weapons at the service of Non-Nuclear-Weapon States members of military alliances and under umbrellas of nuclear sharing. Longstanding agreed commitments on nuclear disarmament remain unrealized, among which stands the 13 practical steps on nuclear disarmament adopted at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, as well as the action plan adopted at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. Despite their nuclear disarmament commitments, Nuclear Weapon states continue to work against a much needed and urgently required international legal instrument to ban and eventually eliminate all nuclear weapons from existing nuclear arsenals today.

We in Egypt are glad to partner with many OPANAL States in the context of the humanitarian consequences process to advance the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The process has shown clearly so far that nuclear weapons are inhumane instruments of war of an unacceptable scope in terms of human loss and environmental destruction. The possession and/or use of such weapons directly defies all basic principles of international law, in particular international humanitarian law. Their disastrous consequences are of a catastrophic scale that falls beyond the capacity of the international community to tolerate or address.

The Treaty of Tlatelolco represents the first legally binding instrument in nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation with a humanitarian approach. Such approach provides today a promising stream of hope in facing the current challenges. It also strengthens our resolve to work closely with you toward advancing and eventually realizing total nuclear disarmament under strict international control.

In closing, I assure you of our full support in your endeavors to maintain the nuclear-weapon-free zone in Latin America and the Caribbean, to advance the establishment of further nuclear-weapon-free zones, in particular in the Middle East, and to contribute effectively to the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world allowing future generations to enjoy the secure future they deserve. Thank you.