

Israel rejects Middle East nuclear talks plan

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Israeli leaders do not comment on the country's nuclear status

Israel says it will not take part in a conference aimed at achieving a nuclear-arms free Middle East, proposed at a UN meeting in New York.

Nearly 200 nations, signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), backed plans for the meeting in 2012.

In a document agreed at the talks, Israel was singled out for criticism.

Israel, which has not signed the NPT, dismissed the document as "deeply flawed" and "hypocritical".

"It ignores the realities of the Middle East and the real threats facing the region and the entire world," the Israeli government said in a statement quoted by the AFP news agency.

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We strongly oppose efforts to single out Israel, and will oppose actions that jeopardise Israel's national security

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"Given the distorted nature of this resolution, Israel will not be able to take part in its implementation."

The statement was issued in Canada, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is visiting.

In the past, the Israeli government has refused to comment on rumours that Israel has a stockpile of nuclear weapons.

In April, Mr Netanyahu pulled out of a US summit on nuclear arms after learning that Egypt and Turkey intended to raise the issue.

'Insignificant' document

Some 189 nations agreed to the 28-page document following a month-long conference on

strengthening the NPT, the cornerstone of global disarmament efforts.

The document urged Israel to sign the NPT, but did not mention Iran, a nation widely suspected of having a nuclear-weapons programme.

Analysts say this was a diplomatic victory for Iran, which denies seeking a nuclear weapon.

The US was among the nations who agreed the document, but President Barack Obama warned that he did not agree with Israel's treatment.

"We strongly oppose efforts to single out Israel, and will oppose actions that jeopardise Israel's national security," he said.

Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon promised that his country's co-operation with the US would remain unchanged, but he condemned the document as "insignificant".

"Iran has signed [the treaty], Iraq has signed it... Syria has signed it, and we see that it hasn't stopped them from seriously breaking the treaty and from trying to bypass it," he said.

Israel also questioned why India and Pakistan - declared nuclear states who have not signed the treaty - were not singled out for mention.

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UN nuclear conference agrees consensus deal



Iran called on nuclear-armed nations to agree to a disarmament timetable

The 189-member nations of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) have agreed a document which takes a step down the road to nuclear disarmament.

The final consensus text includes a call to hold talks in 2012 on a ban on nuclear weapons in the Middle East.

The five official nuclear-weapon states - the US, UK, Russia, China and France - also agreed to speed up arms cuts.

The consensus agreement was seen as a crucial step to reviving the treaty, after a decade without progress.

The treaty has suffered from deep divisions between states who have nuclear weapons and

those who do not, says the BBC's United Nations correspondent Barbara Plett in New York.

It is seen as the cornerstone of global disarmament efforts, she adds.

The 28-page Final Declaration was agreed following intensely-debated talks on the last day of a month-long conference.

The declaration calls for the United Nations secretary general to organise a meeting of Middle East states in 2012 to agree to the creation of a zone free of nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction.

Sticking points

Diplomats discussing the proposals had continued talks late into the night on Thursday before resuming on Friday.

One of the sticking points involved Israel, a non-member of the NPT, which is widely believed to have nuclear weapons although it has never admitted to possessing them.

Arab states and Israel's allies had to work hard to find agreement over wording for the proposed nuclear-weapons-free zone.

Israel has said it backs a nuclear-weapons-free zone in principle, but only after peace agreements with all the countries in the region.

Iran also demanded that the five recognised nuclear-armed nations agree to a timetable for negotiating a treaty to abolish their arsenals.

Under the treaty, the five official nuclear weapons nations are committed to moving towards their elimination.

Iran has faced repeated questions over its own nuclear programme, which the West believes is aimed at making weapons. Iran insists it is solely designed to meet its energy needs.

The NPT has encountered difficulty in coming up with the best method for monitoring suspect nuclear programmes in Iran and North Korea.

The four nations suspected of having nuclear weapons that are not signatories to the treaty - India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel - are not covered by any NPT agreement reached.

The NPT conference, which meets every five years, had risked losing credibility if no agreement was reached.

The last review conference, in 2005, failed to adopt a consensus declaration.