

IAEA calls for nuke-free zone in Middle East

N Korea asked to allow inspection

AFP, Vienna

The UN atomic agency called Friday for the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East, in a move clearly aimed at Israel, which is believed to be the only state in the region with atomic weapons.

The resolution at the International Atomic Energy Agency, presented by Egypt and adopted by consensus, "affirms the urgent need for all states in the Middle East to forthwith accept the application of full-scope agency safeguards to all their nuclear activities... as a step in enhancing peace and security in the context of the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone."

The resolution did not specifically mention Israel, which neither confirms nor denies that it has atomic weapons and is the only state in the region which has not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which sets safeguards that are monitored by the IAEA.

Israel is believed to have up to 200 nuclear weapons.

The resolution said the 140-member IAEA was "concerned by the grave consequence, endangering peace and security, of the presence in the Middle East regions of nuclear activities not wholly devoted to peaceful purposes."

The UN nuclear watchdog wrapped up a week-long general conference yesterday, with Arab states criticising Israel for allegedly having nuclear weapons but refusing to agree to international atomic safeguards.

The 137-nation conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency also adopted a resolution calling for IAEA inspectors to return to North Korea to monitor nuclear activities there, after its inspectors were kicked out of the country in December 2002.

It "calls upon" North Korea "to promptly accept comprehensive IAEA safeguards and cooperate with the agency in their full and effective implementation."

The IAEA had reported North Korea in February 2003 for non-compliance with the nuclear Non-

Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that sets the safeguards for the IAEA to enforce and had passed a similar resolution on North Korea at its general conference last year. Also on the agenda at this year's conference was a resolution on fighting "nuclear and radiological terrorism."

The anti-nuclear terrorism resolution continues from others adopted by the IAEA since the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001.

The goal is to "provide advice and training to member states on where their vulnerabilities are, how to beef up security on their borders and how to stop illicit trafficking," IAEA spokesman Mark Gwozdecky said.

The Israeli-related debate was the second-to-last item on the agenda for the conference but the Israeli delegation was hoping for it to be moved up so it could be wrapped up in the early afternoon since the Jewish Yom Kippur festival, the holiest day in the Jewish year, begins at sundown.

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Thai govt offers truce to Muslim militants in south

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand backed down from a planned tough offensive against southern Muslim separatists Friday, offering militants a ceasefire to the violence which has claimed more than 310 lives this year.

Thai Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchayudh called on militants to accept a ceasefire beginning at the start of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan, which falls around October 16.

"I propose that on the first day of Ramadan both the government and Muslim militants cease all hostilities, with the possibility of militants contacting the government for negotiations," Chavalit told Muslim religious teachers gathered in Bangkok.

Chavalit, who oversees national security, had on Tuesday vowed to launch a decisive strike against militants after a judge was shot dead in the restive southern province of Pattani.

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