Mr. President,

As my delegation participates in this annual debate of the General Assembly on the situation in the Middle East, we are again reminded of the contemporary geopolitical importance of this region.

2. The Middle East region is considered by many as the cradle of civilization, and the birthplace of the three major monotheistic traditions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. This is also a region which has been very much influenced and impacted by both internal and external interests - whether in socio-political spheres such as ideology and sectarianism, or in military terms of defence and containment, or in economic priorities such as energy security.

3. Regrettably, this region is continuing to experience more than its fair share of violence, with history repeating itself in territories being occupied by conquest, as well as conflicts being waged in the name of religion. Millions of innocent civilians continue to suffer due to the lack of political solutions to disputes both old and new. The Sykes-Picot lines drawn by the colonial powers are also now being washed away by blood through the actions of non-state actors. In recent weeks, even the holy city of Al-Quds and its places of worship were not spared from violence and provocative acts.

4. Therefore, Malaysia remains gravely concerned on the overall situation in the Middle East. As a strong believer in multilateralism, we believe that member States of the United Nations have a collective responsibility to ensure that the peoples of the Middle East will be able to live in peace and stability.

Mr. President,

5. First and foremost amongst Malaysia’s priorities in the Middle East is a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. We again reaffirm our solidarity with the Palestinian people and reiterate our support for the legitimate rights of the Palestinians
for an independent State of Palestine with the realisation of two states, Palestine and Israel, living side by side, based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. Malaysia has also remained committed towards the implementation of internationally recognised initiatives such as the Arab Peace Initiative, the Oslo Accords, the Quartet Road Map, the Madrid Terms of Reference, and relevant Security Council resolutions. Our position on this matter has been consistent and clear, as outlined in our earlier statement during the debate under the previous agenda item. Yet we firmly believe that this pivotal issue is central to the situation in the Middle East.

6. Malaysia reiterates our condemnation of Israel’s illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories of West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. However, Israel’s violations of international law have continued unabated, both in the occupied Palestinian territories as well as in other occupied Arab territories. It is therefore apparent that the occupying Power continues to refuse to honour their commitments to international agreements, and this is compounded by the inflexible attitude of the Israeli leadership.

7. We do not see the logic in Israel objecting to so-called unilateral actions by the Palestinian leadership to accede to international agreements, when this is welcomed by the majority of member States as a demonstration of the State of Palestine’s adherence to international norms. On the other hand, the Israeli Government itself defies logic by unilaterally continuing to build and announce settlements, which are illegal under international law and condemned by even their own allies.

8. My delegation also reiterates our shock and deep concern on the recent violence and provocative actions in Al-Quds. We urge an end to such actions, in particular those affecting Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as other houses of worship in the Holy City of Jerusalem. In this regard, we hope that all parties will heed the call of President Abbas, who warned against this situation turning from a political dispute into a religious conflict.

Mr. President,

9. Malaysia also condemned the acts of violence which occurred in the Gaza Strip this summer. The Israeli assault of the Gaza Strip left thousands dead and tens of thousands homeless as their residences turned into ruins. The international community was rightly shocked, and demonstrated their solidarity and generosity during the recent Cairo conference on the reconstruction of Gaza.

10. However, my delegation wishes to take this opportunity to caution against another instance of history unfortunately repeating itself. We have seen this pattern before, during Operation Cast Lead in 2008-9, where again thousands were killed, and again billions of dollars were pledged during the Sharm el-Sheikh conference on reconstruction. Yet, in 2012 Israel again ferociously attacked the people of Gaza in the Operation Pillar of Defence, reducing the territory to rubble.
11. Before we even begin to consider the notion of donor fatigue, we must more seriously consider the more agonizing fatigue of those in Gaza affected by these cycles of violence. We should not turn the oft-quoted “build-destroy, build-destroy cycle” remarks of the Secretary-General into a cliché, to be rehashed every few years when the situation repeats itself. Instead, we should focus our efforts towards a comprehensive solution to this almost perpetual series of events, beginning with a complete end to any and all acts of violence.

12. While my delegation notes the security concerns from the various interested parties, we reiterate our firm demand on the lifting of the blockade of Gaza, and we call for the opening of crossings in and out of the territory, with a priority on access for humanitarian aid and reconstruction material. The long-suffering people of Gaza deserve better from the international community, and it is time we deliver on this.

Mr. President,

13. Let me now turn to the situation in Syria. Malaysia is concerned with the escalating violence that has resulted in heavy casualties and hardship to the people of Syria. We reiterate our call for all parties to immediately end the violence and human rights violations, in particular against civilians. My delegation also urges for all necessary measures to be urgently taken to ensure that humanitarian access is provided to those in need.

14. The ongoing instability has now given opportunities for other armed terrorists groups with ulterior motives to take root in the region, such as the so-called Islamic State. Malaysia rejects the actions of this group, and we condemn the violence being committed in the name of Islam. We also regret that the international community’s calls to end the violence were not heeded, and we are now faced with another factor in the conflict. My delegation hopes that we are collectively able to combat this emerging threat, before history again repeats itself and yet another black flag rises in the Middle East in the absence of a resolution to the conflict.

15. Malaysia therefore reaffirms that a political solution is the only way to end the conflict, and we will continue to support international efforts which call upon all parties in Syria to immediately end the crisis in a peaceful and meaningful manner through dialogue and negotiation. All parties inside and outside Syria should come together and work towards a political solution which is Syrian-led and inclusive, to ensure a viable and sustainable outcome.

16. In this connection, my delegation also welcomes the appointment of UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, and we wish him well in carrying out his important mandate. We are following his work closely, and we note the progress he has made particularly in developing the framework for the freezing of the conflict in Aleppo. My delegation also thanks his predecessor, Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi for his tireless efforts.
Mr. President,

17. With regards to the occupied Syrian Golan, Malaysia reiterates our strong rejections of Israel’s changing of the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and legal status of the territory. Last year my delegation had objected to Israel’s ongoing activities exploiting oil deposits in the southern half of the occupied Syrian Golan. We have since learnt that these activities had recently been overruled by the relevant authorities, albeit on the grounds of environmental impact. However, we remain concerned that the Israeli company involved in this activity is considering an appeal to overturn the ruling.

18. In this regard, my delegation wishes to reiterates that all measures and actions undertaken by Israel, including the construction and expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan since 1967, constitute a flagrant violation of international law and the UN Charter. In this regard, Malaysia calls for an immediate and full withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. President,

19. Malaysia is pleased to co-sponsor the two resolutions under this agenda item. We reaffirm that the root causes to the deteriorating situation in the Middle East must be addressed, including and in particular the illegal occupation of Israel in Arab territories. Thus, it is our hope that the resolutions on Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan will be adopted as in previous years, as a demonstration of the international community’s resolve towards this end.

20. In conclusion, Malaysia wishes to underline our position in a moderate approach to conflict resolution, in order to bridge the differences and restore stability to the lives of Palestinians, Syrians, and other peoples of the Middle East. As the Prime Minister of Malaysia had stated in this year’s general debate of the General Assembly, “The fight against extremism is not about Christians versus Muslims, or Muslims versus Jews, but moderates versus extremists of all religions. We therefore need to rally a coalition of moderates; those willing to reclaim their religion, and pursue the path to peace.”. As such, we believe it is important to continue to sow the seeds of moderation in the region, and remove the root causes from which extremists find fertile soil to plant their poisonous ideology.

Thank you, Mr. President.