**Security Council**

**Open Debate**

**The situation in the Middle East**

**January 26, 2016**

**Statement to be delivered by H.E. Mr. Manuel Domingos Augusto**

**Secretary of State for External Relations**

**of the**

**Republic of Angola**

Mr. President,

At the outset I thank His Excellency Mr. Rodolfo Nin Nivoa for presiding over this important and timely debate. We commend the delegation of Uruguay for the excellent work in presiding over the Security Council.

We praise Secretary General Ban Ki Moon for his relentless efforts to foster dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts affecting the Middle East at this critical juncture.

Mr. President,

In 2011, with the so-called Arab Spring, the world witnessed the events occurring in some countries of North Africa and the Middle East, and the prospects of a new era of peace, democracy and economic development.

Unfortunately, the outcome of these events didn´t deliver increased freedoms and democracy; instead, they brought the collapse of State authority, new and extreme forms of authoritarianism and the unraveling of national borders.

The collapse of State authority further aggravated sectarian divisions, with people, in times of insecurity and uncertainty, leaning towards their ethnic and religious affiliations.

That is the case of Syria that became a fractured State, no longer corresponding to its recognized borders, with the territory divided between areas controlled by non-state armed groups and the terrorists of ISIS, Al-Nusra, among others, thus poised to an uncertain future.

The only window of opportunity lies in a decisive and sincere push, by the regional and world powers, to crush terrorism and embrace all Syrians in the search of a political settlement to the conflict.

The same applies to Iraq, a State broken apart, as attested by the current state of affairs: Baghdad has little or no influence on the Kurdish region and in the Sunni-majority Anbar or Ninewa provinces.

The disintegration of State structures in Libya and Yemen are also troubling realities, exacerbated by extremely dire humanitarian conditions, and the prospect of territorial breakdown if a determined and concerted effort, by the major powers, does not rescue these countries from the deadly threat of terrorism.

Unfortunately, faced with such bleak scenarios, the international community response to the growing problems affecting the Middle East and North Africa has not been directed towards tackling the root causes of these conflicts and bridge the gaps between ethnic communities and religious groups.

Mr. President,

At present, the most pressing issue in the Middle East is to defeat radical extremist groups, in order to facilitate the peaceful resolution of prevailing conflicts.

It is crucial to avoid a scenario of ISIS consolidating an extremist rogue State, in parts of Syria and Iraq, and become a breeding ground for terrorists, spreading fear and hatred.

Political, diplomatic, military, and economic cooperation must be intensified in the search for peace and stability in a region desperate with policies of double standards and inaction, and facing catastrophic political, economic and humanitarian conditions.

Based on such viewpoint, we stress the fading prospects of peace, between Israelis and Palestinians, which constitute an important element of the current disorder in the Middle East, and an effective recruitment tool for radical extremists in the region.

We regret the Israeli policies of settlement expansion. As stated in unison by the international community, the Israeli settlement activities are a violation of international law and are in stark contradiction to the public pronouncements by the Israeli Government on the two-state solution to the conflict.

In this regard, we appeal to the Palestinians to persist in renouncing violence, recognize the State of Israel and respect the agreements concluded so far; we also remind Israel that it can´t remain a secure Jewish and democratic state, while oppressing and illegally governing millions of Palestinians against their will.

As such, we reiterate the relevant role the Security Council should play on this issue, by adopting a resolution, with balanced and fair parameters, for a political solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict, based in our belief that the Security Council has the political and moral obligation to do so, and as soon as possible.

Mr. President,

Diplomacy has suffered successive defeats in the attempts to find peaceful solutions to Middle East crisis and conflicts. A case of success, after the long overdue accords between Egypt and Israel in 1979, Jordan and Israel in 1994, was the recent diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear program, as an indication that any controversy, the more complex and difficult it might be, can have negotiated outcomes if the parties display political will and commitment to seek political solutions to avoid the recourse to military means.

The adoption of the Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian Nuclear Program and its entry into force last week, might work as a game changer, if the Permanent Members of the Security Council reach out, with determination, to regional powers and countries of the Middle East, namely Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, the Gulf States, Jordan, Israel and Palestine, to address and resolve proxy wars and serious crisis situations affecting the region, namely the fight against ISIL, Al Qaeda and the terrorist constellation, the wars in Syria and Yemen, the Palestinian question, the fracture between Sunni and Shiite majority countries in the Middle East; and, above all, for the establishment of a new era of cooperation and respect, for the social and economic development of the region.

Thank you, Mr. President