

# Conference on NATO's role in the region begins today

AMMAN (JT) — A two-day conference to discuss North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) Mediterranean Dialogue and the Broader Middle East Region initiative starts here today with participants from several regional countries and NATO officials.

Participants in the two-day meeting, organised by the Regional Centre on Conflict Prevention and NATO's Public Diplomacy Division, will look at ways to enhance the dialogue that started in 1994 and examine NATO's role in the region.

The Mediterranean Dia-

logue, which started 12 years ago, was focused on exchange of information, civil emergency planning, humanitarian relief and scientific cooperation between NATO and the seven Mediterranean partners of Jordan, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.

The alliance felt that under the current security problems within the region and the world, including international terrorism, dialogue should advance from political cooperation, into a hard-core partnership, according to NATO officials.

In 2002, NATO decided to upgrade the dialogue, through consultations with the partners, on security matters of concern. The move was seen as part of the alliance's bid to strengthen its anti-terrorism operation "Active Endeavour" in the Mediterranean.

In 2004, NATO invited participating states to its Istanbul summit to establish a more ambitious and expanded cooperation framework, thereby elevating its status to that of a genuine partnership.

NATO also launched its Istanbul Cooperation Initia-

tive, a separate but complementary programme, to promote practical cooperation with countries in the broader Middle East.

The new step for partnership entailed extending NATO training to forces of Mediterranean countries, participation in joint exercises, programmes for the development of interpretability, maritime safety and peace support operations.

Preventive measures against nuclear, biological and chemical attacks, as well as mechanisms against the proliferation of weapons

of mass destruction were included.

According to organisers, participants will debate NATO's perceived image in the region, look into ways to develop the partnership into something beyond security cooperation and discuss what kind of role can the alliance play in the volatile region.

Entitled "NATO's Aims and Actions for the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Broader Middle East REGION," the conference brings together representatives from partner countries including Egypt, Morocco,

Tunisia, Algeria and Jordan. Representatives from Israel and Mauritania will not attend, according to organisers.

NATO's Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, and the head of NATO's public diplomacy division, Nicola de Santis, will deliver keynote speeches about NATO's post-cold war reorientation and transformation, its new role and missions around the world and especially the Middle East, as well as its strategies for promoting security in the Mediterranean region.