are giving concrete support to the Joint Mission of the United Nations-OPCW in carrying out its important and urgent tasks and stand ready to consider further support.

As the largest donor, the European Union reaffirms its commitment to continuing to provide assistance, including humanitarian aid, to the Syrian people — assistance that now amounts to close to €2 billion. Yesterday the Foreign Affairs Council agreed on common EU messages on humanitarian aspects of the Syrian crisis, to which I would like to refer.

All efforts must be made to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches all people in need in Syria and that full access is granted to humanitarian aid agencies. We welcomed the Security Council presidential statement of 2 October on the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/PRST/2013/15). It should be fully implemented, and we welcome the efforts being made by the United Nations, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in particular, in that regard. All parties, especially the Syrian authorities, must take all appropriate measures to facilitate safe and unhindered humanitarian access to populations in need of assistance throughout the entirety of Syrian territory, including across conflict lines and borders with neighbouring countries. We call on all sides of the conflict to allow for local ceasefires to facilitate humanitarian work and to respect all obligations under international humanitarian law.

The EU expresses deep concern for the fate of the millions of internally displaced persons and refugees, and commends those countries that are keeping their borders open in order to provide safe havens for refugees. The EU renews its commitment to respond to humanitarian needs in Syria and its neighbours. We recognize that the dramatic situation of refugees affecting neighbouring countries is also of growing concern to countries beyond the immediate vicinity of Syria, and is having an impact on them as well.

To facilitate an effective settlement of the crisis, the EU will continue its engagement with, and support to, the Syrian National Coalition, including in areas under the Coalition's control. The EU welcomes the creation by the Group of Friends of the Syrian People of a Syria recovery trust fund as an important step towards ensuring that the assistance the people of Syria need is properly delivered.

With regard to the Middle East peace process and the ongoing direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians aimed at a comprehensive peace between the two sides, the European Union remains fully supportive of the process and is committed to helping to ensure its success. The European Union commends the courageous leadership shown by Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas in that context, as well as the crucial role played by the United States and the support expressed by the League of Arab States. We trust that such leadership will be the basis needed for substantial decisions to be taken on the key issues with regard to a viable two-State solution.

The European Union recalls its commitment to support the parties' quest for a comprehensive agreement on all final status issues, within the agreed nine-month timeframe. We urge all parties to refrain from actions that could undermine the negotiation process and the prospects for peace. We will not lose sight of developments on the ground, and we will continue to act in accordance with our well-known principles and positions and with international law and international humanitarian law. As negotiations progress, the EU intends to give further concrete form to its support, in line with what will be agreed on by the parties, and keeping in mind the EU's determination to contribute to a new era of peace and prosperity in the Middle East. The EU is concerned with the dramatic shortfall in fiscal revenue due to slowing economic development in the Palestinian territory. The EU is the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority, and we call on other donors, especially those in the region, to increase their financial support to it.

Before concluding my statement, I would like to turn briefly to the situation in Lebanon. The EU welcomes the establishment in New York on 25 September of an international support group for Lebanon. We will continue to uphold our commitment as the largest donor in Lebanon, supporting the country in addressing humanitarian, economic and security challenges. Given the magnitude of those challenges, it is of the utmost urgency that a Government be formed in Lebanon.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): More than two and a half years ago, the unrest in Syria began, with unforeseen, horrific consequences. A country is in ruins. Iceland condemns the use of chemical

weapons in Syria in the strongest possible terms. We also condemn all other violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in the country, regardless of the perpetrators. The latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/24/46) states that the perpetrators of those violations and crimes, on all sides, do not fear accountability and that referral to justice is imperative. Iceland agrees, and reiterates its request to the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

We welcome resolution 2118 (2013), which requires the verification and destruction of chemical-weapon stockpiles in Syria. We also welcome efforts to convene a second Geneva conference in November. In the light of the open debate on women and peace and security in the Security Council last Friday (see S/PV.7044), Iceland would like to stress the importance of women as mediators and their role at the negotiating table. Women's participation in peace negotiations is fundamental to ensuring results, and now is the time to put our words into action and have women actively involved in a Geneva conference, to ensure that their rights will be protected and promoted in any future political solution in Syria.

Journalists are our eyes and ears in conflict zones. It is therefore vital that journalists be granted free access, so that they can report without obstruction. They have a right to the same protection as civilians, as the Council recognized in resolution 1738 (2006). In Syria, however, they are operating under extremely dangerous circumstances, with 28 journalists killed in the country last year. That has to change, and journalists' freedom of movement throughout the country, as well as a non-discriminatory visa policy for them, as called for in the six-point plan, must be respected.

The situation in the Middle East cannot be separated from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which remains a key issue. We welcome the renewed peace talks between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine, and commend Secretary Kerry for his commitment. It is extremely important that the peace process provide tangible results, while respecting the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination as well as Israel's right to exist within safe and secure borders. But time is short. The continuing settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are an obstacle to peace and may well make a two-State solution impossible. The international community, including the Security Council, must address the situation and do its utmost to prevent ongoing violations of human rights and humanitarian law on the ground. That includes addressing the continuing settlement activities, which are not confined to the construction of new homes for settlers but also include new roads and infrastructure as well as demolitions and eviction orders.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that this time the negotiations must result in two States, living side by side in peace and security. That is the only way forward for both parties.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Chullikatt (Holy See): My delegation wishes to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Azerbaijan's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and for convening this timely open debate on the Middle East.

On repeated occasions, the Holy See has clearly voiced urgent concern for the peace and welfare of all the peoples of the Middle East. On this occasion, my delegation once more joins its voice to those of all people of goodwill who stand ready to welcome with great hope the re-engagement of Israelis and Palestinians in direct, serious and concrete negotiations. Our hopes are renewed that we are witnessing at present a newly rejuvenated peace process.

This is a critical time for the region, and there are many issues to be considered. A solution for each and for all of the peoples of the Middle East must be characterized, first and foremost, by respecting the centrality and dignity of the human person, regardless of race or creed, by a concern for every human life and for human dignity and by the tireless pursuit of the common good for the whole of society, while also keeping in mind the regional and international context. The recognition and respect of the inalienable dignity of every human being is the road map to the unity and stability of every nation.

Peacebuilding between the people of Israel and the people of Palestine constitutes a lingering remnant of the twentieth century, which proved to be the bloodiest of centuries. Each side in the drama suffered grave humanitarian crises, whether in declared wars, extremist violence or the military responses thereto. In many of the confrontations, sadly, it has been the civilian population that has fallen victim to declared and undeclared violence. The impact of the

humanitarian suffering of both parties as a result of this ongoing conflict requires the international community every year to donate more funds to sustain refugee populations. The global economic picture, however, warns us that the situation cannot be sustained indefinitely. A political solution is also the best solution to those economic pressures, because peace between the parties generates stable economies and, in turn, attracts development funds.

My delegation wishes to note that other unresolved political issues have introduced yet further instability into the region. Accordingly, we join our voice to those expressing grave concern regarding the situation in Syria, and encourage everyone involved to continue moving forward in a sincere quest for justice and peace. As an imperative first step, the Holy See earnestly and urgently calls upon all parties to put an immediate end to violence and to begin a real process of dialogue with the "Geneva II" conference, planned for next month.

One of the consequences of the current violence in Syria is the flight of non-combatants from their homes. Added to the plight of over 4 million internally displaced persons within the borders of Syria itself, more than 2 million refugees, three quarters of them women and children, have already sought refuge in neighbouring countries and are now seeking peace, security and safety in countries outside the Middle East.

The challenges faced, especially by neighbouring countries, in assisting and protecting those refugees could have a destabilizing impact on the entire region. The situation is extremely grave and is worsening by the day; many people are dying of hunger or from a lack of access to basic and necessary medical care. The Catholic Church remains committed and active at the forefront in providing humanitarian assistance to people regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliation, with all the means at our disposal. In that regard, I would like to recall that, on 1 September, Pope Francis called for a day of prayer and fasting for world peace, and particularly for peace in Syria.

From the beginning, the Middle East has been the cradle of the ancestral faith of Christians, and Christians have lived peaceably in those countries for centuries, indeed millennia. As citizens of their respective countries in the Middle East, they desire to contribute to their societies in the Middle East and to continue to be part of the social, political, cultural and religious landscape of the region and work for the common good of societies to which they fully belong, striving for peace and reconciliation and guided by those values that can help society progress towards greater respect for justice, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

For that reason, my delegation wishes in this Chamber to raise the issue of the worrying exodus of Christians from the region of their birth. Extremist and reactionary forces introduced into the region as a result of political instability and conflicts are targeting Christians and other groups that are suffering from the consequences of their blind violence. Christians see themselves forced to flee for the sake of life and limb, leaving behind a 2,000 year-old tradition bound up in the culture of the region. It is an unacceptable recurrence of what happened in Iraq when sectarian violence reduced the Christian population by 70 per cent.

For those of us here at the United Nations, the challenges of the Middle East to which I have referred are a clarion call to the task of peacemaking, which is the very reason for the existence of the Organization. By mustering the needed political will, the international community can make a difference in the life of the peoples of the Middle East and help them fulfil their long-deferred dream of peace in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): I will be making a shorter statement while the full text is circulated.

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Malaysia associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement to be made by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Malaysia welcomes the resumption of direct talks between both sides and wishes to underline our support for the State of Palestine in its negotiations towards a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We also welcome the efforts of the other stakeholders involved in that important process, including United States Secretary of State John Kerry, the Middle East Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative. Malaysia has always believed in a two-State solution, based on the borders

of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. We urge all parties to demonstrate honesty and sincerity towards achieving those objectives. Words must be followed up with actions to reflect the genuine desire for peace.

The commitment of the Palestinian side is clearly seen in the way the Palestinians have continued to foster an atmosphere conducive to the continuation of the talks. However, that commitment is not matched by those on the other side of the negotiating table. Our Palestinian brothers and sisters have shown tremendous courage and sacrifice as they proceed down the path of direct negotiations. They do so while knowing full well that they are backed by the overwhelming encouragement and support of Member States for their efforts to fully advance their interests within the United Nations and its organs, following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19.

Yet, despite that, Israel continues to announce the construction of new illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. Malaysia condemns Israel's building of illegal settlements in Palestinian lands, including in Jerusalem. Justice is long overdue for that violation, one that threatens to completely undermine the possibility of a just and lasting solution.

Malaysia furthermore reiterates its grave concern at the desecration by Israeli settlers of holy sites, including the recent attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Settler violence has also risen due to the olive season, with more Palestinian-owned groves and farms deliberately burned or robbed. Palestinian prisoners remain under long detention, in violation of international humanitarian law.

My delegation also demands an immediate end to Israel's blockade of Gaza, in particular in the light of the serious humanitarian situation and food security needs of the population. The people of Gaza are being denied their livelihood through collective punishment by the occupying Power that is both inhumane and illegal.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, the occupying Power continues to act with impunity and to change the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and legal status of the territory. My delegation reiterates our strong objections to Israel's pillaging and profiteering from the illegal exploitation of occupied territories, including the geological surveys recently concluded by a United States-Israeli company on oil deposits in the southern half of the occupied Syrian Golan. Malaysia calls for the immediate and full withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan, in line with resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

Malaysia takes note of the recent discussions on the date and modalities of the conference to follow up on the 30 June 2012 meeting of the Action Group on Syria. My delegation expresses our continued support for the tireless efforts of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi. In that regard, we call on all parties to come together and work towards a political solution that is Syrian-led and inclusive.

With regard to Lebanon, Malaysia reiterates that Israel must desist from its continued and almost daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty, whether by air, water or land. Israel must fully implement resolution 1701 (2006), which calls for the full cessation of hostilities and the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, with full respect for the Blue Line.

In conclusion, while there are significant developments in the Middle East peace process, the Security Council is also currently witnessing other openings for peace in other areas of conflict. At the same time, voices of hate and ignorance continue to incite violence and oppression in the region. Malaysia continues to believe 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 in the Middle East. We must collectively summon the political will to bring an end to the immediate suffering in those areas and commit to a moderate cause which could secure greater gains than if we were divided by conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): In their statements today, a number of delegations deliberately referred to the situation in my country in a misleading, provocative and distorting manner. They adduced a number of false allegations to serve their aim of supporting radicalism and terrorism in Syria and across the broader region and to detract attention from the core matter under discussion today: the situation in the Middle East. We remain firm in our conviction, reiterated time and again before the Council, that the objective for our discussion of this item should be to bring to an end the Israeli occupation

of Arab lands, not to discuss the internal situation of a certain State.

I will not respond to the statements made by enemy States that shelter, arm and train terrorists and facilitate their infiltration of Syrian territory across our borders with neighbouring States. They spread devastation, radical terrorism and Wahhabi extremism in Syria and seek, in particular, to bring about the failure of any peaceful solution under Syrian leadership. I mention in particular the regimes of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey as well as some well-known Western Governments whose conduct is in blatant violation of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, in particular the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Israel occupies territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. The beginning of that occupation coincided with the birth of this international Organization. For more than half a century, successive Israeli Governments have perpetrated systematic and documented violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. There has been more than half a century of settlement campaigns that undermine — as recognized by everyone, including Israel's supporters — the prospects for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and of peace and security in the region. There has been more than half a century of complete disregard by Israel for the relevant United Nations resolutions seeking to bring to an end its occupation of Arab territories. There has been more than half a century by Israel of State terrorism, racist laws, desecration of Islamic and Christian holy sites, and the eviction of Palestinian citizens from their homes, including women and children. There has been more than half a century of blind support by influential States, both within and outside of the Security Council, for the continued Israeli policy of occupying Arab territories.

For more than half a century, part of our land has been occupied and Syrian citizens have been chafing under the yoke of Israeli occupation. In the occupied Syrian Golan, Syrian citizens continue to suffer. Their suffering has been overlooked once again by the Secretariat in its briefing today.

Israeli settlement campaigns continue in the occupied Syrian Golan, where Syrians are subjected to the most horrendous policies of racial discrimination, detention and torture. They are deprived of their natural resources and of education meeting the Syrian national curriculum. They are also prevented from carrying their Syrian identity cards. If a Syrian citizen in the occupied Syrian Golan refuses to carry an Israeli identity card, he or she is prevented from entering an Israeli hospital if he or she falls sick. Syrian citizens in the Golan Heights are prevented from following the Syrian curriculum in their studies.

Those facts are well-documented, well-established and well-known to all present. Since all present claim to be against occupation and to seek its termination, why has the United Nations failed, in humanitarian, political, economic and moral terms, to fulfil its responsibility to bring Israel's occupation to an end? While it is true that the United Nations, including the Security Council, has succeeded in adopting hundreds of resolutions calling for the cessation of the Israeli occupation, what is frustrating is that none of those resolution has been implemented, including resolution 497 (1981), on terminating the occupation of the Syrian Golan. It is useful to recall here that all resolutions, as well as international law, have been elaborated to be applied. The Charter of the United Nations, as well as other international instruments, have been adopted to be respected. United Nations resolutions have been adopted to be implemented. Accordingly, we have learned, and in turn we teach young diplomats, to come to the Organization to perfect the art of diplomacy. We try to convince them that the resolutions of this international Organization must be respected and carried out. That is supposed to take place seriously and applied to everybody without exception. I do not believe that any of the States Members that have acceded to the Organization for noble goals have come just to adopt resolutions that remain dead letters, or merely to cite those resolutions and laws in their statements or have them apply to some and not to others in accordance with so-called double standard policies.

I should like to ask, given that, after so many years, the United Nations has been unable to end the Israeli occupation of our occupied territory and return the rights of its people, what, in the Council's view, is the alternative? How can we regain our occupied territory in Palestine, the Syrian Golan and South Lebanon? We believe that what is needed today to preserve the credibility of the international Organization is for some very well-known States to end their policies of double standards. Member States should match words with deeds by taking concrete measures that force Israel to

abide by United Nations resolutions in a manner that will help to end the occupation and the unprecedented bloody tragedy being experienced by Arab citizens and Palestinians living under occupation for so many decades.

It is paradoxical that Israel was established by a resolution of the Organization (General Assembly resolution 181 (II)). Regardless of our views on that resolution, Israel, which is indebted to the Organization for that resolution, currently, does not carry out any of the resolutions adopted by the United Nations when it comes to ending its occupation of Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian land. Israeli occupation forces provide assistance to terrorist groups in the buffer zone in the occupied Syrian Golan by transferring injured terrorists through the separation wall to Israeli hospitals to be treated. It then returns them to Syrian territory, again through the separation wall, to continue their terrorist activities in that critical region.

We should pay due attention to ensuring that such Israeli assistance to terrorists does not constitute a flagrant violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) or international law — or that it endanger the lives of UNDOF personnel and undermine the work of the forces. That is precisely what has happened many times: terrorist groups have abducted UNDOF peacekeepers, targeted their positions and fired on them. We have informed the Department for Peacekeeping Operations of all the full details of such events, including the very serious matter concerning a Qatari intelligence conspiracy and the abduction to Jordan of a Filipino peacekeeping battalion. We requested an independent official investigation in a statement I made at the General Assembly on behalf of my Government, which I have reiterated in a number of statements at the Security Council. Strangely, months later, we continue to await a response from DPKO. To date, we have received no reply, either from the Secretariat or from DPKO. However, as the saying goes, every cloud has a silver lining. That Qatari-Israeli collusion with Wahabi/Takfiri radical terrorists, who wreak havoc along the separation line in the Golan, is indicative of the policy of double standards and its collusion against the safety and stability of Syria and its people, as well as that of United Nations personnel.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein (Jordan): The Palestinian-Israeli negotiations currently under way sharpen our collective hope that in a few months' time a comprehensive peace will finally settle on a land most holy to the three monotheistic faiths — a peace founded on the basis of two States, Palestine and Israel, existing side-by-side in peace and security. As the two sides work their way towards that noble objective, with the extraordinary support provided by the United States Secretary of State, traditional spoilers will attempt, with increasing fever and intensity, to bring ruin upon us, in other words, to spoil that.

We urge the Israeli Government in particular to do everything in its power to prevent the extreme parts of the right-wing settler movement from provoking a crisis on Al-Haram Al-Sharif. We know the Israeli Government has the power to do so — it cannot say it does not — and the stakes are so high. Should it fail to take preventive measures, not only could those groups torpedo the talks, but they could also unleash a colossal, overwhelming global crisis on a scale hitherto not witnessed this century.

Similarly, we demand that the Israeli Government desist from demarcating, expropriating, confiscating, approving, announcing and undertaking any sort of settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in East Jerusalem. Not only could those actions ultimately undermine the talks but, obviously, they remain illegal under international law.

As we have noted previously in the Council, the position of the International Court of Justice on that last point is unambiguous, as explained in paragraph 78 of its 2004 advisory opinion (see A/ES-10/273). Indeed, in earlier paragraphs of the opinion, in relation to East Jerusalem the Court also recalled specifically the position of the Security Council. The Court noted that resolution 298 (1971) states in paragraph 75 that

> "all legislative and administrative actions taken by Israel to change the status of the City of Jerusalem, including expropriation of land and properties, transfer of populations and legislation aimed at the incorporation of the occupied section, are totally invalid and cannot change that status".

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Having just referred to the fundamental question in the region, I must now turn to the bloodier and more grave tragedy in the world, that is, the Syrian crisis. I would like to reiterate what was stated by His Majesty

King Abdullah II in his statement before the General Assembly recently (see A/68/PV.5), that the escalation of violence in Syria and the use of religious and ethnic divisions may undermine a regional renaissance and endanger international security. In order to confront such issues, we have to move quickly to initiate the process of political transition in Syria, to put a stop to violence and bloodshed, to end the refugee crisis and its disastrous effects on the neighbouring or host States, to eliminate chemical weapons, to try the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity and to preserve the territorial integrity of Syria. There is no need to re-emphasize the grave economic crisis experienced by Jordan, which has worsened as a result of acting as host to huge numbers of Syrian refugees.

My delegation gave a detailed account of the Jordanian crisis, providing statistics and numbers, in a closed meeting of the Council to discuss the situation on 30 April (see S/PV.6957). We submitted a request to the Council to visit Jordan in order for members to have first-hand experience of the real situation and its disastrous impact on our national security and economy. We were most hopeful that the international positive consequences of such a visit might have helped to alleviate the suffering andeconomic misery caused by the crisis. Unfortunately, after the passage of 176 days, Jordan has still not received any response to that official request, nor has it received any compensation for the grave material losses it has sustained.

I would like to emphasize that the Jordanian people are not in a position to bear this grave burden without sufficient international assistance.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Moreno Zapata (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Venezuela associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. We also appreciate the briefing and report by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman.

The situation of conflict on the ground in the Middle East has not changed. The reiteration of statements that most States have made during the debate convened by the Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, cannot be viewed merely as words. It is about a renewal of momentum and the maintaining of pressure by the international community in order to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. The Security Council has adopted many resolutions on the issue of Palestine since 1947, and Israel has fulfilled none of them.

The impunity with which the occupying Power acts, flouting the resolutions adopted by this body, strip from it any credible authority or morality to judge anyone. Its criminal record of assassinations, torture, disappearances, apartheid, arbitrary detentions, among other crimes against the Palestinian people, continues to horrify the world.

Notwithstanding any negotiations that may be taking place, we have to realize the need for a positive atmosphere, and for such an atmosphere it is vital to stop the settlements policy of the occupying Power, Israel. That is an indispensable prerequisite for holding any kind of conversation. Moreover, the situation clearly shows a waning in the power of mediation that is exacerbated, not only by the use of the veto to block the application of sanctions against the occupying Power, Israel, but also by the fact that the mediation is being conducted by a partner of the Government of Israel.

Acts of aggression by settlers against the Palestinian population and segregationist controls and roadblocks and illegal settlements are ongoing. They sabotage the peace process, negotiations and violate the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention. Venezuela reiterates to the Council that there is a need to address the situation using the purview granted to this body by the Charter of the United Nations. And we fervently endorse a Palestinian State that is independent, viable and territorially contiguous, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The State of Palestine has shown that it is committed to participating in negotiations in good faith, but the ongoing Israeli aggression against its sovereignty and territorial integrity and the ongoing threat to the viability of the two-State solution make peace impossible in the region. The constant provocations and attacks, such as those that occurred at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and against Palestinian cemeteries, churches and mosques, are all elements that lead to the deterioration of the negotiations. The announcement by the Government of Israel to move forward with a settlement plan on Palestinian territory that includes 3,000 illegal settlements constitutes an act of aggression that places them on the margins of international law before the international community. Such war crimes,

acts of State terrorism and systematic violations of human rights committed against Palestinians must be tried in international tribunals.

Israel's frequent violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and its occupation of the Golan are also a source of great concern. It is deplorable that, rather than encouraging peace and supporting efforts to achieve a space of dialogue, as is claimed for the "Geneva II" conference, some countries — acting from outside — are instigating the more extremist and terrorist factions in Syria to continue the violence. Only political dialogue and diplomatic negotiations can contribute to solving the conflict that is affecting the Syrian people.

The warmongers do not want peace in Syria. They seek to bolster their geopolitical interests through regime change. They aim to destroy Syria and create a new political map in the Middle East. That is empowering terrorist groups like Jubhat Al-Nusra and Al-Qaida, which represent opposition forces linked to atrocities, including the destruction of the Twin Towers in this very city, an event that shook the entire world. Financing or encouraging such groups, which deny the existence of anyone who thinks differently from them, be they Christian, Muslim or Jew, and which promote hatred and the suppression of women, is a crime against humanity and compromises world peace.

In that regard, the Venezuelan Government regrets and deplores the terrorist acts recently committed in the suburbs of Damascus in which 30 people died at the hands of the groups I have just mentioned.

Venezuela encourages a negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria and commends the Government of Syria for its initiative in joining the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Nkoloi (Botswana): My delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate. We welcome this opportunity to continue to engage the Council on matters of international peace and security.

Our appreciation also goes to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Feltman, for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

It has become a tradition for the Security Council to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. This is in an effort to engage the international community and to share ideas on how we can work together to contribute to peace and prosperity in the Middle East. My delegation continues to follow with great interest the socioeconomic and political events in the Middle East, especially events in Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

On the situation in Syria, my delegation would like to express its continued support for the people of Syria and to call for an end to the horrible humanitarian catastrophe besetting the heroic people of that country. We are particularly concerned about the plight of millions of women and children who have been displaced and are without food, shelter and medical care. As we speak, some 6.8 million Syrians require urgent medical assistance, and 4.2 million remain internally displaced. We are told that of the 1.7 million Syrian refugees scattered and stranded in neighbouring countries, 50 per cent are children. It is disheartening for a people who have lived in their ancestral land from time immemorial to be forced into refugee camps on foreign soil. We call on the international community as well as humanitarian organizations the world over to respond with kindness and care to the refugees of Syria.

While we welcome the recently adopted resolution 2118 (2013), which calls on Syria to eliminate and hand over its chemical weapons to the United Nations, we would have preferred to have seen stronger language clearly stipulating the measures to be taken in the case of failure by the Al-Assad regime. However, we remind the international community not to be blinded by the resolution, but to remain vigilant and resolute to ensure that those responsible for the many atrocities in Syria, including the 21 August massacre, account for their deeds.

My delegation wishes to reiterate its position, which is in line with that of more than 60 other countries, to refer the Syrian question to the International Criminal Court. It is our firm belief that atrocities such as those of 21 August defy humankind and human nature. Those who played a part in the planning, organization and execution of those crimes should be investigated and tried by an international court of last resort.

On the question of the Palestine, Botswana continues to believe that there is no alternative to the two-State solution. The coexistence of Israel and Palestine,

living side by side as two sovereign States, cannot be overemphasized. That will not only be of value to the Israeli and Palestinian people, but will contribute to regional stability and offer new opportunities for the region as a whole.

My delegation is therefore encouraged by the resumption, in July, of the long-overdue talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We believe that the talks present an opportunity that should not be squandered. The Israelis and the Palestinians should, at the same time, prove their will and desire to shape their destiny and future.

We also commend all those who continue to be committed to the peace process, the representatives of the Quartet and the Security Council for their relentless efforts towards seeing a peaceful end to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. It is my delegation's belief that these efforts should be augmented by both regional and international support. We further call on the parties to create an environment of mutual trust throughout the negotiations in an effort to safeguard the integrity of the negotiations, lest they be undermined.

In conclusion, Botswana believes that a stable and peaceful Middle East will not only usher in prosperity for the people of the region as a whole but will allow them to play a pivotal role in the development of their region and the world at large.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Ben Sliman (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, allow me to express our warmest congratulations on Azerbaijan's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. Let me also express my gratitude for the convening of today's open debate on the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" — a new opportunity to consider the latest developments in the region, particularly those pertaining to the question of Palestine. Allow me also to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on the subject this morning.

In my country's opinion, the question of Palestine is one of the core issues in the Middle East, particularly in the light of the latest developments in the region, the grave challenges entailed and the need to find urgent solutions. We therefore believe that this issue must remain central on the United Nations agenda as well as on those of all its bodies. The issue requires the continuing effective attention by all Member States until a final, just settlement is achieved. Undoubtedly, that will be one of the fundamental keys to stability and comprehensive peace in the region.

In that context, it is our belief that there is no alternative but peace in order to achieve stability and to open new horizons for the peoples of the entire region. My country expresses its support and encouragement for the resumption of direct talks between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, under the aegis of the United States of America. We thank the United States for its efforts. We look forward to the talks culminating in a comprehensive final settlement of the question of Palestine in all its aspects. Such an outcome should include a clear and well-defined timetable that enables the Palestinian people to regain the right to establish their independent sovereign State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, thereby allowing peaceful coexistence among all parties in the region on the basis of durable peace and security.

The Council has before it today a historic opportunity to provide conditions for a just, balanced and durable solution that allows all parties an opportunity that cannot be squandered, particularly in the light of the current situation in the Middle East, which cannot afford further setbacks. However, most regrettably, what we see on the ground are the practices and policies by the occupying forces. We see unconstructive statements by its officials that do not reflect awareness or the necessary seriousness to achieve the desired peace. We believe that to be a serious threat to the current negotiations and a settlement between the two sides.

In that context, Tunisia condemns the continuing illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory — including the West Bank, East Jerusalem and surrounding areas — which, as indicated in the latest report by Peace Now, the Israeli peace organization, increased by 70 per cent in the first half of 2013, as compared with the same period last year. My country calls on the international community to act urgently to put an end to such practices, which the international community agrees are a flagrant breach of the norms of international law, resolutions of international legitimacy and the fundamental framework for a peace process.

Tunisia also condemns the attacks by the occupying forces and Israeli settlers against Palestinians and their properties, the confiscation of their lands and farms, and

the harassment, humiliation and violation of their most fundamental rights, including the rights of detainees and prisoners. Those, in the opinion of the international community, are a clear challenge to the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law.

My country strongly condemns the attempts to Judaize the city of Jerusalem, to eradicate its Islamic sites and to change its demographic and geographic character, in addition to the daily campaigns of attacks against Muslim and Christian shrines, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Palestinian faithful therein. We call for the stifling embargo imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2007 to be fully lifted in order to put an end to its serious and tragic economic repercussions, under which Palestinian citizens, including women and children, are deprived of the simplest and most basic elements of decent living. We also call for an end to Israel's occupation of Lebanese and Syrian territories.

My delegation would like to express its deep concern concerning the situation in Syria and the continuing acts of killing, destruction and terror in all parts of the country. That has the potential for grave consequences for Syria and its future, and indeed the entire region, particularly on the humanitarian level.

Tunisia reiterates its support for the aspirations of the Syrian people for freedom, dignity and democracy. We also stress the need to step up efforts to achieve a political settlement to the crisis, which has become unbearable. We also emphasize the importance of Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and the cohesiveness of its society. In that regard, my country supports the current efforts towards the holding of the "Geneva II" conference to achieve a political settlement that is agreed upon and supported by all Syrian parties that desire peace. Such a settlement should put an end to the more than two years of strife that has had tragic consequences for Syria and the countries of the region.

We also reiterate our strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict. We believe that to be a criminal act against the Syrian people — indeed, against humanity. In that regard, we very much appreciate both the United States-Russian agreement and resolution 2118 (2013), on the destruction of Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons. Those weapons are indeed a threat to the peace, security and stability of the region and to international peace and security. We hope that development will be a positive step towards a political settlement of the Syrian crisis and the holding, at the earliest possible date, of an international conference on a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruciton in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Kydyrov (Kyrgyzstan.): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this quarterly debate. I also thank Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing.

Let me begin by congratulating the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on recently having been awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize. That timely and important recognition is testimony to the significant work being carried out by that organization around the world, especially in the Syrian Arab Republic during the past several weeks. In that context, we would like to express our full support for the decision taken by the Security Council on 11 October whereby a first-of-its-kind OPCW-United Nations Joint Mission in Syria was endorsed and entrusted with a multiphase mission to carry out resolution 2118 (2013).

The ongoing armed conflict in Syria is of the utmost concern to each and every one of us. The attempts by the international community to resolve the conflict and restore stability in that country remain insufficient. Kyrgyzstan once again expresses its serious concern over the numerous victims of the armed conflict, the humanitarian catastrophe and the further escalation of the crisis. We call on both sides to immediately implement a ceasefire and to resolve the crisis peacefully by conducting a dialogue among all the political forces of the country under the mediation of the United Nations.

We support the recent agreement on Syria's chemical weapons reached between United States and Russia, and subsequently endorsed by the Security Council. We welcome Syria's adherence to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction. Kyrgyzstan is strongly convinced that more efforts should be undertaken by all the parties concerned to resolve the crisis while preserving Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, without military interference from the outside.

The need to avoid external interference, especially by force, unauthorized by the Security Council and to engage in political dialogue on the basis of the Geneva

goes to Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing.

My delegation also associates itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

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