



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9236th meeting

Thursday, 5 January 2023, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Ishikane (Japan)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
Malta	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Israel and Jordan to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Khiari.

Mr. Khiari: I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to address the Security Council on recent developments in occupied East Jerusalem.

At the outset, please allow me to take this opportunity to welcome Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland as the new elected members of the Council.

I would like to note that Special Coordinator Wennesland will provide his regular, full briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, on 18 January. However, we are concerned about the events of this past week in Jerusalem and about the broader ongoing tensions and violence in the occupied West Bank.

On 3 January, Israel's new Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, conducted a visit, accompanied by a heavy security detail, to the holy sites in Jerusalem. The visit was the first to the site by an Israeli minister since 2017. While the visit was not accompanied or followed by violence, it is seen

as particularly inflammatory given Mr. Ben-Gvir's past advocacy for changes to the status quo. The visit was sharply condemned by the Palestinian Authority, many others across the region and the international community as a provocation that risked sparking further bloodshed. Many also warned against any changes to the status quo at the holy sites. Following the visit, the Israeli Prime Minister's Office and other senior Israeli officials emphasized that the Government is committed to upholding the status quo and that the visit did not represent a deviation from it.

As we have seen numerous times in the past, the situation at Jerusalem's holy sites is deeply fragile, and any incident or tension there can spill over and cause violence throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, in Israel and elsewhere in the region. With that reality in mind, I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for all parties to refrain from steps that could escalate tensions in and around the holy sites and for all to uphold the status quo, in line with the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Over the past several days, the United Nations has remained in close contact with relevant parties to de-escalate the situation, and those engagements will continue in the coming days and weeks. At this sensitive moment, all efforts to lower tensions should be encouraged, while provocations, inflammatory steps, unilateral actions and threats of violence must be categorically rejected. Leaders on all sides have a responsibility to lower the flames and create the conditions for calm. The United Nations remains ready to assist and support those efforts.

The President: I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the presidency of the Security Council for its prompt response to the request to hold this meeting to discuss the serious provocations that threaten the status quo at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also thank Mr. Khaled Khiari for his briefing on the latest developments.

The United Arab Emirates strongly condemns the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard by an Israeli minister, under the protection of Israeli forces. Such provocative actions reflect a lack of commitment to the existing historical and legal status of the holy sites in Jerusalem, and they further destabilize the

fragile situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. They also constitute a serious development that moves the region further away from the desired path of peace and contribute to perpetuating the negative trends associated with the conflict. Moreover, those actions threaten to escalate the tensions and confrontations that we are currently witnessing and fuel extremism and hatred in the region. In that context, we condemn the vandalization of the Christian cemetery on Mount Zion. Those responsible for trampling on the graves and desecrating that important historic and religious landmark must be held accountable. Such heinous acts are part of a trend of attacks on religious sacred sites that, if left undeterred, will encourage further violations.

We stress our firm position on the need to provide full protection for the Al-Aqsa Mosque and halt all violations taking place there, which provoke millions of believers around the world, given the sanctity of that holy site. We also emphasize the need to respect the custodial role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan over the holy sites and endowments in accordance with international law and the current historic status quo and not to compromise the authority of the Administration Department of Awqaf and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs and its mandate to manage all the affairs of Haram al-Sharif, including its entry procedures.

The events of the past year and the conflict's long history reveal that the cost of unilateral measures is very high, as they are a major cause of the rising levels of violence and instability. They also undermine efforts to find a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on the two-State solution and in line with the relevant international resolutions. Therefore, we in the Security Council must adopt a unified position against all actions that could exacerbate tensions and instability in the region, and against attempts such as those we witnessed on Tuesday at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. In particular, we also remind the parties of their responsibilities to refrain from all measures that might contribute to fuelling hatred and exclusion.

In conclusion, we stress the importance of reviving regional and international efforts to advance the Middle East peace process in order to achieve the two-State solution and establish an independent Palestinian State, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace, security and mutual recognition.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

At the Security Council's regular open meeting on this item two weeks ago (see S/PV.9224), I said that I hoped that the new year would bring new hope to the Palestinian people. However, what we are currently witnessing is obviously not the right way to start the new year. A few days ago, Israeli Government officials entered the compound of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which aggravated tensions on the ground. China is deeply worried about that.

In recent years, unilateral actions at the holy sites in East Jerusalem have repeatedly exacerbated problems and incited confrontations, triggering numerous bloody conflicts, which truly reflects the sensitivity of the character and status of religious sites. The recent acts by Israeli officials have resulted in the fragile and grave situation on the ground. China calls for the restoration and maintenance of peace and calm at the religious sites and calls on the parties concerned to exercise calm and restraint to prevent any further escalation of tensions.

Israel in particular should stop all forms of incitement and provocation and should refrain from any unilateral action that may lead to the deterioration of the situation. China stands for upholding the international rule of law and abiding by the international consensus on the question of Jerusalem. The relevant Security Council resolutions unequivocally condemn all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. The parties concerned should faithfully maintain the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem and respect Jordan's custodianship of the holy sites in accordance with the provisions of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. We have noted the commitment expressed by Israel's leaders to maintain the status quo of the holy sites. We hope that the relevant commitments can be translated into constructive policies and actions.

Underlying the repeated cycles of tensions between Palestine and Israel is the repeatedly delayed implementation of the two-State solution. Facts have once again demonstrated that piecemeal measures to control the crisis can hardly play an effective role, much less replace a comprehensive and just solution. The international community should increase its sense of urgency, push Palestine and Israel towards resuming peace talks, on the basis of the two-State solution,

resolve the issue of Jerusalem and other final-status issues and realize peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel, as soon as possible. Countries with significant influence in that regard should assume their responsibility and effectively play a constructive role. I would like to reiterate that China supports the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We will continue to work with the international community to practice true multilateralism and contribute constructively to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue and reaching a lasting peace and common security in the Middle East.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

Let me start by saying that the United States remains committed to a two-State solution in which Israel lives in peace and security alongside a Palestinian State and that we are concerned about any unilateral acts that exacerbate tensions or undermine the viability of a two-State solution. As underscored by both President Biden and Secretary Blinken, the United States firmly supports the preservation of the historic status quo with respect to the holy sites in Jerusalem, especially at the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount. We also deeply appreciate the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as custodian of Jerusalem's holy sites.

Secretary Blinken has said very clearly that it is absolutely critical for all sides to exercise restraint and refrain from provocative actions and rhetoric at the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount and other holy sites in Jerusalem both in word and practice. In that spirit, we oppose any and all unilateral actions that depart from the historic status quo, which are unacceptable. We note that Prime Minister Netanyahu's governing platform calls for the preservation of the status quo with relation to the holy places. We expect the Government of Israel to follow through on that commitment.

The United States is also concerned about the rise in deaths and injuries amid heightened tensions in recent months. We urge both Israelis and Palestinians to take the necessary steps to restore calm, prevent the further loss of life and preserve the possibility of a two-State solution. We must preserve that possibility. And we must ensure that all Israelis and Palestinians enjoy equal measures of freedom, justice, security and prosperity.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): We have left behind a year that has marked a notorious record. It goes down as one with the highest cost of life for Palestinians and the second for Israelis in the past several years. That is a terrible mark, which only shows how desperate the situation is and how much it needs an immediate remedy. Unfortunately, we see only increased tensions and growing distrust between the parties.

Every time we have spoken here on the developments in the Middle East, among other key aspects, we have highlighted one core issue: the need to avoid unilateral actions and steps that undermine efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to bringing the parties together and promote a political horizon towards peace. Without such prospects, as we have witnessed so many times, the process becomes derailed, paralysed and blinded, and the situation becomes deadly. Oslo and its high hopes are two decades away now but, in reality, the prospects for peace and the solution it created seem even more distant. This is not viable.

There is another important issue that we have continuously highlighted as key to maintaining peace — the need to preserve the status quo of the holy sites. The current situation, with inflammatory rhetoric, leads in the wrong direction. We join the Secretary-General in his call to the parties to “refrain from steps that could escalate tensions in and around the holy sites”. Albania reiterates its firm position on the crucial importance of preserving the status quo of the holy sites. There are rules and binding agreements agreed by the parties, and they must be respected.

The status quo of the holy sites and the custodianship by the Kingdom of Jordan, as internationally agreed, are crucial for peace and stability in the region and for calm on the ground. In that respect, we take note of the reassurances by the Israeli Government of its strict commitment to preserving the status quo, without changes.

Peaceful coexistence has always proven a valuable investment in peace and social cohesion, just as its contrary has proven disastrous. The current situation speaks volumes for the need of the political horizon to be restored as soon as possible. It can only be done jointly, through genuine efforts by both sides and a firm commitment to a two-State solution within the 1967 borders.

Peace, for us, means a safe Israel; it means a safe, viable, independent and democratic Palestine; it means

equal rights and freedoms for all, in two States, for two people, living side by side in peace and security with mutual recognition and with Jerusalem as the future shared capital. Any other path is dangerous, unsustainable and only jeopardizes the prospect of lasting peace.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We support the convening by the delegations of China and the United Arab Emirates of today's Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We are grateful to Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing on the alarming developments in the Old City of Jerusalem and on the Temple Mount.

The escalation of tensions, against the backdrop of the visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex, on 3 January, of Itamar Ben-Gvir, Minister of National Security of Israel, accompanied by Israeli security forces, is of great concern. That incident is difficult to perceive differently in the light of the events of 2000, when the visit of Ariel Sharon — surrounded by hundreds of policemen — to the Temple Mount served as a trigger for the start of the second intifada, which claimed the lives of several thousand people on both sides.

We once again recall the unacceptability of violating the historical and legal status quo of Jerusalem, the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, as well as the holy sites located in the city. At the same time, we note the stabilizing role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, historically custodian of the Muslim holy sites of Jerusalem and ensuring free access to them. Disagreements on this city remain one of the main sources of instability — not only regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but also throughout the entire Middle East. Such steps threaten to totally destabilize the situation and lead to full-scale armed clashes, which we have already witnessed more than once.

In that connection, we urge both parties to exercise restraint and refrain from provocative steps or unilateral actions. In particular, we hope that the new Israeli Cabinet will not take the path of escalation, but will instead show political will and renounce radical steps to create irreversible realities on the ground, including the destruction of Palestinian homes and the confiscation of their property, with a view to restarting the peace process.

The developments in Jerusalem, which are explosive for the entire Middle Eastern region, demonstrate once again the urgency of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In order to prevent a return to military confrontation, it is necessary to combine international and regional efforts to create conditions for relaunching direct negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis in the framework of the agreed two-State solution — Palestine and Israel, coexisting in peace and security within the 1967 borders.

We are disappointed that our American colleagues in the Quartet time and again refuse to cooperate on the resumption of the peace process — even though their attempts to monopolize the peace process and impose peace on the Palestinians, instead of promoting their aspirations to create their own State, as has become obvious to everyone, do not lead to concrete results.

For our part, we will continue efforts to consolidate international consensus and coordinate efforts among the Palestinians and Israelis and interested international and regional players in the interest of a just solution to the Palestinian problem. We are convinced that direct dialogue between the parties can take place through the mediation of the Middle East Quartet, the only internationally recognized mechanism for mediation in the Middle East approved by the Security Council. At the same time, we would like to note the importance of combining the efforts of the Quartet with those of key regional players.

That is precisely what prompted Russia's initiative to hold a broader ministerial meeting of the Quartet with representatives of Arab countries. On 3 January, Foreign Minister Lavrov had a telephone conversation with Eli Cohen, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, during which we stressed our coherent and consistent position on the Palestinian question, which implies resolving differences between the parties on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, in accordance with the two-State solution. We urge our colleagues to take a serious approach to reanimating peace negotiations on this well-established international legal basis for the Middle East settlement process.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing, and I welcome the participation in this meeting of the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representatives of Israel and Jordan.

Respect for the historical and legal status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem is fundamental to the peaceful coexistence of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. It is an essential consensus that neither side should challenge, at the risk of jeopardizing the prospects of dialogue in the Middle East peace process.

In that connection, the 3 January visit of an Israeli official to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound is a real cause for concern, especially as it follows the assault on the same mosque on 22 December 2022 by more than 200 Israeli settlers, under police protection. Those intrusions are unilateral steps that rekindle tensions and diminish the prospects for appeasement between Palestinians and Israelis in a particularly volatile security context, and they are unacceptable.

In the same vein, we condemn the recent desecration of tombs in the historical Christian cemetery in Jerusalem, which are part of this dangerous dynamic of violations of the sites and religious identity of various communities. The parties must refrain from all unilateral steps and provocations that could trigger an escalation of violence. It is essential that the international community ensure that the Israeli-Palestinian crisis does not carry the seeds of antagonism between the three monotheistic religions.

My country calls for restraint and respect for international law by all parties, in order to avoid a new escalation of violence and a conflagration with even more destabilizing consequences for the entire region, and undoubtedly well beyond. The year 2022 was particularly deadly in the occupied territories, and we must prevent this tragic scenario — a scenario where women and children are often the first victims — from being repeated in 2023.

We reaffirm the need for dialogue, and we call on all parties to resume negotiations in good faith, with a view to restoring confidence. In this regard, the role of the countries of the region and those with influence on the parties is crucial to helping the resumption of the peace talks and to removing the obstacles that stand in the way of the two-State solution.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I begin by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his timely briefing at this delicate juncture. We express our concern about the political climate in the region and the potential for the recent actions in and around the holy sites to further exacerbate tensions. Our first and foremost priority must be to avoid any form of new escalation and help

restore calm. We urge those in a position of influence and power, especially political and religious leaders, to use their influence in a positive and constructive manner and refrain from provocative unilateral actions that serve only to make an already volatile situation even more unstable.

The integrity of the holy sites and the legal and historic status quo must be upheld and fully respected at all times. Any act that violates this is unacceptable. In this context, we acknowledge the important role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as the Custodian of the Holy Sites, which we fully respect. We also take note of the statement issued by the office of Prime Minister Netanyahu that his Administration is committed to strictly maintaining the status quo of the Holy Sites. Malta hopes that this will be fully implemented and adhered to by all.

Furthermore, we are also deeply concerned about attempts to take over the property of Christian churches. Such actions pose a serious threat to the peaceful coexistence of all three monotheistic religions in Jerusalem, and they must be halted. More broadly, while addressing the immediate challenges, we should not lose sight of the root causes of tension and conflict. This week's developments underlined once again the need to further expand dialogue and pursue paths to peace and long-term solutions.

Malta reaffirms its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict based on a two-State solution along the pre-1967 borders, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States living side by side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. We stand convinced that this remains the only viable path to peace.

Finally, we condemn any targeting of civilians, particularly children, in the strongest possible terms, and we reiterate that the killing of children is deplorable and reprehensible. Children must never be the target of violence or put in harm's way, and those responsible for such acts must be held accountable.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): At the outset, we would like to thank Japan for scheduling this timely meeting upon the request of the United Arab Emirates and China. We also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

With great concern, Brazil followed the recent incursion by Israel's Minister of National Security into Haram Al-Sharif in Jerusalem last Tuesday. This is a deeply alarming development, for it risks exacerbating tensions and escalating violence in an area already affected by a great deal of volatility. Brazil considers it to be of the utmost importance to respect the arrangements established under the Hashemite custody of the holy sites with regard to the administration of the Muslim holy places in Jerusalem, as provided for in the 1994 peace agreements between Israel and Jordan.

In the same vein, Brazil remains deeply committed to a just and sustainable solution to the question of Palestine. We have traditionally sought to act constructively to assist the parties in engaging in meaningful dialogue, with a view to building trust and achieving a fair and lasting peace. We must therefore oppose all actions that may lead to altering the historical status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem, for such actions inevitably prevent the necessary culture of peace and violate a shared duty not only by the Security Council but also by the international community as a whole to foster stability, tolerance and mutual understanding in the Middle East.

As we closely continue to monitor the situation on the ground, we urge both parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid unilateral actions. This includes avoiding heated rhetoric that could further aggravate tensions and undermine the mutual trust necessary for the urgent resumption of dialogue with a view to a negotiated solution to the conflict.

In conclusion, Brazil reaffirms its long-standing commitment to the two-State solution, with Palestine and Israel fully viable and living together in peace and security within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders. Striving for stability in the Middle East is nothing short of an imperative for the Security Council. Let us therefore do our utmost to help the parties translate such a noble objective into a viable negotiating process, so as to achieve the future of peace that the region rightly deserves.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): Let me begin by thanking the delegations of China and the United Arab Emirates for requesting today's meeting and Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing to the Council. We also welcome the participation at this meeting of the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine and the Permanent Representatives of Israel and Jordan.

Undoubtedly, the situation in the Middle East, which has been on the agenda of the Security Council for more than seven decades, is a difficult dispute by any measure. Unlike many other conflicts, the passage of time has not made it any easier for the international community to resolve the dispute. Rather, day by day, we seem to be drifting further away from our envisaged goal.

Nonetheless, the creation of the State of Israel by mandate of the Security Council and the anticipated establishment of the State of Palestine are sacred trusts that must be carried through. It is in this regard that we deem it important that the Council always act as an enabler for the Middle East peace process, by bringing the parties back on track when they veer off and encouraging their efforts when it serves the cause of peace.

Ghana has closely followed the recent events in Jerusalem that provoked today's meeting. The unscheduled visit by the Minister of National Security of Israel to the holy site of Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount on 3 January has regrettably created renewed tensions in the Middle East. Jerusalem is supposed to be a place of peace, and, indeed, its holy sites are of significance to Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike.

While urging religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence, we note with concern the confrontations and violent clashes that preceded and took place after the Israeli Minister's visit. We therefore welcome the fact that both the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel have clarified their Government's position that there has not been any policy change in relation to the holy sites of Jerusalem. We believe this is an important act by the new Israeli Government, and we urge consistency in maintaining the status quo ante. However, the renewed tensions in the Middle East are more than manifestations of the recent incidents. They reflect decades of actions that have created mistrust on both sides. We therefore urge the parties to carefully constrain the flourishes of unilateral action that can deepen suspicion and create conditions that encourage those on both sides who do not seek peace to destroy the confidence that is required for dialogue and genuine engagement. In this new year of hope, we urge Israel and Palestine to engage constructively to address the security concerns of Israel and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. That is important if the collective aspiration of the Council, the neighbouring

countries in the region and the international community is to be realized.

For its part, Ghana will continue to encourage the parties to seek the narrow and difficult path of peace through a renewed and constructive dialogue on a political horizon. We will continue to urge the parties to resume direct negotiations for a comprehensive and lasting peace in a spirit of cooperation and good faith.

Finally, Ghana reaffirms its belief that lasting peace and stability in the Middle East is possible through a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side, within secure and recognized borders on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian State.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this emergency meeting. I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing and assessment of the situation.

During its term as an elected member, Switzerland will work to promote peace in the region, based on a two-State solution negotiated by both sides in accordance with international law and the internationally agreed parameters, including Security Council resolutions. In line with that position, Switzerland stresses the need to preserve the historical status quo on the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount, including respecting the role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as Custodian of the Holy Sites. We welcomed Prime Minister Netanyahu's affirmation of that commitment on 3 January, and Switzerland calls on all the parties to demonstrate their commitment in that regard in practice.

In an already tense context, particularly due to the record number of Palestinian civilian deaths last year and the deadly attacks in Israel, the visit of the new Israeli Minister of National Security to the Esplanade of Mosques on Tuesday is cause for concern. Such unilateral actions threaten to disrupt the status quo on the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif and thereby destabilize the entire region. We call on the leaders of all parties to avoid inflammatory and provocative language that could exacerbate the conflict and provoke further violence.

We are aware of the risk of escalation and the negative consequences that would have for peace and security in the region and beyond. We hope that this meeting will reaffirm the need to preserve the historic status quo and help to prevent further tensions. Switzerland calls on all parties to respect international

law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. We also encourage the parties to address the root causes of the conflict and restore a political horizon for a negotiated two-State solution. Switzerland is at their disposal to facilitate a resumption of a credible dialogue in that regard.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): As this is the first time that my delegation is taking the floor before the Security Council, Mr. President, I would like to extend Mozambique's warm congratulations to Japan on its election as a non-permanent member of the Council, as well as on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of January. We pledge our full support to your presidency. I also want to congratulate our fellow newly elected members, Ecuador, Japan, Malta and Switzerland, on their assumption of their seats as non-permanent members. We pay tribute to the five departing elected members and commend the important and positive role they have played in this Chamber. We thank the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Khaled Khiari, for his update, and recognize the participation of the representatives of the Observer State of Palestine, Israel and Jordan in this meeting.

Mozambique is deeply concerned about the recent incidents in the region, in particular those that have taken place lately. We think they have the potential to exacerbate and inflame an already fragile situation. We call on all the parties to act in a responsible and restrained manner. In that connection, we would like to point to the Secretary-General's most recent report on resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2022/945), issued in December, which indicated that 2022 was the deadliest year yet in the conflict. We regret the cycle of violence that has claimed many lives, causing the destruction of property and inflicting a heavy humanitarian toll in the wake of the hostilities. We call on all the parties to the conflict to adhere strictly to the principles of international humanitarian law. We strongly condemn gestures that embolden extreme attitudes that can further erode hope in the viability of a political and negotiated settlement of the conflict based on Security Council and Assembly General resolutions in support of a two-State solution.

Mozambique reiterates its long-standing and principled position in support of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and the right of the State of Israel to exist, the only viable basis for their two peoples to live side by side in two independent and sovereign States, in line with Security Council and

General Assembly resolutions. We call on all parties to refrain from any unilateral action or decision that could potentially undermine international law or change the status quo. We urge the parties to uphold internationally agreed commitments to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. We believe that the primacy of a legitimate and negotiated political process for addressing the core issues driving this protracted conflict is still the only way forward. We therefore call on the Council and all stakeholders to further enhance our common and collective efforts towards a lasting peace in the Middle East region.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his informative briefing this afternoon.

Ecuador is serving as a member on the Security Council for the fourth time in its history. The first time my country held such a seat was in 1950, and the topic we are discussing here today was already part of the Council's agenda. It was also on the agenda in 1960–1961, during our second term, and then again in 1991–1992, during our third. It is indeed regrettable that in 2023 the issue remains on the Council's agenda and, worse still, that we are beginning the new year in an atmosphere of tension and mistrust.

Ecuador calls for an end to the spiral of violence and reiterates its belief that both sides have the right to live in peace and dignity. Remembering the history of this issue is essential to preventing the reoccurrence of acts that have already caused violence, destruction and death in the region in the past. The incitement, provocation and inflammatory language must stop. Peace needs to begin in people's minds, move to their words and then, finally, be evident in their actions.

Ecuador therefore reiterates the call for the parties to exercise calm and restraint and to refrain from taking any actions, decisions or unilateral measures that could exacerbate the conflict. We call in particular for respect for the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem and Jordan's role as their custodian. The parties must refrain from acts of provocation at those sites at all costs.

In conclusion, I reaffirm Ecuador's support for the search for a political, peaceful, definitive and just solution for the parties within the framework of international law, with the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, on the basis of the 1967 borders. We believe that, in order to ensure a return to effective

negotiations, it is essential for the leaders of the parties to exhibit political will, courage and long-term vision. We hope that will be the case and that in the not-too-distant future, this issue will no longer be on the Council's agenda.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I also join others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

First, the United Kingdom recognizes that Jerusalem's holy sites, including Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount, hold particular significance for many around the globe, especially within the three Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. In that context, the visit made by Israel's Minister of National Security has the potential to increase tensions. The United Kingdom strongly supports the historic status quo governing Jerusalem's holy sites, which protects the sites and those who worship there and preserves peace. The United Kingdom also recognizes and values Jordan's important role as custodian of the holy sites and highlights the importance of cooperation with the Jordanian authorities in that regard. The United Kingdom is committed to working with all parties to uphold that status quo in Jerusalem. All parties must refrain from taking actions that inflame tensions, undermine the cause of peace or unilaterally seek to alter the status quo.

Secondly, our position on the status of Jerusalem is clear and long-standing: it should be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, ensuring that Jerusalem is the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian States, with the access and religious rights of all peoples fully respected.

Thirdly, the United Kingdom reaffirms its support for a two-State solution, based on the 1967 lines and with Jerusalem as the shared capital, as the only way to ensure a lasting peace between the parties. We are concerned about the levels of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel. I urge all the parties to refrain from taking actions that undermine the prospects of peace.

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

France expresses its deep concern following the recent visit by Israel's Minister of National Security to the mosques' plaza on 3 January. We must do everything possible to prevent an escalation, which would have grave consequences on the ground.

France, which has a historic role in protecting several religious communities in Jerusalem, calls for respect for the historic status quo of the city's holy sites. We recall the importance of Jordan's specific role in that regard and will denounce any attempts to call that into question. France takes note of the commitment of the Prime Minister of Israel to ensuring that the status quo of the holy sites is respected. It is important for that to translate into results on the ground.

This type of action only reinforces the mistrust between the parties and does not serve peace. France reiterates the urgency of ending Israel's settlement policy, which endangers the implementation of a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, each with Jerusalem as its capital. We reaffirm our commitment to that solution. We also reaffirm our commitment to ensuring Israel's security. Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in peace and security.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Japan.

Less than one month after the previous meeting on the subject (see S/PV.9224), a Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, had to be convened.

Japan expresses its grave concern about the visit to a holy site in Jerusalem by the Israeli Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, on 3 January. Given the already tense situation, it is crucial that all the parties concerned exercise maximum restraint and refrain from any inflammatory action or rhetoric that could further escalate tensions, including any attempt to alter the historic status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem. Japan also expresses its serious concern about the fact that the new Israeli Government has announced policy guidelines "to advance and develop settlement in all parts of the land of Israel", which is understood to include occupied territory. The expansion of settlements is a clear violation of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, and Japan urges Israel to immediately cease such unilateral actions that undermine the realization of a two-State solution. A peaceful resolution can only be achieved through dialogue based on mutual trust between the parties. Japan urges the parties to return to a path of dialogue and seriously commit to the realization of a two-State solution based on the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

Lastly, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the next two years, Japan is determined to continue to contribute to furthering peace and stability in the Middle East.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I thank you, Sir, for convening this emergency meeting in response to our appeals and those of several Security Council members. I also congratulate Japan on its presidency of the Council this month and express our confidence in your wise leadership.

What red line does Israel need to cross for the Security Council to finally say that enough is enough and act accordingly? When will it act? Israel has displayed utter disregard for the sanctity of Palestinian life, of international law and of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. It has done it with absolute contempt for us, the Council and the entire international community, and it vows to continue doing so. Yet the Council remains on the sidelines. Council members say nice things, but they are still on the sidelines. Our people are running out of patience. And the moderation and sense of responsibility that we display should never be construed as weakness. The record shows that Israel's persistence on this kind of path leads not to surrender but to uprising. Those who are committed to international law and peace must act now, not merely lament once the fire spreads out of control.

The Israeli extremist Ben-Gvir, who now holds the rank of Minister, was convicted of incitement and support for a terror group and is known for his racist views, did not come to Al-Haram Al-Sharif to visit. He is pursuing the same extremist agenda that he has pursued all his life — ending the historic and legal status quo. That is his objective, regardless of the consequences. It is the agenda he was elected on and joined the Israeli Government to advance. Did the Israeli Government condemn his actions? I ask this of those who expressed happiness about some statement made by the Prime Minister of Israel. No, it endorsed those actions, even in the wake of worldwide outrage and condemnation. It explained to us all that we had misunderstood what we had seen in plain sight with our own eyes — an extremist Minister of an extremist Government accompanied by occupation

forces storming Al-Haram Al-Sharif in violation of international law, the historic status quo, the Hashemite custodianship and Palestinian sovereignty.

The Israeli argument is that this has happened before, and it is no big deal. Gilad Erdan also stormed Al-Haram Al-Sharif as Minister of Public Security. It is as if a criminal standing trial finds that his best defence is the fact that he committed the same crime before and got away with it. Gilad Erdan stormed Al-Haram Al-Sharif a few years ago for the same reasons that Ben-Gvir did a few days ago. They are pursuing the same agenda that they have confessed to, which is altering the historic status quo. I quote:

“I think there is in an injustice in the status quo that has existed since '67... We need to work to change it so that in the future Jews, with the help of God, can pray at the Temple Mount.”

Those are the words of Erdan the Minister that Erdan the Ambassador will now try to walk back. Those are the facts.

Al-Haram Al-Sharif will not fall. I repeat: Al-Haram Al-Sharif will never fall. It will stand for generations to come. It has outlasted Begin, Shamir and Sharon and will outlast Netanyahu, Ben-Gvir and Erdan. Those who pursue the temporal and spatial division of Al-Haram or plan to take it over do not comprehend what it represents for all Palestinians and for Arabs and Muslims around the world. They do not comprehend the sensitivity of that holy site for billions of people in every corner of the world, and they should listen carefully to me. They — the members of the Council — should stop Israel. It is their responsibility, the responsibility of the Council and all States, to uphold international law and the historic status quo. They should stop Israel. But make no mistake. If they do not, our Palestinian people will.

We should not lose sight of another critical fact. Al-Haram Al-Sharif is in occupied East Jerusalem, an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territory — a fact repeatedly affirmed by the Council and the General Assembly. Those are the facts as asserted by the Council. Furthermore, Israel has no claim or right to sovereignty over the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and therefore no rightful claim over Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Israel's actions have nothing to do with religious freedom and everything to do with its unlawful attempt to alter the character, status and identity of the city. There can be no peace

without Jerusalem. I repeat — there can be no peace without Jerusalem. Israel wants to take it off the table by entrenching its unlawful annexation of the city. But then there is nothing left to discuss. The future of conflict and peace in our region will be determined in Jerusalem, not in any other capital around the world. Anybody who says otherwise is either delusional or lying.

Palestinian Christians and Christian holy sites are also under attack — as many today mentioned — from severe restrictions to religious processions, to attacks on clergy, to the desecration of graves. Palestinian Christians suffer from the same colonial and discriminatory policies as their Muslim brothers and sisters. The historic and legal status quo, the rights of the Palestinian people and the sovereignty of the State of Palestine must be upheld.

Israel is expecting everyone to pretend they cannot see, cannot read and cannot hear and to keep quiet about its unlawful actions. Israel has been waiting for us and for the international community to surrender, which we will never do. Israel has been waiting for us to accept that colonial rule, human rights abuses and war crimes should prevail over the rule of international law, which we will never accept — and should the international community. Now an unhinged unrestrained Government has openly adopted a colonial and racist platform. What future is there for Palestine and for the entire region if there is no reaction to such a development, if there is no stand for the rule of law and justice?

I quote the head of this extremist Government:

“These are the basic lines of the national Government headed by me. The Jewish people have an exclusive and unquestionable right to all areas of the land of Israel. The Government will promote and develop settlement in all parts of the land of Israel — in the Galilee, the Negev, the Golan, Judea and Samaria”.

That is a public confession to annexation and apartheid. What is the international community going to do about it?

We heard today a unanimous Council opposed to illegal actions, provocations and unilateral measures, notably those aimed at jeopardizing the historic status quo. I heard everyone say that. I will once more tell the Council that what it says is important, critical even. But what matters most is what it does next. A proverb affirms that we must not trust what a person says, but

what that person does. We must trust the hands. We appreciate what Council members said, but what is the Council going to do about implementing its own rules. The Council understands that Israel will keep pushing. It might adapt its rhythm, but this Israeli Government will not change course — not until it has to.

We trust the following — that eventually no State in its right mind would sacrifice its credibility, interests and values to shield such an Israeli Government or its behaviour. Some may still be reluctant to say out loud what is becoming impossible to deny: this is apartheid. How many Governments today brag about the relations they had with apartheid South Africa? None can — not even Israel, its closest ally at the time. Who here can justify standing for supremacists instead of standing up to them?

Jerusalem is by nature, like all of the Holy Land — because of history, geography and its significance for all monotheistic religions — a city of pluralism and diversity, and therefore a city of peace. The historic status quo has underpinned all efforts to promote peaceful religious coexistence in the city for centuries. Some of the countries around this table have helped forge and consolidate it — as we heard from our friend, France — with an understanding of how vital it is that the holiest of cities not become the epicentre of a religious conflict. Without it, every holy site is up for grabs. Differences, allayed by the status quo, would turn into clashes. Underlying tensions would implode into conflicts. Disrupting that delicate balance will lead to foreseen and predictable consequences that are grave for us all. The historic status quo is not a legacy of the past, it is a safe passage to a peaceful, just and stable future.

Allow me now to deliver a statement in my capacity as Chair of the Group of Arab States for this month.

(spoke in Arabic)

My delegation has the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States. At the outset, we would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on behalf of the Group, on your membership of the Security Council and for presiding over its work for this month. We wish you every success in your tasks. We also thank Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, for his briefing.

The Arab Group condemns the illegal Israeli practices and violations at the Al-Aqsa Mosque/

Al-Haram Al-Sharif, as manifested recently in the storming of the compound by extremist Israeli Minister of National Security, accompanied by Israeli occupation forces. The Group warns against such aggression, which constitutes a flagrant provocation of the feelings of Palestinians, Arabs and nearly 2 billion Muslims around the world. It also constitutes a blatant violation of international law and the legal and historical status quo. That aggression is also a rejected embodiment of a plan that aims to temporally and spatially divide Al-Haram Al-Sharif and a grave escalation that requires international action to put an end to it.

In that regard, the Arab Group reaffirms the need for Israel, the occupying Power, to respect the legal and historical status quo at the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, including the status of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, within its full area of 144 acres, as a place of worship exclusively for Muslims. The Arab Group also reaffirms the right of the State of Palestine to enjoy sovereignty over the occupied city of East Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Palestine, and maintains that Israel, the occupying Power, has no right or sovereignty over the occupied city of Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites.

The Arab Group appreciates the positions taken by countries that rejected and condemned the provocative and belligerent Israeli storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Those countries also reiterated their rejection of any alteration of the legal and historical status quo.

The Arab Group reaffirms the need for continued efforts and endeavours aimed at protecting and defending the occupied city of Jerusalem and its holy sites against the rejected and condemned occupation attempts to change the city's demography, its Arab, Muslim and Christian identity as well as the legal and historical status quo in the city. The Arab Group supports the Hashemite custodianship to protect Muslim and Christian holy sites, the Jordanian Administration of the Endowments of Jerusalem and the affairs of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque as the exclusive authority, the Al-Quds Committee and the Beit Mal Al-Quds Agency in their efforts to defend the city of Al-Quds and support the resilience of its people.

The Arab Group calls upon the Security Council to uphold its responsibilities and implement its resolutions to halt all illegitimate, provocative, unilateral and escalatory measures and violations that Israel continues to commit unabated, including in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in particular the blatant violation by the Israeli occupation

army and extremist settler groups of the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The Arab Group reaffirms the centrality of the question of Palestine for the Arab nation as a whole and its insistence on international legitimacy, including the Arab Peace Initiative, which was announced in 2002 as a strategic path towards ending the Israeli occupation, resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieving a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and the two-State solution, which guarantees the establishment of an independent State of Palestine along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, while ceasing all illegitimate Israeli measures that undermine that solution. That was reaffirmed by the Algiers Declaration issued at the thirty-first Arab summit.

The Arab Group calls on the Security Council and partners in the international community to act immediately and pressure Israel to stop its aggression against the Palestinian people, end its occupation and realize a just and comprehensive peace in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy. That is the only way to end the conflict and achieve regional and international security and stability.

In conclusion, the Arab Group reaffirms its full support for the Palestinian people in their steadfast defence of their legitimate rights and the city of Al-Quds and its holy sites. It further reaffirms its support for defending the Arab, Muslim, and Christian identity of occupied East Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Palestine, and for the right of the State of Palestine to absolute sovereignty over all its occupied territory since 1967, including East Jerusalem, its air and sea space, its territorial waters, natural resources and borders with neighbouring countries. The Arab Group demands that the international community urgently exert every effort to guarantee respect for and the fulfilment of the national rights of the Palestinian people, foremost of which is their right to self-determination.

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

Mr. Erdan (Israel): At the outset, I wish to congratulate you and Japan, Mr. President, as well as Ecuador, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland, as you begin your terms on the Security Council.

When I heard the news that the Security Council, the body committed to promoting and protecting world peace, was holding an emergency meeting over the

quiet, orderly and uneventful visit of an Israeli minister to the Temple Mount, I was overjoyed. I figured that if this important body is meeting to discuss such a trivial matter, then we had clearly achieved world peace overnight. There would be no more war and no more violence. After all, why else would the Security Council dedicate its time to such a minor occurrence?

Imagine my dismay when I found out that I was wrong. A war still rages in Europe, the Ayatollah regime in Iran is still murdering innocent protesters, as it hurtles towards a nuclear arsenal. Terrorism is still rampant, and totalitarian regimes are still committing atrocities. Yet we are in the Security Council Chamber discussing the peaceful 13-minute visit of a Jewish minister to the holiest Jewish site under the sovereignty of the liberal democracy of Israel.

I am sure that at least some Council members see the absurdity of this situation. Sadly, this meeting, which creates a sense of emergency over a non-event, reminds me of the words of the famous comedian Jerry Seinfeld, who described his show as a show about nothing. Nevertheless, if the Security Council decided to convene on this matter, we may as well utilize this meeting for the best. This is the ideal opportunity to share the truth and facts about the Temple Mount.

I would ask my colleagues if they have heard of the Western Wall. I am sure that they have. Do they know what this wall was west of and why is it the most focal point of Jewish prayer? I will tell them why. The Western Wall is the only surviving structure from the compound of the second Jewish temple. Our temple, which was located on the Temple Mount, was the holiest place to the Jewish people, but it was destroyed by others, and we were left with only its western wall. Many do not know this, and I am not surprised. After all, for years now, the Palestinians have orchestrated and advanced a poisonous campaign to obliterate any trace or connection between the Jewish people and the Temple Mount. They exploit every means — both in words and actions — to promote these lies.

At the United Nations, they advance libellous resolutions just like the one adopted in the General Assembly last week (General Assembly resolution 77/247), deliberately erasing the Jewish name of the compound by referring to it only by its Muslim name, Al-Haram Al-Sharif. And, tragically, many Member States submit to these lies despite the indisputable proof and archaeological evidence proving the Temple Mount's true history.

But it goes much deeper than that. This insidious plot comes directly from the top of Palestinian leadership. Council members have heard it in this Chamber. The personal threats of the Palestinian representative speak volumes. These were personal threats that should not be acceptable in the Security Council, but, again, I am not surprised: it demonstrates the Palestinians' violence. And I am not surprised, because those were the same words of President Abbas:

“The Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are ours. They are all ours, and the Jews have no right to defile them with their filthy feet”.

Is that the way to uphold the status quo? This is blatant incitement and the rewriting of history. Was there an emergency Security Council meeting when those toxic words were uttered?

Long before Jesus overturned the money changers' tables in Jerusalem, or Abdul-Malik built Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the Jewish people have seen the Temple Mount as the centre of our universe. It was there that God tested Abraham's faith by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac; where King David built an altar to God; where King Solomon constructed the first holy temple 3,000 years ago; where the second temple was rebuilt 2,500 years ago; and it is the exact point to which every Jew is commanded to pray towards three times a day. This is the holiest spot to my people.

We have all heard much about the status quo, but do we thoroughly know what it actually means? From 1948, after Jordan occupied East Jerusalem during Israel's war of independence, the Jordanians decimated Jewish life in Jerusalem. And despite their commitment, they forbade Jews from accessing our holy sites. Sadly, they also destroyed synagogues and desecrated Jewish cemeteries. In 1967, when Israel liberated Jerusalem, we made an enormous concession. Israeli mistakenly thought that, if we gave Jordan administrative and religious authority over the compound, it would ensure that the Israeli-Arab conflict would remain within its political and territorial dimensions, rather than being a religious conflict. In addition, we gave up our right to pray there. Yes, we gave our right because some rabbis — until today — say that, owing to the fact that we do not know exactly where the Holy of Holies in our temple were located — a place where only the high priest was allowed to enter — Jews should refrain from ascending upon the Temple Mount and praying there, to avoid any chance that they would walk upon that sacred spot. That is the reason. That is how the status quo was

born. Only Muslims can pray at the site, while Jews and Christians may only visit.

Just listen to what is really happening on the Temple Mount each and every year. On average, only 30,000 to 40,000 Jews visit the Temple Mount throughout the year. They are permitted to do so from only one specific entrance, on specific days and at very limited hours, in small groups and under heavy security detail. Think about why they need that security, when they are only visiting the site. Meanwhile, every year millions upon millions of Muslims go freely to visit and pray at the site while Israel ensures — and we are proud of it — their safety and security. Do members know that, over the past 55 years, since 1967, three additional mosques were opened on the Temple Mount. Does that sound like an attempt to change the status quo by Israel, or by the other side? What this is is only one example of Israel's commitment to protecting the freedom of worship for all faiths.

Minister Ben-Gvir's recent visit to the Temple Mount was not an incursion into Al-Aqsa, or any other fabrication that the Palestinians branded his visit as. Minister Ben-Gvir's visit was in line with the status quo — and whoever claims otherwise is only inflaming the situation. Jews are allowed to visit the Temple Mount — every Jew, including the minister tasked with the security and safety of the Temple Mount. And as the Palestinian observer mentioned, I know that myself because, as Minister of Public Security, I too visited the compound. By the way, I visited after two Israeli Arabs attacked and killed two Druze police officers.

The very fact that this meeting is being held is an insult to our intelligence.

Who is therefore truly changing the status quo? Rather than protecting the sanctity of the site, the Palestinians have turned the Temple Mount into a battleground. Time and again, the mosques are used as arsenals where terrorists keep rocks and explosives to attack Jewish visitors and security forces. The hallowed ground is used as a platform for Palestinian incitement, poisoning the minds of youth and stoking the flames of violence.

There are some countries that believe in religious tolerance and are right now building interfaith complexes where Jews, Christians and Muslims can pray side by side — just imagine. Tragically, the Palestinian terror authority prefers violence over tolerance. They are so intolerant that they not only want to ban Jewish prayer

on the Temple Mount, but also Jewish visitors. Pure anti-semitism.

Just as the Palestinians weaponize international institutions in their jihad war against the Jewish State, they also weaponize the status quo. They break it at will, while falsely blaming Israel for fabricated changes. They have turned the libellous slogan “Al-Aqsa is in danger” into a battle cry to justify terror against Jews. Yes, some members also mentioned it. The bloodthirsty Arafat used that false claim to legitimize the murder of 1,000 Israelis throughout the second intifada, after the visit of Ariel Sharon. Does it justify that? And now the Palestinian Authority is using the same tactic. Do not give that incitement and violence a free pass.

For the Palestinians, the title of the person who visits the Temple Mount does not matter, be they a civilian, a minister or the Prime Minister. All that matters is their religion. If they are a Jew, then that is the core of the issue. It is a matter of Jew-hatred and anti-semitism. For them, a Jew setting foot on the Temple Mount is not only illegitimate, but it also deserves to be met with violence.

There are countless security situations that, unlike Minister Ben-Gvir’s Temple Mount visit, are truly severe acts of escalation. But for them, the Council did not convene. Why was there no immediate debate following the Iranian attack on the merchant tanker *MT Mercer Street*, in which Romanian and British nationals were killed? Or after a Palestinian terrorist murdered three Israelis in Tel Aviv last April, an attack that was glorified by Palestinian leadership? Or when Israel exposed proof of Hamas rocket launch pads next to schools in Gaza? Or only last month after the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East itself reported that a Hamas terror tunnel was discovered underneath a school? Why do such acts not warrant the Council’s immediate attention, while a Jew’s peaceful visit to the Temple Mount does? When the Council dedicates its valuable time to shows about nothing, it legitimizes the poisonous lies of the Palestinians and, as a result, empowers terrorists to continue in their murderous ways.

The Temple Mount holds an unmatched place in my people’s ancient heritage. It is the spot upon which the Ark of the Covenant held Moses’s Ten Commandments and where God resided. The status quo maintains that Jews may visit the site, and it is the right of every Jew to do so. According to Jewish tradition, we believe that

the Temple Mount will one day be a place of peace and coexistence. As Isaiah prophesized in the name of God,

“Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.” (*The Holy Bible, Isaiah 56:7*)

While, sadly, the Temple Mount is not yet a house of prayer for all nations, it is still the right of every Jew, no matter what title they hold, to at least visit that holiest of holy spots. Jews will continue visiting the Temple Mount, and whoever believes in tolerance and co-existence should support that.

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

Mr. Hmoud (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the friendly State of Japan on its membership of the Security Council and its assumption of its presidency for the current month, while wishing it success in its membership of the Council during the next two years and in facilitating its work for this month. I would also like to thank the sisterly United Arab Emirates, China, France and Malta for supporting the request to hold this emergency meeting. We also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political Affairs, Peacebuilding and Peace Operations, Mr. Khaled Khiari, for his briefing to the Council.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan condemns in the strongest terms the storming of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif by the Minister of Internal Security on the morning of 3 January under the protection of the Israeli occupation forces. We emphasize that the storming of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque and the violation of its sanctity constitute a provocative, rejected and condemned step that represents a flagrant violation of international law and the legal and historical status quo in the city of Jerusalem and its holy sites. They threaten further escalation and represent a dangerous trend that the Security Council and the international community must work to stop.

In that context, we stress the position of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan that rejects any measures aimed at changing the legal and historical status quo in Jerusalem, and the need to returning to the status quo that existed before the year 2000, in order to ensure that the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, with

its entire area of 144 acres, is a pure place of worship for Muslims. The Jordanian Department of Endowments of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs is the legal authority with exclusive jurisdiction to manage all the affairs of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and regulate access to it. We also emphasize that Israel, the occupying Power, must comply with its commitments under international law, in particular international humanitarian law regarding the occupied city of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also emphasize the Hashemite custodianship over the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and the Kingdom's efforts, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II, to protect the holy sites and preserve their Arab, Islamic and Christian identity.

Israel claims that the storming by Minister of Internal Security Ben-Gvir is only a visit to the compound and that the visit does not contradict the historical status quo. That claim is far from true, given Ben-Gvir's past raids, history and statements about Al-Haram Al-Sharif. In any case, the Ben-Gvir storming took place without the approval of the Jerusalem Awqaf Administration, the body legally responsible for administering Al-Haram Al-Sharif and regulating access to it. That in itself is a violation of the role undertaken by the Awqaf Administration and the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which is recognized by Israel. Consequently, that constitutes a violation of the historical status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The storming of Al-Haram Al-Sharif by one of the ministers of the Israeli Government is a violation of the legal commitments of Israel pursuant to international law, including the provisions of The Hague Conventions of 1907 and The Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property during the Armed Conflict of 1954, in addition to violating the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 672 (1990) and resolution 1322 (2000), which was adopted by the Council in response to storming Al-Haram Al-Sharif by former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2000.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan also warns of the dangerous consequences of any unilateral Israeli measures aimed at imposing new facts on the ground, such as the annexation of territory, the expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, the violation of holy sites in Jerusalem and the demolition of homes, which would push the entire region towards further tension and escalation.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan stresses the need to find a political horizon to relaunch serious and effective negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides to achieve a peace that ensures rights and is accepted by the people. We also stress that the question of Palestine was, and will remain, the primary, central Arab cause and that the two-State solution — which embodies the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State with occupied Jerusalem as its capital, along the 4 June 1967 borders, and in accordance with international law, the agreed terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative — is the strategic option agreed upon by the international community as the only way to achieve a just and comprehensive peace.

(spoke in English)

I must respond to what the Israeli Permanent Representative just said about Jordan's "occupation" of the West Bank. Jordan has never occupied the West Bank or East Jerusalem. Jordan was unified in 1950, between the east and west banks of the River Jordan. That unification enabled the Palestinians' exercise of their right to self-determination by putting half of the West Bank under the Jordanian Government. It effectively enabled the Palestinians' exercise of their right to self-determination — until, and in accordance with the declaration of unity, an independent Palestinian State can be established. The Israeli representative expressed a falsehood here, which unfortunately is being repeated by some members of the international community without being challenged in any way. At the heart of it is the fact that it was intended to enable the exercise of Palestinians' right to self-determination. In the light of that, it was the context of the occupation of the West Bank in 1967 that gave rise to all of Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law, including regarding how the holy sites are to be treated. It is not a matter of Israel "granting" something with regard to the historic holy sites. The historical status quo is part of international law and part of Israel's obligations as an occupying Power. It is not something that can be granted. The 1954 Convention makes it mandatory for Israel to allow the Department of the Jerusalem Awqaf to regulate access into and outside Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

It is therefore not a matter of Israel granting something, as its representative said; it is a right under international law for the Palestinians and for Jordan's Awqaf Department to administer, which Israel continues to violate.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.