



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9246th meeting

Wednesday, 18 January 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Ishikane (Japan)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. Costa Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Ms. Bongo
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 . .	Mr. Eckersley
United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.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 Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Türkiye 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. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Hameed Ajibaiye Opeloyeru, Permanent Observer at the Observer Mission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the United Nations; and His Excellency Mr. Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: As a new year begins, a dangerous cycle of violence persists on the ground, amid increased political tension and a stalled peace process. The violent trends that dominated the last months of

2022 continue to take a devastating human toll. The violence must stop. Preventing more loss of life and reversing negative trends on the ground must be our collective priority. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the ultimate goal: to end the occupation, resolve the conflict and realize a two-State solution.

Since my previous briefing (see S/PV.9203), a new Israeli Government has been sworn in. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Prime Minister Netanyahu. I look forward to continuing to work closely with the Government of Israel.

Despite the complex challenges, I reiterate the United Nations commitment to supporting Israelis and Palestinians to achieve sustainable peace. The United Nations and its partners have been, and continue to be, engaged in efforts to improve the situation on the ground. I urge all sides to reduce tensions and take concrete steps towards establishing a political horizon in line with the priorities I outlined to the Security Council in November.

In total, between 8 December and 13 January, 14 Palestinians, including five children, were killed and 117 Palestinians, including three women and 18 children, were injured by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis and other incidents. Israeli settlers or other civilians perpetrated 63 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in 28 injuries, including six children, and/or damage to Palestinian property.

According to Israeli sources, five Israeli civilians, including three women, and four Israeli security forces personnel were injured by Palestinians in attacks, clashes, the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails and other incidents. In total, Palestinians perpetrated some 89 attacks against Israeli civilians, resulting in injuries and/or damage to Israeli property, 57 of which were stone-throwing incidents.

A high proportion of Palestinian casualties occurred during Israeli search-and-arrest operations, including in Area A of the occupied West Bank, many of which included armed exchanges. In total, such operations resulted in 10 Palestinian fatalities, including three children, and 86 injuries, as well as injury to three members of the Israeli security forces during the reporting period.

Casualties remained concentrated in the northern West Bank, particularly in Jenin governorate. Those included three Palestinians killed on 8 December during a search-and-arrest operation that involved an exchange of fire between Palestinians and Israeli security forces; a 15-year-old girl who was killed during a search-and-arrest operation in the Jenin refugee camp on 11 December; two Palestinians, including a 17-year-old boy, killed in an exchange of fire with Israeli security forces in the context of a punitive demolition in Kafr Dan village on 2 January; and, finally, on 12 January, two Palestinians killed during a military operation in Qabatiya, in which armed exchanges were reported.

Violence continued to affect children, with five Palestinian children killed during the reporting period. On 8 December, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 16-year-old boy in the Aboud community, near Ramallah, as he and four others were apparently preparing to throw stones and paint at Israeli vehicles. On 3 January, a 15-year-old boy was killed by Israeli security forces in the Duheisha refugee camp in Bethlehem; Palestinians threw stones and Molotov cocktails towards Israeli security forces, and the boy was reportedly lighting a Molotov cocktail at the time he was shot. On 5 January, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian during an arrest operation in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus. The boy was apparently caught in an armed exchange between Israeli security forces and armed Palestinians.

Settler-related violence also continued during the reporting period. On 16 December, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy was assaulted and injured when a group of settlers — reportedly from the Yitzhar settlement — entered Madama village near Nablus and attacked Palestinian houses and vehicles with stones.

On 11 January, an 18-year-old Palestinian stabbed and injured an Israeli civilian near the settlement outpost of Havat Yehuda, in the South Hebron Hills. The Palestinian was subsequently shot and killed by an armed Israeli.

On 13 January, a group of Israeli settlers attacked a group of Palestinians and foreign nationals who were hiking near Jericho, according to eyewitness accounts and video footage from the incident. Two women were reportedly injured.

I reiterate that perpetrators of all acts of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice. Security forces must exercise maximum restraint and

use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. I am particularly appalled that children continue to be the victims of violence. Children must never be the targets of violence or put in harm's way.

Turning to settlement-related developments, on 2 January, the Israeli Government informed the High Court of Justice that it intends to legalize, under Israeli law, the outpost of Homesh by repealing part of the 2005 disengagement law. Built on private Palestinian land, the outpost consists of a religious school and was previously a settlement that was demolished under the 2005 law. On the same day, the Court issued a decision giving the State 90 days to explain why the outpost should not be evacuated and the Palestinian rights holders not allowed to exercise their rights. I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned property remain a serious concern. During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 126 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and seven in occupied East Jerusalem, displacing 127 Palestinians, including 60 children. The demolitions were carried out due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

We have also seen several additional concerning developments in Jerusalem. On 27 December, Israeli settlers accompanied by Israeli security forces forcibly took control of a parcel of agricultural land that a Palestinian family has leased from the Greek Orthodox Church since 1931 in the Silwan area of occupied East Jerusalem. Israeli forces arrested at least five Palestinians protesting the takeover. The settlers maintain that they purchased the land from the Greek Orthodox Church, in a deal the Church rejected as fraudulent.

On 1 January, in a despicable act, some 30 gravestones were desecrated at the protestant cemetery on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Jerusalem's Anglican Archbishop called it a "clear hate crime", while Israel's Foreign Ministry called the attack "an affront to religion." On 6 January, two Israelis, aged 14 and 18, were arrested for the act, and, according to a statement issued by Israeli police following an investigation, a formal indictment is expected.

As outlined during our 5 January Council briefing (see S/PV.9236), on 3 January, Israel's new Minister for

National Security conducted a visit to the Holy Sites in Jerusalem. The visit was condemned by the Palestinian Authority and Jordanian officials, among others, who said it was a provocation and violation of the status quo. Following the visit, senior Israeli officials, including the Prime Minister's Office, reaffirmed that the Government is committed to upholding the status quo and stated that the visit did not represent a deviation from it. 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.

On 30 December 2022, the General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled "Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem" (General Assembly resolution 77/247), which includes a request to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion relating to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. In response, on 6 January, the Israeli security cabinet approved a series of measures against the Palestinian Authority, including the transfer of approximately \$39 million in withheld tax revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to the families of Israelis killed in Palestinian attacks. On 8 January, the Israeli Finance Minister instructed the tax authorities to implement the withholding of Palestinian tax funds to pay for those damages. I am seriously concerned about the impact of such measures on the PA's financial situation.

Also on 8 January, Israel's National Security Minister issued a directive to the Israeli police to increase the enforcement of the removal of Palestinian flags from public spaces in Israel and occupied East Jerusalem.

On 16 January, a statement was issued with 39 Member States as signatories, reconfirming support for the International Court of Justice, international law and multilateralism and noting deep concern regarding the Israeli Government's decision to impose punitive measures following the request by the General Assembly to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion.

Turning to the Gaza Strip, the United Nations continued to deliver vital humanitarian and development assistance. I also continue to engage in diplomatic efforts to further ease restrictions on the movement of

people and goods into and out of Gaza. Despite those efforts, the socioeconomic situation remains a grave concern, with access restrictions continuing to impact the delivery of assistance. Currently, approximately 300 staff of the United Nations and implementing partners have either been denied or not yet received a response to their permit applications. The reporting period witnessed an increase of nearly 500 economic needs permits — to more than 16,000 — while the number of trader and businessmen permits remained largely consistent.

On 30 December, Israel resumed the exit of fish from Gaza to the West Bank. I welcome the resolution of the issue and the lifting of the exit ban, which had been in place since 7 November. While continued progress in those areas is vital, humanitarian or economic support alone will resolve neither the situation in Gaza nor the broader conflict. Political solutions are required. There are no quick fixes. The ultimate goal remains to fully lift the closures in line with resolution 1860 (2009) and reunite Gaza and the occupied West Bank under a single, legitimate Palestinian national authority, as an integral part of a two-State solution.

Turning briefly to the region, in the Golan, the ceasefire between Israel and Syria was generally maintained despite continued violations by both parties of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement of Forces. It remains important for the parties to respect their obligations under the terms of the Agreement and prevent risks of escalation.

Lebanon remains without a President and with a caretaker Government. Meanwhile, the situation along the Blue Line remains calm, without any major incidents. The United Nations is following up with Lebanese authorities regarding the incident in December that resulted in the death of one peacekeeper of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and injuries to three others.

On 9 and 10 January, senior officials from Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates and the United States gathered in Abu Dhabi for the inaugural meeting of the Negev Forum working groups. During the gathering, the Negev Forum regional cooperation framework was released, in which participants affirmed, inter alia, that the new regional relationships can be harnessed to create momentum in Israeli-Palestinian relations towards a negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israelis and Palestinians remain today on a collision course amid escalating political and inflammatory rhetoric as well as heightened violence in the West Bank, both with potentially grave consequences. Courageous political leadership is urgently required to generate the momentum necessary to transform the current dynamic. It is imperative that both sides refrain from provocations and unilateral steps — including at the Holy Sites in Jerusalem — that undermine stability and the ability to achieve a negotiated peace.

I reiterate my call from November for immediate concrete steps towards reversing negative trends on the ground, strengthening the Palestinian Authority and improving access and movement for Palestinians, while ensuring the necessary space for Palestinian economic activity.

Absent a concerted and collective effort by all, with strong support from the international community, spoilers and extremists will continue to pour more fuel on the fire and we will move still further from a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting an end to the occupation and establishing a two-State solution, with an independent and sovereign Palestinian State based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, in line with United Nations resolutions, and international law and bilateral agreements.

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

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, allow me to commend Japan for its presidency, and notably for convening a ministerial debate on the rule of law (see S/PV.9241), as well as to thank you, Sir, for convening this important meeting.

I would also like to warmly welcome and congratulate the new members of the Security Council — Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland — as well as to pledge our support as they uphold their duties under the Charter of the United Nations. I also bid farewell and express our deep appreciation to India, Ireland, Mexico, Norway and Kenya. The five incoming members are friends, as are the departing members.

Allow me to also thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

Peace is still possible. I do not say that lightly but with a heavy heart, as Palestinians are killed every day. The year is two weeks old and already 15 Palestinians have been killed, including four children. And yet I say it again, peace is still possible. It is less probable every day, but it is still possible. Our reality is not fatal; it can be altered — but only if the Council and the international community are ready to undertake immediate, sustained and collective action, grounded in international law, to achieve it. There is a choice to be made, and it cannot be delayed any further. Inaction is, was and will always be the wrong choice. When in doubt, consult the situation on the ground. The reality there tells you where inaction leads.

We face the absurd situation where impunity is enjoyed by those who violate the law and collective punishment is endured by those entitled to its protection. Israel considers that the world cannot hold it accountable for its illegal unilateral actions, and yet it allows itself to punish us for resorting to legitimate multilateral mechanisms.

The latest example was Israel's decision, in response to a resolution by the General Assembly requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice, to impose sanctions on the Palestinian people, civil society and leadership. The action we took was our democratic right, to go to the Assembly and to seek — in a peaceful, civilized and legal way — to secure the endorsement of the majority of the Assembly for a resolution to ask the Court for an advisory opinion. What happened to us and to our friends? Punishment.

Nevertheless, over 100 countries — and the number is increasing by the hour — including through a joint statement, expressed their rejection and called for the reversal of those punitive measures that strike at the heart of multilateralism and of the international law-based order. The Secretary-General also expressed a clear stance against retaliation for resorting to the International Court of Justice. I trust that many Council and non-Council members will express a similar position during our debate today.

The Israeli representative said “Palestinians weaponize international institutions in their jihad war against the Jewish State” (S/PV.9236, p.15). That is martial and inflammatory rhetoric, inciting dangerous religious conflict. Israeli officials have spoken of an act

of “political terrorism”, adding, with regard to the joint statement rejecting the punitive measures, “[t]his is a meaningless declarative statement, and every country that signed it only added fuel to the fire of Palestinian incitement and terror”. This is the most absurd trial on earth, in which the victim is punished, and the witness is accused by the perpetrator, who is claiming to be the victim.

That is not an isolated incident. It is part of a long tradition. Netanyahu said, after the opening of the investigation by the International Criminal Court, “[w]hen the International Criminal Court investigates Israel for fake war crimes — this is pure antisemitism”, adding that, “we will fight this perversion of justice with all our might”.

In 2016, when the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), the former Israeli representative said that the resolution was a victory for terror, calling it an “evil decree” (*S/PV.7853, p.15*). Israeli representatives live in a parallel dimension, where the entire world is wrong, and they are right. They have called the United Nations morally bankrupt. They have blasted countries that voted for draft resolutions relating to Palestine, from their closest allies to their proclaimed enemies, without distinction. They show no respect, consideration or regard for anyone and yet demand them from everyone, even when breaching the most fundamental rules of international law. They say that they will not tolerate any pressure, but have no problem bullying countries publicly and privately. The previous and current Prime Ministers are proud that they contacted 50 Heads of State and Government to pressure them not to vote for a draft resolution on a referral to the International Court of Justice and not to sign the statement rejecting pressure and punishment against the Palestinian people.

Where does the problem lie? Is it in the positions that Council members express, as Israel says, or is it in the impunity that Israel enjoys? Could Israel act this way if any Israeli official had been held accountable for any of its actions? Who has been held accountable for the forcible displacement of Palestinians over past decades? Who has been held accountable for Israeli settlements? Who has been held accountable for the killing and maiming of Palestinians, including children? Who has been held accountable for its mass arbitrary arrests of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and for withholding, to this day, hundreds of bodies of Palestinians, depriving their families of the ability to

bury their loved ones in dignity, sometimes for decades? Give me one name, any name. Israel should know that its actions dictate the Council’s reactions. Israel should renounce colonial occupation to abide by the law, not expect the world to renounce its rules and principles to accommodate its colonial occupation.

We decided at the end of the Second World War to build an international law-based order, when all of us, the international community, founded the United Nations. We have enacted rules, which are not directed against anyone, but for the benefit of all, so as to advance a more just and peaceful world. At the heart of our international law-based order lie two cardinal principles: the right of peoples to self-determination and the inadmissibility of the acquisition of land by force. Palestine exemplifies the denial of the former and the breach of the latter. The first step towards upholding those principles and addressing their breach is to put an end to the illegal unilateral measures, notably in Jerusalem, including those aimed at undermining the historic status quo and the Hashemite custodianship.

The Israeli Government is saying openly what it intends to do and is acting on it. Its programme is to advance settlements and annexation — they are not hiding it, look at the website of Prime Minister Netanyahu — systemic discrimination and oppression. It does not recognize our rights anywhere and proclaims rights for its settlers everywhere. Israel has often denied not only our rights, but our very existence as a nation. Israel’s ban on the display of the Palestinian flag in public spaces is the latest manifestation of that denial.

The Palestinian flag floats here in front of the United Nations and inside the building between the General Assembly and the Security Council. It is raised by millions of people in every corner of the globe, as we can see at soccer matches in Doha, Ireland, Scotland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Brazil, Argentina and Chile, among many others. And it will continue to fly in the sky above Palestine, no matter what laws and rules Israel enacts. That is a peaceful action by people to honour and respect their national flag. And we appreciate the global support by those who raise our flag everywhere, showing their solidarity with the Palestinian people and supporting their rights. Israel still believes that there is a path to peace by crushing the Palestinians. If such a path could be found, Israel would have found it by now. Peace will not come from denying our existence. It will come from the recognition of our plight and rights.

Peace is still possible — less probable every single day, but still possible. Whatever leverage Council members have, whatever tools are at their disposal and whatever influence they enjoy, they must be used now, or later it will no longer matter. Peace is still possible if members stand up to supremacists, reward ending occupation, ensure accountability for annexation, recognize the State of Palestine and reject the State of the settlers in the occupied territory. I urge members to do it now for everybody's sake.

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

Mr. Erdan (Israel): What we have just witnessed is, as always, an act — an Academy-Award-winning act of false victimization. In both his letter that he sent out just yesterday — as he has done many times before because he does not want us to be able to check the facts — and his searing performance today, the Palestinian representative painted a picture of victimhood, spinning tales of unprovoked acts of violence and brutality and of how harmless and innocent United Nations resolutions have brought about swift and severe consequences from Israel's side, of course. Yet this charade is a performance of lies. It is a complete falsification of facts and a distortion of reality.

It is time for the Council to hear the truth, and I will explain it clearly. Over and over again, we have heard how the past year has been the deadliest year for Palestinians. We have heard it from both the Palestinian representative and from Mr. Wennesland, and we have read it in numerous United Nations reports. Yet these numbers and statistics are not facts, nor are they even close to being factual. They are based on a fundamentally flawed and biased methodology — a methodology of discrimination that Israel refuses to accept because it discriminates against Israeli victims while exaggerating Palestinian numbers. I have personally made this point very clear to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as to other official United Nations bodies.

When compiling these distorted statistics and false data, the United Nations takes every Palestinian claim of death and injury at face value. No investigations or fact-checking is done, and no steps to verify the truth are taken. The claims are just accepted as is. Additionally, these reports and numbers lack any context whatsoever, and the context is what makes the difference. The

result is a compilation of lies and half-truths that tell a fabricated tale.

Let me explain what I mean. In his letter dated 17 January 2023 to the President of the Security Council, the Palestinian representative told the story of, for example, Hamdi Shaker Abu Dayyeh, who was supposedly shot and killed in cold blood. Yet what my colleague forgot to mention was that Hamdi, a terrorist whom Hamas posthumously glorified, was an imminent threat. Hamdi was actively shooting at soldiers in the moment when he was killed, and this occurred only one day after he had opened fire on an Israeli bus. Or how about Mr. Ahmad Kahla, who was also mentioned in the Palestinian's letter yesterday? According to the letter, Ahmad was shot execution-style by soldiers. But what was Ahmad doing in the moments before he was shot? He was actively trying to grapple with a soldier in an attempt to steal his weapon.

Hamdi and Ahmed are no chance examples. The vast majority of Palestinian fatalities and casualties are not innocent civilians minding their own business. They are terrorists, neutralized during acts of violence. Now do Council members see why context is crucial? When only half of a story is told, it is not a half-truth that is created, but rather a full lie.

But the fabrications of statistics tragically do not end with that. While Palestinian casualties are distorted and grossly overreported, including momentary injuries such as those triggered by the use of tear gas, Israeli deaths and injuries at the hands of Palestinian terrorists are grossly underreported and ignored. According to the United Nations report presented today, only 20 Israelis were murdered by terrorists in 2022, when, in reality, 31 Israelis were murdered. The same goes for injured Israelis. The United Nations number is 253 injured Israelis, whereas the true number is 418. Discrepancy between the reports and the facts are in the hundreds. Israeli deaths and injuries supposedly do not matter. So, the true number, which the Security Council does not receive, paints an entirely different picture of what is actually happening on the ground.

This may have been the deadliest year, but only for Palestinian terrorists, and it was clearly the year with the most terror attacks committed against Israelis and Israeli casualties in a decade. I invite everybody to check every word that I have said. From 1 January 2022 until 31 December 2022, there were 5,434 terror attacks carried out against Israelis, 418 people were injured and

31 people were murdered. Even in the first two weeks of 2023 alone, 22 Palestinian terror attacks have already been committed against Israelis.

What the Council has heard is clear discrimination and blatant lies, and that is the information that it is fed before every meeting. Israel does not have a shred of faith in these reports, and I want to make it clear that, from this meeting onwards, I will dedicate most of my speeches to uncovering the falsehoods and distortions in the Palestinians' libelous claims. I will share the facts with the Council. Therefore, to the Palestinian representative, who appears to have left the Chamber, I say: save your false cries of victimhood. From now on I will use these debates to unmask your lies in front of the world.

But the so-called violence and brutality was not the only deception I wish to disprove today. There is another slanderous lie that must be addressed. Over recent days, the international community has once again been co-opted by the Palestinians into supporting another misleading and harmful statement. According to the Palestinians' distortion of the facts, an innocent, non-toxic resolution was adopted in the General Assembly, which only requests a non-biased advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (General Assembly resolution 77/247). Yet, without provocation, Israel suddenly decided to implement unilateral measures. That could not be further from the truth. The only unilateral measure taken was the one-sided drafting of such a poisonous and destructive resolution in the first place.

The facts are simple, and I assume Council members remember them. The toxic General Assembly resolution 77/247 is merely one of over a dozen anti-Israel resolutions adopted every single year. It is no secret that it is the Palestinians who are behind these biased resolutions. They concoct the ideas, pen the drafts and conspire to pass these resolutions with the help of the politicized automatic majority of the United Nations against Israel. This is the foundation of the institutionalized bias against Israel at the United Nations.

In a year in which a war is raging in Europe, in which Iran, while murdering and executing protesters, is on the verge of becoming a nuclear Power, in which North Korea test-launched a record number of missiles and in which rogue regimes and terror groups continue to wreak havoc all over the world, this institution saw

fit to adopt 15 condemnatory resolutions singling Israel out. Do members know how many condemnatory resolutions were adopted against the rest of the world combined? It was a total of 13. There were therefore more resolutions targeting Israel than the entire rest of the world combined. No one can dare tell me that there is no institutionalized bias against Israel at the United Nations.

To return to the International Court of Justice resolution, this resolution was not just another step by the Palestinians towards resolving the conflict. It was a clear unilateral step initiated by the Palestinians with the sole purpose of destroying Israel as the Jewish State. But this is not news. Destroying the Jewish State has always been the Palestinians' only goal, and they aim to do so by any and every means. They have been trying to achieve this since — and even before — the founding of the State of Israel, and they continue to try and achieve this objective today.

One of the weapons that they use in this jihad war is the manipulation and abuse of international bodies. They weaponize these bodies in order to force Israel into surrendering to their demands — to 100 per cent of their demands. But when faced with such a threat, Israel will not remain idle at the sidelines. From their endless incitement and funding for terror to the glorification of terrorists and constant rejectionism, the Palestinians are clearly not interested in peace, dialogue or negotiations. They are interested only in using any kind of terror to erase the Jewish State from existence.

Yet, terror comes in many forms. At its core, terrorism is a means by which to scare people into capitulating to demands. This can be achieved through physical acts of violent terror, but it can also be achieved in other ways. The Palestinians have mastered another terror tactic: by manipulating and weaponizing international organizations, the Palestinians aim to force Israel to give into all of their demands. That is multilateral terror. The Palestinians have co-opted the biased anti-Israel majority at the Human Rights Council — another example — to dedicate one third of its commissions of inquiry into investigating Israel. The Palestinians have also added the International Criminal Court to their arsenal of multilateral terror weapons, and now General Assembly resolution 77/247 to manipulate the International Court of Justice is the most recent example of their multilateral terror, which is part of a carefully planned strategy. It is a unilateral step to use multilateral terror.

Let us not forget that, while addressing the General Assembly in September 2021 (see A/76/PV.12), President Abbas brazenly threatened Israel on the global stage. In the same vein of consistent Palestinian rejectionism, he set forward an ultimatum: either Israel gives in to 100 per cent of the Palestinians' demands — forget negotiations or mutual concessions — or he will turn to the United Nations in order to abuse the power of the International Court of Justice. If threatening Israel with an ultimatum is not a unilateral step, then I do not know what is. One year later, President Abbas followed through with his threat. He exploited the politicized anti-Israel majority of the United Nations to adopt a resolution representing the epitome of unilateral measures. It is only necessary to read resolution 77/247 to understand what I mean. Not only does it ignore Palestinian incitement and terror and Hamas' control over Gaza, but it is also worded in such a way that Israel's guilt has been predetermined. All that is left for the International Court of Justice to do is decide the severity of the punishment.

Moreover, there were no substantial or real negotiations on that General Assembly resolution, as members are all aware. Just as the Palestinians presented Israel with an ultimatum, the resolution was presented to the international community as a fact. The resolution was accepted and the vote was held. The automatic anti-Israel majority was exploited and the destructive resolution was adopted. That is how the Palestinians succeeded in manipulating and weaponizing the International Court of Justice in their jihad war of multilateral terror against Israel.

When Israel is faced with a threat of terror, Israel acts to defend itself, as any country would. Therefore, when we were faced with the Palestinians' latest one-sided act of multilateral terror, we refused to stand idly by. Each measure that was taken by Israel in response to the destructive General Assembly resolution was not only justified and legal but also should have been taken a long time ago. For example, offsetting funds paid to terrorists by the Palestinian Authority — their "pay to slay" — is a law in Israel and understandably so. It is not a new law but part of the justified strategy to fight terrorism and any incentives to terrorism.

Nevertheless, the only reason Israel held off on implementing those measures was because we did not want to harm the chances for dialogue. Yet, with the adoption of General Assembly resolution 77/247, the Palestinians stabbed any chances for dialogue or

reconciliation in the heart with a knife. They proved that they are not interested in dialogue. I would like to recall that I warned Member States of that during the vote on the resolution (see A/77/PV.56). I said in the Fourth Committee that unilateral steps would be met by unilateral steps and that Israel must defend itself against those threats.

Despite the disproportionate focus on demonizing Israel and singling us out, Israel is absolutely not the root of the conflict. The only thing that has ever impeded a solution has been the Palestinians' constant rejectionism. Lies are already being spread against Israel's new Government, but we must all remember that every peace plan ever presented — no matter by which Government or American Administration, right-wing or left-wing, Republican or Democrat, Clinton or Trump — has always been rejected by the Palestinians.

Each and every Member State that chooses to support the Palestinians and their one-sided, biased resolutions and statements against Israel must remember that supporting Palestinian lies serves only to further escalate and inflame the situation on the ground. By supporting those falsehoods, they prove to the Palestinians that unilateral measures and their continued rejectionism work. When they strengthen the Palestinians' resolve here on the global stage, their will to continue on the path of incitement and violence is also being strengthened. They continue calling for the murder of Israelis. They continue to glorify terrorists and they continue to pay funds to killers. Then, after all the hatred and bloodshed, they show up here at the Security Council and put on a show, playing the victim.

I have a message for the Palestinian representative: his charade is up. I see right through his lies and, soon enough, so will the entire Council.

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

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

The United States looks forward to working with the new Israeli Government to advance the interests and values that have been at the heart of our relationship for decades. We also look forward to continuing to improve ties with the Palestinian people and leadership. As I have said repeatedly, the United States remains firmly committed to a two-State solution. Two States

living side by side in peace and security is the best way to ensure equal measures of freedom, prosperity and democracy for Israelis and Palestinians. Such a peace can be achieved only through direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. Divisive actions by both sides will only drive the parties further apart.

Efforts are best focused on de-escalating tensions. Such de-escalation is badly needed now as much as ever. We are very concerned by the situation in the West Bank and the potential for further instability. We condemn recent terrorist acts in the West Bank and remain deeply troubled by the number of casualties, which only seems to be increasing. Urgent tangible measures must be taken to prevent further loss of life and to facilitate increased economic growth. Let me be clear: we continue to oppose unilateral actions that endanger stability and the viability of a two-State solution. Such actions include those that threaten the historic status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount; settlement-building and the legalization of outposts; and annexation, acts of terrorism and incitement. The United States will also continue to promote the protection of fundamental rights and democratic values, including the freedom of expression.

Despite the region's serious challenges, there is also cause for optimism — for example, last week's meeting of the Negev Forum working group in Abu Dhabi brought together 150 representatives from across the Middle East to expand and deepen normalization. It was the largest gathering of Israeli and Arab Government officials since the Madrid Conference held in 1991 and presented a real opportunity to bolster security, peace and economic prosperity for all the peoples of the region. We will continue to find ways to engage the outcomes of the Negev Forum to tangibly improve Palestinian lives. We agree with the Special Coordinator's point that the Forum could provide new avenues for advancing the Israeli-Palestinian track. I would also like to urge the return of two captive Israelis, held in Gaza, and the remains of others, including those of the Goldin family, to help alleviate their pain.

In conclusion, I urge member States to work with us to strengthen the long-standing financial stability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. That means increasing financial contributions to an organization that is a critical lifeline for Palestinians, helps Palestinians cope with ever-rising food prices and ensures that Palestinian refugees can receive education and proper health care.

This is a delicate moment for the future of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Let us do everything in our power to reduce tensions and keep alive the hope of the two-State solution. Let us do everything in our power to advance regional peace and integration, and let us do everything in our power to support the region's most vulnerable.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Albania remains troubled by the continued deterioration of the security situation — a trend that has, unfortunately, continued during this month. The continued casualties in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as in Israel, are extremely troubling. We call on both sides to reverse that dreadful trend and to always protect the lives of civilians.

It is unfortunate to note that violence and the shrinking space for a political horizon are mutually reinforcing. They are communicating vessels that open the gates for a further escalation and explosion of violence. Therefore, we see an urgent need to revive the political process and break the cycle of violence and terror. We deplore all loss of life, especially of women and children. All such acts should be properly investigated.

We strongly support the legitimate right of Israel to defend itself, in line with international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians. We strongly condemn all acts of terrorism against Israel and its people. No cause whatsoever can justify terrorism, and it must always be condemned by all.

We also remain deeply concerned about the spread of hatred and condemn all forms of inflammatory rhetoric and incitement to violence. Let us not forget that violence starts in the minds of people. It only breeds more violence in an endless cycle that leads to the explosion of bullets and bombs. That is why it is of paramount importance to tackle the colonization of minds by hate and violent thoughts. We all know that no peace has ever been built with hate speech, incitement to violence or inflammatory rhetoric.

The United Nations has built the legal framework for a lasting and just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we in the Council have a special responsibility to do everything possible to bring the parties together and create the conditions for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We have said it many times

in the Chamber. Provocations and unilateral measures are steps that take the parties and all of us in the wrong direction. They are counterproductive and do not contribute to the easing of tensions so as to allow for a political horizon to emerge. In that respect, we express our concern about the continued expansion of settlements. They are wrong, go against international law and undermine the international efforts to create the conditions to arrive at a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

We reiterate the crucial importance of preserving the status quo of the holy sites and honouring agreements among the parties. We acknowledge the crucial custodian role of the Kingdom of Jordan in preserving peace at the holy sites.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the absolute need for reviving hope. The thirtieth anniversary of the Oslo Accords should be a reminder that peace is possible, and that peace is the only way forward. I reaffirm Albania's full support for the two-State solution, articulated endlessly in the Chamber, with Jerusalem as a shared capital. In our view, that is the only way to ensure that both Israelis and Palestinians live in peace and security, with full and equal rights. Any deviation from that path would lead only to continued insecurity and instability, violence and terror, and conflict and fighting — something that Palestinians and Israelis have seen enough of, and indeed, too much of. It is something that the world has been witnessing for more than seven decades and that is, by all accounts, unsustainable.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I join others in thanking Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing on the overall situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and welcome, in that regard, the briefing on the detailed measures being taken to restore calm in observed hotspots and to activate processes towards the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We also welcome the participation of the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel in today's meeting.

We note that, while the Israeli Government could still contribute to stability in the Middle East, some of its early actions have given cause for concern regarding the prospects for peace, especially as it relates to the two-State solution. Since 28 December 2022, we have been concerned about evolving developments,

including: first, the pledge to annex the occupied West Bank as part of the priority to “advance and develop settlement in all parts of the land of Israel”; secondly, the ban imposed on Palestinian flags in public spaces on 7 January and the attempt to associate national symbols of the Palestinian people with terrorism; thirdly, the restrictions placed on the movement of Palestinian Authority (PA) officials, including the suspension of the travel permit of Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Al-Malki and three other high officials of the PA; and fourthly, the seizure of Palestinian tax revenue.

We know that the price to be paid for peace is usually high, but the cost of conflict is not worth finding out. We therefore hope that the Government of Israel would see beyond short-term national considerations and invest the needed time and effort in restoring trust with the Palestinian Authority for sustainable peace, while building upon past initiatives and seeking new possibilities.

Peace is, however, not a one-way activity. The Palestinian Authority, for its part, needs to work with Israel and, indeed, all other actors across the Palestinian nation to control the unauthorized use of violence by armed and militant groups, whose actions do not serve the cause of peace nor the ultimate aspiration of Palestinian statehood. We urge all militant groups to channel their energies towards a robust political process that can deliver the much-needed peace.

Over the years, the State of Israel has tried endlessly to burnish its democracy, good governance and rule of law in the Middle East and, therefore, when its policies and practices veer off global expectations, it creates great disappointment, regardless of the imperatives. We hope that its institutions will continue to be strengthened and their independence guaranteed. We also hope that in pursuing its security concerns, the State of Israel will be mindful of its obligations under international law concerning the near-daily raids that have led to the arrest of hundreds of Palestinians, the demolition of several Palestinian homes and properties and the increasing incidence of human rights abuses, violations and detentions, without charge or trial, against Palestinians, especially in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

As we have stated in the past, we are deeply concerned about the interminable cycle of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and believe that a

varied and international law-compliant approach is required in addressing the security concerns of Israel. We are equally concerned about the acts of terrorism perpetrated against Israel and its citizens. We remind the parties of their obligations under international law and several resolutions of the Council and urge them to refrain from unilateral actions that obstruct and undermine efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive and just settlement of the decades-old conflict.

We continue to be concerned about the plight of the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza, and reaffirm our support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in providing much-needed humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, Ghana reaffirms its belief that the path for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East continues to be through the 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 the Palestinian State. We reiterate our commitment to supporting a meaningful peace process that can eventually provide the framework for a peaceful and prosperous Middle East.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

The year 2023 has barely begun and the occupied Palestinian territory has already seen one negative development after another, moving further away from peace and stability. That is yet another warning that what we are facing is not a pool of still water, but rather a volcano that may erupt at any time.

At present, only with rock-firm political will, urgent and decisive diplomacy, and collective efforts by the entire international community, including the Security Council, can we prevent the Palestinian-Israeli situation from spinning completely out of control.

First, we must earnestly safeguard the historical status quo of holy sites in Jerusalem. The collective feelings of religious believers are attached to the holy sites. The multiple incidents of bloodshed that have taken place there speak to a level of sensitivity that simply cannot be ignored.

Earlier this month, the visit by an Israeli Government official to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound heightened tensions and triggered widespread concern. An emergency meeting of the Council was called at the

request of China and the United Arab Emirates (see S/PV.9236). Our position remains clear: we must act as required by Security Council and General Assembly resolutions to effectively safeguard the historical status quo of holy sites in Jerusalem and earnestly respect Jordan's custodianship over the holy sites. All parties concerned should remain calm and exercise restraint. Israel in particular should stop all acts of incitement and provocation.

Secondly, unilateral measures that exacerbate disputes and tensions must immediately be put to an end. We note with concern Israel's recent announcement of a series of punitive measures against Palestine, including withholding tax revenues and suspending the issuance of building permits. Those measures not only target the Palestinian Authority, but also will send shock waves across the wider Palestinian population and civil society. The relevant measures run counter to the international community's efforts to strengthen the authority of the Palestinian Authority, improve the Palestinian economic situation, bolster the development of Palestinian communities in the West Bank and support the role of civil society organizations. Bullying will only serve to further exacerbate tensions and diminish the prospects for a political solution. We strongly urge Israel to heed the overwhelming call from Council members, review its relevant decisions and cease all unilateral actions that undermine trust and worsen confrontation.

Equally worrisome are the volatile security situation and heavy civilian casualties in the West Bank. China condemns all indiscriminate attacks against civilians and serious violations against children. We stand against the excessive use of force by security forces. We encourage Palestine and Israel to break the cycle of violence and achieve common security through dialogue and cooperation. The occupying Power should fulfil its obligations effectively under international law by ensuring the safety of the people in the occupied territory.

Thirdly, all parties must strictly abide by the international rule of law. During the first 11 months of 2022, 851 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished or seized, including schools that were built with assistance. The Security Council discussed the international rule of law just a few days ago (see S/PV.9241). Apparently, settlement activities violate international law and Council resolutions, undermine the contiguity of the occupied territory and seriously

erode the living space of the Palestinian people. We urge Israel to fulfil its obligations under Council resolutions, stop settlement expansion, stop demolishing Palestinian-owned property, stop threatening the people in Masafer Yatta and other areas with eviction and stop unilaterally changing the status quo in the occupied territory.

Fourthly, the two-State solution must be fully implemented with utmost urgency. The Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Qin Gang, during his recent visit to Egypt, noted at a joint press conference with the Egyptian Foreign Minister that the frequent flare-ups between Israel and Palestine are essentially a result of the deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and the failure to implement a two-State solution, which is long overdue. Secretary-General Guterres also reaffirmed before the media last week that there is no alternative to the two-State solution. To reject the two-State solution is to dash the hopes of peace in the Middle East.

In the Security Council, we have heard time and again the ardent support of the overwhelming majority of countries for independent statehood for the Palestinian people. What exactly is preventing the vision of the two-State solution from becoming a reality? In the face of the perennial historical injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people, there is no excuse for procrastination nor justification for inaction.

Peace is possible. Today we are once again hearing that message. But peace is possible only if the international community is ready to act with the utmost sense of urgency, work harder to facilitate a resumption of direct talks and, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, take concrete steps to advance a two-State solution. We urge countries who could bring significant influence to bear on this issue to take a fair stand, shoulder their due responsibilities and take practical action.

China will continue to work alongside the rest of the international community and make unremitting efforts towards a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

Mr. Eckersley (United Kingdom): We thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing.

Last year saw large numbers of Palestinians and Israelis killed, worsening rates of settler violence and the emergence of new Palestinian militant groups.

Unfortunately, 2023 has also started with violence and instability. In that context, the United Kingdom Minister of State, Lord Ahmad, visited Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories earlier this month. There, he underlined the United Kingdom's support for a two-State solution and urged the parties, supported by the international community, to do all they can to de-escalate, restore calm and rebuild trust.

To that end, first, the parties must demonstrate through their statements and their policies a genuine commitment to peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians and to a two-State solution. That is the only way to end the conflict, preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic identity and realize Palestinian national aspirations. The United Kingdom opposes all unilateral actions that will make peace harder to achieve, whether taken by the Palestinian or Israeli side, including the Government of Israel's measures against the Palestinian Authority announced on 6 January.

Secondly, the United Kingdom calls on all parties to continue to uphold the historic status quo at Jerusalem's holy sites. During his visit, Lord Ahmad visited Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount. He emphasized the United Kingdom's unwavering commitment to the status quo and to working with the parties to ensure the safety of all who visit. We value Jordan's important role as Custodian of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem.

Thirdly, we urge the leaders on both sides to promote a culture of peaceful coexistence. The desecration of 30 Christian graves in a Protestant cemetery on Mount Zion this month highlights the dangers of increasing division along ethnic and religious lines. We are grateful to all sides for their swift condemnation of those shocking acts. As a country that supports and defends freedom of religion or belief for all, the United Kingdom urges respect for all burial and holy sites, which must be treated with dignity.

Finally, Israel must exercise maximum restraint in the use of live fire when protecting its legitimate security interests. In the first three weeks of this year, 14 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces, including three children. Restoring stability and securing peace is possible but requires effort from all sides in a process towards a two-State solution, which the United Kingdom stands ready to support.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his valuable briefing.

We meet again to discuss the critical situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, which has reached an extremely sensitive and dangerous stage owing to the illegal and unilateral measures and practices adopted against the Palestinian people. Under those circumstances, the Security Council, which has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, must make every effort to address the tensions and de-escalate the situation in order to prevent the conflict from reaching more dangerous levels that could affect the entire region. Such efforts should ensure compliance with relevant Council resolutions, which have identified the real foundation for an acceptable, just and peaceful settlement to that conflict. In that context, we would like to highlight several negative trends that must cease, as they constitute flash points during the current decisive stage.

First, the continuing tensions in and around the holy sites and the escalation of inflammatory rhetoric regarding them must end. We reiterate our rejection and condemnation of any violations or provocative measures aimed at changing the historical and legal status quo of the city of Jerusalem, including the repeated storming of and threats to storm again the Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard. Such provocations, including the recent interception of the Ambassador of Jordan on his way to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, could fuel violence and escalate the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. In that regard, we reaffirm the need to respect the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's custodianship of the holy sites and its management of the endowments in the city of Jerusalem. The United Arab Emirates also appreciates all multilateral efforts to maintain the status quo of the city of Jerusalem, including the efforts of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, chaired by His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco.

Secondly, the demolition of Palestinian properties and the forced displacement of people in Area C must be halted. Today more than 1,200 Palestinians in Masafer Yatta live in a state of uncertainty and fear owing to the risk of forced removal from their homes. Several families have already witnessed the demolition of their properties across various areas in the occupied Palestinian territory. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the percentage of structures demolished or sealed off by their owners in East Jerusalem following the issuance of demolition

orders reached 53 per cent as of November 2022, up from 27 per cent in the previous five years.

Thirdly, settlement activities, which have reached unprecedented levels, must stop. Reports indicate that dozens of plans were approved to build thousands of new settlement units in areas such as Jerusalem, Hebron and the Jordan Valley. Those activities are coupled with the continued rising levels of settler-related violence. We stress in that regard that the construction and expansion of settlements and their roads violate international law and the resolutions of the Council. They also contribute to isolating Palestinian areas and undermining the viability of a two-State solution.

We stress that all those violations must stop and that Israel must uphold its responsibilities under international law. We call on both sides to prioritize dialogue and de-escalation and refrain from adopting extremist positions.

The current situation requires that any punitive measures must cease, as they could deepen the divisions between the two sides, including those related to the General Assembly's request for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice. We also emphasize the need to intensify communication and cooperation between both parties in order to address unresolved issues and agree on confidence-building measures.

It is imperative to restore a peaceful track and establish a political horizon, accompanied by practical measures to improve the situation on the ground, in the hope that negotiations can be urgently resumed on declaring an independent and sovereign Palestinian State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel, in peace, security and mutual recognition.

Ms. Bongo (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of the Observer State of Palestine and Israel in today's open debate.

The clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces reached unprecedented levels of violence in 2022. Given the fact that the security situation on the ground remains volatile, as indicated by the Special Coordinator in his briefing, it is vital for the Security Council to prevent such a tragic scenario from recurring in 2023. Gabon reiterates its call on all the parties to exercise restraint and refrain from taking

unilateral actions that could lead to a resumption of hostilities and hinder the peacebuilding process.

The continuation of settlement activities, seizures, demolitions and expropriations, as well as the visit of a member of Israel's Government to the Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard on 3 January and the sanctions issued against the Palestinian Authority, are worrisome and likely to increase tensions. Ensuring respect for the historical and legal status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem is a requirement for the peaceful coexistence of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. We have constantly repeated that and will continue to reaffirm it.

In that regard, we recognize the role of the Kingdom of Jordan as the official Custodian of the Muslim Holy Sites in Jerusalem and support the efforts of the King of Morocco, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, to preserve the special status of the holy city as a symbol of the common heritage of humankind and the three monotheistic religions. We note with interest the statements of the Israeli authorities on the preservation of the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

We welcome the visit from 12 to 15 December by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, to Israel and the Palestinian territories. The impact of this conflict on children is unacceptable. Some have been killed or seriously injured, while others have been recruited and exploited. We echo the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493) and urge both Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We reiterate the need for the parties to respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

Regarding the sensitive issue of the return of human remains to Palestinian and Israeli families, we call on the parties to find a solution that will establish a climate of trust in order to facilitate a lasting peace. That issue is all the more sensitive as it concerns respect for funeral rites, which are an integral part of the culture and identity of both parties.

Gabon reaffirms its commitment to the two-State solution, with both States living in peace and security along secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital. In order to achieve that, the firm will of the parties, in addition to

dialogue and the resumption of good-faith negotiations, are required. In that regard, the role of the countries of the region and those with influence on the parties is crucial for ensuring the resumption of the peace talks and removing the obstacles standing in the way of the two-State solution.

In conclusion, we reiterate our full support for Special Coordinator Wennesland in his tireless efforts to bring peace to the Middle East.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing this morning, as well as the Secretary-General for his latest quarterly report (S/2022/945) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). I greet the delegations of Palestine and Israel.

The situation reported to us is worrisome and dangerous. The significant increase in acts of violence and clashes in recent months has resulted in dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries. Every death is a tragedy, and it is the duty of all to make whatever efforts are necessary to prevent further loss of life.

The growing hostility between the parties, which has led to destruction and death, is unacceptable, as they are obliged to comply with the rules of international law, including international humanitarian law.

It is imperative that all acts of violence against the civilian population, including acts of terror, provocation and destruction, be avoided and that the lives and safety of individuals be respected, in accordance with obligations under international humanitarian law. It is very important that those who commit acts of violence are held accountable for such acts. Impunity breeds only more violence.

This is the second time the Council has addressed this issue this month. As I did on 5 January (see S/PV.9236), I must again call for a cessation of incitement, provocation and inflammatory words, and again call on both sides to demonstrate calm and restraint and to refrain from any unilateral decisions or actions that could exacerbate the conflict. In that regard, I must reiterate that respect for the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem and for Jordan's role as Custodian is essential.

Measures that contribute to de-escalation and improve people's living conditions, such as the easing of restrictions on the movement of people and goods

between Gaza and Israel, should continue and be expanded as much as possible. Punitive measures or additional restrictions are not conducive to confidence-building.

We look forward to the signing of the Algiers Declaration by 14 Palestinian factions as a first step towards resolving their differences, with a view to holding elections. We look forward to its successful implementation.

We condemn both the demolition of a donor-funded school in Masafer Yatta and the unacceptable presence of a cavity under the grounds of a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East school in Gaza. Children deserve special protection. It is unacceptable that they are victims of violence and that their rights, including their right to education, are being put at risk.

We also express our concern about the humanitarian situation in the occupied territories and reiterate the importance for all United Nations organs and the international community to mobilize their support and assistance to the Palestinian people.

Ecuador reaffirms its solidarity with the Palestinian people and reiterates its commitment to alleviating the difficult situation they face. We are also committed to ensuring the right of the people of Israel to live in peace, which will be achieved only through a political, definitive and just solution for the parties, with the existence of two States — Palestine and Israel — on the basis of the recognized 1967 borders and the relevant Security Council resolutions. In that regard, we express our deep concern about the continuation of settlement activities, which affect the possibility of the two-State solution and make a resumption of negotiations more difficult.

Finally, we reiterate our conviction that the parties have the right to live in peace and dignity. We once again urge them to demonstrate political will and make collective efforts to restart credible negotiations and intensify regional and international diplomatic contacts in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Costa Filho (Brazil): Brazil remains deeply concerned about the situation in Israel and Palestine after another year marked by cycles of violence that resulted in a high number of civilian fatalities, as registered by the Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs. Among the victims are several children, Israelis and Palestinians, who should have been spared the consequences of the hostilities. As reported by the United Nations, 2022 was the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank in the past 16 years. We should prevent the continuation of that regrettable trend in 2023. The fragility of the situation highlights the urgency of a renewed commitment by the Security Council to resolving this long-lasting conflict.

The prospects are not encouraging. This year has barely begun, and the Council already held an emergency meeting, on 5 January (see S/PV.9236) in response to alarming events in Jerusalem, following the incursion of the Israeli Minister of National Security into Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The sensitivity regarding Jerusalem is well known, as is the importance of preserving the historic status quo of its holy sites. Brazil supports the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as Custodian of the Holy Sites of Jerusalem, which should be upheld.

A few days after the events in Jerusalem came the news of punitive measures imposed by the Government of Israel against the Palestinian people, leadership and civil society. Brazil calls on the Israeli authorities to immediately review and reverse those decisions. The fact that such measures were taken in apparent retaliation for General Assembly resolution 77/247 makes them all the more deplorable.

As we continue to closely monitor the situation on the ground, we urge both parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid provocations and unilateral actions, including heated rhetoric, which could further aggravate tensions.

Improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people is an important step towards peace. The Special Coordinator recently briefed the Council on some interesting measures that could contribute to strengthening the Palestinian economy and to addressing the challenge of governance. Economic growth can contribute to intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which is a crucial step towards stabilization and the resumption of genuine dialogue. We must not forget the role played by poverty, food insecurity and hopelessness, which create the perfect breeding ground for extremist forces to flourish.

The situation in Gaza remains a source of great concern. The risk of escalation persists, and the humanitarian conditions on the ground are not improving, as the blockade continues to violate human

rights and hinder development efforts. More needs to be done to address that situation and to allow the economy to grow.

Palestinian refugees must also not be forgotten amid the many ongoing humanitarian crises. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has always played a vital role in providing relief and assistance to millions of people in many countries and in contributing to stability in the Middle East. Brazil reiterates its support for UNRWA, and we echo the calls for renewed efforts to restore the Agency's capabilities, as chronic underfunding continues to risk leaving people unassisted.

Brazil reaffirms its long-standing commitment to the two-State solution, with Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders. But, with each passing day, and in the absence of meaningful action, including by the Security Council, the viability of the two-State solution seems to be disappearing over the horizon.

Brazil condemns all actions taken in an attempt to create *faits accomplis* on the ground and change the demography of the Palestinian territories, such as the Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and demolitions, which cause the forced displacement of the Palestinian population. Such actions constitute violations of United Nations resolutions and international law, and they undermine the prospect of achieving a two-State solution by systematically eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous, independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State.

Before concluding, I would like to express Brazil's gratitude for the work of the Special Coordinator, Mr. Wennesland, for his detailed briefings to the Security Council and for his tireless efforts to reduce tensions on the ground. Brazil agrees with his overall assessment that the mere management of the conflict in perpetuity is not an option. The Council needs to reflect on the role that it should be playing in order to make an effective contribution to breaking those vicious cycles of violence and reinvigorating the stalled peace process.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): We commend Japan for the wisdom in convening this open debate on one of the most important topics on the agenda of the Security Council. We thank the Special Coordinator,

Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his comprehensive briefing and for his tireless engagement in search of a lasting peace in the Middle East. Mozambique pledges its full support for that important endeavour, and we wish him all perseverance.

As we just heard from the Special Coordinator, the conflict shows no sign of abating. The drivers include the expansion of settlements, the continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures and the increase in daily attacks against civilians.

Israel's unilateral measures, in violation of resolution 2334 (2016), are driving away the prospect of direct talks between the parties and, in the long term, the prospect of a two-State solution. That policy of confrontation, hostility and non-cooperation is highly detrimental to the security of both Israel and the Palestinians. It will not bring about the just and lasting peace to which they both aspire, and that they both deserve.

We urge Israel to constructively address the humanitarian situation in Palestine. It must halt the illegal settlement expansion, which is clearly contrary to international law. It must also address extremism and violence among the settlers.

We further urge Israel to allow civil-society organizations and individuals to freely do their work without fear or reprisals. We believe that such organizations can play an important role in promoting peace and understanding between Israelis and Palestinians.

Given the dire humanitarian situation in Palestine, including Gaza, we call for increased, predictable and sustainable support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Such support will allow it to fulfil its important work of delivering essential services to refugees in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The search for a two-State solution, based on the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and decisions, remains the guiding framework of the Council's work. That position was repeatedly stated, including in resolutions 242 (1967) and 2334 (2016). They form the basis of all major international and regional diplomatic efforts towards peace in the region, including those reflected in the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for

peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Middle East Quartet road map.

We hold the view that there is no military solution to the conflict, as the decades of violence have, repeatedly and with great anguish, proved. In that context, we strongly urge Israelis and Palestinians to work constructively together and cooperate in order to lay the groundwork for a lasting peace.

Mozambique reiterates its long-standing and principled position in support of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and the right of existence of the State of Israel.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing. I would like to emphasize three points today.

First, the Security Council must mobilize to prevent an escalation on the ground. The year 2022 was a very deadly one. The beginning of this year has also been marked by a very high level of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in East Jerusalem. That cycle of violence is unsustainable, and it must end.

France calls on the parties to show restraint and refrain from any unilateral measure that could be perceived as a provocation, such as the visit by the Israeli Minister for National Security to Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount on 3 January. France recalls its commitment to respect for the historical status quo of Jerusalem's holy sites. A new escalation would have serious consequences. Both sides must therefore demonstrate responsibility. We remind them, especially Israel, of the need to respect international humanitarian law. France also reaffirms its commitment to the security of Israel and will condemn all attacks targeting its territory or citizens.

Secondly, it is incumbent upon the Council to ensure compliance with international law, including its own resolutions. Several of them, in particular resolution 2334 (2016), condemn the settlement policy. We call on the recently elected Israeli authorities to take the necessary measures to end the increasing level of settler violence. Those responsible must be held accountable for their actions. France condemns the settlement policy and calls for halting further plans to annex or establish settlements. France also calls on the recently elected Israeli authorities not to legalize the outposts in the West Bank. France is also concerned about the latest measures taken by the Israeli Government against the

Palestinian population and institutions, including the withholding of funds that are owed to the Palestinian Authority, the sanctions imposed on senior Palestinian officials and the suspension of Palestinian construction projects in Area C in the West Bank. France calls on Israel to reverse those measures and reaffirms its commitment to international law and its unwavering support for the role of the International Court of Justice.

Thirdly, we must urgently relaunch the peace process, which has been stalled since the second quarter of 2014, as soon as possible. The high level of tensions in the West Bank and Jerusalem are the result of the absence of any political horizon. France continues to support the two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. France is committed to working for the implementation of that solution within the framework of international law, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters. That is the only solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples for peace and security.

Only a credible political horizon will enable the easing of tensions. France therefore calls on all members of the Council, as well as the States of the region, to actively contribute to reviving peace efforts and stands ready to do its part to that end, together with its partners.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate and thank Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing.

As others have mentioned, 2022 was the deadliest year for Palestinian civilians in the West Bank since the United Nations began keeping track of incidents in the conflict. Deadly attacks in Israel have also exacerbated the tense environment, and the risk of escalation is real. Switzerland expects all parties to take the necessary measures to protect civilians and non-combatants. It calls for investigations into the allegations of the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli security forces. Given the high number of violent incidents committed by settlers, Switzerland also calls on Israel to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law towards the occupied population. Furthermore, Switzerland is appalled by the number of children among the victims of violence and violations of international law. We welcome the dialogue launched in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory by the

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We call on all parties to pursue that dialogue and take the necessary measures to protect children.

My country welcomes the willingness of the newly elected Israeli Government to pursue normalization agreements with Arab States. We would also like to see the Palestinians being able to benefit from that new dynamic. Furthermore, we encourage the Israeli Government to pursue constructive economic measures, in particular by granting more construction permits in Area C and more work permits in Israel in order to improve conditions for Palestinians. Meanwhile, Switzerland is concerned about the newly elected Israeli Government's publicly announced intention to expand settlements, including through investment in infrastructure. As the Security Council has already made clear, settlements, including outposts such as Homesh, are a violation of international law. They also represent an obstacle to peace and jeopardize the achievement of the two-State solution.

In that regard, Switzerland would like to reaffirm, as did all members of the Security Council at its emergency meeting held on 5 January (see S/PV.9236), that respect for the status quo on the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount is a key element of achieving peace and stability in the region. My country is also concerned about the growing number of attacks against Christians, such as the desecration of the Protestant cemetery on Mount Zion, which was founded by Swiss-born Samuel Gobat. We call for concrete measures to support the peaceful coexistence of all communities in Jerusalem.

Switzerland is concerned about the weakening of the Palestinian Authority, particularly as a result of the withholding of the taxes owed to it and the prolonged absence of elections. In that regard, we recall that the measures adopted by the General Assembly reflect the will of the international community and must not be subject to retaliatory measures. My country also reiterates its call for elections to be held throughout the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which would contribute to the legitimacy of institutions and restore the political unity that is critical to achieving a two-State solution.

Switzerland calls on the leaders of all parties to refrain from unilateral measures or inflammatory language that could fuel the conflict, provoke further violence and undermine peace efforts. We encourage

the parties to address the root causes of the conflict and to restore a political horizon for a negotiated two-State solution in accordance with international law and internationally agreed parameters, including the relevant Security Council resolutions. Switzerland stands ready to facilitate the resumption of a credible dialogue to that end.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East region in the context of the Middle East settlement process.

As we all heard from Mr. Wennesland, the situation surrounding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains volatile. In the West Bank of the Jordan River, Israeli security forces continue their brutal military raids, the latest of which resulted in the shooting of two Palestinians in the southern part of Jenin. Against that backdrop, there have been regular outbreaks of violence surrounding the Gaza Strip, resulting in casualties on both sides. Over the past year, at least 224 Palestinian civilians, including 61 children, have been killed by the Israeli military. Violence against minors has continued unabated, even during the visit to the West Bank by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter.

Israelis are also dying, and we reaffirm Israel's right to security. At the same time, Tel Aviv continues to ramp up unilateral economic sanctions and measures to expand and legalize its settlement policy, including by expropriating Palestinian property, demolishing homes and erecting outposts. According to the Jerusalem Applied Research Institute, to date a total of 243 illegal settlements have been built in the West Bank. There are daily reports of damage to Palestinian property, the destruction of agricultural land and mass arrests, some without charges. More than 815 such detentions were documented over the past year. Against this backdrop, we are concerned about the intense debate among the recently elected Israeli leadership on a reform of the country's legal system, that, among other things, would authorize the disproportionate use of force, which has been met with outrage even among Israelis and marked by large-scale demonstrations in Tel Aviv. We are convinced that such unlawful and provocative steps threaten to completely derail prospects for the eventual implementation of a United Nations-endorsed two-

State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within the 1967 borders.

We would like to note separately that the Middle East agenda includes such a sensitive topic as the status of Jerusalem — the cradle of the three monotheistic religions — and the holy sites located there. The controversy surrounding the city remains one of the main sources of instability not only in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but also throughout the Middle East. In that context, it is important to ensure equal access for all worshippers to the city's holy sites and that the status quo is not reversed. In that context, we highlight the role of Jordan and the Hashemite Royal Family as the guardians of Jerusalem's holy sites.

A complicating factor in a Palestinian-Israeli settlement is the continuing rift between Fatah and Hamas, which weakens the Palestinian side's negotiating position. In that connection, we stand ready alongside other stakeholders, first and foremost our Egyptian friends, to provide the necessary assistance in the swift restoration of intra-Palestinian unity on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization. We note the contribution of Algeria to the signing of the Algiers Declaration on Palestinian national unity.

Our position on the Palestinian-Israeli settlement remains consistent and unchanged. We advocate the realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians to an independent State of their own, within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace and security with Israel in accordance with the universally recognized international legal framework. We believe that formula to be the only way to ensure Israel's security and to achieve the national aspirations of the Palestinian people.

It is fundamentally important that the majority of States around the world support that policy, as was confirmed in December during the vote on the cluster of General Assembly resolutions on the Middle East (see A/77/PV.52), including on extending the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) until 2026. For our part, we attach great importance to the provision of comprehensive humanitarian assistance to those in need in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as to Palestinian refugees in neighbouring Arab States through international humanitarian agencies with UNRWA at the helm. We believe it vital to continue to provide financial assistance to the Agency so that it can

continue uninterrupted in its work to help the millions of Palestinian refugees throughout the Middle East.

We wish to once again emphasize the importance of convening a meeting of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators at the ministerial level and establishing meaningful cooperation between that mechanism, Palestinians and Israelis and key regional stakeholders. Despite receiving the support of many States, the Quartet's work is currently on hold due to the unwillingness of the United States to pursue multilateral cooperation, seeking instead to completely privatize the Middle East dossier. However, experience and practice has shown that attempts to cut that complex Gordian knot of conflicts singlehandedly by substituting a just solution with economic measures are doomed to failure. The direct result of that amateurish approach is the resumption of armed clashes, causing untold suffering to both Israeli and Palestinian civilians alike. We call on the Secretary-General, as one of the parties to the Quartet, to proactively advance multilateral efforts within that body.

On the whole, we are highly disappointed and dismayed at the fact that the Palestinian question — like a number of other Middle East issues — has gradually become secondary, if not tertiary, in terms of the importance afforded to it by Western States. That is strikingly clear from the near absence of Western representatives on the list of delegations participating in today's open debate, whereas those same representatives are more than willing to speak at the Security Council on Ukraine. That speaks volumes.

At the same time, given that the actions of a number of Western States specifically caused the outbreak of the majority of conflicts in the Middle East, we believe that regional conflicts should not fall hostage to geopolitical competition. In order to lend renewed momentum to the Middle East settlement, it is now more necessary than ever before to consolidate the positions of external players. There is a need to work diligently to that end by establishing collective cooperation with the States of the region, whose role in the Middle East peace process cannot be overestimated.

In that connection, we should like once again to recall the initiative of the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sergey Lavrov, to convene a meeting of the Quartet with the representatives of Arab countries. We believe that the relevance of that initiative is only increasing, especially as the overwhelming majority

of Middle Eastern actors are in favour of resuming the work of the Quartet as the sole internationally recognized mechanism for the Middle East peace process endorsed by the Security Council.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I also wish to thank Mr. Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his comprehensive briefing on the latest developments in the Middle East.

This open debate comes at a timely juncture following recent heightened tensions on the ground. Last year proved to be the deadliest year in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent memory and, as we have seen, the beginning of this year has already been marked with further incidents, including political decisions, that can easily lead to escalation and threaten regional stability.

It is deeply regrettable that we continue to witness tragic casualties being suffered by both sides. Provocative decisions and unilateral actions, as well as inflammatory rhetoric, must be avoided and condemned, as they will undoubtedly continue to exacerbate and undermine the already fragile situation and only contribute to further instability. The developments we witnessed in and around the holy sites on 3 January constitute one such example.

As we made clear in the Security Council's emergency meeting on 5 January (see S/PV.9236), Malta reiterates the need to ensure the integrity of the holy sites and that the legal and historic status quo be upheld and fully respected at all times. We continue to acknowledge and respect the established role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as Custodian of the Holy Sites.

We are concerned by unilateral actions that seek to punish political actors from seeking international legal remedies. As a Member State committed to multilateralism and the rules-based international order, we find that approach to be unconstructive. We hope that measures announced will be reconsidered as a positive sign for peace and stability in the region. More broadly, political announcements that proclaim a commitment to advance and develop settlements in all parts of the land of Israel — in Galilee, the Negev, the Golan Heights and Judea and Samaria — similarly move us further and further away from a two-State solution.

On the security front, Malta continues to strongly condemn any actions that jeopardize the lives of

Palestinian and Israeli civilians. That includes terrorist attacks committed against Israel, which are unacceptable, and Israeli military operations and settler violence in the West Bank, resulting in the loss of Palestinian lives. We will equally call for justice and accountability for the victims — in most cases, they are women and children, who suffer disproportionately in conflict circumstances.

Malta remains concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and once again underlines the importance of opening crossing points and ensuring unhindered humanitarian access. Malta continues to recognize the significant endeavours of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to assist, protect and advocate for Palestinian refugees, particularly in the fields of education and health care, and considers the Agency to be a stabilizing force in the region. We also call for the international community to bolster its support for the Agency's funding, which is in dire need of contributions.

To conclude, Malta once again 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, while addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides and 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 remain convinced that this remains the only solution to peace in the region and that dialogue and commitments by the relevant stakeholders are essential in order to reach a settlement that avoids further violence, suffering and escalations.

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

The Security Council held an emergency meeting on 5 January in response to an Israeli Minister's visit to Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem (see S/PV.9236). Japan recognizes Jordan's special role as custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem and attaches great importance to preserving the historic status quo of the holy sites. Any unilateral actions that would aggravate an already tense situation are unacceptable.

Following the General Assembly resolution requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories (resolution 77/247),

we have witnessed the new Israeli Government's announcement of a series of measures against the Palestinian Authority. Those actions would prevent the parties from reaching a peaceful solution through direct dialogue and negotiations, based on mutual trust between the two sides.

Japan is deeply concerned about the worsening security situation. The recent report of the Secretary-General on the situation (S/2022/945) indicates that a high level of violence has continued in the West Bank on a daily basis, and we have already witnessed a number of casualties this year. In that regard, Japan calls for the utmost restraint in order to prevent the situation from deteriorating further.

Japan supports the continuous efforts of Mr. Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and of countries of the region, such as Algeria and Egypt, towards Palestinian national reconciliation.

Japan stresses the vital role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in assisting Palestinian people. Last year, we contributed approximately \$30 million to UNRWA and have committed another \$33 million this year, including medical, education and food assistance. Japan hopes that such assistance will contribute to the building of peace in Palestine. UNRWA's financial base remains fragile, and Japan would like to call on the international community, especially the members of the Security Council, to consider further financial contributions to the Agency.

Let me conclude by reiterating Japan's strong determination to spare no effort in pushing for the two-State solution, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international parameters. That is the only way to achieve just and lasting peace for both Israel and Palestine.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Flashing lights on the collars of the microphones will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after three minutes.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia.

Mrs. Marsudi (Indonesia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting.

I wish all members a happy new year. Let us work together to make 2023 a better year for the Palestinian people.

Year after year, while we are busy delivering statements here at the United Nations, the situation in Palestine is getting worse. Although the cry for justice echoes in every corner of this Organization, injustice and violence towards Palestinians intensify. United Nations reports reveal that 2022 was the darkest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since 2005. Hundreds of Palestinians, including children, were killed. At the same time, the political situation remains as elusive as ever. The status quo must end. We must break the cycle of concern and inaction and stop the double standards.

I would like to highlight three points. First, Indonesia welcomes the adoption of General Assembly resolution 77/247, which was adopted in December 2022. It will be the second advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice concerning the occupied Palestinian territory. There have been many mechanisms, reports and resolutions on Palestine, but no significant change has taken place. Business as usual cannot be the norm. We must ensure due follow-up to all those processes.

Secondly, we must push for concrete changes. Instead of managing the conflict, we need to lay out concrete steps to end it and move towards a peaceful solution. There can be no room for provocation. The occupying Power must cease punitive policies towards the Palestinians. It must not hinder the Palestinians from fulfilling their economic rights. It must preserve the status quo of the holy sites. It must uphold international law and resume a credible peace process to achieve the two-State solution, based on internationally agreed parameters.

Thirdly, I call on all of us to continue providing much-needed support. Many have predicted that an economic recession is on the horizon. For millions of Palestinians, the hardships would only multiply. More than 2 million Palestinians are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Humanity dictates that we cannot let them suffer in silence, especially in this difficult situation.

The year 2023 must be the year of progress on resolving the Palestinian issue. It is our collective

responsibility to end the Israeli occupation once and for all.

My message to Palestinian brothers and sisters is to let the struggle unite, not divide, them. Indonesia will remain steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people.

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

Mr. Mahmoud (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would once again like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

As we all looked forward to the new year being one of calm, security and stability, especially after a year of regional and international upheaval, Egypt and all countries of the world were surprised to see Israel's Minister of National Security storming Al-Haram Al-Sharif in East Jerusalem, a provocation that undermines the legal and historic status quo in East Jerusalem and the custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan over the holy sites in the city of Jerusalem. Egypt and many countries of the world issued statements to reject and condemn that step as a threat to security and stability in Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the entire Palestinian territory.

In its statement, Egypt expressed its rejection of that raid, which was carried out by an Israeli official accompanied by extremists. We warned of the consequences of such an action on security and stability in the occupied territory and the entire region, as well as on the future of the peace process between the two sides. Egypt calls for self-restraint, assuming responsibility and refraining from any action that could lead to further escalation. The final communiqué of the tripartite summit that was held in Cairo on 17 January and brought together Jordan, Palestine and Egypt adopted the same position.

Needless to say, despite the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory in 2022, which has been described by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as the bloodiest year since 2006, the international community has maintained its firm position, supporting the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people by backing a request for the International Court of Justice to render an advisory opinion on the Israeli practices and renewing

the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East until 2026, with increased funding from the regular budget of the United Nations.

Egypt and all other members of the United Nations look to the Security Council to assume its responsibilities with regard to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and to ending their decades-long suffering under the occupation. Egypt underscores the importance of taking a series of measures to maintain the two-State solution and to bring about peace as follows.

The first is to stop all unilateral measures that undermine the two-State solution and exacerbate the deterioration of the situation, especially settlement expansion, acts of violence against defenceless civilians, particularly children, whether by Israeli forces or settlers, the demolition of Palestinian homes and facilities, arrest operations and the storming of Palestinian cities, in addition to the need to avoid any measures that would change the legal nature of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as occupied Palestinian territory.

The second is not to prejudice the existing legal and historical status of Islamic and Christian holy sites in East Jerusalem and to respect the guardianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan over them.

The third is to lift the Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip for more than 15 years now and to facilitate the entry of goods and the movement of people between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, in addition to the international community providing support for the reconstruction process in the Strip.

The fourth is to provide the necessary support to the Palestinian people and to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in completely fulfilling its mandate.

The fifth is for the Council to fulfil its duties with regard to providing international protection for the Palestinian people, including holding accountable the perpetrators of violence against civilians and the targeting of civilian facilities and infrastructure.

The sixth is to activate the role of the international Quartet and revive the peace negotiations in order to implement the two-State solution through the independence of the Palestinian State along the lines of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital,

in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, international law and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, Egypt underscores its continued efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation and establish a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Along with everyone here, we look forward to ending the occupation of the entirety of the Arab territories occupied since 1967.

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

Mr. Jardali (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Government of the Israeli occupation deliberately opened the new year with a move that destabilizes Jerusalem and provokes the feelings of millions in the Middle East and the world. Lebanon strongly condemns the storming of Al-Haram Al-Sharif on 3 January by the extremist Minister of National Security in the Israeli occupation Government and considers it a flagrant violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, as well as a clear violation of the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem. Lebanon also condemns the attack by Israeli extremists on the Christian cemetery in Mount Zion on 4 January, and we demand that those responsible be held accountable. Those aggressive practices have serious consequences and constitute a direct cause for the escalation of violence and instability.

Preserving the existing legal and historical status of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and respecting the Hashemite Custodianship over the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem constitute one of the essential elements for ensuring peace and stability in the region. In that context, Lebanon calls on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and take immediate measures to protect the holy places from repeated attacks by the occupation authorities and settlers and to ensure Israel's respect for international law.

In the light of the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 77/247, by which it requests an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences arising from Israel's continued violation of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, the Israeli occupation Government announced punitive measures against the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority in response to that move. Those illegal measures reflect the Israelis' fear of requesting an advisory opinion from the Court.

In view of the continued violation by the occupation Government of international law and United Nations resolutions, the latest of which is resolution 2334 (2016), we believe that the solution lies in committing to the international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted in Beirut in 2002 and is based on a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the establishment of a Palestinian State along the borders of 4 June 1967, with east Jerusalem as its capital, and the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation from all Arab territories.

Lebanon takes this opportunity to emphasize its support for the work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon south of the Litani River and its role in reducing escalation and stabilizing security and stability in the light of the increasing daily Israeli violations of resolution 1701 (2006) and of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Lebanon also once again expresses its deep sorrow about the incident that occurred on 14 December 2022, which led to the death of the Irish peacekeeper Sean Rooney and the injuring of three others. Lebanon stresses that those responsible for that painful incident will be held accountable. The Lebanese judiciary recently charged seven suspects, and one of them has been arrested so far.

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

Mr. Hmoud (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to extend my sincere thanks to you, Mr. President, for the appreciated effort you have made in facilitating the work of the Security Council for the current month. I also thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing to the Council.

The past year witnessed a dangerous escalation in cycles of violence and was one of the bloodiest years for the Palestinian people since 2006, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, during which many Palestinian civilians and children were martyred by the Israeli occupation forces, in addition to the injury and detention of thousands of others, not to mention the destruction of hundreds of homes, property, civilian installations and agricultural crops and attacks by extremist settlers.

The Israeli Minister of Internal Security stormed the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif at the beginning of this month. That constituted a condemned

and dangerous development pushing the region towards more conflict, violence and instability.

Israel's continuation of its illegal and illegitimate practices in the occupied territories will inevitably push the Middle East region towards more conflict and violence, while denying the peoples of the region their right to security and peace and threatening international peace and security.

Israel continues to provoke the feelings of nearly 2 billion Muslims through its continuous attacks on the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which in its entire area of 144 acres constitutes an exclusive place of worship for Muslims, thereby pushing towards a religious conflict whose consequences will be dangerous for the entire region. Israel also continuously obstructs access to the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, as demonstrated by the Israeli occupation police that intercepted the Jordanian Ambassador to Israel while entering the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif yesterday. That is behaviour we reject.

Israel also continues to displace the Palestinian population from their homes, including in occupied Jerusalem, in an effort to alter the identity of the Holy City, which constitutes a war crime and a grave breach of international humanitarian law and of Israel's responsibilities as the occupying Power and leads to special legal consequences. The international community must end those violations and refuse to recognize the illegal reality that Israel is trying to impose through those violations.

Israel did not stop at doing that. It also recently imposed punitive measures against the Palestinian people, the Palestinian leadership and civil society. We condemn those measures and the punitive policy adopted by Israel, and we warn of the consequences of such actions against our Palestinian brethren.

The Security Council has a responsibility to maintain international peace and security, pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations, and should immediately take action to protect international law and put an end to the illegitimate Israeli practices in occupied Jerusalem, its holy sites and the rest of the Palestinian territories.

Jordan will spare no effort to defend Jerusalem and its holy sites and to defend our central cause, which is the Palestinian question. We will continue to work to preserve the Arab, Muslim and Christian identity of

the holy sites in occupied Jerusalem and to protect its current legal and historic status quo. That is the priority of its custodian, His Majesty King Abdullah II.

Jordan will continue to work with its brethren in Palestine and all partners in order to bring about fair and comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution and to ensure that all the legitimate rights of our Palestinian brethren, most notably their right to freedom and to a sovereign State based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, in keeping with international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative for achieving fair and comprehensive peace.

Jordan underscores the need for the international community to effectively work towards putting an end to all unilateral measures that undermine the prospects for achieving peace based on the two-State solution. That is the only way to realize comprehensive and fair peace. The two-State solution, which would end the occupation and establish an independent Palestinian State, is the only way to bring about a fair peace, which is a strategic Arab option and a necessity for international peace and security.

We cannot ignore the Palestinian question. We cannot turn a blind eye to the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. As Jordan has always maintained, the Palestinian question is the basis of the conflict, and it is the key to the solution and to the just and comprehensive peace that we seek. It is imperative that the international community find a real political prospect for serious and effective negotiations towards a two-State solution. The current situation is untenable, and the threat it poses is clear to everyone. Measures that deepen the occupation will not lead to peace; their inevitable result is an escalation of the conflict.

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

Mr. Larbaoui (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I once again express to you, Mr. President, our congratulations on Japan's joining of the Security Council and on your assumption of the presidency this month. We wish you every success in your noble tasks, particularly considering the heightened regional and international escalated circumstances that continue to become increasingly complicated.

The situation in the Middle East, specifically in occupied Palestine, is dangerous and has bad

consequences for peace and security in the region. That is a result of the provocative measures been taken by the occupying Power, among them the incursion into the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is added to a series of systematic violations perpetrated daily by the occupation against the defenceless Palestinian people and its holy sites.

Algeria firmly condemns those criminal acts, which constitute a grave violation of international resolutions and show contempt for the feelings of Muslims and Christians throughout the world. His Excellency the President of the Republic of Algeria, Mr. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, in a letter addressed to the Secretary-General on the acts of aggression against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, called on the international community and the Security Council to assume their responsibilities and end those ongoing criminal practices and ensure protection for the fraternal Palestinian people and their holy sites, particularly in the occupied city of Jerusalem.

The city of Jerusalem is subject to daily violations and practices by the occupying Power, which are met with ongoing, horrible silence on the part of the international community. The goal of all that is to change its demographic composition and its Arab, Muslim and Christian identity, which would undermine efforts geared towards a resumption of negotiations.

Algeria continues to firmly support the aspirations of the State of Palestine for full membership at the United Nations. We also supported General Assembly resolution 77/247, which requests an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the persistent violations of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. For that reason, as current Chair of the Arab Summit and a member of the Arab tripartite group in New York, two days ago Algeria signed a joint declaration on behalf of the Group of Arab States and many other countries, reiterating our firm support for the Court and international law as the cornerstone of the international system. We have also expressed our commitment to multilateral cooperation. In that regard, we reject the punitive measures adopted by the occupying Power against the Palestinian people and their leadership in the wake of the request by the General Assembly for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice.

The Arab position on the question of Palestine was reaffirmed during the Arab Summit held in Algiers.

The Arab position emphasizes the centrality of the Palestinian question and our full support for the rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to freedom, self-determination and the creation of an independent sovereign Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital. We also emphasized the collective Arab commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, with all of its components and priorities. We also underscored our full commitment to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict in line with the principles of land for peace and international law, as well as the relevant international resolutions. Algeria has been consistent in its position. We continue to support the fraternal Palestinian people. We are fully convinced that a just and comprehensive peace is a strategic choice that can be achieved only through an end to the occupation of all Arab territories, the implementation of international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, we say to our fraternal Palestinian people, when the moment of truth comes, true intentions and goals become clear and lies become exposed. Free people who support the Palestinian question put the freedom, struggle and sacrifices of the Palestinian people for self-determination above all other considerations.

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

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation for Japan's efforts in conducting the work of the Security Council this month. I would also like to sincerely thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the most recent developments.

The Kingdom of Morocco, led by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, has underscored the importance of refraining from any unilateral measure that could pose a threat to the current legal, historical, geographical, religious and demographic status quo in the city of Jerusalem and to the Al-Quds Al-Sharif compound, for the sake of peace and stability.

In his letter of solidarity sent in November 2022 to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, His Majesty King Mohammed VI highlighted the absence of political horizon on the Palestinian question. He indicated that unilateral measures undermine opportunities for peace and have

enabled extremists to attack holy sites and spread a culture of violence and hatred, which could transform the political conflict into an ideological one and result in serious consequences for the entire region. The Kingdom of Morocco underscores the importance of refraining from punitive measures against the Palestinian people and their institutions.

The Kingdom of Morocco firmly believes that the Palestinian question is a central issue. It is a core issue for the Middle East, and it is at the top of the list of international priorities. We remain committed to our position on every occasion because we believe that stability and prosperity in the region are closely related to finding a just and lasting solution, within the context of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Kingdom of Morocco underscores our steadfast and clear position regarding the just Palestinian question. We reject all attempts to undermine the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, in particular their right to create an independent, sovereign and viable State, based on 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with the State of Israel, in security, stability and peace. The Kingdom of Morocco stresses the importance of refraining from any action that might escalate tensions in the region.

His Majesty King Mohammed VI, as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, has closely and attentively continued to monitor all developments related to the Palestinian question. His Majesty calls for maintaining the legal, cultural and historical status quo of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as a common heritage of humankind, as a symbol of peaceful coexistence among the followers of the three monotheistic religions and as a centre for the values of mutual respect and dialogue. He stressed that in the Jerusalem Declaration, which he signed with His Eminence Pope Francis in Rabat on 30 March 2019.

The Al-Quds Committee plays a political and practical role in supporting the Palestinian people in general and the residents of Jerusalem in particular. It combines the political efforts of His Majesty King Mohammed VI and the field work undertaken by the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Agency under the personal and actual supervision of His Majesty King Mohammed VI. Since its establishment in 1995, the Agency has developed and implemented tangible projects in the areas of education, health, culture and the economy in order to improve the living conditions of the residents

of Jerusalem and preserve the cultural and spiritual landmarks of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as a meeting place for the three monotheistic religions, the common heritage of humankind and coexistence.

Morocco is always committed to improving the living conditions of Palestinians. Recently, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, led successful negotiations in July 2022 on permanently opening the King Hussein Bridge between Jordan and the West Bank. That has reflected positively on the daily lives of the Palestinians and facilitated the movement of people and goods. In his letter of solidarity with the Palestinian people in 2022, His Majesty King Mohammed VI stressed that the efforts and endeavours of the Kingdom of Morocco on the Palestinian question reflect sincere commitment, supported by tangible measures on the ground, that are appreciated and commended by the Palestinian leadership and people. Therefore, we call for distancing the just Palestinian question from useless actions and narrow interests that do not serve it at all.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Kingdom of Morocco will continue to play its historic role in supporting the Palestinian question and maintaining relations with all parties and international stakeholders in order to create the conditions conducive to reviving the negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. That is the only way to achieve security and stability in the Middle East region.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Skoog.

Mr. Skoog: I thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing earlier today.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The EU is worried about the deteriorating situation on the ground and the increased violence in the occupied West Bank, which fuels tensions and animosity. We call on the parties to efforts to de-escalate and end the vicious circle of violence, in which everyone will lose.

As the Special Coordinator has told the Council, 2022 saw the most Palestinian casualties in the West Bank in years. The EU reaffirms its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace, security and mutual

recognition, and with Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States. Furthermore, the EU will seek to encourage and build upon the recent establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and a number of Arab countries, with a view to enhancing prospects for reaching a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East peace process.

We note that the Security Council convened an emergency briefing on 5 January (see S/PV.9235) to address developments at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem. The EU recalls the special significance of the holy sites and calls for upholding the status quo put in place in 1967 for the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, in line with previous understandings and with respect to Jordan's special role.

Underlining the necessity to also respect the status quo of Christian holy sites, which are under increasing pressure, the EU reiterates the importance of maintaining peaceful coexistence among all three monotheistic religions. The EU will closely monitor developments and their implications on the ground and remains ready to contribute further to the protection and viability of the two-State solution.

The EU reiterates its strong support for the International Court of Justice as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. The EU recalls that compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law by States and non-State actors, including accountability, is a cornerstone for peace and security. I note the 16 January statement by a number of States Members of the United Nations, including a majority of EU member States, concerning measures taken by Israel following the request by the General Assembly for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice.

Recalling that settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make the two-State solution impossible, the EU reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions taken in that context, such as building the separation barrier beyond the 1967 line, demolitions and confiscation, including of EU-funded projects, evictions, forced transfers, including of Bedouins, illegal outposts and restrictions of movement and access. Actions such as evictions, forced transfers, including in Masafer Yatta, demolitions, including of EU-funded projects, and confiscation of homes will only escalate an already tense environment.

The EU will not recognize changes to the 1967 lines unless agreed by the parties. We call on Israel to halt continuous settlement expansion, which has reached a record high in the past few years, evictions, demolitions and forced transfers.

The EU firmly condemns the recent terrorist attacks in Israel, as well as all forms of terrorism, and remains committed to the prevention of and the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. We strongly condemn the indiscriminate launching of rockets by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other terrorist groups into Israel. We deplore the loss of civilian lives during the escalation of violence in and around Gaza in August 2022. We call on all parties to take the necessary steps to produce a fundamental change to the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, including the end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns.

The EU will continue to call upon the Palestinian Authority to hold free, transparent and inclusive national elections without further delay. We urge all Palestinian factions to engage in good faith in the reconciliation process, adhere to previous agreements, renounce violence and terrorism, recognize Israel's right to exist and commit to democratic principles, including the rule of law. Democratic Palestinian institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights, are vital for the Palestinian people and, ultimately, for the two-State solution.

Palestinian civil society must be allowed by all parties to carry out that important task freely, while the freedom of expression must be upheld. We recall the need to hold accountable those responsible for the death of Nizar Banat. The EU is proud of its continued support to civil society, which contributes to peace efforts and confidence-building between Israelis and Palestinians. We call on Israel to refrain from any action that would prevent those organizations from continuing their critical human rights, humanitarian and development work in the occupied Palestinian territory. Anti-terrorism legislation should not be used to undermine civil society and their valuable work and contributions to the pursuit of accountability.

We welcome measures to improve Palestinian livelihoods and calls for implementation of the commitments made at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of

International Assistance to Palestinians held in New York in September.

Until there is a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the refugee issue in accordance with international law, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will remain crucial for providing the necessary protection and essential services for Palestine refugees and supporting peace and stability in the region. The EU will continue to support UNRWA in all its fields of operations, including in East Jerusalem. We call on others to do the same.

Allow me to turn briefly to the situation in Syria. To this day, a genuine and inclusive political solution to the conflict in Syria based on the full and comprehensive implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and in line with the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), remains the only route to sustainable peace in Syria.

After more than a decade of conflict, it remains essential that the international community continue to pursue a sustainable and comprehensible political solution. The European Union stands firm in its commitment towards that goal, while supporting the continuous efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen to advance on all aspects of Security Council resolutions, including his steps-for-steps approach in furthering the political process and resuming the work of the Constitutional Committee.

We again reiterate that no normalization, lifting of sanctions or reconstruction will be possible until the Syrian regime engages in a credible sustainable and inclusive political transition, in the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). It must also fully cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its investigations on the use of chemical weapons in the conflict, including the attack in Douma, as well as on the completion of the dismantling of its chemical weapons programme. As a member of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, we will continue to work towards ensuring full accountability in that regard.

Accountability and justice for victims is essential for a stable, peaceful Syria. All parties responsible for breaches of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights law must be held

accountable. We reiterate our call to have the situation in Syria referred to the International Criminal Court.

In the absence of international processes for justice, the prosecution of war crimes and other serious crimes under national jurisdiction where possible, now under way in several EU member States, represents a crucial contribution towards securing justice, as does the Dutch-Canadian initiative to hold Syria to account for breaching the United Nations Convention Against Torture. We will continue to support efforts to gather evidence with a view to future legal action, including by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria and the work of the Commission of Inquiry.

The EU is fully committed to the fate of the missing, and will look positively into proposals for a new mechanism to support the families of missing people, as proposed in the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Missing people in the Syrian Arab Republic” (A/76/890), on how to bolster efforts to clarify the fate of missing people in Syria and identify human remains.

Civilians must be protected at all times. We echo the calls made by the Security Council for the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire.

We recall that the underlying causes of the refugee and displacement crisis must be addressed under resolution 2254 (2015). The EU continues to warn against any further displacements in any part of Syria, as well as against the potential exploitation of such displacements for the purpose of social and demographic engineering. Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries are still unable to go back home as the conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary return, in line with the parameters defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and in accordance with international law, are not fulfilled yet. It is the responsibility of the Syrian regime to remove those obstacles. The EU will be in a position to support returns only once those conditions are satisfied.

The EU commends Syria’s neighbouring countries for hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees for more than a decade and calls on all leaders to avoid divisive rhetoric. At the same time, Türkiye’s security concerns stemming from northern Syria need to be addressed through political and diplomatic means and in full respect for international humanitarian law.

The EU and its member States are the largest donor and have provided €27.4 billion to meet the needs arising from the Syrian crisis since 2011, including over €4.8 billion at the sixth Brussels Conference. Humanitarian needs in Syria continue to increase: 90 per cent of Syrians live under the poverty line and 55 per cent of the population is food insecure. There are now an estimated 15.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, 700,000 more than in 2022. We will continue to demonstrate solidarity with the Syrian people and call on the international community, in particular regional donors, to increase their commitments.

The EU welcomed the unanimous adoption of resolution 2672 (2023) under your presidency, Sir, which mandates the continuation of United Nations cross-border assistance to Syria. However, humanitarian actors would have needed a mandate of at least 12 months and the opening of a second crossing point to ensure more satisfactory delivery of humanitarian aid to the population. We fully support the Secretary-General's and the Emergency Relief Coordinator's repeated calls for more access. Uninterrupted delivery of United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance remains vital for 4.1 million Syrians living in north-west Syria, including 2.8 million internally displaced persons. Their lives depend on that assistance. The EU will continue to advocate for all parties to depoliticize and allow unimpeded and continued delivery of humanitarian aid to all those in need.

Early-recovery projects are important to support resilience, community capacity-building and the self-reliance of the Syrian people and for their future. EU-funded projects are intended and designed for those in genuine need and to strengthen the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the humanitarian response. We will not fund early-recovery efforts that could support social and demographic engineering.

Let me reiterate once more that the EU remains committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian State. We will continue to call on all parties to the conflict, particularly the Syrian regime, to advance a credible, sustainable and inclusive political solution based on the full and comprehensive implementation resolution 2254 (2015) as the only route to sustainable peace in Syria and the way for Syria to become once again the united, sovereign, prosperous and free country we all want to see.

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

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): Pakistan welcomes the convening by the Japanese presidency of this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question.

We express our grave concern about the constantly deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The year 2022 was among the deadliest years for the Palestinian people. According to reports, 230 Palestinian civilians were killed by Israeli occupying forces, including 61 children, in addition to the injuring and detention of thousands of others, while hundreds of homes, civilian properties and structures and agricultural crops have been destroyed.

Pakistan is also deeply alarmed by Israel's ongoing acts of aggression, incitement and provocation against Christian and Islamic holy places, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Pakistan strongly condemns the provocative visit of Israeli Minister of National Security to the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Al-Aqsa is a holy site revered by Muslims around the world. For 14 centuries, Muslims have been loving guardians of Holy Al-Aqsa. Violation of its sanctity offends the religious sensitivities of Muslims all over the world, inflames an already tense situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and could have grave impact the regional and international peace and security.

Pakistan rejects all Israeli measures and attempts to alter the historical and legal status quo of the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif and demands full respect of the status quo and of international law at Al-Aqsa and all other holy sites in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Security Council must act swiftly and resolutely to bring a halt to all such Israeli violations, ensure its full compliance with international law and implement its own resolutions.

There is no question in anybody's mind that Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian lands — the seizure of land and properties for Israeli settlements, the violence against unarmed Palestinian children, women and men, the blockade of Gaza and the desecration of the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque — are all grave violations

of Security Council resolutions and international law, including international humanitarian law.

We look forward to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal implications of the Israeli occupation. We expect that the Court's opinion will lead to Israeli accountability for its crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories. It is a measure of Israel's sense of impunity that it has taken punitive measures against the Palestinian authorities and people for merely seeking the Court's opinion.

The perpetuation of Israeli occupation will not bring peace to the Holy Land. Even if they are dispossessed and disempowered by Israel, every succeeding

generation of Palestinians will persist in seeking their freedom and fundamental rights, including their right to self-determination.

The two-State formula offers the only solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The increasing extremism in the Israeli leadership must not be allowed to foreclose that solution.

The President: There are still a number of speakers on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend this meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1 p.m