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Provisional

President: Mrs. Frazier (Malta)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Ms. Koumby Missambo
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
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 Israel and Qatar 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 the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; and Ms. Leni Stenseth, Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

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

Following consultations among Council members, I have been authorized to make the following statement on their behalf.

“The Security Council reaffirms the right of all States to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders and stresses that both the Israeli and Palestinian people are entitled to equal measures of freedom, security, prosperity, justice and dignity;

“The Security Council reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the vision of the two-State solution where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders, consistent with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions;

“The Security Council expresses deep concern and dismay at Israel's announcement on 12 February 2023 of further construction and expansion of settlements and the ‘legalization’ of settlement outposts;

“The Security Council reiterates that continuing Israeli settlement activities are dangerously imperilling the viability of the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines;

“The Security Council strongly underscores the need for all parties to meet their international obligations and commitments; strongly opposes all unilateral measures that impede peace, including, inter alia, Israeli construction and expansion of settlements, the confiscation of Palestinians' land, the legalization of settlement outposts, the demolition of Palestinians' homes and the displacement of Palestinian civilians;

“The Security Council condemns all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terrorism; calls for the strengthening of ongoing efforts to counter terrorism in a manner consistent with international law, and for all parties to clearly condemn all acts of terrorism and refrain from incitement to violence; reiterates the obligation of all parties regarding the pursuit of accountability for all acts of violence targeting civilians; and recalls the obligation of the Palestinian Authority to renounce and confront terror;

“The Security Council calls on all parties to observe calm and restraint and to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, with the aim, inter alia, of de-escalating the situation on the ground, rebuilding trust and confidence, demonstrating through policies and actions a genuine commitment to the two-State solution, and creating the conditions necessary for promoting peace;

“The Security Council emphasizes the importance of the safety and well-being of all civilians and calls for full respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of the civilian population; calls for the facilitation of access for humanitarian workers to populations in need; and reiterates the need to take appropriate steps to ensure the safety and well-being of civilians and their protection;

“The Security Council notes with deep concern instances of discrimination, intolerance and hate speech motivated by racism or directed against persons belonging to religious communities, in particular cases motivated by Islamophobia, anti-Semitism or Christianophobia;

“The Security Council calls for upholding unchanged the historic status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem in word and in practice, and emphasizes, in that regard, the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.”

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2023/1.

I now give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: We are witnessing a surge in violence, including some of the deadliest incidents in nearly 20 years. I am concerned that developments on the ground are continuing their negative trajectory, gaining in both pace and intensity. At the same time, unilateral actions are moving the parties still further apart, exacerbating tensions and driving the conflict. Immediate efforts are required to reduce tensions, but restoring calm is not, on its own, a recipe for progress.

The United Nations, along with regional and international partners, has engaged intensively with all parties to de-escalate the situation. I appreciate in particular the Council’s efforts to focus its attention on the situation here, as reflected in the presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/1). I call upon the parties to match security efforts with political steps that can halt the negative slide and restore hope in an end to the conflict and prospects for a viable two-State solution.

Since I last briefed the Council (see S/PV.9246), we have seen an alarming number of fatalities. Forty Palestinians, including one woman and seven children, have been killed in the occupied West Bank. In the same period, 10 Israelis, including one woman, three children and one security personnel, as well as one woman foreign national, have been killed.

A significant number of Palestinian casualties have occurred in the context of Israeli security forces search and arrest operations and clashes with armed Palestinians, including in Area A of the occupied West Bank. On 26 January, 10 Palestinians, including militants and a 61-year-old woman, were killed in the Jenin refugee camp. A few days later, on 30 January, Israeli security forces killed five armed Palestinians during an arrest operation that led to an exchange of fire in the Aqbat Jabr refugee camp, near Jericho. Those killed were later claimed by Hamas as members of its armed wing.

Two terrorist attacks were carried out in occupied East Jerusalem. Six Israelis, including a child and

one foreign national, were killed in a shooting attack perpetrated by a Palestinian outside a synagogue on 27 January, and three Israelis, including two children, were killed in a ramming attack on 10 February. Two Palestinians were killed by settlers in the occupied West Bank, one while attempting to carry out a stabbing attack on 21 January and one shot in a confrontation with a group of settlers near a Palestinian village on 11 February. On 13 February, a 13-year-old Palestinian boy stabbed a member of the Israeli security forces in East Jerusalem, during which a second Israeli security forces member was shot and killed in a friendly fire incident.

As the Secretary-General noted last month, the current escalation of violence is deeply worrisome. There can never be any excuse for acts of terrorism or the targeting of civilians, which must be clearly condemned and rejected by all. The celebration or glorification of such attacks is abhorrent and must be unequivocally condemned. I reiterate that the 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 to protect life. I am particularly appalled that children continue to be the victims of violence and involved in violent incidents. Children must never be the targets of violence, used or put in harm’s way.

Amid the mounting violence, there has also been a concerning deterioration in relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Following the 26 January Israeli search and arrest operation in Jenin, the Palestinian Authority announced that security coordination with Israel “no longer exists”. Following the 27 January terrorist attack in Jerusalem, the Israeli Security Cabinet announced a series of measures, including steps to reinforce security and strengthen Israeli settlements, as well as punitive measures against the perpetrators of the attacks in Jerusalem and their families.

On 2 February, Israel’s Finance Minister announced an increase in monthly deductions from clearance revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the PA. The deductions — carried out in line with an Israeli law mandating the Government to withhold the equivalent of what it says the PA pays to Palestinian perpetrators of attacks against Israelis or to their families — will be doubled from approximately \$15 to \$30 million per month. In the light of those deductions, the PA said that it expected to maintain and potentially increase

measures, such as paying partial salaries for PA employees, which will severely impact the delivery of health, education and social support services. The financial implications of those various factors clearly contribute to undermining the stability of the PA.

Significant decisions were announced by the Government of Israel related to settlement advancements and settlement outposts. On 12 February, the Israeli Security Cabinet announced that it had decided to authorize nine illegal outposts in the occupied West Bank. It also said the Civil Administration's Higher Planning Committee would convene in the coming days to advance housing units in settlements, and that police and border police units in Jerusalem would be reinforced and their operations expanded. Such outposts increase the settlement footprint and create friction points in the occupied West Bank. The announcement was met with widespread opposition from the Palestinian Authority and members of the international community. Many emphasized that such unilateral moves exacerbate tensions and undermine prospects for a negotiated two-State solution.

Israeli settlements, including outposts, are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace. Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned property also remain a serious concern. During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 52 Palestinian-owned structures in Areas B and C and 46 in occupied East Jerusalem, displacing 130 Palestinians, including 68 children. The demolitions were carried out owing to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

On 7 February, Israel's High Court of Justice instructed the Government to submit by 2 April its response to a petition seeking a forced implementation of standing demolition orders against the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar. The Government had requested a postponement until 1 June. Also on 7 February, Israeli authorities said they would postpone the demolition of a multi-story structure housing approximately 100 Palestinians in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan. The postponement came a day after the police had told residents that they would move forward with the demolition. I am concerned about the significant increase in demolitions, particularly in East Jerusalem. I urge Israel to cease that practice, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

Turning to Gaza, the relative calm of the past few months was interrupted by exchanges of fire during the reporting period, once again demonstrating the fragility of the ceasefire. Palestinian militants in Gaza fired rockets from the Strip towards Israel on six occasions. A total of 11 rockets were fired: five were intercepted by the Iron Dome system, two landed in open areas and one fell short in Gaza. In retaliation, Israeli security forces carried out air strikes on 14 occasions against what it said were Hamas militant targets in the Strip, causing damage. I reiterate that the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centres violates international law and must stop immediately.

The United Nations has continued to deliver vital humanitarian and development assistance to Palestinians in Gaza and remains engaged with all the parties to reduce access restrictions to support the Gaza economy and basic service delivery. Increasing the movement of goods, in particular between Gaza and the West Bank, is vital for the Gaza economy to grow and generate employment opportunities. Such linkages can help sustain a vision for a political solution to Gaza's challenges.

I welcome the important regional and international diplomatic efforts during the reporting period aimed at preventing a deterioration on the ground. In January, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, meeting with Israeli and Palestinian leaders in an effort to advance concrete steps by both parties to lower the temperature, foster greater cooperation and bolster people's security. The visit coincided with a visit by senior officials from Egypt and Jordan, who met together with President Abbas on 31 January.

Turning to the region, on the Golan, the ceasefire between Israel and Syria has been generally maintained despite continued violations by both parties of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement of Forces. On 28 January, the Israel Defense Forces fired at two individuals from the Bravo side in the vicinity of the ceasefire line, injuring one man who later succumbed to his injuries. In Lebanon, the situation along the Blue Line remained mostly calm. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon interposed between the Israel Defense Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces on 18 and 19 January near Sarda and on 23 and 24 January near Markaba in connection with vegetation-clearing works by the Israel Defense Forces.

We have seen ominous signs of what awaits if we fail to address the current instability. Preventing more violence is an urgent priority that requires not only coordinated security measures but also considerable political efforts. As such, I urge both sides to refrain from taking unilateral steps that could further inflame the situation. I reiterate my appeal to the parties to rein in violence and incitement and hold perpetrators accountable. In particular, there is a need to address instability in the West Bank, characterized by spiralling tensions between Israeli security forces and armed Palestinian factions and friction points between settlers and Palestinians, which drives more violence and emboldens extremists. Restoring security coordination and ensuring that Palestinian security forces can operate effectively is key. At the same time, I urge a halt to all settlement expansion, demolitions and evictions, which fuel those tensions.

With the holy month of Ramadan once again coinciding with the Passover and Easter holidays this year, joint efforts are needed to ensure that this period passes safely and peacefully for all. Provocations, disinformation and efforts by extremists to stoke violence must be addressed swiftly and effectively. In that context, 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.

As we continue to work with the parties and regional and international partners to calm tensions, we must identify and pursue every opportunity to advance our long-term goal: an end to the occupation and the establishment of two States, living side by side in peace and security, on the basis of the 1967 lines, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Stenseth.

Ms. Stenseth: Let me begin by thanking you, Madam President, for your invitation to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to brief the Security Council. I wish to convey the warm regards of the Commissioner-General, Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, and his regret at being unable to meet with you, Madam, and all members of the Security Council today.

A growing number of Palestine refugees in the region stand on the brink of despair. Multiple crises, conflicts, the never-ending occupation, the socioeconomic ramifications of the coronavirus disease pandemic and the rising global food and fuel prices caused by the conflict in Ukraine have pushed a growing number of Palestine refugees into poverty. Competing global priorities and shifting regional dynamics have almost annihilated any remaining attention to the plight of Palestine refugees today.

Meanwhile, the political, socioeconomic and security conditions that surround the refugees continue to deteriorate. In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, this year has already witnessed a record-high number of deaths among Palestinians, including Palestine refugees. Casualties among Israelis are also of grave concern. We can almost anticipate that coming weeks will likely bring more violence, deaths and more life-changing injuries, including for bystanders and children in the West Bank. I echo the Special Coordinator's call to reduce tensions and prevent further loss of life. This cycle of violence must end before it is too late.

For UNRWA, the violence in the West Bank hampers our operations and exacts a heavy toll on the Palestine refugees whom we serve. Palestine refugees living in the northern West Bank, including in and around Jenin and Nablus, are particularly vulnerable to surrounding violence and tensions, which have at times forced UNRWA to interrupt its critical services, including its health centres. Urban spaces within, and around, densely populated refugee camps should not be venues for clashes with automatic weapons and tear gas. Children, including refugee children, have been far from immune to the spiralling violence, which has created an explosive and dangerous environment of fear, anger, desperation and hopelessness.

In Gaza, years of blockade and conflict have isolated the population from the rest of the world, creating a human tragedy that is hard to describe. More than 80 per cent of Palestine refugees in the Strip are poor, and nearly all of them rely on food assistance from UNRWA. Nearly half of the children attending UNRWA schools in Gaza have shown signs of trauma — scars that may be with them for the rest of their lives. In Gaza, we must always be prepared for an outbreak of conflict, not least because our schools are usually the only safe havens for people who flee their homes. We repeatedly call on all parties in Gaza

and the West Bank to respect our neutrality and the inviolability of our premises.

In Syria, the recent devastating earthquake is adding to the hardship and despair of a population already grappling with the shattering 12-year-old conflict and its aftermath. Approximately 62,000 Palestine refugees living in four camps have been affected by the earthquake, with 90 per cent of them in need of emergency assistance already prior to the earthquake.

In Lebanon, the collapse of the economy has hit the most vulnerable the hardest, among them Palestine refugees, 93 per cent of whom are now living in poverty. Children in Palestine refugee camps are exposed to multiple forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect, as their caregivers and communities have exhausted their resources and ability to create a safe and protective environment for children. The situation is so desperate that Palestine refugees are increasingly willing to risk their lives at sea in a desperate attempt to lead a dignified life.

In Jordan, despite overall stability, Palestine refugees struggle with socioeconomic conditions that are worsening with the declining national economy. Gender-based violence and negative coping strategies, including early marriage and child labour, are on the rise in all our fields of operation. Across all fields, Palestine refugees feel abandoned by the international community.

UNRWA has continued to deliver on its mandate against the challenging background. By providing public-like services, including education, health and social services, UNRWA has contributed to the human development of Palestine refugees and has helped maintain a relatively stable environment around them. As we look at the Middle East, UNRWA remains one of the few standing pillars of stability — a pillar of stability for Palestine refugees, for the countries that host them and for the region. UNRWA is, in fact, one of the most successful multilateral and collective efforts of the past 75 years. As we speak, half a million children are going to our 700 schools throughout the region. The schools are a beacon of hope for Palestine refugee boys and girls and often the only hope that they have in what is otherwise a desperate situation. UNRWA schools produce the future partners for peace that the region needs and that the Council is constantly seeking.

The lack of adequate, sustainable and predictable funding has put UNRWA in an impossible situation.

We have reached the limit of what we can do with the resources we have available today. Our total income in 2022 was approximately the same as in 2013, while the needs and costs are exponentially greater today. The status quo is no longer sustainable. And, as the quality of our services declines, so will our ability to contribute to the region's stability. Avoiding UNRWA's implosion is in our collective interest and should be our collective responsibility. In the absence of a political solution, UNRWA remains irreplaceable, including in terms of its stabilizing role. UNRWA's contribution to peace and security is extraordinarily cost-effective, helping to secure the present and future of millions of people in a highly fragile region.

There can be no peace or security in the region without the fulfilment of the basic rights of all, including Palestine refugees. We call on the Council today not to abandon them. We call on the Council today to give them back hope by redoubling efforts to find a political solution. And we on the Council and all Member States to continue supporting UNRWA politically and financially, ensuring that it has the resources it needs to deliver on its mandate. As we approach the seventy-fifth commemoration of the UNRWA mandate, let me conclude by reiterating our Commissioner-General's invitation to reflect on how the international community should live up to its commitment and responsibility to Palestine refugees while a just and lasting solution to their plight is found.

The President: I thank Ms. Stenseth for her briefing.

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 and Deputy Commissioner-General Stenseth for their briefings.

We are deeply troubled by the spiralling violence across Israel, the West Bank and Jerusalem. We strongly condemn the recent terrorist attacks in Israel, including the horrific attack outside a synagogue in East Jerusalem on 27 January and the attack on civilians, including children, at a bus stop in Jerusalem on 10 February. The deliberate targeting of innocent civilians is unconscionable, and the United States supports Israel's right to self-defence. Terrorist attacks on religious sites, attacks by settlers, attacks on security services, rockets launched against civilian areas and other forms of violence create a cycle of increasingly dangerous

escalations. This concern is raised by the upcoming period of religious holidays in Jerusalem. We urge all parties to take steps to restore and maintain calm. And we underscore that all visitors and worshippers should respect and maintain the historic status quo of the holy sites in word and in practice. It is essential that Israelis and Palestinians immediately break the cycle of violence, de-escalate and refrain from any unilateral or divisive actions that will take us even further from peace and stability.

Let me now add a clear and unequivocal statement. We strongly oppose Israel's announcement that it will advance thousands of settlement units, and we strongly oppose Israel's announcement that it began a process to retroactively legalize nine outposts in the West Bank that were previously illegal under Israeli law. Such unilateral measures exacerbate tensions. They harm trust between the parties. They undermine the prospects for a negotiated two-State solution. The United States does not support those actions, full stop. The clear and long-standing position of the United States is that settlement activity is unhelpful and distances us further from a negotiated two-State solution. Such actions are simply detrimental to Israel's long-term security and to our vision of a sustainable end to the conflict. We therefore call on all parties to work towards the conditions necessary for direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, which is the only path to a sustainable end to the conflict and a two-State solution. That is why we strongly support the presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/1) put forward by the United Arab Emirates, which demonstrates the Security Council's unanimous, collective voice on those issues. The presidential statement is real diplomacy at work, and we believe that it signifies to all parties how seriously the Council takes those threats to peace.

The United States joins the other members of the Council in asking Israelis and Palestinians alike to take the urgent and necessary steps to restore calm and improve the quality of life for their people. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, by virtue of its special role over Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, has an indispensable role to play in helping to preserve stability, which could be tested by the impending convergence of Passover, Ramadan and Easter, when tensions tend to run high. Ultimately, the parties themselves are the ones that can and must prevent a further downward spiral. In that regard, the United States stands ready to support the parties as they work

to rebuild trust and create a foundation for an eventual return to negotiations.

At this moment of heightened tensions, we must be sure to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which serves as a lifeline to Palestinians and plays an important stabilizing role in the region. For its part, the United States has already announced nearly \$50 million in support for UNRWA this new year. We call on our partners to provide early, predictable and flexible funding to UNRWA to ensure that the vital services it provides to the Palestinian people continue uninterrupted.

Let us continue to do everything we can to extend the horizon of hope and push for peace.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): Let me begin by thanking the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, and the Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Leni Stenseth, for their briefings. We encourage their further efforts for peace and in addressing the plight of the Palestinian people.

We also welcome the participation in today's meeting of the representatives of Israel and Qatar, as well as the Observer of the State of Palestine.

As we know, the Security Council has a historical responsibility for the situation in Palestine. When we hear briefings such as we received this morning, the Council must be united around its established positions on the question of Palestine. The concerning situation that the briefing conveys should reinforce our unyielding commitment to upholding the two-State solution to address the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and to redress the reversal of the peace and security gains achieved for the region after the ceasefire in May 2021. It is in that context that we support the presidential statement just agreed to by the Council (S/PRST/2023/1).

As most other members of the international community, Ghana is seriously, and understandably so, concerned about the recent Israeli Government policy intent and actions that expand the illegal settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, including through the retroactive approval of settlement outposts, the further expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the demolition of Palestinian-owned homes

and structures in the West Bank. Those actions, besides violating Palestinian rights, portends a de facto annexation of the West Bank and contravenes Israel's obligation under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We are seriously concerned about the consequences that the recent steps of the Israeli Government have on the viability of the two-State solution and the impact it has on the security of the region. We urge the Government of Israel to situate its actions within the limits of its obligations under international law, international humanitarian law and the prescriptions established through the resolutions of the Council. Its actions must help to abate the violations of the basic human rights of Palestinians, including the forceful demolition of their properties, transfer or forced evictions, arbitrary arrests, administrative detention, torture, unlawful killings and the denial of their basic rights to free movement and economic opportunities.

We remain cognizant of Israel's security concerns and condemn all incidents of attacks against its population and territory, including recent violent attacks such as stabbings, kidnappings and the launch of rockets from Gaza into Jerusalem and other Israeli civilian settlements. We encourage the active security cooperation of the Palestinian Authority with Israel in order to address the negative actions of Palestinian militant groups.

We remain concerned about the sharp increase in violent attacks in the West Bank and Jerusalem and other Israeli settlements, which resulted in several fatalities on both sides during the reporting period, with many injured and others in critical condition. Besides the physical damage and destruction to civilian infrastructure, the interminable cycle of violence also negatively affects the economies, health and sociopolitical lives of millions of people in the Middle East region. We urge all parties to observe calm and exercise restraint and deem it important to prioritize the protection of civilians. We particularly find it regrettable that children, who deserve to live in peace and exploit their God-given talents, are being made victims of violence and used as tools of violence.

Given that the experiences of children have a lasting impact on their physical, mental, emotional and psychosocial development, a departure from such a healthy and sound environment has serious and enduring negative consequences on their cognitive and emotional development. We therefore deplore the recent increase in the spate of violent clashes involving

children in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in the West Bank.

The international community's muted reaction to the need for investigations into systematic violations of human rights and other crimes by the parties has not been helpful in stabilizing the volatile situation on the ground. We urge a reconsideration of that position and remind the parties of their obligations under international law and several resolutions of the Council. We urge them to refrain from unilateral actions that obstruct and undermine efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive and just peace to the decades-old conflict.

We call on the leadership of both Israel and Palestine, as well as regional stakeholders, to continue engaging in a meaningful and transparent manner in order to effect significant policy changes that support the efforts for durable peace through a political resolution, based on equal rights and justice.

We note the sensitivities of the holy sites in Jerusalem and call for upholding the status quo ante. The object of religion, which is peace, should not be the basis for violence.

We encourage further financial and relevant support for the activities of UNRWA, whose continuing existence in support of the needed services by Palestinian refugees is a reflection of how much more needs to be done to achieve the goals of a just and durable solution to the Palestinian question.

Finally, I reiterate Ghana's continuing commitment to reinvigorating the Middle East peace process through renewed and constructive dialogue on a political horizon that leads to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and, ultimately, the realization of the two-State solution, on the basis of the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the shared capital.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): Brazil thanks Mr. Wennesland for the comprehensive update and for his tireless work and continuous engagement with all parties and stakeholders while working to de-escalate tensions and open avenues for dialogue. I also thank Deputy Commissioner-General Leni Stenseth for her contribution.

Brazil has been following, closely and with great concern, the fast-forwarding events in Israel and Palestine, which have been aggravating tensions, especially in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and taking

us to a very dangerous point. As the level of violence increases, so does the number of civilian casualties, including children, as well as the suffering and trauma that so many years of conflict have caused.

The fragility of the situation highlights the urgency of a renewed commitment to resolving this long-lasting conflict. We must act to prevent the conflict from spilling out of control, because it could end up affecting the entire region. In that sense, as Mr. Wennesland has frequently reiterated, addressing the root causes of the current tensions is key. The continuing expansion of the Israeli settlements is a well-known source of tensions and violence. In that regard, Brazil and other countries of our region have publicly stated their deep concern about the Government of Israel's recent decision to legalize nine outposts and build 10,000 houses in existing settlements in the West Bank. Those unilateral measures constitute serious violations of international law, including resolution 2334 (2016), the Council's last adoption in this area. Besides constituting flagrant violations of United Nations resolutions and international law, settlements systematically erode the possibility of establishing a contiguous, independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State and thereby undermine the prospects of achieving the desired outcome of a two-State solution. We therefore point to resolution 2334 (2016), whose provisions clearly state that Israel's establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity for the reasons I just mentioned, and should cease immediately.

Brazil urges all the parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid provocations and unilateral actions, including heated rhetoric, which could further aggravate tensions. At this point it should not be necessary to remind them of their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the various Security Council resolutions adopted over the years. And that applies both to the question of settlements and to the other violations of international law that are contributing to the current crisis. Civilians must be protected in times of conflict. Distinguishing between civilians and combatants is at the core of international humanitarian law. All the parties must work without fail to uphold that crucial foundational principle of international humanitarian law if we are to reverse the terrible trend of violence. Cooperation aimed at the security of civilians, besides preventing loss of life, could serve as an important confidence-building measure.

The recent attacks on religious sites, such as the vandalism on 2 February of the Chapel of the Flagellation in Jerusalem, are equally concerning. We urge all political leaders and authorities to promote a culture of peaceful coexistence and religious freedom. Brazil also condemns any actions linked to the idea of changing the historic status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. In that regard, we should not undermine the crucial custodial role that the Kingdom of Jordan has played in preserving peace at the holy sites over the years.

We want to emphasize that peace also depends on a commitment to the promotion of human rights for all. Poverty, food insecurity, hopelessness and a general sense of injustice create a perfect breeding ground for extremist forces to flourish. In that context, we stress the need for improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people by working to strengthen the Palestinian economy and address the challenge of governance. The situation in Gaza is particularly concerning, as the blockade continues to hinder development efforts.

Brazil remains concerned about the chronic financial challenges facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has been providing much-needed humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees. We must not undermine the role that UNRWA has played over the years in maintaining stability on the ground.

Brazil reaffirms its long-standing commitment to a two-State solution, with Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders. We also remain committed to the idea of peace and to the speedy achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We therefore stand ready to engage constructively in initiatives aimed at a more proactive contribution by the Security Council to the cause of peace. And in view of all of this, Brazil expresses its full support for presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1, delivered at this meeting.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for today's briefings, which once again describe a worrisome and difficult situation. In that regard, and in line with the presidential statement that we just adopted (S/PRST/2023/1), the first in nine years on this subject, I would like to focus on four points of particular importance.

First, I should point out that a deterioration of the situation will only cause more suffering, death and destruction for the parties. It is inconceivable that there is anyone who is not aware of that reality. Every effort must be made to avoid greater violence. In that regard, we appreciate and express our gratitude and full support for the work of Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and hope that his efforts can produce the results we all want to see. We also appreciate the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), its commitment to easing the humanitarian situation and its efforts to mitigate the effects of the earthquake that has affected the entire region. We urge for continued support for its vitally important work.

Secondly, in accordance with its foreign policy, Ecuador condemns in the strongest possible terms any kind of violence against civilians or acts of terrorism and their unacceptable glorification. The kind of acts that caused the death of three civilians, including two children, in East Jerusalem on 10 February, must be condemned by all. We call for safeguarding people's lives and safety and emphasize that the norms of international humanitarian law must be respected at all times, without excuses.

Thirdly, we condemn the unilateral decisions hindering the prospects for reaching a final settlement founded on the concept of the existence of two States on the basis of the 1967 borders. The announcement of the legalization of settlements in the occupied territories and the construction of more buildings in them is a unilateral decision that contravenes international law and Security Council resolutions. Those decisions exacerbate tensions and make the path to peace and security more difficult.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate my call to the leaders concerned to show true courage and act in the long-term interests of their peoples, prioritizing actions that can ease tensions and lead to a resumption of negotiations by all parties with the aim of reaching a definitive solution. That is the only way their peoples will be able to live in peace, security and dignity.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East region in the context of a settlement. We listened carefully to the Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations

Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Ms. Leni Stenseth.

The latest escalation in violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has once again demonstrated the danger and destructiveness of the absence of a peace process, which has been blocked by our colleagues on the Security Council in the interests of one side. Amid the increasing Israeli occupation and military activity, Palestinian news coverage has become a series of reports of killings, arbitrary detentions, the inhumane treatment of prisoners, forced evictions and the expropriation and destruction of property. We already presented the corresponding statistics at a previous meeting.

The beginning of this year was marked by further destabilizing provocative steps: the visit by the Israeli National Security Minister, Mr. Ben-Gvir, to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a bloody raid by Israeli military personnel in Jenin, which was followed by terror attacks in East Jerusalem, and the decision by the Israeli authorities to legalize nine outposts and approve plans to build approximately 10,000 houses in settlements in the West Bank.

Against that backdrop, the Israeli intention to double the number of settlers living in the Jordan Valley, as well as in the Syrian Golan Heights, by 2026 can be seen as a de facto annexation of most of the occupied Palestinian, as well as Syrian, territory. We support presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1, adopted on this issue today by the Security Council.

We also strongly condemn Israeli strikes against Syria, which further seriously destabilize the situation in the Middle East region. We view such developments with deep concern. We call on all sides to exercise maximum restraint and prevent the further escalation of tensions, especially in view of the fact that tensions unfortunately tend to erupt at times of religious holidays, in particular the upcoming Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Recent events clearly underscore the need for the urgent resumption of a constructive Palestinian-Israeli dialogue and for avoiding unilateral action. An end to the cycle of violence can be brought about only through a negotiating process, based on the principles of international law, that results in the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, living in peace and security with Israel. The lack of a political horizon, combined with Israel's increased

unilateral steps, undermines not only the basis for a settlement but also the credibility of the peace process as such, leading to radicalization on both sides.

Against that background, there has been a consistent degradation of the overall social and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories despite Israel's professed efforts to provide economic assistance to the Palestinians. In that context, there is a need to ensure that UNRWA continues its effective efforts to provide comprehensive humanitarian assistance in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as in neighbouring Arab countries. In that regard, we call on international donors to support the Agency's flash appeal for \$2.7 million to assist Palestinian refugees affected by the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria.

In that alarming context, we believe that the primary task is to achieve a lasting stabilization of the situation on the ground and to restore the political horizon for reviving the peaceful Middle East settlement process on a universally recognized international legal basis, with the core element of a two-State solution. It is also necessary to achieve intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which is the most important condition for reviving the peace process.

As a permanent member of the Security Council and a member of the international Middle East Quartet mediators, Russia is ready to make a significant contribution to a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We view attempts to usurp external support of contacts between the sides as counterproductive and contrary to the fundamental interests of the two peoples. In particular, we view the actions of the United States, blocking all international formats in support of a settlement in the Middle East and trying to substitute a genuine political peace with an economic one, as destructive. We are convinced of the extreme danger of attempts to promote Arab-Israeli normalization by circumventing a just solution to the Palestinian issue. We regret that such a trend is being transferred by Washington to the platform of the Security Council, where the United States is doing everything possible to prevent the adoption of any solutions that the Palestinians need.

Ms. Koumby Missambo (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and the Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Ms. Leni Stenseth, for their briefings. I reaffirm my delegation's support for the

Special Coordinator. I welcome the presence among us of the Permanent Representatives of Israel and Qatar and the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

The deterioration of the security situation, both in Jerusalem, as we have seen since the beginning of this year, and in the Gaza Strip, and now in the occupied West Bank, requires the special attention of the Security Council. The Israeli raid on Thursday, 26 January, on the Jenin refugee camp and the subsequent attack targeting a synagogue in Jerusalem, both of which resulted in loss of life and dozens of injuries, illustrate the deadly escalation seen since the beginning of January.

My country condemns all such violence, which contributes to the suffering of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. We recognize Israel's right to security. However, it is important to respect international law.

In the same vein, the increase in demolitions, compounded by the recent decision to legalize nine settlements in the West Bank and to build new housing units in the existing settlements, are factors that exacerbate the tensions on the ground.

I would also like to draw the Council's attention to the particularly worrisome economic situation of the Palestinian Authority, exacerbated by the freezing of tax funds collected by Israel from Palestinian Authority workers on its behalf. Urgent measures must be taken for its economic recovery. There can be no prosperity in the region unless such prosperity is shared. That is also one of the factors for peace that must be taken into account.

It is now more than ever time for de-escalation. The parties must show restraint and prioritize dialogue through direct negotiations. The countries of the region and those with influence on the parties must redouble their efforts to achieve that goal. The vicious circle of violence must not be allowed to continue and further compound to the tragic human, material, economic and humanitarian toll of this conflict.

In conclusion, we support presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1, read out by the President.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): Japan welcomes the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1 as a united message of the Security Council.

I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

in the Near East (UNRWA) Leni Stenseth for their informative briefings.

Since the beginning of this year, there have been a number of developments that risk an escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories. The international community has been intensifying its efforts aimed at easing tensions. For our part, in the telephone conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 13 February, Prime Minister Kishida expressed concern about the rising tensions between Israel and Palestine and the unilateral measures taken by both sides.

It is troubling to witness the deteriorating security situation in the West Bank. The dangerous trajectory of violence from last year continues its alarming trend, including in the recent attack by Israeli forces against the Jenin refugee camp, which led to the highest number of Palestinians killed in a single operation in the West Bank since 2005, according to a report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Japan also calls for the reversal of the Israeli Government's recent announcement to declare nine settlement outposts in the occupied West Bank as legal under Israeli law as well as plans to advance new settlement construction. Israeli settlement activities are in violation of international law and must end immediately.

At the same time, we condemn terror attacks in all their forms and manifestations. Recent escalatory actions committed by Palestinians in Jerusalem, such as the terrorist attack outside a synagogue and the car ramming into a bus stop, are deeply deplorable, as they only intensify violence in the area. As the situation surrounding Israel and Palestine manifests continued clashes and violence resulting in casualties, Japan calls for refraining from unilateral actions that exacerbate tensions.

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the Japan-UNRWA partnership. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate Japan's enduring commitment to assisting UNRWA to ensure that Palestinian refugees continue to receive life-saving assistance and basic services.

In conclusion, there is no alternative to direct negotiations between the parties. Japan expresses its strong determination to revive the prospect of a

two-State solution and achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace and stability in the Middle East.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to join others in starting by thanking Special Coordinator Wennesland and Deputy Commissioner-General Stenseth, not only for their briefings, but also for the work of their teams on the ground.

I would also like to thank members of the Security Council for our work to come to a consensus on a presidential statement. This statement (S/PRST/2023/1) sets out the international community's continued commitment to a two-State solution based on 1967 lines and urges an end to Israeli settlement activities and the prevention of terrorism. All parties must desist from unilateral measures that further undermine peace, stability and the two-State solution.

Violence and instability in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories has led to further loss of life. Ten Israelis have been killed in two abhorrent terror attacks in 2023. The United Kingdom condemns all forms of terror, for which there is no justification. Since the start of the year, 44 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces. This includes 11 children. Israel must exercise maximum restraint in the use of live fire, and the Palestinian Authority must urgently resume full security cooperation and renounce and confront terror. We also condemn the indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza on 11 and 12 February towards civilian populations. This escalating cycle of violence must be brought to an end as swiftly as possible, particularly ahead of upcoming religious festivals.

Secondly, the United Kingdom condemns Israel's announcement to legalize 10 outposts and advance up to 10,000 units in settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. As set out by the British Foreign Secretary and our partners in the Quint statement, the United Kingdom strongly opposes these unilateral actions, which exacerbate tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. Settlements and outposts are not only contrary to international law, but they also undermine the prospects for peace. The United Kingdom calls on Israel to reverse these decisions. I also condemn increasing settler violence, including the killing of Mithqal Rayyan on 11 February. Perpetrators of violence must face justice.

Thirdly, the United Kingdom urges Israel to avoid measures that could amount to collective punishment against Palestinians, particularly punitive demolitions.

These cause unnecessary suffering and contribute to the cycle of violence; four Palestinians have been killed during punitive demolition operations so far this year.

In conclusion, restoring stability and securing peace is still possible, but it will require effort from all sides. The United Kingdom stands ready to facilitate discussions and dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians and remains firm in its belief that a negotiated two-State solution, based on 1967 lines with Jerusalem as a shared capital, is the only way to ensure a lasting peace, security and prosperity between the parties.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): Mozambique wishes to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Ms. Leni Stenseth, Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for their comprehensive briefings on the current situation in the region. We reiterate our full support for their efforts towards a just and durable peace in the region and towards the well-being of the Palestinian people.

We note that since the last time the Security Council considered the issue before us (see S/PV.9246), the Palestinian question has registered no progress. On the contrary, the vicious cycle of violence tends to grow at an alarming pace. In this regard, we wish to reiterate our strong support for the presidential statement just read out by the President of the Council and adopted by it this morning (S/PRST/2023/1).

We continue to express our deep concern over the unilateral actions and excessive use of force by the Israeli Government against refugees in Jenin, including women and children. We hold the view that peoples of both Israel and Palestine deserve a peaceful and prosperous life and future. They should be able, in the words of the Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, “to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours...”. In that context, we want to underline once again that the construction and expansion of settlements are totally contrary to international law and undermine the prospects for peace and for the establishment of a Palestinian State. We urge all the contending parties to exercise restraint and to halt all acts of provocation and hostility in order to create favourable conditions that can lead to a resumption of the long-stalled direct dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. We welcome the efforts by international partners aimed at exerting

positive influence regarding respect for the rule of law and democracy in Palestine by creating the conditions necessary for holding presidential and legislative elections in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

We reiterate our urgent and strong appeal for increased, predictable and sustainable support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as well as for the World Food Programme, which will enable both organizations to continue to alleviate human suffering and ensure a level of dignity for the refugees and internally displaced persons in the region.

Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 2334 (2016), among others, as well as various General Assembly resolutions and decisions, form the political and legal basis for a two-State solution, and our efforts for peace in the region must therefore align with them. We must continue encouraging the parties to pursue that path. We strongly urge Israelis and Palestinians to work constructively together to lay the groundwork for a lasting peace based on the full and immediate realization of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and the right to existence of the State of Israel.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Coordinator and the Deputy Commissioner-General for their briefings.

I would like to begin by welcoming today’s adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1. It is important for the Security Council to be able to express itself unanimously on the recent unilateral measures and to reiterate its commitment to a two-State solution. I have three messages today.

First, the recent Israeli announcements represent steps towards annexing Area C. France reiterates its firm condemnation of Israel’s settlement policy, which moves us ever further from the possibility of a two-State solution. France is very concerned about the Israeli Government’s announcement of its intention to advance plans for the construction of nearly 10,000 housing units in the settlements and to begin a process of legalizing nine outposts previously considered to be in violation of Israeli law. Those unilateral measures are contrary to international law, including several Security Council resolutions, such as resolution 2334 (2016). We strongly oppose them and call on the Israeli authorities to reverse their decision, which if implemented will create the risk of a progressive annexation of Area

C in the West Bank. In the Palestinian territories, as elsewhere, France will never recognize the illegal annexation of territories.

We are also concerned about the growing and worrisome violence perpetrated by settlers, which we condemn, and which targets both Palestinians and Israeli civil society. Those responsible for the violence must be held accountable for their actions. France reiterates its commitment to respect for international humanitarian law and to Israel's obligation to protect civilians in the occupied territories.

Secondly, in the face of a highly inflammatory situation, the Council must do everything possible to prevent an escalation. As the Special Coordinator indicated, the beginning of this year has been marked by a very high level of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The cycle of violence is unsustainable for both Palestinians and Israelis and must end. As President Macron told Israel's Prime Minister on 3 February, France firmly condemns the terrorist attacks committed in recent weeks, which have cost the lives of several civilians, including children. Our unwavering commitment to the security of Israel is well known. Israelis, like Palestinians, have the right to live in peace and security. France calls on the parties to show restraint and to refrain from any action that could be perceived as a provocation in the current context.

The cycle of violence can be explained, above all, by the total absence of a political horizon. France therefore calls on all members of the Council, as well as the States of the region, to contribute actively to relaunching the peace efforts, and stands ready to contribute to that end.

Thirdly and finally, the international community must mobilize to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). France supports the Agency, which has played a crucial role since 1949 in helping Palestinian refugees. We contributed €33.5 million in 2022 and will continue our support this year. The international community must mobilize to ensure that UNRWA can continue its activities, which the lives of many Palestinian refugees depend on. Most of them live below the poverty line and are facing new challenges, including the recent earthquake in Syria. We therefore call on all Member States, especially the countries of the region, to contribute financially to the Agency's activities in 2023.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would also like to join others in thanking the Special Coordinator, Mr. Tor Wennesland, and the Deputy Commissioner-General, Ms. Leni Stenseth, for their briefings and for their work.

Switzerland welcomes the exchanges in the past few days between the parties aimed at promoting de-escalation. We are concerned about the deterioration of the security situation and the real risk of escalation, and we therefore welcome the fact that today the Security Council managed to put together a presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/1) by consensus, which we fully support. We remain concerned, however, about the Israeli Government's announcement on 12 February that it wants to build nearly 10,000 new housing units in settlements and to retroactively legalize nine outposts in the occupied Palestinian territory. We call on Israel to refrain from those unilateral measures, which risk further exacerbating tensions and endanger the prospects of a negotiated two-State solution. The measures also include the demolition of the village of Khan Al-Ahmar, which is located in a strategic area that is essential to ensuring the contiguity of Palestinian territory. Switzerland urges the occupying Power to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law, including with regard to the issuance of building permits to the Palestinian population.

We condemn the attacks on civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory, as well as those in recent weeks on settlements in East Jerusalem. Switzerland expects the parties to respect their obligations under international law and to strengthen measures to protect civilians. Accountability is also vital to preventing such violence.

In the face of the increasing humanitarian needs in the region, the services provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are all the more essential today. By providing health, education and social safety-net assistance, UNRWA makes a significant contribution to stability in the region. It is essential for UNRWA to be able to continue to provide effective and efficient assistance in accordance with humanitarian principles, including neutrality. To that end, Switzerland calls for adequate and predictable financial support for the Agency.

In the current volatile context, Switzerland is concerned about the continued weakening of the Palestinian Authority, including as a result of measures taken by Israel. We reiterate our call for elections to

be held throughout the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That is an indispensable step towards restoring the legitimacy of its institutions and re-establishing the political unity that is required for a two-State solution. With the religious holidays of Ramadan, Pesach and Easter just a few weeks away, we reiterate our call on all the parties to engage with strict respect for the historic status quo of Haram Al-Sharif/ Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Preventing further loss of life and reversing the negative trends on the ground remains a priority. Switzerland is ready to support peace efforts, including through its good offices, aimed at restoring a political horizon based on a two-State solution.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland. I would also like to thank the Council members for their warnings on the question of Palestine. And I thank Mr. Wennesland and Deputy Commissioner-General Stenseth for their briefings.

The tensions in Palestinian-Israeli relations have continued for some time now. Israel's unilateral actions keep escalating and are pushing the situation to a point where it is close to spinning out of control. We note with concern that the violence in the West Bank has been intensifying. Search-and-arrest operations, settler violence and clashes and attacks have continued to cause serious civilian casualties, including among children. The solemnity and sanctity of Jerusalem's holy sites have been repeatedly violated and their historical status quo frequently challenged. Provocative acts and inflammatory speech of all kinds have continued to intensify conflict and confrontations. Moreover, Israel keeps advancing its settlement activities. Earlier this month, it announced its decision to legalize nine West Bank outposts and a plan to build 10,000 settlement units, which have been met with widespread condemnation and concern. Those negative developments run counter to international law, the resolutions of the Security Council, the repeated calls by all the parties for a de-escalation of the situation and the efforts of the international community to preserve the possibility of a two-State solution.

At this critical juncture and over the past few days, at the initiative of the United Arab Emirates, Council members have conducted intensive consultations on a draft resolution and reached a broad consensus. As the Council prepares to adopt that draft resolution, we are finally seeing the parties concerned making

efforts towards conducting emergency diplomatic mediation. According to media reports, yesterday Israel pledged to suspend unilateral actions that would undoubtedly undermine the prospects for a two-State solution. However, it must be pointed out that the vitality of diplomatic commitments depends on their implementation. Now is definitely not the time to breathe a sigh of relief. The international community, including the countries with major influence, should continue to focus on the issue, increase the level of commitment and play a genuinely constructive role aimed at ensuring that Israel actually implements its promises on the ground.

At the same time, more needs to be done. In the wake of its promise to suspend hostilities, Israel should refrain from any more rounds of unilateral activities but should rather completely change course and truly return to the track of a two-State solution. The presidential statement that we just adopted (S/PRST/2023/1) is a major step towards managing the current crisis, and it also reflects the determination and desire of the vast majority of members to maintain and implement a two-State solution. China commends the leadership demonstrated by the United Arab Emirates. The Council should be ready to take meaningful action whenever necessary in order to genuinely fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to it by the Charter of the United Nations.

Deputy Commissioner-General Stenseth just briefed us on the work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Palestinian refugees are one of the earliest, largest and longest-lasting such groups in the world. The Agency's critical services, such as education, health care and social assistance, have ensured the basics of Palestinian refugees' lives, demonstrating the international community's solidarity with them and fulfilling its collective responsibility towards them. China fully recognizes and highly commends UNRWA's work. In recent years, UNRWA has repeatedly sounded the alarm about its funding crisis, emphasizing the fact that the Palestinian refugees' situation keeps getting worse and their humanitarian needs are growing. We call on Israel to stop demolishing refugees' homes and schools, end its blockade of the Gaza Strip and cease creating obstacles to UNRWA in fulfilling its mandate.

Next year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the work of the Agency, which has continued without a stop for more than 70 years. That means that after

more than 70 years, the Palestinian question has yet to be resolved. In the face of such protracted injustice and suffering, the international community should reflect deeply and correct its mistakes without delay, including by abandoning piecemeal crisis management and promoting a comprehensive, just and durable solution to the Palestinian question. The Palestinian people are eagerly waiting for the day when their homeland is no longer under occupation and an independent and sovereign State of Palestine can live side by side with Israel while enjoying common security and development. It is our shared responsibility to make sure that day comes as soon as possible.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Deputy Commissioner-General Stenseth for their briefings. It is unfortunate to note that since our most recent meeting on this topic (see S/PV.9246), the situation on the ground has not improved. In fact, the overall climate has worsened. The absence of a political horizon looms large and continues to directly affect the safety and the security of both Israelis and Palestinians on a daily basis by dimming hopes for a peaceful, comprehensive solution to the conflict.

We are appalled by the terrorist attacks on Israel and deplore the loss of innocent life in Jerusalem. We condemn those attacks strongly and unequivocally. The use of acts of terror, the glorification of terror, and incitements to violence and hate speech of any kind, including antisemitism, are deplorable and unacceptable, and must stop. We are also deeply worried about the worsening situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We reiterate our position that the expansion of settlements is wrong and must stop. Equally, violence against the Palestinian people in breach of international humanitarian law, in addition to evictions and the demolition of their private properties, cannot become standard practice.

In that context of alarming, heightened tensions, the key word is de-escalation. Both parties must engage without delay to de-escalate and resume security cooperation, because if we do not break the spiral of violence, more innocent people will be harmed and the already huge divide between the parties will only grow. There should not be another deadly year for the civilians, the children and the innocent women and young people of Israel and Palestine. The death toll from past events is already dreadful. We will not tire of repeating that the parties must refrain from unilateral

steps and actions that erode trust, fuel tensions and breed violence, with the familiar consequences, over and over again. If there is one aspect that this, the longest crisis in modern history, has continued to confirm, it is that one-sided measures have never been helpful and have never contributed to peace efforts. They only trigger animosity between the sides, not only creating more insecurity and instability for those concerned but making the entire region more volatile. That is why we welcome this morning's adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1 and the active efforts deployed in the past few days. We hope they will serve as reflections on the need to find other and better ways to address concerns by common consent.

Next month, believers from the three monotheistic religions will observe their yearly rituals based on the values of family, charity and respect for others. It is a moment of profound reflection and spiritual fulfilment, and everything must be in place for people to exercise their freedom of religion and belief in the most peaceful and harmonious manner possible. Peaceful religious coexistence is a core contributing factor to the potential for comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In that regard, Albania would like to emphasize the particular significance of respect for the status quo of the holy sites and express its support for the special role of the custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in that regard.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Albania's full support for a just, negotiated two-State solution that can make it possible for a secure and safe Israel to live side by side in peace and security with a viable and democratic Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as their future shared capital. Let us not forget that nothing can be built without hope; nothing is possible without continued and genuine efforts; and nothing is sustainable without trust. That is what is needed to keep violence away, bring about change and ensure that both Israelis and Palestinians live as neighbours in safety and security while enjoying freedom, dignity, justice and the benefits of democracy.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his thorough briefing and his constant efforts in pursuit of peace between Israel and Palestine. I also thank Deputy Commissioner-General Stenseth for her valuable remarks. The United Arab Emirates is grateful to the Council members for their constructive approach to the adoption of today's presidential statement

S/PRST/2023/1 — the first decision on this file in more than six years. It is especially important for the Council to be united and unequivocal in affirming that continued Israeli settlement activity dangerously imperils the possibility of a two-State solution. We also welcome the text's strong emphasis on the protection of civilians and counter-terrorism.

After a year in which escalating provocations, tension and violence further eroded the prospects for a two-State solution, the Council's reiteration of its unwavering commitment to the vision of an independent Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace, is absolutely essential. Still, the past few weeks have demonstrated the potential consequences of the continued lack of a credible peace process. We cannot go on mistaking the absence of a breakdown for a sustainable status quo. The sustained deterioration of conditions on the ground will require a far more concerted effort by the parties and indeed by the Council. As we discuss ways to promote and sustain constructive engagement, I would like to stress three points.

First, de-escalation is key. That must include reversing, in addition to suspending, unilateral actions such as settlement activities, which undermine the prospects for a two-State solution and constitute a clear violation of international law and the Council's resolutions.

Secondly, this is a time for political and moral leadership, specifically by refusing to yield further ground to extremism in all its forms. That is critical, as the followers of the three Abrahamic religions will be celebrating the holy month of Ramadan, Passover and Easter in the coming weeks. The holiday period has too often been marred by avoidable violence. The United Arab Emirates is firm in its condemnation and rejection of all forms of Islamophobia, antisemitism and Christianophobia, and we call for respect for all religious sites, including mosques, churches and synagogues. In the light of the alarming rise in extremist hate speech and incitement, it is vital that the Security Council has addressed those issues in a product for the first time. We reaffirm the need to maintain the historical and legal status quo of the city of Jerusalem and its holy sites. The United Arab Emirates once again stresses the importance of respecting the Hashemite custodianship of the holy sites, as expressive of the special role of the Kingdom of Jordan.

Thirdly, the demolition of Palestinian property must stop. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 155 demolitions took place between 1 January and 12 February alone, 28 per cent of them in East Jerusalem. Those are not just statistics. Behind each of the 155 demolitions are uprooted families, destroyed livelihoods and communities scarred by the ensuing violence and dislocation. We once again underscore to all parties the need to abide by their responsibilities under international law, including international humanitarian law, especially with regard to the protection of civilians.

The Security Council's responsibility in the conflict cannot be reduced to a last-resort effort to prevent a complete breakdown. The Council must revitalize its role as the international custodian of a two-State solution whereby an independent Palestinian state, built on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, lives side by side with Israel in peace, security and mutual recognition. That requires actively facilitating a return to direct final status talks. What hangs in the balance is nothing short of the legitimate hopes and aspirations of nearly 15 million people — Israelis and Palestinians — for normal, peaceful, stable, secure and prosperous lives.

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

I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Deputy Commissioner-General Stenseth for their insightful briefings. I also recognize the presence of the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine and the Permanent Representatives of Israel and Qatar. I am pleased that the Security Council acted in a united manner and adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1 this morning. We continue to monitor the latest developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with deep concern.

The significance of maintaining calm and avoiding unilateral inflammatory actions by all parties cannot be overstated. A resumption of dialogue and coordination between the parties on the ground, including on security cooperation, is essential if the conflict is not to escalate further. In the context of the stalled peace process, Malta strongly reiterates its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict based on a two-State solution along the pre-1967 borders, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States living side by side in peace and security, in line

with all the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

Settlement activities are a clear violation of international law and the Council's resolutions and an obstacle to peace. The Israeli Government's recent decision to advance settlement units and to legalize settlement outposts in the occupied West Bank under Israeli law takes us further away from a viable two-State solution. We call on the Israeli authorities to halt settlement expansion and reverse the latest decisions. We also remain concerned about the increases in demolitions, forced evictions and related settler violence in the occupied Palestinian territories. At the same time, Malta underlines the importance of ensuring that the Palestinian Authority holds the postponed national elections without further delay. We were encouraged by the signing in October 2022 of the Algiers Declaration and continue to urge the Palestinian factions to engage in good faith in the reconciliation process. Malta also calls for a broadening of support and the establishment of a safe environment enabling Palestinian civil society to be actively engaged in the peace process.

In 2023 we have continued to witness violence, with casualties suffered by both sides. The protection of civilians must be ensured at all times. While recognizing Israel's legitimate right to defend itself against all attacks, Malta underlines that any operation must be proportionate and in line with international humanitarian law. We equally condemn the terrorist attacks committed against Israel. The status quo must not be allowed to continue. Both parties must find a way to engage in a meaningful dialogue that aims to create two States, living side by side. That is the only path that can lead to long-term de-escalation.

Malta is deeply troubled by the number of victims of violence, especially as a result of the marked increase in incidents involving children, including acts of terrorism. In that regard, following her recent visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict also underscored the disproportionate impact of the conflict on children. Malta echoes her call for all parties to take measures that ensure the protection of all Palestinian and Israeli children.

We should not mention the plight of children without commending the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as a pillar of support to Palestinian

refugees in the region. We also welcome UNRWA's tireless provision of schooling for more than half a million children and the maintenance and operation of hundreds of schools for Palestinian refugees. We equally condemn the actions of any party that seek to bring the Agency's reputation into doubt. UNRWA remains the strongest pillar of support and humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people, and a stabilizing force in the region. Malta reiterates its call for the international financial support that the Agency badly needs to ensure its realization of its new strategic plan.

There is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution. It is important to reverse the negative cycle of violence and prevent any further loss of life. We underscore that a recommitment to the peace process by all parties is imperative. The work of restoring stability and securing peace, thereby safeguarding the lives of Palestinian and Israeli people, should continue to guide our efforts.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, Madam President, allow me to congratulate Malta on steering the work of the Security Council this month. We share deep bonds of friendship and common values with your country. It is fitting for the Council to be meeting and adopting a presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/1) under your presidency. I would also like to thank the Special Coordinator and the Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for their briefings. UNRWA's work is extremely important and should be maintained, protected and financed. Finally, allow me to express our appreciation to the Group of Arab States, represented by my sister the Ambassador of Qatar, for joining today's important meeting.

The year 2023 is still young but an old wound continues to bleed. Watching the news coming from Palestine, many may feel that it is more of the same, that we have been here before and that it is tragic, but it is what it is. But this is not just any moment in time, and while the killing, pain, displacement and demolitions are the same, we are fast approaching a breaking point that no one should care to explore. It is mounting with every child killed, every house demolished and every family displaced. Amid the recurrent headlines, people

may miss it. But for those who know our region or have visited it recently, it is obvious, glaring and undeniable. One of the signs is an acceleration of events. The deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank, which has just gone by, may well be surpassed by the deadliest year currently under way. All the ingredients are there for us to reach a point of no return. I do not agree with those who say that we have already reached it, as we do not have the luxury of fatalism. Every action we take now matters. Every word we utter matters. Every decision we delay matters.

Watching the news coming from Palestine, many may feel that it is more of the same, but for the mother who has lost a child and fears for the ones still alive; for the family that can find no safety in the sanctity of its home; for the millions who endure dispossession, displacement and the denial of rights, the pain hits differently each time. I ask the Council members, collectively and individually, not to become numb. I ask them not to grow accustomed to the status quo or to accept defeat. Our people will not. They will not accept coexistence with oppression and occupation. Humankind has elaborated rules. The Council has adopted resolutions. The global community has endorsed a vision. They should not relinquish them. They must defend them. The Council must defend them.

The year is still young, but Israel persists in pursuing old recipes with objectives that are no longer hidden — colonization and annexation, which have predictable implications, including gross human rights abuses, human suffering, violence and instability. The Israeli Government has announced its unlawful plan and is acting on it. It is time for the international community to announce its own plan in defence of international law and to act on it. It is time for the Council to act. It must not remain paralysed. The international plan should start with Jerusalem, where Israel's colonial and discriminatory policies find their ultimate expression; where Israel's annexation, announced 43 years ago, continues to be met with defiance by the Palestinian people as a whole, and by Jerusalemites in particular; where Israel hopes, through collective punishment and political and geographical suffocation, to subdue our people, to no avail. In that connection, I would like to say a few words in Arabic.

(spoke in Arabic)

They will not succeed in breaking the will of our great Palestinian people, in particular in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Those are our heroic people, who have been

steadfast in Al-Quds Al-Sharif today and always. From this rostrum, I salute them warmly and shake their hands. They are keeping their heads and ours high. They are a crown for our heads in their symbolization of our pride and dignity.

(spoke in English)

The international mobilization we have witnessed in the past few days must be sustained and amplified. Today the Council expressed its clear opposition to those policies yet again, in a united, unequivocal manner, in the first presidential statement it has adopted on Palestine in almost a decade. And while we condemn in the strongest terms the illegal unilateral settlement policies and practices, many countries, including many Council members, have expressed condemnation of those illegal acts as well. I want to take this opportunity to thank the United Arab Emirates and my sister Mrs. Nusseibeh for putting forward the presidential statement and for all their efforts towards its adoption, and I thank Council members for their engagement and support. The Council has thereby once again confirmed its long-standing position in no uncertain terms. That message has to be advanced and translated into a time-bound action plan, a concerted effort by the United Nations and its Member States to set us on a different path — one that leads to freedom, justice and peace.

Every action we take now matters. Every word we utter matters. Every decision we adopt matters. We do not have the luxury of fatalism. The Palestinian people deserve freedom and an end to the historic injustice of the Nakba they endured 70 years ago and that is still ongoing today. All peoples in our region and beyond deserve to live in peace. They deserve freedom, not occupation, coexistence, not supremacy, and peace, not apartheid.

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

Mr. Erdan (Israel): A few weeks ago, a young Palestinian girl recited a poem:

“Daddy gave me a present, a machine gun and a rifle. When I am big, I will join the Liberation Army. The Liberation Army taught us how to defend our homeland. We will achieve victory over America and Israel.”

Amal, the Palestinian girl in question, recited that moving poem on air, and it was publicly broadcast on

an official Palestinian Authority television channel. Tragically, little Amal is only one of countless other young people whom the Palestinian Authority has indoctrinated to hate and murder. The Palestinian Authority runs a monstrous propaganda campaign that would make Goebbels and Hitler very proud. They have poisoned the minds of generations, teaching them that violently murdering Jews means infinite glory. They are taught from a young age that the Jewish State has no right to exist. Their evil seeps into kindergartens, educating them in the belief that martyrdom is the only way. The members of the Council can see that for themselves. Yet none of the dismay and concern expressed in the Council's joint presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/1) is directed at that Palestinian incitement.

The Palestinian Authority is a terrorist entity that in 2022 alone rewarded killers and their families with \$175 million for killing Israelis, to which I draw the attention of the representative of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East if she needs money. The members of the Council are all familiar with the Palestinians pay-for-slay system, yet they are willing to let it continue without condemnation. The Palestinian Authority under Arafat and today under its malicious President Abbas has incentivized the murder of innocent Israelis while rejecting every peace agreement that has been brought to the table. Those are the facts. The members of the Council all understand that the Palestinian authorities' support and incentivization of terror are fundamental breaches of the agreements and international law in question, and that they are the main roadblocks to peace. Until Palestinian children are no longer brainwashed into hating and murdering Israelis, sadly, blood will still be needlessly spilled in our region.

The Palestinians' most fundamental commitment was their obligation to combat terror. Yet today the Palestinian Authority not only refuses to take real action to prevent terrorism, for many years now it has also actively stoked the flames of violence. By glorifying terrorists and paying them money, the Palestinian Authority is breeding a culture of hatred and evil that makes reconciliation impossible. The evidence is irrefutable. The Palestinian culture of hate and terror is real. How can the Council justify ignoring it and never addressing it? And despite the horrific acts of Palestinian terror carried out in recent weeks, the Holocaust-distorting Mr. Abbas refused to issue even one word of condemnation — not one word — after innocent Jewish worshippers were murdered outside

a synagogue. While President Abbas continued to say nothing, officials of Fatah, his party, praised the attack. We all saw the photos. As candies were being distributed to crowds of Palestinians celebrating the dead Jews, Ata Abu Rumeileh, the Fatah Secretary of Jenin, referred to the attack as a heroic operation. Where are Council members' concern and dismay for those celebrations of murder? Where are they?

It was not by chance that Amin Al-Husseini and the Palestinian leadership at the time were close allies of Hitler and later led the rejection of the United Nations partition plan in 1947. Nothing has changed since then. The Palestinians' main goal has remained the same — preventing the existence of a Jewish State. It is difficult to understand what the Council truly expects Israel to do when faced with a terror authority that constantly strives to delegitimize it and that in many of its areas, including of course Gaza, has lost control to Hamas, a designated terror organization.

The members of the Council continue to sit here expressing concerns and dismay only about Israel's response to Palestinian terror, while the most significant violator of any agreement is sitting right here across from me. How did the Palestinians achieve the status of an observer State? Is the Council not aware that the Palestinians committed to refraining from taking any unilateral steps to change their status without negotiations and agreement? They have violated all the agreements, despite not meeting even the most basic necessary requirements. How many times has that violation been condemned here in the Security Council? Zero. This institution is merely another means for the Palestinians to unilaterally try to impose their twisted demands on Israel without any negotiations or dialogue, in order to bring about Israel's destruction. Israel will not complacently come to terms with another terror entity on our borders that aims to obliterate us. We will never accept that.

Over the past weeks, Israel has been mourning the deaths of 11 recent victims of terror and injuries to dozens of civilians, not terrorists. Shockingly, however, we are not here today to condemn the Palestinian acts of terror that led to that loss of life. This meeting was once again initiated to condemn Israel, this time for issuing building permits in already existing communities — already existing. Building permits in our homeland spark international uproar, while dead Jewish children elicit nothing. That is an utter disgrace.

Council members are all aware of the huge extent of illegal Palestinian construction throughout Area C in Judea and Samaria, in flagrant violation of international agreements. One can see it on the ground. Why is that never discussed by the Council?

Today's meeting should have been wholly dedicated to the innocent Israelis recently murdered: Ilya Sosansky, Shaul Hai, Irina Koroleva and Rafael Ben Eliahu, murdered in cold blood by a Palestinian terrorist as they were exiting a synagogue on the holy Sabbath. Fourteen-year-old Asher Natan, who had just finished Friday night dinner with his family, was also brutally murdered in the attack. Eli and Natalie Mizrahi, a recently married couple, heard the gunfire and went rushing to the scene in order to treat the victims. The terrorists murdered them at point-blank range.

A week ago, 20-year-old Shlomo Lederman stood at a Jerusalem bus stop with his wife. They had just gotten married two months earlier. Metres away from the couple was Avraham Paley and his little boys, 6-year-old Yaakov and 8-year-old Asher. Suddenly, a bright blue sedan, driven by a Palestinian terrorist, crashed full speed into the bus stop. Shlomo's young wife is now a widow, and Avraham, who is currently in critical condition on a ventilator, still does not know that his wife had to bury little Yaakov and Asher without him. Those two beautiful children were murdered just for being Jews.

Today's meeting should have been convened to condemn the price paid by innocent Israelis for the Palestinian authorities' incitement and hate. I will not allow the victims to be forgotten. I will now rise for a minute of silence in their memory and the memory of all the other victims of Palestinian terror. I pray for their memory, and I pray that Council members think of them in the future when discussing the true obstacles to peace in our region.

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

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I deliver this statement on behalf of the States members of the Group of Arab States in New York. I would like to start by congratulating you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief

and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for their briefings.

The Arab Group welcomes today's adoption by the Security Council of presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1, prepared by the sisterly United Arab Emirates, and believes that it is an important and timely step. We thank the Council members for speaking in one voice on a very dangerous issue that deserves the Council's full attention and that the Council remain seized of it.

The Arab Group expresses its grave concern over the extremist acts by the new Israeli Government in flagrant violation of all its obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and Security Council resolutions. Such violations have fuelled tensions in the occupied Palestinian territory and threaten regional and international peace and security. In that regard, the Arab Group stresses the pivotal role that the Security Council must play in addressing such violations and in holding the perpetrators accountable by implementing the rules of accountability and transparency applied to all except Israel.

The Arab Group highlights in particular the situation in Jerusalem, the capital of the future Palestinian State in implementation of the two-State solution, which threatens to trigger dire consequences as a result of Israel's ongoing deliberate implementation of policies and measures that are inconsistent with international legitimacy. The Group stresses the centrality of the final communiqué of the Al-Quds Conference on Resilience and Development, convened by the Arab Summit in Algeria on 12 February. The communiqué includes in its political part, among other things, the following main points.

First, the just Palestinian question will remain central for the Arab nation and those who adhere to international law and human rights across the world. Just and comprehensive peace, security and stability in the Middle East will not be achieved until the Palestinian people obtain their legitimate and inalienable rights, foremost of which are the right of return, compensation, self-determination, independence, an end to the illegal Israeli occupation and the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign State of Palestine on the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital. The communiqué calls on the countries of the world to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle, support their just

cause, recognize the State of Palestine and grant it its right to full membership in the United Nations.

Second, the communiqué calls on the international community to take practical action to provide international protection for the Palestinian people and to address the ongoing Israeli aggression, including the Israeli colonial settlement activities, the apartheid regime and its discriminatory measures. It also calls on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities to ensure the effective implementation of its resolutions related to the question of Palestine, and to work to stop the illegal Israeli policies and practices against the Palestinian people. It also calls for the removal of illegal settlements with the annexation and expansion wall. All of that constitutes violations of international law, United Nations resolutions, the Fourth Geneva Convention and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice issued in 2004.

Third, the communiqué affirms that all systematic and illegal Israeli policies and plans that seek to legitimize the annexation of East Jerusalem are null and void and that they distort its Arab identity, change its demographic composition, undermine population growth, harm its people and isolate it from its Palestinian surroundings, including intensifying the policy of house demolitions and the forced displacement of citizens from the neighbourhoods and towns of the occupied city of Al-Quds, including the residents of Silwan, Sheikh Jarrah and other neighbourhoods and areas of the city, as part of the systematic Israeli campaign for ethnic cleansing and strengthening apartheid. Those are all flagrant violations of the relevant international resolutions, including Security Council resolutions.

Fourth, the communiqué also stresses the protection of Islamic and Christian holy sites in the city of Al-Quds and putting an end to the Israeli attempts to alter the historical and legal status quo of the city of Al-Quds and the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, changing its name and dividing it temporally and spatially, as well as undermining the freedom of worship by Muslims there in addition to undermining its foundations and falsifying its history by Israel excavating under it. The communiqué condemns the repeated and escalating attacks on the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, its sanctity and the peaceful worshippers in it by officials of the Israeli occupation Government and extremist settlers. It stresses the rejection of the Israeli systematic and illegal measures to undermine churches and weaken the Christian presence in the holy

city, and warns that such grave violations of the legal and historical status quo of the holy sites of the city of Al-Quds constitute serious violations of the relevant international conventions and commitments and will have serious consequences for international peace and security.

Fifth, the communiqué calls for the implementation of resolutions on the Palestinian question adopted by the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which stress that the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, in its entire area is a place of worship solely for Muslims and an integral part of the world's cultural heritage sites. It affirms the sovereignty of the State of Palestine over the city of Al-Quds and its holy sites and supports the Hashemite custodianship of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Al-Quds and its role in protecting the Arab, Islamic and Christian identity and preserving the historical and legal status quo of Al-Quds and its holy sites. The communiqué also stresses that the Jerusalem Awqaf and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs Department is the only Jordanian entity to have competence to administer, maintain and control entry to the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Sixth, the communiqué calls upon the international community to assume its legal, moral and humanitarian responsibilities to immediately put an end to Israeli settlement activity in the city of Al-Quds and to abolish Israeli racist laws that empower the occupation authorities to withdraw the identity cards of thousands of Jerusalemites and seize their property through the so-called absentee property law. Those racist measures seek to steal more Palestinian land and property in the Old City and its vicinity and wipe out traces of Arab culture in the occupied city of Al-Quds.

Seventh, the communiqué condemns and rejects the Israeli policy designed to systematically distort and change the identity and culture of the Arabs and Muslims in Al-Quds through the closure of Palestinian national cultural institutions, rob the Palestinians of their heritage, replace Palestinian school curricula in the city of Al-Quds with distorted curricula and impose financial and administrative sanctions on Palestinian educational institutions that fail to comply with that malicious policy, which will lead to their closure.

Eighth, the communiqué condemns Israel's arbitrary-detention and administrative-detention policies as well as intentional denial of medical treatment for prisoners, leading to their death.

Prisoners are not permitted to get support for seeking released. The occupation Government must ensure the implementation of international humanitarian law and human rights law while pressing Israel to immediately release all prisoners and the bodies of martyrs. Israel must end its deportation and house-arrest policy.

Ninth, the communiqué rejects any decision that breaches the legal status of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, including by opening offices or diplomatic missions in the city in violation of Security Council resolutions. Such decisions constitute an aggression against the Palestinian people, a violation of their rights, and a provocation of the sentiments of the Arab nation, Muslims and Christians alike. It is a breach of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

Tenth, the communiqué welcomes General Assembly resolution 77/247, which requests an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the existence and impact of the Israeli colonial occupation and its effects on the State of Palestine's territory. The communiqué calls on States Members of the United Nations and all countries that seek to uphold justice to support the State of Palestine by providing written and oral legal statements to the Court by 25 July 2023.

Eleventh, the communiqué calls on the International Criminal Court to conduct a criminal investigation and hold accountable perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity and other crimes being committed by Israel against the helpless Palestinian people, including the crimes of settlement, annexation, aggression and a continued blockade imposed against Gaza, as well as coercive deportation and field execution of civilians, first responders and journalists.

Twelfth, the communiqué calls on the international community to provide protection to Palestinian civilians and implement relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. It urges States and the international community to participate in providing protection for Palestinian civilians and establish an effective mechanism for implementing General Assembly resolutions and reports of the Secretary-

General that include actionable recommendations for the protection of Palestinian civilians.

Thirteenth, the communiqué values the role of Jordan in the protection and maintenance of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Al-Quds under the Hashemite custodianship of King Abdullah II. It also commends the role played by the Al-Quds Committee chaired by King Mohammed VI of Morocco, applauds the efforts of the Al-Quds financial sub-committee of the Al-Quds Committee and salutes the role played by Algeria under President Tebboune in supporting the Palestinian question through its historical political stance and continuous financial support for the Palestinian budget. It also values the role played by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, in support of the Islamic Awqaf in the city of Al-Quds. The communiqué also thanks Egypt under President Al-Sisi for its historical role in addressing the Palestinian question, while thanking all Arab efforts aimed at preserving the city of Al-Quds as the capital of the State of Palestine, protecting its Arab, Islamic and Christian identity and its holy sites, and supporting its heritage and institutions in the face of the systematic policies of settlement and Judaization.

In conclusion, the Group of Arab States stresses that the Council should observe the application of the same rules of international justice on all issues before it without discrimination, in particular in cases of occupation by force of territories of other countries in violation of rules of international legitimacy. The Group also stresses its full conviction that the Security Council, by adopting presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1, is sending a clear message to the Israeli Government that the international community will not be silent in the face of Israel's repeated violations and that it will strongly address these violations and hold the perpetrators accountable. We also look forward to the Special Coordinator's briefing next month on the implementation of all the provisions of the presidential statement and of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.