



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9309th meeting
 Tuesday, 25 April 2023, 10 a.m.
 New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Lavrov/Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Vershinin. (Russian Federation)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Al Marar
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 (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Chile, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Türkiye, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Observer State of Palestine 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.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to participate in this meeting.

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

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: Days ago, Muslims around the world celebrated Eid Al-Fitr, bringing to a close the holy month of Ramadan, which overlapped with Christian Easter and Jewish Passover. That holy period, while mostly calm, regrettably also witnessed shocking incidents of violence at holy sites and tensions across the occupied Palestinian territory and in Israel, with a brief escalation spilling over into the region. While a wider-scale escalation was averted, with each de-escalation the stakes get higher and the tools at our disposal become fewer. The current trajectory is neither sustainable nor inevitable. The parties, the region and the international community need to address the underlying political, security, economic and institutional challenges driving the conflict. There must be an end to the unilateral measures, provocations and incitement that enable violence and prevent progress towards resolving the conflict and ending the occupation.

Overall in the occupied West Bank, 17 Palestinians, including two children, were killed and 200 Palestinians, including four women and 38 children, were injured by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis and other incidents. Another 39 Palestinians, including three women and four children, were injured by Israeli settlers or other civilians in shooting attacks, stone-throwing and other incidents.

Four Israeli civilians, including two women and one child, were killed and 31 injured, including two women, one child, and 12 Israeli security forces personnel, by Palestinians in shooting and ramming attacks, clashes, the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails, and other incidents. In addition, a foreign national was killed and seven foreigners were injured.

The holiday period was largely observed peacefully, with millions of Muslim visitors to the Al-Aqsa compound during Ramadan, the highest numbers in many years. However, on 4 and 5 April, confrontations erupted at the holy sites in Jerusalem when Israeli security forces entered the Al-Qibli prayer hall at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and forcibly removed Palestinians who were barricaded inside. Israeli security forces deployed stun grenades, beat Palestinians with batons and rifles and fired rubber-coated metal bullets, while some Palestinians inside the mosque lit and threw fireworks and stones at Israeli security forces.

Those developments came in the wake of provocative calls and incitement from several parties. Israeli extremists called for Jews to conduct ritual animal sacrifices at the holy sites. Hamas and other armed Palestinian factions called for Palestinians to go to the Al-Aqsa Mosque to resist such acts. As in previous years, Israeli police blocked attempts to carry out the animal sacrifices in the compound, arresting at least two Israelis.

Following those events at the holy sites, on 4 and 5 April militants in Gaza and Lebanon fired dozens of rockets towards Israel. While some were intercepted by Israel's aerial defence system, 46 landed in Israel, causing one injury and damage to property. The barrage from Lebanon was the most intensive since 2006. The Israel Defense Forces carried out airstrikes in Gaza and southern Lebanon on 7 April, aimed at what were said to be Hamas targets. A children's hospital and a health clinic in Gaza were damaged; however, no injuries were reported. Lebanon's Prime Minister condemned the launching of rockets towards Israel. United Nations de-escalation efforts, as well as coordination and liaison by the parties with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, helped restore calm.

From 12 April, Israeli authorities prohibited non-Muslim visits to the site for the last days of Ramadan, in line with usual practice. On 15 April, confrontations erupted between Israeli police and Orthodox Christian worshippers attempting to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's Old City for the Holy Fire ceremony, exceeding an attendance limit enforced by Israeli authorities, citing safety concerns. The Greek Patriarchate and other church leaders criticized the limits on visitors, suggesting it was unjustifiably low and violated the status quo.

Other violence in the occupied West Bank and in Israel continued during the reporting period.

Many Palestinian casualties were incurred in Israeli military operations in Area A of the occupied West Bank and subsequent clashes, some of them armed. On 16 March, undercover Israeli forces entered Jenin, resulting in clashes. Israeli forces shot and killed four Palestinians, including a 14-year-old bystander. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed two of the individuals killed as members of their armed wings.

In Jerusalem's Old City, on 1 April an Arab-Israeli man was shot dead by Israeli security forces near an entrance to the holy sites in disputed circumstances.

On 7 April, two British-Israeli sisters, the youngest a 15-year-old girl, were killed in a shooting attack in the West Bank by perpetrators in a car with Palestinian plates. Their mother was critically injured in the attack and died three days later. No arrests have been made.

On the same day, an Italian national was killed in Tel Aviv, and seven other Italian and British nationals were wounded, in what the Israeli police said was a ramming attack carried out by an Arab-Israeli man, who was shot dead at the scene by police. The alleged perpetrator's family disputed the ramming allegation.

On 10 April, a 15-year-old Palestinian boy was shot and killed by Israeli security forces during an arrest operation and ensuing clashes in Aqbat Jabr refugee camp, near Jericho. Eyewitnesses said that the boy was a bystander, while the Israeli army said that soldiers returned fire after being shot at.

Levels of settler-related violence also remained high. Huwwara remained a flashpoint. On 25 March, Palestinians carried out a shooting attack in the town, injuring two Israeli soldiers. Israeli settlers entered the town the same day and again on 27 March, throwing stones that injured two Palestinians and damaged property.

On 6 April, an Israeli settler shot and injured a Palestinian boy in Jerusalem's Old City. On 18 April, two Israelis were shot and wounded while in their vehicle in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. On the following day, Israeli security forces said they had arrested a 15-year-old Palestinian boy in Nablus who had confessed to carrying out the attack.

I am deeply concerned by the violence and inflammatory actions over the past weeks, particularly the violent confrontations inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque. I again urge respect for the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem, in line with the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

I condemn the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centres. I reiterate that acts of terror and targeting of civilians are abhorrent and must be condemned and rejected by all. All perpetrators 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 appalled that children continue to be the victims of violence. Children must never be the targets of violence, used or put in harm's way.

On 19 March, senior Egyptian, Jordanian, Israeli, Palestinian and United States officials met in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, to further discuss understandings reached in Aqaba, Jordan on 23 February. In the spirit of the agreements reached in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh, I urge all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and refrain from any steps that could exacerbate the situation, and to take concrete steps to implement the joint communiqués. I remain closely engaged with all relevant parties to de-escalate tensions and chart a political way forward.

Turning to settlement-related developments, on 22 March Israeli authorities announced tenders for 940 housing units in settlements in Area C and 89 units in East Jerusalem. On 10 April, Israeli Government ministers and members of the Knesset joined over 15,000 settlers and other Israeli civilians in a heavily secured march to the illegal outpost of Evyatar, in the northern West Bank, calling on the Government to legalize it under Israeli law. I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and that they are a substantial obstacle to peace. I call on all parties to avoid unilateral measures and provocations, such as this march, that can further inflame tensions.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned property remain a serious concern. During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 11 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and eight in East Jerusalem, displacing 14 Palestinians, including seven children — a relative decline reflecting a reduction during Ramadan, as in prior years. The demolitions were carried out due to a lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. On 3 April, Israel's Supreme Court ruled against the eviction of a Palestinian family from their home in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan, ending a 30-year legal battle. I call on Israeli authorities to end the displacement and eviction of Palestinians and to approve additional plans that would enable Palestinians to build legally and address their development needs.

Turning to the region, on the Golan, Israel Defense Forces reported, from 8 to 9 April, six rockets launched from Syria towards Israel and their retaliation with artillery fire and airstrikes, targeting locations in

Syria, including Syrian army positions. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force was in contact with the Israel Defense Forces and Syrian authorities to de-escalate the situation, urging them to exercise maximum restraint and to respect the ceasefire, in accordance with the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. No casualties were reported.

Amid the deteriorating situation on the ground, the Palestinian Authority (PA) continues to face significant fiscal and institutional challenges. At the same time, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes that provide support to the Palestinian people, in coordination and complementarity with the PA, are facing significant funding shortfalls, notably the World Food Programme and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), impacting basic service delivery. I am particularly concerned by the prolonged closure of schools and UNRWA health clinics in the West Bank, where PA and UNRWA teachers, as well as UNRWA health staff, have been on strike for weeks, impacting children across the occupied Palestinian territory.

Efforts are needed by the parties and the international community to strengthen Palestinian institutions, improve governance and shore up the fiscal health of the Palestinian Authority. These steps must be part of a broader political effort that addresses the underlying drivers of the conflict, provides the space and access needed for the Palestinian economy to grow and encourages the parties to update their economic and administrative relations. The forthcoming Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in Brussels in early May provides an opportunity for a strategic shift in this direction. Addressing these immediate challenges can also provide much-needed momentum towards re-establishing a political horizon that favours the two-State solution.

I urge Israelis, Palestinians, States of the region and the broader international community to show leadership, re-engage and work collectively in the pursuit of peace with the aim of ending the occupation and resolving the conflict in line with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and previous agreements, in pursuit of the vision of two States — Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestine — living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing.

I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Malki (Palestine): Allow me at the outset, Mr. President, to congratulate the Russian Federation on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and to express our appreciation for your decision to convene today's open debate. Allow me also to acknowledge and thank all the countries that will speak today in defence of the United Nations Charter, international law and the rights of the Palestinian people. I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Mahmoud Darwish, our national and universal poet, said:

"I know that you the masters of words have no need for rhetoric before the eloquence of blood. Therefore our words will be as simple as our rights."

I therefore come to this Chamber with clear messages.

Seventy-five years ago, our people endured the Nakba. Nakba is a five-letter word that means catastrophe and encompasses the dispossession and displacement of an entire nation. Almost overnight, two thirds of our people became refugees. Seventy-five years later, the Nakba continues. The denial of our rights and the displacement and replacement of our people is still under way with one objective pursued in broad daylight: annexation. It is time to bring the Nakba to an end.

This is the most protracted refugee crisis in the world. It is the most protracted denial of national, collective and individual rights in the world. It is the most protracted protection crisis in the world. It is the longest occupation of an entire territory in modern history. The question therefore begs to be asked: why is it still ongoing?

Is it because there is a lack of rules or a lack of resolve? The rules are clear. The entire international law-based order is premised on two fundamental principles from which no derogation is tolerated: the right of peoples to self-determination and the inadmissibility of the acquisition of land by force. There are no greater breaches of these rules than aggression and annexation.

Not only does the international community have the possibility to ensure international law is respected, but it also has the responsibility to do so, regardless

of the identity of the perpetrators and regardless of the identity of the victims. Had the United Nations Charter been upheld and the Security Council's resolutions been implemented, peace would have prevailed in Palestine a long time ago, rather than occupation and apartheid. That is all we ask for: that the United Nations Charter be upheld and that United Nations resolutions be implemented.

We must express gratitude for the clear and unequivocal stance of the international community condemning violations of international law and supporting just and lasting peace in accordance with the internationally recognized terms of reference. This might be the most established, solid, consistent international consensus on any conflict in the world. What, then, explains that this consensus has not changed the reality on the ground?

The reality on the ground is the result of failure not fate. While the international community has adopted clear positions, it has not backed them with decisive action. Why is it that, when it comes to Israel, the international community can take a stance but cannot act upon it?

The rules are clear; now we need the resolve to enforce them. Yesterday many delegations in this Chamber spoke of this self-evident truth: international law must be upheld (see S/PV.9308 and S/PV.9308 (resumption)). They spoke of obligations, accountability and collective responsibility.

There is nothing that undermines the authority and credibility of international law more than double standards, selectivity and schizophrenia. How is Israel being held accountable for breaching the law, the Charter, countless United Nations resolutions over decades and decades? How many Israeli officials have been held accountable in any form or shape for pursuing colonial settlements on our land, for forcibly displacing our people, for the targeting and indiscriminate attacks against our civilians, and for demolishing the homes and structures many of Council members have funded? What consequences have they faced?

Do members want to know why the Security Council's condemnations and calls are not heeded? They are not heeded for one simple reason: impunity. Do members want to know how the supremacists came to power on a supremacist and colonial platform that is now official Government policy? Once again, the answer is impunity. Is there anywhere else in the world

where Council members would condemn all the illegal actions of an occupying Power and then tell the people under its occupation that their existence and their rights are eventually entirely subject to the goodwill of their oppressors?

We do not take for granted the support provided to our people by the international community over the years, including Palestine refugees through United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We do not take for granted the support provided to our national institutions. We do not take for granted the support provided to peace efforts when they were under way. We do not take for granted the daily efforts to reign in Israel's colonial appetite. This investment for the freedom of one people and peace for all peoples deserves protection.

There are two threats looming. The first threat is for the international community to be demobilized until such time as the parties are ready to make peace; for this, there is not much we can do. The second threat is for the international community to be demoralized; for this, there is no way to mount enough pressure on Israel to change course. We are convinced there is no alternative to the two-State solution, and we remain committed to it, but unfortunately the circumstances are such that we can no longer salvage it.

Such self-fulfilling prophecies would ensure that the reality on the ground will continue to be shaped by the will of the colonial settlers, rather than the will of the peacemakers. We said a while ago that settlers will not only take over Palestinian land, but they will also take over Israeli politics. They will turn a solvable political conflict into perpetual religious conflict. And here we are. Regardless of how difficult it seems today for anyone to step in and take bold action, trust us when we say that the price of inaction is infinitely higher for the Palestinian people, but not only for them.

We have decided not to spare any effort for peace. We welcome any initiatives with international legitimacy and are always ready and willing to meet and explore any avenue to put an end to illegal unilateral measures and to restore a political horizon in line with the internationally recognized terms of reference. We remain committed to upholding our own obligations and to pursuing a peaceful path forward.

We do so because we know the alternative. We appreciate all efforts to save and improve Palestinian lives, but they are no substitute for a political solution.

We cannot coexist under occupation. There cannot be an international law-based order for the rest of the world and a negotiations-based order or an occupying-Power-imposed order for Palestine. Negotiations should seek agreement on how to uphold the law, not how to ensure its permanent breach.

Israel is outraged that it could be held to the same standards as all of us. It will say without blinking that its settlers have the right to live in the occupied Palestinian territory, that it has every intention to make permanent its annexation of Jerusalem and that the Jordan valley and most of the West Bank will suffer the same fate. It will say that it will keep 2 million Palestinians under blockade in the Gaza Strip for decades. It will say that it is not in favour of the two-State solution, that it is entitled to kill Palestinians, that nobody gets to tell it what to do and that it gets to tell everybody what they should do. Israel will scold the Council and every United Nations member for stating the law. If that is how it deals with the Council, then imagine how it deals with the people under its occupation.

Israel will explain to us that the problem is not them violating international law and the fundamental rights of our people, but us raising this matter in international forums. They will tell us that the obstacle to peace is not the crimes committed against our people but our attempts to ensure that those responsible are held accountable. They can be partners for peace while denying our existence, denying our rights, annexing our land, killing our people and rejecting the two-State solution, but how can we be genuine peace partners if we protest those actions?

Palestinians are not killed by the hundreds and thousands every year by mistake. The disregard for Palestinian life, the will to subjugate and dominate them and the feelings of entitlement are such that Israel has put in place a shoot-to-kill policy that indiscriminately affects our children, youth and elderly anywhere and everywhere in Palestine.

Soldiers and settlers wreak havoc in our streets and in our lives. No one is safe anywhere or at any time — not in our land, not in our streets, not in our mosques, not in our churches, not in our schools and not in our homes. There is no feeling of shame in proclaiming that one group, the one illegally present in our land, must benefit from all the privileges, while the other group, the lawful inhabitants of the land, should continue to be deprived of their most fundamental rights.

There is a simple principle that underlies all international law and international justice: deterrence is the only way to prevent recurrence. The only discussion worth having is how to mount a collective response that would deter anyone from breaching international law and ensure that everyone commits to peace, in words and in deeds.

As long as Israel reaps the benefits of its occupation while we pay the price, annexation and apartheid are the only reality we are left with. If we make the occupation costly and I can assure the Council that it will come to an end. The Israeli people themselves will make sure that it comes to an end. But let me be more specific so that no one can say that it cannot be done. Where can we start?

First, I urge one and all to recognize the State of Palestine if they have not done so yet. How can any country that supports the two-State solution and peace justify not yet recognizing the State of Palestine, without which there is no two-State solution? Did they wait for Israel to recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) before they recognized it or did their recognition of the PLO lead Israel to eventually follow suit? Why did they not wait for our approval to recognize Israel, and need Israeli permission to recognize the State of Palestine? If they do not recognize the State of Palestine now, when it is under vital threat, when will they do it, when the two-State solution is definitely dead and buried?

Why would the Council, which has been calling for a two-State solution for decades, not recommend the membership of the State of Palestine to the General Assembly? I have no doubt that the General Assembly will agree once that recommendation is made here, in the Council. Is there a better way to embody international support for the two-State solution than to have the State that has been unjustly deprived of membership since 1948 finally become a United Nations member? Why would Israel, which violated the very conditions of its membership, namely General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III), and continues violating the Charter, be entitled to membership and we, who honour the United Nations Charter, be deprived of it?

The Council has affirmed repeatedly the need for the protection of all civilians. While we adhere to that principle, it is our people who needs international protection. If anyone has a right to

security in the occupied Palestinian territory, it is the Palestinian people.

Everyone is opposed to settlements. Settlements deprive us of our land and resources and annihilate any chance for peace. We must ban settlement products, ban trade with settlements, sanction those who collect funds for settlements and those who advocate for them and those who advance them. We must list as terrorist organizations the groups of settlers that are killing, maiming and setting property ablaze in front of the whole world because they are certain they will not be held accountable? We must condition — in deeds, not words — relations with Israel on Israel's commitment to international law and peace. We must take measures to roll back annexation and to end occupation.

We must mount a collective front to push for peace, to take initiatives and to hold the parties accountable if they do not implement the international will embodied in the United Nations Charter and in the United Nations resolutions. We must support every effort to uphold international law rather than obstruct it, starting with the International Court of Justice.

In short, we must incentivize freedom, justice and peace and disincentivize oppression, perpetual occupation and annexation. Peace, which has eluded us for so long, will then finally be within our grasp.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Erdan (Israel): Each time I set foot in this Chamber for these open debates, I mentally prepare myself for the bias and the falsehoods and the singling out of Israel — the only liberal democracy in the region. Yet today's debate has crossed all the lines. Not only am I both appalled and outraged to the very depths of my soul, but I am very sad. Today is one of the most sacred days of the year for the State of Israel. Today is Yom Hazikaron — the memorial day for our fallen troops and victims of terror, and the day during which every Israeli remembers those who paid the ultimate price while defending the Jewish homeland. In Israel, it is a day of unmatched national mourning. Two sirens, one in the evening and one in the morning, ring across the country, bringing all activity, even traffic, to a grinding halt so that every Israeli can observe two minutes of solemn silence. All restaurants, cafes and shops shut down, while military cemeteries are filled with hundreds of thousands of visitors paying their respects. Television programming is dedicated solely

to films and reels mourning those who fell, while an entire channel runs the names of every single fallen hero. This day holds more sanctity for Israelis than almost any other day of the year.

We made numerous requests to reschedule today's open debate, describing the deep importance of the day. Yet tragically, the Security Council refused to budge. The decision to nonetheless hold this debate on today of all days only further proves what Israelis already know and feel about this biased Organization. What would you do, Mr. President, if the Council were convened to single out and condemn the Russian Federation and your soldiers on 9 May, on Victory Day over the Nazis? Today, on this hallowed day, every Israeli remembers those courageous sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers and dear friends who lost their lives defending Israel. Yet while Israelis mourn, the Council will as usual hear more blatant lies condemning the State of Israel and falsely painting it as the root of all the region's problems.

That could not be further from the truth. The only reason this conflict has not yet been resolved is because the Palestinians refuse to accept the very existence of Israel — the Jewish State. They have proven that by rejecting every peace initiative and by brainwashing their children and inciting them to terrorism and to hate and murder Jews — shame, shame, shame. Meanwhile, the true threat to the region and the world — the Ayatollah regime in Iran — will as usual not even be a footnote in today's discussion. Iran, the number-one State sponsor of terror, has never been closer to becoming a nuclear Power. But in the Council, Iran's destructive and dangerous advancements will likely not even be mentioned, let alone condemned.

Therefore today, on this sacred and solemn day during which we Israelis bow our heads to the 28,468 fallen soldiers and victims of terror, I refuse to take part in this absurd farce. Instead, I will take this opportunity to commemorate the past year's victims of Palestinian terror and those who fell in the line of duty: Yonatan Havakuk, Boaz Gol, Oren Ben Yiftah, Noam Raz, Bar Falah, Noa Lazar, Ido Baruch, Ronen Hanania, Shalom Sofer, Motti Ashkenazi, Tamir Avichai, Michael Ladygin, Aryeh Schupak, Eli Mizrahi, Natalie Mizrahi, Raphael Ben Eliyahu, Asher Nathan, Shaul Hai, Ilya Sosanski, Irina Korolova, Shimon Maatuf, Alter Shlomo Laderman, Yaakov Peleg, Asher Peleg, Asil Sawaed, Yagel Yaniv, Hillel Yaniv, Elan Ganeles, Oris Car, Alessandro Parini, Maia Dee, Rina Dee and Lucy

Dee. If the Council refuses to respect their memory, I will dedicate this speech to it. I light this candle to honour them, and may their memory be blessed. I am sorry, but I refuse to spend this sacred day listening to lies and condemnation. This open debate disgraces the fallen, and Israel will not take part in it.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

The Middle East is undergoing a profound transformation that is unfolding in a highly contradictory way. What is needed more than ever is to improve the relations between the States of the region, stabilize the conflict zones and step up efforts to resolve them politically and diplomatically on the basis of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Our position in that regard is outlined in Russia's new foreign policy concept, which was recently adopted by President Putin. We give priority to establishing a stable and comprehensive architecture of stability and cooperation in the Middle East and promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue. We intend to develop active cooperation with all the countries of the region, both bilaterally and through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

We can see a growing interest in the Russian initiative to ensure collective security, with the participation of all coastal countries, both Arab States and Iran, including with the involvement of the outer circle of influential States. We welcome the positive changes that until recently seemed difficult to achieve. I refer primarily to the restoration of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, through the mediation of China, as well as the plans to return Syria to the Arab family — something we have worked towards for a long time — and the normalization between Damascus and Ankara, which began with Russia's assistance, using the advantages of the Astana format. In addition, largely thanks to the initiatives outlined by Riyadh, we have seen proactive actions steps taken to accelerate the settlement of the bloody conflict in Yemen.

At the same time, we note with deep regret and concern that the Palestinian problem remains on the sidelines of those positive developments. Our intention in convening today's open debate was to draw attention to the unprecedented rise in tensions and violence in the Arab-Israeli conflict zone. We believe that it is

more necessary than ever to reaffirm the common denominators of the Middle East settlement, as set out in the decisions of the Security Council and General Assembly, as well as to stop the threat of yet another armed confrontation and provide a political horizon for resuming the peace process.

Developments in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the disengagement line between Israel, Lebanon and Syria have raised tensions to an extremely dangerous level. Since the beginning of the year, military raids in Jenin, Jericho, Nablus, Huwwara and clashes over the violation of the status of the holy sites have killed more than 100 Palestinians and injured thousands. The number of Israeli casualties is also growing, as the representative of that country just mentioned. The situation is aggravated by the Israeli attacks on Syria — of which there have already been at least 10 this year — including the shelling of Aleppo International Airport, which is the airport used to deliver humanitarian aid to the victims of the devastating earthquake that struck on 6 February. The number of incidents on the Blue Line with Lebanon has increased, including the largest exchange of rocket strikes since 2006.

The main reason for the regular outbreaks of violence between the Palestinians and Israel continues to be the unilateral measures aimed at creating irreversible facts on the ground and the use of force to protect those facts. We cannot be silent in the face of the record speed with which Israel is building settlements, together with its retroactive legalization of outposts, expropriation of land, demolition of houses and arbitrary arrests. Nor can we turn a blind eye to the growing radicalization on Palestinian streets and the deepening rifts between the major Palestinian parties, with the potential to lead to violent confrontations.

In the circumstances, while it is of course important to treat and prevent the symptoms of a deteriorating situation, it is absolutely imperative that all the major stakeholders reaffirm that there can be no alternative to a two-State solution if Palestinians are to realize their right to their own independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and Israelis their right to coexist peacefully and safely with their neighbours and within the region as a whole. Only a return to direct negotiations on all the final-status issues can break the vicious cycle and restore mutual trust.

However, instead of helping to restore the political horizon, the United States and the European Union continue their destructive attempts to substitute some sort of economic half-measures for genuine peace and promote Arab-Israeli normalization by bypassing a just resolution of the Palestinian problem and the Arab Peace Initiative. The Middle East Quartet of international mediators has been a victim of their efforts. Now Washington claims to be the sole sponsor of the Middle East peace process, unembarrassed by the fact that it long ago lost the neutrality and impartiality required of an honest broker, especially after the well-known decisions by the Trump Administration that are in direct contradiction to the relevant Security Council resolutions and that the Biden Administration has not rescinded.

There is a reason why that non-fulfilment of the resolutions of the Security Council resolutions — and not just those related to issues in the Middle East — deserves special mention. Not long ago, the United States and its allies went to great lengths to ensure that, every time a veto was cast in the Security Council, the issue would be brought up for debate in the Assembly. We did not object to that, although the whole notion clearly targeted Russia. However, we have nothing to hide. When we exercise the right of the veto, we clearly explain the reasons and have no problem with repeating our arguments in the General Assembly. But here is the thing. The use of the veto is an inalienable right — a full-fledged part of the mechanisms enshrined in the Charter — and the use of the veto does not violate it in any way.

On the other hand, non-compliance with Security Council resolutions is a violation, I believe, of Article 25 of the Charter, which requires everyone to abide by the decisions of the Security Council. Is it perhaps time that those who have blatantly buried previous resolutions explained themselves to the General Assembly? The resolutions that the West has sabotaged include decisions on Palestine, the Golan Heights, Western Sahara, the Kosovo settlement, the Iranian nuclear programme and, of course, the Minsk agreements on Ukraine, which we discussed in detail yesterday (see S/PV.9308). The Americans and Europeans are crudely exploiting the Ukrainian issue, using blackmail and threats in their attempts to get developing countries on their side and thereby divert their attention from the problems in the Middle East and other regions of the global South. Look, they say,

we will beat Russia and everything will work out on its own. And because of that, the crises that developing countries have long wanted to see resolved fall victim to the double standards and colonial instincts of the West, driven by its own selfish interests to dictate its demands to the whole world, ignoring the culture and traditions of other peoples and making a mockery of international law.

With the Council's permission, I would like to cite a small part of an interview which United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken gave Wolf Blitzer of CNN on 8 February 2021.

(spoke in English)

Answering a question on the Golan Heights, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said,

“Look, leaving aside the legalities of that question, as a practical matter, the Golan is very important to Israel's security. As long as Assad is in power in Syria, as long as Iran is present in Syria, militia groups backed by Iran, the Assad regime itself — all of these pose a significant security threat to Israel, and, as a practical matter, the control of the Golan in that situation, I think, remains of real importance to Israel's security. Legal questions are something else.”

(spoke in Russian)

I am not making any value judgments here. I simply cited a statement by Antony Blinken, who mentioned both “leaving aside legalities” and that “legal questions are something else.” There we have an idea of how resolutions are being implemented and how people are positioning themselves within our Organization.

In the circumstances, I believe the role of the United Nations as a facilitator of multilateral diplomacy is especially important. We urge the leadership of the Secretariat and the Secretary-General himself to pay close attention to ensuring compliance with Security Council resolutions, and, of course, especially those relevant to the Middle Eastern settlement. We would also like to see the Secretary-General fulfil his duties more actively as moderator of the Quartet without waiting for permission. The Secretary-General recently took the initiative to convene a meeting in early May on Afghanistan. We support that, but why should he not take a similar initiative and convene a meeting of the Quartet? That is his prerogative.

Needless to say, at the same time we call on the Israelis and Palestinians to cease all unilateral actions that jeopardize the possibility of implementing a two-State solution, including terrorist and other armed attacks, incitement to aggression, the disproportionate use of force by any party, all unlawful measures related to the issue of settlements and attempts to change the status quo in Jerusalem. We would like to see the Palestinian movements rise above their partisan ambitions and unite on the political platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization. That will improve the socioeconomic situation, strengthen administrative institutions and enable them to prepare for a dialogue with Israel, this time on behalf of the entire Palestinian people. We know that our friends from Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and other colleagues are working towards the restoration of Palestinian unity. We also are making efforts to that end and intend to continue to do so.

I would like to stress the roles played by Saudi Arabia as the penholder of the Arab Peace Initiative, Jordan, as the custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We certainly attach special importance to the need to do everything possible to ensure that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continues its effective work. For its part, Russia will continue to do its best to contribute to the stabilization of the Middle East and North Africa and promote the Middle East peace process, together with all the countries of the region and in coordination with other good-faith mediators. As always, we stand ready to discuss relevant initiatives as part of our collective work in the forum of the United Nations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Al Marar (United Arab Emirates) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over this high-level debate. I also thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing and his continued efforts to de-escalate tensions.

At the beginning of my statement, I would like to congratulate the Muslim nation on the happy occasion of Eid Al-Fitr. We are relieved that thousands of worshippers were able to say their Eid Al-Fitr prayers

at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in peace and calm, in contrast to the painful incidents that we witnessed during the month of Ramadan when Israeli police forces attacked worshippers in violation of the sanctity of places of worship and of the freedom to practice one's religion.

As we have reiterated on many occasions, we underscore today that the special status of the city of Jerusalem must not be compromised. The historical and legal status quo of Jerusalem and the Hashemite custodianship of its holy sites must be respected, both in word and in practice. We believe that Israel's decision to prevent settlers from storming the Al-Aqsa Mosque during the last 10 days of Ramadan prevented further confrontation. However, we regret the resurgence of unrest in the city of Jerusalem following yesterday's attacks, which reflects the continued deterioration of the situation since the beginning of this year.

We are deeply concerned about the continued violence and the increase in raids, demolitions and displacements of Palestinians, which have further exacerbated the situation. The number of Palestinians killed in the first three months of this year alone accounts for approximately half of the total number of those killed in the previous year — the deadliest death toll in nearly two decades. The heinous attack on the Palestinian village of Huwvara also raised alarm about the trajectory of upcoming events, in particular if Israel continues to embolden settlers, provide them with legal immunity and exploit them as a tool to help confiscate more occupied Palestinian land, while continuing its settlement activities.

I would like to draw the Council's attention to the fact that, according to the United Nations, there are almost 700,000 settlers in 279 illegally built settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, 147 of which are outposts. Those numbers represent alarming facts on the ground and serve to highlight the urgent need to protect the two-State solution, which represents the vision agreed upon by the international community and the Council to end the conflict. That is also the only solution that will ensure that the two States of Palestine and Israel live side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition. Therefore, we reiterate our call on Israel to immediately cease all its settlement activities, reverse the negative trends on the ground and uphold its responsibilities in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law.

It is clear that the current phase of the conflict is very delicate and dangerous, in particular as we witness the continued violations of the fragile truce on the Gaza Strip, as well as the recent increase in violence through the exchange of missiles between southern Lebanon and Israel. Those clashes and increased tensions reflect the regional dimensions of the conflict and the fragility of the security and stability of the situation. Therefore, it is no longer possible for the international community to address the conflict with the complacency that we witnessed in previous years. The current situation requires maintaining the pressure to reduce escalation on all fronts, continuing the calls for exercising maximum restraint and avoiding the adoption of unilateral measures. We must not waste the current opportunity to build on the momentum generated by the Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh meetings, at which the two parties were able to reach a mutual understanding, following the lapse of serious talks since 2014. As such, we must ensure that the parties are committed to and implement that understanding and intensify their efforts to restore confidence, which will pave the way to resuming direct negotiations on final-status issues.

The main responsibility for ending violence lies with the parties that instigated it in the first place. As members of the international community and of the organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, we also have the responsibility to reject any violations of international law and Security Council resolutions. As confirmed in the Council's recent presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/1), that includes all acts of violence directed against civilians. We look forward to the international community continuing to express its categorical rejection of any rhetoric that incites escalation. The current tensions cannot withstand any further incitement of violence and hatred. What is at stake is not only the fate of the two peoples, who deserve to live in peace and security, but also the fate of the security and stability of the entire region. For its part, the United Arab Emirates will continue to support all regional and international efforts aimed at achieving those goals. We will continue our unwavering solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people and their legitimate right to establish an independent Palestinian State, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Finally, the ongoing challenges and crises in our region, including the most recent developments in the Sudan, make it imperative to focus on the voices

that call for dialogue and the peaceful settlement of conflicts. We must employ all available diplomatic means and open communication channels to avoid tensions and foster stability across the region. We hope that multilateral action will prove its ability to avoid the deadly conflicts looming on the horizon.

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

France is concerned about the current cycle of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories and in Israel. We condemn all violence against civilians, whether it involves attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians or terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians. We call on Israel to protect Palestinian civilians, in line with its international obligations. The cycle of violence, fuelled by despair on each side, can end only when Israeli settlement comes to an end. France will never recognize the illegal annexation of territories or the legalization of “wildcat” settlements. On the ground, we note that annexation is accelerating despite the commitments made by the Israeli authorities at Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh in recent weeks. The Knesset’s partial repeal of the 2005 disengagement law could pave the way for the building of settlements in the northern West Bank and for outposts to be legalized. We have called on the Israeli authorities to reverse that decision.

Against that backdrop, inaction is untenable and can lead only to a regionalization of the conflict, as we have seen with the indiscriminate firing of rockets towards Israel from the Gaza Strip, southern Lebanon and Syria. France has strongly condemned those attacks and reiterates its unwavering commitment to the security of Israel. I note that today is Remembrance Day in Israel.

France is also committed to the stability and sovereignty of Lebanon. The Council has the responsibility to defend the two-State solution and ensure compliance with the resolutions it has adopted. France reiterates its commitment to the treaties concluded by Israel with its neighbours, as well as to respect for the historical status quo of the holy sites of Jerusalem and the specific role of Jordan in that regard. The violence that occurred at the beginning of the month at the Esplanade of the Mosques is worrisome, as is the growing pressure on Christian communities in Jerusalem.

We cannot continue to look the other way and hope that the situation will not deteriorate further. France welcomes the efforts of the United States, Egypt and Jordan. The parties have made commitments, in particular with regard to halting settlements, demolitions and evictions, but also in the area of security, and those commitments must be followed up with action. France calls for the restoration of a political horizon, which is the only way to recreate trust between the parties and allow for the implementation of the two-State solution. France stands ready to contribute to those efforts alongside its partners, particularly with Germany, Egypt and Jordan in the context of the Amman group. The United Nations, in particular the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, has an important role to play in supporting those efforts. Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve to live in peace and security.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing today, and we reiterate our support for his work, which is so valuable and necessary at this time. I also welcome the presence of the Palestinian and Israeli delegations.

This is the eighth time this year that the Security Council has met to discuss the Palestinian question, which is indicative of a situation of growing tension and violence, and the briefing we have just heard confirms that. Ecuador is deeply concerned about the regrettable events at the holy sites in Jerusalem at the beginning of this month and the resulting violence. We share the feelings of dismay and distress that the Special Coordinator expressed at the time about the acts of violence inside a place of worship. Attacking and beating pilgrims is unacceptable behaviour. We also share his rejection of the storage and use of fireworks in the same place of worship. Sacred places must be respected by all as spaces for reflection and peace, but we have once again witnessed the grave consequences of a failure to do so. We must therefore reiterate the calls for special sensitivity and caution, in addition to respect for the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem and for the role of the Kingdom of Jordan as their custodian. On the other hand, we deplore the indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israeli territory, as well as all acts of violence, terror or provocation. We call on the parties to respect international law, human rights law and international humanitarian law, including

the principles of distinction and proportionality, while reminding them of their obligation to protect civilians.

The cycle of violence must be broken immediately. The regrettable events of the past must be investigated and those responsible brought to justice, but they cannot be a pretext for further violence. Revenge is not justice and does not lead to peace. The first step in breaking the cycle of violence is refraining from all words and deeds of incitement and provocation. Leaders are the first who should demonstrate responsibility and self-restraint in that regard to avoid aggravating tensions. It is very difficult to make progress towards a definitive solution if leaders, through their words and actions, promote a short-term vision and seek only popularity, even at the cost of pushing peace further away. We therefore consider the high-level meetings that took place in February in Aqaba, Jordan, and in March in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, with the participation of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Egypt and the United States, to be a positive development. We hope that the meetings between the parties will continue and that the agreements reached will be implemented. Sincere dialogue is the only pathway to *détente*.

Finally, Ecuador reaffirms its solidarity with the Palestinian people and reiterates its commitment to remedying their plight, as well as to the right of the Israeli people to live in peace. That will be achieved only with a political, definitive and just solution for the parties, and with the establishment of two States — Palestine and Israel — on the basis of the recognized 1967 borders and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): Let me begin by thanking Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing to the Council.

As it is for many others, the unresolved aspiration of the Palestinian people for a safe and secure homeland remains a source of anguish for us. The manifestation of the dispute in its security implications, humanitarian consequences and human rights issues is also of deep concern. Ghana therefore hopes that this meeting will help to drive our collective ambition for urgent and pragmatic steps that can reassert a political horizon for a two-State solution and the stability of the Middle East region. We have three main points to make.

First, we are concerned about the policies and actions of the Israeli Government that risk complicating the efforts to use dialogue to seek the realization of

a two-State solution, which, regrettably, appears to be receding with each passing day as a result of the facts on the ground. We believe that the intentions to annex territory in the West Bank, legalize illegal settler outposts and expand settler activities, along with demolitions of Palestinian-owned properties, forced transfers and evictions, as well as the increased risk of settler harassment, detract from the efforts to reach a political solution, as they undermine the trust that is required for a genuine engagement between the two sides.

Secondly, while we welcome the recent efforts made in the region by the Governments of China, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and the United States to help to reduce the violence, encourage dialogue, and defuse tensions between the Palestinians and Israelis, we remain concerned about the continuing confrontations. Ghana encourages a strong commitment on the part of senior officials of Israel and Palestine to working together to avoid violence and de-escalate tensions on the ground, in line with the outcomes of the Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh meetings. We also encourage the parties to remain committed to a cessation of hostilities and to take further steps to prioritize the prevention of violence and the pursuit of confidence-building measures in order to restore mutual trust and create a political horizon enabling the outstanding issues to be addressed through direct dialogue.

Thirdly, we unequivocally condemn the attempts by extremists on both sides to carry out acts of provocation, which have recently resulted in confrontations. We are concerned about the interminable cycle of violence in the region, which negatively affects the economies, health, and sociopolitical lives of millions of people in the Middle East. We also condemn the spate of terrorist attacks against Israel.

Lastly, we are concerned about the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. We are dismayed by the high levels of deprivation in Gaza and the occupied West Bank as a result of the imposed siege, as well as the use of excessive force by Israeli security forces, with documented incidents of near-daily raids, arbitrary arrests, mostly of Palestinian youths, and violations of their basic human rights, as well as violations of international law and international humanitarian law.

In responding to the dire humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in

Gaza, we call for continued support to ensure the easing of humanitarian access and free movement to and from Gaza. We thank the donors that have contributed to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and encourage further financial and relevant support for the Agency. We urge action to resolve the deepening economic and fiscal crisis faced by the Palestinian Authority, which is also at the root of the threat of unrest in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in Area C of the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. We urge both Israel and Palestine to jointly establish a mechanism that will help to improve the Palestinian people's economic conditions and significantly enhance the financial and fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority in accordance with previous engagements and in line with the outcome of the Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh meetings.

The unending suffering of the Palestinian people, as well as Israel's continuing security concerns, must compel us to be steadfast in the pursuit of our decades-long goal of resolving the Palestinian question. Ghana believes firmly that advancing the peace process will require all regional and international actors to reinvigorate the tools of diplomacy, including international mechanisms and processes, in order to shepherd a comprehensive settlement of the situation in the Middle East.

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

As we heard earlier, today Israel marks the sombre holiday of Yom HaZikaron. We join our Israeli friends in commemorating the loss of those killed in past wars and terrorist attacks, and we unequivocally condemn terrorist attacks and all violence against civilians.

This has already been a painful year for both Israelis and Palestinians, and we must all do everything in our power to reverse those worrisome trends. Just this month, an already tense situation nearly boiled over into a broader regional conflict. Thankfully, we were able to avoid that, but those stakes underscore the imperative for all the parties to exercise restraint in action and rhetoric in order to prevent a further escalation of violence.

We condemn this month's rocket attacks by Palestinian militants from Gaza and Lebanon, as well as the attacks launched from Syria, which endangered civilians. Using Lebanon as a launching pad for rocket

attacks against Israel only puts the Lebanese people at risk and increases the potential for further conflict, while the barrage of missiles launched from Lebanon also endangered personnel from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, who sought cover and protection from potential harm.

The United States recognizes Israel's ability — like any other country — to exercise its inherent right of self-defence. We are also deeply upset by the incidents in the Al-Aqsa Mosque during the convergence of Ramadan and Passover. All sides must respect and maintain the historic status quo at Jerusalem's holy sites, in both word and practice. We were pleased that the final week of Ramadan passed relatively peacefully, and I hope that all those celebrating had a joyous Eid with their families and loved ones, just as I hope those celebrating Passover and Easter were able to enjoy the holidays.

Good-faith dialogue remains, without a doubt, the best path to stability. It remains essential. The United States applauds the efforts taken by the parties, along with the United States, Egypt and Jordan, to de-escalate tensions and build further trust through direct talks in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh. Those meetings and the commitments the parties made were important first steps. Now we call on the parties to fully implement those commitments and look for opportunities for further confidence-building measures.

The United States also remains concerned about the financial constraints that the Palestinian people face, and we urge our partners to take further actions to meet the needs on the ground. We welcome the inauguration of expanded operating hours at the Allenby Bridge border crossing, which will allow for easier travel by Palestinians and facilitate the transportation of goods. However, as many of us here know, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) — a programme that provides education, health care and relief and social services to the Palestinian refugees — will likely run out of funding this summer.

Over the past two years, the United States has helped improve the lives of millions of Palestinians by providing hundreds of millions of dollars in contributions to UNRWA, but we are also concerned about UNRWA's potential financial shortfall. If the international community does not step up, the consequences for regional stability will be grave and people will lose access to basic needs — and we cannot

allow that to happen. All those who can give must give. Now is the time to make meaningful contributions to UNRWA and pursue further efforts toward the long-term stabilization of its finances.

The United States believes that Israel and Palestinians deserve equal measures of security, prosperity and freedom, and we will continue to work towards those goals in tangible ways. We will continue to support a two-State solution and promote dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, and we will continue to support all efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Let us do everything possible to ensure that the days, months and years ahead are brighter, more hopeful and more peaceful for all.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

Since the beginning of this year, numerous incidents have occurred that have exacerbated tensions between Israel and Palestine. The Security Council has met urgently many times, including the most recent consultations held in response to the beatings and mass arrests of Palestinian worshippers by Israeli security forces at the Al-Aqsa Mosque — which we condemned — but the situation remains volatile. Japan attaches great importance to preserving the historic status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. In that regard, Prime Minister Kishida stressed the importance of Jordan's special role of custodianship at the summit meeting he held this month with King Abdullah II of Jordan. Our Prime Minister also had a telephone call with President of the State of Israel, in which he expressed his concern about the unilateral measures taken by both sides. Any unilateral actions or provocations that aggravate an already tense situation are unacceptable.

At the same time, Japan strongly condemns the rocket attacks by Palestinian militants. We also condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including the terrorist attack in Tel Aviv on 7 April.

The settlement activities of Israel in the West Bank continue to be a cause for grave concern. It is imperative for the Government of Israel to cease its settlement activities, demolitions and evictions. The settlement activities, as well as the expansion of settlements, constitute a violation of international law and go against the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Japan once again urges all the parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from taking actions that would escalate tensions and undermine efforts towards peace. In that context, we welcome the serious efforts made through the five-party talks held in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh to manage the situation on the ground through engagement with the parties and advocacy for the resumption of direct negotiations. The international community should play an active role in supporting the parties to achieve a peaceful solution. In that vein, Japan hosted the Group of Seven Foreign Ministers' meeting last week, at which the Group called on the Israelis and the Palestinians to take steps to build trust towards the realization of a two-State solution. It also expressed its readiness to continue assisting the Palestinians to enhance their economic self-reliance.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate Japan's enduring commitment to supporting Palestinians in need, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to which Japan is one of the largest donors.

In conclusion, peace and stability in the region cannot be achieved without a political resolution to the conflict. It is vital to end the cycle of violence on the ground and promote confidence-building measures in order to maintain the prospects for a two-State solution. Japan stands ready to contribute to those efforts, and we urge all the parties to engage constructively towards reaching a two-State solution.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I too would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and his Office's constant efforts to maintain calm, particularly during this past month.

Regrettably, several escalations in recent weeks against the backdrop of religious festivities have again brought us too close to the brink of an uncontrollable and explosive scenario, threatening to trigger wider confrontations. Those events should serve as a wake-up call. Malta remains extremely concerned about the unprecedented levels of violence, the provocations and the unilateral actions, which jeopardize any attempts to constructively remedy the situation and continue to directly impact the lives and security of thousands of people. The protection of civilians demands our undivided attention and focus. Malta unreservedly condemns all acts of terrorism and incitements to terrorism, which continue to threaten civilians and result

in further tragic loss of life. Acts of terrorism can never be justified. We equally condemn the indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza, and more recently from southern Lebanon. In that respect, Malta reiterates that Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence.

Nonetheless, we condemn Israel's excessive use of force, and stress the importance of respecting the principles of necessity and proportionality and especially the responsibility to protect women and children. We call on all the parties to respect international law, including international humanitarian law. We also echo presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1, of 20 February, which opposes the taking of unilateral measures, including Israel's expansion of settlements, legalization of settlement outposts and demolition of Palestinian homes. We are deeply concerned about various worrisome legal amendments and policies regarding settlements, which continue to contribute to the fracturing of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the West Bank. The recent repeal of the 2005 disengagement law and the transfer of the governance of Palestinian territory to a civilian administration are issues of deep concern, exacerbating conflict and obstructing peace.

At the same time, we underscore the importance of ensuring that the Palestinian Authority holds democratic elections. We remain 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 as a vital step towards a renewed Palestinian Government that is representative of the Palestinian people. Along the same lines, Malta expresses concern about the political and fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority, which is having a negative impact on the livelihoods of Palestinians. The disturbing events that we witnessed in recent weeks at the holy sites and the cyclical violence that ensued should serve as an additional warning for actors to de-escalate and promote calm and constructive dialogue. They came uncomfortably close to triggering a conflict with tragic ramifications. It is imperative that the international community focus on encouraging a return to a political horizon. Malta welcomes the continued attempts to re-establish crucial dialogue, including the meetings held in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh, while hoping that such efforts lead to meaningful de-escalation.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of this conflict in the

Middle East based on a two-State solution, within the pre-1967 borders, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States living side by side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. We continue to believe firmly that this remains the only viable path to peace.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): At the outset, I want to recognize that today is Memorial Day in Israel and express the hope that this conflict, which has cost so many lives on all sides, may be brought to a just and peaceful end. I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and acknowledge the presence here earlier today of Foreign Minister Al-Malki.

Sadly, as we have heard, in recent weeks we have witnessed violence that is unacceptable. We call on all the parties to desist from unilateral measures that undermine peace, stability and the possibility of a two-State solution.

First, de-escalation remains imperative. We condemn indiscriminate rocket fire into Israel from terror factions in Gaza, Syria and Lebanon. Nineteen Israelis have been killed this year in acts of terrorism, and 90 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces. Among those, three British-Israeli nationals, members of the same family, were victims of a terror attack in the West Bank on 7 April. We urge the Palestinian Authority to condemn incitements to violence. There is never any justification for such acts. Among Palestinian fatalities, a 15-year-old boy was killed near Jericho on 10 April. While Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence, its security forces must exercise restraint in the use of force and investigate all fatalities.

Secondly, we urge all the parties to cease unilateral actions that diminish prospects for peace. We condemn the raids made by Israeli security forces on the Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan, injuring many worshippers, and we call on all parties to respect the historic status quo and the Hashemite custodianship.

Thirdly, we urgently need to redouble efforts towards achieving long-term peace. We applaud the recent efforts to lay a foundation for dialogue, and notably the initiatives by Jordan, Egypt and the United States. It remains critical to ensure that both Israel and the Palestinians respect the commitments they have

made, including Israel's commitment to suspending the advancement of settlements. Settlements are illegal under international law and threaten the viability of a two-State solution. Our position is reflected in our enduring support for resolution 2334 (2016).

The United Kingdom remains committed to working with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and international partners to end the terrorism that Israel faces and the destructive cycle of violence that continues. Peace will be sustainable only if both Israelis and Palestinians recommit to a negotiated settlement leading to a secure Israel alongside a viable Palestinian State.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing at this high-level debate.

Switzerland is following the situation in the Middle East with full attention. The period around the major religious holidays was marked by acts of violence in the heart of the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem, followed by the launching of rockets into Israel from Gaza, southern Lebanon and Syria. Switzerland firmly condemns those acts of violence. The risk of escalation is real. It will be vital to de-escalate tensions in and around the holy sites in Jerusalem. We call once again for respect for the status quo at the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount and for Jordan's role as custodian. Concrete steps must also be taken to promote the peaceful coexistence of all communities in Jerusalem.

With regard to the Gaza Strip, despite the positive development in the number of exit permits issued by Israel last year, especially for day labourers, the humanitarian situation remains worrisome, with 60 per cent of Gazans dependent on humanitarian aid. Considering that most types of medical care are unavailable in Gaza, we condemn the fact that more than 200 patients did not receive exit permits in February. Switzerland would like to point out that as the occupying Power, Israel is obliged to ensure that the basic needs of the population of Gaza are met. While it is Israel's right to impose restrictions on the entry of certain goods, the consequences of that for the population must be proportionate to the legitimate goal of ensuring its security. Switzerland calls for lifting the blockade, which has now lasted almost 16 years. We also remain concerned about the high level of violence in both the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel, and

we urge the parties to protect the civilian population by meeting their respective obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. In that regard, Switzerland notes that a total of 21 children have died in violent circumstances to date in 2023. We therefore call on all parties to continue the dialogue initiated in December with the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and to take measures to prevent and end grave violations against children.

In the current situation, which remains highly volatile, Switzerland calls on the leaders of all parties to make every effort to reduce tensions and refrain from any unilateral measure, act of provocation or inflammatory language that could fuel the conflict. We call on the parties to implement the commitments made in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh in the wake of presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1, of 20 February.

Switzerland is concerned about the continued planning of settlements in recent weeks, despite those commitments. We recall that settlements are illegal under international humanitarian law and represent an obstacle to peace. There is an urgent need for the parties to address the root causes of the conflict.

The recent commitments made should serve as a concrete basis for confidence-building towards a negotiated two-State solution in accordance with international law and internationally agreed parameters, including the relevant Security Council resolutions. Switzerland stands ready to facilitate the resumption of a credible dialogue towards such a solution, including through its good offices.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): Exactly one year ago, the Security Council met in this very Chamber to hold an open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (see S/PV.9021). The distressing fact is that the scene is much the same: the same cycle of violence, the same rhetoric and the same deadlock.

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his enlightening briefing and his tireless efforts in the search for peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. I also welcome the presence of the Foreign Minister of the Observer State of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

The Special Coordinator's briefing on this day of remembrance for Israel augurs more concern than hope. The violence witnessed over the past few weeks has

taken place in a particularly volatile context. Tensions reached new heights on 4 April, when Israeli forces raided the Al-Aqsa Mosque. That grave incident joins the various other violations of the historical status quo of the holy sites that have occurred since the beginning of this year. Those violations continue to undermine the coexistence of all communities, particularly during such a sensitive period of celebration for the three monotheistic religions of Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

The status quo of the holy sites must be respected and preserved. To that end, we recognize the crucial role of the Kingdom of Jordan as the official custodian of the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem. We also reiterate our support for the efforts of the King of Morocco, as Chair of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's Al-Quds Committee, to preserve the special status of the holy city as a symbol of the common heritage of humankind and of the three monotheistic religions, as well as a place of dialogue and mutual respect. We echo the Pope's call during the celebration of Easter for a resumption of dialogue, in a climate of trust and mutual respect between Israelis and Palestinians, so that peace may reign in the holy city and throughout the entire region.

The recent flare-up on the ground — with rocket fire from Gaza, southern Lebanon and Syria towards Israel and bombings by Israeli forces against southern Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and Syria — has served as a reminder of the regional significance of the conflict. The upsurge in hostilities in recent weeks, manifested in brutality and the disproportionate use of force against civilians, has led to an increasing number of victims. The year 2023 is set to equal the disastrous and dramatic record of 2022 in terms of the number of civilian casualties, including women and children. In that connection, the impact of the conflict on children is terrifying. They are being killed or seriously injured, if not recruited or used. That is unacceptable. We urge both Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

My country reiterates its call on the political leaders of both sides to refrain from, prevent, combat and punish the hate speech and intolerant rhetoric that fuel belligerence and undermine peace efforts.

On the sensitive issue of the return of human remains to Palestinian and Israeli families, we call on the parties to seek a solution that will generate a climate of confidence for a lasting peace. The issue is all the more sensitive as it concerns respect for funeral rites, which are an integral part of the culture and identity of both parties.

The security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory remains precarious and volatile, due in part to the ongoing policy of illegal settlement expansion and the demolition of Palestinian homes and other evictions affecting many Palestinian families. Such acts contribute to the destabilization of the occupied Palestinian territory, exacerbating tensions in the West Bank and fuelling the victims' anger and desire for revenge. It is therefore essential to implement resolution 2334 (2016), which calls for an immediate and complete cessation of all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

In the same vein, the particularly worrisome economic situation of the Palestinian Authority, which has been aggravated by the freezing of tax funds collected by Israel from Palestinian Authority workers on the Authority's behalf, requires urgent measures aimed at achieving an economic recovery. Free access to the Israeli labour market for Palestinian workers in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as the lifting of all restrictions on access to materials in Gaza, are initiatives to be encouraged.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority must centre their actions in a dynamic of appeasement. It is obvious that a complex situation with inextricable stakes cannot be resolved by the protagonists' unilateral initiatives, but can be resolved only by constructive dialogue in good faith between the parties. Now more than ever, it is time to activate the channels of diplomacy in order to ensure that restraint, reason and respect for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and of Israel to security prevail in order to relaunch the peace process.

We welcome the meeting held in Sharm El-Sheikh on 19 March, under the auspices of the Arab Republic of Egypt, among Jordanian, Israeli, Palestinian and American political and security officials, in the framework of the agreement reached in Aqaba, Jordan in February. Gabon reiterates its commitment to a two-State solution, which cannot be achieved without the resolute political commitment of all the parties, the

mobilization of regional players and the firm will of the international community to work harder than ever to restore peace between Israelis and Palestinians. That is the only way to give a greater chance to the two-State solution for which we all yearn.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): We commend the Russian Federation's decision to convene today's important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine question, which we consider to be a high priority on the Council's agenda. We want to express our deep appreciation to Mr. Tor Wennesland, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for the insightful information he shared at today's meeting. And we welcome the presence in the Chamber of His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine.

As time goes by, the simmering conflict between Israel and Palestine seems to be boiling over, descending into a dangerous and permanent state of confrontation. We are deeply concerned about the increased tensions between Israel and Palestine, which leave very few prospects for lasting peace and good-neighbourliness between the two peoples. The high costs of the conflict have had dire consequences, with the most worrisome factors being the high number of casualties who are dead, injured or imprisoned and the high incidence of land occupation, both unfolding on a daily basis. We deeply deplore the situation, which should be addressed as a matter of urgency by the Council and the international community at large. The illegal occupation and aggression are unacceptable and must cease. The Council has a primary responsibility to protect the most vulnerable people from this protracted conflict. In that regard, we deem it important to ensure that the Council's resolutions on the matter are fully implemented, in the interests of peace and stability in the Middle East.

We believe in and defend the long-standing concept of a two-State solution. In that connection, we attach great importance to a resumption of negotiations and a revitalization of the peace process between the parties. Political will and a strong sense of commitment from both parties are the most crucial elements. The Palestinian people have been rightly clamouring for full recognition and implementation of their right to self-determination. We consider that demand fair, just and legitimate under international law and the principles of the United Nations, particularly at a time when already

serious grievances have been amplified in the wake of the illegal colonial project that is dispossessing and displacing the Palestinian people from their lands. Its acts constitute a gross violation of international law and of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and decisions.

Mozambique is deeply concerned about the prevailing situation of violence at the holy sites of Jerusalem, particularly the invasion and desecration of the holy sites. We call on Israel, the occupying Power, to refrain from such acts. More importantly, we need to bring Israel and Palestine back to the negotiating table as soon as possible. We must support them in recommitting their political will to finding lasting peace and a long-term solution. In that regard, we encourage all initiatives, regional or international, aimed at reaching a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

We strongly appeal to the international community for increased, predictable and sustainable support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme. Mozambique reiterates its commitment to supporting dialogue and constructive initiatives for lasting peace and security in Israel and Palestine.

We are aware that no two conflicts can be equated with each other. But the experience of the protracted and challenging problems we faced in the past in Southern Africa shows that the right side of history will always prevail. It should serve as a token of inspiration for finding a solution to the difficult and daunting problems in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): Brazil thanks the Russian presidency for organizing today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We are grateful to Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and welcome the participation of Mr. Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Palestine, in today's meeting.

The Council has met several times since the beginning of the year to address the situation in Israel and Palestine, as a series of crises have unfolded in an increasingly complex and volatile environment. Last month, ahead of Ramadan, Passover and Easter, we appealed for calm and maximum restraint (see S/PV.9290), while anticipating the possibility of a repetition of the scenes of violence seen during the religious holidays of previous years. Regrettably,

appalling incidents, such as raids inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, deeply disturbed the period of religious celebrations, injured worshippers and damaged buildings. Once again, heightened tensions raised the possibility of an escalation of violence with the potential to result in direct confrontation. The stability of the entire region was put at risk. Brazil is also extremely concerned about the launching of rockets against Israeli civilians from the Gaza Strip and Lebanese territory.

Access to religious sites is an essential component of freedom of religion and belief. Respecting the historical status quo of Jerusalem's holy sites is critical, as well as maintaining the custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Brazil condemns the actions undertaken in violation of the historical status quo of the holy sites and regrets that many worshippers were ultimately prevented from celebrating in peace and security. The fact that religious holidays of such significance to Muslims, Jews and Christians alike have become a period of permanent tension should not be normalized. Nor should we normalize the current overall situation characterized by ongoing violence and grave violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. As the Special Coordinator often reiterates, and we agree, managing this conflict in perpetuity is not a viable option. On the contrary, it moves us further away from the goal of lasting peace. If the core issues driving the conflict are not addressed, this intensified cycle of violence will continue.

Some elements are crucial here. First, Israel must immediately cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. As one of the main obstacles to peace, the continued expansion of settlements is in flagrant violation of international law, including resolution 2334 (2016), and it threatens the viability of a future Palestinian State and, therefore, the prospects for a two-State solution. Israel must also put an end to the demolitions and seizures of Palestinian structures, as well as to the displacement of Palestinian families.

Secondly, all acts of violence against civilians must cease. Brazil condemns the settler-related violence, the disproportionate use of force by security forces, as well as the acts of terror, which are never justifiable. The Israeli authorities must provide adequate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, as required by international law, as well as investigate and bring to

justice perpetrators of violence. Leaders on all sides must promote calm, avoid spreading inflammatory rhetoric and speak out against actions aimed at inciting violence.

Thirdly, and as important to peace as the aforementioned measures, is improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people, restoring their hope for a better future. Economic growth may also contribute to intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which is also a crucial step towards stabilization and the resumption of a genuine dialogue.

Palestinian refugees should also not be forgotten. We acknowledge the importance of increased, predictable and sustainable support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). For as long as it has existed, UNRWA has played a crucial role in providing relief and assistance to millions of people. The work of the Agency is key to the maintenance of stability in the region.

In conclusion, Brazil reaffirms its long-standing commitment to a two-State solution, with Palestine and Israel fully viable and living together in peace and security within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders. We therefore encourage all parties to work in good faith and with renewed political will to leave this vicious cycle of violence behind. They should pursue the path of dialogue, working together in a constructive manner towards lasting sustainable peace.

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

We are deeply troubled by the fact that, as we gather here every month, we note over and over again that the situation in the Middle East remains marred by pervasive endless violence with the unfortunate consequences that we have witnessed so many times. It is dangerous, it is unsustainable, and it leads to a dead end.

As Israelis gather to commemorate Memorial Day, we reiterate our strong and unreserved condemnation of terrorist attacks in Israel. Nineteen people have lost their lives this year in such attacks, including four children and European nationals. The deliberate targeting of innocent civilians with indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, or other acts such as the one that was perpetrated yesterday in Jerusalem when a vehicle hit pedestrians near a busy

market, are unacceptable, unjustifiable and should be condemned by everyone. There can be no justification ever for terror acts, and we support Israel's right to self-defence through proportionate response.

A continued tense situation on the ground has, unfortunately, resulted in a troublingly high number of Palestinian civilians — 90 since the beginning of this year — who have lost their lives, including innocent women and children. We deplore the indiscriminate violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, including the destruction of homes and properties. Unlawful action should be investigated, and perpetrators brought to account. We call for full implementation of international humanitarian law and for the protection of civilians and their properties in all circumstances.

We reiterate our position that unilateral actions drive the parties further apart and undermine trust between them, already in very short supply. In that respect, we recall our principled position that settlements are illegal under international law. They should stop, as they constitute an obstacle to peace and hamper the prospect for a two-State solution. We call on both sides to exercise maximum restraint and spare no efforts in finding ways to ease the situation, bearing in mind that the proliferation of violence will do no good to anyone. Inflammatory rhetoric, incitement to violence and hate speech are unacceptable as they only breed violence, which will only continue to harm civilians.

Those worrisome developments reinforce the call for both parties, the Israelis and the Palestinians, to abide by and implement in good faith the commitments made in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh. Every step towards confidence-building measures is an opportunity for them to open up the perspective of the currently blurred political horizon.

The heightened tensions and violence in and around the holy sites are a cause for concern, which reveal and underscore the complexities of the situation. The places of worship should be for safe, peaceful and dignified religious rituals. Political and religious community leaders on all sides must reject incitement and provocations. We are, nonetheless, pleased to note that a record number of 1.5 million Muslim worshippers visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque throughout the holy month of Ramadan to exercise their rights.

Peaceful coexistence among Muslims, Jews and Christians and respect for religious diversity and tolerance towards different faiths and beliefs are

fundamental values to be dearly preserved. They are at the heart of efforts to promote understanding and social cohesion and the best antidote against violence and conflict anywhere, even more so in the Middle East. This confirms the crucial importance of the preservation of the historic status quo of the holy places, and we praise the special role of the custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Let me express once more Albania's full support for the need, the urgent need, to restore a political horizon for a just and negotiated two-State solution within the 1967 borders, unless otherwise agreed by the parties. We see no alternative to comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians. It means a safe and secure Israel and a viable, independent and democratic Palestine. There has never been, and we do not believe there will ever be, an alternative to reconciliation through constructive dialogue and mutual understanding. A solution with two States for two peoples, with mutual recognition and Jerusalem as shared capital, will ensure that both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, live as neighbours in safety and security and enjoy freedom, dignity and justice.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I am honoured to participate in this meeting as the representative of Mr. Qin Gang, State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China.

I would like to begin by thanking Foreign Minister Lavrov for presiding over this meeting. I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. I welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine, in today's meeting. The series of questions he raised in his speech revealed the essence of the elusive settlement of the long-standing Palestinian issue. The international community should attach great importance to it and seriously reflect on it.

Muslims all over the world have just celebrated Eid Al-Fitr. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my warm greetings to our many Muslim friends, brothers and sisters who celebrate this holiday. Regrettably, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has become tense for the whole world during Ramadan over the past few years. Violence in the West Bank has intensified, with frequent tensions in East Jerusalem and Gaza. The international community cannot become accustomed to this or let it continue unchecked. Instead, we must invest further in promoting a comprehensive,

just and lasting settlement to the Palestinian issue with the greatest sense of urgency.

First, we must oppose violence and incitement and seek common security. Over the past month, Israeli forces and police have repeatedly stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque, beating and removing Muslims, thus shattering the peace and tranquillity of Ramadan and triggering new tensions. China condemns all acts of violence against civilians and calls on all parties to exercise calm and restraint and to put an end to all extremist and provocative statements and actions. Palestine and Israel are neighbours that cannot be moved away from one another. The security of one party cannot be based on the insecurity of the other. In order to fundamentally break the cycle of violence and establish lasting peace, we must give equal attention to the legitimate security concerns of both sides and encourage both sides to achieve common security through dialogue and negotiation.

Secondly, we must stop unilateral actions to change the status quo and earnestly uphold the international rule of law. Settlement activity in the occupied territory is illegal. Since the beginning of this year, Israel has continued to pursue unilateral actions on approving returns, legalizing settlements and building new settlements, thus encroaching on Palestinian land and resources, squeezing the living space of the Palestinian people and building a territorially contiguous, independent and sovereign Palestinian State even more elusive. We urge Israel to comply with the requirements of resolution 2334 (2016) and effectively stop all settlement activities. We also note that unilateral measures to change the status quo of Jerusalem are null and void. China calls for earnest respect for the historic status quo of Jerusalem's holy sites and Jordan's custodianship over them.

Thirdly, we must protect peoples' livelihoods and promote economic development in Palestine. The prolonged occupation and frequent turmoil have severely restricted the viability of the Palestinian economy, leading to the continuous deterioration of the situation of the Palestinian people. Israel should cease and lift unreasonable restrictions on the movement of people and goods, as well as on land use in the occupied territories, create conditions conducive to the development of Palestinian communities in the West Bank and lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip as soon as possible. The international community should also provide assistance to Palestine through

multiple channels in order to help Palestine alleviate its financial crisis and ensure the provision of public services. China will continue to do what it can in order to provide humanitarian and development assistance to Palestine and increase its support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Fourthly, we must adhere to the two-State solution and promote the resumption of peace talks. Facts have repeatedly shown that piecemeal crisis management is difficult to sustain, nor can it replace a comprehensive and fair solution. Not long ago, Saudi Arabia and Iran resumed diplomatic relations through dialogue, setting an example of resolving differences through dialogue. On other issues in the Middle East, a positive step towards dialogue and reconciliation are also in the making. It is never too late to do the right thing. State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang recently held separate phone calls with the Palestinian and Israeli Foreign Ministers. He conveyed that China encourages Israel and Palestine to show political courage and take steps to resume peace talks on the basis of the two-State solution. China is willing to facilitate such endeavours. We expect the international community to step up coordination, take substantive steps and make unremitting efforts to promote the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli talks and implement the two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We are glad to be back here in the Chamber. We commend the Russian presidency for hosting this debate on the Middle East. We also recognize today the important contribution of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Wennesland, and thank him for his tireless efforts.

We echo the warnings of the international community that the current cycle of conflict in the Middle East region, especially the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, is cause for serious concern. The conflict has the potential for further escalation, which could lead to the destabilization of the entire region and beyond. It requires our urgent and immediate attention. Kazakhstan echoes the common concern about the continued expansion of settlements across the occupied Palestinian territory.

Kazakhstan calls on interested parties to refrain from any action that could undermine the advancement of the two-State solution. We appeal to all political, community and religious leaders to spare no effort to end the intensifying hostilities.

In the light of the above, Kazakhstan suggests the return to dialogue between all parties to the conflict, accompanied by new measures for building trust and improving the humanitarian situation in Gaza. That is essential because Gaza remains an integral part of the two-State solution, in keeping with relevant United Nations resolutions.

Given that both Israel and Palestine are members of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, we call on them to use the multilateral cooperation mechanisms of that organization to bring closer their countries' positions.

Kazakhstan reiterates the urgent need to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in its critical role of mitigating the deteriorating situation in Gaza and promoting the long-term development of the area. The current situation that we are witnessing today is one of deepening poverty, unemployment and chronic economic regression, which will fuel further conflict. The deterioration of the security and socioeconomic situation across the occupied Palestinian territory must be reversed.

Kazakhstan's long-standing policy is the creation of an independent State of Palestine coexisting peacefully with Israel within the 1967 borders. We join others in reinforcing the two-State solution as the only viable option for durable peace.

Kazakhstan stands ready to join every mediation effort, with a view to ensuring that both Israel and Palestine can live in peace, security, progress and prosperity — the long-cherished goals of both nations.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Peñalver Portal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We align ourselves with the statements made by the representatives of Azerbaijan, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and of Senegal, in its capacity as Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

We welcome the Joint Trilateral Agreement reached by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the People's Republic of China, whereby Saudi Arabia and Iran re-established diplomatic relations and reopened embassies. We hope that this step will contribute to regional stability and security.

Looking at the situation in the Middle East over the past quarter, that positive development contrasts with deplorable developments. During the month of Ramadan, the climate of violence was exacerbated by the Israeli incursion into the Al-Aqsa Mosque and attacks on worshippers, which are flagrant violations of international norms and shock the religious sentiment of Palestinians. This took place in a context where violence, arrest, detention, imprisonment, human rights violations and killings of Palestinian civilians are daily occurrences in the occupied territories. The Palestinian people continue to suffer from Israeli apartheid practices in their own territory.

We reject the Israeli military aggression and occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, along with Israel's annexation policy and its illegal colonization practices, including the continued destruction of homes and other properties, the forced displacement of Palestinian families and the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements.

We condemn the continuing blockade of the Gaza Strip and the latent plans for annexation of the Palestinian territories of the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Contrary to the notion that is attempted to be imposed as part of efforts to rewrite history, the United States is responsible for repeatedly obstructing Security Council action to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and has, in turn, ensured Israel's impunity, the continuation of its policy of aggression and its unwillingness to reach a peace agreement that would allow the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and which would also guarantee the right of return of the refugees. As long as this situation persists, we will continue to reiterate our condemnation of the unilateral decisions of the United States Government to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and establish its diplomatic representation in that city, disrespecting its historical status, as well as to recognize Israel's sovereignty over

the Syrian Golan, which constitute grave violations of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Double standards, selectivity, inconsistency and political manipulation, which undermine the cause of international peace and security to the detriment of the mandate of the Security Council, must cease. We reiterate our demand for Israel's full and unconditional withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and all occupied Arab territories. We demand the cessation of external interference in Syria and call for full respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, while supporting the search for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the situation imposed on that sister Arab nation.

We ratify our support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran and our support for the inalienable right of States to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. We reiterate our rejection of the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA. We demand an immediate and unconditional end to the arbitrary and illegal unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States against nations in the Middle East.

We will continue to strongly support the accession of the State of Palestine to the United Nations as a full Member. We support its President's call for an international peace conference.

It is urgent to heed the historic demands of the United Nations, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and other international actors in favour of the just cause of the Palestinian people. We expect this Security Council to fulfil its mandate.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Hmoud (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the assumption of the Russian Federation of the presidency of the Security Council. I wish you and your delegation every success in leading the Council's deliberations this month. I also welcome Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the state of Palestine, to the Council. I thank the Special

Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan stresses the importance of making concerted regional and international efforts to stop the deterioration we are seeing in the occupied Palestinian territories and to ensure de-escalation by putting an end to all measures that stand in the way. That would pave the way to relaunching serious and effective negotiations to achieve a just and lasting peace based on the two-State solution. Achieving that peace in accordance with Security Council resolutions to establish an independent sovereign Palestinian State within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, is the basis for establishing peace and security in the region. Protecting the right of all peoples of the region to peace, security and stability requires putting an end to all unilateral measures by Israel that undermine the two-State solution, most notably settlement activities, confiscations of land and evictions of Palestinians from their homes.

It is also important to respect the legal and historic status quo of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. All practices that undermine the status quo must stop. As the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is historically the custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, it will continue to play its full role in protecting those sites and preserve their Arab Muslim and Christian identity. We will continue to keep the legal and historic status of those holy sites.

In that context, we stress once again that the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, with its area of 144,000 square metres, is a place of worship exclusively for Muslims. The Jerusalem Waqf and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs Administration, which is affiliated with the Jordanian Awkaf Ministry, is the sole authority with the prerogative of managing the affairs of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and regulating entry into that holy site.

Jordan will also continue to cooperate with all brothers and partners to stop the deterioration of the situation, end violence and its causes and find political horizon for the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on a two-State solution. That peace is a strategic Jordanian, Palestinian and Arab choice. It is a necessity at both the regional and international levels. Working towards establishing such peace is a joint responsibility.

Jordan stresses the importance of implementing all outcomes of the Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh meetings, which led to a number of commitments, most notably upholding the signed agreements and stopping all unilateral measures, ceasing violence and respecting the legal and historic status of the city of Jerusalem.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Mahmoud (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. Egypt highly values the holding of today's meeting at the ministerial level, which is consistent with Russia's long-standing position of support for Palestinian legitimate rights. I would also like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Khalifa Shaheen Al Marar, Minister of State at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the sisterly United Arab Emirates, and His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of sisterly Palestine, to today's meeting.

I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

Egypt aligns itself with the statements of the Group of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Tensions have worsened in the Palestinian occupied territories over the past few weeks as a result of continued Israeli violations in the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem, through settlement expansion, confiscation of land, demolition of Palestinian houses, storming Palestinian cities and continued killings by occupation forces and settlers against unarmed civilians, including children. Since the beginning of the year, the number of Palestinian martyrs has amounted to 98. The Egyptian Ministry for Foreign Affairs recently condemned those practices on several occasions.

As the situation remained tense, Egypt, in coordination with the United States and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, convened two meetings in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh in February and March, with the participation of both Palestine and Israel, aimed at containing the situation and working on de-escalation and self-restraint in order to spare the blood of innocent people. A number of recommendations were agreed during those meetings, most notably to put an

end to unilateral measures, especially when it comes to settlements, and to respect the status quo and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's custodianship over the holy sites.

However, despite the agreements reached in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh, calm has not been restored on the ground, as the agreements have not been implemented. Over the past few weeks, the holy sites in the occupied city of Jerusalem have continued to be subjected to Israeli violations during the celebration of the religious holidays of the three Abrahamic religions. Under the protection of the occupation forces, extremist Jewish groups have continued to storm Al-Haram Al-Sharif, attacking worshipers and restricting freedom of access to places of worship, whether for Muslims or Christians, in flagrant violation of international law, the resolutions of the United Nations, the status quo at the holy sites and Jordan's custodianship over them. The current situation confirms Egypt's repeated warnings — namely, that the continuation of the current violations portends a vicious circle of violence, for which innocent civilians will pay the price. In order to bring an end to the current situation and maintain the prospects for implementing the two-State solution and achieving peace, Egypt calls for three steps to be taken.

First, the agreements reached at the Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh meetings must be implemented, especially with regard to putting an end to all unilateral measures related to settlement expansion; all acts of violence against civilians, whether perpetrated by settlers or Israeli occupation forces; and the confiscation and demolition of Palestinian homes and facilities, arrest operations and the storming of Palestinian cities.

Secondly, the existing legal and historical status quo of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in East Jerusalem and their Jordanian custodianship must be respected.

Thirdly, the necessary international protection must be provided to the brotherly Palestinian people, and there must be accountability for the violations committed against them.

Implementing the steps I just mentioned will undoubtedly contribute to de-escalating the situation in the short-term and stopping the current cycle of violence, especially if it is coupled with the lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip and providing support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In the medium term, there

is an urgent need to address the root causes of the conflict, because managing the conflict alone is not enough. We must work to revive the peace negotiations between the two sides by reactivating the role of the Middle East Quartet and resuming its meetings as soon as possible, in accordance with the agreed international terms of reference.

In conclusion, Egypt affirms its unwavering support for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, above all their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, international law and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Mrad (Lebanon): Before I deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States, I would like to ask your indulgence, Mr. President, as I may exceed the three-minute time limit given that this is a group statement.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I would first like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I also appreciate the briefing delivered by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

I deliver this statement on behalf of the member States of the Group of Arab States.

Over the past month, the members of the Security Council have repeatedly called for de-escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories in general and in Jerusalem in particular, at a time when the religious holidays of the three Abrahamic religions coincide. Nevertheless, the occupying Power has ignored those calls and committed the worst forms of violence against Palestinians, Muslims and Christians, in addition to limiting their ability to exercise their religious rights on the occasion of Easter and Ramadan, especially in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Arab Group condemns in the strongest terms the violence committed by the Israeli occupation forces against worshipers this month, which is a continuation of the cycle of bloody violence that has been systematically practiced against the Palestinians, especially since the beginning of this year and during

last year. The Group also condemns the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the assaults, detentions and arrests of hundreds of worshipers. Those irresponsible acts perpetrated at holy sites provoke millions of Muslims around the world, especially during the holy month of Ramadan.

In that regard, the Arab Group also stress the need for Israel, the occupying Power, to respect the existing legal and historical status quo of the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, including by respecting its status — with its area of 144 dunums — as a place of worship exclusively for Muslims. It is also important to respect the role of the Jerusalem Waqf of Jordan's Ministry of Awqaf Islamic Affairs and Holy Places, as it is the only body authorized to manage the affairs of all Al-Haram Al-Sharif and regulating entry into it. We also stress the right of the State of Palestine to exercise its sovereignty over the occupied city of East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine and its holy sites. Israel, the occupying Power, has no rights or sovereignty over the occupied city of Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites.

The Arab Group values the positions of the countries that rejected and condemned the provocative and aggressive storming by Israel of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. They stress their positions rejecting any altering of the historic and legal status quo. The Group also reiterates its support for all efforts and initiatives to protect the occupied city of Jerusalem, and defends its holy sites while rejecting and condemning any attempts to alter its demographic character and its Arab, Islamic and Christian identity, along with its legal and historic status. The Group condemns the extremist views of the new Government of Israel, in flagrant violation of all its commitments to international law and Security Council resolutions, which have led to a state of stagnation and great tension in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Israel is targeting Palestinian civilians, killing Palestinian children, young people, women and older persons in their cities, villages and streets, and storming their homes, schools and workplaces, as well as deliberately targeting health-care and media personnel, in addition to the attacks by extremist settlers, the colonial expansion and the incitement and racist rhetoric adopted by the Israeli Government, which ignores all human and legal norms, without accountability or punishment, in defiance of the international position with regard to its occupation and violations in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Arab Group therefore calls on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and ensure the implementation of its resolutions in order to put an end to all of Israel's unilateral, illegal, provocative and escalatory steps, as well as the violations that it continues to commit unabated in order to build and expand its illegal settlements. Israel continues to kill innocent people, storm Palestinian cities and villages, confiscate Palestinian land and property, demolish Palestinian houses and structures and displace the original inhabitants, including in Jerusalem, while flagrant violations of the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif are committed by Israel's occupying army and radical settlement groups. In the light of that continued aggression, the Arab Group calls urgently for the protection of the Palestinian people by the international community in line with the proposals made by the Secretary-General, which the General Assembly welcomed in view of the increase in Israel's aggressions against the Palestinian people.

The Arab Group condemns Israel's policy of arbitrary detention and denial of medical care for prisoners. We support the prisoners in their struggle to achieve their release. We must ensure that the occupying Power complies with humanitarian international law and international human rights law. Pressure must be put on Israel to immediately release all prisoners and detainees, as well as the bodies of martyrs. Israel must end its policies on deportation and house arrest, among other things. We call on the international community and Council members to condemn all forms of violence against Palestinian civilians by the occupation forces and radical settler groups and urge for accountability for all such practices.

We will not be able to achieve a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East, along with security and stability, until the Palestinian people are granted their inalienable legitimate rights, including their right to self-determination, and until we see the end of Israel's illegal and colonial occupation and the assurance of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We therefore call on the countries of the world to show their solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle, to recognize that the Palestinian question is a just one and acknowledge the State of Palestine and its right to be a full member of the United Nations.

We welcomed the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 77/247, which calls for requesting the

International Court of Justice to render an advisory opinion on Israel's colonial occupation of the land of the State of Palestine and its repercussions, given that it violates international law and the Charter of the United Nations. We call on all Member States that care for the values of justice and international law to support the State of Palestine in its endeavour by providing written and oral legal submissions to the Court by 25 July. We call on the International Criminal Court to complete its investigation and hold to account the perpetrators of the war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed by Israel against the defenceless Palestinian people.

The Arab Group appreciates Jordan's role in safeguarding and maintaining Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem within the framework of the custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, under the leadership of King Abdullah II. We appreciate the role of the Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Committee and its affiliated Beit Mal Al-Quds under the chairmanship of King Mohammed VI of Morocco, as well as the efforts in support of the Palestinian question by Algeria, under the leadership of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, through Algeria's historic policies and continued financial aid to the budget of the State of Palestine. We express our appreciation to Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, for its support of the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem. We also appreciate the historic role played by Egypt, under the leadership of President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, in support of the Palestinian question. And we want to express our appreciation for all Arab efforts aimed at preserving the city of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, along with its Arab, Islamic and Christian identity with its holy sites and cultural and humanitarian heritage, supporting its institutions while addressing Israel's policies on settlement building and Judaism. We also thank and appreciate the countries hosting Palestinian refugees, including Lebanon.

In conclusion, the Arab Group stresses that the Palestinian question is the central Arab issue. It has been on the Council's agenda since 1948, which exemplifies the injustice that has been inflicted on the Palestinian people and their need for their own independent State. On 15 May we will mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Nakba, whose repercussions have continued to affect every succeeding generation, while further demonstrating the international community's inability

to implement United Nations resolutions. We are still far from seeing the hopes based on the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations come true. There have been many international efforts, peace initiatives and related United Nations resolutions. However, the situation on the ground for Palestinians, including refugees, continues to deteriorate. The unjust realities of the occupation have not changed. Israel's hostile campaigns have continued and its settlements are expanding, while it continues to completely disregard international law, international humanitarian law and the wishes of the international community. In that context, we must continue to provide political and financial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East until a just and permanent solution to the Palestinian question is achieved in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), on the right of return.

We can achieve peace in the Middle East only through a just and comprehensive solution based on the decisions of international legitimacy and the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, including, most recently, resolution 2334 (2016). Furthermore, we need to implement the Arab Peace Initiative and ensure the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the borders of 4 June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

I would now like to make a brief statement in my national capacity on behalf of the Government of Lebanon.

Lebanon condemns the attacks by Israel on Friday, 7 April, which targeted parts of southern Lebanon and threatened the lives and territories of Lebanese civilians. We believe that act of aggression is a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon, which threatens the stability that southern Lebanon was enjoying and is furthermore a clear violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and a threat to international peace and security. Lebanon reiterates its rejection of the use of its territories as a platform for destabilizing the situation and reserves its legitimate right to self-defence. Lebanon emphasizes that the lines of communication with the United Nations and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) represent the best pathway for resolving problems and preserving calm and stability. Lebanon once again warns that all the tensions along the Blue Line are the result of Israel's continued violation of that Line. Israel even recently built a T-shaped wall on the Lebanese occupied territories across from the town of

Alma Al-Shaab. The Security Council must condemn such violations.

On the occasion of the forty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of UNIFIL, Lebanon highly appreciates its important role in establishing peace and security in southern Lebanon. We are also grateful to UNIFIL's troop- and police-contributing countries for their continued commitment to preserve peace. UNIFIL's presence and role in maintaining calm and defusing tensions are necessary to maintain stability and avoid any miscalculations or escalations along the Blue Line. It is also essential for UNIFIL to monitor adherence to resolution 1701 (2006) in that regard. Lebanon underscores once again the importance of coordinating between the activities undertaken by UNIFIL and the Lebanese Government in accordance also with resolution 1701 (2006).

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Once again, I wish to recall the appeal by the presidency to all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously, while we listen respectfully to all those who wish to contribute to today's debate.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Lagdameo (Philippines): I would like to thank Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, for convening today's Security Council open debate on the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would like also to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

We follow with serious concern the recent developments surrounding Israel and Palestine, including the growing tensions on the ground. We join the international community in urging all the parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from violence and provocative actions in order to avoid a further escalation of the situation and end the vicious circle of violence. We support all efforts to prevent all forms of violence, terrorism and violent extremism.

The Philippines recognizes the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the key to the region's peace and stability. The conflict can never be resolved by violence, but only through meaningful dialogue and negotiations in accordance with international law. We continue to support the peaceful implementation of

all United Nations initiatives towards the resolution of the Middle East conflict. We support all efforts to revive the Middle East peace process articulated in the Middle East Quartet road map to peace, including the affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse the negative trends on the ground, which are imperilling the achievement of a two-State solution in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016). The Philippines has always expressed support for the creation of a State of Palestine, living in peace and security with its neighbours. In that regard, the Philippines reaffirms its support for a two-State solution.

We commend the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to immediately respond, under extraordinary circumstances, to the humanitarian needs of the affected populations, including both refugees and non-refugees, as well as the tens of thousands of people who have sought safety in Agency schools in Gaza. Its designated emergency shelters are equipped to host internally displaced persons during times of conflict. We should continue to support UNRWA's work to protect the delivery of vital services to millions of Palestine refugees.

The Philippines enjoins the parties to place a more intense focus on building trust and confidence. We also ask them to refrain from actions that could further incite violence. We encourage the parties to clearly demonstrate their resolve to pursue a just and lasting peace, from which not only their own peoples but the entire world would undoubtedly benefit. We call on all stakeholders, including the Middle East Quartet, to help negotiate the best possible diplomatic outcome. As the Secretary-General has emphasized, it is critical to de-escalate the situation and move towards re-establishing a political horizon. The statements by European Member States, the presidential statements of the Security Council and the joint communiqué of the Aqaba meeting are welcome calls for calm. If implemented, the steps outlined at Aqaba could be an important start to reversing the negative trends on the ground.

We also welcome the recent establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and a number of Arab countries with a view to enhancing prospects for reaching a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East peace process.

Finally, the Philippines reiterates the importance of supporting steps that would expand the space for meaningful dialogue and negotiations, building trust and mutual understanding, and cooperation for peace.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Türkiye.

Mr. Önal (Türkiye): I would first like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I thank you for convening this open debate, and I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

As we meet to discuss the situation in the Middle East, the conflict between Israel and Palestine is going through one of its most difficult episodes in history. Violations against the historic status quo of the holy sites, the desecration of the sanctity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the repeated brutal storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound have led to a dangerous escalation of the situation, creating a spiral of violence. Türkiye denounces in the strongest terms the raiding of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli security forces and the detention of many Palestinian civilians. Those attacks against worshippers in the Al-Aqsa Mosque during the holy month of Ramadan are unacceptable. We engaged in intensive talks before and during the month of Ramadan, in particular with our Israeli counterparts at every level. We warned about the dangers of such an escalation. We would have hoped that our warnings would have been heeded from the very beginning.

The situation in other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory is no less alarming. Illegal settlements, demolitions and evacuations continue unabated. Settler violence has reached unprecedented levels. As a result, many Palestinians have been killed since the beginning of this year. We share the deep concerns of the international community regarding that dangerous trend on the ground, which could have catastrophic consequences if left unchecked.

Turkey has repeatedly underlined the necessity of addressing the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and bringing an end to the plight of the Palestinian people. The reasons that perpetuate the failure to find a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question run counter to the founding principles of this Organization. Ending the occupation is a prerequisite for, and key to, reaching a lasting and sustainable solution to the conflict. We cannot achieve a lasting peace in the Middle East

without an independent, sovereign State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. To achieve that goal, there is an urgent need to return to the political path and accelerate efforts towards the revitalization of the peace process. The financial, administrative and security capacity of the Palestinian State should also be substantially supported. We cannot expect the overall situation to get better unless the living and security conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory are improved.

The powerful earthquakes of 6 February that struck Türkiye and Syria also affected Lebanon and had a damaging impact on the already difficult living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Syria and Lebanon. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has once again shown how vital its role is in providing emergency assistance in times of crisis. Despite financial constraints, the Agency has quickly mobilized to meet the humanitarian and early-recovery needs of Palestinian refugees. We call on all countries to support its crucial work. The Agency's long-term financial stability must be assured so that its life-saving services for millions of Palestinian refugees can continue.

We remain hopeful that one day Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side in peace and security. Türkiye will continue to support all efforts to find a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict, based on the vision of two equal and independent States. Türkiye's unwavering support to the Palestinian people in achieving their inalienable rights, including the right to live in their own sovereign and independent State, will continue.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Gaouaoui (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, Mr. President, allow me to warmly congratulate the delegation of the Russian Federation on its presidency of the Security Council this month and on its excellent guidance of our deliberations. I wish you every success for the rest of the month.

We are meeting in this Chamber just a few days before the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Nakba — the original catastrophe for the Palestinian people. They were expelled and chased from their homeland and scattered to the four corners of the world. They dream of returning to build a State that is recognized by all United Nations resolutions and international forums.

That dream is not being realized because of the obstinacy of the occupying Power and its decades-long status quo policy. Killings and arrests are part and parcel of the daily life of Palestinians, who continue to live under the yoke of an apartheid regime that denies them the right to freedom and life and undermines their most basic rights. How can anything change when the occupying Power continues to deprive Palestinian Muslims and Christians of their religious rights, including that of visiting their holy sites, as we saw at the beginning of the month and during the religious holidays? And as usual, the occupying authorities are not held accountable in any way.

I would like to reiterate Algeria's firm condemnation of the raids by Israeli occupying forces of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and their attacks on worshippers. We emphasize that those barbaric and criminal practices are a flagrant violation of the holy sites and a stark violation of all international laws and norms. That fact now compels us more than ever to implement the mechanisms designed to protect Palestinians, such as resolution 904 (1994), which calls for measures to be taken to guarantee the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians throughout the occupied territory, including by a temporary international or foreign presence. Furthermore, we reiterate that we must activate all international and regional multilateral mechanisms to provide support and protection for Palestinians. Unfortunately, that support and protection are dependent on some leaders focused on narrow interests and political considerations, and the Palestinians will be the only losers in that situation.

Given its continuing support to the Palestinians and commitment to their unity in any future negotiations, based on a clear vision and the internationally recognized terms of reference, Algeria, under the personal and direct guidance of President Tebboune, hosted a series of reconciliation meetings among Palestinian factions that led to the adoption of the Algiers Declaration. Algeria supports Palestine's aspiration to become a full member of the United Nations, given that the Palestinian Authority enjoys the functions of a State. If Palestine joins the United Nations, the principle of a two-State solution will be seen to be fully endorsed by the international community. Algeria reiterates its firm and unconditional support to its brother people of Palestine in their quest to enjoy their inalienable rights in full, including the right to self-determination and the right to create an independent and sovereign State, with

Jerusalem as its capital, as well as to find a just solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees. We reiterate that the Arab Peace Initiative remains essential to a political settlement of the Palestinian question and is a shared position that is reiterated in the Algiers Declaration, which was adopted at the Arab League Summit.

The deafening silence of the international community in response to the suffering of the Palestinian people and the crimes perpetrated by the occupation authorities has enabled those authorities to continue with their plans to change the situation on the ground. That undermines the possibility of a political solution to the Palestinian question in line with international law. Efforts to resort to the highest forums of that law have become a crime that is being collectively punished by the occupying authorities.

We would also like to reiterate that Al-Haram Al-Sharif and its entire area is a holy site for Muslims,

and we underscore the custodianship role played by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in managing its affairs. Any attempt to change the historical and legal status quo by dividing it physically or temporally is unacceptable and constitutes a threat to the future of Palestine and the security and stability of the region. We must therefore revive the peace process with the participation of all parties in order to arrive at a lasting solution to the Palestinian question, one that will enable the Palestinian people to enjoy all their inalienable rights, including the right to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

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

The meeting was suspended at 1.10 p.m.