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Seventy-sixth year

8913th meeting

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New York

Provisional

President: Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez/Mr. Ochoa Martínez (Mexico)

Members:

China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
France	Mr. Benaabou
India	Mr. Raguttahalli
Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
Kenya	Mr. Kimani
Niger	Mr. Abarry
Norway	Ms. Juul
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
Tunisia	Mr. Cherif
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield
Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

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 Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; and Ms. Comfort Ero, Interim Vice President and Program Director, International Crisis Group.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: I brief the Security Council today as we face a series of heightened and interrelated risks across the occupied Palestinian territory.

In the West Bank, a severe financial and economic crisis is threatening the stability of Palestinian institutions. At the same time, ongoing violence and unilateral steps, including Israeli settlement expansions and demolitions, continue to raise tensions, feed hopelessness, erode the Palestinian Authority's standing and further diminish the prospect of a return to meaningful negotiations.

In Gaza, the fragile cessation of hostilities continues to hold, but further steps on the part of all parties are needed to ensure a sustainable solution that will ultimately enable a return of legitimate Palestinian Government institutions to the Strip.

Amid these concerning developments, on 17 November the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians met in Oslo at the ministerial level. Participants commended the parties for approaching the meeting with a constructive attitude, urging them to implement reforms and follow through on commitments to help stabilize the Palestinian economy and strengthen its institutions. Participants expressed support for a package of recommended steps for the parties and the donor community.

On the margins, I met with my fellow Middle East Quartet Envoys. In a joint statement, the Quartet

Envoys expressed concern regarding negative developments across the occupied Palestinian territory, including ongoing acts of violence in the West Bank, the advancement of new settlement units, an untenable fiscal crisis within the Palestinian Authority and threats of violence from the Gaza Strip.

The Quartet Envoys also reiterated the need to take constructive steps to advance the two-State solution and called on all parties to help address the current urgent challenges through fiscal and other reforms, as well by avoiding unilateral steps that could exacerbate tensions and undermine the prospects for peace.

In the meantime, violence continued daily throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, clashes, attacks, search-and-arrest operations and other incidents resulted in the deaths of four Palestinians, including two children, and injuries to 90 Palestinians, including 12 children, caused by the Israeli security forces. One Israeli civilian was killed and nine civilians, including one woman and one child, and six members of the Israeli security forces were injured in the course of these events.

On 5 November, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 15-year-old Palestinian boy during clashes near Nablus. According to the Israeli Defense Forces, the incident is being investigated.

On 16 November, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 26-year-old Palestinian during a search operation and subsequent clashes in Tubas. The Israeli security forces stated their personnel had returned fire after they were shot at and that an improvised explosive device was thrown at them from a passing vehicle. No Israeli security forces were injured in that operation. Palestinian Islamic Jihad later claimed the man as a member.

Tensions and clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces also heightened in and around Jerusalem's Old City. On 17 November, a 16-year-old Palestinian from the Al-Issawiya neighbourhood, in occupied East Jerusalem, stabbed and injured two Israeli security forces personnel in Jerusalem's Old City. In response, an Israeli civilian and the Israeli security forces shot the perpetrator, who was pronounced dead shortly afterwards. According to eyewitnesses, the perpetrator was being restrained when shot.

On 21 November, a Palestinian man opened fire at Israeli civilians in Jerusalem's Old City, killing one Israeli civilian and injuring two others. Israeli security forces returned fire and killed the attacker. Two Israeli security forces were injured. Hamas claimed the assailant as one of its members. Following the attack, the Israeli security forces reportedly conducted search-and-arrest operations in the Shu'fat refugee camp, where the perpetrator lived, detaining several of his family members. All were later released.

Violent attacks and acts of terrorism can never be justified and must be condemned by all.

Settler-related violence remains at alarmingly high levels amid continued tensions over settlement expansion and the annual olive harvest season. Since the harvest began on 4 October, some 3,000 olive trees have been damaged or have had their harvest stolen. Physical attacks on Palestinian farmers, volunteers and humanitarian staff have also been recorded, some reportedly having taken place in the presence of Israeli security forces.

Overall, settlers and other Israeli civilians in the occupied West Bank perpetrated some 54 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in 26 injuries, including to five children, and damage to property. Palestinians perpetrated 41 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians, resulting, as I reported earlier, in one death and nine injuries, including to one child and one woman, and damage to property. Most incidents resulting in injury or damage were caused by stones and Molotov cocktails thrown at civilian vehicles and buses.

On 24 November, a Palestinian man was critically injured and his 10-year-old son injured after their car overturned near Al-Mughayyir village in the West Bank, due to an object thrown from an oncoming car. According to witnesses, the car was hit by objects thrown by Israeli settlers. Israeli authorities have opened an investigation into the incident.

I reiterate that all perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice.

On 24 October, Israeli authorities announced tenders for some 1,350 housing units in settlements. About half are in the settlement of Ariel, at the heart of the northern West Bank. The announcement also included a reissuance of tenders for some 80 units in the settlement of Givat Hamatos, where construction would

further risk severing the link between East Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

On 27 October, after a hiatus of some eight months, Israeli authorities advanced plans for some 3,200 housing units in Area C, with many located in outlying settlements. I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace.

Meanwhile, in a rare development, on 28 October and 1 November, Israeli authorities advanced plans for some 6,000 housing units for Palestinians in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Al-Issawiya and some 1,300 housing units for Palestinians in Area C. While such steps are welcome, I urge Israel to advance more such plans and issue building permits for all previously approved plans for Palestinians in Area C and East Jerusalem.

Israeli demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian homes and other structures continued during the reporting period. Overall, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 84 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and 17 in East Jerusalem, displacing 83 Palestinians, including 24 women and 39 children. The demolitions were carried out due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

On 25 October in Hammamat Al-Maleh, in the northern Jordan Valley, Israeli authorities confiscated a medical clinic serving five communities.

On 2 November, four Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah rejected a proposal by Israel's Supreme Court that would have recognized them as protected tenants in exchange for nominal rent, payable to the settler corporation seeking to evict them, significantly delaying their eviction. The settler corporation also reportedly raised reservations to the Court's proposal. The Court had previously announced that if the parties did not accept its proposal, it would issue a ruling on the case.

I urge Israel to cease demolitions and evictions, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

In another concerning development, on 22 October the Israeli Ministry of Defence announced the designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as terrorist organizations. The Ministry accused them of constituting "an inseparable arm" of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine,

an organization designated as terrorist by Israel, the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan and the European Union. The Israeli Defense Forces extended the applicability of the designations to the occupied West Bank through military orders on 7 November. These designated NGOs work closely with the United Nations and the international community, including on human rights and humanitarian response, and several receive a significant portion of their funding from Member States.

The legal implications of the designations are potentially wide-ranging and add to increasing pressures on civil society organizations across the occupied Palestinian territory. The Secretary-General has expressed concern about shrinking space for civil society around the world, including in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. The United Nations has engaged with Israeli authorities, the designated NGOs and donors to receive more information about the allegations and their implications.

I turn now to Gaza. Humanitarian recovery and reconstruction efforts continued, alongside steps to further stabilize the situation on the ground. In October, some 9,406 truckloads of goods entered Gaza through the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing, some 20 per cent above the pre-escalation monthly average. In addition, almost 3,000 truckloads entered Gaza through the Egyptian-controlled Rafah crossing. As of the end of the reporting period, some 8,500 permits had been issued for traders and merchants in Gaza to enter into Israel.

While the gradual easing of restrictions on the entry of materials and the flow of goods and people into Gaza is encouraging, the economic, security and humanitarian situation in the Strip remains of serious concern. The goal remains the lifting of all closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

In the meantime, the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism continues to play an important role in facilitating access for items and materials that would otherwise not be allowed into Gaza. In a positive development, on 5 November, Israel began providing additional water to Gaza through the new Bani Said connection point, allowing an increase of 5 million cubic metres of water per year into Gaza.

I welcome the strong support expressed to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) at the ministerial

conference co-hosted by Jordan and Sweden earlier this month. Despite welcome additional pledges, I am concerned that UNRWA still lacks \$60 million to sustain essential services to 2 million Palestine refugees across the region until the end of the year. The Agency has yet to pay the November salaries of over 28,000 United Nations personnel, including teachers, doctors, nurses and sanitation workers, many of whom support extended families, particularly in Gaza, where unemployment is high. I call on Member States to do everything possible to protect services by urgently advancing the disbursement of announced pledges and by providing additional contributions in the coming days and weeks.

Both parties sent high-level delegations to the twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Glasgow. There is growing Israeli, Palestinian and regional interest in cooperating on shared environmental threats and climate change action. In that regard, the renewed direct engagement, after an extended hiatus, between Israeli and Palestinian environment ministers is a welcome step. In a separate positive development, on 7 November, the Israeli Government approved the issuance of some 500 permits over the next three years for Palestinians to work in the Israeli technology sector.

I was encouraged by the engagement between Israeli and Palestinian delegations at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in Oslo and took note of the concerns shared by all parties about the fiscal crisis facing the Palestinian Authority. Moreover, nearly all participants expressed serious concerns about the overall trajectory of the conflict.

It is essential that the parties avoid unilateral steps, reduce flashpoints and violence across the occupied Palestinian territory, solidify the cessation of hostilities and support economic development in the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, steps by all parties are urgently needed to shore up the economic and institutional stability of the PA, including through the implementation of needed reforms.

But even a full and immediate financial package may not be sufficient or come quickly enough — if at all — to help buffer the consequences of the current crisis. I therefore emphasize again the importance of concerted efforts by the parties to calm things on the ground. I am concerned that, if we do not act quickly

and decisively, we risk plunging into another deadly escalation of violence.

Recent developments on the ground are worrisome. We need a coordinated approach to encourage all parties to implement policy shifts and reforms; address quickly and in parallel the key conflict drivers at the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in Gaza and those facing the PA; and restore a political horizon that will help stop the endless cycle of crisis management and move back towards meaningful negotiations to end the occupation and resolve the conflict on the basis of United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

The Quartet will continue its consultations with the parties and key regional actors.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Ero.

Ms. Ero: The International Crisis Group is an organization dedicated to the prevention and resolution of deadly conflicts. This past year, we noted with alarm a new outburst of violence in Israel-Palestine. We believe that the Security Council, and the international community broadly speaking, has done little to steer this tragic conflict into calmer waters, to protect its victims and to push Israelis and Palestinians towards a just solution. We thank the Council, and the Mexican presidency in particular, for giving me this opportunity today to present some ideas about a way forward.

The violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in April and May serves as the latest reminder of the instability of the status quo. Palestinians—whether in Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem, Israel itself or in the diaspora—have acquiesced to neither territorial fragmentation nor political marginalization. To the contrary, alongside rockets from Gaza, they raised a collective, if amorphous, voice. Their protests stressed the dispossession and repression of Palestinians, with the question of Jerusalem at the core. Among Israeli Jews, the combination of falling rockets and protests in their streets furthered hardened their conviction that there is no political deal to be had.

On both sides of this conflict, as well as among many Council members, faith in the Middle East peace process has waned. Israel has grown comfortable with the status quo. It is imposing its own realities on the ground in violation of this body's resolutions. And it has consistently rejected anything resembling a

plausible two-State outcome, including explicitly under its present Government. Palestinians have seen Israel entrench its control under the cover of the peace process, denying them their rights and freedoms at a gathering pace. Yet no supplementary or alternative approach has emerged. For over a decade, my organization has urged the international community to eschew the Nobel-prize winning push for a peace deal. Instead, we believe the international community should work to put in place the building blocks of a more peaceful and just future for the generations of Israelis and Palestinians to come.

In the wake of the violent events of last spring, we renewed that call. In August, we released a report lamenting the continuing conflict and the high casualty numbers and destruction, notably among Palestinians and in Gaza. We urged all parties to the conflict—Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas—to take steps to at least staunch the bleeding. We challenged the international community not only to work urgently to lower the temperature by pressing all sides to cease violent and provocative actions, but also to undertake a serious effort to rethink the entire edifice of the peace process. Such a rethinking must acknowledge the structural power imbalance between an occupying State and an occupied people, and the necessity of challenging the impunity Israel has come to take for granted in its conduct towards the Palestinians.

Unfortunately, we have seen little concrete action in that direction since then. Arguably, the opposite has happened. In June, a new Israeli Government came into office. This Government has given indications about its willingness to engage on daily measures and security with the Palestinian Authority, in finding ways to do what it calls “shrinking” the conflict by improving economic conditions in the occupied territories and marginally strengthening the PA itself. Yet the new Government has continued to expand illegal settlements in the West Bank and has taken repressive measures against Palestinians in ways no different from its predecessors.

In October, the Government outlawed six highly respected Palestinian civil society organizations on specious charges of being terrorists. In reality, these organizations have been active for years, if not decades, in providing essential services to people in need—services that Israel, as the occupying Power, has not provided—and in documenting, reporting on and advocating for international accountability regarding Israeli violations of human rights in the occupied

territories. They receive external funding, especially from European Governments and others, and have been active in lobbying the United States Congress and European capitals, as well as the International Criminal Court in The Hague, to advance their cause. According to all available evidence, those organizations have been carrying out their work in a lawful manner to the benefit of Palestinian society and in defence of basic principles of human rights.

These measures give the impression that Israel's policy of "shrinking" the conflict and strengthening the Palestinian Authority in practice goes hand in hand with de facto annexation.

At the same time, there has been no serious effort on the Palestinian Authority's part to refresh Palestinian politics through elections, which President Mahmoud Abbas promised earlier this year but then abruptly cancelled. In the absence of a new popular mandate, Palestinian politics have become dangerously ossified, turning the PA — like Hamas in Gaza — into a governing body with limited powers that is unresponsive, unaccountable, authoritarian and repressive. Palestinian governing authorities in both the West Bank and Gaza have added to restrictions on the freedoms of their own civil society to organize and speak out.

The international community is not an innocent bystander. Through its passive stance, it gives cover to Israeli Government practices.

Yesterday, the world marked the seventy-fourth anniversary of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), more commonly referred to as the United Nations partition plan. It was thus that the United Nations gave its imprimatur to the notion of two States for two peoples. For some three-quarters of a century, the world has failed to deliver on its promise. In the tenth preambular paragraph of resolution 2334 (2016), adopted in 2016, the Council referred to "negative trends" that are "steadily eroding the two-State solution and entrenching a one-State reality". These words reflect the overall re-evaluation of the partition paradigm that is taking place in many quarters.

We at Crisis Group strongly believe that the international community, for now, should focus less on political paradigms and more on what is happening on the ground.

Ultimately, this conflict will be settled only through political negotiations, but they will not succeed until certain basic conditions are in place. The first is Israeli willingness to engage Palestinians both individually as equals and as a collective with aspirations to national self-determination and an external incentive structure designed with this in mind. The second is a coherent Palestinian polity with a leadership that can chart a path forward and challenge the status quo by non-violent means and in ways consistent with international law. The third condition is a reversal of on-the-ground, legal and political measures enacted by Israel that have cost Palestinians many of their most basic rights.

For many years, the protection of people and advancing their well-being were subordinated to the goal of a two-State solution. Today, among global and regional Powers, pessimism about the possibility of achieving a two-State solution is having a similar effect, leading to inaction rather than action. This is not the right way forward.

It is incumbent on this organ to undertake concrete action to protect the rights of all people in Israel-Palestine and Palestinian refugees, even in the absence, for now, of a viable peace process and regardless of whatever form an eventual political solution may take. Regarding that solution, this organ should make clear that, should Israel continue to obstruct the establishment of a fully sovereign and viable Palestinian State, any alternative that emerges in the future will have to respect the right to full equality and enfranchisement of all those in any space controlled by Israel.

More immediately, the international community should push for the following: a long-term truce in Gaza; a return to the historical status quo arrangement at Jerusalem's holy sites, as it was conceived in 1967 when Israel conquered Jerusalem's Old City, with modifications only by agreement of all relevant parties; a halt to eviction orders in East Jerusalem; an end to settlement activity in the occupied territories; rescission of the order banning the six Palestinian civil society organizations; holding Palestinian elections as soon as possible, with the participation of East Jerusalem Palestinians; and revision of the international conditions known as the Quartet principles so as to allow Hamas to participate in a Palestinian unity Government. The present approach, in place since 2006, has empowered Hamas while obstructing Palestinian reconciliation and political renewal.

The laws are on the books. The tools are in the Council's hands. What is lacking is the willingness to use these laws and tools to advance peace in Israel-Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Ero for her briefing and timely comments.

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

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

I visited Israel, the West Bank and Jordan earlier this month, in part to reaffirm United States support for a two-State solution, which, we strongly believe, is still viable — a two-State solution in which a Jewish and democratic Israel lives in peace alongside a sovereign, viable Palestinian State. I had an extensive itinerary, meeting senior Israeli and Palestinian Authority officials, as well as civil society organizations and refugees. I saw first-hand how serious the security situation is for Israel. It is subjected to regular attacks by terrorist organizations, including Hamas and Hizbullah, both of which are funded by Iran. The impact of Iran's regional malfeasance, nuclear aspirations and hatred for Israel cannot be ignored.

Israelis also shared with me their concern that the United Nations is intrinsically biased against Israel. They interpret the overwhelming focus on Israel in this organ as a denial of Israel's right to exist and an unfair focus on that one country — and they are correct. The Security Council's monthly meetings on the situation in the Middle East, which focus almost exclusively on Israel, are seen by Israelis as another example of that. The Council's attention should reflect all areas that threaten international peace and security, and we should have open meetings on Lebanon and meet on Iran more regularly. Israel does not define the Middle East.

During my visit, I saw how serious the security situation is for Palestinians. I heard stories about Israeli settlers attacking Palestinians, ransacking homes and destroying property in the West Bank. That is an issue that I discussed extensively with Israeli counterparts. I was told how many Palestinian families fear eviction from their homes because it is nearly impossible to get building permits as settlements expand. United States disapproval of settlement expansion goes back decades. That is nothing new for us. But the practice has reached

a critical juncture and is now undermining the very viability of a negotiated two-State solution.

Meanwhile, civil society organizations in the West Bank advocating for better governance and freedom face unprecedented challenges in their work. Israelis and Palestinians are locked in a spiral of mutual distrust, preventing the cooperation that could bring about prosperity, freedom and security for all.

We also cannot ignore the fact that the control of Hamas over Gaza makes the situation even more difficult for the Palestinians. Israelis do not believe they have a partner for peace, and Palestinians are trapped in despair because they do not see a political horizon. As Council members know, the animating principle behind the Biden Administration's approach to Middle East peace is that Israelis and Palestinians deserve equal measures of freedom, dignity, security and prosperity, which is a goal unto itself and a means to advance a negotiated two-State solution. But we cannot make progress towards that end without a modicum of trust. It is critical to explore opportunities with Israelis and Palestinians in order to rebuild some degree of confidence in each other.

Fortunately, my meetings yielded several promising ideas we can pursue together. Both sides spoke of the need for confidence-building measures to break down the walls of distrust. Much of that trust-building needs to be worked out between the Israelis and the Palestinians themselves, but the Council can play a role in facilitating constructive steps. We can enforce Security Council resolutions intended to constrain Iran's regional malign activities, nuclear threats and support for terrorism organizations like Hamas and Hizbullah. The Security Council can also speak with one voice in denouncing incitement to violence, whether by terrorist organizations or individuals. We can promote steps to improve the lives of ordinary Palestinians — from encouraging Israelis to issue more work permits to granting additional building permits in Area C of the West Bank. The Council can also demonstrate its support for new efforts to facilitate humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Gaza while ensuring that protections against diversion to terrorist organizations are robust.

Finally, the international community can also provide financial contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that match the political

support the Agency enjoys. As more States step up with contributions, they should also join the United States in urging UNRWA to establish a more sustainable financing model and to rigorously adhere to humanitarian principles, including neutrality. In that connection, during my visit, I personally raised my concerns with UNRWA leadership about anti-Semitic references in textbooks used in Agency schools.

When I met with young girls at an UNRWA camp, I was struck, first and foremost, by their dreams — and they had big dreams. They told me that they wanted to be doctors and lawyers and astronauts. I know Israeli girls and boys have the same hopes and the same dreams. That is what we mean when we say we want equal measures of freedom, dignity, security and prosperity. When a young Palestinian girl and a young Israeli girl look up into the night sky, their hopes and dreams should be equally possible, worthwhile and supported.

Now, after my trip, I am more convinced than ever that the Council must support tangible steps to make a real difference in the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. Unfortunately, time is running out. We need to move now. Let us all commit today to constructive partnership and concrete progress between Israelis and Palestinians. That is the only antidote to the despair, mistrust, insecurity and violence that threaten a two-State solution, which remains our best chance for a sustainable and just peace.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We wish to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East. We listened attentively to the statement delivered by Ms. Ero. It is symbolic that today's meeting takes place in the wake of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

It is with alarm that we observe the stagnation in reaching a settlement in the Middle East, with the unresolved central problem of Palestine, which has created a permanent source of tension for the entire Middle East. Unfortunately, we must note the unabated tensions around the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The looming risk of large-scale hostilities, such as the military escalation witnessed in May, remain.

In that context, the international community faces the urgent tasks of achieving stabilization, providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people and creating conditions for the resumption of the

Palestinian-Israeli settlement process on a universally recognized international legal basis.

We believe it is important to continue efforts to build international consensus and coordinate joint actions to promote a fair solution to the Palestinian problem. In that context, we welcome the outcome of the ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, held in Oslo. We note Norway's contribution in preparing for the event, which shows that the international community has not turned its attention away from resolving this problem.

On the margins of the Committee, the first in-person meeting in several years of Middle East Quartet members was held. The Quartet remains the sole internationally recognized mechanism to facilitate a Palestinian-Israeli settlement. At the end of the meeting, a statement was adopted in support of efforts to promote a settlement in the Middle East. We intend to continue our efforts to step up the work of the Quartet and call on our Quartet colleagues to examine our well-known initiatives, including through the holding of a ministerial meeting and consultations in an extended format with the participation of the States of the region. We also count on the support of the international community for those initiatives.

For our part, we continue to engage with all parties and international and regional stakeholders. On 23 November, President Putin and President Abbas met in Sochi. At that meeting, Russia reaffirmed its principled position on the Middle East settlement in favour of a two-State solution within the framework of the established international parameters. The Palestinian side also reaffirmed its willingness to engage in dialogue on a universally recognized basis.

Unfortunately, against that backdrop, illegal unilateral actions, such as the seizure and demolition of Palestinian property, the construction of settlements, arbitrary arrests and detentions and the violation of the status of the holy sites, continue to have dangerous consequences. Israel's announcement of plans to expand settlement activity in the West Bank and in the Givat Hamatos neighbourhood of East Jerusalem was deeply disturbing. The ongoing construction of settlements and plans to double the number of Israelis living in the Jordan River Valley by 2026 can be viewed as a de facto annexation of most of the occupied Palestinian territory.

We attach great importance to the provision of comprehensive humanitarian assistance to those in need in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as to Palestinian refugees in neighbouring Arab countries. Against that backdrop, the continuing precarious financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is extremely worrisome. The Agency's activities have not only a humanitarian but also a political dimension, with an important stabilizing impact on the Palestinian territories and countries of the Middle East. The leadership of UNRWA is making efforts to improve efficiency and reduce costs, which must be commended. Russia will continue to support the Agency, and we call on the entire international community to do likewise.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and for joining us here today in person. Let me also thank Ms. Comfort Ero for her insightful remarks. I will touch on a few points that Mr. Wennesland brought up.

First, we urged Israel to reverse the recent decisions to construct more than 3,000 housing units and announce tenders for the construction of more than 1,300 housing units in the occupied Palestinian territory. We are deeply worried that existing plans for illegal settlements — and those new ones if built — will seriously weaken the prospect of a contiguous Palestinian State. We also share the Special Coordinator's concern about the destabilizing effect of the possible evictions, including in Sheikh Jarrah. Norway urges Israel to cease the evictions in the occupied territories.

Increased settler violence in the West Bank is also deeply worrying. We expect Israel to stop such violence and to protect all civilians. Moreover, the recent attacks in the Old City of Jerusalem by Palestinian militants are unacceptable. We also remain concerned by the Israeli designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terror organizations. We are particularly concerned that that will shrink the already limited space for important civil society engagement in Palestine. We are following up on the serious allegations made against such organizations. If we are not presented in reasonable time with sufficient information to corroborate those accusations, we will request Israel to rescind the decision. Norway is also deeply concerned by the reported use of rubber bullets and tear gas against schoolchildren in the West Bank.

The right to education must be respected, as emphasized in recently adopted resolution 2601 (2021).

Palestine needs a stronger Palestinian Authority. The absence of regular national elections weakens the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority. Palestinians deserve democracy and the rule of law, with security, equal rights and opportunities for all. The upholding of space for civil society and respect for human rights are also key.

Norway is pleased that it was able to convene a meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in Oslo earlier this month. The meeting addressed the critical fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority and the risk of further destabilization in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza. It called for measures to strengthen the Palestinian Authority, reduce tensions and increase external financial support commensurate with Palestinian fiscal reforms. The meeting also called for the removal of restrictions on access and movement and the completion of key infrastructure projects. Both parties came to the meeting with constructive measures and a positive attitude. The Palestinian Authority announced its intention to embark on the needed financial reforms. Israel came with steps to improve the Palestinian Authority's economy, starting with an early resumption of the work of the Joint Economic Committee to modernize the Paris Protocol.

Improving economic relations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel is key, as there is simply not much external aid available. We hope that the positive meeting in Oslo will contribute to a new dynamic, including on the political track. A strong Palestinian Authority that is trusted by the people and represents all Palestine is vital. The international conference in Brussels earlier this month also made welcome commitments to supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, but more is needed. Norway will increase its funding and urges all others to do the same.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Norway's continued support of and belief in the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 lines, the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), international law and internationally agreed parameters.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. I also thank Ms. Ero for her insightful statement.

Estonia reiterates the importance of a continued dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders and encourages them to engage in further practical cooperation, which would benefit the people of both sides. It is positively noted that both the Israeli and the Palestinian delegations were represented at the ministerial level at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians hosted by Norway on 17 November. We also welcome the statements by Israeli ministers regarding the importance of supporting the improvement of the socioeconomic and financial situation of the Palestinians.

Estonia also supports the international and regional efforts for reconstruction and the improvement of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We welcome the recent steps by Israel to ease the restrictions on Gaza and call for allowing more movement of goods and people to and from Gaza, while taking into consideration Israel's security concerns.

Regarding the situation in the West Bank, we are concerned about the continued incidents of violence, including the clashes between the Palestinians and the Israeli security forces. We strongly condemn the terror attacks and violence against civilians, including the terror attack in Jerusalem's Old City on 21 November. We repeat our call on all parties to refrain from violence, incitement and acts of provocation.

Estonia also remains worried about the continued Israeli settlement expansions, demolitions and evictions, as such acts are contrary to international law. We call upon Israel to refrain from such activities, including the advancing of tenders and plans for the construction of several thousand new housing units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

We take the listing of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terrorist organizations by the Israeli authorities very seriously. We will continue to engage with Israel on that issue. Civil society's enjoyment of the fundamental freedoms is an important part of democracy and essential to promoting peace efforts between Israelis and Palestinians.

We welcome the high-level conference on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) organized by Jordan and Sweden on 16 November and stress the importance of continued support to the Agency. UNRWA continues to be an essential lifeline for many Palestinians and a strong contributor to peace and stability in the region.

Finally, Estonia confirms its continued support for all efforts to create favourable conditions for the resumption of direct meaningful negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians on all final-status issues. In that context, we welcome the meeting of the envoys of the Middle East Quartet on 18 November and express support for their continued consultations with the parties and key regional actors.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): It is good to see Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland at last in person on this cold morning. I would also like to thank Ms. Comfort Ero for her briefing.

During the October open debate (see S/PV.8883) on this file, Kenya called for the greater recognition of grass-roots organizations that are constructively working for peace in the interim and in the long term. We recognize that, while there may be a lack of progress in the State and other official channels, there are still Israelis and Palestinians making vital contributions to sustaining hope for peace and creating an atmosphere conducive to it.

We will also continue to call for the cessation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and demolitions, including those that pose a risk to the actualization of the two-State solution and undermine the territorial contiguity of a viable Palestinian State based on the 1967 lines. We urge the Israeli authorities not to undertake any actions that will further constitute major obstacles to a political and lasting solution. That includes the recent announcement of the construction of 3,100 new settlements in the West Bank. We also call upon all parties to refrain from actions that will stand in the way of peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Kenya has repeatedly condemned terrorist attacks and acts conducive to terrorism perpetrated by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other affiliated militant groups against Israeli civilians and civilian infrastructure. We condemn in the strongest terms the Hamas gunman killing of Eliyahu David Kay during the recent terror attack in Jerusalem's Old City. Our

thoughts and prayers are with his family and the family of those injured. Again, we repeat that no cause can justify the deliberate targeting of civilians and those acts of terror must cease.

Beyond condemnation of that and in anticipation of the December report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), Kenya looks forward to an update on any ongoing efforts to combat terrorism, all acts of violence against civilians and effective operations aimed at confronting all those engaged in terrorist attacks.

Kenya welcomes progress reflected in the outcomes of the recent processes aimed at making a difference to the communities on the ground. We join in the call of the 16 November international ministerial conference on the reinforcement of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA plays a critical role throughout the Middle East, including facilitating critical health, education, social protection, microfinance and other services in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

It is also welcome that both Israeli and Palestinian high-level officials participated in the 17 November ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians. We urge that spirit of cooperation and exchange of constructive and practical measures to continue, especially when it comes to establishing sustainable development on the ground and addressing the coronavirus disease pandemic, particularly in Gaza and the West Bank.

The joint press statement issued on 18 November by the Middle East Quartet envoys further reinforced the urgency of all parties to take additional steps to address the persistent challenges in the Middle East process and advance a two-State solution. We also welcome the statement's emphasis on respect for human rights and the actions of civil society groups.

We believe that the implementable outcomes of all those processes, working alongside the constructive efforts of civil society organizations, are part of the immediate and long-term steps that will entrench and root the sustainability of the Middle East peace process.

We take note that the Israeli Government's designation on 22 October of the six human rights and humanitarian non-governmental organizations as

terrorist organizations happened against the backdrop of the Kenya's call on 19 October for an independent civil society voice in the region. When it comes to the condemnation of terrorism and designation of terrorist groups, Kenya has been and will continue to be on record calling for that to happen. However, designations should also be approached with caution so as not to grant unwarranted recognition, create a semblance of strength or encourage eager recruits to join terrorist organization.

Despite many challenges, we have seen grassroots organizations continue to offer support and solutions at the local level to communities — both Israeli and Palestinian — that continue to be affected by the ongoing crisis. Kenya therefore reaffirms the need for the Council to highlight and support that grassroots tier as a valuable contributor to peacebuilding efforts on the ground.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing. I welcome the participation of Ms. Comfort Ero in this meeting today and thank her for sharing her insights.

I would like to begin by expressing our concerns over the continued violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the West Bank. The number of attacks by settlers in the first 10 months of 2021 was the highest recorded level of violence in recent years. More worryingly, we have not seen any effort by the relevant authorities to reverse that trend.

As the occupying Power, the Israeli Government and security forces have done too little to stop settlers' attacks and protect the Palestinians. In fact, Israeli security guards are using excessive force against Palestinian protesters. As we have said many times in the Council, the policy of impunity and discrimination will not bring about peace. On the contrary, they only fuel the recurrence of violence and resistance. The safety of Israelis is definitely important, but Palestinians deserve equal measures of security and dignity.

Another alarming trend on the ground is the continued expansion of settlements by Israel in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Several weeks ago, the Council held an urgent discussion on the issue with great concern about the new plans (see S/PV.8883). We cannot emphasize enough that those activities constitute violations of international law and relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, as well as undermining the potential to establish a viable

and contiguous Palestine State. In line with resolution 2334 (2016), we call upon the Israeli authorities to end all settlement activities and unilateral acts that erode hopes for a just and sustainable solution to the conflict.

We strongly believe that the two-State solution is the only path to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. In that regard, we welcome the recent statement and efforts by the Middle East Quartet to advance the two-State solution. Any progress in that direction would require more concrete steps by the members of the Quartet.

We also appreciate the work of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, particularly the efforts of Norway to hold the recent meeting to assist the Palestinian Authority in the face of its acute financial situation.

We welcome the recent engagement between senior officials from the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We encourage the further engagement of all stakeholders to create a conducive environment for broad and significant dialogues and negotiations.

On the humanitarian front, we note the improvements of access into and out of Gaza. However, the relevant parties need to do more to ensure the sustained and regular opening of crossing points to facilitate humanitarian and reconstruction efforts. United Nations staff and members of international humanitarian organisations should be able to enter and exit Gaza without any restrictions. We strongly support the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other United Nations agencies in ensuring the delivery of critical aid to Palestinians in Gaza and other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory. However, the humanitarian situation requires comprehensive, sustainable and long-term solutions.

Before concluding, on the occasion of the United Nations International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to reiterate Viet Nam's unwavering support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights. Accordingly, we remain supportive of the establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, in peaceful coexistence alongside the State of Israel, with secure and internationally recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines and a negotiated

settlement and in accordance with international laws, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing and for the unremitting efforts he has made to address the Palestinian question. I also listened attentively to the statement of Ms. Ero.

The question of Palestine concerns regional peace, international justice and the human conscience. The international community seeks to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to this problem at an early date.

China has always attached great importance to the question of Palestine. Yesterday, for the United Nations commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory message to the General Assembly for the ninth consecutive year, reiterating that China will always uphold justice and actively promote talks for peace on the question of Palestine; continue to provide humanitarian, developmental, pandemic and other assistance to Palestine; and support an active and constructive role for the United Nations.

China is deeply concerned about the continuing tension in the occupied Palestinian territory, with frequent civilian casualties resulting from attacks, military and police operations and settler violence. Force does not bring peace and tranquillity, and violence only begets more hatred. We urge all parties to remain calm and exercise restraint, refrain from measures that could lead to further escalation of the situation, avoid harming civilians and work together to de-escalate the situation.

Settlements is one of the central issues in the final-status negotiations on Palestine, which has implications for the future of the two-State solution. China is concerned about Israel's recently announced construction plans for more than 3,000 settlement housing units in the West Bank. To date, more than 300 settlements have been built in the occupied Palestinian territory, and more than 700,000 settlers have moved in, disrupting the contiguity in the occupied Palestinian territory and constricting the living space of the Palestinian people. China urges Israel to cease all settlement activities in accordance with the Security Council resolutions.

At present, the economic and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is very worrisome. The international community needs to provide humanitarian and developmental assistance to Palestine through multiple channels to fight the pandemic and help Gaza recover and rebuild.

For decades, many Palestinian civil society organizations have made significant contributions to improving the humanitarian situation in the occupied territories and upholding the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. China hopes that all parties concerned will foster an enabling environment for civil society to play an active role.

China welcomes the successful hosting of the ministerial conference on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) by Jordan and Sweden and looks forward to its positive role in strengthening the political and financial support of the international community to UNRWA. It is essential to help the Palestinian National Authority to strengthen its governance capacity and empower it to exercise its sovereign functions in the areas of security and finances, among other things. We appreciate the efforts of the Norway-led Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in response to the Palestinian financial crisis. We support the Palestinian factions in strengthening their unity and achieving internal reconciliation through consultations and dialogue and welcome the significant role played by regional countries, such as Egypt, in that regard.

The international community should adhere to objectivity and fairness, advocate tolerance and mutual understanding, and take the thirtieth anniversary of the Madrid Peace Conference as an opportunity to push for the resumption of dialogue on an equal footing between the two sides on the basis of the two-State solution. The Security Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and must take robust action to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

China calls for a United Nations-brokered international peace conference in which all the permanent Council members and all stakeholders in the Middle East peace process participate. Against the current backdrop, that is more important and urgent than ever.

As a sincere friend of the Palestinian people and a strong supporter of peace between Palestine and Israel, China will continue to work with the international community to make positive contributions to an early settlement of the Palestinian question and the achievement of lasting peace and stability in the Middle East region.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Ms. Ero for their briefings.

Let me reaffirm at the outset that the United Kingdom remains firmly committed to a two-State solution, based on the 1967 lines and with Jerusalem as a shared capital. In the absence of a political solution, it is vital that we continue to support efforts to improve conditions on the ground and promote stability for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

In that regard, we thank Norway for hosting the recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) and the parties for the spirit of cooperation they brought to it. In particular, we welcome the commitments made to reinvigorate the Joint Economic Committee and to resolve key technical issues, including an electronic value added tax pilot by the end of 2021. Further direct engagement between the parties, including to progress commitments made at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting, is essential, and we should all spare no effort in supporting it.

On 19 November, the Government of the United Kingdom proscribed Hamas in its entirety as a terrorist organization, including its political wing. We remain clear that Hamas must renounce violence, recognize Israel and accept previously signed agreements. Those conditions remain the benchmark against which its intentions should be judged.

I offer my condolences to the family of an Israeli civilian, Eliyahu Kay, who was killed in Jerusalem on 21 November, reportedly by a member of Hamas. We condemn Hamas' continued attacks against civilians, which are unacceptable and unjustifiable.

The decision by the Israeli authorities to designate six Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the evidence which forms the basis of those designations, is a matter for the Government of Israel. The United Kingdom maintains its own criteria for designation. We continue engagement with a number of

those organizations on human rights issues and respect the role that NGOs and civil society organizations play in upholding human rights and democracy.

We have heard today of rising pressure and risk of instability in the West Bank, linked to the Palestinian Authority's financial crisis, the lack of UNRWA funding and increasing settler violence. As we reiterated at the international ministerial conference on 16 November, the United Kingdom remains a firm supporter of UNRWA and values its importance as a vital humanitarian and stabilizing force in the region. We encourage all efforts to improve the Agency's serious financial situation, which threatens its service delivery.

We condemn any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians; that deteriorating trend must be reversed. We welcome Israeli authorities' discussion of how to address this issue, and urge Israel to bring those responsible to justice and end the culture of impunity.

We continue to call on the Government of Israel to reverse its decisions of 24 and 27 October to advance the construction of settlement units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The settlements being advanced around Jerusalem are a threat to the viability of a future Palestinian State and, therefore, to peace and stability.

Peace will be achieved only through real movement towards renewed dialogue between the parties. We encourage further and deeper engagement in that regard, aimed at creating the foundations for future progress towards a two-State solution.

Mr. Benaabou (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Ms. Comfort Ero for their briefings.

France is concerned about the increase of negative signals on the ground, which contrasts with the positive dynamics of recent months. The Bennett Government's first decisions, taken with respect to settlements in October, with the approval of plans to build several thousand housing units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, are of great concern. France recalls its condemnation of settlement construction, which is illegal in international law.

We are also concerned about the possible construction of a new settlement north of Jerusalem, on the site of the old Atarot/Qalandia airport. We call on the Israeli authorities not to initiate this planning process. If the project were approved and implemented by the Israeli Government, it would mark, as did Givat

Hamatos, the creation of a new settlement in East Jerusalem for the first time in more than 25 years.

We also call on them to reconsider their settlement expansion plans, especially in sensitive areas like Area E1, which endanger the two-State solution and directly undermine the viability of a future Palestinian State.

The increase in settler violence and the deteriorating situation in Jerusalem also remain a source of concern. France strongly condemned the terrorist attack perpetrated on 21 November in the Old City. We call on all actors to respect the status quo in the holy places. Evictions of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem must be permanently suspended in favour of durable solutions.

Finally, France reiterates its concern after the designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terrorist organizations. That Israeli decision may have far-reaching consequences for the continuation of their work by restricting humanitarian space. We are in contact with the Israeli authorities and await further clarification.

Faced with the continued high risk of escalation, more must be done to increase cooperation between the parties and improve the lives of the people. France calls on all parties to refrain from unilateral measures in order to make progress towards that goal. It welcomes the goodwill displayed by the parties at the ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians. We call for the implementation of their commitments and for the rapid convening of the Joint Economic Committee in order to consider more ambitious reforms, in particular on the fiscal front.

More must also be done to continue consolidating the ceasefire in Gaza and facilitate the reconstruction of the enclave, ensuring that aid reaches its beneficiaries.

We welcome the international community's support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, reiterated at the 16 November conference. We call on all States, including the Arab Gulf States, to increase their contributions to the Agency's budget.

France will continue to encourage the implementation of concrete and reciprocal measures aimed at rebuilding confidence between the parties. That is the goal we are pursuing with our German, Egyptian and Jordanian partners as part of the Amman

group. We call on the Quartet to work in that direction as well.

The resumption of dialogue between the parties and the deepening of their cooperation can permanently prevent a new cycle of violence only on the condition of recreating a political horizon. France's position in favour of a solution of two States, each with Jerusalem as its capital, remains unchanged. France calls on the Council to work actively for its implementation.

Mr. Abarry (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin my remarks by thanking Mr. Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East. I also thank Ms. Comfort Ero for her rich and eloquent contribution.

Mr. Wennesland's briefing this morning was no different than previous briefings, since it again established a catalogue of violence, demolition and expulsion that spares neither women nor children. And yet, the situation must change if, as the Security Council and the international community have always affirmed, the solution to the crisis is the two-State solution. Ms. Ero was right to say that Israel, the occupying Power, while enjoying the comfort of impunity, is resolutely pursuing its policy of occupying and settling Palestinian territories, which allows us to foresee the day when there is only one State, Israel. We can never say it often enough — Israel's right to live in peace should not deny the Palestinians their right to their own viable and independent State.

The recent decision of the Israeli authorities to authorize the construction of more than 3,000 new housing units in the occupied West Bank and the designation as terrorist organizations of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations, working in the humanitarian field and the defence of human rights, amply illustrate the contempt shown by Israel, the occupying Power, for the incessant calls on it to respect international law and the relevant resolutions of the Council.

The Niger strongly firmly condemns the continuation of the frenzied settlement policy pursued by Israel for several decades in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian lands, notably through the expansion of settlements, has become the major obstacle to the restoration of trust and peaceful coexistence with the Palestinian people. This posture hinders the diplomatic efforts of nations, through the

Special Coordinator, to advance the political process towards the two-State solution.

While we may once have believed it possible to detect some beneficial effects that the normalization of relations between Israel and certain Arab countries would have had by generating a shift in Israeli policy in the occupied Palestinian territories, it is clear today that all hopes have been dashed. It is therefore no longer possible to continue to turn a blind eye to the ongoing abuses perpetrated by the occupying Power through the demolition of Palestinian structures, arbitrary expropriations and the desecration of holy places, which absolutely must end — as must the forced displacement, the expulsions, the transfer of Palestinian civilians and the expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, which are no more and no less than a flagrant violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on the issue, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Moreover, it is the continued settlement process, injustice and discrimination against the Palestinian people that breed discontent, revolt and violence. Israel must face the fact that the security to which it aspires cannot be sustained through the establishment of a discriminatory system that perpetuates oppression and injustice against the neighbouring Palestinian people. It is equally important, in view of the resumption of the peace process that has been interrupted for several years, that the international community show greater commitment and will, especially as we commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the 1991 Madrid conference, whose success promoted the discussions that led to the Oslo Accords.

In the context of efforts to restore peace between Israel and Palestine, the lifting of the illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip, the improvement of the humanitarian and economic situation and the general living conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories also continue to be priorities that require effective action.

The tense climate in Gaza reflects the deep despair of a predominantly young population for whom every aspect of their lives has been undermined by the prolonged Israeli siege. The situation in the West Bank is not much better, due to an economic recession caused by years of stagnant economic activity and the budget deficit of the Palestinian Authority. All this is happening against the backdrop of the financial difficulties of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which risk

compromising the continuation of aid and assistance programmes for the 5.5 million Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as for refugees in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

That is why we call on the international community to be more generous towards these hard-pressed populations by supporting the financing of the Gaza reconstruction plan and the continuation of UNRWA's vital programmes, but also by providing financial support to the Palestinian Authority.

We welcome the generous gestures of all donors and, in particular, the key role played by certain countries of the region, such as Egypt and Qatar, in alleviating the suffering of the people living under Israeli occupation and in maintaining dialogue between the Palestinian factions.

In conclusion, the Niger believes that only a return to the internationally accepted parameters for the resumption of the peace process, with a view to achieving a two-State solution, can lead to a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In that perspective, we salute the tireless efforts of Mr. Tor Wennesland and all international stakeholders to reach a successful resolution to this dispute, which has a clear impact on the peace, stability and security of the entire Middle East and beyond.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing and Ms. Comfort Ero for her great insights from the perspective of the International Crisis Group.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory remains alarming. Ireland strongly opposes Israel's illegal policy of settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territory. The continual construction of settlements undermines the viability and territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian State, violates international law and damages trust. That is particularly true in sensitive areas, such as E-1, Givat Hamatos and Atarot, as well as deep in the West Bank. We urge Israel to halt all settlement progression and construction and to comply fully with resolution 2334 (2016). During his recent visit, Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney, saw first-hand the damaging impact of settlements.

Ireland is gravely concerned about Israel's designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations, including organizations supported by

Ireland and the European Union (EU), as terrorist entities. Ireland and its EU partners take allegations of terrorism extremely seriously. However, in the absence of evidence to substantiate those allegations, Ireland will continue to support those organizations. We are also concerned about the impact of those designations for civil society, which plays a critical role in open democracies. From our own experience in Ireland, we know the positive contribution that civil society can make to a peace process. We will continue to support human rights defenders who promote respect for international law, peace and accountability.

Other negative trends also give rise to serious concern. The number of Palestinians injured by Israeli forces using live ammunition in 2021 is five times higher than in 2020. We strongly condemn all acts of violence and terrorism, including in the Old City of Jerusalem, and remind all parties of their obligations under international law to ensure the protection of civilians. In addition, settler violence is reprehensible. All perpetrators must be held accountable, and the culture of impunity around such incidents of violence must end. The threat of demolitions and evictions of Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan continues to be troubling. The status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem must be observed.

We welcome the recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians and are pleased that both parties came to the meeting with a practical attitude in addressing the Palestinian economic situation, which is of serious concern. We echo the calls for the parties to translate that attitude into real change and to address structural constraints to economic development.

The dire financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is also a matter of urgent concern. We must ensure that UNRWA has sufficient, predictable and sustainable funding so that it can continue to support the needs of Palestine refugees. At the recent international ministerial-level conference, Ireland joined a number of donors in pledging additional support. We call on other donors, particularly in the region, to step up and translate political support into financial commitments.

The situation in Gaza remains deeply worrying. While we welcome the easing of some restrictions, more must be done. We renew our call for Israel to end the

blockade of Gaza. The support from Qatar and Egypt is positive, however, humanitarian and reconstruction relief remains insufficient to meet the needs of the people of the Gaza Strip.

We call on the parties to build on recent positive steps, improve cooperation and reduce tensions. Direct and meaningful negotiations are essential, as is stronger Quartet engagement. The situation will not be resolved without sustained and substantive attention from the Council and the international community.

Finally, Ireland calls for a legitimate political horizon to end the occupation on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements. We believe that a two-State solution, if implemented, can deliver peace, security, freedom and justice for Israelis and Palestinians. We must continue to strive for an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel within secure and recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

Mr. Cherif (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing and continuous efforts to strengthen the prospects for peace in the Middle East. We also thank the Secretary-General for his ongoing efforts to revitalize the peace process in the Middle East and Ms. Ero for her important briefing.

Yesterday, 29 November, Tunisia, alongside the international community, celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, as we do every year. In that connection, the President sent a letter of solidarity with the Palestinian people to the General Assembly. The special meeting held yesterday by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (see A/AC.183/PV.404) reaffirmed the solidarity of the international community with the just cause of the Palestinian people. The special meeting also showed support for the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to ending the brutal occupation of Palestinian territory, pursuant to the resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly those adopted by the Security Council.

It is of paramount importance that the international community and stakeholders step up their efforts and pressure in order to change the deteriorating and

tense situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, as a result of Israeli policies that violate international law and the repressive and discriminatory practices of the occupying authorities. In that context, one of the main priorities should be ending the expansionist settlement activities of the occupation, the forced displacement of Palestinians, the confiscation of their homes and lands and attempts to change the historical, demographic and legal status of Jerusalem. It is also important to lift the restrictions imposed on the Gaza Strip for more than 14 years.

Given that situation, we reiterate our call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities regarding those grave violations, including by following up on the implementation of its relevant resolutions, the most recent of which is resolution 2334 (2016), and ensuring the accountability of the occupying Power for its violations of, and disregard for, international law. In the light of the systematic attacks and repression that the Palestinian civilian population, including women and children, suffer, we also reaffirm the need to provide them with international protection, in line with United Nations resolutions.

Based on our conviction in the effective contribution of civil society to efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East, we stress the importance of civil society in the occupied Palestinian territories playing its role without restrictions. In that context, we reject the decision of the occupation authorities to designate six Palestinian civil organizations as terrorist entities.

The status quo in the occupied territories is not sustainable and could lead to further escalation. From that standpoint, we stress the need to act without further delay to discuss ways to launch meaningful, credible and time-bound negotiations in order to establish a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In that context, Tunisia reiterates its support for holding an international conference with full powers, with the participation of all parties concerned, to engage in a genuine peace process on the basis of international law, United Nations resolutions, the relevant international terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. We also value the engagement of the members of the Middle East Quartet in the efforts to revitalize the peace process. We hope that the Quartet's role will be strengthened during the upcoming phase so that we can pave the way for real prospects for peace.

The humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories remains dire, especially in the Gaza Strip. In that context, we reiterate the importance of ensuring the delivery of aid to those in need, lifting restrictions on freedom of movement and trade and refraining from undermining reconstruction efforts.

While we thank all international donors for their support to the humanitarian response efforts in the occupied territories, we stress the urgent need to secure additional funding, including to address the financial deficit in the budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). In that context, we commend the role of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians and the Jordanian-Swedish initiative to hold a donor conference for UNRWA on 16 November.

In conclusion, we reiterate Tunisia's strong support for the just Palestinian cause. We will continue to stand by the brotherly Palestinian people in defending their legitimate rights, which will not expire with the passage of time, particularly establishing an independent, sovereign State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I thank both briefers for their presentations earlier this morning.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines joined the international community yesterday, 29 November, to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and focused attention on the fact that the prospect of the State of Palestine, living in peace with its neighbour, Israel, is increasingly elusive. That is not for want of clear, unambiguous resolutions and international law in favour of the two-State solution, but rather the failure to ensure the implementation of those edicts. For too long, the Palestinian people have been denied the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty and the right to return to their homes and property, from which they were displaced. Instead, illegal occupiers have continued to thwart the will of the international community.

It is critical that the countries of the region, the United Nations, the Middle East Quartet and other international parties redouble efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement and stand in solidarity with, and uphold the rights of, the Palestinian people. Yet

again, we reiterate the call by President Abbas for an international peace conference, with the participation of all stakeholders in the Middle East peace process.

We remain deeply concerned about the Israeli authorities' aggression against the Palestinian people, especially as they continue to demolish buildings, plan to build more settlements in the West Bank and aggressively distribute house demolition notices. Similarly, the problem of settler violence against Palestinians remains a long-standing concern. We call on the Israeli authorities to fulfil their obligations under international law to maintain public order in the occupied territory. Palestinians must be protected from settler violence, and the perpetrators must be held to account for their actions.

The fragile situation in Gaza, following the 11-day siege in May, requires an urgent international and cross-cutting approach, including addressing the impact of climate change on crop yields and the quality of life. The pace of Gaza's reconstruction needs to be accelerated. Unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza is critical in order to address the basic needs of the Palestinian population and ensure stability. To that end, we call on the international community to increase its financial support to United Nations agencies to help strengthen the Palestinian Authority's ability to assume its responsibility in the recovery and reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. Moreover, every effort should be made to encourage the fulfilment of assistance pledges made at the international conference on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East held in Brussels on 16 November.

Let me conclude by once again emphasizing that the only option for a comprehensive and just peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is adhering to the long-established and agreed parameters for a two-State solution. In our efforts to help bring about the desired lasting solution to this conflict, we must intensify our engagement and commitment to assisting Palestinians and Israelis in reaching the two-State solution.

Mr. Raguttahalli (India): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing. I also thank Ms. Comfort Ero for her briefing.

India's support for a peaceful resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict is consistent and well known. We hope for an early resumption of direct negotiations on the peace process between Israel and Palestine.

Recent developments on the ground, however, could pose challenges for the resumption of the peace process. The continued acts of violence against civilians in both Israel and Palestine, as well as acts of provocation, incitement and destruction, are deeply concerning. We condemn all such acts. Unilateral actions that unduly alter the status quo on the ground and undercut the viability of the two-State solution must be avoided in the interest of peace and stability. I also underscore the need to respect and maintain the historic status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

We welcome the cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as well as with the countries of the region, to improve the socioeconomic conditions in the West Bank and Gaza, including coordination through the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians. We appreciate the work of donor countries and development partners in the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee.

India welcomes the measures taken by Israel to create greater opportunities for the socioeconomic development of Palestine. On our part, as a committed development partner of Palestine, India continues to provide development and humanitarian assistance, both bilaterally through the Palestinian Authority and through contributions to the United Nations.

Even during the pandemic, work on development projects in Palestine — such as the Palestine-India technology park, the women's empowerment centre and the construction of schools — has continued to progress. On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Prime Minister of India extended his best wishes to the people of Palestine in their endeavour for statehood, peace and prosperity. In his message, he reaffirmed our relationship with the Palestinian people, which is based on deep-rooted historical and people-to-people ties.

We also appreciate the work of the United Nations and its agencies in ensuring the delivery of critical aid to the Palestinians. We call for the regular and predictable transfer of aid, as well as for the appropriate use of such aid. India remains supportive of the role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in human development and the delivery of humanitarian services. India has fully disbursed its pledged contribution for 2021. India's Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Shri. V. Muraleedharan, participated in the recent

UNRWA ministerial conference in Brussels and renewed India's commitment to contribute \$5 million to the Agency in 2022.

I reiterate the urgent need for the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, which will provide a sustainable platform to resolve all final-status issues towards the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel.

The international community, and the Middle East Quartet in particular, has an important role to play in reviving those negotiations. In that regard, I welcome the recent meeting of the Quartet Special Envoys, which is timely. We urge the Quartet and the international community to engage with the Israeli and the Palestinian leaderships to kick-start negotiations. India stands ready to support all efforts aimed at the resumption of direct negotiations.

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

I thank Mr. Wennesland and Ms. Ero for their briefings. As we heard this morning, unfortunately, the cycle of violence in the Middle East continues and there really is no lasting solution in sight. I will focus on three points, namely, the advancement of Israeli settlements, the ceasefire in Gaza and the human rights situation.

First, Mexico condemns, as it has in the past, the recent authorization of the construction of new housing units under the justification of the so-called natural growth of Israeli settlements. Settlement activities, including the confiscation and demolition of property, as well as the construction and expansion of settlements, are illegal under international law and represent an obstacle to the two-State solution.

Secondly, with regard to Gaza, we applaud mediation efforts, especially by Egypt, to consolidate the ceasefire. We also acknowledge Qatar's financial contributions to the population in the Gaza Strip. We welcome the easing of restrictions by Israel to allow the regular and predictable flow of basic necessities to the Palestinian population and call for the definitive lifting of the blockade. A prosperous and peaceful Gaza means security for Israel too, so all efforts must bear that vision in mind.

Thirdly, as we heard earlier, the designation of six Palestinian civil society organizations as terrorist groups reduces the democratic space and constitutes a violation of human rights. On 29 July, Israeli law enforcement authorities raided the offices of Defence for Children International. Mexico calls on the parties to respect human rights and refrain from acts of repression against activists, journalists and human rights defenders.

We condemn all acts of violence, in particular attacks in the Old City of Jerusalem, as well as acts of provocation and attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians. We condemn the 17 November attack on a school south of Nablus. We are concerned that such acts also encourage violence and are used as an excuse for further attacks against Israeli citizens. We urge both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to refrain from the use of inflammatory rhetoric and any acts of incitement. The current cycle of reciprocal violence must end as soon as possible.

Mexico welcomes the latest meetings of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians and the Middle East Quartet.

I reiterate my delegation's firm conviction that the only solution to the conflict is a two-State solution that addresses Israel's legitimate concerns and allows for the consolidation of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders, while maintaining the special status of Jerusalem in

accordance with international law and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Finally, I take this opportunity to wish all our Jewish friends around the world a happy Chanukah.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. My thanks again to Ms. Ero.

Before adjourning the meeting, given that this is the final scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of November, I wish to express Mexico's appreciation to the members of the Council and to the Secretariat for all the support they have given us. It has certainly been an intense month, during which we have achieved consensus on various important issues that fall within the Council's field of competence. We could not have done it alone, or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of all delegations and the Secretariat, including the conference staff, interpreters, translators, verbatim reporters and security staff. I would like to extend my thanks to them all.

As the Mexican presidency draws to an end, I know I speak on behalf of all Council members in wishing the delegation of the Niger the very best for its presidency of the Council during the month of December.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at noon.