



# Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

**8973**<sup>rd</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 23 February 2022, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

---

*President:* Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Polyanskiy . . . . . (Russian Federation)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
France . . . . .	Mrs. Gasri
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Doumbeneny Ndzigina
Ghana . . . . .	Ms. Opong-Ntiri
India . . . . .	Mr. Tirumurti
Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
Kenya . . . . .	Mr. Kimani
Mexico . . . . .	Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu
Norway . . . . .	Ms. Juul
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Bastaki
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersley
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Mills

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

---

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



*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 representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

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

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.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

**Mr. Wennesland:** This month has witnessed a worrisome continuation of the trends I have outlined repeatedly in the Security Council, particularly the destabilizing deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Across the West Bank, daily violence continues. Tensions in East Jerusalem and the refugee camps are mounting. And settler violence remains a serious concern. Illegal settlements and planning processes are steadily advancing, alongside demolitions and evictions, including in and around Jerusalem. Those factors increase the territorial fragmentation of the West Bank, undermine the Palestinian Authority (PA) and further erode prospects for peace.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority continues to face a prolonged financial crisis, which severely undermines its capacity to deliver services and has crippled the economy. Economic and political reforms, driven from inside the Palestinian Authority, are a critical first step to changing that situation. The PA must be strengthened, and the international community should support actions to that end.

High-level dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership has led to welcome commitments and some economic steps, but those efforts must be rapidly turned into substantial, durable achievements and significantly expanded, alongside policy changes on both sides.

Recent efforts by Israel to reduce settler violence in the West Bank and avoid further provocative steps in Jerusalem are well-noted.

In Gaza, a fragile calm currently prevails. However, absent fundamental change, that is only temporary. Hamas control of the Strip, Palestinian divisions and the Israeli closure regime are creating a generation that has experienced multiple wars and humanitarian crises and few prospects for a better life. In line with resolution 1860 (2009), Israel should further ease restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from Gaza, with the goal of ultimately lifting them.

Daily violence continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territory during the reporting period. In the occupied West Bank, six Palestinians, including two children, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis and other incidents, and 205 Palestinians, including 25 children, were injured. Israeli settlers or other civilians perpetrated 55 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in 18 injuries and/or damage to Palestinian property.

In all, nine Israeli civilians, including at least one woman and two children, and eight Israeli security personnel were injured by Palestinians in clashes, shooting, stabbing and ramming attacks, the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails and other incidents. In total, Palestinians perpetrated 108 attacks against Israeli civilians, resulting in injuries and damage to Israeli property.

On 8 February, Israeli security forces entered Nablus, in Area A of the occupied West Bank, and shot and killed three Palestinians in a car. According to Israeli authorities, the three were members of a cell that had carried out attacks on Israeli forces, were planning additional attacks and tried to shoot at Israeli security forces during the incident. The Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades later claimed the men as members. The Palestinian Cabinet and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs condemned the killing, calling it an assassination and demanding an international investigation. Palestinians across the

West Bank protested the killing, and a general strike was announced in some areas.

On 13 February, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy was shot and killed by Israeli security forces in the village of Silat Al-Harithiya, near Jenin. The boy was killed amid clashes that erupted after Israeli forces entered the village to demolish the family home of one of the perpetrators of a December 2021 shooting attack that killed an Israeli civilian. On 15 February, a 19-year-old Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israeli security forces in the village of Nabi Saleh, near Ramallah. The incident occurred near an Israeli checkpoint in a confrontation between Israel security forces and youths, where the man was reportedly shot in the back.

On 18 February, during demonstrations in Beita village, near Nablus, 26 Palestinians were injured, including four by live ammunition. Two of the injured were first responders from the Palestine Red Crescent Society. On 22 February, Israel security forces shot a 13-year-old Palestinian boy in Al-Khader, near Bethlehem. Israeli security forces evacuated the boy, who was later pronounced dead. According to conflicting reports, the boy was either throwing stones or a Molotov cocktail when shot. All loss of life is deeply regrettable, and I reiterate that children must never be the target of violence or put in harm's way. Security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect lives.

Settler-related violence remained a concern throughout the reporting period. On 21 January, adjacent to Burin village, near Nablus, settlers injured five Israeli activists involved in a tree-planting activity with local Palestinians, set one of their vehicles ablaze and damaged another. On 7 February, three residents of the outpost of Givat Ronen were arrested for suspected involvement in the attack. On 24 January, Israeli settlers drove a convoy through the Palestinian town of Huwwara, near Nablus, throwing stones at Palestinians, their vehicles and shops and causing significant damage. Three Palestinians, including a 17-year-old boy, were injured. Israeli police opened an investigation and on 16 February announced the arrest of 17 Israelis in relation to the incident.

Following those incidents, several senior Israeli Government members and members of the Knesset condemned the violence carried out by settlers and pledged to act against it. I note such constructive

statements and urge tangible action in line with Israel's obligation, as the occupying Power, to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population. I reiterate that perpetrators of all acts of violence must be held accountable and brought swiftly to justice.

With regard to settlement advancements, on 24 January, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced plans for some 400 new housing units in place of an existing 80 units in the settlement of Gilo, in occupied East Jerusalem.

On 1 February, Israel's Attorney-General published a legal opinion allowing Israeli authorities to advance plans for a settlement in the partially evacuated outpost of Evyatar and authorize accelerated planning procedures for that purpose. The opinion was issued following a land survey by Israel's Civil Administration. Advancement of the plan requires a decision by Israel's Defence Minister. I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace.

Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 72 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and seven in East Jerusalem, displacing 73 Palestinians, including 32 children. The demolitions were carried out owing to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. I remain particularly concerned about the potential eviction of a number of Palestinian families from homes in which they have lived for decades in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, in occupied East Jerusalem.

On 30 January, Israeli authorities authorized the eviction of a Palestinian family comprising 11 people, including four children, from their home in Sheikh Jarrah during the month of March. In the wake of that decision, tensions increased in the neighbourhood, with numerous reports of violent altercations and damage to property. The already-sensitive situation escalated on 13 February, when a far-right Israeli Knesset member set up a makeshift office near the family's home and called for supporters to come to the neighbourhood. On 22 February, an Israeli court suspended the eviction, pending consideration of an appeal by the family and contingent on the family's depositing approximately \$8,000 as collateral. I call on Israeli authorities to end the displacement and eviction of Palestinians and approve additional plans that would enable Palestinians to build legally and address their development needs.

From 6 to 9 February, the Palestinian Central Council met for the first time since 2018, electing a new leadership for the Palestinian National Council and new members for vacant positions in the Palestinian Liberation Organization Executive Committee. In its final statement, the Central Council called for a halt to security coordination and the suspension of recognition of Israel until it recognizes the Palestinian State based on the June 1967 borders and halts settlement activity, and reiterated decisions from the previous Central Council meeting.

I once again underscore that the fiscal condition of the Palestinian Authority remains dire. Revenues are not keeping pace with needed expenditures, leading to accumulated debt, and investment in important sectors, including health, education and infrastructure, is virtually non-existent. Urgent action is required by the PA, Israel and donors to avert its fiscal collapse and pave the way for long-term fiscal reforms.

To that end, I welcome the current work of the mission of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to support the PA's important work on fiscal stability and reform. The IMF is expected to provide its report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians later in the spring. I also welcome ongoing efforts by Israel to facilitate greater access for Palestinian workers from Gaza and the West Bank to the labour market in Israel, which should be continued.

With regard to Gaza, the further easing of restriction on access of materials into Gaza remains a key priority. I welcome the parties' engagement in that regard over the past weeks, including the entry of white cement into Gaza, required for reconstruction, but more needs to be done. The United Nations continues to highlight to the Government of Israel priority items that need to enter Gaza, largely for United Nations health, water and sanitation projects, some of which were requested more than a year ago. Significant delays in the approval of items under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism impact humanitarian operations and should also be resolved without delay.

I hope that the resumption of technical-level trilateral meetings on the Mechanism will lead to improvements and facilitate reconstruction and much-needed development projects. I urge both parties to build on recent momentum to continue to enhance access to trade. However, I am concerned that recent steps taken

by Hamas authorities risk compromising the Palestinian banking system in Gaza, with potential repercussions for humanitarian and development activities conducted by the international donor community. With funding from Qatar, gradual reconstruction has begun of housing units that were totally demolished during the May 2021 escalation, so far reaching approximately 115 households. Rebuilding destroyed homes remains a priority and needs to be scaled up quickly.

Similarly, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has completed the repair of the nearly 7,000 housing units and is currently working with 700 families whose homes were totally demolished, in part thanks to the contributions by the United States and Germany.

Let me reiterate the Secretary-General's call to provide UNRWA with predictable, sustainable and sufficient funding to provide essential assistance to Palestinian refugees in the region. If we act early enough this year, we can prevent a financial crisis of the scale of last year and the risk that millions of refugees be left without education, health services and life-saving cash and food assistance. Any reduction or disruption of services could have significant humanitarian, political and security consequences for the region and beyond. Preserving UNRWA's services is a joint responsibility of all United Nations Member States.

Turning to the region, while a ceasefire between Israel and Syria has been generally maintained, the situation remains volatile, with continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement by the parties. That includes firing by the Israeli Defense Forces into the area of separation and the continued presence of Syrian armed forces in the area of separation. It is important that the parties respect the obligations under the Agreement and support the liaison with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force to de-escalate the situation during heightened tensions.

In Lebanon, following a three-month stalemate, the Cabinet reconvened on 24 January and shortly thereafter passed the 2022 State budget, now with Parliament for approval. Preparations are ongoing for the 15 May parliamentary elections, although resources have not yet been fully allocated.

The situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations remained relatively calm, notwithstanding a number of incidents. UNIFIL remains engaged with the parties in order

to contain incidents and defuse tensions, including through a tripartite meeting on 11 February.

In conclusion, while we have seen some encouraging economic activity, we must push beyond the paradigm of managing rather than resolving the conflict. Economic steps alone — while essential and desperately needed — will not put us on the path towards a just and lasting peace. There is no substitute for a legitimate political process that will resolve the core issues driving the conflict.

Nevertheless, we must begin somewhere. There is a need for a package of incremental steps that are significant and durable and that reflect a more coherent strategy to strengthen the Palestinian Authority and clearly chart the way towards a two-State reality.

Getting there requires political leadership. I urge Israelis, Palestinians, regional States and the broader international community to take firm action to enable the parties to re-engage on the path towards meaningful negotiations. Only an end to the occupation and the achievement of two States, living side by side in peace and security, based on the 1967 lines, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements, will resolve the conflict.

I remain actively engaged in advancing these efforts with my counterparts in the Middle East Quartet, key regional partners and Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

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

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

**Mr. Mills** (United States of America): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. We fully support his close engagement to work with all the parties and his continued efforts to foster dialogue.

Today I would like to discuss three aspects of the situation: the progress supported by the Abraham Accords, the heightened tensions that we have heard about in Sheikh Jarrah and throughout the West Bank and the humanitarian support we can offer those in need.

First, the United States remains committed to widening the circle of peace between Israel and its neighbours and deepening cooperation among the participants in the Abraham Accords. In that vein, we are encouraged by Israeli Prime Minister Bennet's visit

to Bahrain on 14 February and the warm welcome he received from Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. We were similarly encouraged by the 7 February visit of the Emirati Federal National Council delegation to the Israeli Knesset. Those visits demonstrate that good faith engagement can build confidence and can create a path to cooperation towards greater security, prosperity and dignity.

In addition to those visits, we support the efforts by the signatories to the Abraham Accords to further their relationships through working groups and other initiatives in order to develop trade, cultural and people-to-people ties. Those deepening relations offer new opportunities for the people of the region.

Secondly, notwithstanding this welcome progress between Israel and its Arab neighbours, we heard today that the situation on the ground in Israel and the West Bank and Gaza remains fragile. We are particularly concerned about tensions and violence in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and throughout the West Bank. Let me be clear — all sides must refrain from unilateral actions in order to not heighten tensions and further undercut prospects for a negotiated two-State solution. Furthermore, when actions violate the law, the perpetrators — whether Israeli or Palestinian — should be held accountable.

Thirdly, we need to address the humanitarian situation in Gaza and for Palestinians, more broadly. In Gaza, the need for humanitarian relief, reconstruction and recovery remains acute, which is why the United States supports regular, predictable and sustained access to Gaza for humanitarian actors through the Kerem Shalom and Rafah crossings. We urge all Member States to support those life-saving humanitarian efforts, in which civil society organizations have an important role to play.

Similarly, we also strongly encourage States to join us in funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) so that it can continue to run schools and health services that support Palestinian families. Supportive statements by Governments for UNRWA are, frankly, too often not accompanied by financial contributions. At the same time, we invite Member States to join us in promoting efforts by UNRWA to strengthen the Agency's efficiency, effectiveness and financial sustainability. We will also continue working with UNRWA in order to strengthen the Agency's



accountability, transparency and consistency with United Nations principles, including the principle of neutrality.

I want to make clear that the United States is here and stands ready to support the parties in the pursuit of peace. The fundamental reality is that any solution must be agreed by the parties themselves. In that context, holding meetings for the sake of meetings is not going to help. But when the parties are ready to move forward, the United States will be here to support them. In the meantime, we value our close coordination with other members of the Quartet, and we will continue to strive to keep us all focused on tangible progress that brings us closer to a lasting peace.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

I would like to reiterate Albania's position in support of a just and sustainable resolution of the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians based on a negotiated two-State solution, with two democratic States living side by side in peace and security and full respect for the equal rights of Israelis and Palestinians.

Over the years, the Security Council has laid down the legal framework for the peaceful resolution of this conflict. We encourage and commend all efforts and initiatives that seek to implement this framework and end the conflict. We regret and oppose all unilateral actions that slow down or prevent the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

We find encouraging and welcome the continuation of high-level contacts between the Israelis and the Palestinians, most recently in a meeting between Minister Lapid and Hussein Al-Sheikh. Such meetings are critical for the creation of a climate conducive to opening a political horizon for peace. We call for more engagement between the parties to foster the climate of trust that is vital for the resumption of negotiations and to make peace a reality.

We see no alternative to the path of dialogue and negotiations to resolve the long-standing conflict. We believe that settlement activities and the resulting violence exacerbate the conflict and endanger the prospects of a viable Palestinian State.

We reject, in the strongest terms, all forms of hatred and violence directed against Israelis or Palestinians, especially civilians, who want to live in peace and dignity. Violence, no matter where it originates from,

should be condemned and properly dealt with, as it can lead only to further violence. We condemn, in the strongest terms, rocket attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups. Such indiscriminate attacks against civilians can never be justified. We respect and support the right of Israel to defend itself.

We also recognize that a fundamental change is needed to improve the political, security and economic situation across the West Bank and to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza in particular. We welcome the easing of some restrictions on Gaza, but more needs to be done to reverse that negative trend and create the basis for a political resolution to the conflict at large.

The situation on the ground and periodic flare-ups of violence remind us that the current status quo is unsustainable. The Council should redouble its efforts to create conditions that are conducive to starting meaningful negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. A negotiated settlement in accordance with international law is what is needed to open the path to peaceful coexistence and the enjoyment of equal rights by all.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Entering the new year, the international community had genuine hopes for a new outlook for peace in the Middle East. Regrettably, however, since the beginning of the year, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has remained tense and the plight faced by the Palestinian people has continued to deteriorate.

In his briefing just now, the Special Coordinator once again relayed similar information on the situation. China is deeply concerned by Israel's escalating settlement activities. Recent stories of the fate of the Salem family and other families in East Jerusalem have tugged at the heartstrings of many.

It is estimated that, in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan communities of East Jerusalem, 218 Palestinian families face the threat of forced eviction from their homes, where they have lived for generations. Nearly 1,000 Palestinians live in fear every day, including 424 children. In 2021, the number of Palestinian structures demolished reached a high not seen since 2016. Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories constitute a violation of international law.

We urge Israel to stop evicting Palestinians, expanding settlements and demolishing Palestinian homes and instead create conditions conducive to the development of Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

Equally worrisome is the security situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Since the beginning of the year, Israeli military and police operations have led to many Palestinian casualties, gravely intensifying the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Escalating settler violence has continued to cause the Palestinian people physical injury and property loss. We urge Israel, the occupying Power, to fulfil its obligations under international law, to guarantee the safety and legitimate rights of the people in the occupied Palestinian territories and to thoroughly investigate incidents of violence and human rights violations.

We also call on the parties concerned to stop inciting violence and to refrain from provocative rhetoric and acts in order to prevent the situation in Jerusalem spiralling out of control. The ceasefire in Gaza must also be consolidated.

Improving the Palestinian economy and ensuring people's livelihoods are also matters of urgency. The international community should provide assistance to Palestine through multiple channels to help it alleviate its financial crisis, guarantee public services, fight the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and speed up the reconstruction of Gaza.

At present, China and Egypt are jointly donating 500,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses to the Gaza Strip to help people there fight the pandemic and to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground. We must also pay attention to the situation of Palestinian refugees and support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in carrying out its relief work.

It is necessary to take a long-term perspective by strengthening the Palestinian Authority and empowering it to exercise its sovereign functions in fields such as security and finance. We support the necessary coordination between Palestine and Israel in the economic and civil fields and reiterate our call to lift the blockade and siege of Gaza as soon as possible.

Earlier this month, Secretary-General Guterres said that piecemeal approaches to the question of Palestine will ensure only that the underlying issues perpetuating the conflict remain unaddressed. We cannot lose sight

of the long-sought-after goal of ending the occupation and realizing a two-State solution. We urgently need to intensify collective efforts to resolve the conflict and end the occupation. We fully endorse the Secretary-General's views.

We expect Palestine and Israel to maintain the positive momentum of the recent high-level contact, gradually build up mutual trust and resume dialogue on an equal footing at an early date towards achieving a two-State solution. We hope that all Palestinian factions will be able to unite and achieve internal reconciliation through dialogue and consultation.

We support broader and more effective peace efforts by the United Nations, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We also expect the Security Council to demonstrate greater responsibility.

China supports the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. China supports the peaceful coexistence of Palestine and Israel, as well as the common development of the Arab and Jewish peoples. China is ready to work with the international community to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue so that security, stability, development and prosperity in the Middle East can be achieved at the earliest opportunity.

**Ms. Oppong-Ntiri** (Ghana): At the outset, I join other Security Council members in expressing my appreciation to Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

The situation, as presented, is dire and requires the international community's enduring commitment in pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The worsening security and humanitarian situation in the region amid the crisis brought about by the coronavirus disease pandemic is alarming and calls for renewed attention to advance the implementation of the commitments of the 1991 Madrid Conference, as well as the 1993 Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements.

The regional implications of the unresolved Middle East situation and the impact of the conflict between Israel and Palestine on the peoples of the two nations is a burden that the Security Council must continue to shoulder in pursuit of its mandate to maintain international peace and security. Ghana reaffirms its

belief that the path towards lasting peace and stability in the Middle East lies in a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side on the basis of the 1967 borders.

We recognize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people as well as the aspiration of the countries of the region to live in security. The aspirations for peace and prosperity for the peoples of Israel and Palestine should be pursued only through constructive dialogue and negotiations. In that regard, we urge the parties to resume direct negotiations for a comprehensive and lasting peace in the spirit of cooperation and in good faith.

Ghana welcomes the continuing high-level diplomatic engagement within the context of the Madrid Quartet and encourages active engagement with the parties. We further welcome the commitment of the Munich Group to continue working to reinvigorate an effective political process towards the achievement of a two-State solution, as expressed during its fifth meeting, held in the margins of the 2022 Munich Security Conference.

In supporting those tracks of engagement and the other channels of the Middle East process, it is time, perhaps, for the United Nations and the international community to build synergies around a coordinated approach that will enhance the outcomes of the political processes and ultimately address the just and comprehensive demands of the decades-long conflict.

Ghana encourages the parties to remain committed to the cessation of hostilities, which has held since May 2021. We urge the parties to take further immediate steps to de-escalate all existing tensions and build confidence to generate the political momentum for negotiations. As a result, we caution against the expansion of new settlements by Israel, especially advancement projects, evictions and demolitions, and urge the abatement of unilateral actions that could escalate tensions and prejudice the peace process.

We hope that through the intra-Palestinian peace talks taking place under the auspices of Algeria, the Palestinian factions will commit to genuinely bridging the internal differences among them and build a unified and stable front to pursue dialogue with Israel.

In response to the dire humanitarian situation in Palestine, particularly in Gaza, we call for continued support on the part of all relevant stakeholders by

ensuring the easing of humanitarian access and movement. Ghana also welcomes Israel's intention to engage the Palestinian Authority to address the fragile situation that the fiscal crisis has created and the institutional instability that the Authority has experienced. We hope that the engagement by the parties will create vistas of cooperation to further move forward the political negotiations required by the Middle East process of the parties.

The financial contribution of Member States to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to play a critical role in providing essential services to the 4.9 million Palestinians in the occupied territories and the more than 1.5 million in refugee camps. We urge increased support to reverse the critical funding deficit of UNRWA and to enable it to aid those affected by the conflict. More sustainable and predictable humanitarian funding for the Middle East is needed.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to urge the Council to be seized of the consideration of how the United Nations can support a coordinated peace process that will build on past initiatives as well as recent high-level engagements to explore new possibilities through which Israel and Palestine can both realize their national aspirations.

**Mr. Kimani** (Kenya): We thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing and continued engagement with his counterparts in the Middle East Quartet. I would also like to recognize the presence of the representatives of Israel and Palestine who are with us today.

Kenya condemns the extremist and terrorist acts perpetrated by Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other affiliated militia groups, which continue to pursue ideological aims far outside of the principles of the United Nations Charter.

As we have stated before, their continuing threat to the peace and security of the Middle East has a damaging domino-like effect reaching many other parts of the world, including our region, Africa.

We have also noted the importance of championing grass-roots efforts that contribute to harmonious coexistence as a way to create the conditions for progress in official negotiations.

We urge all parties to refrain from provocative acts such as the recent reopening of a makeshift law office



in Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. That one act sparked clashes between Israelis and Palestinians last week, with the potential of a wider escalation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Those trends make clear the urgent need for Israelis and Palestinians to frame a negotiated peaceful settlement of this protracted conflict. That should remain the Council's focus and premise of engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian situation. The Security Council should collectively encourage talks that advance the realization of the two-State solution, based on the 1967 lines. The path to that requires strong confidence-building measures at the official level and at the people-to-people level.

As such, Kenya continues to commend regional efforts, including those of Egypt, Qatar and Algeria, which are working to ensure the unity of the Palestinian Authority. We also reaffirm the progress made, particularly when it comes to cooperation between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

In that regard, we look forward to the operationalization of the outcomes of the 28 December meeting last year between the Israeli Defence Minister and President Mahmoud Abbas.

The implementation of those proposals, including strengthening security coordination, preventing terrorism and violence, and promoting confidence-building measures in the economic and civilian fields, will be an important step in the actualization of peace. We also welcome the fact that the 19 February ministerial Munich joint statement by Egypt, France and Jordan spoke of the importance of mutual confidence-building measures and the creation of realistic political and economic horizons.

We believe that the cessation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and demolitions, including those that pose a risk to the territorial contiguity of a viable Palestinian State, are also important peace- and confidence-building measures.

The reinforcement of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East also remains critical to ensuring equitable economic advancement and recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic.

**Ms. Juul** (Norway): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

First of all, let me address the situation in Sheikh Jarrah. In January, we condemned the eviction of the Salihiya family from their home. In the last couple of weeks, tensions have again increased significantly. Evicting Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah is unacceptable. Attempts to do so can escalate the conflict, as we saw in May last year.

Norway urges Israel to halt all evictions in East Jerusalem indefinitely and to respect the rights of the Palestinians living there. Freedom of expression and assembly, as well as the right to peaceful protests, must be upheld. Furthermore, the integrity of the holy sites and the historical status quo must also be upheld and fully respected. That applies to Christian holy sites and property in Jerusalem too. I reiterate that Israeli settlements in the occupied territory, including in East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law. Settlement-building, demolitions and evictions must stop.

Let me once again address the need for a vibrant civil society and respect for human rights. Civil-society actors must be allowed to do their work, and room for civil-society actors must be protected, while human rights defenders must be respected. The Palestinian leadership should take steps to enhance democratic legitimacy. Reconciliation and unity in Palestine must be a priority. We welcome the contacts and dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority following up on the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians meeting in November last year.

It is crucial that the parties work on achieving progress, in particular on fiscal questions, before the next meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, scheduled for 10 May in Brussels. I would like to thank Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom for their support in organizing hands-on discussions and the follow-up in the Committee.

The financial situation of the Palestinian Authority continues to be critical. We hope to also see progress on the much-needed reforms of the Palestinian Authority that were announced in Oslo. However, talks between the parties should not be limited to economic issues. The aim should be to discuss a political horizon and a return to negotiations for a two-State solution. Norway remains ready to assist.

It is positive that the number of Gazans permitted to work in Israel is increasing, and we welcome measures to improve the living conditions for the population in Gaza. We reiterate that it is essential for the civilian populations that the calm be preserved and made into a long-term and stable ceasefire. Calm is needed for the current work on basic infrastructure, including water, sewage and energy, to be completed, as well as for creating more jobs.

In conclusion, let me highlight the need for increased donor support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The acute and continuous funding shortfalls are undermining UNRWA's ability to carry out its vital work, thereby threatening stability in the region. Norway recently increased its assistance to UNRWA and will provide a total of 1.1 billion Norwegian krone — about \$125 million — over a period of four years. We encourage more donors to provide increased and predictable multi-year funding.

**Mr. De Almeida Filho** (Brazil): Brazil thanks Mr. Wennesland for today's updates. We welcome the representatives of Israel and Palestine to this meeting.

At the outset, I would like to recall that last month, on 20 January, the General Assembly adopted resolution 76/250 by consensus, calling for active measures to combat anti-Semitism and all Holocaust denial or distortion. Brazil praises Israel and Germany for the initiative to present the text, which states that the Holocaust will forever be a warning to all people of the dangers of hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice.

Nevertheless, news coming from Sheikh Jarrah, in East Jerusalem, is very concerning. The current scenario is a flashback of last year's events that led to violence, the deaths of civilians and destruction in Gaza. The escalation of tensions puts the already fragile ceasefire at risk. Provocative actions by all sides will only incite more violence.

Brazil calls on all parties to exercise restraint and to take steps to restore calm in Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank. International humanitarian law provides for the protection of civilians from the hazards of conflict. Civilians must never be the deliberate target of attacks. Violence and terrorism in all forms and manifestations must be condemned.

Brazil encourages continued cooperation to address the economic needs of the Palestinians. The economic

and fiscal crisis worsens the prospect for political stability and intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Free, fair and transparent elections in Palestine are essential to renew the democratic legitimacy of its institutions. International efforts towards Gaza should continue to aim at the recovery of infrastructure, economic empowerment and the provision of aid to the population there. Humanitarian assistance should continue to flow in a predictable, responsible and regular way.

Brazil hopes that the Abraham Accords may set the path to dialogue and diplomacy in the region, with a positive impact on the resumption of the peace process. The high-level meetings that followed the signing of the normalization agreements are encouraging. We must be committed to finding a political solution to this long and painful conflict. We welcome, in particular, the recent mediation efforts made by third countries, as well as innovative diplomatic initiatives, as long as they are truly grounded in international law and are committed to long-term peace and stability.

Brazil reaffirms its long-standing commitment to the achievement of a just and sustainable peace in the Middle East and to the two-State solution. We aspire to a future in which Israelis and Palestinians live side by side in peace in two democratic, prosperous and sovereign States within secure and internationally recognized borders.

**Mrs. Gasri** (France) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing and for his work. I welcome the presence of the Palestinian and Israeli representatives here among us.

The two-State solution, as defined by the agreed parameters, the resolutions of the Security Council and international law, is the only solution that can meet the legitimate aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and bring about a just and lasting peace. Any attempt to deviate from it carries risks for the region, for Israeli democracy and for Israel's security, on which France will never compromise.

Given the continuing undermining of the two-State solution, it is the responsibility of the Council to work to preserve the prospect for peace. That involves, as a priority, putting an end to unilateral actions, which only exacerbate an already very worrisome situation on the ground. The evictions of Palestinian families, such as in Sheikh Jarrah, are fuelling already high tensions in East Jerusalem. They must be suspended, and sustainable and permanent solutions must be found.

Otherwise, we risk facing a sharp deterioration of the situation, particularly during the month of Ramadan. France also reiterates its call on Israel to definitively suspend its plans for the creation of a new settlement in Atarot and those aimed at expanding Area E-1. We also remain concerned about the record levels of demolitions, including in Ras Al-Tin, as well as the settler violence against Palestinians.

In parallel, we must work to consolidate the ceasefire in Gaza and facilitate the implementation of confidence-building measures between the parties. France calls on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to strengthen their cooperation in all areas, rather than considering suspending it.

In that context, France, together with its European partners, will continue to support Palestinian civil society and work for the strengthening of the rule of law. In that respect, we are concerned by the designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terrorist organizations by Israel. In the absence of evidence, France will continue to support those organizations.

We are equally concerned about the human rights violations in the Palestinian territories. It is also high time for the Palestinian Authority to take the necessary measures to allow for a thorough renewal of the democratic legitimacy of its institutions, as called for by the Palestinian population.

France also calls for the preservation of humanitarian space. In particular, the aid and personnel needed to implement the humanitarian response plan and United Nations early recovery and reconstruction activities must be allowed into Gaza. We reiterate our full support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and we call on all Member States, particularly in the region, to contribute to its budget.

We recall that Israel has an obligation under international humanitarian law to protect all civilians, including Palestinians. The disproportionate use of force must be investigated, and those responsible for crimes must be brought to justice.

In conclusion, it is unrealistic to think that peace can be bought with economic measures alone. France will continue to work alongside its main partners to recreate a credible political horizon to halt a new crisis and relaunch negotiations between the parties or

under the auspices of the United Nations, including by involving the Quartet. Minister Le Drian committed himself to that with his German, Egyptian and Jordanian counterparts in Munich on 19 February.

**Ms. Byrne Nason** (Ireland): I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

Ireland is seriously concerned about the escalation in tensions in recent weeks across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Incidents of provocation, violence, including settler violence, and escalatory acts in the occupied Palestinian territory serve only to inflame an already tense situation.

We are deeply disturbed by the continued reports of the use of excessive force by Israeli security forces. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has reported that, between 25 January and 7 February alone, 215 Palestinians, including 28 children, were injured by Israeli forces in the West Bank. The killing of a Palestinian teenager by live ammunition on 13 February was shocking but, sadly, is not an isolated case. Ireland also wishes to raise the issue of the killing of a 13-year-old boy just yesterday, south of Bethlehem. As the Special Coordinator said, children must never be targeted. It is the responsibility of the Israeli authorities, as the occupying Power, to ensure that all incidents involving the disproportionate use of force are thoroughly investigated, and to hold those responsible accountable for their actions.

Ireland reiterates the long-standing European Union position that Israel must end settlement expansion, confiscations, demolitions and evictions. Such practices, all of which further entrench Israel's illegal occupation, are underlying causes of tension and violence. The continued escalation of settler violence, including in sensitive areas in East Jerusalem, is acutely worrisome, as was the recent burning of the home of a Jewish family in Sheikh Jarrah.

Ireland continues to be concerned about the disparity in conviction rates between Israeli settlers and Palestinians who have committed acts of violence. Ireland calls on the Israeli authorities to bring to justice those responsible for carrying out violent attacks and ensure that they are held fully accountable.

We are seriously concerned about threatened evictions and demolitions in Sheikh Jarrah, which will inevitably fuel tensions. The Lower Aqueduct Plan and

other settlement plans threaten the contiguity of a future Palestinian State and should not proceed. We recall the importance of upholding the historic and legal status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem and acknowledge Jordan's important role in that regard.

Ireland remains extremely troubled by how the policies of the Israeli authorities impact the human rights of Palestinians. Ireland is particularly concerned about the unequal treatment of Palestinians, the application of different standards in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel's failure to ensure the protection and welfare of Palestinians living under its occupation.

Practices around the detention and trial of Palestinian children, and the misuse of the Israeli military court system in particular, are unacceptable. We call on Israel to comply with its obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

I reiterate Ireland's concern about Israel's decision to designate certain Palestinian civil society organizations as terrorist entities. Ireland will continue to support Palestinian civil society and human rights defenders and their critical role in promoting international peace, human rights and democratic values.

Meeting the essential needs of Palestine refugees remains a significant challenge. Ireland continues to encourage support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which provides assistance, protection and stability in a challenging regional environment.

Finally, it is important for intra-Palestinian divisions to be addressed, and we support all efforts to that end. We maintain our position that national Palestinian elections are essential for renewing the legitimacy of national institutions. Such a process of democratic renewal is a critical element of State-building and will help support political efforts to resolve the conflict and make progress towards the realization of the two-State solution.

**Mr. Eckersley** (United Kingdom): My thanks go to the Special Coordinator for his briefing today.

Let me start by welcoming Israeli Prime Minister Bennett's recent visit to Bahrain. We are pleased to see the continuing positive relations between two long-standing friends of the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom actively supports the pursuit of regional stability through normalized relations. We are committed to ensuring that normalization is an enduring success, and will continue to support efforts that bring us closer to that goal. However, the United Kingdom is concerned about the negative trends on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories, including an increasing level of violence and incitement to violence.

The United Kingdom condemns the firing of missiles by Palestinian militants in Gaza at the start of February. We are resolute in our commitment to Israeli security. We continue to call upon Hamas and other terrorist groups to permanently end their inflammatory action against Israel.

As we have heard again today, violence in the West Bank, including settler attacks against Palestinian people and property, is rising. It is the responsibility of the Government of Israel to provide protection to Palestinian civilians, ensure all such incidents are thoroughly investigated and bring those responsible to justice. We are concerned about clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians. Since the last time the Council met to discuss the issue (see S/PV.8950), two Palestinian children have been killed in the West Bank. We urge restraint on all sides.

We have witnessed tensions in Sheikh Jarrah, where scheduled evictions have led to violent clashes in the neighbourhood. We call once again for the halting of forced evictions and demolitions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Such practices fuel tensions on the ground, and we urge a permanent end to settlement activity, which threatens the two-State solution.

The United Kingdom opposes the authorization to legalize the Evyatar outpost in the West Bank. We recall that Evyatar has been a source of instability since May, and that such outposts are illegal under Israeli law and international humanitarian law.

The Palestinian Authority's (PA) fiscal crisis is worsening. Rapid action is needed to improve the situation. We continue to call on the PA to implement the necessary reforms. The United Kingdom wants to see continued cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians, including on economic initiatives, to help boost the Palestinian economy and improve the lives of all in the occupied Palestinian territories. Doing so is



beneficial to the safety and prosperity of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Finally, as we approach a convergence of Muslim, Jewish and Christian religious holidays in April, it is crucial that all parties commit to respecting the historic status quo and to taking steps to avoid exacerbating tensions so as to prevent escalation.

**Mr. Doumbeney Ndzigna** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his enlightening briefing.

I welcome the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to today's meeting.

The overall situation in the Middle East remains an issue of genuine concern. The repeated terrorist attacks that have targeted the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in recent weeks, the attack on the Blue Helmets of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the security and humanitarian situation and numerous human rights violations in Afghanistan paint a deeply alarming picture. My country reiterates its staunch condemnation of such terrorist acts and expresses its grave concern regarding the plight of women and young girls in Afghanistan.

With regard to the situation between Israel and Palestine, and in the light of the detailed briefing we have just heard, we note that the daily life of the people in that region remains marked by violence, namely, violence arising from the establishment of new settlements and the attendant frustration. The ongoing situation serves to create a permanent source of tension on the ground. Much of the violence, which also takes the form of brutality and the disproportionate use of force against civilians, claims an ever-increasing number of women and children as its victims. My country condemns all violence against civilians and calls for respect for international human rights and international humanitarian law conventions. It is imperative to improve the detention conditions, especially for women and children, and end mass arrests and attacks on schools, which, like places of worship, must be sanctuaries. Similarly, it is necessary to ensure the protection of property, particularly livestock and the agricultural production of the population.

My country reiterates its support for a two-State solution. In that regard, intercommunal actions on the ground are necessary to initiate daily cultural

exchanges between Israelis and Palestinians and ultimately promote living together. Such actions can support, and serve as a foundation for, creating the necessary conditions for a climate of trust and better use of international diplomacy.

In conclusion, we encourage the parties to follow the logic of de-escalation, and we remain convinced that only diplomatic initiatives, especially dialogue between the parties, must prevail.

**Mr. Bastaki** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, for his comprehensive briefing.

What we heard today about the fragile humanitarian, security and political situation in the occupied Palestinian territory serves to underscore the need to actively relaunch a credible peace process that leads to the two-State solution, with the State of Palestine and the State of Israel living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition. As Mr. Wennesland previously stated, current efforts must focus on providing a political context that will ensure that the positive engagement we have witnessed in recent months is not squandered.

Accordingly, we hope that the two parties will continue to meet to build confidence and address the most pressing issues in the interest of achieving security and stability. We commend the recent increase in cooperation and coordination between the United States and the two parties in support of the Middle East peace process. We also welcome the recent meetings of the Middle East Quartet, and we look forward to their outcome.

On the other hand, we stress the need to maintain the recent ceasefire for the long term to avoid another escalation, as well as support opportunities for peace. We underscore the importance of continuing to build on regional and international endeavours to end the conflict and reiterate that diplomacy and peaceful dialogue are the best options to achieve tangible progress. Creating an environment conducive to peace requires safeguarding the prospects for a two-State solution and stopping illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territory.

To that end, we note the continued construction and expansion of settlements, including the recent construction of new settlement units in the West Bank, as well as the continued displacement of Palestinians,



especially in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in Jerusalem. It is also important to note that more than 905 Palestinian homes and structures were confiscated or demolished in 2021, in addition to restrictions on the movement of Palestinians, which have exacerbated humanitarian and economic conditions. In that regard, Israel should uphold its responsibilities in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We also reiterate the need to preserve the legal and historical status of Jerusalem and respect the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's guardianship over its holy sites.

Concerning the difficult conditions of the Palestinian people, we stress the need for the international community and the relevant United Nations agencies to continue taking concrete measures to respond to their increasing humanitarian needs. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, two out of five Palestinians will require some form of humanitarian assistance in 2022. As for the Gaza Strip, it is suffering particularly from a significant shortfall of development, food and health aid, owing to its collapsing infrastructure, in addition to the unemployment rate, which is nearing 44 per cent. Accordingly, the United Arab Emirates is continuing to provide aid to the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip. Recently, our efforts have also focused on helping Palestinians combat the pandemic, including by providing support to Gaza hospitals.

In conclusion, I reiterate the firm commitment of the United Arab Emirates, which is in line with the Arab position to achieving the independence of a sovereign Palestinian State, based on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and other agreed international terms of reference.

**Mr. Tirumurti (India):** I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing. I welcome the Permanent Representatives of Palestine and Israel to our meeting.

While India welcomes the recent high-level interactions between Israeli and Palestinian authorities, we remain deeply concerned about the recent developments on the ground, in particular the violent attacks against and killing of civilians. We have consistently advocated against all acts of violence.

We urge all sides to take immediate steps towards the complete cessation of violence.

We are closely following the developments in Sheikh Jarrah, where tensions have risen once again over the potentially illegal eviction of some Palestinian families. Recent provocative actions and statements from both sides, which can quickly reverse the gains made so far, must stop. We appeal for calm to be maintained in Sheikh Jarrah and encourage parties to exercise restraint.

Resolution 2334 (2016) was adopted by the Security Council to reaffirm the international community's firm commitment to preventing the erosion of the two-State solution. It calls on parties to prevent all acts of violence against civilians and to refrain from provocative acts of incitement and inflammatory rhetoric and stresses that all settlement activities must cease. Any action that unduly alters the status quo on the ground and undercuts the viability of the two-State solution must be eschewed in the larger interests of securing peace and stability.

Parties must instead focus on addressing the urgent security and economic challenges, including the precarious financial situation of the Palestinian Authority, and chart a concrete path for discussing key political issues. We reiterate the need for an early resumption of the political course by launching credible negotiations on all final-status issues. India has consistently called for direct peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine based on the internationally agreed framework, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for statehood and Israel's legitimate security concerns.

The absence of such direct talks on key political issues has asymmetric costs for both Israelis and Palestinians and does not augur well for long-term peace. We call on the United Nations and the international community, in particular the Middle East Quartet, to prioritize the revival of those negotiations.

Let me conclude by reiterating India's firm and unwavering commitment to the peaceful resolution of the Palestine question. India's developmental partnership with the Palestine Authority in its nation-building efforts and financial assistance to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is a reflection of the same. India has always supported a negotiated two-State solution leading to the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable

State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders, side by side at peace with Israel, taking into consideration the legitimate security concerns of Israel.

India has been supportive of international efforts towards achieving a comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict and stands ready to contribute constructively to future efforts.

**Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the briefing provided by Special Coordinator Wennesland welcome the presence of Israeli and Palestinian delegations

Once again, we have heard about the deteriorating situation in the Middle East. Today I will refer to three issues: intra-Palestinian political dialogue and reconciliation, violence and settlements and the precarious financial situation in Palestine.

The stalemate in the political dialogue between the parties continues to be a cause for concern. The recent announcement by the Palestinian Central Council that it has decided to suspend the recognition of Israel until Israel recognizes the State of Palestine is an example of that. This comes precisely at a time when civil, fiscal and security cooperation is crucial. Likewise, my country takes note that some political factions did not participate in that Central Council meeting, which indicates that intra-Palestinian reconciliation continues to be stalled.

Another cause for alarm is the persistent violence in East Jerusalem, especially in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. We urge political and religious leaders to refrain from provocations and the use of inflammatory rhetoric.

The first six weeks of 2022 saw the demolition of 130 Palestinian structures, causing the displacement of numerous families. Mexico urges the Israeli Government to suspend all eviction orders.

The expansion and construction of Israeli settlements is contrary to international law and the resolutions of the Security Council. Mexico deplores those practices and urgently calls for an immediate end to the construction of additional housing in the Palestinian territories. Those unilateral actions not only fuel violence, but they also undermine the viability of any just and sustainable prospect for peace.

In addition, Israel's plans to expand national parks in the basin of the Old City of Jerusalem could

undermine the demographic, historical, cultural and religious character of Jerusalem. We call for respect for the special status of this city.

Finally, the precarious financial situation of the Palestinian Authority and the budgetary crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East adversely affect the provision of basic services to the population. We reiterate the importance of the international community continuing to financially support the Palestinian people.

Before concluding, I reiterate Mexico's support for the two-State solution, in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions. That is the only alternative that will allow us to lay the foundations for the peace and security that Palestinians and Israelis yearn for. Mexico also reiterates its support for all initiatives in favour of dialogue and reconciliation. We therefore urgently call for a resumption of peace talks.

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

We thank Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East in the context of the Middle East peace process.

From the Special Coordinator's briefing, it is clear that the stagnation and de facto stalemate of Palestinian-Israeli dialogue is leading to a spike in violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Against that backdrop, settlement construction and expansion continues, as does the confiscation of land, the forced eviction of Palestinians, the demolition of houses, arbitrary arrests and detentions and attempts to change the historical status quo of the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex.

Other growing concerns are the reported recent sharp rise in settler attacks and the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli military against Palestinians, which has led to numerous civilian casualties. A clear illustration of that is a high-profile eviction and house demolition of a Palestinian family that took place in January in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. That incident led to a wave of protests on the streets of Palestine.

Moreover, we are concerned about Tel Aviv's announced plans to expand settlement activity in the occupied Golan Heights, which directly contradicts the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Convention. We stress Russia's unchanging position — we do not recognize

Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which are an integral part of Syria.

In that context, the primary tasks are achieving lasting stabilization, eschewing provocations and unilateral steps that create irreversible facts on the ground, and restoring political prospects for revitalizing the peace process on the universally recognized international legal basis for the Middle East peace process. We are convinced that that is possible only through direct negotiations between the parties.

Another key prerequisite for breaking this deadlock is overcoming intra-Palestinian divisions. We welcome the efforts of Arab countries, in particular Egypt and Algeria, aimed at fostering dialogue between Palestine's main political forces. Our proposal to convene another intra-Palestinian meeting in Moscow as soon as the participants are able to agree on general approaches and to reflect them in a relevant document remains on the table.

Moreover, we continue to collaborate with Palestinians and Israelis, as well as international and regional stakeholders, including in the framework of the Middle East Quartet — currently the only internationally recognized format to support the Middle East peace process that has been endorsed by Council resolutions. We intend to continue working actively with our partners in the Quartet in an effort to enhance the effectiveness of the work of this mediation mechanism by defining collective steps to advance the implementation of the two-State solution endorsed by the United Nations. We reiterate the importance of holding a ministerial Quartet meeting and ensuring that that mechanism works closely with Palestinians, Israelis and key regional stakeholders.

In that connection, we would like to draw attention to another important point. Conditions for resolving a conflict and making collective efforts are never ideal. If they were, there would be no conflict. However, if no action is taken because the environment is not yet conducive, then there will be no progress. We therefore call upon all stakeholders to be receptive to our initiatives.

We also highlight the importance of providing comprehensive humanitarian assistance to those in need in the occupied Palestinian territories and Gaza, as well as to Palestinian refugees in neighbouring Arab States. On our part, we support the efforts of specialized international agencies, particularly the United Nations

Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In that connection, we draw attention to the Agency's appeals to the international community accumulate the much-needed funds so that it can continue to render comprehensive humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees in the Middle East. Russia continues to provide constant financial support to UNRWA through an annual voluntary contribution to its budget.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

**Mr. Mansour** (Palestine): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting and for the Russian Federation's leadership of the Security Council for the month of February. I also thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Speaking to a journalist about my decision to take the floor today, he responded: "What for? Your voice will be drowned by the drums of war". But in my country the war is ongoing, even when the drums cannot be heard. It is a war that has been waged daily against our people for nearly 75 years now. It is a war of dispossession, displacement and the denial of rights. It is a war waged against one Palestinian generation after another; a war that Palestinians endure from the moment they are born, in every aspect of their lives, and even after they die.

Israel proclaims that, if one is Jewish, one has a right of return that withstood the passage of thousands of years, yet is outraged that Palestinians still claim their right to return to the land and homes they were uprooted from 70 years ago. It does not see the irony in its outrage and denial of their right to return. Why is that? The answer is: apartheid.

Israel states that Israeli Jews are entitled to reclaim and retrieve any property they owned prior to 1948. Meanwhile, it has passed laws to expropriate Palestinian properties and land — both the ones they owned then and the ones they live in now. That is apartheid.

Israel proclaims the right to self-determination for Jews everywhere in the land, yet denies the Palestinian

people their right to self-determination anywhere in their ancestral land. Again, that is apartheid.

Different laws apply to Israeli settlers and Palestinians under occupation, which explicitly privilege those who are illegally present on our land and discriminate against its lawful inhabitants. That is settler colonialism and apartheid.

Israel's zoning and planning policies ensure the confinement of Palestinians, when it does not forcibly displace them, to the areas where they already lived decades ago, as well as granting unlimited expansion to Israeli settlers. It is maximum Palestinian geography with minimum Palestinian demography. That is textbook apartheid.

In occupied East Jerusalem, Palestinians can build only within 13 per cent of the city, most of which has already been built up. They have to watch as their houses are demolished while settlements grow everywhere around them, reaching their doorsteps.

In the so-called Area C of the occupied West Bank, Palestinians are confined to 1 per cent of the land, while two thirds of that area, including the Jordan Valley and its resources, are confiscated and dedicated to Israeli settlements. Israel establishes so-called national parks as a pretext to expropriate our land while uprooting trees that are thousands of years old. All of that is apartheid.

In the Gaza Strip, 2 million Palestinians have endured a 15-year-long blockade and one aggression after another, targeting all and sparing no one.

Israel considers that its right to security justifies all of its crimes, yet it denies the right of the Palestinian people to security, depriving them of the most elementary form of protection and any right to defend themselves. Israel kills and maims Palestinians — including children, women, the elderly and people with disabilities, in the streets, in their schools and in their homes — and openly claims that it does not have to answer for its actions. Why? Once again, apartheid.

Israel says that it is barbaric to withhold bodies and deprive loved ones of their ability to offer their deceased a dignified burial. However, by that it refers only to the withholding of the bodies of Israeli Jews — because it sees no problem in withholding hundreds of Palestinian bodies to this very day, some for over three decades. We all know why that is: apartheid.

Israeli laws and courts have guaranteed impunity to Israeli settlers and occupation forces while criminalizing the very presence of Palestinians on their land and their legitimate struggle for freedom. That is persecution and apartheid.

Israel labels Palestinian human rights defenders and civil society organizations as terrorists, while Israeli leaders, who incite State and settler terrorism or themselves commit terrorist acts, sit within the Israeli Knesset and Government.

Israel has arrested nearly 1 million Palestinians during its occupation, not for what they have done but for who they are. Yet not a single Israeli has been condemned for all the crimes committed against our people. The occupying Power is always innocent, and the people under its occupation are always guilty.

Israel has proclaimed that actions that ought to be condemned under international law are acceptable if committed by Israel, loudly declaring that anything else would be purely anti-Semitic. The Security Council condemning settlements is anti-Semitic. The General Assembly calling for the realization of Palestinian rights and the achievement of a just and lasting peace on the basis of international law is anti-Semitic. The Human Rights Council calling for a halt to human rights violations is anti-Semitic. The International Court of Justice determining the illegality of the wall and settlements and calling for their dismantlement is anti-Semitic. The International Criminal Court opening an investigation into war crimes is anti-Semitic. Amnesty International issuing a fact-based, evidence-based, law-based report is anti-Semitic.

But it is apartheid. If Israel could challenge the facts or the law, it would not resort to such ruthless smear campaigns. Irrational arguments that are neither law-abiding nor human rights-respecting are its offence of choice. The Council may not be ready to use the word “apartheid”, but apartheid is and has been our reality for a while now. Israel may be outraged by the word “apartheid”, but everyone else should be outraged by the policy.

One month ago, the Israeli representative brought a stone into this Chamber to help members visualize the violence by Palestinians that Israelis are confronted with (see S/PV.8950). I am terribly sorry, but the doors of this Chamber could not fit Israeli F-16 planes, tanks, warships, military jeeps, drones, bombs and missiles



or the rest of their mighty military arsenal. They could not fit the streets of Jerusalem or Al-Khalil, the Gaza Strip, the Jordan Valley or the villages under Israeli settlers' constant attacks and terror. They could not fit the millions of Palestine refugees denied the right to enter their own land. They could not fit Palestinians of the village of Al-Araqib, in the Negev, demolished 197 times by Israel and rebuilt 198 times by Palestinians. Al-Araqib, along with Beita, Bil'in, Ni'lin, Khan Al-Ahmar, Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, Al-Shuja'iya, Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahia, Zeitoun, Al-Khader, Nablus, Jenin and every single refugee camp show that apartheid is real. They also show that our people will not surrender to it.

Everyone was against apartheid in South Africa once it had been defeated. But history remembers well those who actually fought against it. Israel was an ally of the apartheid regime in South Africa. That is not surprising given that they shared the same vision and the same policies. Our people are resilient, and they will carry on with their legitimate struggle for freedom and dignity, regardless of what the rest of the world does.

But the reality is that we need international mobilization. Peoples around the world are standing by our side. All present here condemned the unlawful policies and actions of Israel. But condemnations alone will never suffice to deter Israel. It is time to translate words into action, action that provides protection to all our long-suffering people, action to end this illegal occupation, action to end apartheid.

**Mr. Erdan** (Israel): While Asaf Avigal spent the last two years working from home, one person was delighted that Asaf spent so much time in the house. Ido, Asaf's 5-year-old son, would constantly come to his desk and say, "Daddy, enough with the screens, come play with me". Although Asaf did not always have the time then, today he would give anything for even one more minute with his sweet child. But, tragically, Asaf will never play with Ido again. Ido was supposed to turn 6 exactly today, but he will forever remain 5 years old. That innocent child spent his final moments huddled in a sheltered room trying to protect himself from another barrage of Hamas rocket attacks.

Despite the fact that he was hiding in a concrete shelter, a stray piece of shrapnel pierced the window and killed him. Ido, like many other Israeli civilians, was the target of those attacks, because Hamas, the radical terror organization, fires rockets that deliberately target

civilian populations, all in the name of advancing the destruction of the State of Israel.

Countries all around the world have recognized Hamas as the terror organization that it is, but, sadly, the Security Council has failed to do so.

What is shocking is that despite Hamas's clear intention of murdering Israeli civilians while using its own population as human shields, the United Nations continued to do what it does best. It proceeded to demonize the only vibrant democracy in the Middle East, the State of Israel. In response to Hamas's rocket fire, the Human Rights Council voted to establish a supposedly impartial and neutral commission of inquiry. But here is the truth: that commission of inquiry is the furthest thing from being impartial and neutral. In fact, establishing a truly impartial and neutral commission of inquiry would completely defeat its true purpose: the delegitimization of the State of Israel. After all, the Human Rights Council was merely adhering to the tradition of singling out and demonizing Israel in every way possible that is so prevalent among United Nations bodies.

Sometimes they do so in order to whitewash and ignore the inhumane crimes that members of the Human Rights Council are committing against their own people every single day. Can anyone honestly look me in the eye and tell me that Israel is not the most discriminated-against State Member of the United Nations? That commission of inquiry has been given an unprecedented open-ended scope, in terms of both its time frame and its geographic coverage. Can any fair-minded person justify such an overbudgeted commission? The budget of the commission is nearly double the budget of those investigating Syria and Venezuela, some of the worst human rights violators around the globe.

But, most importantly, can the findings of that commission possible be unbiased when all its members hold anti-Israel views? For that reason, Israel refuses to cooperate with a biased investigation whose conclusions against Israel were determined and written before its work even began. That distorted investigation is only the latest in a long line of toxic anti-Israel actions by the Human Rights Council.

But it is not only open season on Israel for biased United Nations bodies. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other so-called human rights organizations have chosen to launch a jihad war against



the only vibrant democracy in the Middle East. Some of the very same organizations that could not find the time to write up reports on Syria, Myanmar, Iran or other horrific human rights abusers managed to find the time to write up hundreds of pages delegitimizing the existence of Israel. Those recent reports have attempted to brand Israel with absurd claims and heinous accusations. One can see the campaign that started here today on the mask of my counterpart.

But make no mistake: this is a joint campaign between those organizations and the Palestinians, with the mission of delegitimizing Israel as a Jewish democratic State. But a quick glance at the diverse State of Israel is more than enough to show how unfounded those accusations are.

Can anyone honestly look me in the eye and tell me that Israel, a country that protects the social and political equality of all its citizens, is guilty of systematic injustice? A country in which Arab doctors, Arab members of Parliament and Arab ministers serve alongside their Jewish counterparts? Can any decent person justify associating Israel with this most horrific form of discrimination?

Just this week, Khaled Kabub, a Muslim judge, was elected in Israel to the Israeli Supreme Court, while an Israeli-Arab member of our Parliament was appointed as Israel's Counsel General to Shanghai. These delusional reports have the audacity to ignore the facts, focus on the fabrications and echo a narrative of lies promoted by terror organizations and the corrupt Palestinian Authority just to single out and delegitimize Israel as a Jewish State.

Fortunately, this time moral and like-minded democratic countries have condemned these egregious reports, while the only ones who commended them are terror groups and the Palestinian observer, who referenced them today. Scrutiny is a crucial tool for any democracy, but such inciting lies and deplorable accusations should be reserved for the real perpetrators of such crimes. While these organizations, in addition to United Nations bodies, spend countless hours and resources demonizing Israel, in order to find true discrimination and human rights violations they do not have to look far. All they have to do is look at how the Palestinian Authority and Hamas treat political dissidents, minorities, women and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community. Where are the reports condemning the Palestinian law threatening

life imprisonment for selling land to someone only because they were born a Jew? Where are the humanitarian organizations decrying the Palestinian Authority's pay-for-slay policy?

Just last week, President Abbas continued to incite the murder of Jews: "If we had only a single penny left, we would pay it to families of the martyrs and prisoners." Rather than bettering the lives of his people, President Abbas prefers to incentivize acts of terror. Where is the outcry? While 2 million Arabs live as free citizens in the State of Israel, when Israeli drivers mistakenly drive into Ramallah, Nablus or Jenin, they are immediately lynched by bloodthirsty Palestinian mobs. That is what generations of incitement and institutionalized anti-Semitism look like. If one asks why such forms of discrimination and violence are not worthy of a human rights investigation, at this point the answer should be very clear. All these reports and commissions have one, and only one, goal. Their goal is not to help resolve the conflict or to defend human rights. Their only goal is to delegitimize Israel's very existence. Even in this debate, as in every debate on the Middle East, the Council spends the vast majority of its time hearing regurgitated claims against Israel from the Palestinian observer, who represents the very body that, itself, promotes hate, incitement, violence and terror.

Over the past two months, there have been nearly 500 terror attacks against Israelis, that is, 500 attacks — nearly 500 incidents of rock throwing, firebombs, shootings and stabbings carried out against Israelis, all within less than two months. Despite those attacks being the main obstacle to peace, they are not the focus of this debate. They never are.

As we sit here debating legal disputes and false allegations, the clouds of unrest, violence and war cast long shadows across the world. One might wonder what the urgency was to turn a closed monthly debate into an open one, while such critical matters to global security are being discussed in the General Assembly as we speak.

If we are here today to discuss the situation in the Middle East, the real threat to the region must be the focus of this meeting. Iran, the world's number one State sponsor of terror, spreads chaos and death across the region. It funds an army of six terrorist proxies, dedicated to establishing a Shi'ite hegemony throughout the region. With Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in Gaza,

Hizbullah in Lebanon and Syria and the Houthis in Yemen, the Iranian regime is hell-bent on leaving a wake of destruction in every place that it touches.

If that is how Iran acts now, it is frightening to imagine what the region will look like when Iran becomes a nuclear threshold State. Just last week, Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hizbullah, proudly declared his ability to manufacture, with the help of Iran, precision missiles and attack drones in Lebanon. What will the situation be like when they are protected by an Iranian nuclear umbrella? If the Houthis now launch unmanned aerial vehicles and rockets against civilians, how much worse will those attacks become once their Iranian sponsors have a nuclear arsenal and cash flow?

The predicted outcome of the current negotiations in Vienna will, unfortunately, lead to an agreement that will create a far more volatile and violent Middle East. As a result of the quickly approaching sunset clauses included in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, a renewed Iran deal will permit the ayatollahs to develop and operate the most advanced centrifuges, while shrinking the breakout time for a nuclear Iran to almost zero.

While the world, including the Security Council, continues to turn a blind eye to Iran's destructive and dangerous aspirations, the State of Israel will not hesitate to act as required. A nuclear threshold Iran is an existential threat to Israel. While the Council

repeatedly refuses to address it, Israel will act to ensure the safety of its citizens. Israel will not be bound by the outcome in Vienna and will continue to maintain full freedom to act anywhere, at any time and with no constraints in order to defend its security. We will do whatever is necessary to stop Iran's nuclear drive and counter the threat from its armies of terror proxies.

Today Ido Avigal, a sweet and innocent boy, was supposed to celebrate his sixth birthday. However, as we all know, he never will. None of us want to see one more child fall victim to such violence. Yet, shamefully, when Israeli children fall victim to terror, the silence of the Council is deafening. It is the duty of the Council and of this institution to ensure that no more children like Ido are killed by such deplorable acts of terror.

While the world teeters on the edge of a dark abyss, shifting the blame and focus to places where it most surely does not belong only further endangers our precarious balance. The focus of this debate must no longer be the State of Israel, especially not at a time when a regime that openly called for Israel's annihilation is on the brink of becoming nuclear. The time has come to brush away all the lies and distortions that consume so much of the Council's time and to focus on the pressing issues at hand. That is the only way to ensure a future of peace and stability for the Middle East and for the world.

*The meeting rose at noon.*