



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9000th meeting
 Tuesday, 22 March 2022, 10 a.m.
 New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
India	Mr. Tirumurti
Ireland	Mr. Gallagher
Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
Norway	Ms. Juul
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): 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: On behalf of the Secretary-General, I will devote this briefing to presenting his twenty-first report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), covering the period from 10 December to 18 March.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to fully respect all its legal obligations in that regard. No such steps were taken.

On 5 January, Israeli authorities published tenders for some 300 settlement housing units in East Talpiot neighbourhood in East Jerusalem.

On 10 and 24 January, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced plans to build some 800 and 400 housing units, respectively, in the East Jerusalem settlement of Gilo.

On 17 January, the same committee advanced a plan for some 1,200 housing units next to Ramat Rachel, in the southern Jerusalem area, a significant number of which are intended to be constructed in East Jerusalem.

On 1 February, following an official land survey, Israel's Attorney-General published a legal opinion allowing authorities to declare land in the outpost of Evyatar as State land and authorizing accelerated planning procedures for the establishment of a settlement there.

On 28 February, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced a plan for some 700 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev.

Demolitions and seizure of Palestinian structures continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, 216 structures were demolished or seized by Israeli authorities, or demolished by their owners to avoid costly Israeli demolition fees. Those actions displaced 299 people, including 138 children and 76 women. Of the structures that were demolished or seized, 37 were donor-funded.

In an effort to reduce tension, Israeli authorities reportedly decided to freeze most demolitions in East Jerusalem before and during the month of Ramadan. Tensions were high in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah in the run-up to 19 January, when Israeli forces evicted a Palestinian family and demolished their home. Twelve Palestinians were displaced, including two children and three women, with several arrests reported.

The Israeli authorities stated that the demolition was undertaken to build a special-needs school to serve Palestinian children. Tensions mounted further in February over the potential eviction by Israeli authorities of a Palestinian family scheduled for March. Following weeks of numerous violent altercations, protest and property damage in the neighbourhood, the atmosphere calmed somehow after the 22 January decision by the Israeli Magistrate Court to suspend the eviction pending consideration of an appeal submitted by the family.

In developments that further reduced tension, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled on 1 March that four of the families in the neighbourhood would not be evicted and would be recognized as protected tenants, paying their rent, until a determination were made on their claims to ownership. On 3 March the families held a press conference noting the importance of the Supreme Court decision and vowing to continue pressing their claims of ownership of their homes.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including all acts of terror, as well as acts of provocation and destruction. Unfortunately, daily violence continued. Overall, 244 Palestinians, including four children, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, security operations, attacks, alleged attacks against Israelis and other incidents; 2,966 Palestinians, including five women and 537 children, were injured.

Of those, 2,283 injuries were due to tear-gas, inhalation, while 50 persons were injured by live ammunition. In addition, Israeli settlers or other civilians perpetrated 144 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in 47 injuries and/or damage to Palestinian property.

One Israeli civilian was killed by Palestinians, and 100 Israelis, including five women and one child, were injured by Palestinians in clashes, the throwing of Molotov cocktails, attacks and other incidents. In total, Palestinians perpetrated 277 attacks against Israeli civilians, resulting in injuries and/or damage to Israeli property.

On 5 January, a vehicle under the supervision of the Israeli police hit and severely injured a 70-year-old Palestinian man in Um Al-Khair, south of Hebron. The man later died. Israeli police officers present at the location did not intervene to provide medical assistance to the victim. Police reported that the driver had sustained head injuries from stones thrown at him by other Palestinians present in the area.

On 12 January, an 80-year-old Palestinian-American man died in the context of Israeli security forces operations near Ramallah, where the victim was reportedly handcuffed, blindfolded and assaulted by Israeli security forces. Following an internal investigation on 31 January, the Israel Defense Forces removed two officers from their positions and reprimanded a third. A criminal investigation is ongoing.

On 8 February, Israeli security forces shot and killed three Palestinians in their car in Nablus in Area A. The Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed the men as members. According to Israeli authorities, the three were members of a cell that have carried out attacks on Israeli forces, were planning additional attacks and tried to shoot at Israeli security forces during the incident.

On 22 February, a 13-year-old boy died after having been shot by Israeli security forces in the Al-Khader area, near Bethlehem. There are conflicting reports about whether the boy was throwing stones or a Molotov cocktail when he was shot.

On several occasions, Palestinians were shot and killed by Israeli security forces, reportedly in the context of attempted attacks, including on 21 December 2021, near the settlement of Mevo Dotan, south-west of Jenin; on 22 December 2021, near the Al-Amari

refugee camp; on 31 December 2021, near Salfit; and on 17 January near Hebron. Palestinians were also killed during the exchange of fire or clashes with Israeli security forces on 13 December 2021 in Nablus; on 6 January in the Balata refugee camp; on 1 March in Jenin and Bethlehem; and on 15 March in Qalandia.

On 28 February, clashes erupted at Damascus Gate, in the Old City of Jerusalem, where hundreds of Palestinians had gathered to celebrate the Islamic holiday of Al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj. Thirty-seven Palestinians were injured, including a six-month-old infant and an 11-year-old-girl with disabilities. Twenty Palestinians were arrested, most of whom were between the ages of 14 and 17. Israeli police stated that Palestinians had chanted incitement and thrown stones and bottles at police on the scene. On 6 March, a 15-year-old Palestinian was shot by Israeli security forces in Abu Dis, near Jerusalem, reportedly after having thrown Molotov cocktails at Israeli soldiers. The boy later succumbed to his wounds.

On 6 March, a Palestinian stabbed an Israeli police officer in the Muslim Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem, wounding him, and was subsequently shot dead by Israeli security forces. On 7 March, a Palestinian stabbed and injured two Israeli police officers near the entrance of the holy sites in Jerusalem's Old City, before being shot dead by Israeli security forces. Video of the incident shows a police officer shooting the man while he was on the ground, after already having been shot. Hamas later claimed the man as a member. On 15 March, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian boy in the Balata refugee camp during clashes that developed following an arrest operation.

Settler-related violence remains significant across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. On several occasions, Israeli security forces and Israeli settlers clashed, including in the context of the demolition of unauthorized structures in the outposts, which are also illegal under Israeli law. Beita village, near Nablus, remained a flashpoint for clashes amid ongoing Palestinian demonstrations against the nearby Evyatar settlement outpost.

During clashes on 10 December 2021, a Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israeli security forces. On 4 February, 45 Palestinians were injured, including three with live ammunition. Another 26 were injured on 18 February — four by live ammunition, including

a 10-year-old boy shot in the head with a rubber-coated metal bullet.

Areas in and around Burqa village, which is also near Nablus, saw serious confrontations. On 16 December 2021, a 25-year-old Israeli man was shot and killed by Palestinians near the evacuated settlement of Homesh. On 19 December 2021, Israeli security forces arrested six Palestinians in Silat Al-Harithiya, near Jenin, on suspicion of involvement in the attacks and three related charges. That same day, hundreds of settlers attempted to enter Homesh and set up illegal structures, clashing with Israeli security forces and breaking through their barricades. Later, on 1 March, eight Israelis were arrested in connection with those events.

From 23 to 25 December 2021, repeated raids by Israeli settlers on Burqa led to clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, in which 171 Palestinians were injured, including 15 by live ammunition. On 13 February, a 16-year-old Palestinian was shot and killed by Israeli security forces in Silat Al-Harithiya, near Jenin, amid clashes that erupted after Israeli forces entered the village to demolish the family home of one of the suspected perpetrators of the December shooting.

On 21 January, adjacent to Burin village, near Nablus, Israeli settlers injured five Israeli activists involved in a tree-planting activity with local Palestinians. On 7 February, three Israeli settlers from Givat Ronen were arrested, and demolition orders were issued on structures in the settlements. On 24 January, Israeli settlers drove a convoy to Huwwara, near Nablus, throwing stones at Palestinians and their property. Three Palestinians, including a 17-year-old, were injured.

On 16 February, Israel announced the arrest of 17 Israelis in connection with those incidents. On 25 February, Israeli civilians shot and injured two Palestinian men following a car accident near the Yizhar checkpoint

On 2 and 3 March, two Israeli civilians were stabbed and injured in Hizma town, in Jerusalem. The Israel security forces subsequently arrested a Palestinian suspected of carrying out one of the attacks.

In Gaza, Palestinian militants launched two rockets, and there was one instance of launching incendiary balloons towards Israel. No injuries or fires were reported. In response, Israeli forces carried out

three air attacks on what they said were military targets in the Strip, resulting in no injuries. On 29 December, a Palestinian opened fire towards the Gaza perimeter fence, injuring an Israeli civilian. In retaliation, Israeli forces fired several tank shells at what they said were Hamas observation posts in Gaza. Four Palestinians were injured, including a 16-year-old boy.

On 1 January, the Israel Defense Forces said that two rockets had been fired from Gaza and landed off the coast of Israel. In response, Israeli forces conducted air strikes against what they said were militant facilities in Gaza. No injuries were reported.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls for the parties to refrain from acts of provocation, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric. Some Palestinian and Israeli officials continued to engage in such activity during the reporting period. In a highly provocative move, in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, at the height of the tension over the potential eviction, a far-right member of the Israeli Knesset set up a makeshift office in the neighbourhood. Several members of the Knesset visited the neighbourhood, expressing support for him, while others encouraged his inflammatory actions.

In separate statements, the same member of Knesset also expressed hope that Palestinian hunger strikers would die and that any Palestinian who threw a stone would get a bullet in the head. In the wake of the killing of three Palestinians by Israeli security forces in Nablus, Fatah social and media pages encouraged Palestinians to increase confrontation with Israel. Hamas also called for increased clashes with the Israeli forces throughout the occupied West Bank. Some Palestinian Authority officials deny the Jews' connection to the region and to the holy sites in Jerusalem.

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterates the call on the Middle East Quartet for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse the negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution. The reporting period witnessed some progress on civil and economic steps, with instances of high-level official engagement.

On 27 December, the State of Qatar announced that it had signed an agreement with the Palestinian Authority and the Gaza Electricity Distribution Corporation to advance the construction of a natural-gas pipeline from Israel to Gaza. The pipeline aims to increase electricity generation at the Gaza power plant. In Gaza, during the reporting period, the Israeli authorities authorized

the issuance of permits for some 12,000 Palestinian merchants and traders. In January, the daily movement of workers, traders and businesspeople through the Erez crossing was the highest since the tightening of the Israeli closure in Gaza in 2007.

In February, technical bilateral meetings on the Gaza reconstruction mechanism between the Palestinian Authority, the Government of Israel and the United Nations resumed, with steps identified to improve the mechanism. In a welcome development, white cement, long deemed a dual-use material, began entering Gaza without any special monitoring.

There was a marked increase in the movement of goods out of Gaza in recent months, peaking in January with more than 900 truckloads passing through the Kerem Shalom crossing to the West Bank, Israel and other countries. That is the highest monthly figure recorded since 2007; it comes close to the rate that had existed prior to it and is significantly above the pre-May 2021 rates.

The United Nations continues to highlight to the Israeli Government priority items to enter Gaza, largely for United Nations health, water, sanitation and other projects, some requested more than a year ago. Significant delays in approvals, including for dual-use materials under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, impact all aspects of United Nations operations in Gaza, the economy and the lives of ordinary people in the Strip.

With funding from Qatar, the gradual reconstruction of housing units totally destroyed during the May 2021 escalation, to date some 150 households, has begun. Meanwhile, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has completed the repair of nearly 7,000 housing units and is currently working with 700 families whose homes were totally demolished. On 28 December, UNRWA announced the start of a cash assistance allocation of \$8.2 million to families whose homes were damaged during the May 2021 escalation.

In the occupied West Bank, some actions by the Israeli authorities have contributed to some reductions in tension. On 11 December, the Palestinian Central Election Commission conducted the first phase of local council elections in several hundred small communities in the West Bank, with more than 66 per cent of eligible voters participating.

On 12 January and 17 February, the Commission concluded voter registration and candidate nomination periods for the second phase of the local council elections, scheduled for 26 March. However, on 17 January, the Palestinian Cabinet postponed local council elections in Gaza.

From 6 to 9 February, the Palestinian Central Council (PCC) met for the first time since 2018, electing a new leadership for the Palestinian National Council and new members for vacant positions in the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization. In its final statement, the PCC called for a halt to security coordination and the suspension of the recognition of Israel until it recognizes the Palestinian State based on the June 1967 lines and halts settlement activities, reiterating decisions taken at previous meetings of the PCC.

In its resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council called upon all States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. No such steps were taken during the reporting period. Resolution 2334 (2016) also called upon all parties to continue, *inter alia*, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations. On 14 January, the envoys of the Middle East Quartet met virtually to discuss the latest political developments and the situation on the ground. On 19 February, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan met in Munich and expressed their commitment to supporting all efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace on the basis of the two-State solution, in accordance with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and agreed parameters.

On 9 March, the Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian Foreign Ministers met on the margins of the ministerial meeting of the League of Arab States in Cairo to discuss efforts to launch negotiations aimed at reaching a comprehensive and just settlement of the conflict.

In closing, allow me to share the Secretary-General's observations concerning the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period. I remain deeply concerned by the continued settlement advancement by Israel in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Settlement expansion continued to fuel violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, further entrenching the

occupation and undermining the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independent statehood and eroding the possibility of establishing a continuous and viable Palestinian State.

Some 670,000 Israeli citizens currently reside in more than 130 illegal settlements and more than 100 outposts in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I am particularly concerned about the increasing settlement advancement in and around East Jerusalem. Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and international law and are a serious impediment to peace. I urge the Government of Israel to cease all settlement activities immediately.

The continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures, including internationally funded humanitarian projects, remain deeply concerning. Demolitions affect not only residential structures, but also those related to income-generation and the provisions of essential services. I call upon the Government of Israel to end the demolition of Palestinian-owned property and the forcible displacement and eviction of Palestinians, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

I remain particularly concerned about the potential eviction of several families from homes in which they have lived for decades in Sheikh Jarrah and in the Silwan neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem. Many legal cases initiated by settler organizations invoke an Israeli law by which Israelis, but not Palestinians, may claim land they owned prior to 1948.

I note Israeli court rulings during the reporting period that postponed and suspended such evictions, contributing to a reduction in tensions on the ground. As demonstrated in recent weeks, forced evictions, especially in such politically sensitive areas, can trigger dangerous tensions and violence. Demolitions and evictions entail numerous human rights violations and have raised concerns about the risk of forcible transfers.

I am deeply troubled by the continued loss of life and injuries, including of children, in the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as by the overall deterioration of the security situation, including an apparent increase in shooting attacks during the reporting period. The possible excessive use of force by Israeli security forces, particularly the use of live

ammunition, continues to raise serious concerns. Security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. I am particularly appalled by the continued injury and killing of children. Children should never be targets of violence or be put in harm's way. I urge Israeli authorities to conduct thorough, prompt, effective and transparent investigations into those killings and injuries.

I remain deeply concerned about the level of settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israel, the occupying Power, has an obligation to protect the Palestinian population there from all acts of threats and violence and to ensure, as far as possible, public order and life.

I am also deeply concerned about Palestinian attacks against Israeli civilians. I underscore that all perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice. I am particularly alarmed by the high number of arrests by the Israeli security forces of Palestinians, including children, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem. I am concerned that those arrests, particularly of children, may represent a disproportionate response to the offences committed. Under international law, the arrest and detention of children should be used only as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

I urge all sides to refrain from actions that could further escalate the situation across the occupied Palestinian territories, and I call upon all politicians and religious and community leaders to help reduce tension, particularly in Jerusalem. I am deeply concerned that, at a highly sensitive moment on the ground, officials on both sides continue to stoke tensions and take actions that have the potential to provoke more deadly violence. Acts of terror, violence and incitement must be clearly and unequivocally condemned by all. Officials on all sides have a responsibility to avoid all actions that could escalate tensions.

Palestinians continue to suffer in Gaza under Hamas rule and continued Israeli closures. I welcome the parties' recent engagement on easing access, including for workers from Gaza and the West Bank, into the Israeli labour market. I am encouraged by the growing volume of goods exiting Gaza, which clearly surpasses previous years. Nevertheless, more significant steps are needed to see durable economic benefits. I hope that the resumption of technical-level trilateral meetings

of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism will facilitate reconstruction and the much-needed development projects, leading to reduced aid dependency.

The physical condition of the Palestinian Authority (PA) remains precarious. Revenues are not keeping pace with expenditures, leading to accumulated debt, and investments in important sectors such as health, education and infrastructure are insufficient. In order to address the root causes of recurring financial crises, internal PA reforms and improvements in the economic relationship between Israel and the PA are needed, alongside donor support. To that end, I welcome the current work of the International Monetary Fund mission to support the PA's important work on fiscal stability and reform.

The United Nations is grateful to all donors that continue to support the crucial work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). I am concerned, as UNRWA will already face critical cash-flow challenges in the upcoming three months. Any reduction or disruption of services has the potential to trigger significant humanitarian, political and security consequences, impacting the broader region. As Muslims in the region start the holy month of Ramadan, I appeal to all donors to advance the disbursement of confirmed pledges as much as possible. Preserving UNRWA's services is a joint responsibility of all Member States.

As we endeavour to support the critical needs of the Palestinians across the occupied Palestinian territories, it is also vital that we continue working towards advancing intra-Palestinian unity, as it is central to advancing a two-State solution. The United Nations stands firm in its support of Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts. The holding of general elections in the occupied Palestinian territories would be a crucial step towards Palestinian unity, giving renewed legitimacy to national institutions, including a democratically elected Parliament and Government in Palestine.

In conclusion, let me add that it is regrettable that we have seen little progress in the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) since its adoption in December 2016. On the contrary, the absence of a meaningful peace process to end the Israeli occupation and resolve the conflict is fueling a dangerous deterioration that is destabilizing the situation across the occupied Palestinian territories.

In just one week, as Ramadan begins, thousands of Muslims will come to pray at Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, with the Jewish and Christian faithful following soon after to mark Pesach and Easter in April. That should be a time of peaceful reflection, prayer and celebration for all religions. Provocation must be avoided. Leaders on all sides have a critical role to play in ensuring calm.

In line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements, we must keep in sight the vision of an end to the occupation and of two States — Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State living side by side, in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. I remain actively engaged in advancing those efforts with my counterparts in the Middle East Quartet, key regional partners and Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

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

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

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. We fully support his continued and close engagement with all parties to promote dialogue and peace.

The United States remains committed to widening relations between Israel and its neighbours. One way we can do that is by deepening cooperation among the participants in the Abraham Accords and other countries that have normal relations with Israel. On that front, we are encouraged by Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi's meetings in Bahrain with his counterpart there, and we welcome the meeting between Turkish President Erdoğan and Israeli President Herzog in Ankara. These visits demonstrate that good faith engagement can build mutual confidence and create a path towards greater security and prosperity.

In addition to these visits, we welcome the efforts of the signatories of recent normalization agreements to bolster their relationships through working groups and initiatives. These will help further develop trade, cultural and people-to-people ties and offer new opportunities and hope for people across the region. The United States also believes that normalization

agreements can enhance regional cooperation. But let me be clear: normalization is not a substitute for serious engagement between Israelis and Palestinians. That is why the Biden Administration has made a point of intensifying dialogue with both Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Hady Amr just visited Israel and the West Bank to discuss Israeli-Palestinian relations. He highlighted the need to improve the quality of life for Palestinians in tangible ways and reaffirmed that Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve equal measures of security, freedom and prosperity. We encourage all those who look for peace in the Middle East to commit to constructive acts that help Palestinians and Israelis coexist and prosper.

While we worked toward long-term peace, we also remained deeply concerned about present-day tensions, including violence in the West Bank and in and around Jerusalem. The United States strongly condemns the recent terrorist attacks in the Old City that injured two Israeli policemen, and once again we deplore continuing attacks by Israeli settlers on ordinary Palestinians. We urge the authorities both to condemn acts of violence and to fairly pursue justice for these acts. Individuals, regardless of who they are or where they come from, who commit unlawful acts of violence, should be held accountable.

As the holy month of Ramadan and the Passover and Easter holidays approach, we must aspire to peace, recognizing the heightened religious sensitivities during this time. All sides must refrain from unilateral actions that exacerbate tensions and undercut efforts to advance a negotiated two-State solution. In that spirit, we welcome the recent meetings between Jordan's King Abdullah II and Foreign Minister Lapid and reiterate the importance of upholding the status quo on the Holy Esplanade.

I will close by noting that the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains serious. Humanitarian relief, reconstruction and recovery needs are acute, and food insecurity could worsen in the coming weeks, owing to the rising price of food, fuel and other commodities. In this dangerous environment of scarcity, we encourage all States Members of the United Nations to provide assistance, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to help meet the needs of vulnerable Palestinians in Gaza.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing. We share his concern about tensions in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank.

With Ramadan, Pesach and Easter coinciding in April, it is imperative to avoid a new escalation of violence. Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in security. The integrity of the holy sites and the historic status quo in Jerusalem must be upheld and fully respected.

We also call for respect of the rights of Palestinians, including their right to peacefully protest. We are especially concerned about children being victims of violence and threats, as well as the arrests of Palestinian children.

Among the significant drivers of conflict are Israeli settlement activities, house demolitions and evictions. We welcome the decision by the Israeli Supreme Court to terminate eviction orders against four Palestinian families living in Sheikh Jarrah. However, long-term solutions are needed, and all evictions in East Jerusalem must be halted indefinitely.

We would also like to highlight the situation in Masafer Yatta, where Israeli authorities are planning to demolish several Palestinian villages to establish a firing zone for military training. If implemented, this plan would displace around 1,300 individuals who have lived in this area for generations. We urge Israel to refrain from carrying out this plan, and I reiterate that all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition of occupied areas are in violation of international humanitarian law. Let me therefore again highlight that the establishment of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, constitutes a flagrant violation of international law.

With regard to Gaza, we are encouraged to see a more stable situation. The lifting of Israeli restrictions and relative calm from all sides have made a positive contribution. We encourage Israel to continue the easing of restrictions, allowing for more trade and increasing the number of work permits for Palestinians. The ultimate goal must be the total lifting of the blockade.

We look forward to the second round of local elections being held across the West Bank on 26 March. The mobilization around these elections shows that Palestinians want democracy. Norway

will continue our support for the Central Election Commission. Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority must be strengthened, and its governance spread across Palestine. The economy must be allowed to flourish.

Finally, let me affirm Norway's commitment to a political horizon and a negotiated two-State solution. Even while Ukraine dominates the headlines and the agenda of the Security Council — and for a good reason — we cannot abandon other ongoing crises. We must continue to work for a long-term solution, one that will benefit both Israelis and Palestinians. Finding a political solution to the conflict is not only essential for Israel and Palestine, but for the whole region.

Mr. Gallagher (Ireland): I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The Special Coordinator's briefing highlights the increase in violence in the occupied West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, at this particularly sensitive time. Ireland reaffirms its view that violence against civilians must cease. In our last statement to the Council (see S/PV.8973), we expressed our deep concern at continued reports of the use of excessive force by Israeli security forces leading to the killing and injuring of Palestinians, including children. Such acts have continued in the weeks since then. These killings shatter families and communities and take us ever further away from the possibility of a just and lasting peace. There must be accountability for the actions of the Israeli security forces.

Ireland also urges the Palestinian Authority to protect and uphold the human rights of Palestinians under its control and enhance its efforts to prevent terrorism. As Mr. Wennesland has made clear, the Palestinian Authority urgently needs international support in this regard.

In the run-up to the upcoming religious holidays, Ireland calls on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid escalation, so that these holidays can be safely and appropriately marked by all. We echo the Special Coordinator's statement of 8 March, in which he called on political, religious and community leaders from all sides to reject violence and speak up against those who try to inflame the situation.

We welcome the recent visit by Foreign Minister Lapid to Amman, and reiterate our call for the status quo

at the holy sites in Jerusalem to be upheld, bearing in mind the special and historic role of Jordan as custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

In keeping with Ireland's consistent position on respect for international law, we reiterate our call on Israel to halt all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem and in Area C of the West Bank. Such settlement activity is a flagrant violation of international law. Further settlement expansion plans, such as those for E-1, Givat Hamatos and Atarot, would severely undermine the possibility of establishing a viable and contiguous Palestinian State.

Tor Wennesland's report highlights ongoing Israeli demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures, some funded by donors, including by Ireland and our European Union partners. These acts are contrary to Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law and must cease. Ireland remains particularly concerned about the Palestinian families that remain threatened with eviction from their homes, including in Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah, despite recent positive developments. Israel must also address the enormous difficulties experienced by Palestinians seeking to obtain Israeli-issued building permits.

Children continue to endure the worst of this conflict. We are appalled that four children have been killed by Israeli forces in just over one month and that many others have experienced detention and violence. Israel must uphold international standards of justice for juveniles. We call for an end to the administrative detention of children and any form of ill treatment in detention. Children must never be the target of violence or put in harm's way.

Ireland reiterates our concern at the designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terrorist organizations. Ireland's support for civil society is steadfast, and we recall the critical role it plays in promoting international law, peace, human rights and democratic values.

As a strong supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Ireland renews its call on the international community, including countries of the region, to step up efforts to support the agency. This is essential for the provision of vital services to Palestinian refugees, as well as for regional stability. We commend UNRWA and the United Nations family

for their continued work in the Gaza Strip, where the blockade continues to hamper reconstruction efforts. We acknowledge recent positive steps by Israel in this context and commend Egypt and Qatar's ongoing contribution. However, more must be done. We renew our call for Israel to end its illegal blockade of Gaza, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

Finally, the Security Council must redouble its efforts to address the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The situation on the ground, including ongoing settlement expansion by Israel, continues to erode the basis for an agreed solution. In the absence of meaningful political progress and in the context of a climate of impunity and denial of basic rights, disillusionment is taking hold, especially among young people. The role that youth can play in bringing about a peaceful resolution to the conflict cannot be overstated.

The Security Council must recommit to the imperative of a two-State solution, in line with resolution 2334 (2016), as the only way to guarantee a stable, sustainable peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I thank Mr. Wennesland for the updates brought to the Security Council. Brazil regrets that, once more, we are hearing reports of daily violence, unilateral actions and heated rhetoric that undermine the prospects for viable and lasting peace in the Middle East. Mounting tensions, especially in the West Bank and Jerusalem, days before the start of Ramadan are very concerning.

Brazil once more echoes the call of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process upon all parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from actions and provocations that fuel those tensions, particularly near sacred sites during religious holidays. All parties must urgently focus on de-escalation. We also remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law. Civilians must never be the deliberate target of attacks. Children, who are particularly vulnerable in any conflict, should always be kept out of harm's way.

Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is essential for peace, and the current economic and fiscal crisis worsens the prospects of political unity and stability. Free, fair and transparent general elections should be held as soon as possible to renew the democratic legitimacy of Palestinian institutions.

International cooperation aimed at the recovery and improvement of basic infrastructure and the economic empowerment of the Palestinian population can also improve the prospects of reconciliation. We must not forget that poverty and political instability constitute fertile ground for extremist forces.

In the meanwhile, humanitarian aid must continue to flow in a predictable, responsible and regular way to cover the basic needs of refugees, who continue to rely heavily on the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The financial sustainability of the agency is more worrisome in a scenario of competing efforts to help the growing number of refugees worldwide. We continue to be committed to UNRWA's valuable work.

I reiterate Brazil's long-standing commitment to the achievement of a just and sustainable peace in the Middle East, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security, in two democratic, prosperous and sovereign States, within secure and internationally recognized borders.

But without a horizon for direct talks, faith in peace wanes with each passing day. Brazil supports Mr. Wennesland's willingness to re-engage key stakeholders, including the Middle East Quartet, and to try new ideas with the aim of building trust and confidence among the parties in order to advance the implementation of relevant resolutions of the Council. Brazil will support any genuine effort to rethink the peace process and diplomatic initiatives that contribute to moving us away from the current stalemate, as long as they are in line with international law and truly aimed at sustainable peace.

Only a situation that is acceptable to all sides will be able to pave the way for sustainable peace in the Middle East. The Security Council must reflect on the role it should play in reinvigorating the region's peace process and in paving the way for new direct negotiations.

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

France is very concerned about the high tensions in the occupied Palestinian territories. The approach of the religious holidays is leading to fears of a sharp deterioration in the situation and an escalation similar to that of last May. France echoes the Special Coordinator's call for restraint and avoidance of any incitement to violence.

The measures taken by Israel to reduce tensions are welcome, but must be considerably expanded to prevent a new cycle of violence. That includes a permanent end to demolitions and evictions, in particular in East Jerusalem. It also requires strict respect for the status quo of the holy sites and the proportionate use of force by the Israeli forces. It ultimately requires an end to the expansion of settlements. After several months of the de facto freeze, the resumption of planning and expansion projects since October 2021 has been worrisome. France will never waver in its commitment to Israel's security and firmly condemns all rocket fire against civilian populations and infrastructure.

France calls for the immediate implementation of all provisions of resolution 2334 (2016). There is an urgent need to reverse the negative trends and to create the conditions necessary for the resumption of negotiations between the parties. France calls for increased cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that will enable the implementation of confidence-building measures for the benefit of the people.

At the same time, we must work to recreate a political horizon to restore hope to the people and prevent violence from becoming their only alternative. To that end, we are counting on the United Nations. The two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both, is indeed the only one that will allow for a just and lasting peace in the region by responding to the legitimate aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

France will not recognize any change to the 1967 lines other than those agreed by the parties. France recalls the obligation of all States to distinguish between the territory of Israel and the occupied territories with regard to trade, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016). France implements that policy of differentiation through concrete measures that have been taken at the European level.

France will continue to robustly support Palestinian civil society and the strengthening of the rule of law. It will remain vigilant with regard to the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority. In particular, it calls for all light to be shed on the death of Nizar Banat and for appropriate measures to be taken to ensure that such incidents do not reoccur.

Furthermore, the designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terrorist

organizations by Israel is very worrisome. France intends to continue to support them. It will continue to work to preserve the humanitarian space, particularly in Gaza. In that regard, we reiterate our full support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The precariousness of the situation in the Palestinian territories shows once again the importance of the Council remaining ready to act. We encourage Council members to play an active role in supporting the relaunch of the peace process and the implementation of the Council's resolutions. Our credibility depends on it. France will remain firm in upholding the principles of international law that it has consistently promoted. That is the reason for Minister Le Drian's ongoing commitment to supporting the two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East settlement process in the context of the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

We listened with concern to his report on the continued impasse in the settlement process in the Middle East and the unresolved core issue of the Palestinian question. Unfortunately, we must note that there has been no let-up in violence with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation, leading to casualties on both sides and potentially escalating into the type of full-scale military escalation that we have seen so many times. The situation is further exacerbated by Israel's unlawful unilateral actions, with their potentially dangerous disruptive consequences for the entire Middle East region. They include the confiscation of Palestinian land, forced evictions, the demolition of property, the illegal building of settlements and attempts to change the historical status quo of the holy sites.

The announcement of Tel Aviv's plans to expand settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is deeply disturbing. The continuation of settlement construction and the intention to double the number of Israelis living in the Jordan Valley and the Syrian Golan Heights by 2026 can be seen as the de facto annexation of most of the occupied Palestinian territory. Against that background, there has been a sharp increase in settler attacks, as well as the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli military against Palestinians,

resulting in civilian deaths and injuries. One example of such misconduct was the high-profile eviction and demolition of a house in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah in January.

In the current circumstances, we believe that the primary goal should be to achieve the long-term stabilization of the situation, avoid provocations and unilateral steps to create irreversible facts on the ground, and restore the political horizon for reinvigorating the peace process within the agreed internationally recognized parameters, including the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. We do not agree with those who believe that framework to be irrelevant. The problem does not lie with the framework itself, as its final details in every instance should be discussed by the Palestinians and Israelis in direct negotiations, but with the factors that are preventing the resumption of the negotiation process.

In that context, we are convinced of the need to step up appropriate multilateral efforts, including within the framework of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators with a view to creating the necessary conditions for the swift resumption of direct Israeli-Palestinian talks. Furthermore, it will be impossible to advance the settlement process without restoring the unity of the Palestinian ranks, based on the authority of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the holding of elections.

Against that background, we attach great importance to providing comprehensive humanitarian assistance to those in need in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as Palestinian refugees in the neighbouring Arab countries. We support the efforts of specialized international organizations, first and foremost the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose activities have not only a humanitarian but also a political dimension in providing an important stabilizing effect in the Palestinian territories and countries of the Middle East. In that regard, we note the Agency's appeal to the international community to help meet financial shortfalls so as to maintain uninterrupted support for the Palestinians this year.

For our part, we will pursue our efforts to build international consensus and coordinate joint action in promoting a just solution to the Palestinian question. We call on our Quartet colleagues to consider our well-

known initiatives, including the holding of a ministerial meeting, as well as consultations in the extended format with the participation of regional States. At the same time, we count on the support of the international community in carrying out those activities.

Mr. Tirumurti (India): I too thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

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 refrain from provocative acts of incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, and stresses that all settlement activities must cease.

We remain deeply concerned about the upward trajectory of the violent attacks and killing of civilians. We have consistently advocated against all acts of violence. We urge all sides to take immediate steps for a complete cessation of violence. The 1 March judgment of the Supreme Court of Israel provides a temporary reprieve to the Palestinian families of Sheikh Jarrah. However, the issue of the potential legal eviction of the families remains.

Tensions have remained high in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, despite the Court's decision that has ruled against an immediate eviction. It is unfortunate that the provocative actions and statements have continued. Statements by community leaders and public figures should aim to reduce tensions and not incite them. We appeal for calm to be maintained and encourage all parties to exercise maximum restraint.

We call on the parties to refrain from any unilateral action that unduly alters the status quo on the ground and undercuts the viability of the two-State solution. We need to urgently build on the recent positive developments and not slide back. The focus must be on addressing the urgent security and economic challenges, including the precarious financial situation of the Palestinian Authority, and charting a concrete path for discussing key political issues. An early return to the political course by launching credible direct negotiations on all final-status issues is an immediate requirement. The absence of direct talks between the sides on those issues is not conducive to securing long-term peace.

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 United Nations and the international community, in particular the Middle East Quartet, must prioritize the revival of those negotiations.

India has been supporting Palestinian nation-building and capacity-building efforts under the India-Palestine developmental partnership for more than three decades now. We also continue to assist the Palestinian refugee community through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Let me conclude by reiterating India's firm and unwavering commitment to 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. There is no other alternative to a negotiated two-State solution.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

Regrettably, a little more than five years after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), settlement construction and expansion continue. In December 2016, when the resolution was adopted, approximately 618,000 settlers lived in Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory. Today, the settler population has grown by around 12 per cent. Over the last 18 months, 25 new outposts and satellite settlements were built. In parallel, more than 1,000 structures were demolished in 2021 and 2022. Violent incidents perpetrated by settlers have continued.

The settlements undermine the two-State solution. They impede prospects for peace and affect the human rights of the Palestinian people. Taking over territory by force violates international law. Mexico deplores the expansion of those settlements. We urge the cessation of all settlement-related activities, including confiscation, eviction and the demolition of Palestinian structures.

We take note of the announcement by the Israeli authorities of the implementation of a truce in demolitions during Ramadan and the suspension of evictions of families from Sheikh Jarrah. While that represents a temporary reprieve, it is no substitute for the definitive halting of those activities, which erode the viability of a Palestinian State.

Mexico condemns any act of violence against civilians, including the disproportionate use of force. In accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), we call once again on parties to refrain from provocations, including the use of inflammatory rhetoric.

We wish to express our concern at the fragile nature of the ceasefire and the slow economic recovery in Gaza. Of course, we note the favourable impact of the economic initiatives offered by Israel, which include work permits and an increase in exports from the Strip. However, so long as there is no definitive lifting of the blockade, such initiatives will be limited, and dependency on humanitarian aid will continue.

That backdrop is compounded by the precarious financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the emergence of new humanitarian needs as a result of conflicts in other parts of the world. Once again, we stress the importance of the Palestinian Authority calling elections as soon as possible. Substantive progress in intra-Palestinian reconciliation is perhaps today more urgent than ever.

Before closing, allow me to reiterate something that should not be forgotten when we consider this issue in the Council: that the only solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine is a two-State one that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and enables the consolidation of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State within safe and internationally recognized borders, as well as the special status of Jerusalem in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his detailed briefing.

Resolution 2334 (2016) addresses decades-old issues, but its objectives, while being of immediate and urgent relevance, remain largely unimplemented. Kenya recognizes and commends the progress made through regional mediation efforts and through the Quartet and Munich formats. However, despite the best intentions of the international community, little has improved in terms of political traction on the ground in line with the resolution. For example, Gaza, despite the much-needed focus and recovery efforts, remains dependent on humanitarian relief.

Kenya continues to support the principles underlying resolution 2334 (2016). Those include

urging the stabilization of the situation and the reversal of negative trends on the ground, which are eroding prospects for a two-State solution whereby two States — Israel and Palestine — live side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines.

Significant steps are also needed to create the conditions for successful final-status negotiations. In our persistent call for the full implementation of that all-encompassing resolution, the hope is that the desirable and obtainable objectives do not remain a futuristic endeavour.

Also, in line with resolution 2334 (2016), Kenya continues to condemn and call for accountability and strengthened efforts to combat the acts of terror perpetrated by Hamas and other militant groups. Such indiscriminate acts of terror must cease.

We also call for immediate steps to be taken to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, which have tragically claimed both Israeli and Palestinian lives. Once again, we reiterate that no cause can justify the deliberate targeting of innocent civilians.

The trends of the current reporting period, including violent incidents involving children and youth fatalities; the increasing settler population; clashes in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem; and demolitions all point to the need to look beyond the listing of incidents.

As Kenya has stated before, while the quarterly reports remain essential to keeping the Council informed, addressing cycles of conflict will take much more than chronicling incidents and events.

In that regard and as we look to the next written report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) in June, we believe that substantive advice on clear timelines, objectives and frameworks for resolving pending issues from the good offices of the Secretary-General would add value to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). That would be in line with paragraph 11 of the resolution, in which the Security Council

“[r]eaffirms its determination to examine practical ways and means to secure the full implementation of its relevant resolutions.”

We take note of the steps taken by the Israeli Supreme Court decision to halt eviction in Sheikh

Jarrah in East Jerusalem. That is a welcome de-escalation move ahead of Ramadan and, more importantly, a recognition of how such unresolved issues can quickly escalate, given the events of May. In the interest of the promotion of peace and security, there is a need for all parties concerned to support the daily dividends of constructive grass-roots efforts to mitigate — practically and consistently — these cycles of conflict.

In conclusion, Kenya urges both parties to exert collective efforts to launch peacebuilding and peacemaking processes that will demonstrate commitment to the desirable and obtainable objectives of resolution 2334 (2016).

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I join others in expressing appreciation to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing to the Council, as well as his commitment to the search for lasting peace in the Middle East.

The briefing, as always, gives us much to consider and requires of the Council a substantial engagement in support of the political processes that are required to find peace in the Middle East. The concerns related to the status of implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) remain, as we hear reports of forced evictions, demolitions and expansion of settlements, acts of violence against civilians, settler-related violence and provocative acts by both sides.

However, Ghana welcomes the initiative for the recent high-level diplomatic contacts and dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership, and we implore both sides to maintain the momentum and engage in meaningful and transparent dialogue that is reflected in significant policy changes on both sides.

Despite the limited but hopeful developments, there are ongoing concerns that grate our collective sensibilities. In that regard, I would like to focus the Council's attention on the dire humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Gaza and East Jerusalem, and highlight the need for urgent humanitarian relief and economic assistance to the Palestinian people. I also wish to appeal for the further easing of humanitarian access to allow inhabitants in the occupied Palestinian territories to have access to the basic supplies they require and to live a dignified life.

Ghana reaffirms its belief that the path for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East runs through the

two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the 1967 lines.

We recognize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as well as the aspiration of the countries of the region to live in peace and harmony and call on the parties to desist from unilateral actions that have the tendency to undermine mutual trust and goodwill, which are vital ingredients if progress is to be made on the peace process.

We urge both parties to resolve all differences through dialogue and negotiations in a comprehensive and mutually acceptable manner and call for the implementation of the provisions and outcomes of the 1991 Madrid Conference, the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, subsequent agreements and all United Nations resolutions regarding the question of Palestine.

Despite prevailing global dynamics, we encourage the continuing engagement of the Middle East Quartet and the wider international community in helping the parties to implement their obligations for the settlement of the Middle East problem.

In conclusion, I underscore the need for cooperation and unified action within the Council, which is critical to the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, but also to the world at large, and reiterate Ghana's commitment of support to find a lasting solution to the Middle East problem.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing today.

Let me start by once again reinforcing the need to prevent a return to the violence we witnessed in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories last year. We share concerns about the escalating tensions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We must all work to take steps to avoid exacerbating tensions. In that regard, we welcome the announcement by the Israeli Police Commissioner that there will be a pause on demolitions in East Jerusalem during Ramadan.

We are concerned about the rise in security incidents and violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the death of nine Palestinians this month by Israeli security forces live fire. Where there are accusations of excessive use of force, we advocate swift, transparent investigations. Israel has a legitimate

right to self-defence. In exercising that right, it is vital that all actions are proportionate.

We welcome the dismantling of West Bank outposts by the Israeli authorities, including Maoz Esther, Givat Habaladim and Battir. The violence from settlers against Israeli security forces during the operations is inexcusable. Outposts are illegal under international law and Israeli law and are an obstacle to peace.

As we celebrated International Women's Day this month, we were reminded of the importance of ensuring equitable access to a quality education for all children and the power of educating girls as a tool for peace. We continue to urge the Palestinian Authority to pass the necessary legislation to protect and advance women's rights, and we reiterate our strong support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its vital work to help Palestinian refugee children, including girls, fulfil their potential.

The United Kingdom remains focused on work to improve the economic situation in the West Bank and Gaza. We welcome the beginning of the electronic value-added tax pilot and ongoing work between the parties towards a more efficient tax system. The United Kingdom encourages both parties to continue to make progress on other priority fiscal issues and to reconvene the long-stalled Joint Economic Committee in order to enhance dialogue on economic issues.

Finally, as we look towards the convergence of religious holidays next month, the United Kingdom strongly discourages unilateral actions that may increase tensions. We reiterate our support for the historic status quo in the Old City of Jerusalem. That is the best means of preserving the right to peaceful worship for the three Abrahamic faiths.

It is only through dialogue that we can improve stability across the region and build the foundations for peace. The United Kingdom remains firmly committed to a two-State solution, based on 1967 lines and with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing on the latest developments in the Middle East, including with regard to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

This meeting is being held in a particularly tense regional context, with Ramadan, Passover and Easter approaching.

Violence in recent weeks, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories and in the Old City of Jerusalem, has raised fears of a deadly escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Many of these violent incidents are increasingly taking place among civilians, particularly young people, as Tor Wennesland noted in his briefing earlier.

The climate of tension, exacerbated by brutality, the disproportionate use of force against civilians, the expansion of settlements and the actions resulting therefrom are likely to undo any prospect for peace and fuel the cycle of instability. We encourage the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to exercise restraint and invest in peaceful coexistence, while giving peace a greater chance. In this respect, the Israeli Supreme Court's decision to suspend the evictions of four Palestinian families in the sensitive Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem sets the tone for appeasement.

In addition to the worrying security situation, the humanitarian and economic situation in the Palestinian territories remains alarming, owing to the unprecedented financial crisis facing the Palestinian Authority. Without significant financial support, civilian populations risk facing extreme vulnerability, which has a domino effect on the deteriorating security environment, with the consequent loss of access to health-care services, education and food. This situation would only dramatically increase social unrest, violence and poverty on the ground.

The need for trust between Israel and Palestine, as well as the need for dialogue, is therefore imperative, with a view to easing tensions, seeing the renunciation of provocations and preserving human lives. The dialogue between Israel and Palestine must be serious, in good faith and as inclusive as possible. Accordingly, the recent meeting between the Israeli Foreign Minister and a delegation of senior Palestinian Authority officials, the second such public meeting in less than two months, sends an encouraging signal.

The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires the rapid resumption of negotiations for a real and lasting peace, based on respect for the principles agreed upon by the parties and on the application of the rules of international law. This solution must also be based on the legitimate aspiration and rights of

the Palestinian people to self-determination and on addressing Israel's security concerns.

We reiterate our vision of a two-State solution, which cannot be achieved without the firm political commitment and will of the parties, as well as the active support of the international community, including regional actors. In this regard, the recent meeting between the King of Jordan and the Israeli Foreign Minister is a step in the right direction. Likewise, the role played by the King of Morocco, in his capacity as Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, in preserving the special status of the Holy City as a symbol of the common heritage of humankind, of the peaceful coexistence of the three monotheistic religions, and as a place of dialogue and mutual respect, is to be commended.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our support for the Special Coordinator, Mr. Tor Wennesland, and for his efforts aimed at reviving the peace process between Israel and Palestine, thereby contributing to stability in the region.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Madam President, I am happy to see you back in the chair as President of the Security Council. I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Resolution 2334 (2016) represents a milestone in the attempts by the Council to find a way out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What we heard is worrying and goes against what the Security Council is seeking to achieve. Continued violations of core provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) make a bad situation worse and threaten the prospects for peace and stability in the region.

While we believe that the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) is important, it may not, in and of itself, be sufficient for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. But it is a necessary step in the right direction. We therefore welcome any step that promotes compliance with the resolution. In the meantime, we oppose all unilateral decisions and actions that prevent its full implementation, including unlawful evictions and demolitions. The decision of the Israeli Supreme Court with regard to four families under the eviction process inspires hope for the law to prevail.

Provocations and acts of violence by either side are unacceptable and must be properly investigated. They add to the grievances that need to be overcome

for Israelis and Palestinians to work for lasting peace with one another. They only exacerbate an already tense situation that can easily provoke another outburst of uncontrolled violence. In this respect, we firmly condemn rocket launches and balloons from Gaza. Israel's response in its right to self-defence must also be proportionate.

We continue to believe that settlements and their further expansions are wrong and illegal under international law, and they threaten the possibility of a future viable Palestinian State at peace with a democratic and secure Israel. What we need instead are concrete, continued and sustained steps that defuse tensions and pave the way for the search for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, which will make a two-State solution, with Jerusalem as a shared capital, not just a distant and dimming hope, but a reality.

We continue to believe that civil society is a vital part and hallmark of a democratic society and a pillar for fostering a culture of mutual understanding. We are convinced that it is also key in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict, as civil society actors have a vital role to play in fostering a culture of dialogue and mutual recognition. The uncertainty about the designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations casts doubt upon the work of other non-governmental organizations and makes donors reluctant to fund their activities. This is part of a disturbing trend of shrinking civil space for civil society, especially in Gaza, but also in the West Bank.

We support the preservation of a status quo with regard to the holy sites in Jerusalem. These sites must serve their function to unite people of all faiths and allow us to find strength in our differences rather than reason for division and conflict. We call on all sides to show self-restraint and mutual respect, especially during the holy month of Ramadan, as well as during Passover and Easter celebrations, and avoid actions that fuel tension and confrontation.

Let me conclude by saying that what we desire is not a secret: we want a negotiated and just solution where Israelis and Palestinians enjoy full and equal rights with complete respect for one another's concerns and aspirations. This would not only benefit the Israelis and the Palestinians, but it would bring about enormous positive ramifications for the region and for the world at large.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing, and we also take note of the Special Coordinator's 8 March statement on the security situation in the West Bank.

Like the Special Coordinator, China is concerned about the recent deterioration of the security situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and is deeply saddened by the casualties on both sides caused by the violence, especially Palestinian children. The protection of children in armed conflict is not an empty slogan but an unshakeable moral responsibility and an international obligation that must be fulfilled. We call for a thorough investigation of the recent violence and for effective accountability.

The upcoming month of April will involve the celebration of important holidays for both Muslims and Jews. We call on all parties concerned to abstain from provocative words and deeds, refrain from incitement to violence, jointly uphold and respect the historical status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem, make every effort to prevent the situation from escalating out of control and strive not to allow the conflict in Gaza to repeat what happened last year.

Settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories violate international law, disrupt the contiguity of the occupied Palestinian territories, squeeze the living space of the Palestinian people and affect the prospects for achieving the two-State solution. We are deeply concerned about the continued expansion of settlements in the occupied territories, the growing number of settlers and their increasing violence. We once again call on Israel to halt the expansion of settlements, stop the eviction of Palestinians, cease the demolition of Palestinian homes and create conditions for the development of Palestinian communities in the West Bank, as called for in resolution 2334 (2016).

The international community should continue to help Palestine alleviate its fiscal crisis, improve its economy and livelihood and fight the coronavirus disease. We support Palestinian-Israeli coordination on economic and civilian matters, and we call on Israel to lift the blockade of Gaza as soon as possible.

China has always been concerned about the well-being of the Palestinian people. Last month, China and Egypt jointly provided 500,000 vaccine doses to the people of Gaza. China's 200,000 vaccine doses for refugees outside Palestine have also been delivered

to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in three batches, arriving in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Ultimately, the Palestinian issue needs a long-term settlement on the basis of the two-State solution. We hope that the two sides maintain the positive momentum of the recent high-level contacts, gradually build up mutual trust and resume dialogue on an equal footing at an early date. We call on the international community to make greater efforts to advance the Middle East peace process on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and other international agreements. The Security Council should heighten its sense of urgency, effectively shoulder its responsibilities and take constructive action towards a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli issue.

The current security situation in Europe is of concern to all sides, but the Palestinian-Israeli issue is just as important. The question of Palestine must not be marginalized, let alone remain unresolved for a long time. Recently, the Special Envoy of the Chinese Government on the Middle East Issue visited the region and engaged extensively with all parties on the Palestinian issue to promote consensus-building for peace. China will continue to work with the international community to make unremitting efforts and to do its part to contribute to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement as the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his comprehensive briefing and for presenting the twenty-first report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

Our discussion today comes as the region approaches the month of Ramadan, as well as other upcoming holy occasions for the three Abrahamic religions. Such occasions represent an opportunity to promote the values of peaceful coexistence among different religions. As Mr. Wennesland said, we hope that the upcoming period will be one of calm, in contrast to the traumatic events that occurred in the occupied Palestinian territory at this time last year. We also support his call to the parties concerned to work to reduce tensions, especially in the city of Jerusalem,

and refrain from taking any action that may exacerbate tensions and increase escalation. That also requires the parties to make proactive and coordinated efforts to consolidate and preserve the basis of the recent truce.

In that regard, my country appreciates the efforts of Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, to reach a common understanding that ensures calm and peace during the upcoming period. While we call on all parties to exercise restraint, especially in the light of other tensions in the region, we stress the need to respect the freedom of Palestinians to practise their religious rites and the seriousness of violating them or violating the sanctity of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also commend the efforts of the Arab Republic of Egypt to resume the reconstruction process in the Gaza Strip and to maintain calm there.

With regard to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), reports confirm that we have witnessed an upsurge in settlement activities in recent years, which significantly affects the lives of the Palestinian population and constitutes a violation of international law. The continued settler violence in the occupied Palestinian territories is particularly worrisome. We express further concern over the persistent forced displacement of Palestinians and the demolition and confiscation of their homes and properties. Such acts only further worsen Palestinians' humanitarian conditions and undermine development efforts. We support Special Coordinator Wennesland's call to halt all such practices and safeguard the prospect of a two-State solution, whereby Israel must uphold its responsibilities in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

As part of the presidency's pledge to shed light on the pandemic, which started two years ago, we would like to note that a mere 49 per cent of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories have been vaccinated against the coronavirus disease. That requires addressing the challenges that prevent achieving the desired vaccination rate.

We stress the need to empower Palestinian women in all sectors and support projects and programmes that meet their needs given their important role in promoting stability and development, as well as the conflict's disproportionate impact on them.

Similarly, we emphasize the important role of young people in laying the foundations for peace and

reinforcing the values of peaceful coexistence among the two peoples. Realizing those objectives requires tapping into their potential and investing in their capabilities to enable them to build a brighter future that serves them and their communities.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates reaffirms its historic commitment to supporting an independent, sovereign State of Palestine based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and other agreed international parameters. Genuine efforts are needed to relaunch a

credible peace process that leads to the achievement of a two-State solution, with the State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security and under mutual recognition.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.