



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9021st meeting

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Dame Barbara Woodward	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	France	Mrs. Gasri
	Gabon	Mr. Biang
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	India	Mr. Raguttahalli
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico	Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu
	Norway	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
	United States of America	Mr. Mills

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, the Maldives, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

Mr. Wennesland is joining via video-teleconference.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Silvio Gonzato, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations; and His Excellency Mr. Neville Gertze, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: Allow me to begin by wishing all Muslims a blessed Ramadan. I also extend my best wishes to all Christians and Jews who celebrated Easter and Passover.

When I briefed the Council in March (see S/PV.9000), I expressed my hope that this month and its holy days would be a peaceful and celebratory time. Sadly, this period has been marked by violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and terror attacks in Israel, which have killed and injured scores of civilians. In Jerusalem, the situation remains relatively calm, despite inflammatory rhetoric and violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces that have taken place at the Holy Sites.

In Gaza, the launching of rockets is undermining the fragile stability that has prevailed since last May. Let me be clear — there is no justification for acts of terrorism or violence against civilians. Violence, provocations and incitement must stop immediately and be unequivocally condemned by all.

I also reiterate that political, religious and community leaders on all sides must continue to do their part to reduce tensions, uphold the status quo at the holy sites and ensure that their sanctity is respected by all. In this regard, I welcome statements by senior Israeli officials reiterating Israel's commitment to upholding the status quo and ensuring that only Muslims will be allowed to pray on the Holy Esplanade.

At this sensitive and volatile moment, Israeli and Palestinian leaders have made some commendable efforts to ease tensions, condemn attacks and rein in violence. Regional and international partners, such as the United Nations, Egypt and Jordan, have engaged to help restore calm at the holy sites and ensure continued access for Muslim worshippers. These efforts should continue.

Daily violence escalated sharply in the occupied Palestinian territory and in Israel.

In the occupied West Bank and Israel, 23 Palestinians, including three women and four children, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis and other incidents, and 541 Palestinians, including 30 women and 80 children, were injured. Israeli settlers or other civilians perpetrated some 66 attacks against Palestinians resulting in nine injuries and damage to Palestinian property.

In all, 12 Israelis, including two women, as well as three foreign nationals, were killed and 82 Israelis, including some six children and four women, as well

as one foreign national, were injured by Palestinians in shooting, stabbing and ramming attacks, clashes, the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails and other incidents. In total, Palestinians perpetrated some 104 attacks against Israeli civilians resulting in injuries and damage to Israeli property.

Over two weeks, four terrorist attacks took place inside Israel — the deadliest such attacks in years. On 22 March, an Israeli Arab man killed four Israeli civilians, including two women, in an attack in the Israeli city of Be'er Sheva, before being shot and killed by Israeli civilians. A week later, two Israeli Arab men carried out a shooting attack in the Israeli city of Hadera, killing two Israelis and injuring four others, before being shot and killed by the Israeli security forces.

On 29 March, a Palestinian man from the West Bank shot and killed three Israelis and two foreign nationals, injuring 10 others in a shooting attack in the city of B'nai Brak in central Israel. The assailant was shot and killed by the Israeli police. On 7 April, a Palestinian from the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank carried out a shooting attack in the centre of the Israeli city of Tel Aviv, killing three Israeli civilians and injuring 14. Following an intensive manhunt, the assailant was shot dead by Israeli security forces on 8 April.

Following the attacks in Israel, Israeli authorities significantly reinforced Israeli security force presence along the separation barrier and increased military operations inside the occupied West Bank.

On 31 March, two Palestinians, including a 16-year-old boy, were killed during clashes and armed exchanges in Jenin during an Israeli security force search-and-arrest operation; 20 Palestinians were injured.

On 10 April, Israeli security forces shot and killed an unarmed Palestinian woman with a vision impairment who ran with raised arms towards an Israeli security force checkpoint near Husan. Israeli authorities said they were investigating the incident.

On the same day, Israeli security forces shot and injured a 16-year-old Palestinian boy, who later died of his injuries.

On 13 April, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy was shot dead by Israeli security forces during clashes in Husan. The Israeli security forces said that boy had attempted to throw a Molotov cocktail at Israeli security forces when he was shot — an account disputed by Palestinian eyewitnesses.

Palestinians were also killed by Israeli security forces during search and arrest operations, exchanges of fire and clashes, including on 2 April and 9 April in Jenin; 10 April in Bethlehem and Jenin; 13 April in the village of Silwad, near Ramallah, and in Nablus; 14 April in Kafr Dan, near Jenin and 18 April in the village of Yamoun, near Jenin.

Other Palestinians were shot and killed, reportedly in the context of attacks or attempted attacks by Israeli security forces or Israeli civilians on 31 March near the settlement of Neve Daniel and on 10 April in Hebron.

On 15 April, during the early morning hours, a large number of Palestinians gathered at the Al-Aqsa compound. Some Palestinians threw stones, fireworks and other heavy objects towards Israeli security forces, which used stun grenades, sponge-tipped bullets and batons, including against some bystanders. In the midst of these clashes, several dozen Palestinians entered a mosque in the compound, with some continuing to throw stones and fireworks towards the Israeli security forces. Following a standoff with those inside, Israeli police entered the mosque and arrested those barricaded inside. During the clashes, some damage was caused to the structure of the mosque.

Some 160 Palestinians were injured, including four women, 27 children and at least one journalist, while some 400 were arrested, most of whom were released later that day. According to Israeli security forces, three policemen were injured during the clashes. The conduct of Israeli forces has raised concerns about possible excessive use of force. Importantly, noon prayers subsequently took place that day without major incident.

Over the following days, there were additional, though more limited clashes at the holy sites and in and around the Old City. Some 52 Palestinians were injured by Israeli security forces in these incidents and 10 Israelis were injured by Palestinians in two separate incidents. On 19 April, Israeli authorities decided, in line with past practice, that non-Muslims would not be allowed to visit the Holy Esplanade between Friday, 22 April and the end of the month of Ramadan.

Despite the tensions, overall, hundreds of thousands of Muslims, Jews and Christians have been able to celebrate the holy days in and around the Old City in relative peace and without further escalation.

I reiterate that perpetrators of all acts of violence must be held accountable and brought swiftly to justice. Security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. I am particularly appalled that children continue to be killed and injured. I urge the Israeli authorities to conduct thorough and transparent investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

Against the backdrop of continued settlement activities and ongoing pressure on Palestinian communities in the occupied West Bank, as well as heightened tensions, settler-related violence remained high, particularly following the terrorist attacks in Israel.

On 10 April, dozens of Palestinians vandalized and set fire to a Jewish holy site located in Area A in the West Bank city of Nablus, before being dispersed by Palestinian security forces. Vandalizing religious sites is unacceptable and has the potential to further escalate the situation. I call on all parties to ensure religious sites and places of worship are respected and protected.

Turning to settlement-related developments, on 27 March, members of an Israeli settler organization accompanied by Israeli police took over the first floor of a historic building in Jerusalem's Old City. The settlers' seizure took place amid ongoing legal proceedings over ownership of the property between the settler organization and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. In a statement issued on 29 March, the Patriarchate called the seizure a threat to the continued existence of a Christian Quarter in Jerusalem.

On 19 April, thousands of Israeli activists, accompanied by right-wing members of the Knesset, marched to the evacuated Homesh settlement, demanding its re-establishment. Prior to the march, Israeli security forces temporarily closed the main road and blocked the entrances to several villages, prompting clashes with Palestinians. At least 14 Palestinians were injured by rubber-coated metal bullets. I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and constitute a marked obstacle to peace.

Ahead of and during the month of Ramadan, there was a slowdown in the demolition of Palestinian homes. Overall, the reporting period saw Israeli authorities demolish, seize or force owners to demolish 27 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and one in occupied East Jerusalem, displacing eight Palestinians,

including four children. The demolitions were carried out due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. On 30 March, Israel's Supreme Court decided to postpone by some six months a ruling on the potential demolition of 38 homes in the Palestinian village of Al-Walajeh, near Jerusalem, citing progress in discussions between the Palestinian residents and Israeli authorities on advancing a building and zoning plan for the village. I call on Israeli authorities to end the demolition of Palestinian property and the displacement and eviction of Palestinians, and to approve additional plans that would enable Palestinians to build legally and address their development needs.

Turning to Gaza, the security, humanitarian and economic situation remains deeply troubling. Palestinians in Gaza continue to suffer as a result of years of severe economic and movement restrictions resulting from the Israeli closure regime, as well as the nature of Hamas rule and the ongoing threat of violence. After several months with no rocket fire, militants in Gaza launched five rockets towards Israel, with one landing in the Israeli town of Sderot and causing property damage. The others were intercepted by the Iron Dome system, landed short in the Strip, or landed in open areas inside Israel.

In retaliation, the IDF conducted air strikes against what it said were Hamas targets in the Strip, with no injuries reported. Following the rocket launches, Israeli authorities closed the Erez crossing into Israel to Palestinian workers and traders on 24 and 25 April. I reiterate that the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centres violates international law and must stop immediately.

Some positive developments related to movement and access in and out of the Strip took place during the reporting period. On 27 March, the Israeli Government approved the issuance of 20,050 permits for Palestinian workers from Gaza to enter Israel, in addition to some existing 2,500 permits issued for traders and businessmen. The Government also allocated some \$12 million to improving the crossings between Gaza and Israel, as the amount of goods exiting Gaza remains at a relatively high level.

In a separate decision, Israeli authorities approved essential medical equipment, such as mobile X-ray machines, and reduced restrictions on the import to Gaza of 56 communications items, many of them

routine. Separately, following agreement by the Palestinian Authority and Israel, preparations are under way to facilitate under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism the entry into Gaza of dual-use materials and equipment needed for the repair and maintenance of Gaza's fishing boats as part of revitalizing the fishing sector. The success of this initiative should pave the way for a similar easing of restrictions in other sectors.

Reconstruction of homes fully or partially damaged during the May 2021 escalation is continuing, albeit slowly, largely owing to lack of funds. In a new development, around 3,000 tons of rebar entered Gaza through the Egyptian-controlled Rafah crossing during the reporting period. While these developments are welcome, additional steps are needed by all parties to further enhance access and trade and to improve the prospects for economic development of the Strip.

The fiscal condition of the Palestinian Authority remains precarious. While Palestinian Authority revenues have risen in recent months, expenditures continue to grow, and adequate budget support from donors has not been forthcoming, making it increasingly difficult for the Authority to address outstanding debts and make critical investments in the economy and its people.

Following the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, rising prices and market disruptions, which are taking place across the Middle East, threaten food-security levels of vulnerable families in the occupied Palestinian territory. The cost of the quarterly United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) distribution has increased by 42 per cent since the end of 2021 in Gaza where the United Nations accounts for nearly 60 per cent of food supply, which, in addition to meeting needs for food security, is a key stabilizing factor. Spiking international prices for construction materials will also affect reconstruction efforts all over Palestine and in Gaza. Without additional funding, the World Food Programme and UNRWA will not be able to meet the food needs of the Palestinian population this year, which could have a destabilizing impact across the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip. I echo the Secretary-General's appeal for urgent support for UNRWA, which continues to face a critical financial situation.

The parties and regional and international partners must work in concert to move the Palestinian Authority

onto a firmer fiscal footing while addressing broader systemic issues. While we have seen some encouraging initiatives and Israeli-Palestinian cooperation to address economic challenges in recent months, a coherent strategy is needed to ensure that the progress made is not reversed. Policy changes and initiatives to better regulate the economic interdependence between Israelis and Palestinians and to promote more effective and integrated governance are much needed.

Turning to the region, on 21 April, Jordan convened a ministerial meeting of the Arab League to discuss tensions at the holy sites. The ministerial committee issued a statement following the meeting calling for the respect of the legal and historic status quo.

The ceasefire between Israel and Syria is being maintained in a volatile security situation characterized by violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement between Israel and Syria by the parties. As always, such developments present the risk of escalation

Lebanon is preparing for parliamentary elections to be held on 15 May. The United Nations continues to support the authorities' operational preparations, encouraging women's political participation and urging campaigning without hate speech. On 7 April, the International Monetary Fund announced a staff-level agreement with the Government of Lebanon that would unlock around \$3 billion in financial aid, subject to the implementation of major reforms. At a sensitive time of ongoing tensions in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, I am concerned by the firing of a rocket across the Blue Line into Israel in the early hours of this morning. No group has claimed responsibility for these attacks. The IDF responded with artillery fire into Lebanon. There were no casualties reported, and I urge restraint on all sides. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon continues to engage with the Lebanese Armed Forces to increase its counter-rocket-launching operations to prevent further such incidents and contribute to stability along the Blue Line.

The violence and spiralling tensions of the past month have underscored yet again that efforts to manage the conflict are not a substitute for real progress towards resolving it. We must work immediately to lower tensions and maintain calm. Alongside that, collective efforts are needed to address the drivers of conflict. Reducing violence and halting settlement activity, while shoring up the Palestinian Authority's fiscal stability and strengthening Palestinian institutions, are

crucial. Steps to improve economic conditions must be implemented in a way that lays a foundation for a return to a meaningful political process. Let me repeat what I said to the Council last week, which is that a serious escalation is avoidable. A sustained calm can open the space for a more serious discussion about further improvements and perspectives, and I urge the parties to maintain calm so that the final week of Ramadan can be celebrated without interruption.

Having said that, we must not lose sight of how vital it is to end the occupation and advance towards a two-State reality. The ultimate goal remains clear — two States, living side by side in peace and security, in line with United Nations resolutions and international law. The United Nations remains committed to supporting Israelis and Palestinians in moving towards that future, even as they address pressing political, security, economic and humanitarian concerns and needs. We will continue to work with the parties and with regional and international partners to achieve that goal.

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

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I congratulate you, Madam President, on your country's stewardship of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing and for his efforts at this critical juncture. I would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all the countries of our region and beyond, as well as to the Secretary-General, for rising in defence of the historic and legal status quo in Jerusalem.

In these sacred weeks, in the holiest of lands, we are reminded of its identity. It is a land of diversity and pluralism, not exclusion and exclusiveness. Everything in its DNA rejects monopoly and discrimination. It is barely visible on the map of the world, but its significance reaches every corner of our globe. And at its heart lies Jerusalem, Al-Quds, where every street and stone is testimony to the unique history to which it stands witness. Each year thousands of Orthodox Christians flock to the Holy Sepulchre to witness the holy fire, the symbol of the resurrection of Christ. Israel has decided to disrupt that millennia-old religious tradition, severely restricting the number of believers allowed to come to the site. And yet Israel claims that

it is upholding the historic status quo. A few days ago, the Israeli occupying force stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque Al-Haram Al-Sharif yet again, shooting at worshippers and desecrating the mosque with military boots and violence. Some 200 Palestinians were wounded, among them women and children, and more than 400 people arrested. And yet Israel claims it is upholding the historic status quo.

Israeli officials are clearly the only people who believe that such actions are anything but a flagrant violation of the historic status quo. When its illegal and violent actions were condemned, Israel resorted to its favourite justification — security. It is the one-size-fits-all justification — security to justify illegal occupation; security to justify forcible displacement; security to justify an inhumane blockade; security to justify killing children on their way to school; security to justify bombing entire neighbourhoods; security to justify attacking our people, our land and our holy sites.

And as if that were not enough to dissuade countries from criticizing Israel, they labelled our worshippers terrorists. That is no surprise, as Israel accuses even our human rights and humanitarian non-governmental organizations and our human rights defenders and peaceful civilian protesters of terrorism. The distortions are endless, offensive and dangerous. Jewish extremists and settlers are not just visitors, as Israel claims. They are in fact pursuing an agenda when they enter Al-Haram Al-Sharif. They are seeking a takeover. How do we know that? We just listen to them. They do not hide their intentions. They proclaim them. When Israeli forces allow them to enter the site and provide them with protection and support, they do it knowingly. Pretending not to understand the outrage provoked by such assaults on Al-Haram Al-Sharif, when each time it triggers the same reaction, is outrageous.

But does not the fact that this situation occurs every year beg one simple question? Why are the occupation forces there in the first place? That is what Israel hopes people will forget — the fact that East Jerusalem is occupied and unlawfully annexed, in breach of the Charter of the United Nations. Israel has no rightful claim or sovereignty over any part of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It has no authority over Al-Haram Al-Sharif, where the historic and legal status quo must be upheld and the authority of the Islamic Waqf and the custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan respected.

We should make no mistake. Israel is not only attacking a Muslim or a Christian holy site, in total disregard for the feelings not only of Palestinian Muslims and Christians but of Muslims and Christians all over the world. It is also targeting the Palestinian identity of the city. That is its true enemy. Israel proclaims the city its eternal and indivisible capital, but Palestinians in the city, and their faith, traditions and existence, are trampled on and viewed and treated as a constant challenge to that proclamation. Israel is the occupier. It feels and acts as such in East Jerusalem. It erects military checkpoints, conducts mass arrests, and forcibly displaces the sons and daughters of this land. It continues its attempt to uproot our nation from its ancestral land. One would think that by now Israel would have understood that there is no power on Earth — I repeat, no power on Earth — that can accomplish such a feat, regardless of how many crimes it is ready to commit.

Every day, Israel kills Palestinians, oppresses Palestinians and displaces Palestinians. Yet somehow it is always outraged when they react, when we react. It then goes on to say that its violent, repressive and cruel actions were justified by their reactions. But history has taught us that regardless of their respective actions, there can be no equating a colonial Power and a colonized people, the occupier and the occupied, the oppressor and the oppressed. There is nothing that justifies colonialism and apartheid, nothing that justifies oppressing an entire nation and depriving it of its right to self-determination.

We are seeking a peaceful path to freedom and remain committed to that. The international community and the Security Council have a responsibility to help us chart that path and not to allow Israel to continue blocking it. They have a responsibility to afford the Palestinian people international protection, including in East Jerusalem, or to provide them with the means to defend themselves against aggression. They have a responsibility to summon the will and the means to end the occupation and the conflict. In the absence of such a horizon, no one can expect anything but more suffering and the bloodshed of innocents.

The Council has adopted resolutions to solve the Palestinian question. Mr. Wennesland told us what the United Nations stands for, which is an end to the occupation and the achievement of a two-State solution on the basis of the 4 June 1967 lines, with, of course, East Jerusalem as our capital. We are grateful to the

international community for that global consensus. What the international community lacks is the political will to implement it with the same stake in it that it shows regarding other issues, and not to be selective or ignore us when it comes to implementing that global consensus and the relevant international law and resolutions.

When we speak of the rules-based multilateral order, we do not mean that one of us gets to set the rules while others have to observe them. Nor do we mean that there are different rules depending on whom they are being applied to. The only multilateral order possible is one based on international law. There is one set of rules, one United Nations Charter, one Fourth Geneva Convention, one Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one set of peremptory norms. Does Israel violate those rules? Does Israel violate Security Council resolutions reflective of those rules? It does, and I am certain that no one around this table can say otherwise.

The question therefore is what has been done to hold Israel accountable for grave violations that have spanned decades. Let me rephrase that. Is it not true that the fact that Israel's impunity has never been truly challenged is the main reason that Israel has persisted in its disregard for international law? Double standards, selective outrage and justice denied will fuel only despair and anger, when what we need is hope. The Palestinian people are asking the Security Council why Israel is allowed to get away with it. How does it get away with murder in broad daylight and while everyone is watching, perhaps in the most-documented conflict in the entire world? Why do some countries come to talk to us about singling out Israel when what most singles out Israel is the fact that it has never been held accountable for its actions, even those that all here condemn?

The international law is crystal clear and the international consensus on how to end the occupation and the conflict has been solid and consistent, thanks to the Council. But there is an Israeli Prime Minister who says no to a two-State solution; who says that there are no occupied territories; who says no to negotiations and the international terms of reference; and who says that what Palestinians need are jobs, not human rights. There is an Israeli Government that continues expanding settlements and consolidating Palestinian Bantustans. What will the Council do about it? Does it not have a role to play? What was the Security Council established

for, if not for the maintenance of international peace and security? Is what is happening in our region not a threat to international peace and security? The Council continues to observe and repeat statements on a just solution to the conflict, but it does nothing. Is it not the Council's job to implement its will and decisions and, above all, international law and the principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations?

We all stand united in our defence of international consensus in international forums, but on the ground, it is Palestinians who are killed, displaced, arrested, besieged and suffering. Their rights are recognized by the Council, but they are denied on the ground — we all know by whom. Settlements are condemned by the Council, but continue to expand on the ground. A two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders was forged by the Council, but it is being destroyed on the ground. The historic status quo has been affirmed by the Council, but it is being undermined on the ground. The fact is that there is no international law-based order if there is no will to enforce the law on the ground. What is a law that does not protect a people when they need it most? What is a law if a bulldozer can challenge it and prevail; if a sniper can ignore it and prevail; if a settler can burn it and prevail? What is a law that has no courts to uphold it and no power to enforce it? We were told that the tools were lacking. Never has that statement been less convincing than today.

I started my speech speaking of the holy fire that manifests itself each year to celebrate resurrection. Palestinians everywhere, every day, embody that holy fire, a light that cannot be extinguished. When some believe that darkness has prevailed, it reignites the skies, revived by a faith and a resilience that cannot be extinguished in our people no matter the trials and traumas they have now been forced to endure for a century. Palestine is our land; and we are here to stay, come what may. The day Israel accepts that fact, peace will become possible. It is the Council's duty to make sure that Israel does not delay that prospect any longer. Peace is done and undone on the ground. Those who want peace should start from Jerusalem. Change reality there, and it will change everywhere.

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

Mr. Erdan (Israel): Last week, for the first time in 30 years, the holy holidays of the three monotheistic religions of the world converged on the same day,

with Passover, Easter and Ramadan celebrated simultaneously by worshippers around the globe. While the holidays were recognized by billions, there was one place where that day held extra-special significance — Jerusalem, Israel's capital and the holy city of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. That special day presented an opportunity for Muslims, Jews and Christians to exercise their fundamental right to peaceful worship in the democratic State of Israel. It was an opportunity to demonstrate how adherents of the three monotheistic faiths could pray side by side in peace.

Yet that opportunity for coexistence was instead used by Palestinian extremists to incite violence. Unsurprisingly, some on the Security Council and within the United Nations were quick to once again embrace the lies and falsehoods. Here is the truth — hundreds of Palestinian terrorists rioting on the Temple Mount posed a threat to both Muslims and Jewish worshippers at the Western Wall, and the Israeli police therefore had to intervene, acting with exemplary restraint, while protecting the people and restoring law and order. Nevertheless, many in the international community called for calm on both sides, a request that is completely detached from reality. It serves only to fan the flame of violence, promote radicalization and reward the thugs inciting the chaos. The very notion that mobs of violent rioters motivated by radical Islamic terror groups could be placed on the same moral scale as a law-abiding democracy making every effort to keep the peace is ludicrous. In fact, such comparisons play directly into the web of lies spun by the terror groups.

These fabrications were woven to exploit international condemnation of Israel for acting precisely as a democracy should, with restraint, respect and minimal force only when necessary, in order to ensure security and freedom of worship. Not only did Israel use restraint when dealing with the mob of Palestinian thugs, we also took far-reaching and substantial steps to de-escalate the situation, implementing lessons learned from the past — including by forbidding Jews from visiting the Temple Mount for the last 10 days of Ramadan and, following recommendations from Israel's security apparatus, prohibiting a march of Israeli flags in the Old City of Jerusalem. Sadly, seeing that some have decided to adopt the narrative of terrorists instead of the truth, I am forced to state the obvious.

First, Israel has always ensured freedom of worship for all religions and always will ensure it. By the way, the Palestinian representative lied with regard to the Christian ceremony.

Secondly, Israel is committed to the protection of holy sites and to the status quo according to which Muslims can pray on the Temple Mount while Jews and Christians may only visit. There is not and never has been any intention to change the status quo.

Thirdly, when violence endangers innocent people and prevents others from exercising their rights, Israel will not remain idle. For that very reason, when terror groups such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine decide to create chaos at holy sites, the Israeli police take action. Israel will not allow any extremist group to violate the status quo or incite violence. Yet while the Israeli police go to great lengths to preserve the sanctity of the Temple Mount, the Palestinian terrorists are the polar opposite. They defile their Mosque with rocks and firebombs; they desecrate it with barricades made of trash; and they sully it with riots and violence, all for the sake of hijacking the holy site and inflaming Jerusalem in order to gain political favour within Palestinian society.

The lies of that false narrative can be easily disproved. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and the truth on the Temple Mount has been captured by countless camera lenses. An abundance of photos and videos have clearly demonstrated that Palestinian terrorists and extremists are the only ones to blame for the violence on the Temple Mount, while Israel's police should be praised for respectfully restoring the peace. In fact, I asked to share those videos here today but was banned from doing so, sadly. The United Nations must change with the times and update its anachronistic regulations to permit the presentation of photos and video footage. Today a picture or video, especially one from a reliable source, is worth a million words. That is one of the reasons why this institution is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Even when the truth is so abundantly clear, Israel is always faulted, and false moral comparisons are made. It is frustrating that just as an ostrich buries its head in the sand and refuses to recognize reality, so international bodies can see the truth with their own eyes but choose not to.

The time has come to stop being an ostrich. The facts are clearer than ever. The Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations has sent Council members

videos depicting the truth that Israel protects the right to worship, while Palestinian terrorists are the ones who endanger it. No one can make distorted moral comparisons between such terrorists and Israel. The narrative of lies carries not a grain of truth in the face of the sources of such overwhelming proof. The only people violating the status quo on the Temple Mount are the Palestinian terror groups inflaming things at the holy sites.

When people blindly accept the narrative that Israel is preventing Muslims from exercising their right to pray, is changing the status quo or is using excessive force, they are embracing the narrative of Palestinian radicals. Once that narrative of lies is spread, the spotlight is given to Palestinian terrorists and their violent actions are only intensified. Sympathy for those false narratives has emboldened Hamas and Islamic Jihad to inflame the situation outside Jerusalem, as well. Throughout the past few days rockets were fired indiscriminately from Gaza at Israeli cities and civilians, and a rocket was fired at Israel from Lebanon just last night. Where is the United Nations and the Council's condemnation of such actions? The escalation is the direct result of Member States spreading terrorist lies when the truth is so clear, and that is why the absurd calls that morally equate both sides must end. But let me be clear. The narrative of lies and the unwillingness to accept any Jewish presence in Jerusalem — not to mention at our holy sites — did not begin just a week ago on the Temple Mount. It began before Israel was even founded, and it remains the main and only obstacle to peace.

Israel is in the midst of a terror wave that has so far claimed 14 lives in Tel Aviv, Bnei Brak, Hadera and Beersheba over the course of a few weeks. While the horrific attacks were perpetrated by various different radical Islamic groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and Islamic Jihad, there is one thing that all of the terrorists share — the desire to murder Jews purely because they are Jews. That deep-seated hatred is not born overnight. It is the result of a culture of hate that has existed for many years under the Palestinian Authority. The incitement that drives Palestinians to become shahids and celebrate the death of innocent Israelis is the main obstacle to peace. Nevertheless, despite the riots, violence, incitement and terror, Israel is making every possible effort to ensure that life continues for both Israelis and Palestinians. Israel has permitted and continues to allow the entry of hundreds of thousands

of Palestinians worshippers to the Temple Mount, while providing work permits to more than 100,000 Palestinians working in Israel.

Considering that the focus of these debates never changes, they should honestly be called “The Palestinian question, rarely including the Middle East”, which would be a better reflection of this debate’s top priority than “The Middle East, including the Palestinian question”, the agenda item’s official title. But seeing that title has still not been officially changed, I want to address a topic of real, critical urgency regarding regional stability that constantly falls by the wayside, despite its importance.

While the Security Council spends the precious time dedicated to the Middle East discussing the lies of Hamas or the Palestinian Authority, a true threat to regional security is growing and may soon cause profound devastation. But that threat is not news to the Security Council. In fact, it is a threat that the Council has committed to addressing numerous times. Yet while resolutions have been adopted and bold declarations made, the United Nations and its bodies have not only allowed the threat to stagnate, but through inaction have enabled it to grow exponentially. Hizbullah, the Iranian terror proxy, was once a terror organization, but today, as a result of global carelessness, it has grown into a terror army.

Sixteen years ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 1701 (2006), which, in paragraph 8, calls for

“the establishment ... of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL”.

Since then, Hizbullah has multiplied its arsenal in Lebanon tenfold, with more than 150,000 rockets and missiles. Hizbullah now has military drones and factories, and the brazenness to launch drones into Israel from the area of operations of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Hizbullah, with the help of Iran, can now convert its rockets into precision-guided missiles. Even the Secretary-General, in a report released on Friday (S/2022/214), said that Hizbullah is the most heavily armed militia in the country and is operating in direct violation of resolution 1559 (2004). Hizbullah has become a State within a State, all under the watch of UNIFIL and the Security Council. In order to prevent disaster, surely the time has come for the Council and its resolutions

and forces to take action and demand accountability from the Lebanese Government.

UNIFIL has an annual budget of half a billion dollars and 10,000 troops. Nevertheless, despite its numbers and clear mandate, it has very limited freedom of movement within its area of operations. When the peacekeeping force dares to stray into areas where there is terror infrastructure — primarily in and around private homes — its entry is restricted, and its members often violently attacked by Hizbullah operatives. That is not a marginalized phenomenon. It is a blatant, organized effort to keep UNIFIL away from Hizbullah’s growing terror capabilities, especially in civilian areas. Sadly, the alarming and unhindered military build-up that the Council is committed to preventing will have far-reaching ramifications for Lebanon.

Hizbullah knows that it cannot defeat Israel on the battlefield, so it builds up its arsenal of rockets and precision-guided missiles for the sole purpose of attacking Israel’s home front, civilians and critical infrastructure. Those rockets, their launch pads and other munitions are sprinkled all across southern Lebanon — UNIFIL’s very area of operations — and they are concealed within and under homes and civilian infrastructure. Hizbullah uses the citizens of Lebanon as human shields for its missiles and rockets. I invite any ambassadors interested in seeing with their own eyes Hizbullah’s use of Lebanese civilian infrastructure as cover for its rocket arsenal to ask the Israeli Mission to send over our detailed intelligence briefing on the matter. While the villages of southern Lebanon have become terror bases and every tenth home is a Hizbullah arms depot, it is now only a matter of time before that critical strategic threat to Israel — second only to a nuclear Iran — will force Israel’s hand. Israel will have to defend its citizens. If action is not taken today, not tomorrow but today, the next conflict with Hizbullah will come at a very heavy cost. The price of today’s neglect will be tomorrow’s destruction.

Tragically, the priorities of this debate, which prevent the true regional threats from being discussed thoroughly, extend far beyond ignoring Hizbullah’s military build-up. Hizbullah represents only one tentacle of terror belonging to an even more menacing threat — Iran. Hizbullah is one of six terrorist proxy armies that Iran funds and arms. And Iran, as the world’s number-one State sponsor of terror, uses those armies to spread death and chaos across the region. As we speak, advanced Iranian centrifuges continue to

spin. The Ayatollah's regime is now mere weeks away from enriching enough uranium from a nuclear bomb. Iran, the Member State openly threatening Israel with annihilation, will have enough uranium for a nuclear bomb in weeks. How is it possible that the body tasked with global security does not dedicate a majority of this debate on the Middle East to the Iranian nuclear threat? Should not preventing radical Islamists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction be a top priority of the Security Council? We should try to imagine what the Middle East will look like when Iran's terror proxies can operate under a nuclear umbrella. Will UNIFIL have any freedom of operation once Hizbullah gets its hands on tactical radiological weapons or has the protection of Iran? How much bolder will the Houthi attacks on international trade routes and civilian infrastructure be once they have nuclear backing? While the world continues to take a passive approach to that very real and terrifying threat, Israel will not stand idly on the sidelines. Israel has full freedom to act anywhere, at any time and with no constraints in order to defend its security and its existence.

We are living in an area of distressing instability. Nevertheless, we still sit here today discussing the false narrative that radical Palestinians wanted us to focus on. When the democratic State of Israel is put on an equal footing with terror organizations, the false narrative of extremists becomes legitimized, and the terrorist violence only intensifies. That cycle must end. While these debates remain focused entirely on Israel, the Middle East is becoming a tinderbox. That is a wake-up call, and, unfortunately, there may not be many more before the region erupts. The time has come to repair the Middle East. The time has come for the Security Council to take real action. The time has come for us all to work together to ensure a brighter future. The State of Israel implores all those present to work towards a stable Middle East and a stable world.

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

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. The United States supports his continued close engagement with all parties to promote calm and to foster dialogue.

As we just heard, this month billions of people around the globe celebrate Ramadan, Passover and Easter. Those holidays are a reminder of our

shared humanity and compassion. Unfortunately, we have witnessed a deeply concerning increase in violence during what should be a period of reflection, introspection and communal celebration.

The United States is particularly concerned by the recent violence in Jerusalem on the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/ Temple Mount, which should be a site of peace and tranquillity. We appeal to all sides to exercise maximum restraint, avoid provocative actions and rhetoric and preserve the historic status quo. We urge Palestinian and Israeli officials to work cooperatively to lower tensions and ensure the safety of everyone, and we welcome the recent steps taken in that regard. We acknowledge the special role that is played by Jordan as the custodian of Muslim holy places in Jerusalem and its engagement with all parties to prevent further escalation.

The recent spate of violence only underscores the need to further expand dialogue and pursue paths to peace. The United States condemns the rocket launches from Gaza and Lebanon by militant groups that are seeking to exploit the situation in Jerusalem to advance their narrow interests. We must all condemn such actions, which risk further destabilizing the situation.

The United States is engaged diplomatically with all sides, including through outreach by our Secretary of State. Our Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Yael Lempert, and Deputy Assistant Secretary Hady Amr also travelled to the region to work with the parties and the neighbouring countries to promote calm.

During today's open debate, I expect many Members will offer their own support for the region, but I would urge them to provide more than just rhetorical support. In Gaza, the need for humanitarian relief, reconstruction and recovery remains acute. Due to President Putin's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, food insecurity could worsen even further in the coming weeks in both Gaza and the West Bank as prices of food, fuel and other commodities rise. During the historic Negev summit, leaders involved in normalization discussed how they could support Palestinians in concrete ways and have a positive impact on the daily lives of Palestinians. In that vein, we encourage all Member States to provide concrete assistance, including financial contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to help meet the needs of vulnerable Palestinians.

In conclusion, the United States reiterates its firm belief that both Israelis and Palestinians are entitled to equal measures of security, freedom, opportunity and dignity. But the realization of that vision will require good-faith efforts by the parties and the generous support of the international community. Dialogue, negotiation and cooperation can create the path to a better future for all. They can keep alive the prospects of a two-State solution, in which a democratic and Jewish Israel lives in peace and security alongside a viable and prosperous Palestinian State. The United States remains firmly committed to a two-State solution and will continue pushing for and pursuing a lasting and sustainable peace that benefits Israelis and Palestinians alike. I hope that all Council members will join us in supporting a pathway to peace.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his remarks and for all his efforts to calm tensions on the ground.

Our first and foremost priority must be to avoid a new escalation, such as we saw in May last year. All parties, including political and religious leaders, must contribute to lowering tensions. The integrity of the holy sites and the historic status quo in Jerusalem must be upheld and fully respected, and we acknowledge Jordan's important role in that regard.

Those with influence on the ground should have access to adequate channels of communication that can be used to avoid misunderstandings. Dialogue between religious leaders should also resume. Stun grenades, rubber bullets and Molotov cocktails have no place inside a mosque. Israeli security forces must act proportionally and in line with international law. All civilians must be protected, especially children. The human rights of Palestinians and Israelis are equally important.

We condemn all acts of terrorism, including those recently seen in Tel Aviv and other locations in Israel. We also condemn the firing of rockets from Gaza into southern Israel.

While addressing the immediate challenges on the ground, we should also not lose sight of the underlying causes. The Israeli occupation and settlement activity, as well as violence against civilians, are drivers of this conflict. We need more long-term solutions and, most important, a political horizon. Norway remains committed to the two-State solution and will continue its efforts to that end.

Norway will reconvene the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) in Brussels, hosted by the European Union, on 9 and 10 May. Preliminary reports tell us that progress has been made on several of the priority projects that were defined in Oslo last November. The parties and the donors will therefore continue to review their status, and they will set goals for efforts during the second half of this year.

There is a need to strengthen the Palestinian Authority (PA) as a trusted and legitimate Government for its people. There is also a need for well-functioning and financially sustainable institutions, providing essential public services to the Palestinian people. The PA must implement the necessary reforms to achieve that.

Building a foundation for the Palestinian State, within the context of the two-State solution to the conflict, will continue to be our aim.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): Let me start by thanking the Special Coordinator, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing on the present situation in the Middle East and for his efforts in facilitating de-escalation on the Palestinian question.

All of us are deeply concerned by the highly volatile situation in Jerusalem. The violent clashes at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and in the compound of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which begun on Friday, 15 April, during the sacred celebrations of Ramadan, Passover and Easter, require urgent attention and dialogue. We equally note with deep concern the effect on the freedom of worship on the Temple Mount of the activities of those inciting violence or engaging in violence.

The recurrence of tensions and violence around the holy sites, which have resulted in casualties of both Palestinians and Israelis, raises serious concerns for stability in the Middle East region. We therefore call for the preservation and continuing full respect for the historic and legal status quo of the holy sites to preserve the sanctity of the religious grounds, manage access, guarantee freedom of worship and ensure non-interference in the peaceful practice of the monolithic faiths of the Middle East.

Ghana also reiterates its condemnation of the recent violent attacks in Israel against innocent civilians by militants, leading to death and injury. The destabilizing objectives of such militants do not

align with the international consensus for a peacefully negotiated solution.

However, Ghana welcomes the various efforts being made to achieve reconciliation between Israel and her neighbours. We encourage renewed efforts towards the realization of the two-State solution, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side within secure and recognized borders and in peace, on the basis of international law, the tenets of the Charter and the parameters set out in the numerous decisions of the Council.

We nonetheless note with concern Israel's closure of the border crossings used by pedestrians, civilian workers and traders, and urge the easing of the restrictions and the reopening of the crossings as soon as possible, bearing in mind the potential impact of the closure on the ailing Palestinian economy. However, we welcome the commitment expressed by the Israeli Government to ensure unhindered access for humanitarian aid during the period of the closure and ask that more be done to alleviate the living conditions of the Palestinian people. In that regard, we encourage the parties to sustain their engagements on concrete measures that would make a positive impact on the daily lives of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

Taking into account the present situation in the occupied territory and the challenges that exist in the Quartet, the Council must assume its responsibility and facilitate a renewed commitment by the parties to reinvigorating a robust political process that builds on the outcomes of previous initiatives, cognizant of the need to define a clear political horizon in the direction of the two-State solution.

Despite the intractable nature of the conflict, we believe that it is possible to bring finality to the decades-long question of Palestine. Ghana will continue, therefore, to support international efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): Given the trajectory of events in recent weeks, we welcome the briefing from Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland. Kenya also welcomes the high-level outreach by the Secretary-General and the Office of the Special Coordinator, as well as the openness to engage on this issue shown by the top officials of the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Authority and key neighbouring States,

including Jordan and Egypt, as they have an immediate influence on the ground.

Let me reaffirm that Kenya's interest remains to support an end to that protracted conflict, whose damaging effects have proved to be far-reaching.

The ongoing holy days for Muslims, Jews and Christians should be a period of peace and reflection. Yet year after year, those holy days are tainted by recurrent violence that has led to fatalities of civilians, including children.

The many decades of meetings of the Council continue amid a fragile peace characterized by cycles of escalation of violence followed by calls for calm, de-escalation and ceasefires. Perhaps it is time for a shift in approach.

Of course, Kenya appreciates the fact that the recommendations and principles stemming from the Council's long-term engagement, including the comprehensive pillars of resolution 2334 (2016), when fully implemented, will contribute to framing the intent of a negotiated peaceful settlement and the actualization of the two-State solution, with a viable Palestinian State based on the 1967 lines; that the important work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force remains vital to the stability of the subregion; that official and grass-roots channels working to invigorate conditions conducive to peace and mediation and recovery efforts in Gaza, as well as enhanced economic and security cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian authorities, are important practical confidence-building measures; and that the call for a cessation of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and compliance with obligations under international law, including modalities for ensuring the safety and protection of the civilian population, will remain critical.

But that said, the Council, in our view, needs to move beyond the existing cyclic and, in many ways, stagnated state of engagement. I therefore make two propositions on what needs to be prioritized to safeguard the rights and security of both Palestinians and Israelis.

First, strong condemnation must continue against those who call for the application of human rights and freedom but still violate the same within their own communities, among them being Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other affiliated militant

groups. There is need to look deeper and address the mechanisms and sources of weapons and funds that reinforce such activities, including the barrage of rocket attacks from Gaza and the 7 April terror attack in Tel Aviv, which Hamas was quick to welcome and glorify. We reiterate that no cause, for whatever rights, can justify the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Secondly, the right of self-determination for Palestinians is closely linked to the right of freedom for the exercise of religion. That interlinkage inevitably has to form part of the underpinnings of lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The recent riots and acts of aggression in the Old City and in and around the holy sites in Jerusalem, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque, are concerning. The historic and legal status of Jerusalem must be respected and upheld by all parties.

We note the steps taken by political, religious and community leaders calling for the safety of and respect for the sanctity of holy sites. In that regard, efforts to contain the proliferation of provocations, misinformation and incitement by extremists are important to mitigate against actions that serve only to fuel tensions and religious sensitivities, which trigger further destabilization, as witnessed in the events of last May.

We make these observations not to make any false equivalencies but to urge for actual movement, longer-term solutions and tangible outcomes that are in keeping with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Council's resolutions.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, for his informative briefing on the situation in the Middle East region.

We continue to closely monitor developments in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the context of the ongoing clashes at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, in which more than 152 Palestinians were injured after Israeli security forces used tear gas and rubber bullets against the protesters. We express our deep concern over the escalation of tensions that took place against the backdrop of a general surge of violence in Israeli cities, which resulted in the deaths of more than 40 people, both Palestinians and Israelis, over the past month.

In that regard, we note the need to exercise restraint as well as to refrain from provocative steps and unilateral actions in order to prevent a repetition of the scenario of last May, when unrest in Jerusalem escalated into days of violent Palestinian-Israeli military clashes.

We recall once again that violating the historical and legal status quo of the holy sites is unacceptable, and we would highlight the stabilizing role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which is historically responsible for protecting the Muslim holy sites of Jerusalem and ensuring free access thereto.

The situation, as we heard today from Mr. Wennesland, is aggravated by Israel's aggressive settlement policy on the West Bank of the Jordan River and in East Jerusalem, which contravenes international law. For instance, procedures to authorize the expansion of 132 settlements are moving ahead at full speed. Last year alone, construction began on 1,270 settler housing units, and tenders were announced for an additional 3,467 housing units in the West Bank and more than 500 in Jerusalem. More than 140 settlement outposts also remain, even though they are illegal, including under the Israeli legal system.

Settlement plans for the occupied Syrian Golan also create the risk of general destabilization in the region. There has also been a significant increase in settler aggression, amid the acquiescence of the Israeli authorities.

We call on Israel to abandon radical steps to create irreversible realities on the ground, including the demolition of Palestinian homes, the confiscation of their property and arbitrary arrests, and to resume the peace process within the internationally recognized legal framework.

The root cause of the regular outbursts of tension and the cyclical escalation of violence in the Middle East is the unresolved Palestinian question. Recent developments in Jerusalem demonstrate the urgency of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In order to prevent such recurrences of violent confrontation, international and regional efforts should focus on creating the conditions for relaunching direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis within the framework of the agreed two-State solution, with Palestine and Israel coexisting side by side in peace and security on the basis of the 1967 borders.

At the same time, we are convinced of the need to intensify multilateral efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to negotiations. For our part, we continue to engage with Palestinians and Israelis, as well as with international and regional stakeholders. On 18 April, Russian President Vladimir Putin had a telephone conversation with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, during which he emphasized the importance of relaunching direct dialogue between Palestine and Israel, in particular under the auspices of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators.

We reaffirm our readiness to work with our Quartet partners to improve the effectiveness of the work of that format, which has been endorsed by the Security Council. At the same time, we would like to note the importance of coordination between international mediators and regional partners. That is precisely what prompted the Russian initiative to hold an expanded ministerial meeting of the Middle East Quartet with key members of the League of Arab States.

We would also like to emphasize that advancing the peace process is impossible without restoring inter-Palestinian unity on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization. We are ready to work with other interested parties, especially our Egyptian friends, to provide the necessary assistance in that area.

Russia will continue its efforts to build international consensus and to coordinate joint actions in favour of a just solution to the Palestinian problem. We are disappointed that our Quartet colleagues again and again refuse to cooperate on resuming the Middle East peace process. As we see it, attempts to monopolize it and to impose economic peace on the Palestinians as a substitute for the just fulfilment of their aspirations to the establishment of an independent State will not yield concrete results.

Unfortunately, today we again heard attempts to shift the blame and accuse Russia of a looming food crisis, including in the Middle East. We see that as an attempt to divert attention from the failures of Western States and the sanctions and unilateral coercive measures they have introduced, which are precisely the root cause of the current situation. Our Western colleagues could easily solve this problem if they simply chose to do so. There is therefore no need to engage in demagoguery and mislead the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): We strongly endorse the briefing of Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland.

The Council must consider very seriously how to respond to the extremely worrying situation on the ground. In that regard, we echo the Special Coordinators remark that a serious escalation is avoidable.

As the Secretary-General has said, the ongoing holy days for Muslims, Jews and Christians should be a period of peace and reflection. Ireland is deeply concerned about the violence in Jerusalem over the past two weekends, particularly at Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

Ireland reiterates that the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem must be upheld, with full respect for Jordan's custodial role, so as to ensure existing worship rights. Excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israeli security forces exacerbates an already tense situation.

We have heard the Special Coordinator outline the number of Palestinian deaths and injuries in recent weeks in incidents across the West Bank. We remain extremely concerned about the loss of civilian lives, including of women and children. Israel, as the occupying Power, must ensure that its security forces exercise the utmost care in order to preserve civilian life.

It is clear to Ireland that unresolved conflicts, especially those with no discernible political horizon, breed instability, extremism and violence. Ireland joins other members of the Council in condemning terrorism and all attacks against innocent Israelis and Palestinians. We never underestimate the suffering violence causes or the obstacles it puts in the way of peace. Resolving conflict is not to give in to terrorists, but to overcome them.

All of us around this table know that instability, violence and extremism easily spread across international borders. We also know, indeed too well, that a security response alone cannot address the issue. A credible political horizon is both vital and urgent.

Unresolved conflicts between peoples — and long-running occupations — inexorably lead to violations of the rights of individuals, in this case, the rights of the Palestinians to equality, to live without discrimination, to self-determination, to justice and to peaceful coexistence; the rights of Israelis to live in peace and security; the rights of Palestinian and Israeli youth to

build a future where peace is not just an aspiration, but a reality.

Unresolved conflicts are also inconsistent with — and eventually undermine — international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. That is especially true of this unresolved conflict. The Council has a duty to act.

Today we call the Council's attention, yet again, to illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. If there is one thing that could be done now to preserve the possibility of an eventual negotiated solution between the parties and open a horizon for hope, it would be an end to settlement expansion. It is possible, and it should be done.

Not only are continued settlements wrong in and of themselves, but the associated infrastructure encroaches on scarce Palestinian land and resources. We are concerned about the rise in severe settler violence incidents. The Israeli authorities must address these issues comprehensively and without delay. Those responsible for carrying out violent attacks must be held fully accountable.

The Palestinian institutions must work together to build greater democratic legitimacy so that they can, in turn, build the confidence and the esteem of the Palestinian people in their capacity to lead them towards a peaceful and sustainable solution.

The Palestinian people need concrete international support. Conscious of the mounting financial and interlinked humanitarian challenges they face, Ireland will continue to play its part, including through its support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which remains so critical to regional stability. Ireland calls on others, particularly those in the region, to step up and match their political commitments with the financial resources to enable the Agency to continue to provide vital services to Palestine refugees.

Ireland will continue to support Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict through a negotiated two-State solution, on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

Mrs. Gasri (France) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to thank the Special Coordinator for his very detailed briefing and to assure him of France's full support.

France is very concerned at the increase in tensions and violence that have multiplied in recent days in Jerusalem, and which have also claimed many victims in the Palestinian territories. We strongly condemn the terrorist attacks that have killed 14 people in Israel, including one of our compatriots.

France calls for restraint and the avoidance of all forms of violence and provocation. Our shared collective priority must be to prevent an escalation similar to that of May 2021. We call for the utmost vigilance, as the situation remains explosive during this period of religious holidays. In this context, France strongly condemns the rocket attacks that targeted Israel recently. Respect for the status quo at the holy sites is essential, and we recall in turn the essential role of Jordan. We support the Secretary-General's call for the proportionate use of force. Any allegations of disproportionate use must be rigorously and transparently investigated.

Beyond immediate efforts to preserve calm, there is an urgent need to address the root causes of the conflict, of which this escalation is but an all-too-familiar symptom. We have warned since October against the resumption of unilateral measures in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The resumption of settlement activity, as well as record levels of demolitions, evictions and settler violence, are fuelling an explosive situation, which is reinforcing the extremes. We call on the Israeli authorities to put an end to settlement activities and fully respect its responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

France also reiterates the importance of recreating a political horizon for the resumption of negotiations to implement the two-State solution, with Jerusalem as its capital. Without a genuine political process between the parties, the same causes will produce the same effects, and the cycles of violence will be repeated.

In coordination with its partners, France remains mobilized to support all efforts aimed at de-escalating the situation and relaunching the peace process. In this regard, I reiterate our full support for the efforts of the Special Coordinator. We have increased our financial support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in 2022 because the Agency is essential to the stability of the region. We in turn call on all Member States to increase their support.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I would like to begin by thanking Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing, as well as for his Office's tireless efforts towards de-escalation.

It has been less than a week since the Security Council last met to discuss the situation in Jerusalem. The situation on the ground was already extremely serious then and has deteriorated further. In the days following our meeting, we have seen renewed violence, including in and around holy sites in Jerusalem, as well as in Gaza and elsewhere. It is even more regrettable that the escalation is happening during a period of religious celebrations for the three major monotheistic faiths, which is a time to practice peace, tolerance and self-reflection.

The scenes we have witnessed over the last few weeks are shocking and unacceptable. Places of worship should not be battlegrounds, especially a place of such religious significance as the Holy Esplanade. The safety and security of religious sites is an essential component of freedom of religion or belief and should be preserved at all costs. In this context, we recall such initiatives as the 2019 Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites and the 2020 Declaration on Safe Places of Worship adopted by the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Alliance.

The confrontations of May 2021 in Gaza resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths, thousands of injuries and the widespread destruction of infrastructure. Slowly and with great effort from the United Nations, regional partners and from the parties themselves, a measure of stability had been re-established. The sporadic launching of rockets from Gaza over the last few days, which we thoroughly condemn, stands as a reminder of the risk of returning to 2021 and of losing more civilian lives and any progress made since then.

The ongoing violence and provocations are a costly setback — another in a long line of incidents that obstruct the search for a lasting peace. Refraining from incitement and inflammatory rhetoric is of utmost importance at this juncture. We therefore call not only for restraint from political, religious and community leaders, but also for proactive engagement towards de-escalation.

Most importantly, we urge Israeli and Palestinian leaders to engage with each other, be it directly or through the mediation instruments offered by the United Nations and by regional partners. Measures

taken to prevent acts of provocation are also essential. In this context, we welcome the engagement of Israeli authorities with parties on the ground to ease tensions. We also welcome the Israeli assurances on the enduring historical and legal status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem, which must indeed be preserved. As custodian of the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is also an important partner in bringing this crisis to an end.

Amid this tense escalation, Christian holy sites in Jerusalem must be kept safe and open for worship. Bringing the violence to an end and returning to a credible political process is a priority shared by all, and the international community should use all means available to it to support de-escalation.

The current crisis is the result of years of frustration with the lack of progress in finding a lasting solution to the conflict — a solution that seems even more distant when dialogue breaks down and parties take unilateral actions. Bringing the violence to an end and returning to a credible political process within the framework of a negotiated two-State solution is a priority shared by all, and the international community should spare no effort to support it.

Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and welcome the delegations of Israel and Palestine to today's meeting.

Mexico expresses its concern that, despite calls for calm, the situation in the West Bank, and particularly in Jerusalem, continues to be very volatile. It is regrettable that during religious festivities violence has been exacerbated to such a degree. Jerusalem, the cradle of millenary civilizations, should be a place of coexistence and tolerance.

Mexico deplores the violent incursion into religious sites by Israeli forces of law and order. Attacks against churches, synagogues, mosques or any other place of worship are simply unjustifiable. We deplore the number of civilian casualties, including of minors, and urge the Israeli security forces to exercise maximum restraint and to respect the principle of proportionality. Mexico also calls for a redoubling of efforts to guarantee freedom of movement, association and worship.

Recognizing the special status of Jerusalem, and in accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council, in particular resolution 476 (1980), we urge Israel to

refrain from altering the demographic composition, institutional structure and physical, cultural and historical character of Jerusalem.

We call on Israeli elected representatives and religious and social leaders to refrain from all acts of incitement and the use of inflammatory rhetoric. We also call on Palestinian leaders not to use those serious incidents as a justification for promoting anti-Israeli sentiment.

Mexico also urges Israel to redouble its efforts to deter clashes in and around the Old City of Jerusalem.

In addition, Mexico condemns the recent attacks against the Israeli population in such cities as Be'er Sheva, Hadera, Bnei Brak and Tel Aviv, among others, as well as rocket fire from Gaza.

To end such cycles of violence, negative trends on the ground must be reversed. These include the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements and all attendant activities, such as the confiscation of, eviction from and demolition of Palestinian property. Similarly, reconstruction and economic development in Gaza must be facilitated. It is therefore essential to lift the blockade on the Strip.

In other matters, Mexico welcomes the organization of the second phase of municipal elections in the West Bank on 26 March. We hope that general elections will soon be held in the Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem. At the same time, we are concerned about the ongoing unpredictable fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority and call for continued civil, fiscal and security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, Mexico takes note of the holding of the Negev Summit at the end of March. Such initiatives are an opportunity to strengthen regional cooperation and understanding, but they cannot be considered a substitute for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

We welcome the mediation efforts of Egypt, Jordan and Qatar to de-escalate the situation. Mexico reiterates its full support for the work of the Special Coordinator and the Peace Quartet.

Mexico reaffirms its commitment to a two-State solution that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and allows for the consolidation of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Before concluding, let me reiterate the call to focus diplomatic efforts on addressing the historical and root causes of this hostile situation. The resumption of the peace process is indisputably the responsibility of Israel and Palestine. However, the international community and the Council are responsible for promoting and facilitating the process.

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

We are deeply concerned about the series of incidents at holy places in Jerusalem during the ongoing holy month of Ramadan. The historic status quo at holy places in Jerusalem must be respected and upheld. All acts of obstruction, vandalism and desecration, which violate the sanctity of the holy places — be they in Jerusalem, Nablus or elsewhere — must be unequivocally condemned.

We recognize the efforts made by Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and other countries to avert escalation. It is unfortunate that despite those efforts, the situation on the ground has once again deteriorated. We appeal to all parties to stop the provocations and incitement, which could further worsen the situation. We extend our support for all steps that are aimed at reducing tensions and restoring calm. We appreciate the efforts made by the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in that regard.

We are also gravely concerned about the acts of terrorism and incidents of violence in Israel and the West Bank. We have consistently advocated against all acts of terrorism and violence. We strongly condemn such acts, which have resulted in an increasingly high number of casualties, including women and children. It is time to show restraint, desist provocative actions that fuel tensions and abide by resolution 2334 (2016). We urge all sides to take immediate steps for a complete cessation of violence.

The recent rocket fire from Gaza and the retaliatory air strikes by Israel demonstrate the fragility of the situation and the potential for escalation. We call on all parties to de-escalate and respect the ceasefire.

The continued precarious financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains a matter of concern, as the Palestinian refugee community in the Palestinian territories and elsewhere depend on

the services provided by the Agency. I reiterate India's commitment to supporting UNRWA financially and helping the Agency overcome its liquidity crisis. India has already contributed \$20 million over the past four years and has also pledged \$5 million for the UNRWA programme budget for the year 2022.

The ongoing incidents once again underscore the need for the immediate resumption of peace talks between Israel and Palestine. The absence of such direct negotiations is not conducive to securing long-term peace and will only increase the risk of recurrence and the escalation of such violence. An early return to the political dialogue process by launching credible direct negotiations, while addressing the security and economic challenges, is an immediate necessity.

India has consistently called for direct peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine, 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 must prioritize the revival of those negotiations.

In conclusion, I reaffirm India's 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. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his second briefing to the Council in less than a week and commend his tireless efforts to support stability and peace in the region.

We find ourselves at a critical juncture. As previous years have demonstrated, either we will witness a dangerous escalation that will further increase tensions in the region, or the situation will be defused so as to prevent further aggravation. In that context, we condemn the repeated incursions by Israeli forces into the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the assaults perpetrated by settlers in the courtyards of Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

What we need now is restraint, as well as intense and continued regional and international efforts and pressure to de-escalate the situation and introduce constructive initiatives for rebuilding trust between the parties. In that regard, we must use all available

diplomatic means, including existing channels of communication with the parties, to achieve those goals.

As my country's Foreign Minister stressed in his call with his Israeli counterpart, there must be de-escalation, and practices that violate the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque must be stopped. In that context, we appreciate some of the decisions taken recently by the Israeli Government to de-escalate the situation and reduce tensions. We urge that more such decisions be taken to create a stable and sustainable situation that will create a political environment that will allow for Palestinians and Israelis to sit together at the negotiating table and revive the Middle East peace process.

In that context, we also commend the efforts of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Arab Republic of Egypt and the United States in urging the parties to abide by the recent truce and restore calm in the region. We also support the call made at the latest emergency Arab Ministerial Committee meeting regarding the need to relaunch serious and effective negotiations to restore confidence in the feasibility of the peace process and put it on a clear path towards a negotiated solution based on the two-State solution, whereby the Palestinian State would live side by side with Israel in peace, security and mutual recognition. That constitutes a strategic Arab choice and a regional and international necessity.

The current situation, which has already led to hundreds of injuries and arrests among worshippers as well as severe damage to the facilities of the Holy Mosque, underscores the need to ensure the protection of worshippers, while simultaneously refraining from any provocative actions in Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also stress the need for the Israeli authorities to respect the right of Palestinians to practice their religious rites and to have free access to holy places, including the Al-Aqsa and Al-Ibrahimi Mosques.

We once again emphasize the need to preserve the existing legal and historical status quo of the city of Jerusalem and its sanctities in line with international law. We stress the need to avoid undermining the authority and powers of the Jerusalem Endowment Administration and the affairs of Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also emphasize the need to respect the role of the custodianship of the Islamic and Christian holy sites and endowments, which is entrusted to His Majesty King Abdullah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Furthermore, the United Arab Emirates also appreciates all multilateral efforts to protect the city of Jerusalem, including the efforts of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's Al-Quds Committee, chaired by His Majesty King Mohammed VI of the Kingdom of Morocco.

In conclusion, we affirm the United Arab Emirates support for achieving the independence of the Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and other agreed international terms of reference. Our region is in dire need of finding just, comprehensive and peaceful solutions to crises and conflicts, including through joint action, in order to pursue development and meet the aspirations of its peoples for progress and prosperity.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his enlightening briefing, to which we paid close attention. I also welcome the participation of our colleagues the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine in this meeting.

We are holding this debate in a particularly tense context due to the violence witnessed in recent weeks, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories and in the Old City of Jerusalem, which raises fears of a deadly new escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Tensions recently escalated on 15 April as a result of clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli police, culminating in an intervention by Israeli police inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque, leaving many people injured, particularly on the Palestinian side. That serious incident is just one of the violent events that have occurred since the beginning of this delicate period of religious celebrations for the Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities.

We cannot help but be fearful that an easing of the situation is not on the cards as, after days of violence, particularly at the holy sites, there have also been rocket attacks against Israel from a Palestinian enclave and air strikes on the Gaza Strip. That increase in local tensions is all the more notable because it has not happened for months. Many of those acts of violence, characterized by brutality and the disproportionate use of force against civilians, are claiming increasing numbers of victims, including women and children.

My country strongly condemns all such violence, which is not conducive to building lasting peace and

stability between Israel and Palestine. On the contrary, it only fuels frustration, deepens wounds and damages efforts to build trust between Israel and Palestine, which is an indispensable prelude to dialogue and a political settlement to the conflict. It is clear that such a complex situation with intractable issues cannot be resolved by the protagonists' unilateral initiatives, but by constructive dialogue in good faith between the parties.

We endorse the Secretary-General's call on leaders on all sides to calm the situation and immediately cease provocations along the Esplanade of Mosques to prevent any further escalation and to maintain and respect the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

We commend the role of the King of Morocco as Chair of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's Al-Quds Committee in preserving the special status of the Holy City as a symbol of the common heritage of humankind and the peaceful coexistence of the three monotheistic religions, as well as a place for dialogue and mutual respect. It is necessary to preserve the particularities of Jerusalem as a city of peaceful coexistence, as underlined in the appeal for Jerusalem launched on 30 March 2019 by the King of Morocco and Pope Francis.

We also believe that neighbouring countries have an important role to play and, in that regard, we commend the efforts of Jordan and Egypt in seeking to ease tensions on the ground.

It is more important than ever to break the deadlock in which the Council finds itself, as it risks leading to international fatigue with many grave consequences for the future of the peoples of Palestine and Israel.

For decades, Palestine has been in the grip of a major political crisis with devastating consequences, particularly in the humanitarian and economic spheres, in the context of the devastating coronavirus disease pandemic. In the course of the conflict, the Palestinian Authority has gradually lost its capacity to provide essential services to its population, including food, education and health.

The security situation in the occupied Palestinian territories remains precarious and volatile, owing in part to the continuing illegal policy of settlement expansion and the demolition of Palestinian homes and other evictions affecting many Palestinian families. Not only are such actions contributing to the destabilization

of the occupied Palestinian territories and exacerbating the territorial fragmentation of the West Bank, but they are also fuelling anger and the desire for revenge. It is essential to implement resolution 2334 (2016), which calls for an immediate and complete cessation of all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

It is crucial for the parties to build on the momentum for calm. To that end, we hope that the announcement by the Israeli authorities calling on all to support efforts in good faith to restore calm to Jerusalem and ensure freedom of worship on the Temple Mount for both Jews and Muslims will help to ease tensions.

It is high time to activate the channels of diplomacy to ensure that restraint, reason and responsibility prevail. Neighbouring countries and key partners in the region have a crucial role to play in that respect towards relaunching a more credible peace process. We welcome the initiative of the meeting held in Negev on 28 March, at the end of which the participants recognized the need to strengthen multilateral cooperation and resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, inter alia. We encourage the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to show restraint, to refrain from provocation and to invest in peaceful coexistence, as well as to give peace a greater chance.

We reiterate our commitment to the two-State solution, which cannot be achieved without the firm political commitment and the will of the parties, as well as the support of the international community, including regional actors

In conclusion, we reaffirm our support for Special Coordinator Wennesland in his efforts towards ensuring calm and maintaining close contact between the parties, as well as among the key regional partners.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland for his briefing and welcomes the Permanent Observer of the Observer state of Palestine and the representative of Israel at this meeting today.

Recently, major Islamic, Jewish and Christian holidays have followed one another in succession. While worshippers were all looking forward to celebrating their respective religious holidays in peace and security, the Palestinian-Israeli situation has been faced with a new round of tensions and escalation. Enforcement operations by the Israeli security forces

have led to more casualties among Palestinian civilians. The Israeli police has entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque on multiple occasions and has clashed with Palestinians, further aggravating tensions.

Exchanges of rockets between the Gaza Strip and Israel have made the situation more volatile, and attacks against Israeli civilians have also occurred from time to time. Religious holidays should provide an opportunity to realize peace rather than trigger a relapse into hostilities. China condemns all attacks against civilians and violations of the historic status quo at the religious holy sites. Israel and Palestine's security is interdependent and indivisible.

If one side's security is ensured at the expense of the other side's security, it will be impossible to break the cycle of violence or resolve the security conundrum. Only by upholding the common comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security concept can peaceful coexistence be realized. We call on all parties, in particular Israel, to exercise restraint and prevent the situation from further escalating, or even getting out of control.

Israel recently indicated that, from now until the end of Ramadan, non-Muslim worshippers will be banned from the holy site. That is an important step in the right direction. Under international law, the occupying Power has the obligation to take the necessary measures to prevent security threats or provocations against Palestinian civilians. China supports continued communication among the Special Coordinator, Israel, Palestine and other parties to move towards de-escalation.

A ministerial meeting of the League of Arab States was held days ago and issued a communiqué calling on the Security Council to prevent any escalation of violence and restore peace and security. China supports the Arab League and Arab countries in actively playing their respective roles. The Security Council should very seriously take into account the current situation and the calls of Arab States, urgently take action and speak with one voice in playing the role conferred upon it.

The Palestinian question is always at the heart of the Middle East issue. Regardless of developments at the international level, the Palestinian question cannot be sidelined, let alone be forgotten. In that regard, what is lacking is not a grand or just plan, but rather the courage to take action. The fundamental reason for the repeated escalation is the fact that the legitimate

national rights of the Palestinian people have not been realized and that the two-State solution has not been implemented.

Settlements upend the contiguity of the occupied territories, constrain the living space of the Palestinian people and jeopardize the prospects of realizing a two-State solution. China urges Israel, pursuant to resolution 2234 (2016), to halt the demolition of Palestinian homes, the eviction of Palestinian people and the expansion of settlements and create the conditions necessary for the development of Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

We call for the timely and full lifting of the embargo against Gaza and support the work of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and assistance to Palestine to improve its financial situation and people's living conditions. China hopes that Palestine and Israel can continue their high-level engagement for the timely relaunch of dialogue on an equal footing.

We call on the international community to make greater efforts based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international consensus, such as the principle of land for peace, to advance the Middle East peace process. The Security Council should increase its sense of urgency, shoulder its responsibilities in earnest and work actively for a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

In conclusion, I reiterate that China supports the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, supports the peaceful coexistence of Palestine and Israel and the joint development of the Arab and Jewish people. Together with the international community, China will continue its tireless efforts towards a comprehensive and just solution to the Palestinian question.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I would like to express my delegation's appreciation for the briefing by the Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process and his efforts and calls for calm and restraint. We fully support his work.

To have hope is to want an outcome that makes our lives better in some way, since envisioning a better future motivates us to take the steps to make it happen. Therefore, hope is an obligation for the Security Council to play any role it can in helping achieve peace

between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We regret to see that recent developments on the ground are shattering once again the hopes that we must entertain to arrive at a point where just and lasting peace appear on the horizon.

Civilians remain targets of violence. We condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians. Terrorist acts are abominable actions that should be universally and unambiguously condemned, whenever and wherever they occur. Albania understands the legitimate concerns of Israel for its security and the need to respond to terrorist attacks against its civilians. Terror has no place anywhere, and there can be no justification for it. It must never be left unanswered; it must never be condoned. We condemn any incitement to violence whatsoever. Holy places and holy days should be used for prayer and spiritual reflection, as billions are doing across the world. That is, and should always be, incompatible with the incitement to violence or any inflammatory rhetoric. The holy places should not be places or targets of violence or vengeance, but of veneration and reverence.

We remain equally concerned about the loss of life among the Palestinians, especially women and children. Israel must show self-restraint to prevent further escalation, and any excessive use of force leading to civilian casualties must be properly investigated. The response to terrorist acts must be firm. Yet it must be legally rooted, institutionally carried out and always proportionate. We are also concerned that unilateral steps, the expansion of settlements, the demolition of homes and the eviction of Palestinians can only make a bad situation worse. Rising settler violence must stop, and those responsible for it must be held to account. We have and will continue to call for concrete, continued and sustained steps that diffuse tensions.

This grim picture of recent developments should not obscure the fact that there is only one path that is worth fighting for: a reality where Israelis and Palestinians enjoy equal rights and freedoms. We know from past examples that anytime the parties have come together they have been able to make progress, to foresee a track for their future. That is why we welcome high-level contacts between Israelis and Palestinians, which should contribute to renewing confidence and help create conditions towards the relaunch of the peace process as soon as possible.

We believe that direct and meaningful negotiations between the parties, with the help of and facilitation by important stakeholders, within the framework of relevant United Nations resolutions, should lead to the creation of two States: a secure State of Israel and an independent, democratic and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, with mutual recognition, trust and respect, and with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

We know only too well that there is a plethora of grievances. Narratives are utterly opposed, and interests could not be more divisive. But each day passing without contacts, negotiations and meaningful engagement is a day lost to peace, which will only maintain and widen that divisive gulf, with all its known regrettable consequences.

The Abraham Accords have opened important doors for strategic cooperation between Israel and its neighbours. We welcome that and encourage further similar steps. We want to believe that this positive atmosphere will be seen as a strong encouragement to help the parties work together with renewed energy. We commend the active engagement of Egypt and Jordan in favour of peace.

We remain convinced that a sustainable solution to the peace process remains an imperative if Israel and all its Arab neighbours are to be able to construct a robust regional economic and security architecture that will not be evanescent. Its dividends would be felt way beyond the region itself. Therefore, knowing what the solution may be for this enduring conflict to end and continuously failing to do what is required to come closer to that solution is equal to a never-ending misfortune.

How many times has a timid ray of hope appeared somewhere only to have something dark and more powerful come along to brutally crush it, as if hope for the Middle East peace process were always misplaced? Extremists and their agendas will always be around the corner; they should not be allowed to occupy a central place. On the contrary, hope, vision and rationality should be the ingredients to foment progress towards peace. Therefore, we should not yield to failure, since it measure not only in terms of time — of years and decades lost — but also in the loss of human lives and futures and dreams that are squandered, and aspirations that are destroyed.

Peace is made by people and for the people; but people without hope are people without dreams, aspirations and projects. And when you happen to be so tragically dispossessed of anything meaningful in life, you remain stuck in time with nowhere to go.

That is why we see no alternative to a situation where Israelis and Palestinians work and learn to live together by respecting each other's rights and aspirations and by sharing hope and sharing that land they both identify with. As per the words of Martin Luther King: "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."

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

Let me start by thanking Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing, and for the tireless efforts of him and his team on the ground.

The United Kingdom shares the concerns expressed around this table about the fragile situation in Jerusalem. It is crucial that all parties take urgent steps to reduce tensions and avoid further escalation.

Jerusalem is a city holy to so many, and the United Kingdom remains firmly of the belief that maintaining the historic status quo is the only means of ensuring freedom of worship. Amid rising tensions on the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount, we urge the parties to engage and de-escalate the situation, particularly in terms of ensuring sensitive policing. All religious sites must be treated with utmost respect.

We condemn recent terror attacks in Israel, resulting in the deaths of 14 people. Our hearts go out to the families of those killed. We fully support Israel's right to ensure its security, and we unequivocally condemn rocket attacks against Israel by militants in Gaza.

The United Kingdom is also concerned by the number of Palestinians, including minors, killed by Israeli security forces in recent weeks. We continue to urge thorough and transparent investigations into the deaths of Palestinian civilians and call for restraint in the use of force. Israeli security forces have a responsibility to ensure the safety of the Palestinian population.

In conclusion, let me stress that it is not too late to reverse those trends. We must do all we can to prevent a return to the violence we witnessed last May and to rebuild trust and work towards a sustainable and comprehensive peace. The United Kingdom remains

fully committed to a two-State solution and to playing its part in efforts to that end.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Flashing lights on the collars of the microphones will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after four minutes.

I give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Al Omoush (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate you, Madam President, on the friendly United Kingdom's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

The dangerous Israeli escalation at the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif requires international coordination to prevent any illegal escalating measures aimed at altering the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem. The storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by the Israeli army and police in recent days, which led to injuries among worshippers and the arrest of hundreds, is a dangerous and condemnable escalation that threatens to ignite tensions. Those incursions have caused a major rift in the most basic rules of coexistence in the holy land.

Israel, the occupying Power, bears responsibility for what is happening in Jerusalem. It must respect the legal and historical status quo, abide by the provisions of international humanitarian law and international law related to the duties of the occupying Power and not attempt to infringe upon basic principles, especially with regard to the historical status quo at Muslim and Christian holy sites, in particular in the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, all of which fall under the historical Hashemite custodianship.

In that vein, we stress that the Jordanian administration of the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf is the only entity authorized under the provisions of international humanitarian law to manage all the affairs of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in its entirety, amounting to 144,000 square metres. Comprehensive calm should be maintained, which requires Israel to respect the legal and historical status quo of the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif and to find a genuine political horizon that guarantees the fulfilment of all the legitimate rights of

the brotherly Palestinian people on the basis of the two-State solution.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has recently engaged with our Palestinian brothers and other international actors, including Israel, the United States of America and major European countries, within the framework of Jordan's efforts and ongoing role in protecting Islamic and Christian holy sites, to restore and maintain a comprehensive calm and to prevent further escalation, which would have significant consequences for security and stability in the region as a whole.

In the context of Jordan's efforts to maintain calm and respect for the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem, we demanded that Israel take a number of measures that it was hoped would contribute to preventing clashes, including, but not limited to, allowing free access for Muslim worshippers to the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, lifting the restrictive barriers to Jerusalemites and the people of the West Bank and removing all restrictions aimed at limiting the right of Christians to free and unhindered access to the churches of the Old City, especially the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Israel, the occupying Power, should not obstruct the administration of the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf and should enable it to perform its duties, including with regard to controlling security inside Al-Haram Al-Sharif and access to the site.

Finally, the historical Hashemite custodianship is a duty and a responsibility that the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan will perform with all its resolve, capabilities and means in a way that supports the right of Palestinian brothers and sisters to obtain their legitimate rights, in particular their right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent sovereign State within the 4 June 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

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

Mr. Jardali (Lebanon): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this open debate at such an important time when our collective resolve is being tested around the world.

This month was supposed to be a special month for the three Abrahamic religions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The three religions were supposed to engage in a holy and peaceful celebration. But, during this

holy month of Ramadan and Easter, which Palestinian Orthodox Christians celebrated yesterday, Palestinians were subjected to a dangerous escalation of violence and a campaign of violations of their religious and human rights through continuous Israeli attacks on their holy places, in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Israeli occupying forces carried out several incursions on the Al-Aqsa/Al-Haram Al-Sharif holy site, injuring and detaining hundreds of worshippers. Israel's repeated provocations stoked religious tensions. We call on the Security Council to uphold its responsibility and to take immediate measures to protect the Al-Aqsa Mosque from the repeated attacks by Israel and settlers and to ensure that Israel respects international law.

Israel is trying to unilaterally and illegally change the legal and religious status of the holy places in Jerusalem by gradually creating facts on the ground. Lebanon rejects any attempt to change the current legal and historic status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and we warn that such a step incites only more violence and conflict.

Preserving and respecting the legal and historic status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, restoring the situation to that prior to the 2000 period and respecting the fact that it is a Muslim religious prayer site and that visiting it is organized by the Islamic Waqf, which is administered by the Jordanian Islamic Ministry of Awqaf, the legal administrator of the affairs of the holy Haram, are very important for peace in the city.

Israeli violations of Palestinian rights are taking place across the occupied Palestinian territories. The Israeli occupying forces are raiding neighbourhoods and killing and assaulting Palestinians, including women and children. Such violations in Jerusalem, settlement activities and the forced displacement of Palestinian families from their homes and lands continue unabated. All those actions are in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations and United Nations resolutions, especially resolutions 252 (1968), 267 (1969), 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016).

All of this is happening at a time when Israel has closed all avenues and extinguished all hopes for a political solution based on international legality, the two-State solution and self-determination for the Palestinian people. The Palestinian State is becoming more difficult to establish because of the continued

Israeli settlement policies and the deeply entrenched occupation. The legal basis for a solution is enshrined in a series of United Nations resolutions, from resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) to the latest resolution 2334 (2016), and the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted in 2002 during the Arab summit in Beirut, which called for a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders, the establishment of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). There is a need for a real commitment from the international community to ending the occupation, protecting the Palestinian people and endorsing a settlement to this conflict.

The Lebanese Government continues to work to address the multifaceted crisis facing the country. The staff-level agreement reached between Lebanon and the International Monetary Fund earlier this month is an important step towards that objective. Food insecurity, coming on the heels of a debilitating political and financial crisis and a cruel pandemic, is more than the Lebanese people can endure. Lebanon, along with many other developing countries, is being severely impacted by the rise in essential food and commodity prices.

The triple crisis of food, fuel and finance is affecting the whole world, but developing countries, countries in debt and vulnerable countries that are in conflict are especially impacted by that crisis. The risk of hunger and famine is looming large in some parts of the world. The international community needs to work together to solve the global crisis. It cannot be solved by countries on their own. Solidarity is needed now more than ever to face that growing challenge.

In few weeks from now, on 15 May, Lebanon will hold its parliamentary elections, with the Lebanese diaspora voting a week earlier, on 8 May. The Government is committed to guaranteeing a smooth electoral process. There are a record number of women running in the elections, pointing to the active role that women are increasingly playing in Lebanon's political, economic and social life. Observers from regional and international organizations have been invited to help to contribute to an inclusive and transparent process.

The upcoming elections are important to resetting the political dynamism and infusing the system with a new momentum for an energized political life that brings about reform and breathes new life into the country.

Lebanon welcomes the appointment of the new Head of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Major General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz, who took up his duties in February, and pays tribute to his predecessor, Major General Stefano Del Col, for his dedication, work and accomplishments.

We cannot stress enough how invaluable UNIFIL has been for the stability, peace and security in southern Lebanon. Its role in de-escalating and reducing tensions and in preventing any miscalculation or escalation along the Blue Line remains indispensable. That role is all the more important in the context of the daily Israeli violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which violate resolution 1701 (2006) and increase tensions in the area, thereby threatening peace and security. We reiterate our call on the Security Council to put an end to such Israeli violations, and we reiterate Lebanon's commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety.

The economic crisis that Lebanon is facing has also hit the Lebanese Armed Forces, a critical element of the country's stability, hard. Lebanon is particularly grateful to UNIFIL for its provision of additional non-lethal material and logistical support to the Lebanese Armed Forces, in line with paragraph 11 of resolution 2591 (2021).

Due to the critical role that that support played in helping the Lebanese army continue its work in implementing resolution 1701 (2006) and preserving peace and security in the South, Lebanon asked the Security Council, in a 15 March letter, that this organ consider extending that support for one more year.

We hope that the Council will look favourably on this request and continue to support the partnership between UNIFIL and the Lebanese army in their quest for a more peaceful Lebanon and region.

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

Mr. Mahmoud (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset, Madam President, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. We wish you success in that endeavour. Allow me also to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Our meeting today is being held as a dangerous and unfortunate escalation has been taking place on

the occupied Palestinian territories in the past few weeks. Israel insists on disregarding resolutions of international legitimacy, mainly Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016), particularly in East Jerusalem. Radical Jewish groups are storming into Al-Aqsa Mosque under the protection of Israeli occupying forces on a daily basis during holy Ramadan. That scenario is reminiscent of last year's developments, which led to hundreds of martyrs and injuries.

Egypt condemns the raid by Israeli forces of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and the violence against Palestinians. We stress the need for all parties to show restraint and fully protect Muslim worshippers, who must be allowed to practice their prayers in the mosque, which is a purely Muslim landmark. Once again, Egypt rejects violence and instigation in all their forms, including the calls to raid the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan. We warn that such actions could jeopardize stability and security in occupied Palestinian territories and the region as a whole.

The continual attempts to Judaize East Jerusalem and the attempts by occupation forces to control the city and change the legal and historical status of holy sites augur a very dangerous escalation. That is a violation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the first of the two kiblans and the third of the two holy mosques.

Egypt reaffirms the need to respect the status quo in the holy sites of the city, which are under the custodianship of the brotherly Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. It is important to respect freedom of religion, ensure access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, release the detainees and put an end to the violence and unilateral measures taken by the occupation forces in the city.

All Islamic and Arab committees related to Al-Quds must be upheld, especially Al-Quds Islamic Committee chaired by King Mohammed VI and the Al-Quds Arab Committee chaired by Jordan. Moreover, all unilateral measures in the West Bank must stop, namely, settlement expansion, including in East Jerusalem; attempts to expel Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods; and the demolition of Palestinian homes and structures.

It is also important for the occupation forces and settlers to stop targeting unarmed Palestinians, especially children, end the blockade on Gaza and facilitate reconstruction. In that regard, Egypt continues to support reconstruction in Gaza, as Egyptian

companies are implementing projects to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian citizens. We have invested \$500 million in Gaza.

Egypt continues to work with international and regional partners to ensure an environment conducive to the resumption of negotiations between the two sides, in line with the agreed international terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution, across the lines of 4 June 1967. Egypt took part in the Munich Group meeting on 19 February, which issued a statement stressing, among other things, the need for both sides to resume negotiations, put an end to unilateral measures that impede the two-State solution, preserve the legal and historical status of the holy sites, and support and fund the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Egypt is making every effort to contain the current escalation, in cooperation with the two sides and active regional players.

At the regional level, Egypt continues to support efforts to ensure a comprehensive settlement of the Yemeni crisis that meets the aspirations of the brotherly Yemeni people. We reaffirm our support for the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen. We look forward to seeing him succeed in reaching a comprehensive settlement of the crisis through a political solution that preserves the unity, sovereignty and independence of Yemen and ends the human suffering of the brotherly Yemeni people, in line with the relevant terms of reference.

We welcome the establishment of the Presidential Council in Yemen to complete the transitional period. That is an important development that we hope will restore safety and stability and lead to a consensus among Yemenis to resolve the crisis.

We also welcome the announcement by the Special Envoy of a two-month truce in Yemen. We hope that it contributes to a comprehensive settlement of that crisis. We stress the need for the Security Council to play a more effective role in the crisis to push for a political settlement, ensure a ceasefire and fight terrorism and illicit armed groups.

With regard to the situation in brotherly Libya, Egypt is closely following the latest developments. We continue to support efforts to achieve stability and hold the postponed presidential and parliamentary elections as soon as possible. In that regard, Cairo hosted a meeting from 13 to 20 April on the constitutional track

between the House of Representatives and the High Council of State, which was sponsored by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and attended by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. That meeting was aimed at helping our Libyan brothers agree on the constitutional track in order to hold presidential and parliamentary elections, in line with Security Council resolutions and the outcomes of the Paris and Berlin meetings as soon as possible.

We commend the progress made in the first round of the Cairo meetings towards a consensus among Libyans on the constitutional basis. Egypt is in contact with the various parties in Libya and has consistently reaffirmed the need to preserve the ceasefire. We urge all parties to de-escalate and avert a return to violence. We call on all international parties concerned to spare no effort to ensure the success of a Libyan-led, Libyan-owned political solution. That requires an agreement among the Libyans themselves, first and foremost, and respect for Libyan institutions and their roles.

In conclusion, Egypt reaffirms that the only way to achieve security, stability and peace in the Middle East is by liberating all Arab territories occupied since 1967 and fully respecting the resolutions of international legitimacy and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, especially respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-interference in their internal affairs.

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

Mr. Larbaoui (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Council is meeting today, as it has done for decades, to discuss the situation in the Middle East, at the heart of which is the Palestinian question. We are doing so days before the seventy-fourth anniversary of the Nakbah of a people whose only fault is rejecting the occupation of their land and calling for their right to self-determination and the recovery of their legitimate rights, like the other peoples of the world.

The Council is also meeting today at a time when the Israeli occupation forces are continuing their brutal attacks on unarmed Palestinians in occupied Jerusalem and around the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Settlers also continue to storm the Mosque. Those raids have led to the deaths and injuries of hundreds. Settlers continue to prevent worshippers from practicing their religion. They continue their provocations against Muslims around the world during this holy month of Ramadan.

Such despicable practices are very dangerous to the region. They are a threat to peace and security in the region. They are a flagrant and blatant violation of human rights and basic freedoms, including the freedom of religion, which is legally guaranteed by all laws.

At a time when the international community is unable to implement its resolutions, the Israeli occupation continues with its settlement policies and with its systemic work to impose the status quo and change the legal and historic status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. They continue to Judaize Islamic holy sites in Al-Quds Al-Sharif in a blatant violation of international law.

Following the brutal attacks on our brothers in Jerusalem and at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, our President, Mr. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, made several phone calls to international parties in an attempt to put an end to those attacks. In his statement to the Secretary-General a few days ago, he stressed the need for the international community, especially the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities and take urgent and effective steps to end those attacks and violations carried out by the occupying Powers. The attacks have been ongoing over the past 55 years. He called for protecting the brotherly Palestinian people and their holy sites and ending their suffering and injustice, which has prevented generations of Palestinians from enjoying their basic rights, especially their right to self-determination, by ending the occupation of the territories of the State of Palestine.

Our President also said that the credibility of the United Nations and the Security Council is often tested by the violence and persistence of Israel to impose the status quo, which aggravates the legitimate fears of a people who believe in the international community and justice.

In the face of such violations against the brotherly Palestinian people, the United Nations must adopt strong and firm response, thereby providing the necessary protection to unarmed civilians and their holy sites. That response must meet their legitimate right to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Algeria once again condemns the systemic and repetitive attacks and violations against the Palestinian people, especially in East Jerusalem. We call upon the international community to put an end to such practices

because, if they continue, they will block all prospects for a political settlement due to the intransigence of the occupation authorities. That — God forbid — would lead to an explosion in the region and further desperation among the Palestinian people, especially among young people, thereby extinguishing any remaining hope for reviving the peace process in the region.

We reaffirm Algeria's full solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people. We will continue to support their legitimate question to recover their legal and inalienable rights, namely, their right to establish an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. A just and final peace can be achieved only when the international community, specifically the Security Council, shoulders its legal and historic responsibilities and compels the occupying Power to end its occupation of the Palestinian territories and enable the Palestinian people to enjoy self-determination, and liberate all the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan.

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

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting, and I welcome the briefing by the Special Coordinator.

For all Muslims around the world, including in Palestine, Ramadan is the holiest of all months — a time that should be defined by nothing but peace and calm. Yet what we have seen thus far in Jerusalem has only increased tensions and is deeply concerning.

Since the beginning of Ramadan, many civilians, including children, lost their lives as a result of the operations of the Israeli security forces in the West Bank. More than 400 Palestinians were injured during the events in the West Bank and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The intervention of the Israeli security forces towards the Muslims present at the Al-Aqsa Mosque for prayers on 15 April was unacceptable, and we strongly condemned it. We reiterate our calls for restraint during this holy month of Ramadan, which also coincided with the Jewish Passover. Further provocations and threats against the status and sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque must be prevented.

We also condemn the recent terrorist attacks in Israel. Maintaining calm during this sensitive period is critical. We take note of the decision of the Israeli authorities to close the Al-Aqsa Mosque to non-Muslims

until the end of Ramadan as a step in the right direction and towards restoring calm, especially in Jerusalem.

President Erdoğan has been in touch with Palestinian President Abbas, Israeli President Herzog and Jordanian King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, as well as with the Secretary-General, in order to contribute to efforts to secure calm in the region. He will resolutely continue those efforts.

What is essential, however, is to move beyond addressing the periodic tensions and escalations and to focus instead on the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That is the only way to achieve lasting peace and stability in the region. In that connection, there is no alternative to a two-State solution based on the established parameters.

Millions of Palestinian refugees rely on the life-saving assistance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It is essential that its services continue to be provided in a sustainable, predictable and uninterrupted manner. Turkey will continue to support UNRWA's vital work, both financially and politically. We look forward to hosting its Commissioner-General soon in Turkey for comprehensive discussions. Meanwhile, it is imperative that we follow through with our collective responsibility to support the Palestinians in their endeavours to overcome the injustices and challenges they face.

Economic and humanitarian steps are important, but not enough to bring peace. There is an urgent need to address the root causes of this conflict. It is important that both sides continue to work on a variety of confidence-building measures in order to prepare the ground for the revival of peace negotiations. The United Nations should also play the critical roles it has assumed, including as a member of the Middle East Quartet.

I would like to end by reiterating Turkey's unwavering support for the Palestinian people in reaching their long-delayed right to live in a sovereign and independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

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

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to begin by congratulating the United Kingdom on its presidency of the Security Council during the month

of April. I appreciate its efforts in leading the work of the Council. I also wish to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his very important briefing.

We are meeting today in the light of fairly difficult circumstances — particularly in Jerusalem — for the Palestinian question due to the events that took place at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Mosque Esplanade. The situation at Al-Haram-Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque has recently evolved dangerously, and the Israeli occupation force has committed repeated provocations and violations during this holy month. The Kingdom of Morocco condemns that aggression against the Palestinian people and their holy sites and has called for putting an immediate end to them.

Unfortunately, the increase in the escalation of violence is the result of the impasse in the Middle East peace process, which is an additional element fuelling tensions and extremism, which in turn are creating further tensions and hate speech in the region as a whole. Indeed, they are widening the existing gap between Palestinians and Israelis and undermining prospects for restoring peace and security in the Middle East. That is why the Kingdom of Morocco, under the leadership of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, who chairs Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has strongly called for putting an end to all acts that could lead to further tensions.

His Majesty King Mohammed VI is committed to supporting the Palestinian question and defending the distinct status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Last Monday, His Majesty King Mohammed VI held a phone call with his brother His Majesty King Abdullah II, as the Hashemite Custodian of Jerusalem Holy Sites, to discuss the developments in Jerusalem and at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the light of the incursions and aggression against holy sites and worshippers. Their Majesties considered that such an escalation could further fuel extremism, hatred and violence and could undermine all chances for reviving the peace process in the region. We would also like to pay tribute to the efforts of Egypt on the question of Palestine.

As Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, the King of Morocco has made every political and diplomatic effort to ensure maintaining the historical and legal status of the holy sites. In that context, in his joint declaration with Pope Francis during his visit to the Kingdom of Morocco on 30 March 2019, His Majesty

King Mohammed VI underscored the importance of preserving the holy city as a common heritage of humankind and its historical, legal and demographic status so that it is open to worshippers of all three monotheistic religions.

The Al-Quds Committee has consistently made every effort, both practically and politically, to support the Palestinian people, especially Al-Quds residents. The Bait Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency is working on the ground, under the supervision of His Majesty Mohamed VI and with Morocco supplying nearly 86 per cent of its annual budget. Since its inception, in 1995, the Agency has been working to protect Arab and Islamic rights in the Holy City in the social, economic and educational areas as well as in health care, and it has had a direct impact on the residents of Jerusalem. The Al-Quds Committee is also working with Arab and Islamic countries on a number of projects in Jerusalem.

As we said during the meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Riyadh, we stand in solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people and support their legitimate rights on the basis of international law and the two-State solution embraced by the international community that would ultimately lead to the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel, in

peace and stability, within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Kingdom of Morocco is convinced of the centrality of the Palestinian question in the Middle East, which is at the top of the international community's priorities.

In the letter of solidarity that he sent in 2021 on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, His Majesty King Mohammed VI said that the established Moroccan position is unwavering and a result of the conviction shared by all Moroccans. He added that we will spare no diplomatic effort to resolve the just Palestinian question and the cause of Jerusalem.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm that the kingdom of Morocco will continue its historic role and relations with all parties in order to guarantee the conditions necessary for revitalizing talks between Palestinians and Israelis, which is the only way to achieve security and stability in the Middle East.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.05 p.m.