



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9107th meeting
Monday, 8 August 2022, 3 p.m.
New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Zhang Jun/Mr. Geng Shuang (China)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
India	Mrs. Kamboj
Ireland	Ms. Moran
Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
Norway	Mr. Kvalheim
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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



The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Egypt, Israel and Jordan 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 this 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.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: The past few days witnessed a deeply worrisome escalation in the Gaza Strip between Israeli military forces and Palestinian armed groups, primarily the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Preliminary numbers, which have yet to be confirmed, indicate that, from 5 August, the Israel Defense Forces launched 147 airstrikes against targets in Gaza. Palestinian militants launched approximately 1,100 rockets and mortars into Israel, many of which landed deep inside Israeli territory. During the escalation, 46 Palestinians were killed and 360 were injured, and hundreds of residential housing units were damaged or destroyed, along with other civilian infrastructure. Seventy Israelis were injured, with damage to residential and other civilian structures.

Last night, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Israeli Prime Minister's Office announced, in separate statements, that a ceasefire had been agreed and would come into effect at 11.30 p.m. on 7 August. The ceasefire remains in place as I speak. I welcome this agreement and I am grateful to Egypt for its crucial role in securing the ceasefire, alongside the United Nations,

and I appreciate the very important support provided by Qatar, the United States of America, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and others to de-escalate the situation. Together, those combined efforts helped prevent the outbreak of a full-scale war and, as of this morning, allowed for the delivery of much-needed humanitarian relief to the people of Gaza. The United Nations remains in close contact with all parties to solidify the ceasefire and ensure that the significant progress made towards easing restrictions, which we have seen since the end of the escalation last May, can be safeguarded and ultimately expanded.

This most recent escalation had its roots in deeper tensions, which have been rising for months across the occupied Palestinian territory. Tensions spiked across the West Bank in March and April, particularly after five terrorist attacks — the deadliest in years — took place inside Israel. Following those attacks, Israeli authorities increased military operations inside the occupied West Bank, with a significant number of the operations taking place in Jenin, focused on Palestinian militant groups operating in the area.

On 1 August, Israeli security forces arrested Bassem Al-Saadi, a senior leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the occupied West Bank, along with his son-in-law. A 17-year-old Palestinian, whom PIJ claimed as an affiliate, was killed during the operation. PIJ immediately declared a "state of alert" and raised the level of readiness of its militants. In response to the threats, Israel closed the crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip on 2 August and implemented measures restricting civilian movements in the so-called "Gaza envelope". Tensions mounted amid highly inflammatory rhetoric by Palestinian militant groups. The United Nations, Egypt and others began intensive mediation efforts to avert an escalation.

On 5 August, Israeli forces carried out a series of air strikes against reported military targets, including against a senior PIJ commander in Gaza, who was killed in the attack. Hours later, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militant factions launched more than 100 indiscriminate rockets and other projectiles from within civilian neighbourhoods inside the Gaza Strip towards civilian population centres in Israel, including Tel Aviv, central Israel and the Gaza envelope. Over the following days, Israeli air and artillery strikes against militant targets in Gaza and rocket launches by Palestinian militants into Israel continued intensively.

The escalation took a severe toll on the civilian population. I repeat that the figures we are presenting are initial and verification is ongoing.

From 5 through 7 August, 46 Palestinians were killed, including 20 civilians — 15 children and 4 women. According to Israeli official sources, the strikes killed 21 operatives, mainly affiliated with PIJ. The Ministry of Health in Gaza reported 360 Palestinians injured, including at least 151 children and 58 women. At least 10 houses were completely destroyed and 48 severely damaged and rendered uninhabitable. According to the Gaza authorities, over 600 housing units were damaged, displacing 84 families.

Approximately 1,100 rockets and mortars were fired by Palestinian armed groups, mainly PIJ's Al-Quds Brigades. Some 20 per cent of those reportedly fell short within the Gaza Strip, causing damage and, in at least three cases, potentially large numbers of civilian casualties. United Nations monitoring of the incidents is ongoing. Of those that crossed the border, most were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome, but some caused material damage. Israeli sources reported 70 injuries, including nine children.

I condemn the indiscriminate launching of rockets from highly populated residential neighbourhoods in Gaza into civilian population centres in Israel, which puts at risk both Palestinian and Israeli civilians and violates international humanitarian law. While fully recognizing Israel's legitimate security concerns, I reiterate that, under international law, all use of force must be proportionate and take all feasible steps to avoid civilian casualties. Children, in particular, must never be the target of violence or be put in harm's way.

Against the backdrop of the Gaza escalation, tensions remained high in the occupied West Bank. From the onset of the escalation, Palestinians held demonstrations in multiple locations, protesting the Israeli strikes on Gaza. The President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, issued a statement condemning the Israeli strikes and reiterating his call for the international community to protect Palestinians.

In addition to loss of life, injuries and destruction of property, the complete closure of the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings for six days had severe humanitarian consequences for Palestinians in the Strip. Gaza was on the brink of a humanitarian collapse last evening when the ceasefire came into effect. As in all escalations, there are dire humanitarian consequences and a total

breakdown of all normal supply lines and essential services. Basic food, medical supplies and fuel were unable to enter. As a result, on 6 August, Gaza's only power plant shut down, causing rolling power cuts of over 20 hours per day and severely impacting the delivery of basic essential services and facilities, such as hospitals and clinics, schools, water desalination and distribution, as well as wastewater treatment. Gaza's chronic shortages of essential medicines and equipment were exacerbated by the escalation, and the closure of Erez prevented the daily crossing of some 50 patients requiring specialized treatment in Israel. The closures also worsened the already precarious food security situation in the Gaza Strip, reducing stocks of basic foods, particularly wheat flour.

The ceasefire announced last night has allowed the resumption of essential movements of goods and people in and out of Gaza, including the delivery of humanitarian assistance and fuel for the Gaza Power Plant. I welcome Israeli authorities' timely reopening of the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings after the ceasefire went into effect. The opening of Kerem Shalom has allowed a total of 23 trucks of fuel to enter the Gaza Strip today, enabling the Gaza Power Plant to resume normal operations from 8 p.m. this evening, local time.

Ms. Lynn Hastings, Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and United Nations Resident Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, entered Gaza this morning and is leading the United Nations and humanitarian response on the ground. She has spent the day meeting with United Nations and humanitarian agencies, families affected by the escalation and civil society groups, and assessing the damage and needs. The cost will be steep.

The escalation of recent days came a little more than one year after the end of the May 2021 escalation in Gaza. The devastating impact of that conflict is still with us today. In the months following the hostilities in May 2021, gradual but significant progress was made in opening Gaza for the movement of people and goods. Those steps helped ease living conditions in the Strip. It is imperative that we see a resumption of the measures that were in place and continue our efforts to expand them further. We are committed to supporting the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement, ensuring the safety and security of the civilian population and following-up on the Palestinian prisoners file.

Yesterday the Secretary-General welcomed the ceasefire announcement and called on all sides to abide by the agreement. I echo the Secretary-General's call. I want to make the Council aware of the following: the ceasefire is fragile. Any resumption of hostilities will only have devastating consequences for Palestinians and Israelis and make any political progress on key issues elusive.

Ultimately, the underlying drivers of this and previous escalations remain. These cycles of violence will cease only when we achieve a political resolution of the conflict that brings an end to the occupation and the realization of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 lines, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

I reiterate my call to the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships, along with the international community, to strengthen diplomatic efforts to return to meaningful negotiations towards a viable two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): 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 thank China for its able leadership of the Security Council and its convening of this emergency meeting to address blatant violations of the Charter of the United Nations and of the Council's resolutions. I also thank the United Arab Emirates, France, Ireland and Norway, together with China, for requesting, upon our appeal, the convening of this briefing.

Israel claims for itself a right to security that would seemingly justify murdering, imprisoning and oppressing an entire nation. It claims a right to security that would trump our right to life, our right to self-determination and our right to be safe in our homes. It claims a right to security that supersedes the United Nations Charter, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It claims for itself everything that it denies us. Israel claims it is always defending itself, even when it keeps attacking the Palestinian people. If the Council is against violence, it cannot excuse Israeli violence, justify it or encourage it. Israel's so-called "right to security" has become a license to kill, and it must be revoked.

In an international law-based order, international law is the measuring stick for anybody's actions. We are

bound by its rules and remain ready to abide by them. What about the other party? Can it keep rewriting the rules as it wishes? And can the Council accept such double standards, which undermine the protection of the law everywhere? How many more times will Israel get to justify bombing our people in Gaza until someone says enough is enough? Is the Council, as the highest authority responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, ready to say enough is enough? How many more years does Israel get to impose its inhumane blockade on 2 million people — half of them children — until someone says enough is enough? How many more children do we have to bury until someone says enough is enough?

Regardless of who is in power in Israel, there are two constant features of Israeli policy: bombing Gaza and advancing colonial settlements and the settlers' agenda. Those are undeniable facts. While Israel was bombing Gaza this time around, Israeli extremists were storming Al-Haram Al-Sharif yet again and violating the historic status quo.

This was an unprovoked and unjustified act of aggression. Its real reason is barely veiled — the upcoming Israeli election and the desperation to appeal to and appease the extremists. Forty-four Palestinians and counting — 46 according to Mr. Wennesland — were killed, including 15 children, in a morbid power play and display. Israel kills our people because it can. When will the world show them that they cannot? Does not the Council have a clear position on the protection of civilians? Are our civilians' lives less worthy of protection than other civilians? Are they somehow the exception to every rule? Are they in a zone where the United Nations Charter and international law do not apply? Or is the identity of their aggressor somehow enough to justify blanket immunity for the perpetrators and no protection for the victims?

The recommendations of the Secretary-General presented four years ago and welcomed by the General Assembly have yet to be implemented. I am referring to protections. We need protection. Our civilians are entitled to protection. Our children deserve protection. Alaa Qaddoum was 5 years old. I am sure everyone has seen her picture. She was an innocent angel. Does the Council know how hard it is to speak in the past tense of those who had yet to experience life? Alaa Qaddoum was 5 years old, and she was already three wars old. She survived the first two, not the third.

Did the Council hear about the parents who spent years trying to have a child and finally had a son, only to have to bury him a few years later? Did the Council hear about the Al-Nabahin family, another name added to the long list of Palestinian families who lost four or more of their members, including three children? Do Council members know how it feels to be powerless, to be unable to provide any protection for one's child, to know there is no safe haven or shelter anywhere? Do they know how it feels to survive one war and wait for the next onslaught? How can I convey these things so that people finally understand that those who really need the Council's support for their security are these defenceless Palestinian families, not the nuclear Power, not the occupying Power?

How will Israel answer our calls for protection? By blaming the victim. Israel is beyond reproach. It kills Palestinians because it has to, and it always has to. If it is stealing our land, it is our fault. If it is killing our children, it is our fault. If it is occupying our country, it is our fault. If it is besieging our people, it is our fault. Israel wants peace; that is why it builds Israeli settlements and demolishes Palestinian homes. Israel wants peace; that is why it needs to expand and we need to live in enclaves. When do we say enough is enough? Should we wait for the next round or the one after? The next aggression? The next settlement? The next forced transfer of civilians? When do we finally demonstrate to the Palestinian people that there is a peaceful path that leads to freedom, instead of doing everything to convince them otherwise?

A 15-year-old child in Gaza has survived a blockade that is older than he or she is and six wars. How many more wars does he or she need to survive before acceding to life — a simple and safe life in their homeland? The Secretary-General stated in his report on children and armed conflict:

“I am shocked by the number of children killed and maimed by Israeli forces during hostilities, in air strikes on densely populated areas and through the use of live ammunition [...] and by the persistent lack of accountability for these violations.” (S/2022/493, para.93)

Only weeks after the report was issued, we are confronted with the same patterns of disregard for Palestinian civilian life, and specifically Palestinian children's lives, fostered by the same impunity.

The Secretary-General further stated:

“During the May 2021 escalation of hostilities, there were substantial air strikes by the Israeli armed forces, resulting in a significant increase in the number of cases of violence against children [...] should the situation repeat itself in 2022, without meaningful improvement, Israel should be listed.” (*ibid.*, para.303)

We believe the listing of Israel is long overdue and that the threshold set by the Secretary-General himself has been crossed yet again. Mr. Wennesland described to us a similar situation that took place in a condensed period of time, three days, during which one third of the deaths that occurred were of children.

We are deeply grateful to Egypt for its unrelenting efforts to put an end to this aggression. We also want to express our appreciation to the United Nations, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Qatar and all who helped end this violent, abhorrent aggression. But the situation is profoundly unsustainable. Where do we go from here? We know the result of the current equation. We Palestinians know that better than anybody else. However, another equation is possible. The Council's actions need to be determined by the outcome it is seeking. The international community and the Council have determined in no uncertain terms the outcome we aspire to. We have a global consensus on what the solution should look like. It is an outcome embedded in countless United Nations resolutions, including those adopted by the Council. The members of the Council are not bystanders, praying for that outcome, they are actors who can decisively affect the outcome. The Council is the highest authority in the United Nations system where the maintenance of international peace and security is concerned. It is not an organization that makes comments and expresses opinions. It is a body that can change things, enforce things and decide that things should be done according to international law and its collective will, as reflected in its resolutions.

Fifteen children were killed in the space of a few days, and many more are traumatized and suffering. They deserve a better future, a future the Council can help bring into being. This meeting is for honouring them. They deserve to be honoured. Every innocent child killed anywhere deserves to be honoured. In three days, we lost 15 children.

During his visit, United States President Biden reiterated that Palestinians and Israelis deserve equal

measures of freedom, security and prosperity. By that he certainly did not mean that Israelis should live with the abysmal level of freedom, security and prosperity that Palestinians are currently enduring. We deserve the same. Those words should be applicable to us, implemented regarding us and enforced regarding us, not the Israeli side alone. Gaza is not destined to go merely from rubble to rubble, and neither is Palestine fated to remain under occupation forever. The Palestinian people's destiny is to live in freedom, dignity and security in their homeland.

We need to collectively shape a political horizon that can end the current reality and break the impasse we are in. In his statement yesterday, the Secretary-General emphasized that point. The Council members all talk about political horizons, but we need to move from saying that to implementing it. We should not wait until the next war or the next election. Peace is never reached by waiting. The Council needs to seek it out, with all its strength and determination, and with the power that it has under the provisions of the Charter. The Council is very powerful. It can do what has to be done and enforce it, and we want it to do that, to act now, to save lives, to save peace. Whatever the price, peace must be achieved, because the cost of war will always be infinitely higher. We know. Our people are the ones who are enduring most of that cost. Peace is within reach if the will of those seeking peace proves stronger than the will of those denying it.

We appeal to the Council. Our President always says that we are extending both hands, not just one, for peace. Do we have acceptance from the other side? The Council should make it enforceable. It should not accept a situation in which we wait until one party decides that it is ready for peace. The Council decides when peace should happen and it should drag the two parties to the peace process today, not tomorrow. That is our message to the Council, the message of the victims. That is the message on behalf of the 15 children we lost and whom we are honouring today in this meeting of the Security Council.

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

Mr. Erdan (Israel): The debate that we are holding today has the opportunity to go in one of two directions. It can either mark a clear win for the international community against the forces that seek our collective destruction, or it can be a stain on the history of the

Council. This debate must focus on the facts. A terror organization attempted to murder Israeli civilians, murdering innocent Palestinian civilians along the way, and because of the terrorists' clear and present threat to our citizens, Israel defended itself. There is no room for false narratives. The facts are clear. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) deliberately fired 1,100 rockets at Israeli civilians, of which roughly 200 landed inside the Gaza Strip, killing innocent Palestinians, among them young children. That is not an estimate. It is the hard truth, and Israel has full proof. Just this morning I shared proof at a media stakeout clearly showing a Palestinian Islamic Jihad rocket falling in Jabalia refugee camp, killing Palestinian civilians, among them children. We have video footage, radar evidence and mission logs proving that the tragic deaths of the children in Jabalia were clearly the result of an Islamic Jihad rocket. Yet no matter how much hard evidence Israel has to show, the Palestinians always fall back on their lies. It is disgraceful and pathetic. If any Council member is interested in receiving and reviewing our irrefutable evidence, I will happily share it with them myself. I will sadly share it with them myself.

The enemy that Israel is facing is one that is willing to murder its own children while attempting to murder Israeli civilians and children. That is the reason, as even the Secretary-General pointed out, that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad deploys its rockets and terror infrastructure among civilian populations. The PIJ was preparing and attempting an imminent and credible attack on Israeli civilians near the Gaza border, forcing Israel to close down roads and civilian activity in the vicinity of the Gaza Strip, essentially paralysing tens of thousands of Israeli citizens for three days. On Friday, shortly before the terrorist attack, Israel had to defend itself. We took action solely to protect our civilians and defend our country. Any other claim is a flat-out lie.

For those who are still not familiar with Palestinian Islamic Jihad, allow me to provide some background. The latter is a radical terror organization armed, funded and trained by Iran. In fact, while the Palestinian Islamic Jihad was indiscriminately firing rockets at Israeli civilians, its leader, Ziyad Al-Nakhalah, was meeting with his Ayatollah-puppet masters in Tehran and receiving orders from them — we can all see the photos. Using proxies to further its ambition of establishing a radical Shiite hegemony is Iran's modus operandi.

Over the course of two and a half days, Palestinian Islamic Jihad rained about 1,100 missiles down on

Israeli towns and cities. To prevent that fanatical organization from targeting Israelis, we were forced to carry out precision and surgical strikes against its commanders, as well as its operatives' launch pads and terror infrastructure. Israel is a law-abiding democracy and always aims to set an example. That is why we carried out our operation with astounding accuracy and extreme precision, taking precautions hardly ever seen in areas of conflict around the world. This morning, I also shared footage showing how Israel does everything possible to minimize civilian casualties. Thanks to those extensive and documented precautions, Israel — and I want to stress this — has a lower collateral damage rate than any other military.

Despite the absurd lies heard here today, our operation was aimed at targeting PIJ terrorists and nobody else. In fact, most of the casualties were the result of PIJ rocket fire. The Israeli air force's mission to neutralize Khaled Mansour — a senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad commander with a lot of Israeli blood on his hands — had even been aborted three times before it was carried out, owing to the presence of children in the area. Is there any other military in the entire world that goes to such lengths?

PIJ has only one goal: to annihilate Israel and replace it with an Islamist State. Does that remind anyone here of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham or Al-Qaida? Of course it does. Those groups are no different — they share the same horrifying and distorted vision. The way they attempt to advance their twisted goal of destroying the State of Israel by firing rockets at Israeli civilians while using Gazans as human shields. That is a double war crime. Yes, as I mentioned earlier, not all of the rockets launched make it out of the Gaza Strip. In the process of trying to murder innocent Israelis, nearly 20 per cent of PIJ's projectiles misfired and resulted in the tragic killing of Palestinians. These evil terrorists hide behind civilians to murder Israeli civilians and end up murdering Palestinian civilians along the way. Their hate knows no boundaries.

I want the members of the Security Council to consider how they would react if terrorists were threatening their citizens. How would Norway react to radical Islamists plotting to fire missiles at civilians in Oslo? How would Ireland respond if jihadi rockets were raining down on Dublin in an effort to wipe out the infidels? I think we all know the answer.

Just a week ago, a justified strike neutralized Al-Qaida's leader, Ayman Al-Zawahiri. Before leading Al-Qaida, Al-Zawahiri was a top member of Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Does that sound familiar? Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Egyptian Islamic Jihad share more than just a similar name. They share the same values of annihilating the free and modern world in which we live. That is precisely why, when Al-Zawahiri's was eliminated, this institution, as well as most of the world, gave its full sport. It brought us one step closer to eradicating radical terror from the world. Yet when Israel neutralizes such terrorists in order to prevent an imminent attack against its citizens, United Nations officials are suddenly deeply concerned. It is hard to explain such double standards.

I want to make one more thing clear. I want to remind everyone of the Gaza Strip's history and the events that led up to the current situation that Gaza is in. The Palestinians seem to think that, if a lie is repeated enough, it becomes truth — but that is not so. No amount of fabrications and libel can change the facts on the ground. Exactly 17 years ago today, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip, dismantling dozens of Israeli villages and uprooting thousands of its own citizens. We hoped that step would build trust and bring calm. Yes despite our goodwill, we did not receive calm. On the contrary, we received more terror. The Palestinians chose Hamas and their terror ideologies over progress and prosperity. Hamas quickly took over the Strip, literally throwing the Palestinian Authority representatives off of rooftops — that is why they are no longer there — and it has since spent most of its efforts and resources on expanding its terror infrastructure in Gaza. It has built rocket factories next to hospitals and weapons storage sites inside schools and, as witnessed by many Council members in the past, it has dug cross-border terror tunnels underneath Jewish towns.

Hamas also is currently holding two special-needs Israeli hostages in Gaza, Avera Mangistu and Hisham Al-Sayed, as well as the bodies of two Israeli soldiers, Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, and we are committed to doing everything to bring them back home. That choice of terror and violence over coexistence and peace is the only reason Gaza finds itself in its current situation — there is no other explanation. And the only remedy for the Gazans is for their leaders stop trying to annihilate Israel and stop investing their resources in terror infrastructure.

As we saw in the case of the Abraham Accords, there is no economic cure-all for Gaza — only the choice of coexistence over violence. And despite all of the rockets, threats and attacks, Israel still does everything in its power to make life better for Gazans — be it by increasing the number of work permits, allowing in a daily supply of hundreds of trucks full of goods, even in times of conflict, or supplying Gaza with electricity — we still choose goodwill over conflict. Actions speak much louder than words, and what Israel does for Gaza eclipses the lip service that the Palestinian Authority pays to it at these debates. Nevertheless, if Israel is threatened, we are forced to take action.

Before I conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to thank President Al Sisi and the other senior Egyptian officials who were essential in restoring calm. We deeply appreciate their efforts to restore stability to our region.

Israel acted only against the terrorists of Palestinian Islamic Jihad — not against the people of Gaza, or Hamas or the Palestinian Authority — only against PIJ. Sadly, this debate can only cause more harm than good. But rather than making a bad situation worse, there is one way to bring some good out of this debate. Today each and every member of the Council has a critical responsibility. They can either choose to condemn a murderous terror organization, or they can make false and immoral comparisons between Israel, a law-abiding democracy, and radical jihadists. If the Council truly wants to improve the situation in Gaza, there must be one outcome and one outcome only: it must condemn the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and hold those terrorists fully accountable for the murder of innocent Palestinians. Holding a Security Council debate on the Palestinian Islamic Jihad while not using the opportunity to fully condemn it for its war crimes will only encourage it to continue its destructive ways. Any outcome of today's debate that does not place full accountability on the shoulders of that radical group will only make it stronger. I truly hope that the Council does the right thing.

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

Mr. Mahmoud (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August, and to thank you for convening today's important meeting. I would also like

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

What we have seen in the past few days in the occupied Palestinian territory is something that Egypt and many countries have previously warned about — the possibility that owing to the deteriorating conditions on the ground, the situation could spiral into a new cycle of violence at any moment. The Gaza Strip witnessed a sudden military escalation between Israel and one of the Palestinian armed groups in which 43 martyrs were killed, including women and children, and approximately 300 injured. A large number of Palestinian facilities and houses were destroyed. This latest escalation comes at a time when the Gaza Strip has not yet recovered from that of last year, which caused widespread destruction. At the same time, Israel also allowed a number of settlers, under the protection of the Israeli police, to storm the courtyards of the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Al-Aqsa Mosque, which violated the Mosque's sanctity, provoked Muslims and was a stark violation of the historical and legal status of the holy sites in East Jerusalem.

In view of the tense situation following the latest military attack, Egypt once again took the initiative to mediate between Israel and the Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip in order to secure an immediate cessation of the violence and provide protection to Palestinian civilians in the Strip. Those efforts succeeded in securing a ceasefire, which came into effect on 7 August. The mediation is part of Egypt's comprehensive efforts to secure calm in the wake of the previous escalation in May 2021 and to resume the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, which is still under way, with the aim of improving its residents' living conditions. Egypt appeals to all the parties to fully abide by the ceasefire and exercise restraint. We affirm that whether in the context of ceasefire mediation or reconstruction, our efforts do not change the obligations of Israel, which bears full responsibility for the Gaza Strip, as it continues to occupy the Palestinian territory based on the 4 June 1967 lines.

This recent escalation comes against the backdrop of Israel's continued policy of a blockade of the Gaza Strip, which makes accessing goods and services through the Israeli crossings difficult, in addition to the continuing violations it is committing in the West Bank through its policy of arrests, settlement expansion and destruction of Palestinian houses and facilities, as well as the occupation forces' use of live ammunition

against civilians, including children, and on top of the increased levels of violence perpetrated by the settlers. Egypt has repeatedly stressed that the status quo cannot continue and that it is crucial that we see an end to the vicious cycles of violence between the two sides, for which civilian martyrs are paying the price. In that regard, Egypt reiterates that in order to stop the recurring bloodshed of innocent civilians, it is crucial that the following steps be taken.

First, all of Israel's practices, especially its settlement expansion in the West Bank, should be stopped, because they violate the Palestinians' most basic rights. In addition, the blockade on the Gaza Strip should be lifted, which would contribute to improving conditions on the ground and rebuilding confidence between the two sides.

Secondly, urgent action should be taken to facilitate the delivery of goods and services to the Gaza Strip and to provide the necessary funding for its reconstruction in order to ensure decent living conditions for Palestinians.

Thirdly, the legal and historical status of the holy sites in East Jerusalem under the custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan should be respected.

Fourthly, international protection should be provided to the Palestinian people. We call on all the parties to stop all targeting of civilians, taking account of the Palestinians' particular situation, with the population density of the Palestinian territory and the number of civilians, including children, who have been killed in the recurring rounds of conflict.

Fifthly, we affirm that it is the responsibility of any party whose actions cause the death of civilians, as well as the responsibility of the international community, to investigate, monitor and review, independently and transparently, the recurring cycles of violence targeting civilians and civilian facilities, as well as other violations that run counter to the basic principles of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Sixthly, we stress that the successive cycles of violence show how important it is for the international community, especially the Middle East Quartet, to assume its responsibility for reviving the peace process, in order to arrive at a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question and assure the Palestinian people of their full rights in an independent

Palestinian State, along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Egypt will never abandon its historical responsibility towards its brother people of Palestine or its relentless quest to achieve a better future, something we all hope for, in which security, peace and stability prevail in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your prompt response to the request by my country and several other Security Council members to hold this urgent meeting to discuss the current developments in Gaza. I also thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his important briefing and commend his continued de-escalation efforts.

The United Arab Emirates reiterates its deep concern about the recent violence in the Gaza Strip that has claimed the lives of dozens of civilians, including 15 children. We stress the need for all parties to abide by their responsibilities under international law and international humanitarian law, particularly with regard to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, in order to spare civilians from the harm of violent confrontations. The deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza cannot bear more shocks. We welcomed the entry into force of the ceasefire on Sunday evening local time, following Egypt's mediation efforts. We express our sincere appreciation to our brothers in Egypt, led by President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, for their intensive efforts and continued engagement, which culminated in an agreement to halt the escalation and restore calm.

We would also like to stress the importance of ensuring that all the parties exercise maximum restraint. We reiterate our rejection of terrorism and extremism in any form, which create new levels of violence and instability that must be avoided. We also note the importance of Egypt's continued mediation efforts, with regional and international support, aimed at ending the recurring cycles of violence that worsen the Palestinians' suffering. That also requires the genuine willingness of both parties to the conflict to satisfy both peoples' desire for peace.

We agree with the Special Coordinator's comments regarding the importance of maintaining the progress

towards the gradual reopening of the border crossings in Gaza. Such measures have the potential to contribute to reviving Gaza's fragile economy and respond to the humanitarian needs of the population, including through the restoration of the health and services sectors.

We condemn the storming of the courtyards of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by groups of extremists, including their provocative actions. We also recall the importance of preserving the existing historical and legal status of the holy places in the city of Jerusalem, including Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, as well as the importance of respecting sisterly Jordan's custodianship of the Islamic and Christian holy sites.

We cannot consider a lasting peace in the region without a settlement to the Palestinian question based on the two-State solution. We therefore believe that it is necessary to resume the international efforts to find a just, comprehensive and peaceful solution, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, that ensures dignity, security and stability for all parties. We warn that the situation could remain explosive in the absence of real political will on the part of the parties to resume negotiations and break the deadlock in the peace process.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates reiterates its readiness to support all regional and international efforts aimed at advancing the peace process in the Middle East and achieving the two-State solution through the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, based on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): We would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this emergency meeting at the request of multiple members of the Security Council, including France. I would also like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing and all his efforts in support of de-escalation and to assure him of our full support.

France is deeply concerned about the escalation over the past few days, which has resulted in many victims among Palestinian civilians. We resolutely condemn the violence and reiterate our condolences to the bereaved families. All parties have an obligation to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law. We very much regret that children were among those killed. We also deplore the firing of rockets

into Israel's territory and reiterate our unwavering commitment to ensuring Israel's security.

We welcome the ceasefire reached on 7 August and thank Egypt for its active role in mediating it. We must make every effort to prevent a new escalation, in which the civilian population would stand once again to suffer the most, which is unacceptable. France takes note of the reopening of border crossings into Gaza, which had been closed since 2 August, and calls for the rapid transfer of people in need of care. We reiterate that the only way to achieve lasting stability in Gaza is by ensuring the return of the Palestinian Authority and lifting the blockade, with credible security guarantees for Israel.

Only a just and lasting peace will make it possible to put a definitive end to the escalations we have seen. In the light of the increasing situations of tension in recent months, France reiterates that both Israelis and Palestinians have the right to live in peace, dignity and security. If we do not restore the political framework for a just and lasting peace, such tensions will unfortunately continue to spread. We call on all parties to respect the ceasefire that came into effect on 7 August and to put an end to this cycle of violence, serves no one. France will spare no effort, in conjunction with its European and regional partners, to support the resumption of political negotiations with a view to settling the conflict within the framework of international law.

Mr. Kvalheim (Norway): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and analysis of the situation on the ground, as well as his impressive efforts to de-escalate the situation.

We are deeply saddened by the casualties and loss of lives during the recent escalation in and around Gaza. Norway strongly condemns all acts of terror, indiscriminate attacks and attacks against civilians. We underline the need to protect civilians and fully respect international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality. And children must be protected and never put in harm's way.

Norway welcomes the ceasefire and commends all actors contributing to restore calm. We urge full compliance and observance of the ceasefire. We also welcome the announcement that the border crossings have been reopened and that the Gaza power plant has restarted. For the past week, border crossings into Gaza had been closed, electricity was cut and Gaza's sole power plant was shut down due to a lack of fuel, with

a serious impact on the functioning of hospitals and emergency services.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is fragile and was already dire before this recent escalation. As Special Coordinator Wennesland has emphasized, the recent use of violence may undermine the efforts to develop Gaza. We must do all that we can to prevent the situation from getting any worse. Over the past year, we have seen significant improvements in Gaza, including increased work permits, expanded fisheries zones and eased restrictions on trade. We must secure those improvements so that they are not lost.

It is also important to have a holistic perspective. The situation in the West Bank remains volatile and needs continued attention. Israel must contain the drivers of conflict stemming from the occupation. We have pointed on several occasions to the need to stop illegal settlement building and forced evictions of Palestinians from their homes, as well as to refrain from taking actions that fuel tensions. Similarly, it is important to avoid increasing tensions in Jerusalem. Radical elements must not be allowed to escalate the situation around the holy sites, and their historic status quo must be upheld. If the tensions and underlying drivers of the conflict are not addressed, there is a risk of new escalations, terror and violence. We urge the parties to return to the negotiating table and put an end to the conflict.

Ms. Moran (Ireland): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting at the request of a number of members of the Security Council, including Ireland. My thanks also go to Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing and his continued efforts.

Ireland welcomes the ceasefire announced on the evening of 7 August, and we call on all parties to ensure that it remains in force. We thank Egypt, along with the United Nations, Jordan, Qatar and others in the region, for its efforts in brokering the ceasefire. We share the deep concern at the violence in recent days. The impact of Israeli strikes on civilians in the Gaza Strip is unacceptable. A total of 46 Palestinian lives were lost, including 15 children. The impact on children, in an already difficult humanitarian situation, is especially worrisome. Ireland extends its condolences to the families of the victims and expresses solidarity with the injured.

Ireland condemns the launching of rockets from Gaza. Attacks and the threat of attacks against

Israeli citizens are unacceptable. The protection of all civilians across the occupied Palestinian territory — in Gaza and the West Bank — and Israel is of paramount importance and is required under international law. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects are prohibited under international humanitarian law, and constant care must be taken to spare them. Accountability must be ensured for all attacks against civilians.

As Mr. Wennesland pointed out, the slow progress made in gradually opening Gaza since the end of the May 2021 escalation risks being undone, leading to even greater humanitarian needs when global resources are so stretched. As the occupying Power, Israel is duty-bound to ensure unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance. There is an urgent need to ensure an adequate supply of fuel, power and medical supplies. It is also vital to ensure that patients can leave Gaza for medical care. Civilians in the Gaza Strip are bearing the brunt of the military escalation, especially the children of Gaza, many of whom have endured four bombardments in their short lives. Some 800,000 of the 1 million children in Gaza are in need of psychosocial support and care. It is incumbent on all parties, including those in the Council, to restore hope for a meaningful peace process that addresses the needs of all Palestinians and Israelis, including women. We fully support Mr. Wennesland's ongoing efforts and share his assessment of the situation.

We have yet again witnessed a repeated cycle of violence on the back of two major military escalations in 15 months. Those events are not happening in isolation. They are just the latest cycle in a long and brutal conflict. The cycle of reducing tensions when violence boils over is not enough. Proactive, firm and direct engagement is required by the parties and the international community. Ireland emphasizes that without addressing the root causes of the conflict with a view to ending the 15-year Gaza blockade and 55-year occupation of the Palestinian territory, further violence is inevitable and the threat of extremism will remain. This ceasefire must not become a pause between cycles of violence. What is needed are genuine efforts to revive a political engagement between the parties. There can be no military solution to a political conflict. Ireland will continue to be forthright in expressing its concerns regarding the actions and policies of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that Ireland stands ready to support all efforts to help resume credible negotiations aimed at achieving a just and lasting two-State solution based on international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions and agreed parameters.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): Brazil would like to thank Mr. Wennesland for his detailed and valuable briefing. We express our condolences to the families of those who were killed and injured in the recent cycle of violence.

At the outset, Brazil joins others in welcoming the Egypt-brokered ceasefire announced yesterday. We thank Egypt for its crucial efforts, as well as all those — especially Mr. Wennesland — who have worked to bring some calm and de-escalate the situation on the ground. It is now imperative that the ceasefire be fully implemented and respected by all parties. The ceasefire must ultimately be accompanied by an easing of tensions throughout the Palestinian territory and in Israel. All provocations and all incitement to hatred and violence must stop. Brazil condemns all attacks against civilians. This latest escalation of violence underlines the urgent need to make progress towards a just and sustainable political solution to the conflict and address its driving forces. While the challenges in Gaza and the conflict as a whole require political solutions, economic growth also remains vital to give hope to the Palestinian people, while intra-Palestinian reconciliation is a crucial step towards stabilization and a resumption of genuine dialogue within the framework of the peace process.

The safety and security of religious sites are an essential component of freedom of religion and belief and should be preserved at all costs. Upholding the status quo of the holy sites is fundamental, as is maintaining the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's special role as custodian of Muslim holy places. Brazil reiterates its agreement with the assessment that merely managing this conflict in perpetuity is not a viable option. We can no longer afford the high costs of perpetual cycles of violence. Without a political perspective and respect for international law, the same causes will produce the same effects, the cycles of violence will continue to follow one another and the civilian population will continue to bear the brunt of it all. The Security Council bears a heavy responsibility to live up to its mandate and the expectations of people affected by the conflict. Brazil will continue its efforts to contribute to Security Council action and to finding solutions. The Council

must now engage in support of the efforts to relaunch the political process and address urgent questions such as the issue of detainees. Brazil reiterates its resolute support for a two-State solution, within the framework of international law and the resolutions of the Council. That is the only way to meet the aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and to ensure the security of all.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): The United States welcomes the ceasefire that was reached last night. Our thanks go to Special Coordinator Wennesland, as well as Egypt, Qatar, Jordan and other regional partners, for facilitating an end to the recent hostilities. We call on all the parties to fully implement the ceasefire, including through the consistent delivery of fuel shipments to Gaza to ensure that hospitals and other public services can operate.

We are deeply saddened by the reports of civilian casualties and need to swiftly and thoroughly investigate each of them. We should refrain from jumping to conclusions until we can determine the facts. To give just one example, Israel was originally blamed for an attack that inflicted civilian casualties in Jabalia refugee camp, which now appears to have been caused by a Palestinian Islamic Jihad rocket. So let us be sure to follow the facts and see where they lead us.

We are of course also concerned about the humanitarian impact of the recent violence. Residents of Gaza have seen their access to electricity reduced at one of the hottest times of the year. Medical facilities and other public services were shuttered. The resumption of fuel deliveries today comes not a moment too soon. Speaking more broadly, our position is clear to everyone in this room. We fully support Israel's right to defend its people against terrorist threats, including rocket fire aimed at civilians or without regard to them. We also believe that Israelis and Palestinians equally deserve to live in safety and security, and we are working assiduously to that end.

The United States will remain engaged with senior Israeli officials and the Palestinian leadership in the days ahead to continue implementing the many new initiatives that President Biden has launched to improve the quality of life for Palestinians. But let us be clear. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad is designated a terrorist organization in the United States and many other nations. It is also an Iranian proxy group that has conducted attacks on innocent civilians for years. It is telling that Palestinian Islamic Jihad leaders were in

Tehran over the past several days while the people they claim to be protecting were left in harm's way.

I would also note that it was Palestinian Islamic Jihad, not Israel, that held up agreement on a ceasefire designated to save lives and resume shipments into Gaza, thereby callously prolonging those hostilities. We commend Prime Minister Lapid for his leadership, which ultimately prevented further casualties and suffering.

The Council should be able to come together and unconditionally repudiate the terrorism of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, whose reckless actions have put the lives of civilians on both sides at risk. Their actions must be condemned by all countries in no uncertain terms, and no country should be expected to tolerate or passively accept such brazen attacks on its civilians.

Even as this conflict in Gaza brings new lists of families devastated by loss, we recall the two Israeli civilians still being held in Gaza, along with the remains of two Israeli soldiers killed in action in a previous conflict. Every family, irrespective of nationality, religion or creed, deserves to bury its loved ones in a dignified and unimpeded manner.

We hope that the ceasefire holds, and we will continue working to prevent further violence. We all know that the best way to achieve lasting peace is through a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As President Biden affirmed during his visit to the region in July, the United States remains deeply committed to the two-State solution. To that end, we strongly urge all parties to refrain from any unilateral steps that would imperil progress. Building towards a durable solution means refraining from provocative actions, rhetoric or other measures that would disrupt respect for the historic status quo at holy sites in Jerusalem.

We call on all Member States to join us in supporting steps that can stabilize the situation on the ground, deliver economic benefits to the Palestinian people and revitalize political horizons that meet the needs of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting. We also thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

As we have heard, the situation in the Middle East is a very delicate one that compels the Security Council to

convene. However, we hope that it meets not to merely deplore the situation, but to take action to re-establish dialogue between the parties that would lead to lasting peace.

What will the Council do? That is the question being asked in several parts of the world in the light of the recent escalation. We hope that we can find an answer of some kind. The escalation of violence that occurred at the end of last week is indeed very worrisome. We have already been informed about the toll of the violence — dozens of people dead, including children, and hundreds injured, along with major damage to civilian infrastructure.

The Council's calls for the parties to show maximum restraint and act in line with international humanitarian law are not enough, in particular when principles such as precaution, proportionality and distinction are disregarded. Mexico condemns the disproportionate actions by the Israel Defense Forces. We also condemn the launching of rockets by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which has resulted in the loss of civilian lives. However, as has been said here today, a thorough, independent investigation must be conducted into the attacks that resulted in civilian victims. If not, we will continue to hear reciprocal accusations that do not necessarily shed light on the events.

Of course, we would like to acknowledge Egypt's timely and effective diplomatic efforts, as well as the participation of other regional actors, which led to the ceasefire — albeit fragile but, ultimately, functional. However, the recent escalation of violence again underscores that, so long as lasting peace has not been achieved, the violence will continue.

Israel must lift the blockade on Gaza and put an end to the collective punishment. Pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009), the freedom of movement in the Gaza Strip must be sped up, including of people and basic goods such as food, medicine and fuel — and we are glad that the latter has already resumed, as it is essential for supplying electricity and drinking water, among other things. There must also be free and unhindered access for urgent humanitarian assistance, and the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East must be supported.

The launching of missiles from Gaza is also unacceptable. Perhaps lifting the blockade will stop missile launches.

Mexico reiterates its commitment to the solution of two independent States as the only viable way to resolve the conflict. It is a solution that would ease Israel's legitimate security concerns and enable the creation of a sovereign, politically and economically viable Palestinian State, pursuant to the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. However, we should not wait any longer to put an end to the cycles of military clashes and destruction. The underlying causes of the conflict must be addressed.

Although it is clear that it is primarily up to the parties to the conflict to resume the dialogue, the international community, and the Security Council in particular, is obliged to ensure that such dialogue occurs as soon as possible, without further delay.

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

For more than seven decades, the Council has struggled with the question of Palestine and has been unable to deliver a just and fair solution that assures for the people of Israel and Palestine an opportunity to live side by side in peace and security. We are dismayed by the perpetual cycle of violence that makes the vision of the two-State solution fade with each passing day, which makes the prospect for peace and stability in the region a mirage.

We welcome the present agreement reached under the auspices of Egypt and other friendly regional partners for the restoration of the ceasefire. Nonetheless, we count with regret the many ceasefires that have been crafted and broken and have had to be restored. We believe that, until both Israel and Palestine understand that neither of their narratives is a complete picture of reality, the seemingly intractable conflict could persist at great cost to all of us for many years to come. We hope, therefore, that the positions of both sides can be adjusted peacefully. We believe that it is only through a sober return to the negotiating table that the strong emotional feelings of dispossession, prolonged occupation and denial of full statehood by Palestinians can be reconciled with Israeli fears of terrorism and existential threats from its neighbouring brothers in Palestine and the region.

As a country with pacific intentions, Ghana does not accept the pre-emptive use of force under any circumstances, since it risks the proliferation of the lawless use of force. That is a position we have held for

many years. While acknowledging the State of Israel and its citizens' right to equal measures of security, freedom, opportunity and dignity, we are deeply concerned about the violence in the Gaza Strip, which came on the back of escalatory attacks in the West Bank. We condemn in no uncertain terms the violent attacks that have so far resulted in the deaths of at least 46 Palestinians, including 15 children, with many more injured. We also condemn the more than 1,100 rockets fired by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad into Israel. Those attacks only escalate tensions and prejudice the possibility for the peace that is urgently needed on the ground. Non-violence is a principle that we expect the Palestinian authorities to impress on all militant groups if the peace process is to have any chance of resuscitation. We join the Secretary-General and others in calling for full respect for the agreement reached for the cessation of hostilities for the sake of the civilian population on both sides. They have suffered terrible destruction, unnecessary pain and irredeemable loss.

Ghana is also deeply concerned about the dire humanitarian situation caused by the recent border closures in the West Bank and the 15-year blockade of Gaza, with its adverse impact on women and children. We call on Israel to offer real guarantees of safe passage and access to humanitarian convoys and relief workers to provide needed assistance. We believe that there is no legal or moral justification for indiscriminate attacks targeting civilians and non-combatants, the majority of whom are children and women and who are the most vulnerable. We call for urgent international investigations of the civilian casualties that have occurred and for establishing accountability for them.

In conclusion, I want to say that as the Council, we have a duty not turn our backs on the bloodshed, suffering and hardship that have continued to afflict Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, or on the danger from the rockets that continue to threaten the Israeli communities bordering the Gaza Strip. As a matter of urgency we must therefore reinvigorate the tracks of engagement for the Middle East peace process without delay.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the developments in the Middle East. We are grateful to the Chinese presidency for convening today's meeting to consider the worsening crisis in

Palestinian-Israeli relations, the danger of which is not limited to the region.

We are very concerned about the rapid deterioration of the situation in the conflict zone, which resulted in an armed confrontation and numerous human casualties. The latest escalation was provoked by Israeli air strikes on the Gaza Strip on 5 August, in response to which Palestinian groups launched a large-scale indiscriminate shelling of Israeli territory. As we have heard today, according to the latest information at least 44 Palestinians were killed, including 15 children, with more than 300 injured, as a result of Israeli attacks. We would like to express our condolences to the families of all those killed or injured. We strongly condemn the use of force and exhibitions of violence against the civilian populations of both Palestine and Israel.

We are deeply concerned about such events, which could lead to a resumption of a full-scale military confrontation and a further deterioration in the already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. We call on all the parties involved to exercise maximum restraint, uphold the norms of international humanitarian law and work to prevent a new escalation of hostilities. Against that background, we were relieved and pleased to note the agreement reached on a cessation of hostilities in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone. For our part, from the very outset, we have engaged in energetic efforts in the interests of a ceasefire and maintained intensive contacts with key regional partners. We note in particular the mediation efforts of the Egyptian and Qatari leadership, which ultimately made it possible to reach an agreement on a ceasefire. The United Nations, including Special Coordinator Wennesland, also made an important contribution to resolving the situation.

The recent exacerbation of the situation is the result of a combination of factors, primarily the absence of a direct negotiation process between the Palestinians and Israelis. It is in those negotiations that the parties must work out solutions to all the fundamental issues pertaining to the final status of the illegally occupied Palestinian territory. The stagnation in the peace process, compounded by provocative unilateral steps such as we are currently witnessing, could detonate the situation on the ground at any moment, leading to a new cycle of violence.

We reaffirm Russia's principled and consistent position, as reflected in the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, in support of

a comprehensive and long-term settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in accordance with the principle of a two-State solution. The outcome of that process should be the realization of the legitimate national right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State within the 1967 borders. We believe that a direct dialogue between the parties should be conducted with dynamic support from the Middle East Quartet, as the only internationally recognized mechanism for accompanying the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. In that connection, we once again reaffirm our intention to cooperate with our partners in the Quartet with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the work in that format, which is endorsed by the Security Council.

At the same time, we would like to note the importance of coordinating the international mediators with regional partners. That was what prompted Russia's initiative to hold an expanded ministerial meeting of the Middle East Quartet with key members of the League of Arab States. We regret that due to the unconstructive approach of our American colleagues, the issue of resuming the Quartet's activities is still pending. Washington's stance is aimed at eroding the internationally recognized foundations of the settlement and negotiation formats in the Middle East and does nothing to contribute to a detente but rather leads to further escalation. It cannot serve as a source of confidence for the parties concerned, first and foremost the Palestinians, who as we know are in a far more vulnerable position.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Let me thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for updating us on the latest developments in and around Gaza.

We join others in welcoming the ceasefire reached through the mediation of Egypt. We commend Egypt for its engagement and efforts. We consider the ceasefire to be a step in the right direction for ending the bloodshed and urge all sides to honour it. Nonetheless, we remain very worried by the latest escalation and its consequences. I would like to make the following points.

First, our position has been and will remain clear. Albania firmly condemns all forms of terror attacks on Israel and its population. Terrorism cannot and will never be justified. It can only be condemned in the strongest terms as unacceptable behaviour. Terror cannot promote any cause. Indiscriminate rocket launches from Gaza on populated areas of Israel will

not lead to any solutions. They can only make a bad situation worse, as is always the case. Those who believe in violent solutions will have only themselves to blame for the consequences.

Secondly, Israel has a right to protect itself from such attacks, because no one should live in fear, but it should always use proportionate force and protect civilian populations and civilian infrastructure. The protection of civilians is an obligation under international law for all parties to a conflict, and they should always exercise maximum restraint. Civilians should be kept away from any violent acts. We are deeply troubled by the deaths of innocent civilians, including children. They should never be a target and cannot be collateral damage.

Thirdly, we know that it is all too easy to stoke conflicts in the Middle East. It is harder but better to resist, contain the conflict and seek peaceful solutions. That makes Egypt's mediation even more laudable. Albania reiterates its call to all concerned to refrain from any kind of provocation or violence and from the use of unnecessary force, which can exacerbate an already fragile situation. We have seen it so many times — violence will instil more fear and create more casualties and destruction. It will only undo the achievements and positive steps that have been made, including the opening of Gaza in May 2021, and it will render a path towards peace even more difficult to find. It will not help to heal the wounds of the conflict over the years — it will only add to them.

Israelis and Palestinians have seen everything in the course of the past 74 years. There has been enough war and too many victims. Entire generations have been raised without clear prospects of a solution and populations are living in fear of the next escalation. There is no alternative to dialogue and negotiations, and we do not see any other possible path than through the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition and with Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States. We hope that the humanitarian channels with Gaza will remain open and functional to the benefit of all those in need.

Solutions to such complex issues will not come easy. They need trust among the parties, goodwill and continuous efforts by the parties and all actors who can help. We have seen progress and timid success before. They should serve as templates for the future, proof

that there is possibility to work for and produce results for all.

The political horizon that is now clouded and, ultimately, the desired lasting solution of the most complex geopolitical situation in modern times will not come as a heavenly gift and will not be born while waiting. It will not come through fear or by force. It will not come through threats or powerlessness. It will not come through violence or by denying the existence of others. It may and will come through hard work, continued dedication and trust. That will trace the path to lasting peace, development, a decent and dignified life without fear and with clear prospects for the future of all Israeli and Palestinian youth.

Mrs. Kamboj (India): I also thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing on the situation in Gaza.

After a year of relative calm, tensions have risen again in Gaza. It is a matter of grave concern that the violence has not completely subsided despite hectic diplomatic parleys, development initiatives and efforts by the international community to hold together the fragile ceasefire negotiated in May 2021.

The latest cycle has once again caused immense suffering and resulted in the loss of precious civilian lives, including children, and has left several injured and traumatized. We extend our deepest condolences to all those affected and to their families.

We support the diplomatic efforts of the United Nations, members of the international community and the countries of the region, especially Egypt. Those efforts have led to a ceasefire to calm the situation further and seek to achieve durable peace. We urge all parties to de-escalate the situation in order to ensure that it does not spiral out of control.

The recent developments can also challenge the incremental gains made in the past year in addressing Gaza's humanitarian and economic situation. The delivery of human humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza must therefore remain the focus of the international community.

Even as the Council focuses on the cessation of hostilities in Gaza, we must also underline the urgent need for resuming dialogue between Israel and Palestine for a two-State solution. The absence of direct and meaningful negotiations between the two parties will

only widen the trust deficit, which in turn increases the chances for similar escalations in future.

Long term peace in Israel and Palestine can be achieved only through a negotiated two-State solution leading to the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel, taking into consideration the legitimate security needs of Israel.

India has consistently called for the resumption of direct peace negotiations between the parties, which we believe is the best path towards achieving the goal of a two-State solution. The United Nations and the international community must prioritize the revival of those negotiations.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this urgent meeting. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, for his inspiring briefing and for his efforts.

The escalation of violence in recent days in the Gaza Strip remind us of the scope of the journey towards peace in the Middle East. It is clear that the logic of clashes is synonymous with instability and insecurity for all parties. It will not yield any viable political prospects.

Gabon is committed to the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and welcomes the ceasefire agreement signed in Gaza, mediated by Egypt and several other countries of the region. We remain attentive to the evolving situation on the ground in the aftermath of the entry into force of this fragile truce and call on all parties to show restraint. Of course, we call for accountability. Independent investigations must be conducted and those responsible for the violence on both sides must be held to account for their actions.

My country reaffirms its commitment to the two-State solution, with two States living side by side on the basis of the 1967 borders. Terror on the ground against civilians, including children, is unacceptable. The Council must uphold international law in order to protect the rights of the Palestinian people, while guaranteeing Israel's security. That is the only way to ensure the viability of the two-State solution.

We therefore call on all parties to relaunch negotiations in order to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and achieve a real and lasting peace based on

respect for the principles agreed upon by the parties and the application of the rules of international law.

Finally, we support the work of the Special Coordinator and his statement on the urgency of ending the escalation, ensuring the safety and security of the civilian population and following up on the issue of Palestinian prisoners.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the representatives from the United Arab Emirates and others for calling this important Security Council meeting.

The United Kingdom joins fellow Council Members in welcoming the ceasefire in Gaza announced last night. We express our thanks to Egypt, Qatar and the Office of Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for their mediation efforts. We now urge all parties to do their utmost to ensure that the ceasefire is durable and prevents further violence. These past few days we have once again seen tragic scenes in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

We strongly condemn the firing of over 1,100 rockets at civilians by Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the ongoing campaign of terror attacks by that group, which has resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians, Israelis and Palestinians alike.

As my Foreign Secretary has been clear, the United Kingdom stands by Israel and its right to defend itself in the face of such terrorism and violence. The United Kingdom expresses its deepest condolences to the families of innocent Palestinian civilians killed over the past three days, particularly the tragic deaths of children. The United Kingdom supports a timely and thorough investigation in that regard. The Israeli Palestinian conflict and the cycle of violence have taken too many lives.

We remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, including the lack of movement and access, damage to civilian infrastructure and critical supplies, such as fuel for power plants to supply electricity, including for hospitals. We welcome Israel's announcement that it is allowing humanitarian aid through to Gaza. Immediate access for humanitarian relief is essential, and we expect that the ceasefire agreement will now allow for prompt restoration of movement and access for people and goods via the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings.

This escalation is yet another reminder of the urgent need for progress towards a two-State solution that ensures a safe and secure Israel living alongside a Palestinian State, based on 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing on the current developments.

The escalating acts of violence over the past few weeks in and around Gaza are deeply concerning. These tragic incidents, which have resulted in the loss of civilian lives, including the lives of children, are deplorable. We convey our condolences to families of those who lost their loved ones and quick recovery to the injured.

We are concerned at the disproportionate use of force, and we reiterate the need for fulfilling obligations under international humanitarian law, especially with regard to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Kenya also condemns all acts of violence, particularly the indiscriminate launch of rockets from populated locations in Gaza into Israeli territory by the Islamic Jihad militants.

These hostilities compound an already dire humanitarian situation, and, if not urgently contained, they will, beyond their already high human cost, reverse any progress made towards achieving a permanent and secure peace. We therefore commend the Special Coordinator and the countries in the subregion, in particular Egypt, which immediately stepped in to play an urgently needed mediating role, for their efforts to de-escalate the situation and restore calm. In this regard, we welcome the announcement of a ceasefire, and we encourage all sides to adhere to it, exercise restraint and refrain from any acts of provocation, thereby preventing any further loss of life or destruction of property. We also take note of and welcome the announcement by Israel of the resumption of access for humanitarian personnel and essential goods, including medical supplies, food and fuel, into Gaza.

It is our sincere hope that the ceasefire will hold and that the parties will commit to a resumption of direct negotiations to achieve the two-State solution, where Israel and Palestine dwell side by side in peace within the 1967 borders.

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

I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and express appreciation for his efforts aimed at de-escalating the situation. I also thank the United Arab Emirates and other countries for their initiative to convene today's meeting.

Yesterday afternoon, Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad put a pause in the fierce clashes that took place in the Gaza Strip over the past few days by reaching a ceasefire agreement. Egypt, Qatar, Jordan and other countries of the region have played a key role in reaching the ceasefire through mediation and promoting talks. Special Coordinator Wennesland has also carried out fruitful endeavours in this regard, which China highly appreciates.

The current situation on the ground remains very fragile. Undoubtedly, the Security Council is duty bound to pay close attention to the situation and prevent its further escalation. Reaching a ceasefire agreement is only the beginning. The key to a ceasefire and stopping violence lies in the ceasefire's implementation. Relevant diplomatic efforts should continue, and parties with influence should persist in playing their roles in urging parties to the conflicts to earnestly observe the ceasefire and exercise restraint so that calm can be restored in Gaza as soon as possible.

The clashes in the past few days have killed 41 Palestinians and injured more than 300. Among the dead were 15 children, the youngest of whom was only five years old. I have listened to the briefings by the Special Coordinator, as well as that of our colleague from Palestine. The relevant situation is heartbreaking and saddening indeed.

Civilians were also injured on the Israeli side. China condemns indiscriminate attacks on civilians and the disproportionate use of force and grave violations against children. The protection of civilians and civilian facilities in armed conflicts is an international obligation that must be fulfilled. There should be no exceptions or blind spots.

The security of Israel and the security of Palestine are inseparable. We should pay equal attention to the legitimate security concerns of both sides, break the cycle of violence and achieve common security.

The relevant military operations have also led to the destruction of a large number of houses and infrastructure and the disruption of power supplies in the Gaza Strip, further aggravating the plight of the people in Gaza. The international community should speed up its humanitarian response, increase support for the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza and spare no efforts to prevent a large-scale humanitarian disaster. We call for the immediate lifting of the blockade on Gaza and an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

The situation in Gaza is closely related to that of the West Bank of the Jordan River. We are deeply concerned about the tense situation observed around the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the past two days. We call on all parties concerned to learn from history to effectively safeguard the historical status of the religious holy sites in Jerusalem, respect Jordan's custodianship of the holy sites, avoid any unilateral act of changing the historical status quo and prevent violence, threats and provocations against Muslims. Not only should the international community prevent the crisis in Gaza from spreading to the West Bank, but it should also prevent the frictions in East Jerusalem from rekindling the war in Gaza and turning it into a conflict of larger scope and intensity.

In addition, in recent years, the Security Council has held several emergency meetings on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the problems and the crisis continue to fester unabated. The root causes of the upheavals in the Israeli-Palestinian situation are that the Middle East peace process has deviated from the right track. The foundation of the two-State solution has been eroded, United Nations resolutions have not been followed through effectively, and the Palestinians' right to independence and statehood has been repeatedly violated.

Facts have proven time and time again that piecemeal crisis management cannot replace a comprehensive and fair solution. Limited economic and humanitarian measures cannot erase political and security debts. Individual national policies cannot replace long-term international consensus and multilateral processes. The international community must adopt a long-term view, tackle the root causes of the problem, conduct diplomatic efforts with a sense of urgency, reverse the negative situation on the ground by restarting the peace process as soon as possible, and take substantive steps to advance the two-State solution so that the

Palestinian people can fully enjoy their rights and so that a comprehensive just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue can be achieved at an early date.

The Council should carefully heed the voices of the Palestinian people, adopt effective measures against all disruptions and bring hope and justice back to the Palestinian people.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Hmoud (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on the People's Republic of China's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his valuable briefing.

I would now like to read out the following statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States:

"The Arab Group welcomes the truce that halted the recent Israeli aggression on the occupied Gaza Strip, and we commend the role of the Arab Republic of Egypt in brokering this truce and its pivotal role in restoring calm and stability.

"The Arab Group would like also to thank the State of Qatar and the United States of America for the role that they played in putting an end to the Israeli aggression and restoring security and calm in the occupied Gaza Strip. The Arab Group also commends the continuous efforts of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to protect the legal and historical status of the Islamic and Christian holy sites and addressing Israeli actions that target them, as well as protecting the Arab, Islamic and Christian identity of the holy sites in the context of the Hashemite custodianship of Jordan by His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein.

"The Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip that caused the current cycle of violation is a reflection of an unsustainable situation, namely, the absence of the basic two-State solution, where there would be a sovereign, geographically contiguous Palestinian State within 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as that is the only way to resolve the conflict and achieve fair and comprehensive peace.

"The Israeli aggression targeting Palestinian children and Palestinian homes, as well as civilian

facilities, is condemned in the strongest terms. The international community must protect the Palestinian people and seriously act to put an end to Israel's contempt for international law and international humanitarian law and to investigate violations committed against civilians — 44 Palestinians killed, including 15 children, to date due to the aggression. Is that the proportionate use of force? Is that the concept of respect for the law that is espoused by the occupying Power? I do not think so.

“Fair and comprehensive peace will never be achieved by aggression against Gaza. Peace will never be achieved by undermining the two-State solution through the persistent settlement, confiscation of lands and displacement of Palestinians from their homes. Peace and security will be achieved for all only through effective and serious negotiations to achieve the two-State solution, where there would be an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Security Council resolutions, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative. As the occupying Power, Israel is bound to protect the Palestinian people according to international law.

“The Arab Group calls for putting an end to all escalatory, provocative, unilateral steps. We condemn the Israeli violations of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. We reiterate that the Al-Haram Al-Sharif, whose area is a 144-square-dunums, is an exclusive Muslim place of worship according to the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. In that regard, the Arab Group emphasizes that managing Jerusalem Awqaf and all Al-Aqsa Mosque affairs is exclusively under Jordanian supervising pursuant to the provisions of international humanitarian law, including all the Al-Aqsa Mosque area. We commend the tireless

efforts of His Majesty King Mohammed VI during Morocco chairmanship of the Al-Quds Committee.

“What we witnessed of the escalation over the past few days constitutes a message to the international community that the absence of a political prospect is no longer sustainable. In that regard, the Arab Group reaffirms that peace, as a strategic option, and settling the Arab-Israeli conflict according to international law and the relevant international resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and 2334 (2016), as well as the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, with all its elements, is the only solution.

“The Arab Group again reiterates the centrality of the Palestinian question for the entire Arab nation, as well as the Arab, Islamic and Christian identity of occupied Eastern Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Palestine. We also reiterate the right of the State of Palestine to extend its absolute sovereignty over the entirety of its occupied territories in 1967, including Eastern Jerusalem, its air and maritime spaces, its territorial waters, its natural resources and its borders with neighbouring countries.

“In conclusion, the Arab Group calls on the Security Council and the international community to ensure a complete ceasefire and put an end to Israel's violations of international humanitarian law and its unilateral provocations in the occupied territories and the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Prompt international actions should be taken to put an end to escalation, which will lead to catastrophic consequences for all. Active actions should be taken to create a true prospect for establishing a fair and comprehensive peace.”

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I will now adjourn the meeting so that the Council can continue its discussion on the subject in closed consultations.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.