



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9116th meeting

Thursday, 25 August 2022, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

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

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United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mr. Mills

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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22-47151 (E)



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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; and Mr. Daniel Levy, President of the U.S./Middle East Project.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: My previous briefing (see S/PV.9107) took place just after Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) each independently declared a ceasefire, following three days of military escalation. I am pleased to update the Security Council that the ceasefire remains in effect and a fragile calm has been restored in Gaza. The Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings have remained open since 8 August, allowing for the entry of essential goods and materials. The United Nations is working with partners to ensure the delivery of urgent assistance to those who need it most.

The ceasefire prevented the situation from escalating into a full-scale war, which would have had devastating consequences. It also allowed for the resumption of the measures implemented over the past year that have resulted in much-needed economic relief to the people in Gaza. But a ceasefire is limited to ending immediate hostilities; the underlying drivers of the conflict are still unresolved.

Violence has increased across much of the occupied West Bank. Israeli settlement activity continues, along with demolitions and evictions. Fiscal and political challenges threaten the Palestinian Authority's effectiveness in delivering essential public services. The West Bank and Gaza remain politically divided. Palestinians in Gaza face the challenge of economic and movement restrictions linked with the Israeli closure regime, the nature of Hamas rule and the ever-

present threat of violence. Unless those fundamental issues are addressed, the cycle of acute crisis followed by short-term fixes will persist. Concerted efforts are needed to restore a political horizon and resume meaningful negotiations.

My briefing on 8 August provided an initial account of the three-day escalation. Overall, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted 147 airstrikes against what they said were militant targets in Gaza. Palestinian militants indiscriminately fired approximately 1,100 rockets from densely populated areas in the Strip towards Israel. Of those, Israeli officials reported that around 35 per cent were intercepted by the Iron Dome and 18 per cent fell short and landed within the Gaza Strip, causing damage and, reportedly, civilian casualties.

The violence took a severe toll on civilians. According to the most recent figures, 49 Palestinians were killed, of whom at least 26 were civilians, including four women and 17 children. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, 360 Palestinians were injured during the escalation. Israeli officials reported 70 Israelis injured, including nine children. In Gaza, 10 houses were completely destroyed, while another 48 were severely damaged. A reported 650 housing units were damaged.

On 5 August, Israeli forces carried out a series of air strikes, killing a senior PIJ leader and other suspected militants. In the initial strikes, a 5-year-old girl was killed in eastern Gaza City, along with two men, and a 22-year-old woman was killed east of Khan Younis.

On 6 August, a 60-year-old woman was killed and five were children injured in an Israeli strike. One of the children, a 10-year-old girl, died in hospital on 8 August. On the same day, seven other Palestinians were killed in an Israeli strike in Rafah, including a 13-year-old child, two women and a senior PIJ commander. Thirty others were reportedly injured, including at least seven children and five women.

On 7 August, five children were killed and four others were injured in an explosion in Al-Falouja cemetery, east of Al-Jabalia. On 16 August, citing Israeli official sources, media reported that the IDF had concluded that the casualties were caused by an Israeli air strike. The IDF has not publicly confirmed the finding.

On two separate occasions, Palestinian civilians were killed or injured in explosions, the causes of which have yet to be verified. On 6 August, seven

Palestinians — all civilians, including at least four children — were killed in an explosion near the Emad Aql Mosque in Al-Jabalia. Forty-three others, including 26 children, were injured. On 7 August, an explosion in Al-Bureij killed three children and their 49-year-old father, whom the Al-Qassam Brigades claimed as an operative. Israeli forces denied involvement in the incidents, which they said were caused by rocket launches from militant groups. Palestinian armed groups have made no public statements on those incidents.

I am concerned that air strikes in densely populated areas resulted in civilian fatalities and injuries. Israel must abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law, including the proportional use of force and the taking of all feasible precautions to spare civilians and civilian objects in the conduct of military operations.

I condemn the indiscriminate launching of rockets by Palestinian armed groups from highly populated neighbourhoods in Gaza into civilian population centres in Israel, in violation of international humanitarian law.

I reiterate that children must never be the target of violence or put in harm's way.

Daily violence also continued at high levels across the occupied West Bank. During the reporting period, a total of 12 Palestinians, including four children, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis and other incidents, and 289 Palestinians, including three women and 83 children, were injured. Israeli settlers and other civilians perpetrated 39 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in eight injuries and/or damage to Palestinian property.

In all, 28 Israelis and other civilians, including at least four women and two children and four Israeli security personnel, were injured by Palestinians in clashes, shootings, stabbings and ramming attacks or as a result of the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails, among other incidents. In total, Palestinians perpetrated 75 attacks against Israeli civilians, of which 57 were stone-throwing incidents, resulting in injuries and/or damage to Israeli property.

On 22 July, Nasser Al-Shaer, a Hamas-affiliated former official, was shot multiple times and injured by two unknown assailants in Kafr Qalil village, near Nablus. The Palestinian Authority ordered an investigation, and on 26 July, Palestinian security

forces announced that they had arrested two Palestinian suspects.

On 24 July, Israeli security forces shot and killed two Palestinians and injured six others in an exchange of fire during an arrest operation in Nablus.

On 26 July, Israeli forces shot an unarmed 59-year-old man with a mental disability at the Huwwara checkpoint, south of Nablus. The man died of his injuries on 29 July.

On 9 August, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian and injured five others during a clash in Hebron. Israeli officials said that the Palestinian had thrown stones towards Israeli forces, who responded with live fire.

On the same day, four Palestinians, including a 16-year-old, were killed, and 76 Palestinians were injured with live ammunition during clashes that erupted following an Israeli security forces military operation in Nablus. Another 16-year-old Palestinian subsequently died from his injuries.

On 14 August, a Palestinian opened fire at a group of Jewish worshippers in Jerusalem's Old City. Eight civilians, including a pregnant woman, were injured, two seriously. The assailant fled the scene, but later turned himself over to the police.

On 15 August, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian during a search operation and subsequent clashes in Kufr Aqab, north of Jerusalem. Israeli police stated that the man was shot while attempting to stab officers. The man's father, who was present during the operation, denied that.

On 17 August, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian and injured five others during clashes in Nablus, which took place in the context of Palestinians throwing stones and reportedly firing towards buses transporting Israeli civilians to Joseph's Tomb for religious worship in accordance with established procedures.

On 19 August, an unarmed 58-year-old Palestinian man was shot and killed. A video appeared to show the man to be a bystander returning from dawn prayers when an exchange of fire broke out. There are conflicting accounts as to the source of the shot. Israeli authorities stated that they are investigating the incident.

Settler-related violence also continued during the reporting period. On 29 July, a 15-year-old Palestinian

was shot during a confrontation between Palestinians and armed Israeli settlers accompanied by Israeli security forces outside Al-Mughhayyir village, near Ramallah. The boy subsequently died. According to witnesses, he had thrown stones and was shot in the back while running away. It remains unclear whether Israeli settlers or security forces fired the shot. Two other Palestinians were injured with live ammunition.

In three separate incidents, Israeli civilians used batons and metal bars and threw stones to attack Palestinian farmers working on their lands, injuring five Palestinians, including an elderly man.

I reiterate that the perpetrators of all acts of violence must be held accountable and brought to justice. Security forces must use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

Turning to settlement-related developments, on 25 July, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced plans for the construction of 1,215 housing units at the Lower Aqueduct site, adjacent to Kibbutz Ramot Rachel and the Palestinian neighbourhood of Umm Tuba. Some of the units are intended for construction across the Green Line in occupied East Jerusalem.

On 27 July, Israel's Supreme Court reversed its previous ruling, which ordered the evacuation of settlers from the illegal outpost of Mizpe Kramim, near Ramallah. The Court accepted the Government's argument that the Palestinian land in the area had been allocated to the settlers in good faith and that the principle of market regulation should be applied. Rights groups expressed concerns that the ruling would pave the way for the retroactive legalization of other outposts under Israeli law.

On 28 July, Israeli settlers, accompanied by Israeli security forces, moved into an empty Palestinian house in the H-2 Area of Hebron city.

I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 78 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and 18 in East Jerusalem, displacing 103 Palestinians, including 50 children. The demolitions were carried out due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

On 25 July, Israeli security forces demolished two homes housing multiple families in Qarawat Bani Hassan village, near Salfit in Area B. Family members of the residents were accused of having killed an Israeli settlement guard in April 2022. The demolition resulted in damage to three additional neighbouring homes and displaced 18 people, including 10 children. Three Palestinians were injured in related clashes with Israeli forces.

On 8 August, Israeli security forces demolished two houses in the village of Rummana, near Jenin, in Area B. The houses belonged to family members of Palestinians indicted for killing three people in Israel in May. Thirteen people, including four children, were displaced. I call on the Israeli authorities to end their demolitions of Palestinian-owned property and the displacement and eviction of Palestinians, and to approve additional plans that would enable Palestinians to build legally and address their development needs. I am concerned about the recent announcement by Israel's Ministry of Education that it had given instructions to halt the granting of permanent licences to six Palestinian schools in occupied East Jerusalem owing to what it described as incitement against Israel in their curriculum. If a solution is not found, more than 2,000 students will be affected.

On 17 August, the Military Commander of the Israel Defense Forces rejected appeals by five non-governmental organizations (NGOs) objecting to their designation in November 2021 as unlawful organizations. The same day, Israel's Defence Minister announced that the designation of three of them as terrorist organizations, made in October 2021 under Israel's counter-terrorism law, had been made permanent. Three other organizations have appealed their designations. On 18 August, Israeli forces ordered the closure of the offices of seven organizations, including all six NGOs that had been designated as terrorist organizations in November 2021, and searched their offices in Ramallah. Equipment was confiscated and in some cases destroyed, and confidential files were seized. The Israeli authorities also summoned the directors of at least three of those organizations for questioning. I echo the Secretary-General's concern about the shrinking space for civil society in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

In Gaza, despite the disruptions caused by the escalation, some positive steps were taken during the reporting period. As of 1 August, more than 14,000

economic-needs permits have been issued, including more than 11,000 permits for workers from Gaza to enter Israel and another 3,000 for traders and businesspeople. Israel also extended social entitlements to workers from the Gaza Strip. I would welcome seeing a steady increase in the number of permits issued in future. Since 8 August, when movement was resumed into and out of Gaza, progress has been made on resuming the incremental easing of access restrictions that we have seen over the past year. However, delays in importing essential goods and equipment continue.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains deeply troubling. The escalation, and the closures of Israeli-operated crossings between 2 and 7 August, exacerbated the ongoing hardships and resulted in new immediate needs. The United Nations has identified approximately \$15 million in additional funding requirements for providing psychological support, shelter, livelihoods and cash assistance, as well as essential medicines and medical assistance. In addition, the humanitarian response across the occupied Palestinian territory continued to face chronic funding gaps. As of mid-2022, only 25 per cent of the requirement for the humanitarian response plan had been met. Meanwhile, global price increases for key commodities have strained the resources of humanitarian partners and left vulnerable families at risk of food insecurity. The World Food Programme is in immediate need of \$26.5 million to support vulnerable households in Gaza and the West Bank. If the funding is not received, the support to those families will stop in October. On 1 August, in a welcome step towards facilitating imports to the occupied West Bank via Jordan, the use of 40-foot containers was permitted for the first time for shipping goods via the Allenby Bridge. I am hopeful that it will pave the way for addressing other significant obstacles to Palestinian trade.

Turning to the region in the Golan, the ceasefire between Israel and Syria was generally maintained despite several violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. It remains important that the parties respect their obligations under the terms of the Agreement and prevent risks of escalation.

In Lebanon, the lack of progress on reforms, the deadlock in the formation of a Government and the increasing strain on institutions, including the Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces, continue to weigh heavily on the State authorities. Heightened tensions persist in the area of operations of the United Nations

Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in south Lebanon. In recent months, at least four firing ranges unknown to Lebanese authorities have been observed in regular use south of the Litani River, which is a blatant violation of resolution 1701 (2006). The increasing number of incidents affecting UNIFIL's freedom of movement is unacceptable. Ensuring the mission's access throughout its entire area of operations, including the full length of the Blue Line, is critical to implementing its mandate. Israel's regular and ongoing violations of Lebanese airspace also remain of concern and constitute violations of resolution 1701 (2006).

The measures taken by Israel to ease the conditions in Gaza since the May 2021 escalation have improved the lives and livelihoods of many Palestinians, and I am encouraged to see them being restored following the most recent escalation. The United Nations will continue engaging with the parties to expand on the progress made over the past year, with the aim of solidifying the ceasefire and enabling further economic development. But as the events of the past weeks have shown us once again, managing the conflict is no substitute for real political progress. We must again turn our attention to the broader strategy of ending the occupation and realizing a two-State solution in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements. That strategy will require significant steps from all sides. It must include the strengthening of the Palestinian Authority and its ability to engage with Israel on the political, economic and security fronts, as well as efforts to achieve the return of the legitimate Palestinian Government to Gaza.

It is crucial that we work to restore a political horizon. As a first step, the tensions and violence across the occupied Palestinian territory should be stopped or significantly reduced, especially in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Unilateral steps that perpetuate negative trends must stop. The space for Palestinian economic activity and further improvements to access and movement in Gaza and the West Bank should be expanded. At the same time, the Palestinian Authority, including its institutional capacity, should be strengthened. Considering the things that I regularly have to report to the Council about, the status quo is neither a strategy nor a strategic option — neither for positive change on the ground nor for a restart of talks between the two sides. I urge the Israeli and Palestinian leadership, as well as the countries of the region and the broader international community, to take firm action to enable a return to meaningful negotiations.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Lazzarini.

Mr. Lazzarini: Let me first express my sincere appreciation to the presidency for giving me the opportunity to address the Security Council today. Since my previous briefing to the Council in May 2021 (see S/PV.8782), the situation of Palestinian refugees has further deteriorated. More than 80 per cent of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza live below the poverty line.

In Gaza, the escalation of violence earlier this month was a stark reminder that war and violence can erupt anytime in the absence of a genuine and comprehensive effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some 60 Palestine refugee families lost their homes, and 17 children were killed, 8 of whom were students in schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Nearly half of UNRWA students suffer from trauma and need special assistance to cope with the repeated cycles of violence and the economic hardship in which their families live.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, political, economic and security conditions are deteriorating as Palestine refugees experience high levels of dispossession, violence and insecurity.

In Syria, after 11 years of conflict, the most destitute families are returning to live amid the rubble of their destroyed homes as they can no longer afford rent. Children who returned to demolished camps, such as Yarmouk or Ein Al-Tal, walk near unexploded ordnance to take UNRWA buses to school.

In Lebanon, the pressure on the Agency to do more to address the impact of the economic and financial crisis on the Palestine refugee community is becoming unbearable. Protests and acts of violence directed against UNRWA are, at times, forcing my colleagues to close our installations. Illegal emigration of Palestine refugees is rising.

In Jordan, the pandemic left deep scars on the labour market. Unemployment is soaring, particularly for females and young people. Child labour and early marriage are reportedly on the rise.

Despite those challenging operating environments, UNRWA remains the lifeline for one of the most underprivileged and desperate communities in the

region. Going to school, getting health services or receiving a food parcel are, for many Palestine refugees, their only sources of normality. They look to UNRWA for that normality.

For over 70 years, UNRWA has been a source of opportunity and hope for a better future for generations of Palestine refugees. With the support of Member States, the Agency has contributed to one of the most successful human development stories in the region. From educating over 2 million Palestine refugee girls and boys, to universal infant vaccination and reduced maternal mortality that exceeds global standards, there is a lot for which we can all be proud.

During armed conflicts, the Security Council's support has enabled UNRWA to provide shelter and protection and helped rebuild destroyed neighbourhoods and communities. The psychosocial support that Palestine refugee children receive is key to their mental well-being and essential for their ability to learn, and the quality of the education that UNRWA students receive is praised by such reputable validators as the British Council, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Bank. On average, they outperform their peers by one year of learning.

In Syria, nearly 95 per cent of UNRWA students passed their national exams this year. Rama, from Yarmouk refugee camp, achieved the highest scores despite prolonged displacement and repeated power cuts. Success stories are everywhere, from Ghada, who is the first woman technician in renewable energy in Gaza, to Bara'a, who joined a medical research team in Spain that is making groundbreaking progress in the fight against pancreatic cancer.

Today children and young people must be able to perform and compete in an increasingly digitalized world. UNRWA is committed to giving Palestine refugees that ability. Our information technology hub in Gaza serves the entire United Nations system and provides jobs for over 120 young women and men.

We reached gender parity in our schools a long time ago, and our 700 schools across the region comprise the only public-like educational institution to have rolled out a comprehensive human rights curriculum. While we are acutely aware that we operate in a politically charged environment, we have made unparalleled investments in promoting United Nations values and

UNESCO standards across our programmes and through staff attitudes.

Today our collective achievements are at risk. For the past decade, the chronic underfunding of our programme budget has made it increasingly challenging for the Agency to fulfil the mandate given it by the General Assembly. Shifting geopolitical priorities, changing regional dynamics and the emergence of new humanitarian crises have deprioritized the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Coordinated campaigns to delegitimize UNRWA with a view to eroding the rights of Palestine refugees are increasing in frequency and in maliciousness. The Agency has also experienced more than once how a change in domestic politics can suspend support overnight.

Consequently, and despite immense outreach efforts, funding has stagnated over the last decade, forcing us to operate year after year with a shortfall of around \$100 million. Until last year, the funding gap was managed through cost control, austerity and carry-over of large liabilities from one year to the next. But today we have no financial reserve. We have reached the limit of austerity and cost-control measures. Today UNRWA is facing an existential threat.

What is at stake is this: quality and principled education for over half a million girls and boys; access to health care for around 2 million Palestine refugees and a social safety net for around 400,000 of the poorest among the poor; psychosocial support for hundreds of thousands of children; job opportunities for the youth in Gaza and elsewhere; and emergency food and cash assistance for over 2 million Palestine refugees across the region to meet their humanitarian needs. What is at stake is simply the sense of normality and hope that our services bring to Palestine refugees.

A major aspect of the role of UNRWA in regional stability stems precisely from the predictability of its high-quality services. For Palestine refugees, UNRWA remains the last standing pillar of the commitment of the international community to their rights to a dignified life and to a just and lasting solution. When they see us delaying salaries, decreasing the quality of the services and unable to respond to increasing needs, they understand that the support of the international community to their plight is fading.

Despair and a sense of abandonment are growing in the refugee camps. Despair is a threat to mental well-being. Despair is a threat to peace and stability.

It is hard to believe that the lack of sufficient resources results solely from financial constraints. The impact of predictable services on the safety of refugees and on regional stability should suffice to convince every Member State to commit funding to UNRWA in line with the resolutions they adopt.

Instead, the Agency continues to be under three sources of intense pressure: first, the commitment of the General Assembly to upholding the rights of Palestine refugees and its instruction to UNRWA to deliver a number of public-like services until a just and lasting solution is found; secondly, the lack of sufficient funding from Member States with which to implement the mandate and the unpredictability of most of the funding; and lastly, the objection to any perceived change in the way services are delivered. Any such change is seen as an attempt to encroach on the rights of the refugees. Hosts and refugees fear that it may lead to weakening UNRWA and, with time, dismantling it altogether. Failing to reconcile those demands will make the General Assembly mandate more and more impossible to implement.

Our ability to fulfil the General Assembly mandate lies with Member States and with their political will to fully fund our core budget. I appeal today to Member States that have reduced their funding to reconsider the impact of their decision on the region's stability. I appeal to those that have changed their political and foreign policy dynamics in the region to continue to be part of the success stories of UNRWA's education.

In a few weeks, the extension of the UNRWA mandate will be put to the General Assembly for approval. I appeal to all Member States to mobilize politically and financially to support UNRWA and to continue working towards a political solution that will benefit the region and its peoples.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Lazzarini for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Levy.

Mr. Levy: I would like to thank the Security Council, and the Chinese presidency in particular, for allowing me to share some thoughts with Council members today. The events of earlier this month covered in detail by Special Envoy Wennesland are as concerning as they are predictable. To be very clear: Israelis deserve security; Palestinians deserve security.

Month in and month out the Council meets to repeat its familiar condemnations, formulas and slogans. I want to use this opportunity to rethink and reappraise some assumptions and beliefs that may inadvertently contribute to the intractability of this conflict — to consider afresh reasons why it remains so prone to stalemate and human suffering. I suggest doing that through five concepts that may assist us in such an endeavour.

The first concept is justice. The permanent dispossession and denial of the most basic rights and freedoms of the Palestinian people will never be a recipe for achieving sustainable security. That, the illegal blockade of Gaza and the unlawful occupation represent forms of structural violence and collective punishment that we cannot ignore. While the need for a political horizon is acknowledged, the dimensions of that horizon seem to shrink and shrivel, becoming ever less ambitious. There can be no effective or prolonged approach to Gaza in isolation — it is part of the broader Israeli-Palestinian reality — whether in terms of security, the separation policy or closure. And crucially, there is a need to respect international law across the board — whether in State responses to armed threats or partisan resistance against State occupation. I would also say, in that context, that there is a need for Palestinian political renewal, internal reconciliation and overcoming of divisions, as well as an international need to engage all relevant actors without applying unrealistic and selective preconditions.

The second concept is equilibrium. Any attempt to resume negotiations between the parties without addressing power asymmetries is a hollow and redundant exercise. As Comfort Ero, President of Crisis Group — with whom my organization, the United States/Middle East Project, cooperates extensively — noted to the Security Council recently (see S/PV.8913) — the structural power imbalance between an occupying State and an occupied people must be acknowledged. A focus on relations of power, rather than both-sides-ism, may help offer clarity of thinking and policy.

As an example, attempts at economic confidence-building are consistently too little, too late and too ephemeral when they are attempted under conditions of permanent occupation. That defies principles of harmony and reciprocity. Especially with global resources stretched thin, the Palestinian economic predicament should really be understood as one that is primarily a function of politically

imposed obstacles — on movement, borders, access to land, confiscations, demolitions and ever-expanding settlements — rather than the absence of charity.

We heard the briefing by the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, just now. There must be that economic commitment to a predictably resourced UNRWA capable of delivering services. That is a security necessity, but also a commitment of a political nature to Palestinian refugees who continue to be denied a solution.

The third concept is accountability. I previously had the opportunity to highlight to the Council two core problems (see S/PV.8883): a legitimacy deficit in Palestinian politics and an accountability deficit vis-à-vis Israeli policies. It is Israel's actions, as the powerful occupying party, that pre-eminently determine the direction of travel. I would suggest that profound shifts are occurring as a result of the unwillingness to hold Israel to account, not least on settlements.

Recent months have witnessed a disturbing intensification of that trend with the targeting of those least able to protect themselves and those most in the front line bearing witness to violations of international law. Following the shock expressed by the Secretary-General over the number of Palestinian children killed and maimed by Israeli forces last year, we have just seen that same trend again this month in Gaza, as noted by Special Coordinator Wennesland and Commissioner-General Lazzarini. We witnessed the killing of those who report on and expose these crimes, Shireen Abu Akleh being the latest journalist to pay with her life.

And now I would draw Council members' attention to the assault on those who document abuses and defend human rights, with Israel's actions against six prominent Palestinian civil society organizations, some funded by members in this Chamber. A terrorist designation was made by the Israeli authorities against six non-governmental organizations. A number of countries went on record that compelling evidence had not been forthcoming. Now the offices of those organizations have been raided and shuttered and their workers have been interrogated. A response limited to expressions of condemnation is too easily dismissed. It is impunity on steroids and, unfortunately, it encourages more of the same, or even worse. There really should be practical consequences at a multilateral and bilateral level. We already have a hollowed out Palestinian polity

and economy, and this is now an attempt to emaciate Palestinian civil society.

The fourth concept is context. It is no exaggeration to characterize the current global disorder as a world in metamorphosis — dangerously combustible while potentially rewarding if we can be innovative while realistic. In that respect, the Abraham Accords may be many things, but they cannot be a substitute or distraction from securing peace and the rights of Palestinians. If not properly managed, normalization can risk further nurturing a misplaced Israeli sense that the Palestinians can be ignored and marginalized.

It is also the case that international law and principles purported to be universal cannot be asserted only when it is convenient, and then set aside when friends or allies appear in the role of perpetrator. Our world is too transparent; these things are noticed.

Fifthly and finally, there is the concept of architecture. I would suggest that, contrary to the prevailing perception that everything is stuck and a stalemate, in actual fact Israelis and Palestinians are passing through a quite profound transition. Talk of the eclipse of the two-State option is neither alarmist nor far-fetched, rather, it is a sober and probably a behind-the-curve rendering of the lived reality. I would say that, for Israel itself, the absence of an off-ramp on this journey towards a new paradigm should be a cause for concern — placing in jeopardy that country's future. Neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis are going to disappear, and finding a just way to live together has never been more urgent. Over time, that profound shift will most probably take every State represented here out of its comfort zone. Let me conclude by briefly explaining why.

We know of certain developments that can be both politically uncomfortable and politically salient at the same time. The increasingly weighty body of scholarly, legal and public opinion that considers Israel to be perpetrating apartheid in the territories under its control is just such a development. A designation made by Palestinian scholars and institutes and later examined and endorsed by Israeli human rights organizations, led by B'Tselem, has now become the legal designation made by Human Rights Watch and this year by Amnesty International. That is what the failure to generate accountability and to achieve two States looks like. As uncomfortable as I know it is for some, I urge the Council not to underestimate the longer-term significance and traction of what is happening. At the

Human Rights Council meetings held in Geneva in March, representatives of States speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, the Group of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation all referenced that apartheid situation. It will come as little surprise if that echoes and resonates in parts of the world that have experienced apartheid and settler colonialism and gone through decolonization. It is a paradigm that will also bring the discrimination faced by Palestinian citizens of Israel into sharper relief. It must be a wake-up call.

Some 75 years ago, the United Nations offered partition as the political paradigm for the Holy Land. Today that land is de facto united under one dominion. In the absence of unprecedentedly far-reaching action to make good on partition, the successors to the Council members of today will be coming to debate the challenge of achieving equality under a reality of non-partition.

If the Council seriously considers those five principles and their implications, we may find a way out of the repetitive impasse — the familiar condemnations, formulas and slogans — and perhaps usher in a new opening and path to justice and equilibrium for Palestinians and Israelis.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Levy for his briefing. Many of his views are thought-provoking and should enable the Council to better reflect on the issue with a view to finding a solution to it.

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

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Commissioner-General Lazzarini for their briefings. We also appreciate the briefing by Mr. Levy.

We welcome the continued maintenance of the ceasefire enacted on 7 August, as well as the resumption of fuel shipments to Gaza to ensure that hospitals and other public services can maintain critical operations. The United States would like to reiterate its appreciation to Egypt, Qatar, Jordan and the United Nations for their close engagement with all parties in order to prevent another escalation of the conflict. We mourn the loss of life, and we support a speedy and thorough investigation into reports of civilian casualties. We demand that terrorist organizations, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, cease attacks on Israel.

Those indiscriminate attacks are on Israeli civilians and recklessly put Palestinian lives in Gaza at risk. We condemn all attacks on civilians, including the 14 August shooting attack in Jerusalem on worshippers near the Wailing Wall.

The United States values the role that independent non-governmental organizations play in monitoring human rights violations and abuses in the West Bank and Gaza, in Israel and elsewhere, and firmly believes they must be able to continue that important work. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, together with a strong civil society, is critically important to responsible, responsive and democratic governance. The United States remains concerned about the escalating tensions, especially in the West Bank. We urge Israelis and Palestinians to refrain from unilateral actions, including settlement activity, evictions and the demolition of Palestinian homes, incitements to violence and disruptions of the historic status quo at holy sites, all of which risk a resumption of violence. As President Biden reaffirmed while visiting Israel and the West Bank last month, the United States believes that

“the Palestinian people deserve a State of their own that is independent, sovereign, viable and contiguous. Two States for two peoples, both of whom have deep and ancient roots in this land, living side by side in peace and security. Both States fully respecting the equal rights of the other citizens. Both peoples enjoying equal measure of freedom and dignity”.

There are no shortcuts to statehood. It is imperative that all stakeholders help to develop the conditions needed for negotiations on a two-State solution and embrace a political horizon that would support it, and that can be achieved only through direct negotiations between the parties. The Negev Forum highlights what can be achieved by working together to overcome shared challenges in the region. We believe the Forum can support the emergence of a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East. The United States also believes that those efforts contribute to tangible progress towards the goal of advancing a negotiated peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The United States is committed to serving as a strong partner of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and is proud to be the Agency’s largest single donor. As we have just heard, UNRWA plays an essential role in promoting regional stability, and it

cannot do so without adequate funding. Many countries offer rhetorical support to UNRWA here in New York but do not match their words with financial support. We encourage Member States to provide robust, reliable funding to help address the Agency’s long-term sustainability, as the Commissioner-General has just outlined.

In conclusion, we call on all countries to join us in our commitment to peace and security in the Middle East. We urge all parties in the Council and around the world to support efforts and initiatives that help meet the economic, political and humanitarian needs of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for their briefings. We also listened with interest to the briefing by Mr. Levy.

Today’s discussion of the situation in the Middle East comes three weeks after the escalation in Palestinian and Israeli clashes, which became an armed confrontation with casualties. Another uptick in tensions was provoked by Israeli air strikes on the Gaza Strip, in response to which firing began onto Israeli territory. It is very disheartening that these are far from being the first such outbreaks of violence. In that regard, we welcomed the ceasefire agreement and call on all the parties concerned to exercise restraint and avoid taking unilateral steps or engaging in inflammatory rhetoric. They should also comply with international humanitarian law and not allow another escalation of hostilities.

We note in particular the mediation efforts by Egypt and Qatar that ultimately led to the ceasefire. However, we are concerned about the possibility that if a scenario of this kind recurs, it could cause a full-scale military clash and further deterioration in the already dire situation in the Gaza Strip, whose residents need immediate humanitarian assistance, including with regard to rebuilding ruined infrastructure.

It is becoming ever clearer that, in the context of the Palestinian question, which has gone unresolved for so long, and a lack of due attention from the international community, any provocation could lead to a new large-scale regional confrontation. A trigger for the resumption of violence could be the ongoing

unilateral steps, taken primarily by Israel, to create an irreversible situation on the ground, such as the construction of settlements in the occupied territories; the eviction of Palestinians and the destruction of their homes; the expropriation of property; arbitrary arrests; a de facto carte blanche for the Israeli military to use force; and systematic violations of the status of the Holy Places of Jerusalem.

Over the past month, the Israeli authorities have provisionally approved a plan to build 1,446 housing units in the settlement of Sur Baher in the southern part of the Jerusalem municipality. A decision was also made to expand the settlement of Mevo Horon in Ramallah governorate by 251 housing units.

The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493) also expresses concern about the number of Palestinian children killed by the Israeli army. In 2021 alone, 78 minors were killed, 982 were injured and 637 were arrested. Western countries have turned a blind eye to the systematic violations of Palestinians' rights over the course of the longest occupation in post-World War history, while giving excessive attention to individual regions and conflict situations — a clear indication of their double standards.

It has recently become clear that one of the factors hindering the achievement of a just peace for Palestinians is the actions of the United States, which seeks to monopolize the peace process and reformat it according to its desired mould. There have been obvious attempts to impose economic peace on the Palestinian people instead of meeting their legitimate aspirations to create their own independent State. Washington effectively blocked the activities of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, whose most recent ministerial-level meeting level took place in 2016.

For our part, we advocate for a just solution to the Palestinian question on the basis of a two-State solution and the universally recognized international legal framework providing for the creation of an independent Palestinian State along the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. During direct negotiations between the parties, other final-status issues should also be settled, including on borders, refugees and water resources. In doing so, concerns about Israel's security must be taken into account.

We are taking consistent steps to support collective efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East and will

continue to work with all interested parties in the region and in the Security Council.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I would like to thank Mr. Wennesland and Mr. Lazzarini for their informative briefings. I also listened with great attention to Mr. Levy's briefing.

The ceasefire announced on 7 August is still fragile. Without concrete measures to reduce tensions in the Palestinian territories and in Israel, there is a real risk of the resumption of violence. Unfortunately, in the past few days, we have witnessed actions with no aim other than to shatter the current truce. I refer in particular to the attack against Jewish worshippers in Jerusalem on 14 August. I join Mr. Wennesland in deploring the fact that certain groups justify such acts of terror.

Brazil is also concerned by the large number of Palestinian civilians who were killed or injured, and children in particular, as a result of recent clashes. Brazil condemns all attacks against civilians, and we call on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and abide by international humanitarian law.

The cessation of acts of violence and terror, de-escalation and rebuilding trust are all necessary and urgent, but they are not ends in themselves. Unless there is progress towards a just and sustainable political solution to the conflict, the danger of renewed cycles of violence will persist. Respect for international law and for the relevant resolutions of the Security Council must be the basis of any lasting peace. Brazil stands ready to contribute to finding concrete solutions and ways forward. We reiterate our support for a two-State solution, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace, security and prosperity.

As the conflict drags on, the civilian population pays a heavy toll — not only in terms of lives lost and people injured, but also in terms of frustrated expectations and dreams cut short. Economic growth and development are necessary to give the Palestinian people hope and to help reduce the appeal of violent ideologies.

As we have stated before, financial support to the Palestinian Authority is an integral part of efforts for peace and security. Moreover, the Palestinian economy as a whole needs support for its industrial and agricultural sectors. In that context, Brazil would like to praise the untiring work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its Commissioner-General,

Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, who strive to fulfil their mission in spite of persistent underfunding. Even though our Government budget faces constraints of its own, Brazil announced in June an additional financial contribution to UNRWA, and we support the renewal of UNRWA's mandate at the next session of the General Assembly.

Diplomacy and the efforts of the international community have prevented the most recent flare-up of violence from escalating further. Let us not be satisfied with a mere ceasefire. Instead, the Security Council should spare no effort to bring about real progress towards a political solution. The international community and the populations affected expect no less from us.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Every time we meet here on this issue — which happens quite often — we express our serious concerns about the worrisome trend of violence and tension, with the fear that such negative developments will take the Israelis and the Palestinians further away from efforts to resolve the tragic conflict. That is why upholding the ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian militants is critical to avoiding another explosion of violence and safeguard the gains that have been made through the tireless efforts of many actors over the past couple of years. That is especially true with regard to Gaza, where the ability of an increased number of Palestinians to work in Israel has a real positive impact on the population and contributes to improving prospects for rapprochement and peaceful coexistence.

Violence is a tragedy within a greater tragedy, which is and remains the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, every effort must be made to prevent escalation, and every opportunity must be seized to bring the parties closer together. We will not tire in reiterating our categorical rejection and condemnation of every terrorist attack against Israel or anywhere else. We abhor terrorism in all its forms and call on all to denounce it vigorously and unreservedly. We mourn every loss of life from such senseless and cowardly attacks, especially when they involve civilians.

We support Israel's right to defend itself and respond to terrorist attacks with proportionality and within the bounds of both domestic and international law. We are also concerned about the loss of life among Palestinians, especially children. Civilians in general, and children in particular, should never be a target or put in a harm's way in any circumstance. Those tragic cases should be properly investigated to deter similar cases in the future.

Each and every innocent victim of violence serves as a tragic reminder of how desperately peace is needed now, not tomorrow. That is why we support every effort to resume the peace talks within the legal framework created by the United Nations, in order to find a lasting and just solution to the conflict, with a democratic and secure Israel and a viable and democratic Palestinian State living in peace with one another, with Jerusalem as their shared capital. While peace is always signed on paper, it is actually implemented on the ground through concrete and resolute actions that are palpable and beneficial to all. There can be no doubt that peace will remain an elusive dream until Israelis and Palestinians enjoy full and equal rights — the basic conditions for a dignified life. Rights are the foundation for reconciliation and mutual recognition between Israelis and Palestinians.

Let me also reiterate our strong support for civil society as a critical pillar of any democratic society. We join the European Union and others in expressing our concern about Israel's action against six Palestinian non-governmental agencies, as well as in calling on Israel to refrain from any action that would prevent those organizations from continuing their critical human rights, humanitarian and development work.

We have said it many times, but we believe it is important to reiterate once again that the parties should refrain from actions that run counter to genuine efforts to promote the peace process. In that respect, we will continue to highlight our position that settlements and their expansion contravene international law and constitute an obstacle to a two-State solution, the cornerstone of the peace process. They are wrong and must be stopped. We urge all sides to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric that escalates tensions and endangers the peace process.

We see no way other than peace talks to reverse the worrisome trend of escalating tensions and periodic and cyclic outbursts of violence. If there is one lesson to be learned from the decades of this conflict, it is that violence has never been conducive to any positive development. On the contrary, it has always brought suffering to both Israelis and Palestinians. The negotiation table is the only place where a viable and just solution can be found. We support all efforts to bring the parties together and deal with the difficult and complex issues with patience, determination, resolve and vision, through dialogue, mutual recognition of each other's concerns and aspirations, understanding

and respect. We should not let hope die, since nothing good is ever done without hope, and nothing important is ever built without dreams.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Wennesland and Mr. Lazzarini for their comprehensive briefings. We also listened with interest to the briefing by Mr. Levy.

The recent developments in the Gaza Strip reflect many significant issues. The security situation is still precarious, and the continuing cycles of violence continue to be worrying. They underscore that the only way to end such cycles is a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question. That ultimate objective must remain the focus of the relevant parties and the international community. Merely managing events on the ground as they occur is not a viable approach. We therefore stress the need for the parties to resume constructive negotiations that can lead to achieving a two-State solution and the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace, security and mutual recognition. The international community should also play its part in maintaining peace and security by providing the necessary support for the political process. In conjunction with those efforts, we reiterate the need to maintain the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. We commend Egypt's mediation efforts, which once again played a significant role in restoring calm.

We emphasize that more cycles of violence will only lead to further deterioration in the humanitarian and economic situations in Gaza. According to United Nations reports, more than 80 per cent of the nearly 2 million residents of Gaza rely on humanitarian assistance. The unemployment rate among young people is at 80 per cent, and the children of Gaza are suffering from serious psychological traumas. Children who turned 15 years old this year have already witnessed five terrible conflicts in their lifetime. That is why reducing tensions in Gaza and improving the humanitarian and economic situations of its people are in the best interests of all parties. They are also vital to achieving security and stability, and therefore demand that the United Nations and its international partners intensify their efforts and support the process of recovery and reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.

The worsening humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory requires further humanitarian, economic and development support. We

therefore call on the Palestinian and Israeli authorities to intensify their efforts on the economic, health and services fronts with a view to improving the livelihoods of Palestinians, especially refugees. We recognize the important role that civil-society stakeholders can play in the occupied Palestinian territory and note that recent developments in that regard are a source of concern, which is why we stress the importance of cooperating with civil-society organizations in the efforts to realize the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people.

We once again condemn all unilateral measures undermining the possibility of a two-State solution, and specifically the continuing settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which represent a clear violation of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We also condemn settler violence against Palestinians, which must end. It is also important to safeguard the legal and historical status quo in the holy places of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, since it is crucial to halt all measures that attempt to change the identity of the city.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates underscores its readiness to support all regional and international efforts aimed at achieving progress in the Middle East peace process and a two-State solution. We stress in that regard that diplomacy and peaceful dialogue are the best ways to ensure de-escalation. Continued violence is not in the interests of any of the parties. On the contrary, its many victims of innocent civilians, including women and children, deserve a better life and a better future.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Wennesland and the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for their very comprehensive briefings. I also welcome Mr. Levy's participation in today's meeting.

The immediate priority is ensuring that the ceasefire in Gaza is maintained. Keeping the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings open for the flow of goods and people is key to meeting the people's most pressing needs. Building on the truce should also include a resumption of the reconstruction work that was stopped during the most recent escalation. France stands ready to fully play its part in those efforts. We welcome the work of the United Nations, especially UNRWA, whose activities are crucial to achieving stability in the region. We call on all donors to step up their financial

support for the Agency, as France has done by doubling its contribution since 2019.

A new escalation will be inevitable, however, without a paradigm shift and the relaunch of a genuine political process. A strictly economic approach that does not restore a political horizon will not bring stability to the region. That is why ending unilateral measures is imperative. As we know, that requires stopping settlement activities, demolitions and evictions. In that regard, France is extremely concerned about the situation in Masafer Yatta and Ein Samiya. France calls on Israel to abandon plans for the EI area. The parties must also refrain from hate speech and incitements to violence, and we particularly want to point to the responsibility of leaders on all sides in that regard. We also recall the importance of respecting the status quo at the holy sites.

Like its European partners, France is deeply concerned about the recent Israeli raids on several Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Such actions against NGOs are unacceptable. A free and vibrant civil society is essential to promoting democratic values and implementing a two-State solution. In the absence of evidence of those NGOs' support for or participation in terrorist activity, France will therefore continue its cooperation with civil society in the Palestinian territory and with those same NGOs.

Only a two-State solution can bring about a just and lasting peace. It is the only solution to date that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people and ensures Israel's security, on which France will never compromise, by the way. France calls on the Council to work without further delay to restore a political horizon to implement it.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing, particularly regarding the aftermath of the recent escalation of violence in Gaza.

The briefings delivered by Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and Mr. Daniel Levy, President of the US/Middle East Project, once again remind us that, as long as the underlying political, social and development factors of this protracted conflict remain unaddressed, the cyclical trends, including the eruption and resurgence of conflict in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, will persist.

We welcome the fact that the 8 August ceasefire agreement in Gaza continues to hold. We commend all parties that have been instrumental in ensuring that, including neighbouring countries, for their efforts.

By the same token, we note that, in the already delicate economic conditions, as depicted in Gaza, every escalation worsens the humanitarian situation, heightens existing tensions and makes full recovery ever-more elusive. As such, it is critical that the Security Council strongly condemn the terrorist attacks of such groups as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and their affiliates.

Addressing Gaza's economic isolation from the wider regional and the global economy will be critical to the peace, security and stability of the broader Middle East region. In that regard, the Government of Israel's recent assessment and decision to increase the work-permit quota for Palestinians in Gaza and to reopen the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings is welcome. Such steps contribute to the implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), which, among other things, emphasizes the safety and well-being of all civilians, as well as the need to ensure a sustained and regular flow of goods and people through the Gaza crossings.

Kenya reiterates that peace efforts, both at the official and grass-roots levels, that comprehensively integrate the socioeconomic development of all sectors of society will always be critical to the stability and peace of the region in the interim and in the long term. In particular, a grass-roots approach will contribute to harmonious coexistence and conditions conducive to official negotiations.

As we heard this morning, UNRWA continues to play a key role in facilitating critical health, education, social protection, microfinance and other services to the Palestinian population. We note, however, that its fiscal situation remains dire. In that regard, in addition to fulfilling pledges to ensure adequate and predictable funding for UNRWA, we urge strengthened efforts to identify areas of cooperation and collaboration between the Agency and other peacebuilding and development entities. We believe that those services, alongside confidence-building measures in the area of commerce and security between Israeli and Palestinian authorities, speak to what is immediately practical in the context of an elusive peace process. Nevertheless, they are not a substitute for the resumption of the political process

and dialogue between the parties for long-term stability and peace.

Our delegation underscores that the actualization of the long-held goal — a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders, based on the 1967 lines — will require a meaningful commitment to the peace process by all parties in alignment with international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the Council's resolutions, including the comprehensive pillars of resolution 2334 (2016), and the existing regional peace initiatives and frameworks.

A commitment to an independent, sovereign, viable and contiguous Palestinian State also means the immediate and complete cessation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as demanded in resolution 2334 (2016).

Ms. Bongo (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for their briefings. I welcome Mr. Daniel Levy, whose presentation we listened to attentively.

Although the security situation on the ground remains very fragile, the briefings we just heard indicate a lull since our most recent meeting (see S/PV.9107). Gabon reiterates its appeal to all parties to show restraint and to refrain from unilateral action that could lead to the resumption of hostilities and hamper the peacebuilding process.

The work of civil society, which plays a major role in the Palestinian territories and contributes to improving the social fabric and promoting human rights, must not be hindered. It is essential for the populations that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can continue to do their work freely in a difficult context.

As we just heard, the humanitarian and economic situations in the Palestinian territories remain critical. The unprecedented financial crisis facing the Palestinian Authority and the budgetary problems of UNRWA accentuate the urgency facing the international community, but also the usefulness of NGOs.

We note with interest as a sign of détente that the Israeli military authorities decided to increase the number of Palestinian workers authorized to enter Israel.

My country reaffirms its commitment to the two-State solution, with two countries living side by side on the basis of the 1967 borders. We urge all parties to relaunch negotiations to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian crisis in order to achieve a real and lasting peace based on respect for the principles agreed by the parties and the implementation of international law.

The involvement of the countries of the subregion is fundamental. The recent visit by President Mahmoud Abbas to Türkiye after its resumption of diplomatic relations with Israel is an encouraging factor. The normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab countries must contribute to the peace process in the Middle East, and thereby meet the legitimate needs and aspirations of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

In conclusion, we reiterate our support for the mandate of Special Coordinator Wennesland and express our encouragement for his tireless efforts on the ground to ensure the stability of the region.

Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Commissioner-General Lazzarini for their briefings. We also attentively listened to Mr. Levy's statement.

Today I will focus my statement on the following points: the situation in Gaza, the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), violence, settlements and civil society organizations.

On the situation in Gaza, we note the continuation of the ceasefire that put an end to the violence unleashed at the beginning of the month, resulting in the deaths of more than 40 people, including 15 minors. We call for an exhaustive investigation to identify those responsible for those civilian deaths.

We also witness the reopening of border crossings and the increase in work permits for Palestinians. Nevertheless, the situation in the Gaza Strip is still critical. We once again call for an end to the blockade. It is simply unacceptable that the children of Gaza, 41 per cent of the population, know no way of life other than the blockade. Without prospects for a political horizon moving towards sustainable peace, the cycle of violence will continue.

As stated previously in the Security Council, the work of UNRWA is essential to meet the needs of close to 6 million Palestinians in humanitarian aid, reconstruction and the provision of basic services.

Unfortunately, the chronic financial deficit reduces the Agency's ability to meet those needs.

Mexico takes note of the recent report of the Commissioner-General on the financial situation of UNRWA. We commend efforts to use resources efficiently, promote transparency and diversify funding sources. As a show of its commitment, since my country has contributed annually to the Agency's budget since 2008.

Mexico deeply regrets the multiple incidents of violence in recent days. We deplore the attack in the Old City of Jerusalem on Jewish worshippers and condemn the glorification of such acts.

We are also concerned about the raids and operations by Israeli law enforcement that have led to clashes in the West Bank. In the first seven months of this year alone, lethal ammunition has killed 45 Palestinians and injured nearly 4,300, including 503 children. Mexico condemns the disproportionate use of force. We also condemn the fact that shots were fired at two Palestinian Red Crescent ambulances and that three other ambulances were prevented from reaching people, in violation of international humanitarian law.

Mexico deplores the decision to approve the construction of 1,400 additional housing units in the settlements of Har Homa and Givat Hamatos. The construction and expansion of settlements in the Palestinian territory is contrary to international law and the resolutions of the Security Council and an obstacle to the viability of a two-State solution. My country takes note of the decision by some European nations to continue cooperating with six Palestinian civil-society organizations in the absence of evidence linking them to terrorist groups, since any designation of a terrorist entity should be duly substantiated. We call for an end to the harassment of those organizations, including the detentions of their personnel and the seizure of their materials and equipment. A democratic State should not be acting in ways that limit the space for civil society.

Finally, Mexico reiterates its commitment to a two-State solution as the only viable option for resolving the conflict. It is what is needed in order to address Israel's legitimate security concerns and to enable the consolidation of a sovereign, politically and economically viable Palestinian State, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I join others in thanking Mr. Wennesland, Mr. Lazzarini and Mr. Levy for their valuable briefings today. Let me start by welcoming this month's two-year anniversary of the Abraham Accords, which are a historic milestone that brings us closer to the goal of shared prosperity and peace throughout the region.

As we stated during the Security Council's emergency meeting on 8 August (see S/PV.9107), the United Kingdom welcomes the ceasefire in Gaza and reiterates its call for the parties to make every effort to sustain it. It is critical to ensure humanitarian access in and out of Gaza in accordance with international humanitarian law.

We were appalled by the terrorist attack in Jerusalem on 13 August. The United Kingdom unequivocally condemns all acts of terrorism, and our thoughts are with the victims and the families of those affected. We reiterate our unwavering commitment to Israel's security. This conflict has taken a terrible toll on both sides. We are concerned about the record number of Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces this year and urge Israel to show restraint in its use of live ammunition and to ensure a thorough and transparent investigation of all fatalities.

We have been clear regarding our concern about the Israeli Government's decision last year to designate six Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as terrorist organizations. The subsequent raids on the offices of seven Palestinian NGOs, as well as the arrests of their staff, are equally alarming. Civil-society organizations play an important role in upholding human rights and democracy, and they must be able to operate freely in the occupied Palestinian territory. We continue to engage with a number of those organizations.

We call on the Israeli authorities to halt plans to advance evictions from Khan Al-Ahmar and from the settlement plan in the E1 area. Advancing settlements into E1 would seriously hinder a two-State solution. Settlements are contrary to international humanitarian law. This month we also saw demolition orders issued in Masafer Yatta and against a donor-funded school in Ein Samiya. Such demolitions cause unnecessary suffering and, in all but exceptional circumstances, are contrary to international law.

The United Kingdom is a long-standing supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for

Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) because of the vital role it plays in providing core services and humanitarian and protection assistance to Palestinian refugees across the region. We were pleased to announce at the Agency's pledging conference in June that we have finalized a new multi-year funding agreement with UNRWA and will provide £15 million this year.

In conclusion, the situation on the ground demonstrates the urgent need to make progress towards a two-State solution that ensures a safe and secure Israel, living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States. The United Kingdom remains committed to working with all the parties to reduce tensions and take steps towards a sustainable peace.

Mr. Nyarku (Ghana): I join previous speakers in thanking Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland, Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini and Mr. Daniel Levy for their comprehensive briefings, which have given the Security Council an assessment of the situation prevailing on the ground.

The briefings we have heard today are not very different from previous ones. We had hoped to hear much more promising prospects for improvements on the ground in this decades-old conflict, which is a clash not only over territory but over rights and aspirations to peaceful coexistence and development. Regrettably, from what we have heard, the parties' positions are far apart and the situation on the ground continues to hinder the possibility of achieving a two-State solution anytime soon.

We welcome the reports, consistent with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, of the renewal of friendly relations between Israel and Türkiye, as reflected in their decision to return their Ambassadors and Consuls-General to each other's capitals. We hope that such efforts will help to strengthen regional stability and support the renewed dialogue between the parties that is essential to the achievement of a two-State solution.

While we are conscious of Israel's security concerns, we are nevertheless also concerned about the worsening human security, the dire humanitarian situation and the prevalence of human right abuses, violations and detentions without charge or trial in parts of the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. We are especially alarmed by the fact that several innocent

unarmed Palestinians, including children, have been killed or injured.

We share the international community's concern about the unilateral actions by Israeli settlers aimed at forcing Palestinian communities and families from their land across the occupied West Bank and in East Jerusalem. After their designation last year as terrorist groups, the raiding and shutting down of the offices of six prominent Palestinian civil-society organizations that are known to have contributed to the protection of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory is equally worrying. We do not condone terrorism in any shape or form, but we believe that such designations require clear justification if they are to be adopted by the entire international community.

Achieving peace requires deliberate actions aimed at building trust. In that regard, we urge the parties to de-escalate the existing tensions and generate the political momentum required for direct negotiations. We urge Israel to respect the inalienable rights of all residents of the occupied Palestinian territory and abide by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

We reiterate that all parties in the conflict must fully comply with international humanitarian law, the United Nations Charter and the many relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). As an occupying Power, the Israeli Government has a responsibility to protect the civilian population; guarantee complete, unhindered and secure access for humanitarian assistance to the vulnerable, in particularly the elderly, women and children; and facilitate the free movement of humanitarian workers throughout the occupied territories.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our position that violence cannot be a tool for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that the path for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East runs through the internationally negotiated two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. However, realizing the goals of the Middle East peace process requires the Council and the wider international community to sustain the engagement of the parties, whose good-faith efforts are required to resolve this decades-long conflict.

Ms. Heimerback (Norway): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his timely briefing. We

also appreciate the contributions of Commissioner-General Lazzarini and Mr. Levy.

First, let me acknowledge and again thank the Special Coordinator and the United Nations for all their efforts to establish a ceasefire following the latest hostilities in Gaza. We would also like to highlight the critical roles played by Egypt and Qatar. It is now essential that the ceasefire continue to be respected and that the economic measures and the easing of restrictions on access and movement be maintained.

Some 17 children were killed in Gaza, and hundreds injured, during the hostilities earlier this month. These escalations have consequences. We condemn all indiscriminate attacks and attacks against civilians. All parties are obliged to protect civilians and fully respect international humanitarian law, including its principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

Furthermore, Norway strongly condemns all acts of terror, including the attack on Israeli civilians in Jerusalem on 14 August, where eight people were injured. Everyone — Israelis and Palestinians alike — deserves to live in security. There is an urgent need for a more long-term solution, including a political horizon.

Turning to other relevant developments, we are deeply concerned about the shrinking space for civil society, including the recent Israeli raids against several Palestinian civil society organizations in Area A in Ramallah. And we are troubled by subsequent reports of threats against the employees of these organizations and their families. Such actions are unacceptable. These organizations carry out important work defending the human rights of Palestinians vis-à-vis both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. They must be allowed to continue to work in a safe and enabling environment.

Norway has clearly stated that the information Israel has provided does not sufficiently justify designating the organizations as terror organizations. We will continue our support for Palestinian civil society. A strong and vibrant civil society is key to promoting democracy and human rights in Palestine and supporting the two-State solution.

Norway will convene the Ministerial Meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), the donor group for Palestine, at the margins of the General Assembly on 22 September. The aim of the AHLC is to help build the foundations for the Palestinian State. Items on the AHLC agenda include further

strengthening the Palestinian Authority's institutions and Palestinian Authority reform; increasing the Authority's revenues; transferring more authority from Israel to the Palestinian Authority; developing infrastructure; and easing restrictions on travel, trade and economic activity both in the West Bank and Gaza. This work must also include Palestinian leaders contributing to strengthening the legitimacy and accountability of the Palestinian Authority. We urge the parties to use this opportunity to step up their efforts to make progress on the State-building agenda.

As Commissioner-General Lazzarini has outlined, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East plays a key role in ensuring that the needs of Palestine refugees are met and that their rights are ensured. The Agency's continued ability to serve this function also remains crucial for regional stability. We are deeply concerned by the warnings of yet another financing crisis in the autumn, once again putting the Agency's delivery of services at risk. The recurrent budget crises have had a detrimental effect on the Agency, its staff and the Palestine refugee population in general. We call for renewed efforts to mobilize resources, provide flexible financing and put the Agency on a more stable financial footing.

In closing, let me repeat our call for increased efforts aimed at preparing for negotiations towards a political settlement. The two-State solution, based on the 1967 lines, is the only viable solution to ensure peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Ms. Moran (Ireland): I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Commissioner-General Lazzarini for their briefings. It is very good to see Mr. Levy back in New York, and we thank him for his incisive insights, which have given us a lot of food for thought.

Today I wanted to focus on three issues: the protection of civilians, the issue of accountability and the critical issue of civil society space for Palestinian civil society.

Ireland welcomes that the ceasefire agreed on 7 August between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad continues to hold. We also welcome the lifting of additional restrictions imposed on 2 August on the crossings into the Gaza Strip. Nonetheless, we share concerns about the fragility of the ceasefire and the potential for another major escalation, particularly as tensions remain high in the West Bank.

In all conflicts, the protection of civilians must be paramount. As a result of the hostilities this month, 49 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip, including 17 children. It is appalling that today, once again, we must address in the Security Council the killing of innocent children. International humanitarian law is clear: any attack must comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions. All civilians in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel must be protected.

We know what is needed to protect civilians in Gaza: a permanent ceasefire and the lifting of the blockade in line with resolution 1860 (2009) of the Security Council. People in Gaza have nowhere to go. The most recent escalation has exacerbated the already severe humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

As we have heard from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and others, humanitarian actors are providing essential support in Gaza. Continued support for UNRWA, which as we have just heard from the Commissioner-General is so vital for all Palestine refugees, is absolutely essential.

Ireland is gravely concerned at the alarming increase in Palestinian civilian fatalities, including the killing and maiming of children in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as a result of the use of live ammunition by Israeli forces. We call on Israel to refrain from using excessive force and for impartial and transparent investigations into all incidents that led to death or injury. Those responsible for violations must be held accountable.

Ireland condemns the gun attack on a bus carrying Jewish worshippers in Jerusalem on 14 August, which led to the injury of eight civilians. So long as there is an absence of accountability and the root causes of the conflict remain unaddressed, cycles of conflict and violence throughout the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel will continue. Ireland is also concerned about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention, which is now at its highest level since 2008. We call on Israel to act in accordance with its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, and in particular to refrain from arbitrary arrests and detention.

The Israeli raids on six Palestinian civil-society organizations on 18 August, and the measures that have followed, are unacceptable and represent a worrying reduction of space for civil society in the occupied

Palestinian territory. In common with others, we have received no information from Israel that would justify reviewing our policy towards those non-governmental organizations. Ireland supports the United Nations High Commissioner's call to Israel to revoke the designations of Palestinian civil-society organizations as terrorist entities. We have serious concerns about the misuse of counter-terror legislation to reduce civil-society space in the occupied Palestinian territory. Israeli incursions into Area A undermine previously signed agreements and the prospects for a two-State solution.

Ireland's view of Israel's settlement activity and practices of evictions and demolitions have been clearly stated in the Council before. Any settlement activity and advances by Israel in the E1 area in particular would undermine the viability and territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian State and jeopardize a two-State solution. We urge Israel not to proceed with its eviction decision in Masafer Yatta and its planned demolition of a donor-funded school in Ein Samiya.

Finally, Ireland would like to reiterate the need to restore hope for a political horizon and a meaningful peace process towards a two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States. Ireland reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. It is incumbent on the parties and on the Security Council, together with the wider international community, to revive direct and inclusive engagement so that all Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace.

Mrs. Kamboj (India): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland, Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini and Daniel Levy for their briefings.

The escalation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip earlier this month has only exacerbated the dire humanitarian situation of the Gazan Palestinians, who have already been suffering, including as a result of the non-availability of funds for the United Nations humanitarian response plan and the global increase in commodity prices. We hope the situation will be addressed soon with increased donor funding.

We welcomed the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. We urge the parties to abide strictly by the ceasefire agreement so that the ongoing intensive diplomatic efforts can be strengthened. In that context, we appreciate the efforts of the international community, especially the role of Egypt, in the process. We also note Israel's efforts following the ceasefire to resume

the movement of people from the Gaza Strip and the entry of humanitarian goods and fuel. But while we are focusing on strengthening the ceasefire, we must also continue to work together towards a political solution to effectively address the underlying drivers of the dire economic and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

We remain deeply concerned about the developments in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Violent attacks and the killing of civilians continued during the reporting period. Acts of destruction and demolition are also continuing. Provocative actions and rhetoric have again raised tensions around Jerusalem's holy sites. The historical and legal status quo at Jerusalem's holy places must be respected and upheld. We are also gravely concerned about the acts of terror and incidents of violence in Israel and the West Bank. There can be no justification for any act of violence committed against civilians. We have consistently opposed all acts of violence, especially against women and children, and we reiterate our call for a complete cessation of violence. We urge the parties to refrain from unilateral measures that vitiate the conditions necessary for promoting peace and to focus instead on bridging the trust deficit. It is the international community's collective responsibility to send a strong signal opposing any step preventing the possibility of a two-State solution.

The financial challenges of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are compounding every year. There is a significant risk that UNRWA's services will have to be curtailed if adequate funds are not made available soon. The Agency's services to millions of Palestinian refugees are crucial from the humanitarian and development perspectives and contribute to the overall stability of the region. As far as India is concerned, and in response to UNRWA's funding crisis, India has increased its annual financial contribution to the Agency. We have contributed \$20 million to its programme budget since 2018. We have also pledged \$5 million for this year, half of which has already been released. We encourage donors to consider stepping up their contributions so as to help the Agency overcome its liquidity crisis this year.

The situation again underscores the need for an immediate resumption of peace talks between Israel and Palestine. The absence of such direct negotiations is not conducive to securing long-term peace and will only increase the risk of a recurrence and escalation of violence in Israel and Palestine. It is therefore crucial

to immediately launch credible direct negotiations in order to return to the political dialogue process as soon as possible. India has consistently called for direct peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine aimed at achieving a two-State solution, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for statehood and Israel's legitimate security concerns. The United Nations and the international community must prioritize a resumption of those negotiations.

In conclusion, I reaffirm India's unwavering commitment to establishing a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, taking into account Israel's legitimate security concerns. There is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution.

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

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland, Commissioner-General Lazzarini and Mr. Levy for their briefings. Their views and recommendations have served as useful inspiration for the work of the Security Council.

For the past month, the volatile situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has disturbed the whole world. The conflict in Gaza has led to hundreds of civilian casualties and massive damage to its infrastructure, once again pushing the situation to the brink of war and leaving the people of Gaza in a state of fear and a life in desperate straits. We appreciate the active mediation by Egypt, Qatar, Jordan and other countries of the region, as well as Special Coordinator Wennesland, aimed at reaching a ceasefire. All the parties must be urged to respect the ceasefire and exercise restraint so that calm can be rapidly and fully restored in Gaza. The diplomatic efforts should continue on all fronts.

During the conflict the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other humanitarian agencies have dealt with many problems, actively carried out humanitarian operations and provided the people in Gaza with emergency relief and assistance, for which China is grateful. The path to recovery and reconstruction in Gaza is tortuous and long. The international community should accelerate its humanitarian response, offer assistance to Palestine through multiple channels and provide strong support for UNRWA. We call on Israel to

facilitate the entry of humanitarian and reconstruction supplies into Gaza and to promptly and fully lift its blockade of Gaza.

The frequent incidents of violence on the West Bank are a cause for concern. China condemns all indiscriminate attacks on civilians and serious violations against children in the occupied Palestinian territory. We are opposed to the Israeli security forces' excessive use of force and call for investigating such violent incidents and ensuring accountability for them. More than 100 days have passed since female journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, of Al Jazeera, was shot dead, yet there has still been no credible explanation of the incident.

For years, Palestine's civil-society organizations have played a vital role in helping vulnerable populations, including women and children, improving the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and upholding the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The recent actions taken by Israel against several Palestinian civil-society organizations have caused widespread concern among the international community, and we call on Israel to respond earnestly to those concerns.

The status quo in the occupied Palestinian territory is unsustainable. The international community must rise above piecemeal crisis management, squarely face the root causes of the situation, take effective action and work to put a settlement of the Palestinian question back on the right track.

First, we must encourage Palestine and Israel to pursue common security. Israel and Palestine will remain neighbours. Their security is interdependent and indivisible. Seeking the absolute security of one side, taking unilateral action and basing one's own security on the insecurity of the other can only deepen mistrust, heighten tensions and trap the parties in an endless cycle of violence. The international community should consider the security concerns of both Palestine and Israel as equally important and encourage both sides to find the highest common denominator, through

dialogue and cooperation, in order to achieve common security. At the same time, the occupying Power should properly fulfil its obligations under international law to protect the safety of the people in the occupied territory.

Secondly, the negative trends on the ground must be reversed immediately. The continued expansion of settlement activities encroaches on Palestinian land, consumes Palestinian resources and violates Palestine's right to self-determination, putting a contiguous, independent and sovereign State of Palestine further out of reach with each passing day. Every inch of settlement expansion puts a new obstacle on the path to a two-State solution. We call for the immediate cessation of all settlement activities, an end to unilateral changes to the status quo in the occupied Palestinian territories and the demarcation of the final borders between Palestine and Israel through peaceful negotiations.

Thirdly, a two-State solution must be advanced on all fronts. The Palestinian question has been dragging on for more than 70 years. Generations of Palestinian refugees have lost their homes and been displaced, and countless Palestinian children have been deprived of hope and a future. What is lacking in the settlement of the Palestinian question is not grand plans or strident slogans but the courage to stand up for justice and action to honour commitments. The ability, or lack of it, of the United Nations and the Security Council to demonstrate responsibility and dare to act is being monitored by the international community and recorded by history. It will be vital to muster a sense of urgency, take substantive steps to advance a two-State solution and support the Palestinian people in restoring and exercising their inalienable rights so as to achieve peaceful coexistence for Palestine and Israel, harmony between the Arab and Jewish nations and lasting peace in the Middle East.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.