



Security Council

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Provisional

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Tuesday, 24 January 2012, 10 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Ebrahim	(South Africa)
<i>Members:</i>	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	India	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Haroon
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 23 January 2012 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which is contained in document S/2012/56 and which reads as follows:

"I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council which is to be held on Tuesday, 24 January 2012, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

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

It is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of

the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Fernandez-Taranco.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco: After 15 months of absence of direct talks, I am pleased to report that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators started meeting on 3 January in Amman under the auspices of King Abdullah and Minister for Foreign Affairs Judeh of Jordan and in the presence of Quartet envoys and Quartet representative Blair. Since that first meeting, a series of direct preparatory talks have been held under Jordanian auspices. The parties began discussing important issues related to territory and security, in accordance with the Quartet statement of 23 September 2011. They are also discussing ways to build confidence and create a positive environment for those talks to succeed.

The Secretary-General commended the Palestinian and Israeli leaders on those important first steps and expressed his appreciation to His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan for his initiative to facilitate talks and give new impetus to the Middle East peace process. The Secretary-General, who was in Lebanon 10 days ago, will soon visit the region again to support the search for peace.

We remain hopeful that the preparatory meetings between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators will continue and ultimately lead to serious negotiations based on comprehensive proposals on territory and security, and reaching an agreement for a two-State solution by the end of this year, as envisaged by the Quartet. In the short term, it is essential that provocations stop, as called for by the Quartet, and that early progress be made to build confidence among the parties and sustain these nascent talks.

Neither the international community nor the parties can afford to let this opportunity pass by. The Secretary-General continues to call on the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to show vision, courage and determination to reach a historical peace agreement that would meet the legitimate aspirations of the people on both sides.

Unfortunately, actions on the ground continue to contribute to tensions. Settlement activity in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, continued during

the reporting period, and Under-Secretary-General Amos briefed this Council last week on the current situation. Violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians also remains troubling. On 25 December, an Israeli woman was injured by stones thrown at her car near Hebron. On 9 January, seven Palestinians were arrested by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) near Ramallah for throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at vehicles travelling on road 443 through the occupied territory. Settlers injured 12 Palestinians, including four children. Three Palestinian children were hit and injured by Israeli vehicles in Hebron and Nablus between 10 and 12 January. On 11 January, a mosque near the Palestinian town of Salfit was desecrated with Hebrew graffiti referencing “price tag” in connection with the dismantlement of an outpost. Settler attacks on Palestinian orchards also resulted in injuries and more than 100 Palestinian trees being uprooted.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished structures related to a number of unauthorized outposts. The demolition of outposts is an Israeli commitment under the Road Map. However, in parallel, new initiatives to retroactively legalize some outposts were advanced by the Government and in the Knesset. Israeli authorities also demolished 88 Palestinian structures in different locations of the West Bank during the reporting period, including seven in East Jerusalem, citing lack of building permits. Demolitions included 21 residences and 25 water-related structures.

Citing security, the Israel Defense Forces conducted 336 operations in the occupied West Bank, during which 74 Palestinians, including three children, were injured and 273 arrested. Two IDF soldiers were also injured. The IDF arrested nine Palestinians allegedly in possession of illegal weapons and ammunition. On 4 January, the IDF shot and injured a Palestinian at a checkpoint near Bethlehem. On 22 January, a Palestinian man reportedly carrying a metal object was shot and injured by IDF soldiers at the Qalandia checkpoint.

In another concerning development, several members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) have been arrested by Israeli security forces. On 19 January, two Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, including Speaker Aziz Dweik, were arrested. On 23 January, Israeli security forces entered the compound of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Jerusalem and detained the

two remaining Palestinian Legislative Council members who had sought refuge there since July 2010. Last night, another Hamas PLC member was arrested from his home in Ramallah. Two other PLC members were previously arrested at the ICRC building and transferred to Ramallah in 2011. The Palestinian negotiator subsequently delivered a letter to his Israeli counterpart complaining about the detention of the PLC Speaker, referencing Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody in general and calling for their release. We are troubled by reports that the Israeli authorities have subjected Mr. Dweik and possibly others to administrative detention.

Palestinian security forces continued to maintain law and order in the parts of the West Bank under the control of the Palestinian Authority. On 29 December, Palestinian security forces seized and defused an improvised explosive device, and on 6 January they arrested eight Palestinians on criminal charges in Hebron. On 14 January, Palestinian firefighters put out a blaze on an Israeli bus travelling south of Hebron and evacuated Israeli passengers. We also would like to remind the parties of their Road Map commitments to end incitement. In this regard, we have noted with concern the statement of the Palestinian Authority Mufti on 9 January.

The Palestinian Authority continues to build its institutions, which in April 2011 had already achieved a level sufficient for a functioning Government of a State. However, in a meeting with Special Coordinator Serry on 16 January, Prime Minister Fayyad expressed his grave concern about the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority. In 2011, direct budget support amounted to only \$742 million out of the \$1 billion that had been expected. Continued shortfalls could challenge the impressive progress realized through the State-building agenda. The United Nations encourages donors to deliver their contributions for 2012 as early as possible in the year.

The pace of economic growth slowed in the third quarter of 2011, increasing by only 0.5 per cent over the previous quarter. This, however, was still a 12 per cent increase over the third quarter of 2010. During the third quarter of 2011, the West Bank actually saw its real economy shrink by 0.3 per cent, whereas the Gaza Strip experienced an economic expansion of 2.6 per cent in real terms. The structure of gross domestic product in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip reveals a continued concentration of economic activity

in non-tradable sectors, including certain services, public administration and construction. Sustained growth will require an expansion of this productive base and the tradable goods sector. Increased measures to enable this and to reduce access impediments will be essential for continued growth, such as in manufacturing, mining and agriculture.

Weekly demonstrations continued in the West Bank against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 2004. Clashes with the Israel Defense Forces left 28 Palestinians injured; one Israeli soldier was injured by rock-throwing.

Turning now to the situation in Gaza, a total of 29 rockets and 12 mortar shells fired from Gaza hit Israel without resulting in injuries or damage. The Israel Defense Forces conducted six incursions and 10 airstrikes into Gaza, resulting in four Palestinian militants being killed and seven injured, and 15 Palestinian civilians injured. We condemn in the strongest terms any indiscriminate firing towards civilian areas and call on Israel to show maximum restraint. Obligations under international humanitarian law must be respected for the protection of civilians. It is essential to strengthen the calm in order to improve the conditions of the population in Gaza.

We continue to call for the lifting of the closure in the framework of resolution 1860 (2009). In the short term, we believe that the full opening for the import of construction materials would bolster the legitimate Gazan economy and enable much needed reconstruction activities. It is important that exports be allowed to resume at scale, including transfers to the West Bank and Israel. These changes could be applied with due consideration for Israel's legitimate security concerns and could make a significant difference in the lives of many Gazans. We will continue to work with the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority in this regard.

At present, the United Nations has received approvals for a total of approximately \$270 million of works requiring construction materials that are still classified as dual use. However, three key housing projects of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, totalling over \$60 million, have yet to be approved. Efforts between the factions to advance Palestinian reconciliation are continuing. Fatah and Hamas

representatives met again in Cairo on 21 December to that end. On 14 January, the Palestinian Central Election Commission obtained permission to reopen its offices in Gaza.

We continue to support Palestinian unity within the framework of the commitments of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the positions of the Quartet, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Allow me to turn to the situation in Lebanon. From 13 to 15 January, the Secretary-General visited Lebanon and held talks with President Sleiman, Prime Minister Mikati and Speaker Berri, as well as a number of representatives of Lebanese parties. The Secretary-General also paid a visit to the headquarters of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in Naqoura, in support of the mission and efforts of UNIFIL peacekeepers, who play a crucial role in preserving the calm along the Blue Line.

In his discussions with Lebanese interlocutors, the Secretary-General reiterated the United Nations unwavering commitment to Lebanon's stability and security, as well as the need for Lebanon to meet all its international obligations, including those under the relevant Security Council resolutions. He strongly encouraged President Sleiman's effort to reconvene the national dialogue, including the effort to enable progress on the development of a national defence strategy that would address the question of arms outside the control of the State.

A number of security incidents that illustrate the continued fragility and vulnerability of conditions in UNIFIL areas of operation took place during the reporting period. On 19 December, four rockets were found, and subsequently removed, by the Lebanese armed forces near Wadi Khancha. A UNIFIL investigation is ongoing. On 28 December, an explosion — the third since mid-November — took place in Tyre in front of a restaurant, causing minor damage. The Lebanese authorities are conducting investigations into the explosions. All these incidents are violations of resolution 1701 (2006) as they manifest the presence of unauthorized weapons and related material in the UNIFIL area of operations.

The investigations into the rocket launchings towards Israel on 29 November and 11 December and the attack against UNIFIL personnel on 9 December in the vicinity of Tyre are still ongoing. UNIFIL, in cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces,

intensified its operational activities and maintains a high level of vigilance in order to prevent any hostile activities.

In an ongoing violation of resolution 1701 (2006), almost daily Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued during the reporting period.

The situation along the Lebanese-Syrian border remains of concern. On 27 December, three Lebanese nationals were killed and one injured in the area of Wadi Khaled by gunfire from the Syrian side of the border. President Sleiman condemned the killing and called for an investigation of the incident. On 21 January, a 16-year-old Lebanese fisherman was killed at sea off the coast of Arida at the Lebanese-Syrian border. Two other fishermen were detained by Syrian security forces and subsequently released.

The United Nations continues to monitor the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon. As of 13 January, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Government had registered over 5,660 Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The significant increase in number is due largely to intensified registration with UNHCR and the Government. The United Nations continues to coordinate closely with the Government of Lebanon on the provision of assistance to the displaced.

While in Lebanon, the Secretary-General also attended a conference on reform and transitions to democracy in the Arab world, organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. In his keynote address to the meeting, the Secretary-General outlined the United Nations firm commitment to helping Arab countries through the transitions that they have embarked upon. The Secretary-General also reiterated his clear call on President Al-Assad to stop the violence and the killing of people.

For over 10 months now, Syria has continued to be engulfed in a violent political crisis, with a rising death toll on a daily basis. The foreign ministers of the League of Arab States met in Cairo on 22 January and adopted a resolution that proposes a political plan, with a specific timeline, for resolving the crisis in Syria. The plan calls for all violence and acts of killing to stop. It reminds the Syrian authorities of their obligations to withdraw all military forces from cities and population centres, release all prisoners, and ensure the freedom of peaceful demonstration and full

and unhindered access to the Arab League organizations and Arab and international media throughout the country.

The plan also calls on the Syrian authorities and the opposition to engage in a serious dialogue under the auspices of the Arab League with the objective of forming a transitional national unity Government to oversee a peaceful transition to a democratic and pluralistic political system. The Arab League resolution envisages that the Secretary-General of the Arab League and the Chairman of the Arab League Committee on Syria inform this Council and seek its support. The Arab League ministers also decided to extend the Arab observer mission by one month, and requested Mr. Elaraby to continue his cooperation with the United Nations Secretary-General in providing assistance to the Arab League observer mission. The Syrian authorities rejected the resolution, which they described as a flagrant interference in Syria's internal affairs with the aim of drawing foreign interference.

Time is pressing for the violence and human rights violations to stop and for a credible, inclusive and Syrian-led political process to start in Syria, with the aim of effectively addressing the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and ensuring the full exercise of their fundamental freedoms. We hope that the international community will act in a concerted and coherent manner in support of ongoing efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

Turning back to the Middle East peace process, let me conclude by reiterating our determination to contribute to the ongoing talks, help the parties build mutual confidence, and develop concrete proposals on territory and security. Leadership is needed to ensure that the process moves forward with the support of regional and international partners. As the Secretary-General recalled in Beirut, a two-State solution is long overdue. The status quo offers only the guarantee of future conflict. We must all do our part to secure a lasting peace that will end the occupation and the conflict and realize the legitimate rights of all.

The parties should now redouble their efforts to resolve all permanent status issues, end the conflict and establish an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President: I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

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

Mr. Mansour: On behalf of Palestine, I congratulate you, Sir, and your friendly country South Africa on your assumption of the Security Council presidency and on your wise stewardship of the Council. We are honoured by your presence as you preside over this important meeting today. We also express appreciation to the Russian Federation for its very skilled leadership of the Council in December.

I thank the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for his briefing today.

Today, I also wish to renew Palestine's warmest congratulations to the new Security Council members, the friendly countries of Azerbaijan, Guatemala, Morocco, Pakistan and Togo, which are also members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), joining the current members of the NAM caucus on the Council. We are confident in their commitment to upholding the Charter, international law and the Security Council's resolutions, and we wish them all success in fulfilling their high responsibilities.

I also convey Palestine's deep appreciation to the members whose terms ended in December — the friendly countries of Brazil, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gabon, Nigeria and the Arab representative on the Security Council, Lebanon — which all served with dedication to the pursuit of peace and security, including with regard to the question of Palestine.

We are grateful for the efforts exerted during their tenure in support of the rights of the Palestinian people and aimed at reaching a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That includes their efforts in connection with Palestine's legitimate and worthy application for United Nations membership, which remains before the Security Council awaiting recommendation after the rendering of the report of the Committee on the Admission of New Members on 11 November 2011. In that regard, I reaffirm our conviction that recognition of the State of Palestine constitutes a genuine investment in the two-State solution for peace. We reiterate our deepest gratitude to all States that have recognized Palestine, including those that most

recently extended recognition from different corners of the globe.

The start of a new year brings new hopes and renewed commitments. Despite all odds, the resilient Palestinian people remain hopeful that this year will bring long-awaited freedom, justice, peace, dignity and security in their homeland. With international support, they continue to strive for their inalienable rights, including to self-determination and return. They remain convinced that justice and the rule of law will prevail, and they hope that this will be the year that brings an end to the Israeli occupation and that also brings the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Palestinian leadership continues to spare no effort to achieve peace. Despite the many obstacles placed by Israel, the occupying Power, in the path of peace, Palestine has fully cooperated with the current efforts of the Quartet aimed at advancing the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders, and has submitted comprehensive proposals on borders and security, as called for by the Quartet. We express appreciation to Jordan for the initiative of His Majesty King Abdullah II to revive the ailing peace process, and we affirm that Palestine has engaged in good faith in that effort, based on positions of historic compromise rooted in international law and justice.

Moreover, we continue our efforts to promote Palestinian reconciliation based on our legitimate national interests and aspirations and the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization. We hope soon to restore the unity of our people and land, and we are grateful for the support being given in that regard by Egypt, our Arab brethren and other concerned members of the international community.

However, despite those positive developments, the situation on the ground remains appalling and totally contradictory to all legal norms, undermining any peace efforts. Rather than acting to bring the occupation to an end, Israel is entrenching it, causing more human suffering and prolonging the conflict. Especially destructive has been its settlement campaign, deliberately waged in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, United Nations resolutions, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the Road Map, and in defiance of global demands for complete cessation.

In 2011, as revealed by the Israeli organization Peace Now, Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, actually exceeded that of all past years, creating thousands of illegal facts on the ground. From the expansion of existing settlements to the construction of new ones; from the construction of the wall and Israeli-only roads to the confiscation of land and the demolition of homes; and from the establishment of hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks to the displacement of Palestinians and permitting the vile aggression of settlers against Palestinian civilians and property — none of that has stopped, not for a single day.

Recent reports by Peace Now, confirmed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and highlighted during the important briefing to the Council last week by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Valerie Amos, attest to the intensity and vastly detrimental impact of Israeli settlement policies on the Palestinian people, the contiguity of Palestinian land, humanitarian conditions and the prospects for peace.

In fact, Israeli settlement activities increased by at least 20 per cent in the past year, with construction initiated on 1,850 units and at least 3,500 units under construction in 2011 in 142 illegal settlements and so-called outposts in the West Bank. The settlement drive has been most fierce in and around East Jerusalem and in the Jordan Valley deep inside the territory, as well as in other areas referred to as “Area C” — an area amounting to at least 62 per cent of the land where the occupying Power prohibits an official Palestinian presence.

The occupying Power continues its illegal measures aimed at Judaizing East Jerusalem and to alter its Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and Christian demography, character, identity and heritage. Settlement activities, home demolitions, the revocation of residency rights, the closure of Palestinian institutions, the transformation of Palestinian neighbourhoods into walled ghettos, excavations and countless other measures are deepening the crisis in East Jerusalem, further isolating it from its natural Palestinian environs to the north and south, impairing its socio-economic and cultural fabric, and fuelling tensions and religious sensitivities in the City.

In the Jordan Valley, Israel continues to seize vast tracts of Palestinian land, to demolish homes, water

wells and farms, and to displace hundreds of Palestinian families, in addition to the hundreds of thousands already displaced. Since 1967, it is estimated that the population has been reduced from more than 300,000 people to only 56,000 today. Such displacement is otherwise known around the world as ethnic cleansing. The Palestinian Bedouin community, an indigenous population the majority of whom are refugees and whose livelihood and sustenance are tied to the land, has been especially hard hit by those illegal actions. It is no coincidence that much of the land from which the Bedouins are being forcibly removed is linked to planned settlement expansion and other colonization activities aimed at advancing Israel’s illegal, de facto annexation of Palestinian land.

Terror and crimes by Israeli settlers are also on the rise, with a record 40 per cent increase in attacks in the past year and a 165 per cent increase since the year 2009. Most recently, wilful attacks and provocations have included the beating, killing and injury of Palestinian civilians, including children and elderly shepherds; the destruction and vandalism of homes, vehicles, farmlands and olive orchards; and the vandalism and burning of numerous mosques and churches.

All of this is being perpetrated under the watch and protection of the Israeli occupying forces, with nearly zero accountability for such crimes. Those deplorable attacks are not isolated incidents, but rather part of the deliberate agenda of extremist settlers and their supporters in the Government to terrorize the Palestinian people, make their living conditions unbearable, and remove them from their land.

In the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian civilian population continues to suffer from the occupying Power’s illegal policies, particularly the grave effects of the Israeli blockade by land, air and sea. Humanitarian conditions remain critical, with the most vulnerable plagued by poverty, high unemployment and food insecurity. Moreover, it has now been three years since the military aggression against Gaza, and Israel continues to evade responsibility for the massive crimes perpetrated against the Palestinian people and to obstruct the reconstruction and rehabilitation needed to rebuild the communities, infrastructure, economy and lives destroyed by that aggression. In that connection, we recognize the remarkable effort by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to assist the Palestine

refugees in the Gaza Strip and in all other areas of its operation at this critical time. We reiterate our call for Israel to be held accountable for the crimes it has committed against the Palestinian people, and we call again for the full lifting of the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip.

In that regard, while Israel, as an occupying Power, is obliged under international humanitarian law to protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, it seems clear that it is forfeiting that responsibility. In addition to the colonization and collective punishment measures I have mentioned, that stance is reflected in the occupying Power's violent military raids and continuing arrests of Palestinian civilians, including children, as a result of which thousands of Palestinians remain unjustly imprisoned in Israeli jails, including several elected officials, some of whom were recently rearrested. It is also evidenced by Israel's use of excessive force against peaceful protesters, killing and injuring innocent Palestinians who are defending their land and their people's rights, including 28-year-old Mustafa Tamimi on 9 December 2011.

We therefore call on the international community, in particular the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, to protect the Palestinian people in a manner consistent with its obligation to ensure the protection of all civilians in armed conflict. In that regard, I wish to inform the Security Council that the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has mandated its Chair to request Switzerland, in its capacity as the depositary State, to undertake the necessary measures, in line with the relevant resolutions, to convene a conference of the high contracting parties to ensure respect for the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We stress the value of such a conference in determining measures to uphold the law and pressuring Israel to cease its illegal practices and comply with its obligations.

The two-State solution is withering with every inch of Palestinian land that is seized by the occupying Power, every settlement unit constructed, every Israeli settler transferred, every wall erected, every home demolished and every Palestinian family displaced. Israel's colonization and oppressive collective punishment of the Palestinian people are rapidly eroding hopes and beliefs that peace is possible on the basis of the two-State solution, to which not only the Palestinian side has committed, but also to which the

international community has committed and greatly invested in.

Yet, the Israeli Government wildly insists that its settlement enterprise is not the main obstacle to peace, as reiterated days ago by the Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations, who illogically and insensitively insisted that it is the Palestinians' call for freedom, justice and their human rights — mainly the right to return — that is the main obstacle. That begs the question: how is the illegal colonization of Palestinian land conducive to the realization of the two-State solution, by which an independent, sovereign, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is to coexist with Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders? What kind of two-State solution for peace does Israel envision as it continues its settlement and theft of Palestinian land beyond the Green Line? It is surely not the same vision of peace articulated and pursued by the Council, the Quartet and the international community as a whole, and not the vision that brought us to the table in Amman.

If not ceased, what Israel is doing in the occupied Palestinian territory will ensure that the two-State solution never comes to be and will give further validity to alternative options. The urgency of stopping that illegal campaign therefore cannot be overstated. That would not only be an act of good faith that would lend credibility to peace efforts, but is also obligatory for Israel under the law and the road map, with which it cannot continue to selectively comply and to which it must be held accountable.

The truth of Israel's commitment to peace cannot be measured by empty lip service to peace or the mere presence of its negotiators at the table. It must be measured by Israel's deeds. When negotiators come to the table absent good faith and genuine peace proposals and when the Israeli Government continues its deceitful, belligerent conduct in the occupied Palestinian territory, we must truly question whether or not Israel is interested in the just and lasting peace that we seek to achieve — a peace based on United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

For decades, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has invoked the Security Council's responsibility under the Charter. Yet, the Council remains paralysed, failing to uphold its duties and allowing the conflict to fester, with broad political, security and humanitarian

consequences. We remain convinced that holding Israel responsible for its crimes will be the only way to bring those illegal actions to a halt, prevent the further deterioration of the situation and salvage the prospects for peace. We therefore call again on the Council to take serious measures that will send a clear message to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately cease all of its illegal actions and to commit to the long-held parameters of the peace process.

The Palestinian people and their leadership remain committed to a peaceful solution and to peace negotiations. Moreover, we have not given up our conviction in international law and the United Nations system as central pillars in our efforts to achieve a just solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including the Palestine refugee problem, to bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to achieve our freedom and rights. We will therefore continue our efforts to mobilize the Security Council, as well our efforts in the General Assembly and all other relevant United Nations organs, to make that a reality. In that regard, we appeal for the strong and valuable support of all Member States.

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

Mr. Prozor (Israel): As this is the first time that I address the Security Council in the new year, let me congratulate the five new Council members on their election. I wish each of them the best of luck in navigating the sometimes stormy debates of the Chamber.

As we gather in the Chamber, an alarm bell is ringing. Never has it been so clear that Iran is seeking to build a nuclear weapon. That is the single greatest threat to the security of the entire world. Now is the time to act. Tomorrow is too late. The stakes are too high. The price of inaction is too great.

The latest International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports prove beyond any doubt that Iran has a nuclear weapons programme, which it is rapidly advancing. Iran recently announced that it would enrich uranium to 20 per cent at its nuclear facility in Qom. There is no plausible civilian justification for that action. It blatantly violates numerous resolutions of the Council and will bring Iran significantly closer to producing weapons-grade, highly enriched uranium.

Each and every Member of the United Nations — particularly those of the Council — should lie awake at night thinking about what would happen if the regime in Tehran gets a hold of the most dangerous weapon on Earth. Only the pressure of a united international community can stop Iran from continuing its march towards nuclear weapons. The political and economic price that Iran will pay must be clear. Israel commends the recent steps taken by the United States, the European Union and others in that regard. Although those are very important steps, we must judge them based on their results. It is time for the rest of the international community and the Council to join those efforts.

We come together today after a year of turmoil in the Middle East. Great challenges lie on the horizon. People are demanding dignity and seeking liberty after generations of oppression. Extremism threatens fragile societies. Human rights continue to be trampled. Unrest has shaken the foundation of the political order from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea. And what issue has the Council deemed to be the most pressing in its monthly debate on the Middle East? Surprise, surprise — it is the status of municipal building applications in the West Bank. In the last two monthly briefings by the Secretariat, barely a square inch of Jerusalem or the West Bank has been left unexamined. Yet entire Middle Eastern countries where people are being killed, repressed and tortured daily continue to go without mention. That is logic turned on its head. Let me be clear — perfectly clear. Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is important on its own merits, so that Israelis and Palestinians alike can lead peaceful, secure and prosperous lives. But the misallocation of the Security Council's time, energy and resources erodes its credibility.

How many times have members of this Council — and many others — repeated the statement that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the central conflict in the Middle East and that if we solve that conflict we solve all the other conflicts in the region? Today one would ridicule that statement. It is obvious that Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Bahrain and other conflicts in the Middle East have nothing to do with Israel. The constant repetition of the statement does not make it true. How many times have members of this Council — and many others — repeated that settlements are the primary obstacle to

peace? Similarly, repetition of that statement does not make it true.

The primary obstacle to peace is not settlements. The primary obstacle to peace is the so-called claim of return. Let me repeat that. The major hurdle to peace is the Palestinians' insistence on the so-called claim of return. No one will ever hear Palestinian leaders — not even here in this Chamber — say “two States for two peoples”. If anyone ever hears them say “two States for two peoples”, I would ask them to phone me at my office immediately — to and call me collect, in the event of such an unprecedented occurrence. No one will hear them say “two States for two peoples” because today the Palestinian leadership is calling for an independent Palestinian State but insists that its people return to the Jewish State. That would mean the destruction of Israel.

The idea that Israel will be flooded with millions of Palestinians will never be accepted. The international community knows it, the Palestinian leadership knows it, but the Palestinian people are not hearing it. To substantiate that, in a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion last November, 90 per cent of Palestinians said that they would not give up the claim of return. That gap between their perception and reality is and will remain the major obstacle to peace.

Since the Palestinian leadership refuses to tell the Palestinian people the truth, the international community has the responsibility to tell them the truth. It has the responsibility to stand up and say that the so-called claim of return is a non-starter. Yet many around this table who never miss an opportunity to tell Israel what it has to do for peace conveniently lose their voices when it comes to telling the Palestinian people about the basic compromises they will have to make for peace.

The Palestinian refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish State goes hand in hand with a culture of incitement in mosques, in schools and in the media. Day after day, children are taught to pursue violence and to hate, vilify and dehumanize Israelis and Jews. Let me be clear. I am talking not only about Hamas in Gaza, but also about the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, where one cannot turn a corner without seeing terrorists and terrorism glorified.

This month, on 9 January, as Mr. Fernandez-Taranco mentioned — and I will go into it because he

mentioned it only in passing — Palestinian Authority television broadcast the proceedings of an event celebrating Fatah's forty-seventh anniversary. It featured a sermon by the Authority's most senior religious leader, Mufti Muhammad Hussein, who presented the killing of Jews as a sacred goal for all Muslims. His comments were deeply disturbing. But what was even more disturbing is that no one from the Palestinian leadership stood up and condemned his comments, denounced his actions or dissociated themselves from his message. Not only did they not condemn his words, they even broadcast them on public Palestinian television channels. The Palestinian leadership said nothing — and its silence speaks volumes.

The path to peace is clear. The international community must tell the Palestinians unequivocally that unilateralism is a dead end and that direct negotiations are the only way forward. Recent talks in Amman are a positive step in this regard, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank King Abdullah and everyone else for helping to facilitate those meetings. Now Israelis and Palestinians must take the next step towards peace together. It is time to stop negotiating about negotiating. It is time to stop meeting about meeting. It is time to stop talking about talking. Yet instead of taking steps toward peace with Israel, President Abbas continues to flirt with the dangers of unity with Hamas.

Hamas is another subject that has not been mentioned here. Hamas is a terrorist organization funded, supported and trained by the Iranian regime. It has diverted nearly every resource in Gaza to oppressing its own people or attacking ours. Women are subjugated, political opponents are jailed and murdered, and children are used as human shields and suicide bombers. That is the reality on the ground in Gaza today, as we speak, yet we did not hear one word or even syllable about it in today's briefing.

The Quartet has long applied three principles that Hamas must adopt to become a legitimate actor in the peace process. It must renounce violence, recognize Israel and abide by prior Palestinian agreements. The bar could not be set any lower, yet at no point has Hamas satisfied those conditions or indicated any intention to do so. It says no to negotiation, it says no to recognition of Israel and it continues to carry out violence against Israel day after day. Any who suggest that Hamas is a partner for peace should take a trip to

the Gaza Strip. The area remains a launching ground for constant rocket attacks targeting Israeli cities and civilians. Last year, some 700 rockets were fired into Israel. That is an average of almost two rockets fired every single day.

Let me state clearly what I have said in numerous letters to the Security Council and in previous debates. The situation in Gaza is very serious. One spark could ignite a dangerous escalation. The Security Council has an obligation to act boldly and immediately. Yet the Council still has not found the time or the will to utter a single syllable of condemnation against the attacks, and the silence is deafening.

No people should be expected to live under such terror. No Government should be expected to stand idle in the face of such violence. Later this month, the Secretary-General will visit Israel and see the threats we face with his own eyes. Let us hope that his trip brings a bit of new perspective to this Organization about the real obstacles to peace and security and the real issues of extremism, terrorism and incitement in our region.

The challenges facing the Middle East are growing every day. They stand clearly before the Council. They threaten all of us. It is on the Council's shoulders to confront them with courage and with leadership. Tired rhetoric and misplaced focus have too often characterized this debate. They will no longer suffice. As Iran inches closer to acquiring a nuclear weapon, as extremists spread terrorism and hate, and as the enemies of peace test the resolve of the international community, silence is not an option.

Confronting these fundamental threats will not be easy. It will require struggle and sacrifice. As Winston Churchill once said, "We must be united, we must be undaunted, we must be inflexible". At this critical moment, for the sake of our children and our common future, the world has no other choice.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

I will begin on a welcome and even hopeful note. King Abdullah and the Jordanian Government have taken a bold step and shown tremendous leadership in bringing the parties together for direct meetings in

coordination with the Quartet. The discussions are showing promise, and we are encouraged that the parties have already met several times this month in Amman. We believe strongly that the Council's focus should be on offering support to the Jordanian effort and on urging the parties to take full advantage of this opportunity.

Last Wednesday, the Council discussed the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as in southern Israel. The discussion today has already focused a great deal on counterproductive actions taken by both sides. I want to encourage my colleagues on the Council to join in encouraging the parties to refrain from unhelpful actions and to promote an environment that is conducive to progress. We join in condemning in the strongest possible terms both incitement to violence and continued terrorist attacks on civilians in Israel, including rocket attacks from Gaza. We also reiterate our ongoing concern about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and our support for increased measures to ensure the safety and well-being of Gazans. We likewise urge Israel to continue and to step up its efforts to deter, confront and prosecute anti-Palestinian violence and extremist hate crimes. Let me also reiterate that we do not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity.

We should not lose sight of our shared goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution to this conflict. Last year, in May, President Obama laid out his vision for a lasting peace that would involve two States, for two peoples: Israel as a Jewish State and the homeland for the Jewish people and the State of Palestine as the homeland for the Palestinian people, each State enjoying self-determination, mutual recognition and peace. President Obama reiterated that goal in his speech before the General Assembly in September (see A/66/PV.11). He reaffirmed the basis for successful negotiations, which is well known to all of us. Israelis must know that any agreement provides assurances for their security, and Palestinians deserve to know the territorial basis of their State.

In an effort to operationalize the President's vision, on 23 September 2001 the Quartet issued a statement calling on the parties "to overcome the current obstacles and resume direct, bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations without delay or preconditions." (see *SG/2178*) That statement, taken as a whole, presents a robust framework for resuming direct negotiations between the parties. We are now at

a critical juncture. The Government of Jordan deserves our gratitude for facilitating re-engagement by the parties. With Jordan and the Quartet's help, the parties have begun a difficult but necessary process. It is imperative that we do everything we can to contribute to the success of that pathway.

I shall turn now to Syria. The situation there continues to deteriorate dramatically. Despite the presence of Arab League monitors, the Al-Assad regime is ignoring its commitments to the Arab League plan, including by failing to end all acts of violence and to protect Syrian civilians. Scores of civilians are killed every day. Thousands of political detainees remain incarcerated across the country, many at serious risk of torture. As a result of the regime's failure to fulfil the requirements of the Arab League plan, there are more and more calls from the region for Security Council involvement.

On Sunday in Cairo, the Arab League approved a resolution that calls for Al-Assad to hand over powers to his Vice-President in order to form a unity Government, enabling a political transition to begin in Syria. We welcome the Arab League's continued leadership and efforts to facilitate a transition and broker a political solution to the more than 10 months of brutality by the Al-Assad regime. We believe that it is essential that the international community work together to support a stable transition, and we commend the Arab League for putting forth a transition plan. The Council should fully support the Arab League's efforts to broker an end to the bloodshed and a peaceful transition to democracy in Syria.

The United States has been very clear in our approach to the crisis in Syria. We have long said that Al-Assad, who has shunned all opportunities to institute real reforms that address basic human rights issues, needs to step aside and let a peaceful transition in Syria occur. We first imposed sanctions on the Al-Assad regime and its enablers last spring, and have increased them as Al-Assad has refused to end the violence. Many others in the international community have enacted similar measures. The European Union approved yet more sanctions yesterday, and sanctions have been part of the Arab League's initiative since last November. It is long past time that the Council adopt a strong resolution that supports the Arab League's efforts to end the crisis and restore peace to Syria.

We call again on the Syrian Government to permit access to the commission of inquiry created by the United Nations Human Rights Council in August. The United States fully supports the Syrian people's demands for a democratic, representative and inclusive Government that respects human rights and provides equal protection under the law for all citizens, regardless of sect, ethnicity or gender.

The United States continues to call on the opposition to refrain from violence, while recognizing that exercising such restraint becomes more and more difficult as the regime ratchets up its repression. The Arab League's Secretary General stated very clearly in his report this week that

“the opposition had to carry arms in response to the excessive use of force by the Syrian Government to counter protests, the use of repression, detention and torture and violations of human rights by security agencies”.

We hold the Syrian regime fully responsible for the worsening cycle of violence.

We are concerned by recent reports of shipments of arms and munitions to the Syrian Government. We call on supplier countries to voluntarily halt arms transfers to the regime. We encourage all nations to join the widening effort to stop the flow of weapons to the Al-Assad regime.

I will conclude with the situation in Lebanon. We remain committed to the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006), and urge the Government of Lebanon to adhere to those and other international obligations and commitments, including with respect to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. We condemn the terrorist attack against peacekeepers of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon on 9 December 2011, the third such attack in less than a year. The United States calls on the Government of Lebanon to investigate those incidents and bring those responsible to justice. We welcome the Secretary-General's recent visit to Lebanon, including his remarks on the importance of disarming Hizbullah, an international obligation established by resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006).

The United States continues to support the Lebanese Armed Forces and recognizes the critical role that they and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) play in maintaining stability

throughout Lebanon. We thank Major General Alberto Asarta Cuevas for his leadership during his tenure and welcome incoming UNIFIL Force Commander Brigadier General Paolo Serra.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India): At the outset, I would like to welcome you, Mr. President, to the Security Council and to thank you for presiding over this meeting. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing, as well His Excellency Mr. Ron Prosor, Permanent Representative of Israel, and His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine, for their statements.

Today's open debate is taking place at a crucial time when the international community is engaged with Israel and Palestine to restart direct peace talks. On 23 September — the day when President Mahmoud Abbas filed an application with the Secretary-General for Palestine's membership in the United Nations — the Quartet issued a statement proposing a series of steps to restart the peace process (see SG/2178). The steps included a preparatory meeting between the parties within a month and a commitment of the parties to submit their preliminary proposals on territory and security within three months, to make substantive progress within six months, and to hold a donor conference and to reach an agreement on the final status issues by the end of 2012.

During the last four months, the Quartet engaged with the parties separately, met with them several times and sought proposals on security and the border. Those actions were followed by a series of meetings in Amman this month under the auspices of King Abdullah II. While the prospect of direct talks has remained elusive, it is encouraging that the parties have remained engaged in those processes. We believe that such engagements need to become more serious and purposeful with a view to resolving the issues in a time-bound manner.

To realize the Quartet's time frame for reaching an agreement by the end of the year, it is necessary for Israel to completely stop settlement activities. Continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, besides being illegal under international law, are undermining the efforts of the international community to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the two-State solution. Several reports, including those of the Office

for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, clearly indicate that the increasing trend of settlement activities in Palestinian lands is not compatible with the two-State solution.

Settlement activities have also exacerbated the humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Because more than 43 per cent of the West Bank is outside the control of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian people have been deprived of access to their natural resources and prevented from undertaking their rightful economic, social and cultural activities. The situation has resulted in a large number of Palestinian people losing their homes and access to their farms and their livelihoods. Settlement activities have also led to violence and have aggravated social tension between settlers and the Palestinian population. We therefore reiterate our call for Israel to stop all settlement activities.

In Gaza, the blockade and restrictions on exports continue to have far-reaching consequences. Poverty and aid dependency have increased, and demands for emergency services like health, water, sanitation, education and temporary shelter have overstretched the resources of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). There is an urgent need to further ease restrictions on humanitarian supplies to the Gaza Strip. Established channels for such supplies should be used even as the capacity of such channels is improved.

Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is an important issue that needs no emphasis. We support the efforts of the Palestinian leadership to expedite implementation of the reconciliation agreement reached last year between the Palestinian factions.

It is also necessary that all violence come to an end. We condemn all attacks that cause harm to the civilian population and damage civilian infrastructure.

For a comprehensive and durable peace in the region, other issues relating to the Arab lands remaining under occupation are also important. For the Middle East peace process to succeed, progress must also be made on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks. Those critical issues must not be lost sight of amid the unprecedented social and political upheaval that the region is witnessing.

In fact, developments in the region call for consolidation of the collective efforts of the

international community to assist the countries in undertaking inclusive political processes and implementing reforms to meet the legitimate aspirations of their people. In such collective efforts, we must respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries. It is important that the grievances of the people be addressed through dialogue and negotiations rather than through resort to arms. No action should be taken from outside that might exacerbate the problems and give rise to extremism.

India has been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel, pursuant to the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map. That support was reiterated to the Palestinian leadership last week when our Minister for External Affairs visited Ramallah.

India also remains committed to continuing its development cooperation with Palestine through direct budgetary support, training of personnel in various areas, annual contributions to UNRWA and projects under the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Fund.

Palestine is recognized by more than two thirds of the membership of the United Nations. That was clearly demonstrated by the overwhelming vote in Paris on 31 October 2011 in favour of Palestine's membership in UNESCO. As the first non-Arab country to have recognized Palestine, in 1988, India remains convinced that Palestine meets all criteria for United Nations membership, as set out in the United Nations Charter, and deserves to become a full-fledged member of the Organization. We hope that the Security Council will support Palestine's application for membership in the United Nations sooner than later.

In conclusion, let me reiterate India's support for the Quartet's efforts to find a lasting resolution for the Israel-Palestinian issues, based on the two-State solution. India stands ready to play its role in the Council's collective endeavour to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): The situation in the Middle East, at the core of which is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, retains the attention of the Security Council, which today is devoting a public

debate to the topic. I would like to congratulate the South African presidency for giving the Council, once again, the opportunity to take up this issue, which is of concern to the Council and to the delegation of Togo. I would also like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, for his briefing.

The peace process between Israel and Palestine continues to experience difficulties. There has been little progress on the ground. Unfortunately, acts of violence continue to be perpetrated by both sides. The lack of trust between the parties, above all the absence of political will, and the pressure of national public opinion are in part at the root of the stagnating situation.

At a time when the Palestinian Authority is carrying out efforts to garner international recognition of Palestine with a view to the creation of a State of that name, diplomacy has not yet produced the desired results on the ground, even as the international community continues to rest its hope for a lasting peace based on the principle of land for peace. Moreover, the announcement in the last quarter of 2011 of new settlements and the approval on 27 November 2011 of a plan for the construction of a hundred housing units in Shilo in the West Bank are hardly conducive to lasting peace in the region.

In the Gaza Strip, the situation continues to be difficult due to the blockade, which, in the view of Togo, should be lifted. The issue of refugees in Palestinian camps also continues to be a source of great concern and raises the issue of respect for human rights.

That is why we hailed the praiseworthy work undertaken by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and call upon the international community to continue to provide it with substantial material and financial support, as recently expressed in its appeal for funding. On the other hand, rocket fire on Israel and the taking of extremist positions, which lead to reprisals, must end, so as to create conditions conducive to sustained discussions between the two parties.

Against that grim background, we can welcome some positive acts, such as the release of several hundred Palestinian prisoners and of the Israeli soldier, Shalit. Also, the decision to resume transferring the customs and tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, which were frozen after the vote in UNESCO, and the

willingness demonstrated by the two parties to resume direct negotiations, as called for by the Quartet in its statement of 23 September 2011 (see SG/2178), should be welcomed.

On that last point, Togo would like to note once again the remarkable work by the envoys of the Quartet and its representative, Mr. Tony Blair, who, in the framework of the three cycles of separate meetings, prepared parties for direct negotiations. The recent initiative of Jordan to host a meeting of representatives of the Quartet and Israeli and Palestinian negotiators is part of the efforts for the resumption of the negotiations, which have been suspended since September 2010. This is why dialogue must always be encouraged, for we know that the progress obtained in the region, albeit limited, was possible only thanks to negotiations.

Togo reiterates its support to the Quartet and calls on the two parties to overcome their differences and to bear in mind the interests of their peoples and the future of the region as they engage in direct negotiations with the objective of reaching a definitive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Togo, which has good relations with Israel and the Palestinian Authority, believes that there can be no peace without negotiations carried out in good faith by the two parties. My country's position has always been for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security within secure and internationally recognized borders. I also wish to urge our friends in Israel and Palestine to encourage and support the peace process.

Along those lines, all acts inciting violence, from either side, must end. Israel must also be recognized by all Palestinian parties as a partner and interlocutor with whom they must negotiate. The Quartet, which is the facilitator of these negotiations, must also be the guarantor of the application on the ground of the outcome of the negotiations.

The Security Council should continue to seek a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Of course, it is difficult to agree on this issue within the Council, but the Council's responsibility under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security requires that it bring sufficient pressure to bear on the two sides to ensure that they negotiate in good faith so as to come to a definitive solution to the conflict,

which has pitted these two sides against each other for too long. It is undeniable that the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a just and sustainable manner will have positive repercussions for peace and security throughout the Middle East.

Mr. Osorio (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin by welcoming you, Mr. President, and thanking you for travelling to New York to preside over today's meeting in the Security Council. I also wish to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his detailed report this morning on the current situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Once again, Colombia reiterates its view that the process for achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East must be comprehensive, well structured and based on the principles of the United Nations Charter and the lofty goals of international peace and security. We therefore believe that the creation of a viable Palestinian State, living in peace beside Israel and having clearly defined, secure and internationally recognized borders, must be the result of direct negotiations between the parties. That will ensure coexistence between those two peoples.

We make particular mention of the meetings that have been held in Amman between the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators. We welcome these meetings. They were held in the framework of the plan put forward by the Quartet on 23 September (see SG/2178) and under the good auspices of the King of Jordan. We ask the parties to continue these talks, which could lead to the prompt resumption of the negotiating process in a spirit of mutual trust that guarantees the achievement of lasting and stable peace for which we all hope.

Each of the parties must make efforts to remove what are considered obstacles in the path of negotiations, as we have heard today from the representatives of Palestine and Israel. On the one hand, the settlements in the occupied territories and the blockade of Gaza have an adverse impact on the well-being of the populations and on the human rights situation, as well as on access by those people to basic services, particularly with regard to health and education, as revealed recently by Under-Secretary-General Amos to the Council. We also must find solutions to the legitimate concerns of Israel with regard to its security and must put an end to all acts of violence against its people.

We believe that in order to achieve lasting peace, the parties must abstain from adopting unilateral measures that contravene international law and are aimed at harming or endangering civilians. The international community, in turn, must do everything possible to ensure that the parties take effective measures to guarantee respect for and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people.

My delegation wishes to stress the achievements of the Palestinian Authority in preparing its institutions for the creation of a State. We therefore support the actions of the international community to strengthen the capacities of the Palestinian institutions to make a viable, independent sovereign State possible for the well-being of its people.

With regard to Syria, we remain concerned at the extremely serious human rights situation in that country and the lack of progress in implementing the various initiatives put forward by the Arab League. We insist on the absolute need to put an end to all acts of violence. We welcome the efforts of the Arab League to avoid further worsening of the situation and to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria. We urge the Government of Syria and the opposition to initiate a political dialogue aimed at the establishment of a government of national unity and at setting favourable conditions for calling elections.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me begin by greeting you, Mr. President, and thanking you for being here to preside over our meeting. I wish to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing, which was quite complete.

The Palestinian question has been deadlocked for a number of years now, after a great many efforts. Today, we see that we are at a critical and historic juncture. The peace process in the Middle East now faces major challenges as a result of the obstacles put in its path by Israel. We note that there is a lack of political will to allow the Palestinian people to enjoy their rights and establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital. Those obstacles and procrastination tactics — along with the ongoing crises, especially with regard to the settlements policy, home demolitions and the confiscation of Palestinian land and property, including villages and towns being cut off as a result of the construction of the separation wall, in spite of international and Arab peace

initiatives — mean that, unfortunately, the two-State solution cannot be achieved.

Last week, Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, spoke about the current state of affairs and provided us with figures and statistics that clearly illustrate the negative and dangerous impact of the settlements policy, in particular with regard to the economic, social and humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. That also has a negative impact on reaching a durable solution at the international level. In addition, some Israeli settlers carry out systematic and repeated attacks against the Palestinian people, which the Israeli authorities do not deter or punish.

The Israeli occupying authorities in Jerusalem have stepped up settlement activities, both in Jerusalem in general as well as in East Jerusalem and neighbouring areas. A number of excavations are taken place under the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in blatant violation of international norms. We must ensure respect for this pivotal city in order to arrive at a solution to the Middle East issue. The Security Council should shoulder its responsibility and help to find a solution to this very complex problem involving a city of great importance to all monotheistic religions.

The Council should work quickly to meet the legal, moral and political obligations incumbent upon it and the Organization vis-à-vis the Palestinian people, whose right to establish an independent State should be realized. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Morocco supports all international and regional efforts aimed at relaunching the peace process, in particular with regard to the Jordanian initiative, which we truly hope will make it possible to resume negotiations. Once the desire and political will for peace are made clear by both parties, especially by the Israeli people in rejecting anything that obstructs peace, my delegation will not hesitate to promote every effort aimed at comprehensive and just peace based on international legitimacy.

This conflict has lasted far too long. We must find a lasting and comprehensive peace. A great number of regional and international initiatives have been launched, with Arab States putting forward a bold initiative demonstrating our good faith and commitment to achieve peace. The elements of an ultimate solution are now clear to everyone, as are the details. Israel must demonstrate political will and

determination to arrive at a genuine solution that takes into account the aspirations and rights of the Palestinian side. Israel must demonstrate on the ground its desire to negotiate sincerely in order to achieve peace, security and cooperation. We all want to see peace in the region, which has suffered more than any other part of the world. This is a region that has suffered from wars and tragedies and whose people year for peace, coexistence and cooperation.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): Thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over this debate today. I would also like to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing, as well as the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

It has been more than one year since the start of the revolution in Tunisia, which sparked the wave of calls for democratization across the Middle East. The process of change and reform continues in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya. Although the process will be long and difficult, we believe that it will result in the fulfilment of the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of all four countries. We, our international partners and the United Nations will continue to support the process of reform in every way we can. But we are clear that the primary responsibility for shaping the future in all those nations lies with the people themselves.

In Syria the struggle for freedom continues to be crushed with horrific brutality by a regime that has failed to recognize the unstoppable momentum of its people's desire to win their legitimate universal rights. It is simply a fact, borne out by countless examples over recent history, that autocratic regimes that use repression to cling to power do not survive indefinitely. The Syrian regime must now stop its prevarication, procrastination and deception. In accordance with the League of Arab States plan of action and its communiqué of 22 January, the regime must immediately and verifiably put an end to the violence, release all those who have been arrested during the protests, withdraw all military and security forces from cities and towns and allow free access to international media. It is time for the Security Council to take robust action in support of the Arab League, with the objective of stopping the violence and, as the communiqué makes clear, ushering in a rapid Syrian-led political transition that leads to free and fair elections.

In that context, we are concerned about the supply of weapons into Syria — whether sales to the Government or illegal smuggling to the regime or the opposition. When questioned by the BBC on 16 January about the supply of weapons to the Syrian Government, the representative of one Council member responded that continued sales of arms to Syria had “no effect on the situation at all”. We fundamentally disagree. It is glaringly obvious that transferring weapons into a volatile and violent situation is irresponsible and will only fuel the bloodshed.

Against the backdrop of changes across the Middle East, it is as crucial as ever to ensure that the Palestinians too secure their legitimate rights. The creation of a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State is long overdue. The new talks taking place in Jordan have, thankfully, ended the protracted impasse. But those must be much more than just talks or an attempt by one side or the other to shift the blame for failure. Both sides must now present concrete plans on borders and security as the basis of substantial negotiations of two of the core issues.

In order for those talks to be successful, they need to be conducted in an atmosphere conducive to making progress. It is difficult to see how such an environment can be created while settlement-building and settler violence continue. Israel's continued settlement announcements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, send a devastating message. The systematic and deliberate expansion of settlements not only damages the prospects for a negotiated settlement, it threatens the very idea of the future Palestinian State. Along with the other European members of the Council, as well as a number of other Council members, we were clear, following last month's briefing (see S/PV.6692), that all settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, must cease immediately and that Israel should reverse its announced plans.

We believe that a negotiated solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict is achievable. The parameters are well known to all: borders based on the 1967 lines, with agreed swaps; security arrangements that respect Palestinian sovereignty and demonstrate that the occupation is over, while protecting Israeli security; a fair and agreed solution for refugees; and Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

If the parties fail to present and negotiate on concrete proposals on borders and security, it will not be because of a lack of solutions. There have been many options aired over decades of negotiations. Failure will be a direct result of a lack of political will. Neither party can afford to demonstrate such complacency in the context of a radically changing region.

Mr. Wittig (Germany): I thank you, Mr. President, for guiding our meeting today. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. Germany aligns itself with the European Union statement to be delivered later on.

On many occasions, we have deplored the political stalemate in the Middle East. We have consistently urged for efforts to find a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be intensified. Therefore, we very warmly welcome the Jordanian initiative in support of Quartet efforts to facilitate direct contacts between the parties with the aim of resuming direct and meaningful negotiations.

Our primary goal remains a just and lasting peace. The viability of a two-State solution must not be jeopardized by developments on the ground, in particular, continued settlement construction in Jerusalem and Area C. At the end of December, we discussed the settlement issue in depth in the Council and, together with France, the United Kingdom and Portugal, outlined our concerns. As a matter of urgency, we want to see comprehensive proposals on borders and security, as envisaged by the Quartet statement of 23 September of last year, and confidence-building measures that help to build trust between the parties and that demonstrate a genuine commitment to start meaningful negotiations. Any statements or developments referring to possible settlement plans for the area around Jerusalem called E1 are of particular concern. Pushing forward with such plans would mean cutting off East Jerusalem from the West Bank. That would have a highly negative impact on the viability and contiguity of a Palestinian State in the occupied territories in the context of a two-State solution, if not make it possible.

We welcome measures taken by the Israeli authorities in response to increasing settler violence. We trust that determined law enforcement will bring

the perpetrators to justice, in compliance with the obligation to protect civilians under international law.

Forced relocations of Palestinians in Area C must be halted and the implementation of demolition orders in that Area must be stopped. Restrictions on access and movement should be further lifted. Palestinians must be allowed to use their natural resources in Area C.

On Gaza, import capacity has increased but we are still at only 40 per cent of the weekly volume of the first half of 2007. Much more, also with regard to exports, is needed to allow the Gaza economy to recover and to generate jobs. Further progress on access and movement would also contribute to easing legitimate Israeli security concerns as it would strengthen the business sector, at the expense of radical forces, and could help dry up the financial basis for Hamas provided by the tunnel business.

Rockets targeting the Israeli civilian population continue to be launched from Gaza. We strongly condemn those attacks. There is no justification for that indiscriminate violence. It must end.

There was mention of the Mufti of Jerusalem's inflammatory speech on 9 January at a rally marking the forty-seventh anniversary of the founding of Fatah. We strongly condemn that speech. Such incitement against the Jewish people is repulsive, unacceptable and purely anti-Semitic. Jerusalem is a city sacred to three faiths and all its religious leaders should promote respect and tolerance.

On its tenth anniversary, the Arab Peace Initiative also deserves renewed attention. The Arab Spring has demonstrated that the peoples in the region want to shape the future on a peaceful basis through negotiations and discussions, not by the use of violence. Our primary goal remains a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That ambition must be turned into reality — the creation of a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living in peace and security side by side with the State of Israel.

On Syria, we welcome the important decision taken by the League of Arab States just two days ago. A clear signal from the Council that supports the initiative of the League of Arab States in all its aspects is needed. The Council should condemn the continued and systematic human rights violations and the use of

force against civilians by the Syrian authorities and demand an immediate end to all violence. It must recall that all those responsible for all violence and human rights violations should be held accountable. It must build on the decisions of the League of Arab States, in particular those taken last Sunday.

We fully support the efforts of the League of Arab States in all their aspects. We welcome the intention of the Arab League to appoint a special representative on Syria and to seize the Security Council of the situation in Syria. We would therefore welcome the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and the President of the ministerial follow-up committee briefing the Security Council as soon as possible on the Arab League's initiative to solve the crisis in Syria.

To solve the Syrian crisis there should be Arab ownership, but with the strong unified support of the Security Council. With the steps taken by the Arab League, a page has been turned, and the Security Council now needs to respond with one voice.

Mr. Moraes Cabral (Portugal): Allow me to join others in welcoming you, Mr. Minister, to the Council and to thank you for chairing our debate. I also thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his very thorough briefing, as well as the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements. Portugal naturally associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by Ambassador Mayr-Harting on behalf of the European Union.

We are at the dawn of the defining moment of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Tomorrow, the parties will meet for the fifth time in Amman since the beginning of January. Portugal commends King Abdullah II and the Jordanian Government for their endeavours in facilitating direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians on the basis of the September Quartet statement. We are encouraged by those developments, and we urge both sides to continue to engage seriously in this important process and to take concrete steps towards the full and timely implementation of the Quartet's 23 September statement in all its elements.

Portugal welcomes the submission of the Palestinian proposals on borders and security by the Palestinian negotiator to his Israeli counterpart. We also take note that Israel has responded by presenting a number of issues for discussion. We strongly encourage Israel to take a step further and also submit its views on borders and security in clear terms.

The creation of an independent and viable Palestinian State is long overdue. As I have repeatedly stated, the only solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lies in a political and comprehensive agreement based on two States living side by side in peace and security. Portugal therefore fully supports the Quartet process and efforts to reach an agreement between the parties on all core issues on the basis of the internationally endorsed parameters by the end of 2012, at the latest. If that is to succeed, the parties must commit themselves seriously to negotiations, show good faith and refrain from provocative actions that undermine confidence in each other.

Last week, the Council was briefed by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos on the dire humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. As she made perfectly clear, the humanitarian dimension of the Israeli occupation is of the gravest concern. In Gaza, the blockade has just been reinforced with the removal of Karni crossing infrastructure, leaving Kerem Shalom — which has considerably less capacity — as the sole commercial crossing between Gaza and Israel. We regret this development, and urge the Government of Israel to fully implement resolution 1860 (2009) in order to allow the reconstruction of the destroyed and damaged infrastructure and the recovery of the Gaza economy, thereby reducing the population's dependence on international aid.

On its part, Hamas, as the de facto authority in Gaza, must end all rocket attacks against Israel, which we vehemently condemn. All parties must refrain from actions that exacerbate tensions and threaten calm and security in and around Gaza. Israel's right to security and to protect its own citizens, which is unquestionable, must not be secured at the cost of unnecessary human suffering in Gaza.

In the West Bank, the situation in Area C and East Jerusalem is most troubling. Here, settlement expansion, increasing settler violence, stringent zoning and planning regimes, evictions and demolitions, restrictions on access and movement that deny Palestinians essential services, and the use of their land and resources are fostering the forced displacement of Palestinian communities. As Valerie Amos also recalled on Wednesday, in the West Bank 46 per cent of land is off-limits to Palestinians, who are faced with a severely constrained and shrinking living space in which to sustain their livelihoods.

The human and political toll of these policies and developments on the ground is absolutely devastating. By increasingly expanding settlements, which are illegal under international law, fragmenting the West Bank and isolating East Jerusalem from other Palestinian territory, Israel is actively destroying the viability of a contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State, and consequently the prospects for peace. Pending a political agreement that solves all final status issues, Israel must halt its illegal actions and fully abide by its obligations under international law.

The peace we all envision for the Middle East is a lasting and comprehensive one. This year will mark the tenth anniversary of the Arab Peace Initiative. Its premises and elements remain as valid today as they were a decade ago. We call upon Israelis and Arabs, alongside the Quartet efforts on the Israeli-Palestinian track, to seriously engage on the other dimensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The full implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative would enable Israel's integration into its regional environment and the normalization of its relations with the Arab and Muslim world, thus enabling a stable, peaceful and prosperous future for all in the Middle East.

A year ago, the people of Tunisia took to the streets to demand freedom and democracy, and set in motion a wave that quickly changed the face of the Arab world. As the past year has shown, political transition and societal transformation are complex and challenge-ridden, but we trust that the legitimate aspirations of the people of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen will be fulfilled. It is essential that those charged with implementing transition and transformation do so on the basis of dialogue, inclusiveness, equal rights for all citizens, and the rule of law. Exclusion, repression and violence are simply not the answer. They are never the answer.

In this context, Portugal remains gravely concerned about the continuing violence and the daily loss of life in Syria. Notwithstanding the deployment of the observer mission of the League of Arab States, the Syrian authorities have not altered their brutal repression of the Syrian people, and continue with the widespread and systematic violation of human rights. Thus, the situation continues to spiral dangerously out of control, with the risk of plunging Syria and the region into a bloody sectarian conflict.

Portugal fully supports and commends the efforts of the League of Arab States in seeking a solution to the current crisis, and urges the Syrian authorities to abide by their commitment to immediately and fully implementing the Arab plan of action of 2 November 2011 and the League of Arab States proposals for a peaceful transition in Syria.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): I welcome you, Sir, to the Security Council and thank you for convening today's debate.

I should like to thank Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for a very difficult assessment, which he gave in a very honest fashion. I also align my delegation with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Egypt and Kazakhstan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

As members are well aware, Pakistan has stood by its Palestinian brethren in their six-decade quest for the realization of their inalienable right to self-determination. Today, the protagonists of the Arab Spring, citing democracy, have said much the same thing with respect to many parts of the world. We therefore call upon the Security Council to transform its words into resolute action, notwithstanding the very welcome recent Quartet activities in the Middle East. The Council should ensure a mechanism to implement its decisions on Israel and Palestine; if it fails to do so, it will further undermine its own credibility.

While we deliberate endlessly in the Security Council, the Palestinian observer showcased today how his people continue to suffer at the hands of what they call an occupation force. I am not terribly sure whether his cry for help is condemned to be unheard here or whether his people's dreams of peace and tranquility are not shared by others while they continue to draw world attention to their encirclement and the uncrossable barriers surrounding them.

The settlement activity of Israel continues sadly unabated. The Middle East Quartet and the international community seem to be in a haze of suspended promises. The Palestinians want a halt to this settlement activity — a demand that is endorsed by the Council and universally supported — yet there is seemingly no recourse on the matter. As some speakers have mentioned today, last week Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos informed the Council

that settlement activity had rendered 43 per cent of the West Bank unusable for Palestinians, and had impeded access to services, leading to increased violence and severe starvation in the territory.

The Gaza strangulation and starvation are neither legally justifiable nor morally tenable. They are systematically eradicating the space for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. In my mind, they also constitute a major roadblock to peace. Settlement activity and peace are mutually exclusive. This strangulation was further extended and enforced by a decree with effect from 2 January. So life in Gaza will not, cannot, return to normal. We therefore call for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009). We would like to join the civilized world and suggest that, to stop strangulation and starvation, the United Nations should arrange a flotilla of its own to carry relief supplies to the hapless Gazans. Surely the Israelis cannot deny United Nations humanitarian supplies under United Nations auspices.

I would like to mention that, to my mind, the progress that the Palestinians have made in establishing State institutions over the past couple of years, despite overwhelming obstacles, has been extraordinary — a fact that was not only accepted by a number of independent observers but that was also manifested in the acceptance of its membership last year by UNESCO. There is no gainsaying the fact that the Palestinians are working towards full United Nations membership as a just reward.

I would like now to come to a point that has been whispered about in certain corridors of late. Someone asked “Have you noticed how often we mention Iran, Syria, Nigeria, Libya and the Sudan?” They wonder, and I wonder with them, whether we should be afraid, being a Muslim, since all those countries seem to come from that category. A lot of people say that the way things are going, we are going to be the next 70 per cent of Council work; should we not get a permanent seat as well? I wonder if we are doing right in frightening the world into religious ethnicities. I do not think it is beneficial to the Council or this institution. While I say that with just a passing reference, I do wish to say it because people are talking about it. I think that when talk starts, it is a matter of time before people get worried about things. That is a sort of worryment that I would respect many of my colleagues here in addressing in a fashion that says it is not so. I hope it is not so.

Having said that, let me also say that I am confident that that sort of scare will not be encouraged by the Council and that, as was mentioned by various people in various aspects, we will be referring to other important aspects of the world under discussion here today, in a fashion that promotes democracy, representative Government, et cetera. But, as they say, why does this get mentioned as regime change? Should not regime change be an outward feeling of everyone within their own countries to motivate change? What happens if that change takes on some other aspect that is not acceptable to those surveying the scene from far-off shores? I believe that this may not sound too reasonable, but I do wish we would be reasonable and not allow something like this to emanate from the sacred halls of the Chamber.

Therefore, Pakistan supports lasting peace for all the inhabitants of the Middle East, irrespective of religion, ethnicity or nationality. That is important. The framework for peace in the Middle East is laid down elaborately in resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009), as well as in the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. Mustering and sustaining the political will to implement the framework is imperative.

We hope that the international community will lend its rightfully so moral and political weight to nudge the process towards our common objective of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, as has been decided by the international comity many times for years, living side by side and in peace with all its neighbours, including Israel.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

The region of the Middle East is undergoing sweeping transformations. We understand people's yearning to take their destiny into their own hands by fundamentally changing the direction of their internal and social-economic systems. The role of the international community should consist of helping them to find the most effective and least painful route towards achieving that goal. Attempts by outside forces to manipulate the situation from afar or to bring to power certain political, ethnic or religious groups rather than others to serve their own interests are fraught with grave consequences as much for the

people of individual countries as for regional stability and international peace and security.

The turmoil in the Middle East should not obscure the need for a Palestinian-Israeli settlement. Moreover, as the head of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, underscored during his recent trip to Moscow, intensifying efforts to break the stalemate in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process on the universally accepted basis of international law constitutes an important factor in regional stability that, in turn, would favour Israeli security.

The yearnings of the Palestinian people are well known, namely, the swiftest possible settlement of the conflict, the establishment of an independent, viable and territorially indivisible State with its capital in East Jerusalem, according to the 1967 borders, living side by side in peace and security as good neighbours with Israel, and a resolution of the issue of refugees.

As with other crises, the solution to the Palestinian-Israeli problem can be found only through negotiations, and not through force. In that respect, we are seriously concerned by the continued periodic isolation of the Gaza Strip. We call upon all sides to refrain from the use of force and to prevent armed clashes. We welcome the beginning in Amman, thanks to Jordan's assistance, of direct Palestinian-Israeli contacts with a view to resuming a substantive negotiating process and achieving an equitable, lasting solution on the basis of international law. We believe that both sides will be able to show a constructive approach, that they will uphold their obligations under the road map — *inter alia*, that they will draw up and implement confidence-building measures — and that they will refrain from unilateral acts of provocation. Along with other members of the Quartet of international mediators, Russia will work towards relaunching the substantive Palestinian-Israeli negotiation process and towards establishing an atmosphere conducive to that end.

Of particular importance in that context is the immediate cessation of Israeli settlement activities on the West Bank of the Jordan River and in East Jerusalem. Such activity is illegal and seriously undermines international efforts to achieve a settlement on the basis of a two-State solution. We cannot help but be concerned by the rise in violence towards Palestinians and their property in the West Bank, which has been subjected to settler aggression that goes

virtually unpunished. The demolition of Palestinian buildings, the expropriation of Palestinian property, restriction of their freedom of movement and other violations of international humanitarian law have unfortunately become a daily fact of life. That must be brought to a halt.

In our view, the arrest by the Israeli military of Palestinian members of Government is inappropriate. We were particularly concerned to learn of the detention of a leader of the Palestinian Legal Council who was elected in 2006. That kind of action is hardly conducive to building the atmosphere of trust required for conducting a comprehensive Palestinian-Israeli peace process.

We call on the Israeli Government to take strong measures to swiftly normalize the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip: lift the blockade and help restore its effective trade with the outside world.

The Palestinian people have an undeniable right to full membership in international organizations and can count on Russia's support in that regard.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome His Excellency Mr. Ebrahim, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa, and thank him for presiding over today's open debate. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. I have listened attentively to the statements delivered by the observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

The Middle East peace process is currently at an impasse, which is a source of great concern to China. We consistently advocate the settlement of disputes through political negotiations on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map for peace in the Middle East, with a view to ultimately realizing an independent Palestinian State living in peace with Israel.

China welcomes and supports any and all measures that would help to break the current deadlock in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and relaunch the dialogue. We appreciate the recent efforts of Jordan and the Middle East Quartet to facilitate direct contact between the parties. We hope that the relevant efforts to promote peace will help to ensure the early resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations and achieve substantive results. China supports a

greater role for the Security Council in resolving the Middle East issue.

Israel's settlement activities are a major obstacle to the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations. China expresses its serious concern at Israel's recent approval of plans to build new settlements. China has always opposed Israel's establishment of Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We urge Israel to immediately cease settlement construction, to act prudently and to actively align itself with international efforts to promote peace so as to create conditions for the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

The security and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Gaza, remains grim. China hopes that the relevant parties will exercise restraint, avoid any escalation of tensions in Gaza, effectively implement the relevant United Nations resolutions and fully lift the blockade of Gaza.

China has always supported the just cause of the Palestinian people as they work to regain their legitimate national rights. We have consistently held that the building of an independent State is the legitimate right of the Palestinian people and is a basis for the implementation of the two-State solution. China supports the establishment of a fully sovereign, independent Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. China supports Palestinian membership in the United Nations.

The Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks are also important components of the Middle East peace process. A comprehensive solution to the Middle East issue is inextricably linked to peace negotiations between Syria and Israel and between Lebanon and Israel. China firmly supports the just cause of Lebanon and Syria to maintain their sovereignty and territorial integrity and recover their occupied territories. China supports the Arab countries in their strategic choice in seeking a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank your country, Mr. President, for having convened today's open debate, and you, Sir, for presiding over this meeting. We extend our appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernández-Taranco for his informative briefing. We

have also listened carefully to the statements made by the representative of Israel and the observer of Palestine.

Over the past two years, the situation in the Middle East has gained increasing attention on the agenda of the Security Council and also in international public opinion. Events have evolved at dizzying speed, often demonstrating contradictory trends.

The so-called Arab Spring has inspired many who call for societies that are more democratic, more participatory and more tolerant, and where social justice prevails. As was foreseeable, however, the concrete expression of those popular demands varies from one country to another and has so far produced differing outcomes. The refreshing and stimulating winds also bring signs of growing tensions, both within countries and between States. In accordance with this Council's mandate to maintain international peace and security, we are obliged to closely follow unfolding events, keeping clearly in mind that the primary responsibility for resolving intra-State conflicts lies with the citizens of the country concerned.

In the spirit of Chapter VI of the Charter, we believe that whatever action the Council takes to support the parties directly involved in processes that involve conflicts should give priority to preventive-diplomacy measures. In our opinion, invoking Chapter VII is a last resort. Moreover, in keeping with the spirit of Chapter VIII of the Charter, we advocate working very closely with regional and subregional entities, in this case with the League of Arab States.

I will mention only a few specific issues pertaining to the Middle East region.

In regard to Lebanon, we welcome the Secretary-General's recent visit and his productive meetings with its Government officials and main political stakeholders. We commend the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia for having organized the high-level meeting on reform and transitions to democracy. We urge the Government of Lebanon to continue meeting all of its international obligations, especially those related to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and those derived from resolution 1701 (2006). We support the efforts to maintain its security, and we also underscore the need to cease violations of Lebanese airspace, which, in our opinion, are unacceptable.

I now turn to what is perhaps the most urgent topic on the before the Council in the Middle East: the situation in Syria. We support demanding that the parties immediately cease the use of force and adopt concrete measures that will lead to reconciliation.

However, the term “parties” is an abstract concept. We believe that popular demands expressed in a peaceful way cannot be compared to a Government responding with force to those demands. That type of situation, as we have learned far too well in many Latin American countries, tends inevitably to devolve into violations of civilians’ human rights, posing a serious danger of free-falling into a dynamic whereby repression provokes armed resistance, leading to a spiral of violence with unforeseeable consequences. That is precisely the situation that the Secretary General of the League of Arab States described in his report of 22 January to that body’s Council. We trust that the presence of Arab League monitors and the search for what is called an Arab solution to the situation will help keep Syria from the brink. We support the agreement proposed by the Arab League Council at its meeting last Sunday. That matter will no doubt require some type of collective pronouncement by the Security Council.

I would now like to address the age-old dispute between Israel and Palestine, which is always a background to the tensions that affect the Middle East. For our part, we favour the creation of a viable, sovereign and independent Palestinian State living in peace and harmony within secure and defensible borders next to the State of Israel. We understand that realizing that vision falls to both parties, Israel and Palestine, through direct negotiations on all outstanding issues. Based on our belief that supporting such negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis is the only means to resolve their current differences, we welcome the direct meetings held between the parties in recent weeks in Amman — the first of their kind in more than a year and a half. Moreover, we believe that the Council must continue to support the actions of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative, and at the same time guarantee that the peace process moves forward so that the parties can achieve a definitive solution.

However, we also note an increasing divergence between the suggestions offered by the Quartet and the political realities on the ground. The Council must therefore address those obstacles, which include, among others, illegal settlement expansion in the

occupied territories, which greatly complicates progress in the peace process. Our position on the settlements is that they are illegal under international law and that they constitute a serious obstacle for peace, undermining the requirements for a two-State solution. At the same time, we are aware of the need to address the legitimate security concerns expressed by Israel.

In conclusion, in each of the unique Middle East situations on the Security Council agenda, it behoves us to call upon opposing parties to renounce the use of violence and to search for negotiated solutions to their differences. For that to occur, the demands welling up from the grass roots of the various societies must be heard and addressed. Finding peaceful outcomes to the various points of tension in the region — each one with its unique characteristics — is in the interest not only of the region but of the whole world.

Mr. Mehdiyev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to welcome Mr. Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, and to thank the South African presidency for convening this very important open debate on the situation in the Middle East. We are grateful for the briefing on the subject by Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco.

Azerbaijan welcomes the valuable efforts of Jordan to revive negotiations and expresses its hope that the ongoing discussions in Amman will help to restart the peace process towards the achievement of a long-awaited comprehensive, just and lasting solution. It should be made clear that, in contrast to some other well-known situations involving groundless and illegitimate territorial claims — including those under the far-fetched pretext of care for ethnic minority groups — the people of Palestine have been recognized as having the right to self-determination and statehood. That has been affirmed in a number of United Nations resolutions and by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion on the *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* (see A/ES-10/273). We support the application of Palestine for admission to membership in the United Nations and look forward to a solution to the issue based on international law.

Azerbaijan also supports the ongoing efforts towards Palestinian reconciliation and expresses its

hope that Palestinian unity will soon be achieved. At the same time, as we have repeatedly stated on a number of occasions in the past, the lack of agreement on political issues in situations of armed conflict and military occupation cannot be used as a pretext for disrespect for international humanitarian and human rights law. Indeed, the prolonged occupation of the Palestinian territories has placed a tremendous burden on civilians.

We are particularly concerned at the continued settlement policy and practices in the occupied Palestinian territories. The reports from both the United Nations and non-governmental organizations in that regard are self-evident. Most alarming is that, apart from their impact on the rights, freedoms and everyday lives of the Palestinians, settlements cause serious damage to the peace process and, more specifically, threaten a two-State solution and the emergence of a viable Palestinian State. As was recently noted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs,

“continuing settlement construction, expansion and encroachment on Palestinian land is an integral part of the ongoing fragmentation of the West Bank, including the isolation of the East Jerusalem.”

There is no doubt that such fragmentation undermines the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, which is to be realized with the creation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State alongside Israel.

Regardless of whether settlements are new or old, they are illegal under international law and must be seized immediately, completely and unconditionally. Pursuant to article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies. That constitutes the basis and expression of a rule of law prohibiting the establishment of settlements in the occupied territories consisting of the population of the occupying Power or of persons encouraged by the Power to settle those territories with the intention, expressed or otherwise, of changing the demographic balance. We proceed from the importance of reaffirming, with respect to the occupied Palestinian territories and similar situations in different parts of the world, the continuing applicability of all relevant international legal norms,

achieving the invalidation of activities aimed at the consolidation of military occupations, initiating urgent measures towards removing the adverse effects of such activities and discouraging any further practices of the same or similar nature.

We are of the view that the Security Council cannot remain indifferent to situations involving serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. In carrying out its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Council must react adequately to put an end to illegal practices and policies and to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are observed and respected.

Azerbaijan is deeply concerned at the continuing destabilization, violence and widespread human rights violations in Syria, which have resulted in the deaths of thousands of people. The position of my country in this regard has been clearly reflected in our support for the recently adopted General Assembly resolution on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic (Assembly resolution 66/176).

Azerbaijan fully supports the efforts of the League of Arab States to address all aspects of the situation in Syria, including its steps aimed at ending the crisis and acts of violence.

We are strongly of the view that the only solution to the crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process. It is important that obligations with respect to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Syria and all other States in the region are fully observed and respected.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing on the Middle East. It confirmed our concerns regarding the limited prospects for a resumption of the peace process, the continuing repression in Syria and the resulting and growing threats to the stability of the region.

We hail the diplomatic efforts conducted under the auspices of the King of Jordan, but our expectations are limited. The absence of a renewed method for bringing the parties back to the table is, for us, a serious stumbling block. For a year we have been asking that parameters adopted by the international community frame this resumption of negotiations by giving the parties a solid basis for trust. Neither the

Quartet nor the Council has been able to achieve this objective. These failures have demonstrated that the will of the parties is not enough.

France believes that only a follow-up mechanism enlarged to include all stakeholders able to contribute to a definitive solution, including the United Nations and this Council, will enable the creation of the dynamic needed to resolve issues that touch on the foundations of Israeli and Palestinian national identity. That said, this is not to lift responsibilities from the parties themselves. It is to launch a call to all stakeholders, in this year laden with internal constraints, to make possible the emergence of conditions that will allow a credible resumption of peace talks.

The will of the parties is not enough, but it is essential. We were struck by the dangerous developments that characterized the situation on the ground in 2011, particularly the acceleration of Israeli settlement activity to a level not seen for a decade. Last 20 December, the four European members of this Council noted their concern regarding a systematic, premeditated and deliberate policy of illegal construction, contravening the vision of a two-State solution and in violation of international law and the resolutions of this Council. In the West Bank as well as in East Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities must immediately end this policy, which is a threat to the territorial and economic integrity of the future Palestinian State.

Regarding the attempt to isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank or the forced displacements of the Palestinian population in Area C, the changes in the demographic realities on the ground in violation of the Geneva Convention — as noted by my Azerbaijani colleague — must be condemned by the international community. We deplore that the Council has not been up to the task of issuing a judgment, of reasserting the principles at the heart of the two-State solution, when those principles are threatened.

In Gaza, a radical change in policy is also required. Ms. Amos indicated this to the Council. In 2011, the blockade, far from having been lifted as called for in resolution 1860 (2009), instead became stronger with the closure of the Karni crossing. The dependence of the economy of Gaza on international

aid has been reinforced, as has the control of Hamas over the destiny of the population.

It is not a question of compromising the security of Israel, which continues to be the target of rocket attacks, which we condemn. However, measures must be undertaken quickly to lighten the weight of the blockade on the people, who are held hostage. The viability of the political process also depends on our support for the partners in the peace process, in preserving their legitimacy, given the hopes expressed by their populations.

France is committed to supporting the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, in particular in the context of the Paris Conference, which contributed to efforts to build Palestinian institutions. But financial assistance, like the reforms implemented by Prime Minister Fayyad, come up against the lack of political perspectives. While President Abbas has revived efforts to foster Palestinian reconciliation, he must be supported so that the principles of negotiation and peaceful settlement of conflict, endorsed by the Palestinian Liberation Organization, may prevail.

I now to turn another topic of concern and indignation, and that is the situation in Syria. The repression led by the Syrian leaders against their people and the systematic and massive violations of human rights to suppress the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people continue with complete impunity. More than 5,500 Syrians have lost their lives since last March in what now can be characterized as crimes against humanity.

The Syrian regime is dragging its people into chaos, and the entire region is threatened: refugees flow into neighbouring countries, Lebanese sovereignty is repeatedly challenged, fears for the future of minorities and of fragile religious equilibriums are growing, and there are known violations of the arms embargo imposed on Iran, with arms flowing to Syria. It is unacceptable that certain countries, including some in this Council, continue to provide the very means by which violence is committed against the Syrian people.

Given the silence of the Council, the Arab League has taken up the issue. It proposed an action plan to the Syrian regime last November and sent a monitoring mission to guarantee the implementation of the plan on the ground. This weekend, one month since the

mission's deployment, the Arab League could report only the failure of Damascus to uphold its obligations. None of the League's four requirements — cessation of violence, withdrawal of armed forces from cities, release of political prisoners and free access to the international media — has been met. The Arab League has drawn the inevitable conclusions and called for a peaceful political transition by which President Bashar Al-Assad would hand over power.

We fully support the Arab League's plan for resolving the crisis. It is the only way likely to return stability to Syria and to preserve stability in the region. We welcome the Arab League's request that its Secretary-General, along with the Chair of the Interministerial Committee on Syria, be allowed to report to the Security Council on the situation. It is indeed crucial that the United Nations provide all the necessary assistance to the regional organization concerned. It is still more necessary that the Security Council get past the blockages so as to underscore the legitimacy of this initiative by providing it unanimous support of the United Nations.

The Council's ability to contribute to the resolution of these crises is also a matter of the credibility of its action at the regional level.

Lebanon, to which the Secretary-General has just paid a visit, is a country threatened by the spectre of the civil war unleashed in Syria. In this context, we call on the Lebanese authorities to continue to work with all the component parts of Lebanese society. We hail their commitment to respect all their international obligations, including those pertaining to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

In Egypt the people voted in elections that met the criteria for free democratic expression. The elections were an important step in the democratic transition, which must be continued. Power should be transferred to the elected civilian authorities. The rights of women and minorities, the rules of free democratic expression and the basic principle of rejecting all violence must all be upheld.

In conclusion, I appeal for consistent action on the part of the Security Council. The Arab Spring has brought unprecedented upheaval to the Middle East. The Council must necessarily adapt its actions to the new reality. We now have a moral obligation to address the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. That obligation underscores the absolute necessity for

the Council to respond unanimously to the crisis in Syria, which is threatening the entire region. While the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council of Arab States are actively contributing to resolving the regional crises, it is a matter of the very legitimacy of the Security Council in the region for it to fully uphold its responsibilities to maintain international peace and security.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa.

South Africa expresses its appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing to the Security Council. We thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

My delegation associates itself with the statements to be delivered later today by the representatives of Benin and Egypt, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States and the Non-Aligned Movement, respectively.

The historical celebrations that took place in South Africa on 8 January, marking the 100th anniversary of the African National Congress, the oldest modern liberation movement in Africa, were a stark reminder of the resilience of the human spirit. In 1994, after decades of struggle for liberation, South Africa emerged from the scourge of apartheid to become an equal among the nations of the world.

The year 2012 marks 45 years since Israel first occupied Palestinian land. Drawing lessons from our own experience, we are certain that the Palestinians, with the assistance of the international community, will prevail in their quest for a viable State of their own. We should all play our part in fulfilling the aspirations of the Palestinian people, who have long yearned for freedom and who continue to endure the harshness of Israeli occupation.

In that regard, South Africa remains convinced that Palestine meets all the criteria for United Nations membership as set out in the United Nations Charter and deserves to become a full Member of the Organization. In addition, we must work towards a solution that maintains Israel's right to exist and ensures long-term peace and stability for its people.

We have come to the beginning of a new year, and yet peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis continues to be elusive. South Africa remains disappointed that since 23 September 2011, when the Quartet committed itself to assisting the parties to make progress in the peace process, tangible progress has yet to be registered.

We appreciate the efforts of the Quartet over the past two months, in particular its facilitation of meetings with the parties, albeit separately. We also support the Quartet's appeal urging the parties to begin direct negotiations immediately and without preconditions and to submit proposals on borders and security. Palestine's submission of proposals on those issues is emblematic of its commitment to the prompt and peaceful resolution of the conflict with its neighbour. Conversely, Israel's failure to comply by omitting to submit proposals as required by the Quartet on the same issues is disappointing.

My delegation further welcomes the efforts of Jordan in its attempt to restart direct peace talks. We can only hope that such discussions will yield positive results and culminate in an earnest beginning of direct negotiations between the parties.

It is perhaps opportune that, as the international community, we ask ourselves some questions, namely, is it not time to assess the effectiveness of the Quartet model? And what more can the Security Council do to help the parties resume negotiations and find lasting peace?

What is of concern is that, despite attempts to resuscitate the negotiations, the prospects for direct talks seem non-existent, as the Israeli Government continues its acts of aggression, such as ongoing illegal settlement construction, home demolitions, illegal excavations of religious sites and restricting the access and movement of the Palestinian people. It is worth noting that in the midst of attempts to reinvigorate the peace process, Israel has continued to issue tenders for new illegal settlements, including on 3 January, the same day that deliberations between the parties began in Jordan. Those illegal actions cast a shadow over the sincerity of Israel as a partner for peace, especially since settlements have led to the fragmentation of the West Bank and the isolation of Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories, undermining the feasibility of a contiguous Palestinian State.

Those are antagonistic acts that make the reality of a two-State solution, as called for by the international community, a distant dream, if not a pipe dream. It is the Security Council's responsibility to act against such actions, as they violate international law, including the resolutions of the Council. The last time that the Council attempted to take action on the settlements was in February 2011, and we failed to fulfil our responsibility, despite all of us agreeing that the settlements are indeed illegal.

Another disturbing development is the escalation of settler violence in the occupied Palestinian territory. In that regard, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recently reported that settler attacks against Palestinian civilians had increased by at least 50 per cent. Settler attacks on civilians, the desecration of Palestinian mosques and churches and the destruction of property, including the cutting down of olive trees, should be unequivocally condemned. It is vital for the Israeli Government, as the occupying Power, to prevent such acts of violence and take action against perpetrators. The failure of the Israeli Government to address violence perpetrated by settlers has led to a state of impunity that, according to OCHA, encourages further violence and undermines the physical security and livelihoods of Palestinians.

We welcome the implementation of the second stage of the prisoner release agreement, which we hope will serve as a positive confidence-building measure. We reiterate that that is a positive step towards greater cooperation between Israel and Palestine that should be maintained and built upon. With regard to the remaining prisoners, we urge the Israeli Government to fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law by ensuring their safety, allowing access to them by family members and respecting their basic human rights.

South Africa has always maintained that the future of Palestine is significantly dependent on the unity of its people. The Arab Spring augurs well for the Palestinian struggle. In that regard, we encourage the Palestinians to take advantage of the new regional context and strive for greater unity among various political groupings. In particular, we urge Hamas and Fatah to implement the Cairo reconciliation agreement and collectively consolidate the gains of the Palestinian people. Having learned from our own experience, we believe that intra-Palestinian unity is essential for long-term reconciliation and sustainable peace in Palestine.

With regard to the situation in Gaza, South Africa remains deeply concerned about Israel's continued blockade. We concur with the call made by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Valerie Amos, after her visit to Gaza last year, for an end to the man-made and protracted humanitarian situation through the lifting of the blockade on Gaza. The blockade and the restrictions it imposes are in violation of international humanitarian law, including article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and contrary to the will of the international community, as expressed in various Security Council resolutions, including resolution 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009). Violence and rocket attacks against Israel emanating from Gaza are also of concern and should be condemned. Those actions are indiscriminate and in no way advance the legitimate Palestinian cause.

On Syria, South Africa has taken note of the outcome of the Arab League ministerial meeting on 22 January. We welcome the League's decision to extend its observer mission and the League's efforts at achieving a peaceful resolution of the situation. We remain deeply concerned about the ongoing violence by all sides, including the recent spate of car bombings and the resultant loss of life and injuries. South Africa emphasizes that the primary goal is for the violence to cease in Syria. We reiterate that any solution to the Syrian crisis should be Syrian-led, based on genuine national dialogue, devoid of any form of intimidation and free of interference from outside. My delegation has also taken note of the draft resolution submitted by the Russian Federation, and we will continue to participate constructively in the negotiations on the text.

In conclusion, we believe that the current developments in the Arab world will undoubtedly have a bearing on the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. In our search for a solution to the Palestinian question, it is now more than ever clear that we should not lose sight of the broader regional question to which Palestine is inextricably linked. We therefore call on the Council and other stakeholders to accelerate efforts towards the holistic resolution of the Middle East crisis, including the Lebanese and the Syrian tracks.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to not more than four minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the honour to address the Security Council today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at this critical juncture of the Council's efforts to address the situation in the Middle East. I should like to start by expressing the Movement's appreciation to you, Mr. President, for personally presiding over this meeting of the Security Council, as well as our thanks for the briefing given today by Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains firmly convinced of the urgent need for the international community to renew its resolve to act collectively to uphold its long-standing commitment to the realization of the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of international law and the well-established terms of reference of the peace process. The international consensus that we must reach is the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Serious international action in a timely manner is immediately required, as the window of opportunity for actualizing the two-State solution on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders is rapidly closing.

It is regrettable that all serious efforts exerted to date by international and regional parties, including the latest initiatives by the Quartet in its 23 September 2011 statement (see SG/2178), and the time frame it set forth, which will end on 26 January 2012, as well as the valuable efforts by Jordan to revive negotiations between the two sides, have been unable to make the desired progress, due to Israel's refusal to respect and adhere to the well-known, clear parameters and the occupying Power's insistence to continue illegally and aggressively changing facts on the ground.

Israel's actions are in total contradiction to the two-State solution and to its claim that it accepts the solution, accepts the Quartet statement and the road map and actually seeks to end the conflict. Quite the

opposite, Israel's illegal measures in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly its massive illegal settlement campaign, are entrenching its nearly 45 years of occupation and prolonging the conflict and injustice.

In that regard, the Non-Aligned Movement recalls that the final status negotiations, which began with great hopes in September 2010 under the auspices of United States President Barack Obama, with the participation of the Quartet, Egypt and Jordan, which aimed at concluding an agreement within one year, collapsed just a few weeks later, due to Israel's refusal to renew its moratorium on settlement activities, cease its illegal settlement campaign and abide by the internationally endorsed parameters for negotiations, based on relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

Even while claiming to cooperate with the Quartet, Israel has continued daily to violate its road map obligation to cease all settlement activities, including as regards natural growth, and to dismantle all settlement outposts. Israel's credibility as a peace partner consequently remains in serious doubt and, even more dangerously, the two-State formula — as the most viable solution at the core of a comprehensive peace settlement — is gravely threatened.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns Israel's continuing pursuit of illegal settlement activities in all its manifestations, along with the many other illegal policies and practices it continues to carry out in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and calls for their immediate and complete cessation. NAM stresses that all such unlawful attempts to alter the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remains rejected and unrecognized by the international community. We call on the Security Council to act for the implementation of its many resolutions in that regard and for serious efforts to hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for its violations of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law.

In that connection, NAM calls for the immediate implementation of the recommendations made by Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, in her recent briefing to the Security

Council on 18 January, regarding the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, and to address specifically the grave impact of Israel's settlement policies on the Palestinian people and their land. Israel's illegal colonization of the occupied land, its displacement of the Palestinian civilian population and its imposition of brutal forms of collective punishment continue to increase humanitarian suffering among the Palestinian people, deepen hopelessness and despair, fragment the territory and undermine its contiguity and integrity, and raise tensions and instability. It is a critical situation that must be a cause for serious concern for the Security Council, in line with its duty under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security.

NAM believes that such illegal actions are not only undermining peace efforts and obstructing the resumption of credible, direct negotiations but, if they are not stopped and reversed immediately, they will actually make it physically impossible to realize the two-State solution on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders. The announcements in recent months regarding the establishment of thousands more settlement units, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem, and the continued Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes and properties and devious attempts by the Israeli Government to legitimize its illegitimate settlement schemes require urgent reaction by the international community, and specifically by the Security Council, if the two-State solution to this conflict is to be salvaged. A strong message must be sent in rejection of the occupying Power's continued settlements, annexation and occupation and in favour of peace, security, respect of human rights and the rule of law. The future of both peoples and of the region as a whole is dependent on that message.

The Non-Aligned Movement therefore reiterates its call for the Security Council to act and demand that Israel, the occupying Power, abide by its legal obligations, without exception. Empty pretexts and illogical justifications for illegal actions must not be tolerated. It is high time to end the impunity that has gone on for far too long, to the detriment of regional and global peace and security. That is why the Movement firmly believes that calls for compliance must be backed by credible action, consistent with the Council's Charter duties, and as a result of the clear conclusion that the occupying Power is deliberately obstructing the attainment of peace and security in our

region. Israel must be called upon and compelled to abide by all of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the road map. That is the real key to advancing the resumption of direct negotiations and a peaceful settlement based on the two-State solution to the conflict.

With regard to the critical humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, NAM emphasizes the need to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to lift fully its illegal blockade, in accordance with its obligations under international law, resolution 1860 (2009) and other relevant United Nations resolutions. Member States must remain firm in their demand that this unacceptable and unsustainable situation be brought to an end, as it continues to inflict deep suffering on the Palestinian people and to negatively impact international and regional efforts to promote peace.

NAM also wishes to utilize this opportunity to express its support to the Palestinian reconciliation efforts, which continue to be shepherded by Egypt. We hope that Palestinian unity will soon be restored in the interest of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people. NAM looks forward to that achievement and to the holding of Palestinian legislative and presidential elections in the coming period.

The members of the Movement share the global hope that comes with each new year. We are hopeful that this will finally be the year that brings peace and justice to the Palestinian people and that finally brings an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in all aspects. We are convinced that achieving the two-State solution to this conflict requires respect for international law and United Nations resolutions. We insist that the Security Council has a leading role, which it must play, in this regard.

The Security Council must demand that Israel respect its legal obligations. It must also assist the parties by setting forth clear parameters, as enshrined in its own resolutions, for peace negotiations that will actually bring to fruition the two-State solution on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, thereby achieving the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and all its neighbours.

The larger United Nations membership also has a crucial role to play in upholding international law and

United Nations resolutions and advancing a peaceful settlement to the conflict. In that regard, NAM continues to believe that concrete efforts by the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure respect for the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, would be a vital contribution. Accordingly, as mandated by the Movement, on 16 January, the Chair of the Coordinating Bureau addressed another letter to Switzerland, in its capacity as depositary of the Geneva Conventions, requesting the undertaking of measures, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions, to convene a conference of the high contracting parties for that purpose.

At a time when the two-State solution is being severely weakened and should be strengthened, we recall the application submitted by Palestine on 23 September 2011 for admission to United Nations membership. We await Security Council action that recognizes the legitimate and historic rights of the Palestinian people and contributes to the peace effort. Indeed, we are at a critical juncture and must do all we can collectively to prevent further destabilization and continuation of this tragic and destructive conflict, and instead promote peace, justice and security.

Turning now to Lebanon, the Non-Aligned Movement condemns Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and the recurrence of serious breaches of resolution 1701 (2006). The Movement calls on all concerned parties to implement fully resolution 1701 (2006) in order to end the current fragility and to avoid the recurrence of hostilities.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as the Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null, void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Finally, in my national capacity, let me say that it was really regrettable that Ambassador Ron Prosor, Permanent Representative of Israel, whom I have known for many years and in different capacities,

chose to characterize the uprising by the Arab peoples, including in my country, Egypt, towards democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as conflicts, and to more blatantly use the Arab uprising as a pretext to prolong the Israeli occupation of Palestinian occupied territory and other Arab occupied territories. To Ambassador Prozor, for whom I have a lot of respect, I say that the winds of freedom in my country and in many other Arab countries will only solidify our determination to achieve a comprehensive and just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — but a solution that should be negotiated among equals. The slogan frequently heard from the Israeli delegation that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East will not be sustained for long.

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

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): Let me start by welcoming you, Mr. President. We are really honoured that you are presiding over this Council meeting. Allow me also to congratulate the new members that joined the Council as of the beginning of this year. I also wish to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing, as well as to stress the leading role that the United Nations should play in the resolution of the Middle East conflict. In that regard, we commend the recent visit of the Secretary-General to Lebanon — the first trip of his new term — during which he reaffirmed his commitment to Lebanon's sovereignty and security, to the aspirations of the Arab peoples and to peace and stability in the region.

Lebanon associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as with the statements to be made on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab Group.

The Quartet statement of 23 September reiterated the obligations of both parties and called upon them to refrain from provocations (see SG/2178). Yet, in less than one week from that date, the Israeli authorities approved a plan to build 1,100 housing units in the settlement of Gilo on land originally expropriated mainly from the Palestinian village of Beit Jala. In less than one month, the same Israeli authorities approved a plan for the construction of 2,610 units in the settlement of Givat Hamatos on land illegally annexed from Beit Safafa and Bethlehem, further encircling and

cutting East Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank.

In the past four months, Israel has managed to expand its settlement activities at an unprecedented rate. In November 2011, the Israeli Government announced plans for the construction of 2,000 housing units in the settlements of Ma'ale Adumim and the Gush Etzion bloc. At the time, in another unilateral prejudgment of the outcome of any negotiation, the Israeli Prime Minister declared that those new areas “will, under any future agreement, remain part of Israel”.

Recently, this past December, the Israeli Government announced another 130 new units in the settlement of Gilo, as well as plans to construct a “tourist complex” in the Silwan neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem. This month, the Israeli Government issued three new tenders for the construction of yet another 300 settlement units in occupied East Jerusalem — in the settlements of Pisgat Ze'ev and Har Homa.

According to the latest Human Rights Watch report, published just yesterday, as of 1 November the Israeli authorities had demolished 467 Palestinian homes and other buildings in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, displacing 869 people. That rate means that Israel will have forcibly displaced more Palestinians in 2011 than during any year since the United Nations started collecting cumulative figures. The Israelis have also uprooted and burned hundreds of olive and almond trees in Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron.

In East Jerusalem, Israeli bulldozers demolished a Palestinian-owned structure in order to create a parking lot for settlers in the Silwan neighbourhood, and razed a playing field belonging to a Palestinian college for the purpose of establishing a so-called Israeli national security college in Al-Sawwanah. In addition, armed settlers have physically assaulted and injured Palestinian civilians, including many children, as documented by reports of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

OCHA reported that, during 2011, five Palestinians, including two children, were killed and over 1,000 Palestinians injured by Israeli settlers or security forces in incidents directly or indirectly related to settlements. This January, a settler shot and killed a 15-year-old boy near the Palestinian village of Safa. OCHA further reported that, in 2011, illegal Israeli

settlers vandalized over 10,000 Palestinian olive trees, while Israeli occupation forces destroyed 90 water structures throughout the West Bank.

OCHA also notes that 90 per cent of Israeli police investigations into incidents of settler violence during the past six years were closed without any indictment. In her last briefing to the Council, the United Nations Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Valerie Amos, reported that settler violence in 2011 had increased by 40 per cent since 2010 and 165 per cent since 2009.

That is the reality of Israeli settlement activities, which stands in complete violation of the principles and provisions of international law — the same principles and provisions that the Organization was established to protect and defend, as stated in its Charter. In resolution 446 (1979), the Security Council reaffirmed that the Fourth Geneva Convention applies to the Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967. The said resolution also determined that:

“[T]he policy and practices of Israel in establishing settlements in the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967 have no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.” (*resolution 446 (1979), para. 1*)

The Council reached that conclusion decades ago, and dozens of General Assembly resolutions have reiterated that settlement activity in the Arab territories occupied in 1967 are illegal and illegitimate and constitute an obstacle to peace.

Furthermore, the July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Wall also concluded that “the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory (including East Jerusalem) have been established in breach of international law” (*A/ES-10/273, para. 120*).

Here, do we need to also recall that the road map, put forward by the Quartet and endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003), requires Israel to freeze “all settlement activity (including natural growth)” (*S/2003/529, annex*). It also requires that Israel “immediately dismantle settlement outposts erected since March 2001” (*ibid*).

Those are the principles and provisions of international law and the United Nations resolutions on

settlements. However, they are the same principles and provisions that Israel has continued to ignore and challenge to the point where the number of settlers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank now exceeds 517,000.

A lasting peace in our part of the world needs to be a comprehensive and just peace based on the principles of international law and the United Nations resolutions. Accordingly, it will also require that Israel withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and from the remaining occupied parts of southern Lebanon.

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

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): It is a pleasure to see you, Mr. President, preside over this meeting today. Let me thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

The briefing highlighted the many uncertainties and difficulties prevailing in the Middle East. In the midst of that scenario, the contacts entertained by Palestinian and Israeli representatives in Jordan offer a glimpse of hope, which must be nurtured. Brazil recognizes and praises the immense amount of political effort on the Palestinian side to participate in those talks and to present concrete proposals. We commend the Palestinian Authority for its concrete and appreciable efforts towards peace, which show vision, political resolve and the disposition to achieve peace through negotiations.

The Palestinian gesture is yet to be met with equivalent boldness. We therefore urge Israel to engage in a constructive way. We strongly encourage Israel to promptly present meaningful proposals on borders and security, in accordance with the time frame set forth by the Quartet (see SG/2178).

Israeli settlement activities are contrary to international law and the single most important obstacle to peace. The Israeli authorities themselves are being faced with security challenges emerging from the counterproductive environment that settlements produce. Settler violence against Palestinian citizens and their property is a clear expression of the silent, but undeniable violence contained in settlement construction itself.

We cannot expect a culture of peace to breed where settlements, demolitions, attacks and evictions are the rule. The international community and the Security Council, in particular, have clear responsibilities to uphold. A clear condemnation of settlement activities is needed. We cannot allow the very principles of peace negotiations to be turned upside down and to become a logical incentive for further expropriation and unilateral alteration of the realities on the ground, particularly around East Jerusalem.

We reiterate our call on Israel to stop all settlement activities. That is not a concession to be made in the course of negotiations, but rather an obligation under the various resolutions of the Security Council and international law.

We welcome the fact that the Council heard a briefing last week by Under Secretary-General Valerie Amos on the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Regular briefings by the Secretariat are certainly useful to Council members and the whole membership.

However, the Council should go beyond that and resort to other diplomatic tools that would truly allow it to fulfil its Charter responsibilities in what is perhaps the single-most demanding challenge on the international peace and security agenda. Its greater involvement in search of a solution to the conflict is an urgent imperative. As a first step, we propose that the Quartet regularly and fully report to the Council on its progress or lack thereof. We also welcome the Secretary-General's decision to visit Palestine in early February. We look forward to hearing from the Secretary-General upon his return, and to continuing to discuss the dire situation of Palestinians living under occupation.

On the situation in Gaza, allow me to mention Brazil's decision to donate \$7.5 million to the activities

of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East related to reconstruction. This contribution is an expression of Brazilian solidarity with the people of Gaza. It adds to the projects already developed in Palestine with the support of the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Fund. Alongside our IBSA partners, we will continue to call for the immediate, urgent lifting of the inhumane blockade imposed on 1.5 million human beings in Gaza.

Brazil remains deeply concerned over the situation in Syria. We will continue to follow closely the implementation of the important commitments made by the Syrian Government to the Arab League, including allowing foreign media access to the country. We condemn the continuation of violence. The complete and immediate end of violence continues to be of the utmost priority. Resort to armed struggle will not bring Syria or the region closer to the realization of legitimate aspirations to democracy, freedom and equal socio-economic opportunity.

At the same time, the complete cessation of political repression and full respect for fundamental freedoms are necessary conditions if reforms are to be truly credible and effective. We have been following very closely the efforts of the Arab League to help find a peaceful and negotiated solution to the current situation in Syria. The role of the Organization remains critical in ensuring that such a solution is found through a nationally-owned political process. The Security Council can best help if it is able to send a clear unified message against violence and in support of such a process.

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

The meeting was suspended at 1.35 p.m.