



# Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

**8883**<sup>rd</sup> meeting

Tuesday, 19 October 2021, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Kamau. . . . .	(Kenya)
<i>Members:</i>	China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Estonia . . . . .	Mr. Jürgenson
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	India . . . . .	Mr. Tirumurti
	Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Mexico . . . . .	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Niger . . . . .	Mr. Aougi
	Norway . . . . .	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. King
	Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield
	Viet Nam . . . . .	Mr. Dang

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter by the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of Security Council members dated 7 May 2020 (S/2020/372), which was agreed in light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this official record of the Security Council will be supplemented by a compilation of annexes (S/2021/884) containing the statements submitted by interested non-members of the Council.



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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; Mr. Daniel Levy, President, U.S./Middle East Project; and Ms. Hanan Ashrawi, political and civil society leader.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

**Mr. Wennesland:** At the outset, I welcome the ongoing engagement between senior Israeli and Palestinian officials. I strongly encourage further expansion of such efforts, which can improve conditions on the ground and pave the way towards reinvigorating the peace process. But we should have no illusions about the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to deteriorate, and we have seen no progress towards realizing a two-State solution. That political stagnation is fuelling tension, instability and a deepening sense of hopelessness. The security situation in Gaza remains fragile, and security dynamics in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are deteriorating, including growing tensions in and around the holy sites.

Settlement activity, evictions, demolitions and the seizure of Palestinian property; military operations by Israeli security forces, in particular in Area A; and

movement and access restrictions, including the severe closure of Gaza, further fuel the cycle of violence.

A large number of Palestinians, including children, continue to be killed or injured by Israeli security forces. Settler-related attacks against Palestinians and their property, including in the presence of Israeli security forces, continue. Israeli civilians continue to be subjected to attacks by Palestinians, which have caused deaths, injuries and damages. Israeli and Palestinian civilians are suffering and paying a steep price for the persistence of the conflict, including the protracted occupation.

In addition, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is facing an unprecedented fiscal and financial crisis. A strengthened PA and PA institutions are needed in order to implement the necessary reforms and eventually return to Gaza. I am concerned that those negative trends are occurring simultaneously across the West Bank and Gaza; they should not be left unaddressed.

Daily violence continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territory during the reporting period. In Gaza, while a relative calm largely prevailed, on 30 September a Palestinian man was killed by Israeli security forces as he approached the perimeter fence. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said that the man had approached the fence in the central Gaza Strip with two other men carrying a suspicious bag and digging in the ground. Relatives of the man disputed the accounts, saying he was hunting birds. In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, clashes, attacks, search and arrest operations and other incidents resulted in the death of three Palestinians and injuries from live fire and rubber-coated metal bullets to 66 Palestinians, including nine children and one woman. Four Israeli civilians and two soldiers were injured in the course of those events.

On 30 September, a Palestinian woman was shot and killed by Israeli security forces after reportedly attempting to stab Israeli security forces officers in Jerusalem's Old City. On the same day, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian man in the village of Burqin near Jenin. According to Israeli security forces, the man had opened fire at Israeli troops as they were conducting an arrest operation. Palestinian Islamic Jihad later claimed that the man was one of its members.

On 14 October, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 14-year-old Palestinian and wounded another while they were allegedly throwing Molotov cocktails

at civilian vehicles west of Bethlehem. On the same day, a Palestinian man drove his vehicle into and injured an IDF soldier near the Qalandia checkpoint. Israeli forces fired on the vehicle and injured and arrested the driver.

In addition, since 8 October we have witnessed nearly nightly clashes between Palestinians and Israeli civilians, as well as Israeli security forces, in and around the Old City. Meanwhile, settlers and other Israeli civilians perpetrated 26 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in 18 injuries and damage to property. Palestinians perpetrated 31 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians in the West Bank, resulting in injuries in four cases and in damage to property in the rest.

On 28 September, some 70 Israeli settlers attacked the Palestinian village of Mufaqara, I-Rakeez and Al-Tuwani, in the South Hebron Hills. The settlers injured nine Palestinians, including children, killed livestock and damaged vehicles and homes, as well as community infrastructure. A 3-year-old Palestinian boy, hit in the head by stones as he slept, was hospitalized with a skull fracture. In related clashes, 20 Palestinians were injured by Israeli Defense Forces. Palestinians also threw stones towards Israelis during the incident, injuring one soldier.

On 29 September, Israeli Foreign Minister Mr. Yair Lapid condemned the attacks tweeting, "This violent incident is horrific and it is terror." He called the perpetrators "a violent and dangerous fringe" and said Israel had "a responsibility to bring them to justice". Israeli security forces arrested at least six Israelis in relation to those incidents, including two children, as well as three Palestinians. And at least four Israelis have reportedly since being arrested, and later released. An investigation by the Israeli authorities is ongoing. I welcome the swift condemnation of the attacks from the Israeli Foreign Minister and underscore that all perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice.

Since the annual olive harvest began a week ago, some 1,200 olive trees have reportedly been vandalized by settlers. On 15 October, some 40 settlers attacked Palestinian farmers east of Yasuf village, north of Salfit, injuring a Palestinian woman with pepper spray and three others by throwing stones. I call on Israel to take all the necessary steps to fulfil its obligation to protect Palestinian civilians from violence, including by Israeli

settlers, and to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for such attacks.

On 4 and 18 October, the Israel Civil Administration held discussions on objections to two settlement housing plans, for a total of nearly 3,500 units in the strategic E-1 Area in the West Bank. I am concerned that Israeli authorities continue to consider plans for constructions in E-1. If built, those units would sever the connection between the northern and the southern West Bank, significantly undermining the chances for establishing a viable and contiguous Palestinian State as a part of the negotiated two-State solution. I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace.

On 5 October, the Jerusalem Magistrates' Court granted the appeal of a Jewish Israeli who had been expelled from the Holy Esplanade for praying in violation of Israeli police regulations that allow only Muslims to pray at the site. The Court's decision was condemned as a violation of the status quo by the Palestinian, Egyptian and Jordanian Governments, by Palestinian factions and by Muslim and Christian leaders in Jerusalem and throughout the region. The police appealed the decision to the Jerusalem District Court, which overturned the lower court decision and reinstated the appellant's temporary visit ban on 8 October. In a statement released the same day, Israel's Public Security Minister reiterated that the status quo must be observed, adding that any changes to the existing arrangement "would endanger public safety and could cause a flare-up". I welcome that statement by the Israeli Minister. And I reiterate that all sides must respect and uphold the status quo at the holy sites.

Israeli demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian homes and other structures continued during the reporting period. Overall, the Israeli authorities demolished, seized and forced owners to demolish 18 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and seven in occupied East Jerusalem, displacing five Palestinians, including three women and one child. The demolitions were carried out owing to the lack of Israeli building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. On 29 September, Israel's High Court of Justice granted a request by the State of Israel to postpone to March 2022 its response to a petition to implement an eviction notice against the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar, in Area C of the West Bank. In its request, the Government cited the coronavirus disease pandemic and the current diplomatic security situation,

adding that there had been significant progress towards an agreement that could avoid a demolition.

On 4 October, Israel's Supreme Court presented a proposal to four Palestinian families facing evictions in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and to the Israeli settler cooperation seeking to evict them. The proposal would significantly postpone eviction efforts, while requiring the families to pay a nominal annual rent to the settler cooperation. The Court specified that the agreement would in no way prejudice ongoing legal proceedings to determine ownership of the properties. If the parties do not reach an agreement by 2 November, the Court stated, it would issue a ruling. I urge Israel to cease demolitions and evictions in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law. In a welcome development earlier today, Israeli and Palestinian officials announced that some 4,000 Palestinians living in the West Bank without proper documentation would be registered in the Palestinian population registry and receive identity documents.

The PA's fiscal situation is reaching a breaking point. Expenditures far exceed its revenues, and the gap is growing. Donor support, including direct budget support, has continued its multi-year decline. Estimates suggest that the PA will have a 2021 budget deficit of approximately \$800 million. That would nearly double the 2020 gap, and, even with donor support and emergency measures, we will see that situation continue. The borrowing capacity of the PA with banks has been exhausted.

Together with other long-standing fiscal leakages that are contributing to the financial crisis, Israel continues to deduct millions of dollars a month from clearance revenue transfers in response to Palestinian payments to security prisoners, their families and the families of those killed in the context of attacks. Israel's recent loan of 500 million shekels against future Palestinian revenue was critical, but it only temporarily delays the looming crisis and does not address the structural impediments imposed on the Palestinian economy.

Significant reforms and policy changes by both Israelis and Palestinians must be implemented to address the structural challenges. Such reforms could and should be met with increased support from the international donor community. That will form a key part of the upcoming agenda of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International

Assistance to Palestinians, scheduled to take place in Oslo in November.

Efforts continue to stabilize the situation in Gaza and support recovery and reconstruction following the May escalation. The United Nations has launched reconstruction efforts for severely damaged housing units. Preparations for additional reconstruction have begun with assistance from Qatar after the lifting of some restrictions on the entry of construction materials by Israeli authorities. Up to 1,800 of the more than 2,000 destroyed and damaged civilian homes will be rebuilt in the first phase. In addition, Egypt began repairing one of Gaza's main coastal roads in late September.

During the month of September, nearly 7,000 truckloads of goods were sent to Gaza through the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing — approximately 80 per cent of the pre-escalation monthly average. About 2,000 truckloads entered through the Egyptian-controlled Rafah crossing, marking one of the highest-recorded volumes of entering goods. In addition, as of 18 October, more than 6,000 permits had been issued for Gaza merchants and traders to enter into Israel — a critical contribution to boosting the local economy, which can be expanded.

While I welcome the issuance of permits and improvements in the movement of goods into and out of the Gaza Strip, much more is needed to facilitate sustainable access. I reiterate that the Gaza reconstruction mechanism remains best-placed to enable the entry of the accountable delivery of items and materials that would otherwise not be allowed into the Strip.

I remain concerned about the continued budgetary shortfall of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and I welcome the recently announced contributions from key donors. However, UNRWA continues to lack the necessary funds to sustain its critical programmes for the rest of this year. UNRWA remains indispensable with regard to regional stability and must have the necessary resources to fulfil its mandate.

I now turn briefly to the region. With regard to the Golan, while the ceasefire between Israel and Syria has been generally maintained, violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement by the parties continue, increasing tensions. Both parties' adherence to the terms of the Disengagement Agreement is important for preserving stability.

In Lebanon, a new Government was formed on 10 September by Prime Minister Najib Azmi Mikati, ending 13 months of the caretaker period. The 24-member Government, which includes one woman minister, voted to reach an agreement with the International Monetary Fund on tackling the energy crisis and holding the 2022 elections on schedule. The investigations into the Beirut port explosion has faced setbacks as a result of reported intimidation of the judge in charge of the investigation. On 14 October, deadly clashes erupted in Beirut at a protest calling for his removal.

We can no longer lurch from crisis to crisis. Our approach cannot be to address the current situation piecemeal, incident by incident on a short-term, day-to-day basis, as stand-alone issues. A broader package of parallel steps by the Government of Israel, the PA and the international community is needed. Such a framework should begin to address key political, security and economic challenges that are preventing progress. Such efforts are urgently needed and will require a clear political commitment and involvement from the Government of Israel, the PA and the international community.

We must begin to restore hope in a peaceful and sustainable negotiated resolution to the conflict. Despite the enormity of the current political, economic and humanitarian challenges, we cannot afford to be pessimistic or passive. I welcome the efforts of the envoys of the Middle East Quartet, including in the call held on 14 October. I encourage both parties to urgently implement positive and significant policy shifts to address the security situation, improve the Palestinian economy and strengthen Palestinian governance and institutions. I also urge Israeli and Palestinian authorities to find additional avenues for cooperation, including on the implementation of existing agreements.

That is not the endgame, but rather key steps in the process that can and must lead us back to genuine negotiations, end the occupation and allow for the realization of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 lines, international law, United Nations resolutions and previous agreements. We must build consensus in support of a broader framework for engagement, or face an increasingly desperate reality shaped by extremist voices and unilateral actions that will heighten the risk of Palestinians, Israelis and the region entering into a more severe conflict. The United Nations is actively engaged in advancing those efforts, including through

the Middle East Quartet, key regional partners and Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Levy.

**Mr. Levy:** I thank the Security Council and the Kenyan presidency for giving me this opportunity to brief members today.

I would like to enter into the record of today's meeting a report published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the U.S./Middle East Project, which I head, entitled *Breaking the Israel-Palestine Status Quo*, and to acknowledge my co-authors — Zaha Hassan, Hallaamal Keir and Marwan Muasher.

In short, that report calls for a rights-based approach to Israel-Palestine, building on but not replacing international law. It acknowledges the simple reality that pursuing a more-of-the-same peace process guarantees further failure and reinforcement of the negative trends that we have just heard described in such detail by Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland. It should come as a wake-up call to the Council and its deliberations that the extent of that deterioration has led Palestinian human rights groups; Israeli human rights organizations, including B'Tselem; and, indeed, Human Rights Watch to make a legal designation that the crime of apartheid and persecution is being committed by Israel against the Palestinians. That is quite new.

The Council knows better than I — after, all it holds these debates every month — that the endless incantation of worn-out slogans gets us nowhere. Israelis will say that the United Nations body is unfairly and uniquely obsessed with this conflict. Palestinians will say that the Council has unfairly and uniquely failed to act to protect Palestinians and make good on its own decisions. When a conflict takes on those attributes of being chronic and intractable, we must try to break out from the repetitive and predictable — to disengage from autopilot.

Allow me to humbly suggest that we first recognize three core concepts, that we turn to these to guide our actions, which themselves need to change, and that this hopefully opens the way to some necessary new thinking. And as I briefly offer thoughts on these, I want it to be known that I am cognizant that I have no claim to having all the answers.

The first framing proposal is to consider a legitimacy deficit in Palestinian politics. The Palestine Liberation Organization must become fully representative, inclusive and, by extension, better able to demonstrate strategic agency and to negotiate. Palestinians have a right to elect representatives to their national institutions; that requires a Palestinian leadership decision, as well as supportive, not preventive, steps by Israel and the international community. We also cannot ignore or condone when existing Palestinian self-governing authorities on the ground, with their limited mandate, repress their own people.

Secondly, there is an accountability deficit when it comes to Israel's actions. If the unlawful and peace-negating policies of Israel continue to be met with impunity, there should be no expectation of positive change. It is that simple. Israel pursues policies in violation of international law and of United Nations resolutions because it can. No tangible cost or consequence is attached.

Thirdly, there is a symmetry deficit. We must acknowledge the overarching and defining relationships of power in this conflict — the fundamental asymmetry between an occupying State and an occupied people. We cannot lapse into a misplaced both-sides-ism. The focus therefore must primarily be on redressing Israeli actions, precisely because that reflects the unequal relationship of power, whereby Israel pre-eminently determines outcomes on the ground and denies basic freedoms to another people. Israeli rights cannot be sacrificed, but they cannot come at the expense of Palestinians in need of protection and the restoration of their rights, whether in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, in refugee camps in the diaspora, or when facing forms of structural discrimination inside Israel. In that context, last year's normalization accords exacerbated that asymmetry without providing an on-ramp for peace.

Those core conceptual understandings should help guide our actions, which can in turn create the building blocks for new thinking and peace. They can also help explain why repeated attempts at economic peace, at confidence-building measures, at managing or shrinking the conflict without addressing occupation and rights are doomed to continual dismal failure, as Coordinator Tor Wennesland said. Without the politics, the rest cannot be done.

So how can we do that? In a few weeks, the Council will mark the fifth anniversary of resolution 2334 (2016). It should implement that resolution — really implement it. That resolution, for example, calls on all States to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territory occupied since 1967. So every time Israel's illegal settlements are allowed to benefit, without checks, from trade agreements, from bilateral cooperation and exchanges, which Israel has with third parties, then resolution 2334 (2016) is violated.

One place that differentiation is happening is in the Human Rights Council database of companies complicit in doing business with illegal settlements. I say, achieve a durable ceasefire between Israel and Gaza that ends the blockade of Gaza and generates more security for Palestinians and Israelis alike. Talk to whoever it is necessary to talk to. Set aside conditionalities and encourage regional parties to do likewise.

In short, this is not about maximum pressure, but it is about using leverage, including the currently neglected instruments at the Council's disposal, so that Palestinian rights are better protected, so that they can live without the threat of displacement or arbitrary arrest and detention, with protection for land and resource rights, and for freedoms, including those to move and organize.

The commitment of the new United States Administration to equal measures of freedom, dignity and security for Israelis and Palestinians and the July remarks of the Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, of Chinese support for platforms of informal dialogue and readiness to offer their own views and proposals are both welcome and will hopefully be acted on in meaningful ways.

Finally, in both this body and in the respective societies, we can be nurturing and giving breathing space to new thinking that is peace-oriented and rights-respecting and takes us beyond the current impasse. That same resolution 2334 (2016) was adopted five years ago, when a certain Joseph R. Biden was Vice-President. That also noted that a one-State reality was being entrenched. Many consider that to be the case.

So as this body take steps to salvage a two-State outcome, we must also be open to the possibility that maybe there is no off-the-shelf solution at this stage. Is there really nothing more to say about how to address the legitimate concerns and aspirations of both peoples, the rights of both Jews and Palestinians to self-

determination, without placing one right on top of the other or pitting one against the other, for security not to be something that either Israelis or Palestinians can have but a necessity for both, for the rights of Palestinian refugees and the Jewish impulse for a refuge of last resort to both be respected?

To paraphrase the Ugandan academic and author Mahmood Mamdani, can we think about political identities and political communities as mutable, not inborn — the products of history that have been created by and can be dismantled by political processes in the interest of political justice. This body may at some stage be forced to revisit its partition vote of 1947 and its historic endorsement of two States. If that is not to happen, then far-reaching and long-delayed thinking and action are required that, to be clear, lie outside of the current collective comfort zone.

I look forward to hearing my friend Ms. Ashrawi and Ambassador Mona Juul, and all the members of the Council.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Levy for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ashrawi.

**Ms. Ashrawi:** I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to address the Council today, especially to the Republic of Kenya for this kind invitation.

As Council members have been hearing for over 70 years, the United Nations and its various bodies have been seized of the Palestine question, repeatedly reviewing conditions, as we have heard by our colleague Tor Wennesland and his predecessors, adopting resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), and dispatching fact-finding missions to no avail. Sadly, the Security Council has been unable to assert its authority, allowing this injustice to become a perpetual tragic human moral, political and legal travesty.

It would therefore be disingenuous of me to come before the Council assuming I could inform its members of something that they do not already know. Nevertheless, I do appreciate the opportunity to communicate in a candid manner, not to recite endless statistics — Council members have them — nor to reiterate the ongoing pain of the people deprived of their basic rights, actually including even the right to speak out. They have been admonished not to whine or complain as a means of silencing the victim.

The tragedy is that Council members know all of this, yet it has had minimal impact, if any, on the horrific conditions in occupied Palestine. I imagine it must be disheartening and frustrating for the United Nations and its members to find themselves trapped in the cycle of deliberate disdain and futility. It is therefore imperative that the Security Council consider where it has gone wrong and what it can do to correct course and serve the cause of justice and peace, particularly in addressing the core issues and thinking outside the box, as my colleague Daniel Levy has again said.

Undoubtedly, the absence of accountability for Israel and of protection for the Palestinian people has enabled Israeli impunity to ride roughshod over the rights of an entire nation, allowing for the perpetuation of a permanent-settler colonial occupation. Much of the prevailing political discourse overlooks reality, as has been said, and is diverted and subsumed by chimeras and distractions proffered by Israel and its allies under such banners as economic peace, improving the quality of life, normalization, managing the conflict, containing the conflict or even shrinking the conflict. These fallacies must be dismantled. Volatile situations of injustice and oppression do not shrink; they expand and explode with disastrous consequences. Similarly, the delusion of imposing calm under siege and systemic aggression, particularly as in Gaza, is an oxymoron, for calm or security, on the one hand, and occupation or captivity, on the other, are antithetical and irreconcilable.

Likewise, the fallacy of confidence-building measures — my apologies to Tor Wennesland on this, but I think there can be very little confidence under occupation — is misguided, since occupation breeds only contempt, distrust, resentment and resistance. The oppressed cannot be brought to trust or accept handouts from their oppressor as an alternative to enjoying their rights to freedom and justice.

The misleading and flawed “both sides” argument or “both-side-ism”, as Daniel Levy put it, calling for balance in a flagrantly unbalanced situation, is another attempt at obfuscation and generating misconception, as though both occupier and occupied — oppressor or oppressed — have equal responsibility for this horrific situation. Israel’s impunity is further enhanced using such excuses as being the so-called only democracy in the Middle East or a strategic ally or having shared values, or even for the sake of protecting its fragile coalition.

There has also been tacit and at times overt acceptance of Israel's ideological absolutist arguments, including the invocation of religious texts as a means of dismissing and supplanting contemporary political and legal discourse and action. The so-called Jewish State law, which allocates the right to self-determination exclusively to Jews in all of historical Palestine, is therefore endorsed and normalized. In the meantime, the massive disinformation machine persists in its racist, maligning and demonizing of the Palestinian people, going so far as to label all of them as terrorists, or a demographic threat, which is a dehumanizing formula exploited as a way to deny the right of millions of Palestine refugees to return.

Such slander has warped political focus and discourse globally. Some States have gone off on a tangent, pursuing Palestinian textbooks for so-called incitement, as though the occupation is not a source of provocation and incitement, or adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition that conflates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, or criminalizing the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, or intimidating and censoring academics and solidarity activists who stand up for Palestinian rights. These distortions ignore the unequal and unjust laws designed to persecute Palestinians individually and collectively. They are evidenced in the defamation of our political prisoners and the targeting of their families' livelihoods, as though Israeli military courts or prison systems have anything to do with justice or legality.

Council members all know that, since 1967, over a million Palestinians have been imprisoned and over 75,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israel. And yet the Council labels all these people as terrorists or not deserving of any kind of rights or attention. The mindless refrains that Israel has the right to defend itself, while the Palestinian people are denied such a right is perverse, and that the occupiers' violence is justified as self-defence, while the occupied are stigmatized as terrorists. Similarly, we cannot afford in all things we do to disregard the context of occupation and its systemic aggression as the framing device for all critical assessments and action; everything must be viewed in that context.

Occupied Palestine, including Jerusalem, is the target of a comprehensive and pervasive policy of colonization and erasure. We can talk about settlements wherever we have the numbers, but it is nothing but a

collective form of expansion, polarization and invasion, of displacement and replacement, in which Israel is appropriating everything Palestinian: our homes, our land and resources, our cultural and human heritage, our archaeological sites, which we have safeguarded for centuries, our history, our cuisine, the names of our streets and most egregiously the identity of Jerusalem, as we witness in the ethnic cleansing of the Old City — Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, inter alia. Even our cemeteries have been desecrated, such as in the building of a so-called Museum of Tolerance on top of human remains in Mamilla cemetery.

And Israel continues to stoke the flames of a holy war with repeated assaults on our holy sites, particularly Al-Aqsa mosque. Jerusalem is being targeted in a deliberate campaign of annexation and distortion, and now Israel brazenly declares its intent to complete the settlement siege of Jerusalem and destruction of the territorial contiguity of the West Bank with its outrageous settlement plans for E-1, Qalandria or Atarot airport, Pisgat Ze'ev and Givat Hamatos. We cannot be distracted by symbolic gestures that create false impression of progress. We have to look at reality.

And claims that the time is not right or that it is difficult now to work for a peaceful solution give licence to Israel to persist in such perilous policies. And repeating the verbal commitment to the two-State solution while one State is allowed to deliberately destroy the other rings hollow.

All of this does not preclude our recognition of our own shortcomings. We do not shirk our responsibility to speak out against internal violence, human rights abuses, corruption or other such practices that are projected and presented by our own people. It is our responsibility to carry out democratic reform and revitalize our body politic while ending our internal divisions. This is a Palestinian imperative.

And we must caution others against exploiting our shortcomings to justify Israeli crimes or international inaction or to condition any positive engagement on the creation of an ideal system of governance in Palestine while we languish under a lawless system of Israeli control. We ask that the Security Council, as trustees of the rules-based order, uphold its responsibilities, provide us with protection from aggression and empower our people to amplify their voice, both in governance and in liberation.

Peace is not achieved by normalizing the occupation, sidelining the Palestinian question or rewarding Israel by repositioning it as a regional super-Power. Such an approach keeps in place the causes of regional instability and insecurity, while enabling Israel, as a colonial apartheid State, to superimpose greater Israel on all historic Palestine.

Generation after generation, the people of Palestine have remained committed to the justice of their cause, the integrity of their narrative, the authenticity of their history and culture and their inviolable right to live in freedom and dignity as an equal among nations and in the fullness of our humanity. It is time to declaim another type of justice, invoke our collective will to activate the Charter of the United Nations and affirm the relevance of international law. As Mr. Levy said, it is time to think outside the box and stop doing more of the same, hoping for different results. The time has come for courageous and determined action, not only to undo the injustice of the past but also to chart a clear and binding course for a peaceful future of hope and redemption.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Ashrawi for her briefing.

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

**Mr. Mansour** (Palestine): We congratulate Kenya on its presidency of the Security Council. We thank you, Mr. President, as Foreign Affairs Principal Secretary of Kenya, for presiding over this important meeting and welcome you to the Security Council. We also wish to thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing and to extend a special word of appreciation to today's other briefers, my dear sister Ms. Hanan Ashrawi and Mr. Daniel Levy, adding the important voice of civil society to our deliberations on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine question.

Whatever step we take is guided by the destination that we are hoping to reach. The international community identified that destination a long time ago and has never deviated from that determination. That is what we refer to as the international consensus, which is based on the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders.

However, it is patently clear that that is not the destination that Israel has in mind. That is clear in its insistence on maintaining its illegal occupation. It is clear in the colonial policies that it pursues on the ground, which openly aim at making such a solution

impossible, and in the statements of its officials, who negate our right to self-determination and independence and denigrate the existence of our people.

Given that Israeli stance, it does not make much sense to say that we will wait until the parties are ready and willing, because not only is one party telling the Security Council that it will not adhere to international law and the international consensus, but it is also actively violating it, with no regard for the Council's appeals. How do we therefore hope to reach the destination of a just and lasting peace if Israel is allowed to sit alone behind the steering wheel, determining the course and our collective fate?

It is normal to hope that a certain sense of self-preservation and self-interest would push Israel to see that the project that it pursues is self-defeating. But Israel's violation vision is clearly guided solely by its colonial appetite, as proved over and over by its policies and practices, which breach international law, including the Council's resolutions, and are the cause of deep anguish and hardship for the Palestinian people, who have suffered the wrath of its occupation and the misery of exile for generations. It has decided to ignore all signals that demonstrate how unwise its plans are. After 75 years of such policies, aimed at the dispossession, forcible displacement and denial of the rights of our people, while in 1948 two thirds of our people were forced to leave their homeland, Palestinians are on the verge of being a majority of the population living between the Jordan River and the sea.

However, Israel believes that it can seize our geography and control our demography. Did it not manage to ensure, since 1967, the inability of Palestinians to build on more than 60 per cent of the West Bank and on 87 per cent of East Jerusalem, facilitating its plan to unlawfully annex maximum land with minimum Palestinians? While Palestinians are besieged in fragmented, and even walled, enclaves, their land and resources will therefore remain under Israeli control, their fundamental rights will be denied and a dual system will ensure privileges for one group and discriminate against another.

I know that it sounds familiar. It is called apartheid, and anyone who believes that that is a welcome prospect is blinded by ideology and a feeling of supremacy that is destructive to both those who hold it and those who suffer from it.

Israel thinks that the last part of its plan is Palestinian surrender. It calls that Palestinian acceptance of the unlawful reality that it has created. To achieve that, it tries to convince Palestinians that they are better off if they stop struggling and accept the premise that international law does not matter, that Palestine is no longer a priority and that Israel will never be held accountable for its actions. It wants them to lose hope so that they finally surrender.

But what Palestinians rely on is not hope alone but faith — the deep-seated faith that humans cannot surrender to their chains and that the servitude and captivity of a nation will never be compatible with the human condition. The very history of those around this table and of the United Nations is a tale of the rebellion of peoples against their chains and valiant struggles for liberation and justice.

I therefore turn to the Security Council and to the institution as a whole. They have expressed clear positions. They have been steadfast in their opposition to illegal unilateral actions. They have given generous assistance and support to Palestine statehood and the Palestinian people. They have invested in peace for decades and decades.

Of course, they could continue to intervene each time that we reach a breaking point, such as when Israel decides to formalize its annexation, as it did a year ago. They could intervene to deal with the flames generated by Israeli provocations at Haram Al-Sharif, to stop the forcible displacement of Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, to broker a ceasefire after Israel kills dozens of Palestinian families, as it did in May, or to stop the latest announcement of settlements that would destroy the chances of peace, as we have witnessed in recent days. We truly value such efforts, but they only slow Israel down on the destructive path on which it is embarked; they do not stop it.

We need the Security Council to take hold of the steering wheel. To some, it may seem useless now or difficult given competing priorities or requiring too much political capital for little progress. But the alternative is so dire that the Council will eventually need to intervene, and by then it will be much more costly and much more difficult.

The Security Council has determined clearly the way forward. It has created a mechanism to be an expression of its will — the Quartet. Who is better placed to have their hands on the steering wheel?

We need a collective approach that relies on the positions already adopted by the Council, including resolution 2334 (2016), which was mentioned by previous speakers today, and those of the international community at large. That approach must explore the tools available at the national and international levels in a genuine spirit of multilateralism and commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

We need the Security Council to accompany the steps it deemed necessary to reach the destination, with the enforcement of consequences for those who refuse to move forward on that path. Let us start by putting the brakes on illegal unilateral measures. Let us start by exploring every available avenue in order to provide the Palestinian people the protection to which they are entitled. Let us mobilize the goodwill and available resources around the globe by convening an international conference under the auspices of the Quartet that would involve the actors who can make a contribution to peace. Let us not think that momentum appears by magic; it is generated and sustained by our collective action.

Thirty years ago, when the Madrid Peace Conference was held, it was not an expression of the will of the parties, but rather a reflection of the strong will of the international community that left the parties with no option but to show up. The Conference was not successful in itself, but it generated a dynamic that allowed peace efforts to reach new heights and to achieve a breakthrough. If anybody had assessed the chances of success when Yitzhak Shamir was Prime Minister of Israel, they would have thought that those efforts were doomed and therefore useless. The statements and political positions of Israeli Prime Ministers cannot be the decisive factor that determines whether peace efforts have a chance of success. They are not the only party that decides and guarantees success.

The only question worth asking is what incentives does Israel have to change its behaviour? What disincentives does it face if it persists with the same policies? Those who are leading these colonial policies are hoping to transform the international community into a bystander or a silent witness or, at worst, a critical commentator. But the international community is an actor and a decisive one at that, and it must act as such. It is important for the international community to signal as soon as possible that it is determined to ensure that we are on the right track and will not allow

anyone to derail the process. If the Council cannot make determinations and policies related to the maintenance of international peace and security, then who is?

The Palestinian people will not disappear. They will continue reinventing their just struggle until they achieve their national, collective and individual rights. One way or the other, they will live in freedom and dignity in their homeland. If we believe that the way for that to happen is through the two-State solution based on 1967 borders, action can no longer be delayed. As the saying goes: “actions speak louder than words”.

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

**Mr. Erdan (Israel):** Thirty years ago, in October 1991, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir addressed the Madrid Peace Conference and declared:

“We believe the blessing of peace can turn the Middle East into a paradise; a centre of cultural, scientific, medical and technological creativity... It could put the Middle East... on the road to a new era.

Thirty years later, we are seeing Prime Minister Shamir’s vision slowly coming to life. The recent Abraham accords and the long-standing relations between Israel, Egypt and Jordan have put us on the road to a new era in which the Middle East will not be a centre of conflict, but of creativity and solutions to the world’s most pressing challenges.

That potential is particularly clear as the world prepares for the critical United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. Israel is a global leader in crucial areas such as water management, sustainable agriculture and renewable energy. Together with the nations of the Abraham Accords and all peace-seeking nations, we can turn the Middle East into a global hub of climate innovation for the benefit of our environment, our economies and the future of our children.

Unfortunately, rather than pushing peace forward, the Security Council debates on the situation in the Middle East only seem to perpetuate the conflict. Rather than helping to turn the vision of peace into a reality, these debates create an alternate and false reality. These biased debates give the Palestinians the illusion that they will never be held accountable for their crimes and that all of their radical demands could be granted by the international community. The unbalanced discussions — I hope the Council felt it — only serve to strengthen Palestinian rejectionism

of any further negotiations with Israel, thereby maintaining the conflict.

Today, we heard from the Palestinian Ambassador the same lies, falsehoods and distortions that we hear at every debate on the situation in the Middle East. Is he not ashamed to come before the Security Council, when his Government is paying hundreds of millions of dollars to terrorists? How can he possibly speak about aggression when his leaders in schools glorify the murder of Jews and incite terror? He dares to talk about international law when his courts recently sentenced two Palestinians to 15 years in prison for the “crime” of trying to sell land to a Jew.

Is the Ambassador not embarrassed to speak about human rights while his police forces are beating to death real civil society activists, such as Nizar Banat? The Ambassador sits here and talks about the situation in Gaza. Why does he not tell the Council whose decisions led to cutting off Gaza’s electricity in 2017? How can he claim to represent the Palestinian people when 80 per cent of Palestinians are fed up with President Abbas?

When the members of the Security Council allow this organ to be turned again and again into a platform for the most outrageous anti-Israel libels, they are not only stopping the train of peace from moving forward, they are knocking it off the tracks. As I said, these debates reflect an alternate and false reality that is detached from the reality on the ground. It is an alternate reality, in which hundreds of Palestinian terrorist attacks are not the Council’s focus, while every Israeli court ruling regarding illegal Palestinian construction becomes the most critical crisis in the Middle East. It is a false reality, in which every Palestinian claim against Israel is the most urgent issue on the agenda, while the terror in and the destruction of Iran and its proxies throughout the region are almost an afterthought.

The most recent example of that absurd approach is the decision to invite, as a representative of civil society, an individual who was a member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and has been a Palestinian politician for decades. What is next? Will the Council invite Hassan Rouhani and Javad Zarif as representatives of Iranian civil society?

Ms. Ashrawi is not just a lifelong spokesperson for the Palestinian political leadership; she is an opponent of peace. Following the Abraham accords, she condemned those historic peace agreements and claimed that the leaders of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain had

been coerced and cajoled into making peace with Israel. Does the Security Council really want to give a platform to an enemy of peace? MIFTAH, the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, the organization that Ms. Ashrawi founded and led, has published anti-Semitic blood libel, claiming that Jews use Christian blood on Passover. Does the Security Council really want to legitimize someone responsible for spreading gross anti-Semitism?

If the Council wishes to invite members of civil society, why not invite courageous Palestinian and Israeli entrepreneurs who are working together to create coexistence? Why not invite representatives of bodies who are providing treatment to Israeli children injured and traumatized by Hamas' rocket attacks? If the Council invited Ms. Ashrawi, why not ask her to explain her criticism of President Abbas for undermining democracy and establishing an authoritarian regime?

As Prime Minister Shamir said 30 years ago in Madrid, Israel strongly desires peace. It is absolutely critical that the Council send the clear message that peace will come when the Palestinian Authority ceases to pay millions of dollars in salaries to terrorists and, instead, uses those funds to build medical centres, schools and a vibrant private sector. Peace will come when Palestinian children are taught that their national heroes are scientists, inventors and peacebuilders rather than terrorists whose only claim to fame is that they tried to kill Jews.

While some members of the Security Council remain stuck in the mud of their anti-Israel obsession, the real threat to global security is quickly advancing. Iran continues to progress towards its goal of becoming a nuclear-threshold State. The murderous Ayatollah regime continues to openly violate its international commitments in the fields of enrichment, stockpiling uranium metal and advanced research and development, while obstructing the International Atomic Energy Agency. It uses diplomatic talks to buy time so that it can enrich uranium to near weapons-grade levels, while gaining nuclear know-how that can never be reversed.

At the same time, Iran continues to spread death, destruction and instability throughout the region as it seeks to advance a Shi'ite hegemony over the Middle East, and exports terror around the world. But the Council does not have to take it from me. It should take it from Major General Gholam Ali Rashid, a senior commander in Iran's armed forces. In a speech by

Major General Rashid on 25 September, he described the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' grand strategy of terror. He said,

“I have assembled for you six armies outside of Iran's territory, and I have created a corridor 1,500 kilometres long and 1,000 kilometres wide, all the way to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. One army is in Lebanon; it is called Hizbullah. Another army is in Palestine and it is called Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. One army is in Syria. Another army is in Iraq and another is in Yemen.”

If the Security Council does not take strong action against the six armies, those armies will soon be protected by an Iranian nuclear umbrella, and the Ayatollah's reign of terror will turn into a hurricane of violence.

Let me be clear. Israel favours a diplomatic solution — one that would truly prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear-threshold State. However, Iran has no intention of negotiating such a solution. It has no desire for a longer and stronger agreement. Its only desire is to prolong negotiations, while keeping international pressure from becoming stronger. The dangers of failing to take action in the face of Iran's flagrant violations of its commitments cannot be overstated. Non-compliance is a contagious disease, especially in our region. Yet, as Iran poses an existential threat to Israel, the State of Israel can never and will never allow Iran to become a nuclear-threshold State. We will do whatever is necessary to stop Iran's nuclear drive and counter the threat from its armies of proxies along our borders and beyond our borders.

Some 30 years after the Madrid Conference, Israel remains committed to peace with all our neighbours. The road to peace is clear. It requires standing up to Iran — the greatest threat to security in our region. It requires a Palestinian leadership willing to transform its culture of hate into a culture of peace and it requires an international community led by the Security Council, willing to adopt a new approach, based on promoting cooperation, understanding and people-to-people ties. If we take that road, we can indeed turn the Middle East into a paradise of progress, prosperity and peace.

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

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for

his briefing. I also thank briefers Hanan Ashrawi and Daniel Levy for sharing their views with us today.

I welcome the participation of the observer of the Observer State of Palestine Mansour and Israeli Ambassador Erdan.

Before I address what we have just heard, I would like to briefly comment on the content of these monthly meetings. The monthly agenda calls for a briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The Council spends a great deal of time on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is both understandable and consistent with the agenda. But, far too often, the substance of those discussions is centred almost entirely around criticism of Israel and counter-attacks. I sincerely hope that, going forward, Council members will do their best to take a more balanced approach. In addition, there are other countries and situations in the region that merit Security Council attention and should not be neglected.

That said, all of us here sincerely care about providing a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike. This is a complex crisis with deep suffering on both sides. Along with bringing balance to those discussions, we need to reflect on the actions truly take us closer to the goal of peace. The first step towards resolving any conflict is frank and direct dialogue. The United States, therefore, supports the resumed direct contact between Israeli and Palestinian leaders. To that end, we also welcome the re-engagement between Israeli and Jordanian leaders, as well as the progress from the Abraham Accords.

I had the opportunity to sit down with Prime Minister Bennett last month for a productive discussion about the challenges and opportunities facing Israel here in the United Nations system. We have also been engaging with Palestinian partners, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Israel and Palestinian Affairs Amr recently travelled to the West Bank to meet with President Abbas.

Gaza continues to have an acute need for humanitarian relief and recovery. Humanitarian actors need regular, predictable and sustained access to Gaza. Member States should provide financial, as well as material, assistance to help meet the needs of the people of Gaza.

That includes funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near

East (UNRWA), so that the organization can continue to run schools and health services that support Palestinian families. The United States provided more than \$318 million to UNRWA this year, but it still faces a shortfall of roughly \$100 million. We applaud Kuwait's recent contribution of \$21.5 million to the Agency and we encourage others to follow Kuwait's example and help to ensure the continuation of vital services for Palestinian refugees.

At the same time, we need to see UNRWA undertake the necessary reforms to ensure its financial sustainability. We will work with UNRWA to strengthen the Agency's accountability, transparency and consistency with humanitarian principles, including neutrality.

As the international community moves to increase its assistance to the people of Gaza, we call on Hamas to cease its cruel detention of two Israeli civilians. Civilians are not pawns. Similarly, we urge Hamas to return the remains of two Israeli soldiers to their families. I met with Leah Goldin, the mother of one of those soldiers, in June, and I have to say that I was deeply moved by her account of the unnecessary suffering caused by that outrageous act. It is really a matter of basic human decency. Mrs. Goldin's son's remains should be returned to her family to bring her closure.

We are deeply concerned by the violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers in the West Bank against Palestinians and their property. Reports of masked men terrorizing a village in Hebron, destroying homes and injuring children on 28 September and similar acts elsewhere in the West Bank are abhorrent. We appreciated the strong and unequivocal condemnation of that violence by Foreign Minister Lapid, Defence Minister Gantz and others in the Israeli Government. We call upon the Israeli authorities to investigate those incidents fully, including the response by Israeli security forces.

That kind of violence diminishes the freedom, dignity, security and prosperity of Palestinians and Israelis alike. It stands in the way of peace.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland, as well as Mr. Levy and Ms. Ashrawi, for their briefings.

France welcomes the renewed unity of the Security Council in support of the two-State solution, which is the only solution to date that meets the legitimate

aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security while respecting the rights of both. That is why the Council has endorsed the parameters of that solution in several resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Our responsibility today is to work to preserve that perspective, as well as the possibility of achieving peace and ensuring lasting stability across the entire region.

France calls on the parties to refrain from all unilateral measures. We urge Israel to reverse its plans for settlement expansion, particularly in sensitive areas such as E1 and Givat Hamatos, which directly undermine the viability and contiguity of a future Palestinian State. Those plans call into question the two-State solution on the ground, in addition to being contrary to international law.

France reiterates its concern about the record increase in violence and demolitions, as well as the eviction procedures underway in Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah. Our expectations in that regard are well known. All parties must unambiguously reaffirm their commitment to the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem, as any doubt surrounding that status quo could lead to an escalation and reignite tensions in the region.

France welcomes the resumption of high-level contact between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which opens the way to a new dynamic with deeper cooperation in all areas in the interest of all, first and foremost the peoples. More needs to be done to preserve a ceasefire in Gaza and I welcome Egypt's action in that regard.

Following the welcome easing of some restrictions on Gaza by Israel, it is essential that goods required for reconstruction and humanitarian personnel are allowed into Gaza, where international law must be respected. Additional measures to support economic recovery will also be needed.

We will condemn any attack on Israeli territory.

Further economic cooperation is also needed to stabilize the situation in the West Bank. We hope that the ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in November will provide an opportunity to make progress, including on the fiscal front.

My final point concerns respect for the rule of law and the strengthening of Palestinian democratic

institutions. Our expectations of the Palestinian Authority with regard to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are well known. In particular, it must shed full light on the assassination of Nizar Banat.

Finally, France is determined to support all initiatives that contribute to restoring the process of dialogue. We are actively working on that alongside our German, Egyptian and Jordanian partners. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our support for the work of the Special Coordinator, Tor Wennesland. France will also play its full part in the conference in support of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in November, as its action is essential to the stability of the region and to meeting the needs of Palestinian refugees.

**Ms. King** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): Let me begin by thanking Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland, Mr. Daniel Levy, President of the U.S./ Middle East Project, and Ms. Hanan Ashrawi, political and civil society leader, for their briefings. I thank our colleagues, representatives of the State of Palestine and Israel, for their statements.

For decades, the international community has been witnessing the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Every month, we come to the Council and state our positions in line with international law and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, but that does not seem to move the needle. Our words do not stop the erosion of Palestinian statehood, the killing of Palestinian children or the attempted erasure of a people and their homes.

Cynically and paradoxically, such observations have, in the not-too-distant past, spawned arguments that we must do away with international law and the two-State solution. Such an approach rocks the foundation of our rules-based international order. The refusal of Israel and its international backers to come to terms with the requisite of an independent Palestine and a secure Israel remains our biggest hurdle. In these new, perilous times that humankind faces, we must do better. We must, as Mr. Levy suggested, disengage from autopilot and implement resolution 2334 (2016) in the interest of a political solution and political justice.

Recent developments with respect to Israeli settlements are of particular concern. The recent announcement of approvals for advancing the construction of thousands of homes in E1 is a flagrant

violation of international law and further undermines the peace process and the two-State solution.

We renew our call on the Israeli authorities to urgently reverse those latest decisions as a matter of urgency. Yet again, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines denounces the continuing and increasing demolition and confiscation of Palestinian houses and structures in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The situation in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, which remains under threat of forced eviction of Palestinian families from their homes, is also troubling. We call on Israel to immediately halt all forced evictions and to cease its systematic policy of settlement expansion, demolition of Palestinian structures and obstructing Palestinian development.

We are also deeply concerned about allegations of the use of excessive force by Israeli security forces against Palestinian civilians. That includes the killing and wounding of Palestinian civilians, including children. Therefore, we reiterate our call on Israel to observe international humanitarian law, as set out in the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

Turning to the recent developments surrounding the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, we call on all to respect the historic and legal status quo at that holy site in the interest of peace and stability.

While noting that the Israeli authorities have eased some of the restrictions in Gaza, much more needs to be done to prevent an even more grim future for Palestinians. Continued humanitarian access and funding services to the Palestinian population in Gaza remain critical. We call attention once more to the illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. The blockade must end to facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for Palestinians in need and the reconstruction of Gaza. Moreover, we call on the international community to make tangible investments to resolve the critical funding shortfalls for the reconstruction efforts in Gaza and programmes run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Before concluding, my delegation welcomes the United States' plans for the re-establishment of a United States consulate in Jerusalem. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines recalls once again that there is no substitute for a two-State solution between Israelis and

Palestinians. Time is running out on us; we need to work collectively to promote genuine dialogue between the parties. Only through dialogue and negotiations can there be lasting peace in Israel, Palestine and the wider Middle East.

**Ms. Byrne Nason** (Ireland): It is a privilege to see you, Mr. President, in the chair among us again today. As always I sincerely thank Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing this morning. I would like to welcome Ambassadors Mansour and Erdan who are with us today. I want to extend a very special thanks to Hanan Ashrawi, who has for so long been such an eloquent and powerful voice for the Palestinian people. And I want to recognize in particular her work in recent years as a strong advocate for the younger generation of Palestinian women and men. That is much appreciated. I thank Daniel Levy for what was a very valuable and thought-provoking contribution. It was really good to hear from him today, and I thank him for his long-standing contributions to Israeli-Palestinian discussions.

We are deeply concerned about the briefing we had by Tor Wennesland this morning and what we know about the rise in violence across the West Bank, particularly the increase in settler violence and the use of live fire by Israeli forces. We call on Israel to hold those responsible accountable, to end the culture of impunity around such incidents of violence and to ensure that any response by security forces is proportional and in compliance with international law.

Ireland condemns all acts of violence, including rocket attacks from Gaza, which fuel tensions and put civilian lives at risk. Once again, I repeat Ireland's call on Israel to halt all illegal settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem and in the E-1 Area, as well as demolitions, evictions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures. Israel should provide permits for legal construction and the development of Palestinian communities.

Ireland remains firmly committed to a negotiated two-State solution, which provides a viable basis for a resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict. We condemn all acts that threaten to erode that prospect.

We call for the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem to be upheld in both word and practice, recognizing the special role of Jordan.

Last month, during Ireland's Security Council presidency, two young women addressed this same debate (see S/PV.8869). Ms. Mai Farsakh underscored the terrible impact of illegal settlements on Palestinian women and girls. Ms. Meredith Rothbart clearly illustrated for us the essential and constructive role of civil society in local peacebuilding. Through them, we saw clearly that the occupation has had a disproportionate impact on women and girls. Ireland commends civil society in the occupied Palestinian territories and in Israel for their efforts to develop an approach of community-based women's empowerment. Through those young women last month, we saw that they have the capacity to shape a more hopeful future for their societies. We believe that it is imperative that the Security Council, the parties to the conflict and the international community listen to their voices.

We strongly condemn recent targeting of Palestinian activists and civil society organizations. Ireland calls on all duty-bearers — Israeli and Palestinian alike — to protect and uphold the rights of civil society and human rights defenders.

Ireland commends the vital work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is of critical importance to millions of Palestine refugees in the occupied territory and across the region. Ireland once again appeals to donors, including its Gulf partners, to enhance support for UNRWA.

Despite some recent welcome steps, we remain deeply concerned about access into Gaza and obstacles to reconstruction efforts, five months after the end of the conflict. As noted in the rapid damage and needs assessment, there are significant mental health consequences faced by Gazans from prolonged exposure to violence, the loss of family and loved ones, and the frustrations over the lack of control from worsening poverty, unemployment and insecurity in the Gaza Strip. We renew our call on Israel to end the blockade of Gaza.

We welcome the announcement by the Palestinian Central Elections Committee that municipal elections will be held in December. Ireland reiterates its belief that Palestinian legislative elections across all of the occupied territory, with the full participation of women, are necessary to give a democratic voice to all Palestinians, to help progress towards intra-Palestinian

reconciliation and to renew the legitimacy of national institutions.

Finally, Ireland reiterates its call on the Middle East Quartet to enhance its efforts to work towards the resumption of a political process. We welcome ministerial-level contacts between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority that have taken place in recent weeks.

As we approach the thirtieth anniversary of the Madrid Conference, it is imperative that the Security Council, partners in the region and the wider international community remain engaged and working for a solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. There can be no doubt that we need to rekindle the hope that took hold in Madrid. We need to work to build confidence to enable a political path for an end to the occupation that began in 1967, so that Palestinians' rights, as well as those of Israelis, can be guaranteed.

Ireland stands ready, both through the Security Council and nationally, to assist in whatever way it can.

**Mr. Jürgenson** (Estonia): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. I also thank Mr. Levy and Ms. Ashrawi for their insightful statements.

Estonia remains committed to finding a long-lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-State solution, international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We continue to support all efforts to create favourable conditions for the resumption of direct, meaningful negotiations on all final-status issues.

We welcome the recent engagement between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders and encourage them to expand that dialogue further. We also urge the parties to engage in more practical cooperation, including in the economic, financial and other areas, which would serve as confidence-building measures and would be in the interests of the people of both sides.

Regarding Gaza, it is vital to continue stabilizing the fragile situation. We support the international and regional efforts aimed at reducing tensions and holding the ceasefire in Gaza. We call upon Hamas and other terrorist organizations to refrain from firing rockets and incendiary devices into Israel and urge Israel to use its right to defend itself proportionally, protecting the civilian population.

It is also essential that international and regional efforts for reconstruction continue, with the aim of improving the dire humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in the Strip. In that context, we welcome the recent proposals to advance the economy and improve the socioeconomic situation of Palestinians.

Turning to the West Bank, we are worried about the continued incidents of violence, including the clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces. We call on all parties to refrain from violence, incitement and acts of provocation.

The demolition of and evictions from Palestinian property by Israel are worrying. We call upon Israel to refrain from those activities as well as from advancing any settlement plans, as such acts are contrary to international law. We also reiterate that the status quo of the holy sites must be fully respected.

Finally, I would like to stress the important role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in providing help to the Palestinian refugees and stabilizing the region, including through humanitarian response and reconstruction in Gaza. The upcoming conference hosted by Sweden and Jordan will be an important opportunity to find ways towards more sustainable funding of the Agency.

**Ms. Juul** (Norway): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his very thorough although slightly concerning briefing today. I also thank Daniel Levy and Hanan Ashrawi for their very valuable contributions.

Let me begin by reiterating Norway's enduring commitment to a broad political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conflict is often overshadowed by seemingly more urgent crises on the Council's agenda, yet it is critical that we keep focusing on the need to address the underlying issues here as well. We reaffirm our support for a negotiated two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 lines; the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016); international law; and internationally agreed parameters, where Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side in peace, within secure and recognized borders.

The current relative calm in Gaza, as well as the recent increase in imports and the number of work permits issued, is a positive development. The distribution of cash assistance to tens of thousands of vulnerable families has also been successful. However,

as the Special Coordinator has highlighted, that situation is not sustainable. The closure of Gaza must be lifted. To improve the lives of Palestinians living in Gaza, we must spur economic growth by allowing many more Gazans to seek work in Israel and in the West Bank; generating good jobs in Gaza itself; and easing import and export restrictions.

We call on all actors to contribute to keeping the calm and averting further hostilities, and we support all efforts to secure a long-term and stable ceasefire. Calm is a prerequisite for true progress in rebuilding Gaza better.

Norway welcomes the signals from the Israeli Government that it will support improving living conditions in Gaza. The Palestinian Authority (PA) will remain our partner for development efforts in Palestine, including in Gaza.

We are deeply concerned about Israeli plans to implement the E-1 settlement plan. Such settlements would cut off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and undermine the viability of a contiguous Palestinian State. Israeli settlements on occupied territory constitute a violation of international law. We urge Israel to halt settlement activities, house demolitions and evictions. Those actions have not only inflamed the recent escalation around Gaza; they go against international efforts to stabilize the situation and resolve the conflict.

We are also deeply worried about the increased violence, including settler violence, in the West Bank. We remind Israel of its responsibility to protect civilians, especially children, and call on it to stop the use of live ammunition against Palestinian protesters. We call also on the Palestinian Authority to uphold human rights and to refrain from limiting the civil-society space.

Norway welcomes the renewed high-level dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and we were encouraged to hear from Tor Wennesland that there have also been recent contacts in the Quartet. We stand ready to assist in further strengthening dialogue. Norway will host a meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians on 16 and 17 November in Oslo to address the deteriorating fiscal situation of the PA and consider how to strengthen the Authority.

The meeting will also provide an opportunity for the parties, donors and development partners to agree on concrete steps forward on both on the economic and political aspects of Palestinian State-building. The two-State solution is the only solution that will ensure long-term stability, which will benefit not only Israelis and Palestinians but also the region as a whole.

**Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I welcome the participation of the Special Coordinator, Tor Wennesland, and I thank Ms. Ashrawi and Mr. Levy for their valuable briefings. We also welcome the delegations of Israel and Palestine to this Security Council meeting.

We have once again heard accounts of the prevailing tension and violence within the region. The conflict persists; violations of human rights continue; and there has been no progress towards the desired goal that would allow for a solution that many of us had hoped and believed to be the definitive one: the creation of a sovereign, independent Palestinian State that is politically and economically viable, living in peace with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Against that backdrop, and in view of what we have heard this morning, I will focus on three points: settlements and violence, the status quo in Jerusalem, and Gaza and intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

First, concerning settlements and violence, the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian territory runs counter to international law. Moreover, it is an obstacle to the implementation of any prospect for peace.

Beyond the numbers, which, so far this year, are not small — 682 structures have been demolished, including some funded by the international community, as well as others needed for health services and drinking water — the construction of new housing units in settlements such as Givat Hamatos, Atarot and Pisgat Ze'ev impede the geographic contiguity of the Palestinian State. The construction of units in this context must cease, as must the transfer of settlers, the demolition of homes and the displacement of civilians. Measures to reverse negative trends on the ground must be promoted, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016).

Secondly, we note with concern the growing tensions in the Old City of Jerusalem, resulting from actions and pronouncements aimed at changing the

status quo. We note that Israeli authorization to enter and conduct non-Muslim acts of worship on the Esplanade of the Mosques was reversed by competent authorities. In accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council, Mexico urges that measures that alter the status and the geographical, demographic and historical character of Jerusalem be avoided.

Thirdly, Mexico urges the Palestinian Authority to continue organizing municipal elections and call parliamentary and presidential elections. We insist on the importance of guaranteeing the full, equal and substantive participation of women and young people in the political and civil life of Palestine. We also welcome Egypt's continued mediation efforts in favour of intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

The cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on civil and security matters — and in particular the high-level contacts that are taking place — are welcome and encouraging signs. We hope that these will deepen and expand towards a political understanding for peace negotiations. We commend efforts to revive the Palestinian economy, in particular those aimed at boosting the economy in Gaza. We reiterate the need to lift the Israeli blockade and guarantee the consistent and regular entry of essential goods and materials for the reconstruction of the Strip.

In conclusion, the Palestinian question is probably one of the longest-standing items on the Council's agenda. Regrettably, after seven decades, we are still in the cycle of managing the conflict. We call for direct negotiations to begin as soon as possible and without preconditions, with the support of the international community, in particular the Middle East Peace Quartet. We truly believe that this is the way forward.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome Mr. Kamau to the Security Council to preside over today's meeting and thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. We also thank Ms. Ashrawi and Mr. Levy for their briefing. China is deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in the occupied territory of Palestine. Nearly five months after the Gaza conflict, the security and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory remains grim. In the Gaza Strip, the conflict in May damaged a large number of public facilities and civilian houses, worsening the already severe economic and humanitarian situation. Of the 110,000 displaced people in Gaza, 8,250 still have not yet returned to their

homes. More delay in the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza will cause greater suffering of the people already affected by the conflict.

China appreciates the efforts aimed at alleviating the plight of the local population, such as the issuance of cash assistance by Qatar and the United Nations and the work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, in spite of difficulties. We call for the early reconstruction of Gaza to let people return to normal life. The international community should increase its support for this reconstruction. Israel should open additional suitable ports in Gaza to clear the obstacles for the entry of humanitarian and reconstruction materials there.

China has strongly called for the easing of tensions. In the West Bank, Israeli military and police operations continue to cause Palestinian casualties, aggravate the conflicts between the two sides and escalate tension. The violence by Israeli settlers has intensified, exemplified by the attack on 28 September that injured several Palestinians, including a three-year old sleeping child. As Special Coordinator Wennesland has repeatedly emphasized, Israel, as the occupying Power, must fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law by guaranteeing the safety of the people in the occupied territory, thoroughly investigate the attacks and bring those responsible to justice.

China urges Israel to stop its actions that undermine the prospects of the two-State solution, such as the expansion of settlements. Recently, Israel approved building a new settlement in Givat Hamatos in Jerusalem. Palestinian residents in communities such as Sheikh Jarrah are still at risk of being evicted. The construction of settlements violates international law and undermines the prospects for a two-State solution. Israel must abide by the relevant United Nations resolutions, stop expanding settlements, cease demolishing Palestinian houses and refrain from evicting Palestinian people. The historically established status quo of Jerusalem's holy site should be maintained and respected.

The fundamental way to solve the Palestinian issue lies in the implementation of the two-State solution. Two weeks ago, the Permanent Observer of Palestine stated in a letter to the President of the Security Council that the international community should not replace the just settlement of the Palestinian issue with crisis

management and control (S/2021/856). China fully agrees with this.

Only by realizing the two-State solution and restoring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people can the cycle of violence be broken, and Palestine and Israel live side by side and coexist in peace. We hope that Palestine and Israel will take the recent high-level contact as an opportunity to continue to build momentum, gradually re-establish mutual trust and resume equal dialogue at an early date.

We support Egypt and other countries in the region in playing an important role in promoting reconciliation among Palestinians, and we call for strengthening the authority of the Palestinian National Authority and empowering it to exercise sovereignty functions in security, finance and other fields. We urge countries with important influence to uphold an objective and fair position and avoid partiality and double standards on the issue of Palestine.

The Security Council bears the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security and must take effective actions to resolve the Palestinian issue. We reaffirm our readiness to host direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel in China, and we call for the holding of an international peace conference led by the United Nations, with the participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and the various stakeholders in the Middle East peace process.

China has always attached great importance to the humanitarian situation in Palestine and has taken concrete actions to support the Palestinian people in their fight against the pandemic. On many occasions, China has sent humanitarian assistance, such as emergency cash assistance and pandemic supplies and vaccines, to Palestine. China will donate an additional 1 million doses of vaccines and will join forces with Egypt to send 500,000 vaccine doses to people in the Gaza Strip. We will also provide 200,000 doses of vaccines to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

As a sincere friend of Palestine, China supports the just cause of Palestine in pursuing its national rights and the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We will continue to work with the international community to promote an

early, comprehensive, fair and just settlement of the Palestinian issue.

**Mr. Aougi** (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Wennesland, Mr. Levy and Ms. Ashrawi for their briefings.

A month ago, the announcement of a rehabilitation plan for the Gaza Strip, the meeting in Ramallah between the Palestinian President and the Israeli Defence Minister and the visit to Egypt by the Israeli Prime Minister were developments that we welcomed, while calling for the judicious use of those encouraging signs towards détente in relations between Israel and Palestine. In addition, aware of the fragility of the calm restored since the ceasefire of last May, we also recalled the need for both sides to strengthen measures that could contribute to consolidating the calm and restoring trust between Israelis and Palestinians in order to foster the conditions for a resumption of the peace process.

However, in view of the situation observed in the region for some time, the prospect of peaceful coexistence between those two peoples and the return of peace continue to be severely tested, leaving the threat of instability and violence still looming.

The increased attacks and persecution by Israeli settlers against the Palestinian population, including farmers and even young schoolchildren, the continued demolition of Palestinian structures, including agricultural land, the confiscation of Palestinian land and private property, the approval by the Israeli authorities of a plan to build several housing units in Palestinian areas in Jerusalem, as well as the desecration of Muslim cemeteries and violations against Islamic holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque, are all serious and condemnable acts that reflect this reality and must stop.

Coming back to those recent attacks on Muslim shrines, I would like to stress that such practices shock and offend the feelings of Muslims in Palestine and the rest of the world. Such practices will only increase hatred, fanaticism, radicalization and violence, all of which will only complicate an already difficult situation and hamper the path towards the return of peace and peaceful coexistence between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

For that reason, the Niger condemns those odious and unacceptable acts against Muslim holy places in

the strongest terms and calls on Israel to do everything possible to put an end to them. The Niger recalls that it falls to the Israeli authorities to ensure the protection of the faithful, respect for the holy places and the historical and legal status of Jerusalem, a holy city for the three monotheistic religions.

My country remains convinced that, in order to achieve such peace, which we have been seeking for nearly 70 years in the Middle East, the Palestinian cause cannot be circumvented forever, and Israel's flagrant disregard for international law and United Nations resolutions cannot continue indefinitely. The Palestinian cause will continue to serve as a stark reminder of the right of peoples to self-determination.

Creating the conditions for this peace, for which we hope and pray for the peoples of the region, lies mainly in stopping the unbridled settlement policy carried out by Israel for several decades in the occupied Palestinian territories and in the resumption of direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians with a view to achieving the only valid solution to their dispute: the establishment of a viable Palestinian State within its 1967 borders, living side by side at peace with Israel. That solution must be safeguarded at all costs.

In that regard, the Niger believes that the Security Council, by virtue of its obligations, must be able to enforce its resolutions, which must no longer be options, but an imperative, compliance with which is the guarantee of peace and security for each and every Member that has committed to the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations.

It is equally important that the international community, the Quartet and the members of the Council, as well as regional actors with influence on the parties, continue to exert the necessary pressure to avoid further escalation and to work for the revitalization of the peace process with a view to successfully ending this conflict.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to express its concern about the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories due to the coronavirus disease pandemic, exacerbated by the fragility of the health system, extreme poverty and food insecurity, among other things. We are also concerned by the shortage of funds faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which continues to threaten the survival of thousands of Palestinians, mostly women

and children. We therefore call on the international community to show more compassion and generosity to this hard-pressed population by supporting the funding of the Gaza recovery plan and the vital programmes for thousands of Palestinian families that UNRWA provides.

We also call on Israel, as the occupying Power, to fulfil all its obligations under international humanitarian law by ensuring the well-being and survival of the population under its control.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): May I welcome you, Mr. President, back to New York. I also thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing and our two civil-society briefers, Mr. Daniel Levy and Ms. Hanan Ashrawi, for their thought-provoking contributions.

I would like to start by welcoming the increased engagement between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority over recent months. We are confident that this dialogue will continue, and it is our hope that it will deliver tangible results to tackle immediate and long-term threats to peace and stability. The parties have our full support in that.

The United Kingdom also welcomes the increased calm in Gaza and the recent steps taken by Israel to loosen constraints on access for goods and people into and out of the Gaza Strip. We now ask Israel to set out a full and transparent plan to improve movement and access in Gaza, in line with international humanitarian law, to allow for reconstruction and development to advance.

Notwithstanding a number of positive signals, we continue to see negative trends in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. As we have heard, rates of demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes have continued to rise, and this year may see the worst rate of demolitions in five years. We urge the Government of Israel to ensure that Palestinian families living in the occupied territories can remain safely in their homes.

Violence in the West Bank, including settler attacks against Palestinian people and property, is now on the rise. The shocking attack, on 28 September, on the Palestinian village of Umm Mufaqarah, in the south Hebron hills, resulted in a 3-year-old Palestinian child being hospitalized. We call on Israel to provide appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian

population, to ensure all such incidents are investigated thoroughly and to bring to justice those responsible. We welcome the Government of Israel's commitment to addressing settler violence, as well as Foreign Minister Lapid's condemnation of the Umm Mufaqarah attack.

We are also concerned about the Israeli security forces' use of excessive force. We continue to urge Israel to uphold the principles of necessity and proportionality when defending its legitimate security interests.

The dire fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) carries the risk that it will be unable to pay salaries or its suppliers in full, starting next month. Rapid action is needed to improve the situation. The United Kingdom will continue to work with the PA to help it implement necessary reforms, and we urge our international partners to do the same.

Lastly, as we celebrated the International Day of the Girl Child last week, we were reminded of the impressive educational attainment rates for girls across the occupied Palestinian territories. We must celebrate that success and ensure that the vital provision of education, including to girls, is protected from the threat of instability.

In conclusion, the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process continues to impact negatively the lives of everyday Israelis and Palestinians, and the ongoing conflict is in need of a just and lasting resolution. We continue to urge all parties to renew their commitment to peacebuilding and to work to deliver it. The United Kingdom continues to believe that a two-State solution offers the only meaningful prospect for durable peace.

**Mr. Ladeb** (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I welcome you, Mr. President, as you preside over this meeting. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his detailed briefing. We also value the efforts of the Secretary-General, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and all United Nations staff in the occupied territories for alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people and promoting opportunities for peace in the Middle East. We also commend the role of the civil society in supporting those efforts and thank Ms. Hanan Ashrawi and Mr. Levy for their briefings,

In the face of historical injustice to which the Palestinian people have been subjected for decades and the continued systematic violation by the occupying Power of their most basic legitimate rights, the international community has been demanding a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, an end to the occupation and enabling the Palestinian people to establish their independent and sovereign State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Despite the international support for the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people and the two-State solution, the occupying Power continues to flout international law and Security Council resolutions, most recently resolution 2334 (2016), by imposing a de facto policy on the ground, further implementing its expansionist settlement plans, forcibly displacing Palestinians and confiscating their homes and land while attempting to change the historical, demographic and legal status of Jerusalem and committing other serious violations, in addition to repeated settler attacks against Palestinians in the West Bank — all in the absence of any accountability.

In that context, Tunisia reiterates its categorical rejection of attempts to change the status quo of Jerusalem's holy sites and renews its support for the historical Hashemite guardianship of those sites.

In the light of the violence and attacks on the Palestinian civilian population, including women and children, Tunisia also calls for their protection, as guaranteed by international law.

The continued situation in the occupied territories risks further escalation, especially in the absence of any real prospects for resolving the conflict on the basis of the resolutions of international legitimacy and the agreed terms of reference. That has led to feelings of injustice, despair and hopelessness among Palestinians, especially among youth.

As a result of its responsibility to maintain international peace and security, the Security Council is required to undertake what is needed to ensure the implementation of its resolutions concerning the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in particular a halt to settlements and the push towards breaking the deadlock in the Middle East peace process.

Under the powers granted by the Security Council to the Middle East Quartet, we look forward to the Quartet

intensifying its efforts to help resume negotiations as soon as possible. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the proposal of holding an international peace conference under the auspices of the Quartet. Given the deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, particularly in the light of the aftermath of the recent military aggression, the continuation of the blockade for more than 14 years and the consequences of the coronavirus disease pandemic, we stress the importance of facilitating humanitarian access, lifting restrictions on the freedom of movement and trade and refraining from obstructing reconstruction efforts.

We also call on international donors to increase the level of humanitarian assistance and response in the occupied Palestinian territories and to support relevant United Nations efforts. In that context, we emphasize the urgent need to ensure additional funding to cover the deficit in UNRWA's budget. We also call for predictable and sustained funding for its budget. We look forward to the holding of the donors conference that Jordan is planning to organize jointly with Sweden to support UNRWA.

In conclusion, we reiterate that achieving security and stability in the Middle East region inevitably includes a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, in accordance with international law, resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Tunisia will remain steadfast in supporting just causes, at the forefront of which is the Palestinian question until the Palestinian people regain all their legitimate rights — to which there is no statute of limitations.

**Mr. Tirumurti (India):** I welcome your presiding over today's meeting, Mr. President. I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing. I also thank Ms. Hanan Ashrawi and Mr. Daniel Levy for their insights, and I welcome the participation of the Ambassador of Israel and the Ambassador of Palestine in our meeting.

India's position on the Palestine issue is consistent and well known. We firmly believe that only the establishment of a sovereign, viable and independent State of Palestine, within recognized and mutually agreed borders, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, taking into consideration the legitimate security concerns of Israel, can deliver a durable and lasting solution to the conflict.

I reiterate India's long-standing position that the Palestine issue should be resolved through a peacefully negotiated settlement that promotes a two-State solution. The maintenance of peace and stability is a prerequisite for that to go forward.

Consolidating the ceasefire in Gaza and expediting its reconstruction should continue to be a priority of the United Nations and the international community. We call on all parties to the conflict to respect the ceasefire, continue their cooperation and coordination with the United Nations, and take concrete steps that would improve the economic and humanitarian situation of the civilians in Gaza. I also reiterate the urgent need to address the underlying causes that have resulted in the deterioration of the situation in Gaza. I reaffirm India's call for regular and predictable transfers of aid and other essential items to Gaza to ease the humanitarian situation and facilitate early reconstruction, as well as for appropriate use of such aid. It is also important that the international donor community support the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip through the Palestinian Authority.

We also encourage the parties to remain engaged on the prisoner exchange discussions and work towards a positive outcome, that being a humanitarian imperative. We appreciate the role of Egypt in facilitating those talks.

We condemn all acts of violence against civilians, as well as all acts of provocation, incitement and destruction. We call for parties to desist from provocative action and inflammatory rhetoric in the interest of peace and stability. We underscore the need to respect and maintain the historic status quo in the holy sites of Jerusalem.

We are concerned by the Palestinian Authority's precarious fiscal situation, which has been further exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The international community needs to support the Palestinian socioeconomic recovery, with a focus on social protection, in line with the priorities of the Palestinian Authority.

We appreciate the recent announcements to improve the economic and administrative relationships between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Those announcements have to be translated into action.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East plays an important

role in providing humanitarian and development assistance. India has continued to support the Agency's core budget through annual voluntary contributions.

India has been consistently supporting Palestinian nation-building efforts under the India-Palestine development partnership. In addition to our ongoing projects in the health, education and technology sectors, we are also implementing quick impact projects that would benefit the local communities. Those programmes have continued despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also call upon the international community, the Middle East Quartet in particular, to take concrete steps towards resuming and facilitating peace negotiations. In that regard, we welcome the continued high-level exchanges between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority. Those exchanges will help build confidence between the parties and create a favourable environment for the resumption of peace negotiations. Such measures should run parallel to efforts to restart direct negotiations, which remain the best pathway to reach the two-State solution.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing. We listened attentively to the civil society representatives, Mr. Daniel Levy and Ms. Hanan Ashrawi. We welcome the personal participation in this meeting of Mr. Kamau.

The achievement of lasting peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa remains among the top priorities on the agenda of the Security Council. We note with regret that no progress has yet been seen in resolving the myriad regional crises. We are also troubled by the fact that most conflicts are not only compounded by external intervention, but are also exacerbated by the attempts of actors to promote unilateral solutions, while ignoring the opinions of local residents, tribal, ethnic, religious and denominational groups.

It is clear that one of the foundations for the establishment of long-term stability in the region is progress in the Middle East settlement process, including the core element of a fair solution to the Palestinian problem. Unfortunately, tensions on the West Bank of the Jordan river and in the Gaza Strip continue unabated, exacerbating the problems of maintaining a ceasefire, providing humanitarian assistance to the affected Palestinians and reviving the peace process.

Against that backdrop, unilateral actions, which are fraught with dangerous consequences, continue. Such actions include the confiscation and destruction of Palestinian property, the construction of settlements, including construction plans in the occupied Syrian Golan, arbitrary arrests, violations of the status of the holy sites and violence. At the same time, we note the importance of taking Israel's security interests into account.

In that regard, we reiterate the call to abandon provocative actions and unilateral steps. International cooperation and concerted measures must accompany the progress in achieving a Middle East settlement. In our view, the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance to all those affected and in need in the Gaza Strip is the main objective in the upcoming period. The work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as well as the international community's support for the Agency, are as important as ever.

At the same time, we note again that the entire range of final status issues must be addressed in direct negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Those negotiations should be launched without delay. As a permanent member of the Security Council and a participant in the Quartet of international mediators, the Russian Federation assiduously strives to achieve a settlement on an internationally recognized basis — United Nations resolutions, Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative — that provides for the creation of an independent, sovereign and territorially contiguous Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We call on our partners in the Quartet — the United Nations, the European Union and the United States — to step up cooperation to that end. On 14 October, we held another virtual meeting with special representatives. We emphasize the importance of convening ministerial-level meetings of the Quartet, including in the lead-up to the thirtieth anniversary of the Madrid Conference on the Middle East. We are also ready to engage in dialogue with key regional players and to involve them in the efforts of the Quartet.

We note that a number of States in the Middle East region have chosen to normalize relations with Israel. We believe that such efforts will have a positive impact on the situation in region only if their focus is on finding a solution to the Palestinian issue on an

internationally recognized legal basis. As the recent outbreak of tensions around the Gaza Strip has shown, there is no other way forward.

The Russian Federation is actively cooperating with various Palestinian stakeholders in the interest of overcoming the internal division. We are facilitating the efforts our Egyptian friends to that end. We welcome, in particular, the recent holding of the Palestinian-Jordanian-Egyptian summit in Cairo and express the hope that it will be a first step towards a fundamental change in the status quo, which is at an impasse.

**Mr. Dang (Viet Nam):** I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his informative briefing. I also thank Mr. Daniel Levy and Ms. Hanan Ashrawi for their insights. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Palestine and Israel in today's meeting.

We are concerned over the continued violence in the occupied Palestinian territory. Since the announcement of the cessation of hostilities in May, tensions and violence between the parties have, unfortunately, not subsided in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Clashes continue to cause a rising number of Palestinian casualties, and settler-related violence remains a major concern during the olive-harvest season.

We are particularly troubled by the fact that children have long been exposed to violence. As the occupying Power, Israel has an obligation to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population, especially children. The Israeli authorities must cease the excessive use of force against civilians and carry out impartial and prompt investigations into all violent attacks. The culture of impunity must be ended. We also urge all parties to exercise restraint and refrain from any action or rhetoric that may fuel tensions.

The seemingly endless violence that we have witnessed only underscores the importance of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the conflict. As long as the occupation, settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian properties continue, there will be no sustainable peace.

The trends on the ground are not encouraging. We remain concerned by reports that settlement projects are being advanced in the West Bank, including in Jerusalem. We reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the prospects for achieving a viable two-State solution.

In line with resolution 2334 (2016), we call on the Israeli authorities to permanently end all settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian property in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. That would be an important step towards building trust and returning to negotiations.

Once again, we reiterate our strong support for the two-State solution, including the establishment of a State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, that peacefully coexists alongside the State of Israel, with secure and internationally recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines and a negotiated settlement, in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016).

We welcome the recent engagement between senior officials from the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. That is an important and positive step towards strengthening cooperation in the areas of security and economic policies. We encourage further direct engagement and call on both sides to work together to facilitate the reconstruction of Gaza and boost the Palestinian economy.

Concrete steps towards that end will contribute to creating an atmosphere of trust between the parties and paving a path towards broad and significant dialogue and negotiations. We welcome all efforts by international actors to facilitate the building of that momentum.

We note the recent steps to ease access restrictions into and out of the Strip. All humanitarian and reconstruction efforts should be further facilitated, since the situation in Gaza remains volatile. We appreciate the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other United Nations agencies in ensuring the delivery of critical aid to Palestinians in Gaza. However, humanitarian staff from the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations must be able to enter and exit Gaza on a regular basis. Crossings should be open to commercial and humanitarian goods and reconstruction materials. In the long term, the blockade of Gaza must be fully lifted.

In that connection, we urge the international community to heed the Secretary-General's call for an increase of \$6.1 million, including 43 additional posts, for UNRWA to support education, health care and general assistance to Palestine refugees.

In conclusion, we would like reiterate Viet Nam's unwavering support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Foreign Affairs Principal Secretary of Kenya.

Since 1948, the Security Council has addressed the situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian question on numerous occasions. Every month the Council gets to hear of developments and observations and recommendations stemming from the important work of the Special Coordinator's Office and various briefers engaged on this issue. I thank Mr. Wennesland, Ms. Ashrawi and Mr. Levy for their interventions this morning.

I would also like to recognize the presence of the representatives of Israel and Palestine at this debate.

As the body entrusted with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, we need to ask: what else can we do to sustainably answer the Palestinian question? Kenya's interest has always been and will remain to support an end to this lasting threat to peace and security in the Middle East. Threats to peace and security in the Middle East have a damaging domino effect that reaches many parts of the world, including the subregion and even our own neighbourhood. Let no one believe, even for one fleeting moment, owing to the character of the debate today that Kenya does not remain gravely concerned with the situation in the Middle East outside of Israel and Palestine. Kenya, though distant from the Middle East, has tragically seen Kenyan blood and lives lost to terrorists inspired by the politics and the situation in the Middle East.

The Council has called for and ordered ceasefires, the latest one being four months ago, following the 11 days of hostilities between Israel and Hamas. It has submitted draft resolution after draft resolution with recommendations and principles, including resolution 2334 (2016), to frame a negotiated peaceful settlement for that protracted conflict.

Indeed, Kenya has called for the reinforcement of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as have many Member States present here today. It has called for a cessation of Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and of demolitions, including those

that pose a risk to the actualization of the two-State solution and undermine the territorial contiguity of a viable Palestinian State based on the 1967 lines.

We have highlighted the importance of secure borders and of safety and security for both Israelis and Palestinians, the protection of the status quo of Jerusalem and the important work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in contributing to the stability of the subregion.

We have regularly taken note of the progress made, particularly when it comes to cooperation between the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities and regional mediation efforts.

Kenya in particular has repeatedly condemned the terrorist attacks and acts conducive to terrorism perpetrated by Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other affiliated militant groups against Israeli civilians and civilian infrastructure. We have condemned those who call for the application of international human rights law and international law but still violate the same among their own communities.

As intractable as the conflict may seem, in the past, there have been political breakthroughs that have come despite the most serious challenges and the most insurmountable barriers. What then is the missing link to resolving this protracted situation in a sustainable manner? I suggest to the Council that however much it may have done or wish to do, in the end, the answer lies in the hands and the minds of Israeli and Palestinian people and their leaders. We should no longer prescribe peace; rather, we should allow Palestinians and Israelis to chart the course for peace and harmonious coexistence through genuine and truly inclusive dialogue that is rooted in their communities. We are persuaded that the leaders of both parties must intentionally embrace, scale up and actualize mutual peace by empowering those among them that are working for peace. And it is this grass-roots tier that I would like to speak about for the rest of my statement.

At the formal peace talk stream, what we call “official channels”, there has been a tendency to frame and discuss this conflict and peace process around

legal and political frameworks that seem far removed from important elements that Israeli and Palestinian communities at the grass roots, which currently coexist side by side, consider to be important and with which they are grappling on a daily basis. The result of this Track One approach has proved that the “solutions” or “conclusions” offered at this level are geared primarily to macropolitical and/or macroeconomic issues, while the layered sociopolitical-theological tensions and other dimensions of society continue to bubble underneath.

A few weeks ago, during the briefings of the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (see S/PV.8869), one of the young female civil society briefers reminded us that the conflict we are dealing with today is partly the result of the approach taken 20 years ago and which is still being used. This approach prioritizes “official channels” over diverse grass-roots-based organizations and the channels that the grass roots themselves create. These organizations embody years of directly and boldly grappling with sociopolitical-theological concepts, whether they be related to the Muslim, Jewish or Christian faiths — to define, interpret and contextualize the historical and immediate political experiences and realities of the people’s daily lives.

Let us therefore hear more from them and revisit, reframe and reassess the Security Council’s efforts in the same courageous vein embodied by both Israeli and Palestinian young and grass-roots leaders, who are daily coexisting, as I said, and constructively building interethnic and intercultural peace, who are calling things as they are and who are seeking accountability for those things where it is needed.

We make these observations not to make any false equivalences but to urge actual movement away from the current endless conversation that has seized the Security Council to rapid yet nonetheless longer-term solutions and tangible outcomes to this situation.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

*The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.*