



Security Council

Seventy-third year

8375th meeting

Thursday, 18 October 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Cordova Soria (Bolivia (Plurinational State of))

Members:

China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
France	Mr. Delattre
Kazakhstan	Mr. Ashikbayev
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

18-32554 (E)



Accessible document

Please recycle



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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Namibia, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Uruguay, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and 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 this meeting: Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem.

Mr. Mladenov is joining us via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Chargé d'Affairs a. i. of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; and His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer, League of Arab States to the United Nations.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in

accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: Every month, I brief the Council on the situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian question. Every month, we speak of how continuing settlement construction and the demolition of Palestinian structures in the occupied West Bank undermine the very foundations of the prospect of a sovereign Palestinian State. We condemn terror, violence and incitement that eat away at the trust between Israelis and Palestinians, and we call for unity and reconciliation. Every month, we appeal to political leaders on both sides to find their way back to the table for negotiations, to reverse the negative trends on the ground and to restore hope that it is through peaceful negotiations, not violence, that both Israelis and Palestinians will be able to live side by side, masters of their own fate.

Day after day, however, we see the situation on the ground slipping in a different direction. We see it sliding into a one-State reality of perpetual occupation and violence that does not serve peace; we see the international consensus on how to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict being challenged. Yet we all understand that without a negotiated resolution based on the final-status issues — as they have been defined by Israelis and Palestinians themselves — there can be no sustainable peace that realizes the national, historic and religious aspirations of both peoples. It is our shared responsibility to restore that prospect, to facilitate negotiations, to help the weaker party, to insulate the process from radicals and extremists and to show results.

Before I turn to the most urgent questions related to the situation in Gaza, I would like to begin with developments in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where violence is on the rise and the Israeli authorities have continued the demolition and confiscation of Palestinian-owned structures. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 39 structures were demolished or seized in the West Bank, including five in East Jerusalem, displacing approximately 33 people and affecting the livelihoods of over 100 others. Thirty-

four of the targeted structures were in Area C, including five installed in solidarity with Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu, the Bedouin community at imminent risk of demolition and displacement. On 23 September, the Israeli authorities requested the residents of Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu to self-demolish their homes by 1 October or face demolition by the authorities, in line with the 5 September final ruling of the Israeli High Court. On 8 October, the authorities extended the validity of land requisition orders for roadwork to enable the demolition. The community was given one week to object to the order.

Khan Al-Ahmar is among the 18 communities located in or adjacent to the controversial E-1 area, where plans for new settlement construction would create a continuous built-up area between the Ma'ale Adumim and East Jerusalem, undermining the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, along with the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, the League of Arab States and others, have called on Israel not to go ahead with its plan to demolish the village. I once again join that call for a cessation of demolitions and other measures that run contrary to Israel's obligations under international law.

All structures lacking permits from the Israeli authorities in Area C and East Jerusalem, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain, are potentially subject to demolition. While the rate of demolitions has declined since the beginning of 2017, over 13,000 demolition orders are pending against structures in Area C, three-quarters of which are on private Palestinian land.

Meanwhile, on 14 October the Israeli Government reportedly approved the allocation of \$6 million for advancing the construction of 31 housing units in the Jewish settlement in Hebron, which would be the first new construction there in 16 years. I reiterate the long-standing United Nations position that all settlement activities are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace.

Violent incidents also continued in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Among those, on 7 October an Israeli man and woman were shot dead by a Palestinian man in the Barkan Industrial Area in the West Bank. The assailant fled the scene and the Israeli security forces are currently carrying out a widespread search operation in the area. On 12 October, a Palestinian

woman was killed near a checkpoint south of Nablus; she had been injured by stones allegedly thrown by Israeli assailants. I extend my condolences to the bereaved families. Such incidents must be condemned in the strongest of terms, and I call on everyone to stand up to violence and condemn terror.

Settler-related violence is also a continuing concern. There were 23 attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians, resulting in 1 death, 12 injuries and property damage. To date in 2018, according to OCHA, over 1,600 Palestinian-owned trees have been vandalized across the West Bank. As the annual olive harvest begins, concerns are particularly high. I call on the authorities to ensure smooth access of Palestinian farmers to their land and that sufficient measures be taken to protect farmers and their property from attacks.

In recent weeks, protests at the Gaza fence have expanded to include night demonstrations. Hamas and other militants continued to send incendiary kites and balloons across the border, causing fires on the Israeli side. The Israeli Defence Forces have responded with riot dispersal means and live fire. Thirty-three Palestinians, including nine children, have been killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations and other incidents. Soldiers were meanwhile injured.

Intense clashes took place at the Gaza fence during Friday protests on 12 October, in which an estimated 20,000 Palestinians participated. Seven people were killed and over 150 injured by live fire on that day alone. Incendiary kites launched from Gaza started fires, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated at the fence and a group of protesters breached the fence and entered Israeli territory on that day. In addition, overall during the reporting period, Palestinian militants fired two rockets that landed in Israel. Israel responded by launching 45 missiles and shells at sites in the Gaza Strip.

In the early hours of 17 October, Palestinian militants fired a rocket from central Gaza towards Israel that hit and significantly damaged a residential house in the Israeli city of Beersheba. The city, some 40 kilometres from Gaza and well beyond the ring of communities in the immediate vicinity of the Strip, can be reached only by medium-range rockets. After the 9 August Grad rocket that landed in the outskirts of Beersheba, that was the second projectile to reach such a distance since the 2014 conflict. Three Israelis were reportedly injured. A second rocket landed in the sea

south-west of Tel Aviv. The Israeli air force responded with a series of air strikes, firing at several locations, most of them identified as military sites around Gaza. One Palestinian militant was killed and at least two were injured in a strike on a group that was in the process of launching rockets.

On 11 October, the Israeli Defence Forces announced that they had destroyed another tunnel extending from near the city of Khan Yunis in Gaza, some 200 meters inside Israeli territory.

In response to violence at the fence, for the third time since March, on 7 October Israel reduced the permissible fishing area off the Gaza coast from nine to six nautical miles. Again on 17 October, following the rocket attack on Beersheba, Israel further reduced the fishing zone to three nautical miles and closed all crossings between Israel and Gaza.

I brief the Council today as we enter a pivotal phase in Egyptian-led efforts to overcome intra-Palestinian divisions. I would like to convey two very clear messages to the Council.

The first is that the situation in Gaza is imploding. That is not hyperbole; it is not alarmism. It is a reality. The World Bank recently warned that the Gaza economy is in free fall, with an official unemployment rate of 53 per cent and over 70 per cent among Palestinian youth. Every second person in Gaza now lives below the poverty line. All key indicators — humanitarian, economic, security and political — continue to deteriorate. We remain on the brink of another potentially devastating conflict — a conflict that nobody claims to want, but a conflict that needs much more than just words to be prevented.

As I have outlined in detail in recent months, the United Nations and its partners have engaged, in response to requests from several Security Council members, in an extraordinary effort to stabilize the situation in Gaza and prevent an escalation. We have done so in full coordination with Egypt and in full transparency with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The effort has aimed at avoiding war and facilitating a return to the informal understandings reached in 2014 to maintain calm. That will not only alleviate the suffering of 2 million Palestinians, but will give political leaders time to achieve progress in reconciliation. Since the beginning of this process, the United Nations has firmly held that we need to

make every effort to return Gaza to the control of the legitimate Palestinian Government.

But let me assure the Council that, barring substantial steps to reverse the current course, this precarious sense of calm is doomed to give way under the mounting pressure. It is already beginning to fray. Recent days have seen tensions and violent confrontations rising again. That should be of great concern to all of us. The gravity of the situation compels us to take decisive action.

The latest rockets that were fired from Gaza towards Beersheba are a dangerous escalation of the situation. Unfortunately, they also fit a pattern of provocations that seek to bring Israel and Gaza into another deadly conflict. It is our responsibility to do everything possible to avoid that outcome. I am afraid that there is no more time for words. Now is the time for action, and we must see very clear actions on all sides that de-escalate the situation. Otherwise, the consequences will be terrible for everyone.

My second key message is cautiously more optimistic. There is a growing consensus and determination among key international and regional partners on moving forward to defuse the powder keg that is Gaza. On 27 September, a ministerial meeting on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was held on the margins of the high-level general debate. Member States contributed generously to the Agency, raising some \$122 million. This very impressive collective international effort has prevented an immediate shutdown of key UNRWA services, including in Gaza. Nevertheless, a significant funding gap remains.

Also on 27 September, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) agreed on the implementation of an urgent set of humanitarian projects in Gaza. Those interventions are aimed at addressing the immediate energy, water, sanitation, health care and economic needs of the population. The goals are concrete, realistic and achievable. There is no discussion of projects such as airports, seaports or sea channels. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Government of the State of Qatar for its swift and generous response to the AHLC call by providing some \$60 million for fuel to increase the supply of electricity in the Gaza Strip.

Relieving the humanitarian pressure on the ground will reduce the threat of escalation and give space for Egyptian-led efforts to return the legitimate Palestinian Government to Gaza. The Middle East Quartet has also endorsed that approach. Disengaging from Gaza, plunging it into another conflict or tightening the closures furthers the divide, with devastating humanitarian and political consequences for the Palestinian national cause.

I appeal to all Council members and to all friends of Israel and Palestine to join the United Nations in calling on all sides to step back from the brink. All parties must maintain their continued commitment to the 2014 ceasefire arrangements. Hamas and other militant groups must immediately and effectively stop all provocations and attacks, including rockets and mortars, IEDs, attempts to breach the fence, incendiary balloons and kites and tunnel construction, and rein in all violence at the border. Israel must restore the delivery of critical supplies to Gaza and improve the movement and access of goods and people, and Israeli security forces must exercise maximum restraint in the use of live ammunition. The Palestinian Authority must not disengage from Gaza and must continue its engagement with the international community to help alleviate the suffering of its people in Gaza. Any effort by any party to block the provision of critical assistance designed to relieve humanitarian suffering must not be tolerated.

These steps are only temporary and aim at avoiding war. We must never forget that, at its heart, Gaza is not a humanitarian problem. It is a political problem. Humanitarian efforts are taking place in coordination with and in support of Egyptian efforts to bring Gaza back under the full control of the legitimate Palestinian Government. The Government's return to Gaza and the lifting of the suffocating movement and access restrictions are necessary for addressing not only the humanitarian and economic needs of the population in a sustainable manner, but also the very important political challenges ahead.

In addition to the unification of all Palestinians under one single, legitimate Palestinian National Authority, the bigger picture must also be addressed — an end to the occupation and the realization of a two-State solution based on relevant United Nations resolutions, with Gaza as an integral part. Make no mistake — the consequences of failure would be severe, just as the benefits of success would be profound.

Briefly turning to Lebanon, the country has entered its fifth month without a Government. Prime Minister-designate Hariri continues consultations for an agreement on a national unity Government. I hope that the political stakeholders will soon overcome their differences and provide Lebanon with a new Government that can deliver on its commitments vis-à-vis its citizens and the international community.

While the situation in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line remained calm, the rhetoric between Israel and Lebanon underpins a risk of miscalculation. It is essential that the parties refrain from provocative actions and renew their commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) in word and deed. Furthermore, I call on the Lebanese authorities to complete the investigation into the 4 August attack on a patrol of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

Turning to the situation on the Golan, military conflict on the Bravo side ceased in late July, with the Syrian Government regaining control of parts of the area of separation that had previously been under the control of various non-State armed opposition groups. In recent weeks, low levels of military activity have been observed in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) has assessed that this is due to controlled detonations of explosive ordnance as part of the clearance by Syrian security forces. I personally visited UNDOF facilities in the Israeli-occupied Golan on 4 October and was encouraged with the progress made in implementing the phased UNDOF plan for the continued return of forces to the Bravo side. I welcome the reopening on 15 October of the Quneitra crossing, which was facilitated by the parties to the 1974 Separation of Forces Agreement.

In closing, let me reiterate that we must break out of the endless cycle of emergency responses and stop-gap measures. The Palestinian people — whether they live in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in Gaza, or as refugees in the region — deserve sustainable and just solutions, just as the people of Israel deserve peace and security. Both deserve to have their national dignity and identity respected and to build a better future for themselves and their families. Palestinians deserve to be masters of their own fate, to be governed by democratically elected institutions, to have a State of their own that lives in peace and security with the State of Israel — without the walls of occupation, without the fear of reprisal or displacement, and certainly without

the fear that the entirety of their lives will be spent struggling with no end in sight.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his important briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. El-Ad.

Mr. El-Ad: It is very difficult, if not impossible, to fully convey the indignity, the outrage and the pain of a people denied the benefit of human rights for more than 50 years. Here in this Chamber, it is hard to articulate the flesh-and-blood meaning of the exposed lives Palestinians endure under occupation. But no matter how hard it is to describe, the real hardship is that of facing such an intolerable existence day in and day out, trying to live, raise a family and develop a community under those conditions.

It has been almost two years to the day since I last had the honour of speaking before the Council — two more years of occupation, two years in which the routine of the first 49 years of occupation continued. Since I last spoke here, 317 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces and 13 Israelis have been killed by Palestinians. Israel has demolished 294 Palestinian homes and has continued making arrests on a daily basis, including of minors. Israeli settlers have vandalized and uprooted thousands of olive trees and grapevines. Israeli security forces have continued to regularly enter Palestinian houses, sometimes coming in the dead of the night to wake children, register their names and take their pictures. Palestinians have lost countless hours waiting at checkpoints with no explanation. And so, the routine of the occupation marches on.

All of that is often referred to as the status quo. Yet, there is nothing static about that reality. It is a calculated and deliberate process of slowly splitting up an entire people, while fragmenting their land and disrupting their lives, separating Gaza from the West Bank, breaking up the West Bank into small enclaves and walling off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. Eventually, what remains are isolated bits that are easier to oppress — a family slated for eviction in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan; a community, such as Urif, south of Nablus, trying against all odds to hold on to its land and farm it in the face of Israel's long arm of unchecked settler violence; and all of Area A of the West Bank, conveniently said to be under full Palestinian control, but, in fact, essentially comprising large bantustans, slowly but surely being hemmed

in by an increasing number of new or expanding Israeli settlements.

None of that is random. All of it is policy-driven. Two of the most recent and most conspicuous examples are Israel's conduct in the recent protests in Gaza and its plans for Khan Al-Ahmar, a Palestinian shepherding community. Some 200 people live in Khan Al-Ahmar, just a few kilometres east of Jerusalem, in an area where Israel has long endeavoured to minimize the Palestinian presence and expand settlements. Israel plans to raze the entire community, claiming that all its structures were built illegally. The Government further claims that it has generously offered to relocate the community, even going so far as to guarantee that it would foot the bill for the relocation site. Israel also contends that its actions are legitimate. The High Court of Justice had given its seal of approval, had it not? But such claims are nothing short of distortions, carefully constructed by eager attorneys building on the unsound and unjust foundations of hollow legal formalisms.

First, there is no argument that the homes were built without permission from the Israeli authorities. But that is the case not because Palestinians are inherently law-breakers, as some in Israel suggest; rather it is because they have no other alternative. It is almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits from the Israeli authorities because the Israeli-established planning regime in the West Bank is meant by design to serve settlers and dispossess Palestinians.

Secondly, the Government failed to mention that the two relocation sites that it so generously offered leave something to be desired. One is beside a garbage dump and the other is next to a wastewater treatment facility. Moreover, relocation would completely undermine the community's ability to make a living.

Lastly, in its ruling, the High Court completely ignored the reality of the planning regime in the West Bank. The fact that the High Court approved the Government's decision does not make the demolition just or even legal. It only makes the justices complicit by proving that the action is nothing short of the war crime of the forcible transfer of protected people in an occupied territory.

With a population of nearly 2 million, the Gaza Strip has essentially become an open-air prison. Its inmates have been staging protests for the past six months, after suffering for more than a decade under an Israeli-imposed blockade that has led to economic collapse,

soaring unemployment rates, polluted drinking water, dwindling power supplies and, ultimately, deep despair. Since 30 March, more than 5,000 Palestinians have been injured by live Israeli gunfire and more than 170 have been killed, including at least 31 minors. The youngest were just little boys. Majdi Al-Satari, Yasser Abu Al-Naja and Nasser Musabeh were just 11 years old when they were killed.

As with Khan Al-Ahmar, Israel's High Court of Justice found Israeli policies vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip to be legal on a range of issues, from authorizing various aspects of the blockade to recently approving rules of engagement that allow Israeli snipers to continue firing from a distance at demonstrators inside Gaza. The only problem with all of that is that none of it is legal or moral or even remotely acceptable. Yet, as long as that methodical, relentless process does not trigger international outrage and international action, Israel can successfully continue to carry off that contradiction in terms — oppressing millions, while somehow still being considered a democracy. That, in a nutshell, is the pattern that the occupation follows. Israeli institutions, in which Palestinians have no representation, move pieces of paper along a well-choreographed disassembly line. How do we legalize the demolition of that community? How do we whitewash yet another killing? How do we take over that plot of Palestinian land?

With more than 50 years of experience, we have had plenty of time to perfect that well-oiled farce. We are now quite the experts at constructing a facade of legality, which has been very successful in allowing us not to have to deal with any real international consequences. None of those actions has anything to do with security, as Israel tries to argue. However, they affect the amorphous construct called the Middle East peace process. If one looks beyond the blinders of the process, it is clear to see how its supposedly yet to be negotiated outcome is, in reality, being dictated day in and day out by unilateral Israeli actions.

The only thing being processed here is Palestine. Consider the following historical analogies. Voter suppression was a cornerstone of the American south, under Jim Crow laws. But we have done one better — delivering no less than voter obliteration. As the occupied Palestinians remain non-citizens, not only can they not vote but they have absolutely no representation in the Israeli institutions that govern their lives. I will take a look at the discriminatory planning mechanisms and the separate legal systems in

the occupied territories. They are reminiscent of South Africa's grand apartheid. Granted, neither analogy is a perfect fit but history does not offer us precision. It offers us a moral compass, which points towards rejecting Israel's oppression of Palestinians with the same unwavering conviction with which humankind's conscience rejected those other grand injustices.

Israel, however, appears to be following a different compass. While doing so, it is also busy removing any obstacles that might keep it from its objective. Ongoing efforts to legislate against Israeli human rights organizations now go hand in hand with the routine in which opposition to the occupation is being equated with treason. The Israeli Government's statements ahead of today's Council meeting are just one more unfortunate example of the spirit of the times. Therefore, I say to Prime Minister Netanyahu that he will never silence us or the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who reject a present founded on supremacy and oppression and stand for a future built on equality, freedom and human rights. I am not a traitor, nor am I a hero. The heroes are the Palestinians who endure the occupation with courage and perseverance, wake up in the middle of the night to find soldiers barging into their homes, know that if a loved one is killed, impunity is all but guaranteed to the perpetrators and stay on their land, knowing that it is only a matter of time before the bulldozers arrive.

I am one of a team of some 40 committed Israelis and Palestinians. We do not focus on how many is the right number of States to achieve a solution. Instead, we focus on the realization of human rights. That is why we reject the occupation. We reject it because the current reality is wholly and utterly incompatible with what is right and what is just. It is a reality wholly and utterly incompatible with a life of freedom and dignity for all 13 million people — Israelis and Palestinians alike — living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. And that is the future we strive for. Even if it now seems far off, and receding ever further away, we can make that future a reality. Assertive international action can make it happen. It is the only viable non-violent option. The world must let Israel know that it will no longer stand idly by and that it will take action against the continued dismantling of the Palestinian people.

The rules-based international order will not defend itself, and the successful fragmentation of Palestine is detrimental to Palestinians and Israelis alike, as well

as to international law and the values enshrined in it. It is the role of the Security Council and the delegations seated in this Chamber to oversee precisely that. The stakes are high. The Security Council must take action. In fact, it has already decided to do so, even if in a very limited fashion. However, it is a matter of record that the Secretary-General has so far had little to report to the Council on the implementation of paragraph 5 of resolution 2334 (2016).

Before closing, I would like to take us all back to Khan Al-Ahmar. The need for action there is acute and urgent. As Israel tests the international community's resolve to see how far and how fast it can proceed, what might happen any day now in Khan Al-Ahmar will determine the fate of Palestinian communities all over the West Bank. So far, Israeli preparations to demolish Khan Al-Ahmar continue unabated. High-level international statements have had no impact — not even the united voice, as expressed on 20 September, of the five current European members of the Council, joined by former member Italy and future members Belgium and Germany. They have my sincerest thanks and deep appreciation for those statements. Without their efforts, I doubt if Khan Al-Ahmar would still be standing today.

Yet, Israel has already answered their call by continuing with preparations for the demolition. Just a few days ago, the Minister of Defence described actions that are nothing short of a forcible transfer as “moving a small group of people within a several-kilometre radius”. He called on the Council to stop its “flagrant interference” in Israel's plans, as if the forcible transfer of Khan Al-Ahmar, a strategic step in Israel's dismantling project, is somehow an internal and domestic matter. The members of the Security Council have spoken, and they have received Israel's answer. Action must now follow.

The President: I thank Mr. El-Ad for his briefing.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We warmly congratulate the Plurinational State of Bolivia on acceding to the presidency of the Security Council and express our appreciation to you, Madam, for your skilled leadership of the Council.

I thank Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing to the Council today. I also extend

our thanks to Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem, for his presentation, further exposing the dismal realities of the situation and sharing the concerns of civil society as they witness the distress of a people whose human rights are being so grossly violated and the destruction of the chances for peace and stability for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Against that backdrop and in view of the many regrettable developments since our last debate (see S/PV.8316), including escalating punitive measures against the Palestinian people and leadership, it is necessary to clarify certain matters.

Standing up for oneself and one's rights should never be equated with disrespect of anyone or misconstrued as a provocation. It is in fact an utmost expression of respect for one's rights and dignity, regardless of the consequences. When the American patriot Patrick Henry declared “give me liberty or give me death”, he was not disrespecting or provoking anyone, but rather insisting on his right to live freely. It was considered an act of heroism, moral courage, and reverence for the liberty due to all humankind. The Charter of the United Nations has affirmed that right of all peoples to self-determination.

As Palestinians continue to be deprived of this right, it has been affirmed and called for in countless resolutions and declarations endorsed by a vast majority of States and peoples worldwide. Our right to self-determination and to live freely is a legitimate and inalienable right — a right we will never forsake; a right that we will not negotiate with anyone, nor will we ask permission to exercise it from anyone. It is the right of the Palestinian people to exercise it and they will exercise it alone, as has been the case with all peoples who have exercised the right to self-determination. Why, after all these years, considering humankind's progress and the understandings reached on the universal desire and right to freedom, why would the Palestinian people be expected to be any different? Why would they be expected to forever submit to foreign occupation and colonial domination?

Also affirmed in these Halls, year after year, is the fact that peace can never be realized in the absence of human rights and can never be built on the dehumanization of others. That has been proven repeatedly throughout history. We therefore agree with a statement made in the recent past by the United States

Permanent Representative, Mrs. Haley, before the Council on Foreign Relations, that

“peace and security cannot be achieved in isolation from human rights ... Desperate people subject to humiliation and abuse will inevitably resort to violence.”

It is true that such a situation can never be a path to peace, and a peace so imposed will never be viable. The situation of Palestine is no exception. Yet, despite the extreme human rights crisis being endured, our people continue, more often than not, to choose non-violence and peaceful protest.

What we are witnessing, however, are precisely such short-sighted, inhumane policies as Israel, the occupying Power, always chooses violence, brutalizing the Palestinian civilian population and colonizing its land, with zero consequence, supplemented by the recent United States decisions contravening United Nations resolutions, pressuring and vilifying the Palestinian leadership, and politicizing desperately needed humanitarian aid, including for more than 5.4 million Palestine refugees.

As part of an attempt to impose a so-called peace deal, such policies do nothing to help overcome the political impasse but rather harden it and cause more mistrust, which is already at an all-time high. Moreover, such policies prejudice and undermine just solutions to the core issues, prolonging the conflict and ensuring only more instability, insecurity and hardship.

We categorically reject these policies and the distorted, punitive, negative narratives accompanying them, which demean the legitimacy of Palestinian national aspirations and dismiss our rights, including those of our refugees. We also refute attempts to discredit the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which operates on the basis of a strong General Assembly mandate and has been consistently lauded by host countries and the international community — including the United States — for its exemplary humanitarian and development programmes and proven contribution to regional stability over the decades.

We refuse to accept such policies and rhetoric and respectfully stand up for our rights, as enshrined in universal covenants and countless United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council. We do so peacefully and unwaveringly, committed to

all political, diplomatic, legal and civil means to secure our rights. We reject the pretexts used to continue denying those rights and exempting Israel from its violations. We cannot accept continued appeasement and hesitance to hold Israel accountable for its crimes, even as it flagrantly breaches all obligations as an occupying Power, threatening the very existence of our people in their homeland and even boasting of this in the most sinister of ways.

We cannot accept continued lip service to the peace process while Israel keeps proving how empty its commitment to negotiations and the two-State solution actually is, all the while entrenching its occupation, mocking the international community and still demanding privileged treatment. Israel should not be permitted to continue thwarting credible negotiations aimed at achieving just solutions to the final status issues — Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders, security, water and prisoners — solutions which we all know to be vital to establishing lasting peace and security between the two peoples.

All who call for negotiations should make it clear that these must be based on the long-standing parameters and terms of reference set forth by the relevant resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. These are not preconditions; they are the foundation and guarantees of a just peace, which would inherently mean addressing the legitimate rights and concerns of both sides. Trying to accommodate illegitimate asks, claims and actions will never solve the problem; it will only create new ones, as we have seen over the 25 exhausting and futile years of the Oslo process.

As affirmed by the late former Secretary-General Kofi Annan in one of the last pieces he penned on behalf of The Elders, regarding the conflict:

“[A] people deprived of liberty and dignity will never be pacified. Nor will they meekly accept a settlement imposed by outsiders that redraws borders and redefines sovereignty without popular consent. Any fresh approach to peacemaking must be welcome in principle ... Yet, if it does not address the root causes of the conflict, including historic dispossession, illegal settlement expansion, the status of Jerusalem as a shared capital and the rights of Palestinian refugees, the deal will be doomed to failure.”

Those words ring alarmingly today. We have continually called on the international community to uphold its collective responsibility to bring an end to the Israeli occupation and this 70-year injustice. We do so again today, urging the Security Council to uphold its duties under the Charter of the United Nations and to act in conformity with its own resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), to address the root causes and tangibly contribute to a solution that will be just, comprehensive and lasting. We have also continually affirmed our commitment to the two-State solution as the path to peace, insisting, however, that it be a just peace — not one stripping our people of their land and rights. We do so again today.

How can those seeking to make peace condone, support or excuse the violations being perpetrated every single day against the Palestinian people by Israel and its destruction of the prospects for peace? They must not condone or excuse the savage killing of innocent civilians who have been cruelly denied protection for decades by an international community that has appeased and armed the occupation to the maximum with little remorse. While they may be seen as statistics by some, the Palestinian men, women and children who have been killed — including over 200 peaceful protesters, among them at least 45 children, since the Great March of Return in Gaza began, and including the mother of eight children, Aisha Mohammed Rabi, who was killed last week in the West Bank by Israeli settlers, as well as the tens of thousands who have been injured by the Israeli occupying forces — are not just numbers to us, but our sisters and brothers whose pain and losses we grieve for and weigh heavily on us, not least on our collective belief that justice and peace are possible.

They must not condone or excuse attempts to clear away people — human beings — like rubbish, with no regard for rights and dignity, or the demolition of their homes and lives. The forced transfer of people, as is happening in the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar and witnessed so many times before in occupied Palestine over the years, constitutes ethnic cleansing. This is not a mere decision by Israel's so-called judiciary, which has proven to serve and subsidize the occupation and where the chances for minimal justice for Palestinians are nil; this is a war crime.

They must not condone, excuse or in any way support the colonization of a people's ancestral lands, as is being committed flagrantly in occupied

Palestine, including East Jerusalem, where the Israeli Government not only persists with illegal settlement activities in all their manifestations — in flagrant breach of resolution 2334 (2016) and countless other resolutions — but openly declares its intent to annex our land, with officials, including the so-called Justice Minister, leading the charge in flat-out contempt of international law and the international community.

They must not condone or excuse the imprisonment of 2 million Palestinians in Gaza under the occupation's illegal blockade, by which Israel has caused humanitarian and socioeconomic devastation and exploited and deepened the Palestinian division, which regrettably remains a dark stain on our national history that has not been expunged despite many attempts at reconciliation, including the important effort of our brothers from Egypt, which we appreciate immensely.

Nor must they condone or excuse the imprisonment, detention and abuse of thousands of Palestinians, including hundreds of children, by the occupying Power, or its deceitful distortions of social welfare to the families of prisoners and martyrs as it persists in its attempts to undermine and weaken all of our institutions.

They must not condone or excuse religious extremism, incitement and hatred; pitting one religion against another threatening the sanctity of holy sites, including Al-Haram Al-Sharif; or the legislation of racism, discrimination and segregation, with racist laws that deem one people superior to another and grant them exclusive rights to the land, including to self-determination and return, while simultaneously denying those rights to the indigenous Palestinian people in a situation that can only be classified as apartheid.

The fact that an occupying Power should feel immune from accountability, even as it kills innocent civilians and violates all norms and principles of international law, only deepens cynicism about the potential for a just peace, especially among our young people, whose hopes are evaporating. The fact that the illegal occupation should last for more than a half-century, with no concrete action to bring it to an end, risks not only the future of our people and region, but also destroying the credibility of the international system and its laws, which the world has gone through wars and colossal human and material sacrifices to build, assert and defend.

What we demand — an end to the occupation and historic injustice — is not only a call for respect and

the realization of the Palestinian people's inalienable human rights and national aspirations, but also a call on the international community to respect and defend the universal principles and moral standards that it has itself developed and accepted as basic canons, all of which are in grave jeopardy at this critical moment.

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

Mr. Danon (Israel): I have a few comments to make on the circus that has been staged today in this Chamber. B'Tselem is an Israeli organization that is funded by the European Union and European Governments. It was invited to the Security Council today by Bolivia — a country with a terrible human rights record — to defame our strong democracy, but it has actually had the exact opposite effect. By inviting B'Tselem, Bolivia has in fact demonstrated the strength of Israel's vibrant democracy. I challenge everyone present to find a Palestinian or a Bolivian who could dare defame his Government in the Security Council. At best, he might be thrown in jail, but he would more likely end up dead.

I would like to read out an English translation of a short passage from an official Palestinian Authority textbook. It states,

“There is an important place for heroes in every nation. They have sacrificed everything. They should be remembered forever, and we must be proud of them. A nation becomes even more proud as it gains more and more heroes. For if it were not for our heroes, we would not have a nation.”

The next page of the textbook lists the number of those so-called heroes, like Dalal Mughrabi, the terrorist responsible for a massacre that killed 38 innocent people. For her killing, she is described in the book as “a crown of her nation”.

That is from a textbook that Mahmoud Abbas has authorized for the current school year. This is Abbas's culture of hatred, right before the Council. It is the reason why Palestinian school children learn that it is better to kill a Jew than to keep a job. The Council will not hear that from Mr. Mansour or Mr. El-Ad, but Mahmoud Abbas is to blame. In his 13 years of rule, Abbas has done nothing but inspire that rampant culture of hatred. He is enabling an imminent war between Hamas and Israel. He preaches tolerance in English and terror in Arabic. If Council members

are really interested in the truth, they should read translations of Abbas's Arabic speeches. He does not recognize Israel. He calls us racist. He is trying to bring us to court. He has led his people down a path of self-destruction and misery, stealing their chance at a good life. Far from being a peace partner, Mahmoud Abbas is the obstacle to peace. If members hope to see a better future for Palestinians and Israelis, they will join us in indicting Abbas.

We are on the brink of a major escalation in Gaza. Last night, two rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel. One hit Beersheba, and the other one was aimed at Tel Aviv. Hamas has set more than 8,000 acres of Israeli agricultural land on fire. It has launched at least 300 rockets into Israel this year alone. It sends thousands of rioters to commit violence on our southern border almost every day. It steals foreign-aid funding to expand its weapons arsenal and uses the cement intended for schools and hospitals to construct terror tunnels. Israel has just discovered and destroyed the fifteenth terror tunnel found since October of last year.

Israel continues to send a strong message to Hamas that nothing will justify terror and that it will pay a heavy price for attacking Israel. But we have not forgotten about Abbas. Abbas is taking active measures to radicalize the people of Gaza and prolong their suffering. For his own cynical political purposes, Abbas is pushing Israel and Hamas towards a war that could begin any day. For months, Abbas has withheld critical international funding for the people of Gaza.

We heard Mr. Mladenov. Today, more than 40,000 Palestinian workers in Gaza do not receive a paycheque from Abbas and half of them live below the poverty line. The unemployment rate is 53 per cent. Families live with little electricity or fuel and even less clean water. When an Arab country offered \$60 million to help to pay for electricity in Gaza, Abbas said no. He even threatened to make it worse for the people of Gaza if countries ignored those orders and delivered funds. Abbas has now refused help from Israel, the United States and even the United Nations. He exploits the dire situation in Gaza in order to stay in power.

In Judea and Samaria, Abbas is guilty of a different type of exploitation — the infamous “pay to slay” policy, which remains the crown jewel of Abbas's incitement campaign. In the Palestinian Authority's 2018 budget, Abbas allocated \$355 million towards the “pay to slay” policy. That is 7 per cent of the total budget of the

Palestinian Authority — 7 per cent. Let me put that into perspective — 7 per cent of the budget of Bolivia last year was more than \$1 billion; 7 per cent of the budget of Sweden was \$19 billion; and 7 per cent of the budget of the Netherlands was \$24 billion. Imagine all that money spent to encourage the killing of Jews.

That criminal policy is killing people. Ten days ago, it did. It was just the beginning of another ordinary workweek. Kim Levengrond Yehezkel and Ziv Hagbi entered their offices as usual, like every Sunday in Israel. They worked in the Barkan industrial zone, a complex of factories in which thousands of Israelis and Palestinians work side by side. Kim was 28 years old. She was a mother with a one-year-old baby. Ziv was 35 and a father of three. The ordinary workweek quickly turned into a massacre. A Palestinian co-worker of Kim and Ziv — someone they knew — turned into a terrorist that day. He used his work permit to enter the factory as he would any other day. But this time he had a rifle hidden in his bag. He made it through the security checkpoint and entered the room where Kim and Ziv sat in their office. Then he had them tied up and he shot them in cold blood.

Just like that, four children lost a parent, two spouses lost their partners and that very society suffered yet another wound from terrorism. The killer is still at large but he cannot hide forever. We will catch him, and he will pay for his crime. But Abbas will pay too. Abbas will pay him. He will pay a total of \$3 million to that animal during his lifetime in prison. That is the legacy of Abbas — to slaughter innocent Israelis and be rewarded for life. The same \$355 million Abbas pays to terrorists is also more than 45 per cent of the foreign aid that the Palestinians will receive in 2018. That means that nearly half of every dollar that everyone gives to the Palestinian people to build roads and schools is put into the pockets of those who murder Jews. Therefore, if they do not pull their funding, they are complicit in the “pay to slay” policy. Earlier this year, the United States and Israel passed legislation to freeze payments to the Palestinian Authority until it ends its “pay to slay” programme. Australia has also cut aid funding to the Palestinians, as it feared they were financing terror. In response, Abbas ensured that he would continue those payments even if “we had only a single penny left”.

Abbas’s priority is clear. His aim is to incite, so ours must be to indict. If there were no culture of hate, no incitement, no payments to terrorists and no glorification of murder, just imagine where Israel and the

Palestinians would be today. If there was a Palestinian leader who actually cared about his people, perhaps we would have a solution to the conflict. Let me remind the members of the Council of some simple logic. They cannot expect different results when they do not change the equation. If they really want to change the reality for Palestinians and Israelis, they must change the equation. Remove the source of the culture of hate and textbook terrorism. When that source is removed, when Abbas is gone, only then will we see a brighter future.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In my capacity as representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, I am not at this time going to respond to the unfounded accusations of the representative of Israel.

In my capacity as President of the Security Council, I now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. Special Coordinator Mladenov’s briefing was informative and it is appreciated. Mr. El-Ad’s briefing, by contrast, was the sort of distorted and one-sided account that is provided all too often at the United Nations when it comes to Israel and the Palestinian issue. It is why I have so often attempted to bring some diversity to our discussions of the challenges facing the Middle East. Rather than repeating the same tired points at this monthly meeting, I will take the opportunity to focus on a matter of great significance that is taking place today in the Middle East — a matter that has received far less attention than it deserves. I urge my colleagues to listen, as their countries might unknowingly be affected by it.

First, by way of a little background, in less than two weeks, on 30 October, Iran will celebrate Student Basij Day. What does Basij Day celebrate? It is the day on which, during the Iran-Iraq war, a 13-year-old boy strapped a live grenade to his body and leapt under an oncoming Iraqi tank. His name was Mohammad Hossein Fahmideh. Child soldiers like Hossein were a horrifying feature of the Iran-Iraq war. Children were sent into battle with a plastic key to paradise hung around their necks. They were untrained and considered expendable. In wars between trained adult military forces, the numbers of the wounded typically outnumber the dead. But the child soldiers of Iran were used as cannon fodder and as a human minesweeper. The dead far outnumbered the wounded. According to the Iranians themselves, 36,000 school-age children

were killed and just under 3,000 were wounded in the Iran-Iraq war.

So why does that history matter today? Some in the international community still labour under the misimpression that the Iranian regime might be a responsible international actor or might abide by the laws of a civilized society. Some think that Tehran might care more about a better life for the people of Iran than about the forcible spread of the regime's power and influence. Many things about the Iranian regime contradict that premise. One of the most glaring contradictions is the continued use of children to fight and die in Iranian aggression abroad. The Government in Tehran long ago turned Mohammad Hossein Fahmideh's death into a propaganda tool to recruit and train children for war. It continues to use that memory of its past barbarism to promote more barbarism. The use of child soldiers is a moral outrage that every civilized nation rejects, while Iran celebrates it.

The Basij Resistance Force is a paramilitary force operating under Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In addition to cracking down on dissidents and enforcing internal security in Iran, the Basij indoctrinate schoolchildren and provide combat training to children as young as 12 years old. Those children are then coerced into fighting abroad for the IRGC. Since at least early 2015, the Iranian regime has used the Basij to recruit and train Iranian children to fight in Syria in support of the brutal Al-Assad regime. The Basij also targets Afghan immigrants in Iran — some as young as 14 years old — to fight in Syria.

The United States has followed the money that funds the recruitment, training and coerced deployment of child soldiers in Iran. Earlier this week, we identified the sources of the Basij funding and took action to cut them off from the global economy and financial system. Two days ago, the United States Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control imposed sanctions on a network of 20 Iranian corporations and financial institutions that provide funding for the Basij Resistance Force. That network is deeply entrenched in the Iranian economy. It is comprised of multibillion-dollar business interests that operate in Iran's automotive, mining, metals and banking industries. The network uses shell companies to hide the ownership of those interests. Many of the companies do substantial international business across the Middle East and Europe.

The United States action targets banks, investment firms and subsidiary mining and manufacturing companies. It includes the largest tractor manufacturing company in the Middle East and North Africa. It also includes Iran's largest steel producer, which funnels millions of dollars each year to the Basij and its financial network. Our Treasury Department has done impressive forensic accounting to uncover the hidden and overlapping networks of businesses and financial institutions that fund the work of the Basij forces.

For anyone who cares to look, that is a perfect example of what is fuelling the outrage of the Iranian people today. Iran's economy is increasingly devoted to funding Iranian repression at home and aggression abroad. In this case, Iranian big business and finance are funding the war crime of using child soldiers. That is crony terrorism. The Iranian people are rightly disgusted with it and they are taking to the streets to protest. To add insult to injury, the Basij use the very money that they have stolen from the people to forcibly shut down the protests and arrest the protesters.

The designations announced by the United States Treasury Department extend beyond property or interests in the United States or in the possession of United States persons. Anyone who engages in transactions with those designated entities could themselves be designated and any foreign financial institution that knowingly engages in transactions with those entities could themselves be subject to United States sanctions. The sanctions that the United States is levelling against Iran are broad and deep, and for good reason. Any company or individual that does business with that Iranian network is complicit in sending children to die on the battlefields of Syria and elsewhere.

The United States will do all that it can to reverse the flow of international funds into the coffers of the Iranian regime. I thank everyone for listening today and for their attention to this human rights crisis that is occurring in the heart of the Middle East. I urge my colleagues to join with the United States in helping to protect Iranian children from the Government that is supposed to protect them.

Mr. Ashikbayev (Kazakhstan): We thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his detailed and objective update on the situation in the Middle East. Let me focus on some developments in the Middle East that have caused the

overall turmoil, not only in the region but also beyond, with heightened and grave consequences for global insecurity. These violent conflicts are also having an increasingly serious impact on countries in Africa, South, Central and South-East Asia and other regions.

Kazakhstan's position on the Middle East peace process is very clear and remains unchanged. We support the two-State solution and call for the early resumption of negotiations, especially in the bilateral format and without preconditions. That should be in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant Security Council resolutions and other mechanisms and initiatives, such as the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid principles and the land-for-peace formula.

We support the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of a free, sovereign and independent State within the international borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It is necessary to begin direct talks to reach agreement on pending issues by giving them a so-called final status through the signing of a basic treaty that provides security to both Israel and Palestine.

Turning to Gaza, we are alarmed to see increased Palestinian casualties. We reiterate that the Israeli security forces must calibrate the use of force, which must be employed only as a last resort. We also underscore our call on Palestinians to avoid provocations. All the incidents in Gaza since March must be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. We reiterate our call for all sides to refrain from any act that could lead to further casualties and, in particular, any measures that could place civilians in harm's way. Kazakhstan believes that Gaza remains an integral part of the two-State solution, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. We hope that relieving the humanitarian pressure in Gaza will reduce tensions and the threat of escalation. Furthermore, we call on the Palestinian Authority and Hamas to seriously engage with Egypt on reconciliation and move forward with implementing the Cairo agreement of 12 October 2017.

We are concerned about the temporary withdrawal of international staff from Gaza, following a series of worrying security incidents affecting its personnel, who were harassed and prevented from carrying out their duties. The challenging financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is a cause for concern, in

particular the emergency appeal for the occupied Palestinian territory. We endorse the Agency's calls on the local authorities in Gaza to provide effective protection to its personnel and facilities.

Regarding Syria, Kazakhstan believes that the Astana process has great potential for directing intra-Syrian talks towards long-term peace and for supporting the Geneva process. We call on the International Syria Support Group and other countries to help to implement the measures stipulated by the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), the Vienna statements and other texts.

With regard to Lebanon, with the parliamentary elections held successfully in May, we hope that the new Government can be formed soon with the consolidation of the Constitution through a democratic process. We realize that both of those are contingent on developments in neighbouring Syria. I am pleased to inform the Council that Kazakhstan's support to United Nations peacekeeping operations is being expanded by co-deploying, by the end of October, a well-trained and highly qualified Kazakh contingent to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in partnership with India. In addition, competent individual officers will also be sent to Lebanon and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization.

We congratulate Iraq on the election of its new President, Mr. Barham Salih, and the appointment of the new Prime Minister-designate, Mr. Adel Abdul Mahdi. That will result in the next Government being formed soon to help to bring about stability and peaceful coexistence among the population and its minorities.

Turning to Yemen, we call for broad-based, inclusive national dialogue in order to end hostilities, which in turn will provide an opportunity to revive the economy, resolve the humanitarian crisis and restore public services. Only a political settlement will mitigate the humanitarian and security challenges.

In conclusion, the region today and the entire world are experiencing an uneasy confrontation among countries, thus adding to mutual distrust and tension. Peace and security, a world without terrorism and nuclear weapons, sustainable development and human rights for all are also noble goals for the Middle East, which cannot be achieved without the joint efforts of the international community.

Just over a week ago, Astana was host to the sixth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. Once again leaders of different religious denominations, including the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar of Egypt, the Chief Sephardic and Ashkenazi Rabbis of Israel, leaders of Shi'a Islam, Christianity and Buddhism — all in all more than 80 delegations from 46 countries around the world — stressed the importance of international cooperation to overcome intolerance, discrimination, exclusion, tensions and conflicts based on ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural differences.

Kazakhstan is deeply committed to joining the multilateral efforts to secure stability in this troubled region which, at the same time, holds great promise when peace will prevail.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing and for his efforts in actively pushing forward the de-escalation of tension and the easing of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. I listened carefully to the statements made by the representatives of Palestine and Israel, as well as by Mr. Hagai El-Ad.

The current Palestinian-Israeli situation is very fragile and tense, with frequent violent confrontations and ongoing risks of escalation. The Palestinian Great March of Return demonstration in the Gaza Strip has been going on since March, with Palestinian civilian casualties continuously on the rise. Settlement activities continue on the West Bank of the Jordan River and in Jerusalem and the demolition of Palestinian houses is still taking place. That seriously challenges the prospects for the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 border. The violent conflict and political confrontations have further exacerbated the mistrust between the two sides, with more restraining factors for the relaunch of the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks.

The grim humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is not conducive to regional stability and the Middle East peace process. The party in question should fully lift its Gaza blockade at an early date. The use of force and violence for violence are not conducive to the settlement of the issue. The relevant parties should proceed from the goal of the overall security and peaceful coexistence of the peoples in the region, exercise restraint and avoid escalation. The international community should fully implement the General Assembly resolutions

concerning the protection of Palestinian civilians in order to ease the current situation in Gaza.

Faced with the current situation, the international community should have an enhanced sense of urgency. The Security Council should strengthen its unity in a common effort to return the Palestine question to the track of a negotiated solution. First, the Council should push for but not weaken the two-State solution. The two-State solution is the right way to settle the Palestine issue. The international community should implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, the land-for-peace principle, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map to Mideast peace and, on that basis, strengthen political and diplomatic efforts. Efforts should be made to abandon any and all measures that weaken the prospect of the two-State solution, implement resolution 2334 (2016), stop all settlement activities in the occupied territories, and adopt measures to prevent violence against civilians.

Secondly, the Council should be united and cooperate to push for an early end to the stalemate of the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks. Parties with significant influence on the Middle East peace process should play a constructive role, promote the mutual confidence of the two sides, start a new round of efforts to promote peace and try new mechanisms of good offices. All parties should work to break away from the vicious cycle of escalating confrontation between Palestine and Israel and accelerate the internal Palestinian reconciliation process.

Thirdly, the Council should properly address the final status of Jerusalem. That is a complex and sensitive issue and has a bearing on the future of the two-State solution and regional peace and stability. In dealing with related issues, all parties should be prudent and avoid imposing unilateral solutions that lead to renewed confrontation. All parties should uphold the principles of respect for their diverse history, adherence to fairness and justice, implementation of the international consensus and the realization of peaceful coexistence. On the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international consensus and through final-status negotiations, they should reach a settlement that takes the interests of all parties into account.

China resolutely supports the Palestinian people in establishing a Palestinian State that enjoys full sovereignty and independence on the basis of the 1967 border, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We support

the greater integration of Palestine into the international community, with a view to its active participation in the affairs of the United Nations. China will continue to play a constructive role in taking the Middle East peace process forward.

For many years, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has played an important role in providing health care, education and other basic services to the 5.3 million Palestinian refugees. The international community should provide UNRWA with more adequate, predictable and sustainable funding. We appreciate those who made additional contributions to UNRWA and appeal to all to continue to strengthen their support to UNRWA and to countries receiving Palestinian refugees. Over the past 30 years, China has made annual contributions to UNRWA. This year, we increased our contribution to UNRWA in view of its urgent needs. China will continue to do what it can to provide assistance to UNRWA so that it may implement its mandate.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): I would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his most useful and comprehensive briefing on the latest developments concerning the Middle East and Palestine.

It is clear that provocative actions continue to fuel tensions on the ground. That inevitably pushed the parties to another cycle of confrontation and violence. While we condemn all attacks and deeply regret the loss of any innocent civilian lives, we would call upon the parties to exercise maximum restraint. The region is already on the edge. Every effort must be made to avoid further escalation. We support any and all efforts to diffuse tension. In that context, we appreciate what the United Nations and Egypt are doing to help to restore calm and facilitate a return to the 2014 ceasefire arrangements.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be of serious concern and the growing sense of frustration and despair among the Palestinians is completely understandable. Meeting the critical needs of the Palestinians living in Gaza remains a daunting challenge and addressing the huge funding gap must continue to be a matter of the utmost priority. That needs much greater attention and mobilization by the international community, even though it was a matter of discussion at a number of meetings held on the

margins of the General Assembly last month. These included the meetings of the Middle East Quartet and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. We share the concerns expressed by the Middle East Quartet and note its support for the efforts of the United Nations to prevent further escalation, empower the legitimate Palestinian authorities in Gaza and address all humanitarian needs.

We also note the outcome of the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the priority areas it identified to address the critical situation affecting the Palestinian economy and the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We would strongly agree with the support expressed for the Palestinian Authority to reinstate its governance in Gaza, in order to reunite Palestine under one authority. We believe that progress in the Egyptian-led reconciliation is indeed the key, and the Palestinian parties should be urged to cooperate for the sake of their own people, who have been suffering for far too long.

Ethiopia's position on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute has always been consistent and clear. As much as we support the right of Israel to exist in peace and security, we also support the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right of Palestine to exist as a free and independent State.

Accordingly, we fully support the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security. Indeed, this is the only viable option to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. We believe that this is not only in the best interest of both Israel and Palestine but that it will also significantly advance peace and security in the Middle East.

Peace in the Middle East and Palestine, however, continues to elude us. It is very clear that we need to reinvigorate efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, lasting and just solution to the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian dispute on the basis of the two-State formula. In other words, facilitating the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties is vital. It is, we believe, incumbent upon the Council to fully support such efforts for the sake of peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians and peace in the broader Middle Eastern region.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Madam President, we thank you for having convened this meeting and Mr. Nickolay Mladenov and Mr. Hagai El-Ad for their important briefings.

Peru notes with deep concern the continued violence between Israelis and Palestinians. We cannot but deplore the deaths and injuries and the worsening of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, with no solution to the prolonged conflict in sight. We continue to condemn the disproportionate use of force by Israel and the indiscriminate actions against civilians carried out by Hamas. International law, international humanitarian law and human rights are being flagrantly ignored.

We must continue to reject hate speech, incitement to violence, recourse to terrorism, laws promoting discrimination and anti-Semitism, all of this within a particularly unstable regional context. The settlements, demolitions and evictions in occupied Palestinian territory openly defy international law and specific resolutions of the Council, including resolution 2334 (2016), and they jeopardize the territorial integrity of the Palestinian State and hence undermine the possibility of achieving a political solution to the conflict.

We note with particular alarm the legal and humanitarian consequences of the demolition of a group of structures and the eviction of a Bedouin community in Khan Al-Ahmar. We believe that the Israeli authorities must ensure that this demolition is halted, in accordance with international law. We are also alarmed about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Poverty, injustice and marginalization are a breeding ground for radicalization and violent extremism.

We believe that the provision of goods and basic services, as well as overcoming the isolation of millions of Palestinians, must be priority issues for the international community. In that regard, we commend the implementation of development projects in Gaza that are being promoted by the United Nations, with international support. We stress how important it is that the crossing points of Kerem Shalom and Rafah remain open, with adequate security, and that the fishing zone on the Gaza coast not be reduced, as this would have humanitarian consequences.

We wish to underscore the generous contributions announced by various States to provide predictable and sustainable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and also to alleviate the serious energy crisis affecting the people of Gaza. We note, however, that this entity continues to face a critical financial situation and that it is therefore vital to continue mobilizing the support of the international community. We also deplore the

recent announcements about the possible closure of its offices in East Jerusalem, despite the legal framework regulating its functioning in accordance with resolutions adopted by the United Nations and other instruments of international law.

Peru continues to encourage the parties to resume direct negotiations with a view to achieving the only viable solution to the conflict: two States living securely within mutually recognized borders and with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

The United Nations and the Council in particular are called upon to provide such a solution and to protect civilians affected by the conflict. In this regard, we wish to conclude by expressing our recognition of and support for the important diplomatic work done by Mr. Mladenov and to thank him for periodically reminding us, in a clear and balanced way, of our responsibilities as an international community.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would first like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing on the most recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, which remind us of the gravity of the situation there. We commend his endeavours and reiterate our full support for his efforts to ease tensions and avoid a confrontation. We would like also to thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem. We commend him for his courage in participating in this meeting to discuss the violations by the Israeli occupation authorities of the human rights of Palestinians, who are living in very difficult economic and social conditions because of these practices.

We are meeting today a few weeks after the conclusion of the general debate of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session, whose echo continues to resound. The strong support given to the Palestinian people by Heads of State and Government in their statements sent a clear message about the way in which Member States have addressed the Palestinian question for the past seven decades, namely, that Israel, the occupying Power, must be compelled to stop its violations of the most basic rules of international law and that it must implement its legal obligations as stipulated by international conventions and treaties, notably the Charter of the United Nations, which we have all adopted as our guiding light and which embodies our belief in basic human rights, the dignity

and worth of the individual and the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

Unfortunately, these rights remain but a dream for our brothers and sisters in Palestine. The echo of this message did not simply stop at the General Assembly but spread to many other meetings held during the high-level week, as well as the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee on Palestine and the ministerial meeting of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Those two meetings reaffirmed the priority that a large number of States give to these issues with a view to alleviating the Palestinian people's suffering as a result of the crises they are facing, especially on the humanitarian and economic fronts. Those States are also trying to maintain the dignity of Palestine's 5 million refugees and not to disappoint the more than 500,000 male and female students among those refugees. Based on its commitment to supporting UNRWA so that it can continue to offer its vital services to refugees, last month Kuwait decided to donate an additional \$42 million to the UNRWA budget.

Unfortunately, despite the resonance of these messages, they have produced no results, because the Israeli occupying forces have continued their grievous systemic violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Israeli occupation forces have continued to use excessive force against Palestinian civilians taking part in the Great March of Return, which was a peaceful demonstration. As we heard earlier from Mr. Mladenov, those forces have continued to use live ammunition against demonstrators, raising the number of those killed to more than 205 and of the injured to more than 20,000. In the past two weeks alone, we have witnessed the deaths of 10 Palestinian martyrs, including three children, and 882 Palestinians have been injured. And Friday, 28 September, saw the highest number of casualties in a single day since May, when seven martyrs were killed.

This killing and terror spree did not simply stop there. Attacks have continued to dominate the stage in the occupied territories. Aisha Al-Rabi, a mother of eight, died a martyr from a head injury received during an attack by settlers who threw rocks at the car that her husband was driving as they were returning home from a family visit in Hebron. Before she was killed, she had been preparing for the forthcoming wedding

of her daughter Salam. The Council no doubt agrees with me on the need to condemn this heinous crime. These actions, which constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, are the responsibility of the Israeli occupation authorities alone. In that regard, we join our voice to that of Special Coordinator Mladenov in demanding that those who killed this Palestinian mother be quickly brought to trial.

We also want to note the impending danger of the implementation of the unjust decision to raze the town of Khan Al-Ahmar and forcibly move its Bedouin residents away from the demolition site as bulldozers and demolition machines, accompanied by large numbers of Israeli troops, drew nearer. These events resulted in injuries to many of the community residents and those who stood in solidarity with them, including an Israeli citizen, as they were severely beaten while defending their homes and property. We reiterate our rejection of Israel's aggressive and systematic policies targeting unarmed Palestinians, which are all part of an illegal plan to annex these lands and impose a policy of fait accompli that aims to partition the West Bank, undermine its geographic continuity, negatively affect the possibility of a two-State solution and maintain the foundations for a racist regime against the Palestinian people.

We also strongly condemn the Israeli Government's recent endorsement of a decision to build a new Jewish settlement neighbourhood in the city of Hebron, where more than 200,000 Palestinians live, south of occupied Jerusalem, reportedly the first such endorsement in Hebron since 2002. We can add that to the record of unjust Israeli settlement decisions that clearly violate Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which among other things confirms that Israeli settlement activity constitutes a clear violation of international law and is an obstacle to peace. It also states that Israel should immediately and completely end all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and also affirms that the international community will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including those pertaining to Jerusalem, except those changes that are agreed to by the two parties through negotiations.

Arrests, the demolition of homes, the destruction of property, the unprecedented expansion in the construction of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, the

targeting of civilians and the siege of the Gaza Strip, which has gone on for nearly 12 years, have all become part of the Palestinian people's daily routine for years. Nevertheless, the Security Council unfortunately remains incapable of compelling the occupying Power to implement its resolutions, thus giving Israel a green light to continue its practices and entrench its occupation and thereby undermining any chance for a genuine peace that would guarantee the Palestinian people their legitimate rights, including their right to independence, sovereignty and a dignified and free life, the most basic of human rights.

Many decades have gone by since the Palestinian question was put on the United Nations agenda. It is constantly being discussed, and many resolutions have been adopted about it. However, the question remains unanswered, and no solutions have been found. The resolutions have not been implemented because of the obstinacy of Israel, the occupying State, and because of its explicit and blatant refusal to implement resolutions of international legitimacy and its deliberately mocking disregard of those resolutions. The time has come to make sure that the members of the Security Council give this issue, like others, its fair share of attention, as Israel continues its attacks and acts of aggression, which could be considered the inevitable result of the absence of any serious call from the Security Council to Israel to end that continued aggression and to fulfil its obligations as the occupying Power, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize the strategic option, which is to arrive at a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted by all Arab States at the 2002 Beirut summit. This solution would be based on Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories to the borders of 4 June 1967, and it includes dealing with all final status issues in a way that can enable the Palestinian people to enjoy all of their legitimate political rights, including the right to self-determination and to establish an independent State on their territory with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Mladenov and Mr. El-Ad for their informative briefings.

The situation in the Middle East continues to be a complex one requiring a significant collective effort, first and foremost by the United Nations and its Security Council, which is the main guarantor of the international legal architecture.

In our view, strict adherence to international law and to the spirit and letter of the Charter of the United Nations constitutes a firm foundation for developing a formula for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In that regard, we are seriously concerned about the aggressive re-examination of previously reached agreements, including some that have been enshrined in Security Council resolutions. We believe that any ideas and proposals in this area should be based on relevant internationally accepted principles and previously approved resolutions of the Security Council, along with the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid principles. Any plans or agreements, whatever they are called, should be subordinate to the main goal of stabilizing the situation in the region by arriving at a just, long-term settlement of the Palestinian question as a key item on the Middle East agenda.

We see that the Palestinian-Israeli situation is steadily deteriorating. The lack of progress in the political process has created a vacuum that is being filled with violence, unilateral measures and provocative rhetoric. We are not even supposed to mention the fact that all the long-standing problems, including settlement activity, are still a long way from being solved. The gulf of misunderstanding and mistrust is widening, undermining the prospects for a resumption of negotiations.

We cannot help feeling alarmed by the escalating tension around Gaza, the missiles launched at Israeli settlements and the answering air strikes. We condemn any displays of terror and urge all the parties to refrain from confrontational attitudes. We appreciate the efforts undertaken in accordance with United Nations policies by Special Coordinator Mladenov and various regional players to correct the current trends and help Gazan residents. Needless to say, that assistance should be carried out in close coordination with the legitimate Palestinian authorities under President Abbas, and should be integrated into the task of restoring Palestinian unity.

We note the need for sustainable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose activities for decades

have had an important stabilizing effect in relieving the burden of Palestinian refugees in Gaza and countries of the Middle East. We want to point out that the issue of refugees should be the subject of a bilateral Palestinian-Israeli dialogue, not the object of arbitrary decisions.

In the current circumstances, we urgently need to mobilize efforts to revive the political process between the Palestinians and the Israelis on the international legal basis that we are all familiar with, which assumes the implementation of a two-State solution as a result of direct negotiations. Unilateral steps are not capable of achieving a just and lasting peace designed to realize Palestinians' national aspirations and strengthen Israel's security. That is why we have kept our proposal for holding a summit in Russia between the leaders of Palestine and Israel on the table, with a view to enabling us to end an extraordinarily dangerous and prolonged impasse in the efforts to reach a Palestinian-Israeli settlement. Russia will continue to maintain its principled position, supporting and developing relations with all the parties in the framework of a positive agenda. We support the Middle East Quartet's active resumption of its work of international mediators, which is still a unique mediation format approved by Security Council resolutions.

Progress in the business of resolving the acute crises in the Middle East and North Africa can be made only in a framework of broad cooperation and respect for our obligations under international law. The joint efforts of the country-guarantors of the Astana process have proved in practice that developing a common vision for a settlement in Syria is possible despite our differences. We are open to collaborating with anyone who is willing to join this process in a constructive spirit. We firmly believe that together we can do a great deal to end the bloodshed in Yemen, stabilize Libya, support normalization in Iraq and unblock other crises. The countries of the region have a rich cultural, human and natural potential from which they can develop and even flourish, but it is a potential that will be fully realized only when interference in the region's internal affairs comes to an end.

The Russian Federation supports the formulation of a positive and unifying agenda on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, for the Security Council and the entire international community. We believe that the Council's meeting during our presidency on a comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa (see S/PV.8293)

made an important contribution to the joint analysis of the genesis of the conflicts in the region and the quest for collective tools to resolve them.

The key to our collective work in the region should be creating conditions conducive to strengthening a general atmosphere of trust. This is crucial to the relations between the Arab States, Israel and Iran. We would like to remind the Council that in its resolution 598 (1987), the Security Council instructed the Secretary-General to work with the parties in the region on measures for enhancing its security and stability. This is a complicated issue, but we have to begin working on it, and we are ready to provide every possible assistance for it through our contacts with our regional partners.

The ultimate goal should be establishing a regional security architecture that is genuinely inclusive and is intended to involve every State in that part of the world. Our concept of strengthening security in the Persian Gulf under international guarantees, which we could begin to implement through a conference in which the States of the subregion participate, is still relevant, and in future could be expanded to other Middle Eastern countries. In all these and other aspects, Russia is ready to work with interested partners on an open, impartial basis.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I would like to start by thanking Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and for his tireless efforts. The United Nations and its agencies deserve to be commended for the work that they are doing on the ground every day in a very challenging environment. We stand fully behind their efforts and their continued close consultations with the parties. I thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad for being here today and for sharing his honest assessment and valuable perspectives, and more importantly for the integrity and bravery of B'Tselem and many other civil-society organizations in both Israel and Palestine. We commend him for his conscience and encourage him to speak up as an Israeli citizen. Personal insults have no place in this Chamber.

We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later today.

Sweden has a long-standing engagement on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a steadfast friendship with the peoples of both Israel and Palestine. As a member of the Security Council, we have consistently

based our position on international law, including international human rights and international humanitarian law. While the proliferation of new and re-emerging crises in the Middle East requires our attention, we must maintain our active commitment to resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict. The situation is increasingly urgent as new generations grow up in a reality marred by conflict. The shared vision of the international community remains unchanged. It consists of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the future capital of those two States and the home of three world religions. We must now return to a meaningful and inclusive peace process, ending the occupation and resolving all final status issues. If we are to achieve a just and sustainable peace, it is critical to ensure that any future peace plan is based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and previous agreements. Final status issues can be taken off the table only when they have been resolved through negotiations between the parties.

The continued rapid deterioration of the situation on the ground is destroying hopes for peace. A two-State solution is regrettably becoming more distant by the day. Israelis and Palestinians alike have an urgent responsibility to reverse those trends. We are deeply concerned about the continuing rapid settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and that includes the decision by the Israeli authorities to advance plans for new settlement units in the city of Hebron. We are also deeply concerned about the demolition of homes, including the imminent threat of demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar and the forcible displacement of its inhabitants, a majority of whom are children. The village is located in Area E-1, a location of strategic interest for preserving the contiguity of a Palestinian State. Settlements are illegal under international law, and the evictions and demolitions of homes that enable the policy to continue seriously threaten the prospects for peace. We strongly condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terrorism. The use of disproportionate, lethal violence in recent days and weeks is a tragedy. The crimes must be investigated and those responsible must be held accountable.

The peace process cannot merely be about ending the occupation and the conflict. It must also be about building peaceful and inclusive societies. A vibrant civil society, particularly with the meaningful inclusion

of women and young people, is critical to sustainable peace. The shrinking space for civil society and the possibilities for promoting human rights are a source of great concern on both sides. On the Palestinian side, laws are used to curtail freedom of expression, and on the Israeli side, representatives of civil-society organizations are delegitimized, creating obstacles for them in carrying out their important work. We call on both the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships to support, respect and allow members of civil society to operate and express their views freely.

In the so-called post-Oslo generation, few on either side have any hope that peace is still possible. We must show these young people that there is an alternative to conflict, violence and a constantly deteriorating situation. And the voices of young Israelis and Palestinians must be heard, in line with resolution 2419 (2018). Both Israel and Palestine have been vocal advocates for the full implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and the meaningful inclusion and engagement of women in the peace process. We remain committed to supporting such efforts in every way we can.

Mr. Mladenov has rightly put the Council on high alert today. Gaza is on the verge of collapse. The situation remains untenable and increasingly desperate. Millions of people are caught between Hamas and other militant groups on the one hand, and the Israeli policy of closure on the other. The people of Gaza must not pay the price for that long-standing crisis. We continue to witness tragic events leading to regrettable loss of life. All the parties must exercise maximum restraint, avoid confrontation and take immediate steps to de-escalate. We must also step up efforts to avoid a humanitarian disaster. There is an urgent need for humanitarian interventions with a quick, direct and immediate impact on the daily lives of the people in need. All actors have a responsibility in that regard.

There is an urgent need to lift the restrictions, secure full and sustained access and movement to and from Gaza and ensure unimpeded access for all humanitarian actors, while maintaining respect for the legitimate security concerns of Israel, Palestine and Egypt. The efforts to achieve the full return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza must be redoubled. We support the Egyptian-led efforts to achieve reconciliation and call on all Palestinian factions to revitalize genuine attempts to that end. Only reconciliation will lead to a unified

Palestinian leadership and a reunification of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established by the General Assembly and mandated to provide assistance and protection to Palestinian refugees across the region until a negotiated, lasting and just solution to that issue was reached. UNRWA not only delivers critical services and education but plays a crucial role in ensuring stability in a region seriously affected by conflict, terrorism and turmoil. During the high-level week of the General Assembly, Sweden, together with Jordan, Turkey, Japan, Germany and the European Union, hosted a ministerial meeting to mobilize political and financial support to UNRWA. Together we managed to mobilize \$122 million, significantly reducing UNRWA's deficit and enabling the Agency's schools to remain open throughout 2018. Having now overcome the most immediate crisis, we must shift our focus to the coming year. Much work remains to be done to secure funding for 2019. We must maintain the recent positive momentum and end the Agency's perpetual crisis mode by finding solutions for more predictable and sustainable funding. UNRWA is not part of the problem, it is part of the solution.

In conclusion, we cannot allow the viability of a two-State solution to move beyond our reach. We must act, or we risk moving rapidly not only towards perpetual occupation but towards a one-State reality. That should not be in anyone's interest. The Council, and every one of its members, has a responsibility. Our faith in a negotiated, just and fair two-State solution led us to recognize the State of Palestine in 2014. It is not too late to resolve this conflict. We must do everything in our power to make sure that the hope of two States is kept alive and that the vision of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East is realized. We owe it to every young Israeli and Palestinian. They deserve no less from us.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing and his commitment day in and day out, and to renew France's support for him. I would also like to commend Bolivia's initiative in inviting Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of the Israeli non-governmental organization B'Tselem, who has been doing remarkable work under difficult conditions. It is an ongoing policy of France to support opening the work of the Security Council to the voices of civil society, which must

be heard in the context of addressing the crises on our agenda.

Turning to the situation on the ground, every passing day confirms the tragic threefold observation that we regularly make before the Council. First, the false status quo before us masks a daily deterioration of the situation that is linked in particular to the settlement policy. Secondly, that situation has the potential to degenerate into open crisis at any moment, as we have been seeing in Gaza for months, and it also produces its daily share of violence, including an incident that recently claimed the lives of two Israelis and that we condemned. Thirdly, when the prospects for peace on the ground diminish, they do the same in people's minds and conversations, feeding into a particularly dangerous vicious cycle. Last month was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Oslo Accords, and according to opinion surveys, almost three quarters of Palestinians now believe that their situation has worsened since the Accords were signed. Today, only a small percentage of Palestinians and Israelis still believe in the possibility of a two-State solution. Generation by generation, Palestinians and Israelis are losing hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, which opens the door to the worst possibility, the despair that is our common enemy. That is why it is so important for the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to preserve a pluralistic and open space within their respective societies. The democratic future of those societies depends on that and on the possibility of dialogue between them.

Any negotiations must take place within the framework that I have just outlined, which is based on international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 478 (1980), on Jerusalem.

Today, I would like to underscore two points, both dictated by the urgency of what we are seeing on the ground — the situation in Gaza, where we are once again on the edge of a cliff, and the Israeli settlement policy, which, through the case of Khan Al-Ahmar, threatens to irreversibly undermine the possibility of a two-State solution.

First, with regard to the situation in Gaza, for the second time since the beginning of the summer the Gaza Strip is on the verge of a new conflict, something it has experienced three times in the past decade. In that context, France calls on all actors to exercise restraint. The rockets that were launched during the

night of Tuesday and Wednesday from Gaza to Israel, one of which hit a house in Beersheba, fortunately without causing any casualties, are an extremely worrying development. I want to say it again with the greatest clarity: France condemns the indiscriminate firing on Israeli territory, regardless of the perpetrators, just as it condemns the use of incendiary devices and the construction by Hamas of offensive tunnels, of which a new one was dismantled again over the past few days by Israeli forces.

Already in mid-August, the worst had been avoided thanks to the efforts of Egypt and the steps taken by the Special Coordinator. However, we know that if the current situation continues, a large-scale escalation cannot be definitively avoided, and if there is one, the people of Gaza will once again pay the price. We must therefore do everything we can to prevent it. It is up to the Council to speak with a strong voice to prevent an escalation by breaking a silence that is becoming increasingly deafening and incomprehensible to the world every day.

Those peaks in tension are arising in the context of humanitarian collapse and political impasse in the Gaza Strip. For more than six months, there has been a series of acts of violence in Gaza against the backdrop of a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented severity. The toll of recurring demonstrations along the separation barrier is appalling: more than 150 Palestinians have been killed since 30 March in rallies fuelled by the despair of the population. France has condemned the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force and calls on Israel to respect the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully, on the one hand, and to live up to its obligations to protect civilians in the context of international humanitarian law, on the other hand. We have also denounced the exploitation of the demonstrations by Hamas and other armed groups and their use in attempts to cross the separation barrier, as seems to have been the case during last Friday's rallies.

To restore hope among the people of Gaza in the short term, we must respond to the humanitarian emergency. The efforts of the Special Coordinator and all United Nations agencies to rapidly improve the humanitarian situation contribute significantly to this response. All actors must coordinate their efforts in this regard. Ultimately, only a lifting of the blockade, together with the necessary security guarantees for Israel, can meet the needs of the people. At the same time, the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains essential, particularly in Gaza, where two thirds of the population are refugees. International drives have raised an additional \$120 million for UNRWA at the margins of the General Assembly and must continue to do so. France has played its part and intends to continue to do so by doubling its contribution to the Agency for 2019. The stakes are high both for the populations concerned and for regional stability. Tensions since the start of the school year, in particular in Gaza and Lebanon, attest to that.

Finally, there can be no sustainable humanitarian response to the crisis in Gaza without a political solution, including the full return of the Palestinian Authority to the territory. Gaza is not a landless territory, and it cannot be dissociated from the question of the Palestinian State in the context of the two-State solution. We call on all parties to pursue dialogue in the context of Egypt's ongoing efforts, which we commend, to relaunch the inter-Palestinian reconciliation process within the framework of the agreement reached in Cairo a year ago.

The gravity of the situation in Gaza should not make us forget the severity of the situation in the West Bank and Jerusalem, where the critical advances in settlements are creating an irreversible situation before our very eyes. We are close to the point of no return, and if we are not careful, the two-State solution may disappear before us, like a mirage in the desert. France's position is clear and unchanging: the settlements are illegal under international law and counterproductive because they destroy trust between the parties and stoke tensions on the ground. They are accompanied by worrisome developments in violence, including by certain radical settlers. We have called for all light to be shed on the death of a Palestinian woman last week close to Nablus, which we condemned.

Today, I will focus on the case of Khan Al-Ahmar, which has long been identified by the entire international community as a red line. On 12 September, the Israeli Government decided that it would demolish the village. This decision could be implemented at any time. Together with its main partners, France has expressed its profound concern about this matter and solemnly calls on the Israeli authorities not to proceed with the demolition. The demolition of this Bedouin village, which would result in the forced displacement of its inhabitants, would contravene international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva

Convention, as well as Council resolutions. I note that several of the structures that are directly targeted, including one school, have received European funding.

In addition to its humanitarian consequences, that demolition would have potentially irreversible political effects. It would pave the way for the settlement of the so-called E-1 area, which, as everyone knows, is of strategic importance for the two-State solution. It would separate the north and south of the West Bank and isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian territories. By destroying the continuity of the Palestinian territories, it would make the two-State solution impossible and would instead favour a strategy of de facto annexation of the West Bank by Israel, which would be taking on a heavy responsibility in terms of the history of both peoples.

France is a friend to both the Israelis and the Palestinians. It has no other interest than peace in the region and ensuring the possibility for the populations concerned to live in safety and dignity. As we all know, the destinies of the Israelis and the Palestinians are intertwined; neither of the two peoples will achieve their national aspirations in a sustainable way at the expense of the other.

As I have said, there is no solution other than a two-State solution, but there can be no two-State solution without an agreement between the parties on Jerusalem, and there can be no possible agreement on Jerusalem outside internationally agreed parameters. These parameters are not options or a menu that we can pick and choose from; rather they are the cornerstone of any peace process and any future negotiation. Moving away from this framework would fuel tensions and violence because of the symbolic, historic and religious dimensions of Jerusalem, both for the Palestinians and for the Israelis. It would also provide a space for all radicals in the region, who want to see this political conflict become a religious conflict, to rush into. Given that risk, we have a collective responsibility in the Council to act within the parameters that we have defined together and which are recalled in resolution 2334 (2016), which was adopted almost two years ago. France will spare no effort in that regard.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I want to join others in thanking Special Coordinator Mr. Mladenov for his briefing and for the work that he and his team do on the ground. I want also to thank Mr. El-Ad. Like the French and Swedish representatives, we think it is important

that the voices of civil society can be heard in this Chamber, and he was invited by the Security Council.

I wish to digress, if I may, to make a point about non-Council-member speakers, building on the one I made yesterday. This is an open debate. It vitiates the point of an open debate if we cannot understand what is said in the Chamber, no matter who it is said by. I would therefore like to know at some point what the Israeli Permanent Representative said to Mr. El-Ad in Hebrew. I would also like to make a general point that if speakers use a language for which there is no interpretation, that the presidency of the day stop them and ask them to speak in one of the Council's — or the Organization's — six authorized languages.

Turning to the substance, I think Mr. Mladenov is right to remind us that every month we come here and talk about the same things while everything that we have heard today about the region shows how desperate and unsustainable the situation is. There are terrible, cruel and sad stories of deaths and injuries on both sides. These stories underscore the need for urgent progress to end what is a useless cycle of violence and a heartbreaking waste of life and ruined families. On terrorism, to quote a famous playwright: "The gunmen are not dying for the people; the people are dying for the gunmen." We ought to bear that in mind as well.

We fully respect Israel's right to security. At the same time, as many speakers have said today, the situation in Gaza is unsustainable. There needs to be an immediate improvement in the humanitarian situation. We need political resolve to make these improvements. The reconciliation agreement of 2017 was a good start, but now all the Palestinian factions must implement that agreement. We strongly support the efforts of Egypt and the wider international community to secure this goal with some urgency. And we strongly support the return of the Palestinian Authority to administer Gaza. We continue to encourage all parties to work together to ensure that this objective is met.

Like other speakers, we remain deeply concerned about the planned demolition of the village of Khan Al-Ahmar. I take this opportunity to again call on the Israeli Government not to go ahead with its plan to demolish the village. The decision of the Israeli Supreme Court did not mandate demolition, which remains at the discretion of the Israeli Government. We appeal to the Government not to proceed with the demolition of this village, which is located in an area

of strategic importance for the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. Its demolition threatens the prospects for a two-State solution with Jerusalem as a shared capital because, as others have said, it would pave the way for building settlements in the E-1 area.

We have heard a lot of common themes from the speakers today so I will not repeat them. I will just say that the Special Coordinator asked us to echo his three calls — for both sides to step back from the brink, for them to uphold the 2014 ceasefire and for Hamas to stop its provocations; for Israel to restore the delivery of critical supplies and use proportionate responses in their use of live fire; and for the Palestinian Authority to not disengage from Gaza. I am happy to throw the United Kingdom's voice behind his calls today and to make it crystal clear how strong our support is for the Special Coordinator.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was mentioned. In this regard, I would just say that we welcome the increase in donor contributions that was announced on 27 September. They will help meet the immediate needs of the Palestinian people, but in the longer term UNRWA itself needs to continue to give priority to the implementation of cost-saving reform measures. We will continue to work closely with UNRWA and other donors on the continuity of its central services.

In conclusion, like France, we consider ourselves to be a friend to both the Israelis and the Palestinians. Like France, we believe that the destinies of these two people are inextricably intertwined. Substantive peace talks between the parties leading to a two-State solution based on 1967 borders, which includes the West Bank and Gaza, is the best way to end this conflict and ensure a sustainable peace. It is the best way to ensure Israeli security, which is absolutely vital, and to achieve a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the Palestinian refugee question, in line with Council resolution 1515 (2003). The United Kingdom will continue engaging meaningfully to help bring this about.

Finally, I want to say that I have concentrated today on subject matter that the Special Coordinator raised. I think I am right to do so. Other speakers touched on wider matters. I do not have time now to go into the issue of child soldiers, but I would just like to put on record that the United Kingdom shares the concerns about these child soldiers.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I want to thank you, Madam President, for giving me the floor. I also want to convey our appreciation to the delegation of Bolivia for having included this extremely important item in the programme of work of its presidency in this month of October. I also wish to thank Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Mladenov for his excellent briefing today. Despite the difficulties he faces, the collective work that he represents has always been commendable.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is very concerned about the brutal and ongoing events that, for many years, have claimed numerous human lives and threatened the security in various places in the Middle East, which is a situation that has led to massive internal and external displacement of millions of people in certain countries of the region, such as Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Libya, to name just a few. The United Nations and the international community must now find a sustainable solution to these conflicts, in which warring parties have extinguished the hope of the people, despite the fact that the passage of years has shown that the conflicts can have no military solution.

On the Palestinian question, I would like to first express our most heartfelt condolences to the conflicting parties. We join them in solidarity over the thousands of citizens who have lost their lives during the seven decades of this long, tragic history, to which we have always given due attention since our State's inception. Like other countries, Equatorial Guinea is dismayed at the persistence of the conflict and the stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on conditions for the creation of a Palestinian State.

In recent years, we have seen a massive increase in violence in the region by parties to the conflict. The improvised rockets from Gaza and the disproportionate responses of the Israeli army frighten both sides. The impact of those unnecessary exchanges has mired the Palestinian population in Gaza in undesirable living conditions, with destroyed infrastructure and insufficient basic daily means of subsistence, including an elevated rate of unemployment, mainly among young people. These and other aspects of the situation described in the media are the result of the insurgency in an area dominated by fear and destruction, leading to a precarious and unprosperous future for both sides.

But there is another reality that both Israelis and Palestinian must recognize, whether they like it or

not — both peoples will always be there, side by side. Accordingly, the parties would be well served to foster a peaceful and harmonious coexistence. In this regard, the Israeli and Palestinian leaders must engage in political and moral analysis on the future they want for their people, considering that the best future Israelis can wish for their children necessarily involves the creation of an independent Palestinian State, and a future Palestinian State will not exist unless Israel's security is guaranteed.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is convinced of the crucial role of the United Nations on the Palestinian question. Since it was put on the agenda in 1947 up to today, both the General Assembly and the Security Council have taken very significant steps that could have resolved the conflict, which is reflected in the various important resolutions that have been adopted on the topic. The implementation of these resolutions and the effectiveness of the work of the United Nations call for unreserved unity among the members of the Council. History has demonstrated that Israelis and Palestinians cannot easily resume negotiations, let alone reach an agreement, if the Council and the international community do not engage in a more united and positive manner.

Ever since we began our membership of the Council, we have called for the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. We believe that insecurity in that densely populated enclave and tension with Israel concerning that area are caused by the considerable power vacuum. That vacuum, which contributes only to the deterioration of local living conditions, could pave the way for extremist organizations in the surrounding areas to gain greater access to young people. That, in turn, would increase the level of insecurity in the region. In that regard, we again call on the international community to provide greater support for the initiative of Egypt and other international actors working on intra-Palestinian reconciliation, while bearing in mind that the peace agreement signed in October last year between Hamas and Fatah has not been implemented.

We welcome the efforts of certain countries that recently announced an increase in their contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, because of its ongoing financial crisis, is in danger of reducing the number of important services it provides to millions of Palestinian citizens.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the position of Equatorial Guinea, which, in line with Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid guiding principles, the Quartet road map and other instruments, considers the claims of the Palestinians, which are based on history, to be just. We therefore reiterate our support for the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, which should be the subject of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians so as to ensure a safe and peaceful coexistence between the two States and harmony with other States of the region.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for a very comprehensive and insightful briefing. I also thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem, for his contribution.

I would also like to align myself with the statement to be delivered later today on behalf of the European Union.

Despite our constant calls for de-escalation in the Middle East, there has, unfortunately, been no progress at all. On the contrary, we have failed to prevent further loss of life. Recent developments in the Gaza Strip, where thousands of Palestinians have demonstrated, some of them violently, are very worrying. Unfortunately, at least six Palestinians were killed and hundreds injured. Once again, we call on all sides to act with utmost restraint in order to avoid further casualties. On the one hand, Israel should respect the principle of proportionality in its use of force. On the other, protests at the Gaza border fence, fuelled by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, have led to violence, which affects both parties to the conflict. Recurring rocket attacks from Gaza aimed at Israel, as well as the launching of incendiary kites and balloons from the Strip, which have been aimed at nearby Israeli communities, are unacceptable and must stop. Very worrying signals are also coming from the West Bank, where a Palestinian woman was killed by stone-throwing. On the Israeli side, three civilians have also been killed in recent days and weeks, including two Israelis killed by a Palestinian co-worker at the Barkan Industrial Park. We firmly condemn such incidents and call for a swift investigation to bring those responsible to justice.

The humanitarian situation of 2 million people in the Gaza Strip is still alarming. Limited access to basic services, including health care, chronic energy crises

and the lack of fuel, can easily lead to the escalation of social tensions that may destabilize the situation in the region even further. In that regard, we commend the efforts of Special Coordinator Mladenov to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the Strip, including the fuel-delivery deal reached last week, thanks to his engagement. The danger of Gaza's collapse is real. That is why we strongly urge all parties to de-escalate, exercise maximum restraint and prevent incidents that jeopardize the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis.

Our main goal and commitment should be the resumption of a meaningful peace process. We still believe that only by returning to meaningful bilateral negotiations, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, will it be possible to bring positive input to the process. That is the only path towards a two-State solution and the resolution of all final-status issues. The creation of a political horizon, as well as an appropriate framework for political progress, will be possible only by working together with our regional and international partners, starting with the Middle East Quartet. We wish to especially underline the engagement of the United States and its peace proposal, which, when revealed, could help with the reactivation of the Middle East peace process.

We support the two-State solution, under which the national aspirations of both parties to the conflict would be met, including the Palestinian right to self-determination and independence, as well as the Israeli right to ensure its security. Unfortunately, the two-State solution seems to be at risk of fading away. The likely demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar in the very near future and subsequent Israeli settlement plans, potentially splitting the West Bank into two parts, would make the two-State solution almost impossible.

We are closely following Egyptian-led discussions on intra-Palestinian reconciliation and hope that that process will be successful. We, therefore, urge all Palestinian factions to work together to achieve the sustainable development of that process, thereby allowing the Palestinian Authority to resume its full responsibilities in Gaza. One single and legitimate Palestinian Authority could be an important step towards ensuring the unity of a future Palestinian State and providing a basis for a sustainable peace agreement.

In conclusion, let me underline the severe funding difficulties of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

(UNRWA). Collective efforts by the international community have enabled UNRWA to continue providing essential services until the end of this year. The termination of UNRWA's important activities could well cause instability and create a vacuum that would serve only the extremists. We should do our utmost to preserve the crucial role played by UNRWA in the region.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire welcomes today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

We thank Special Coordinator Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, whose briefing has provided us with the context surrounding the multiple and complex challenges to peace and stability in a region notably affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We also thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad for his briefing.

My delegation is concerned about the breakdown in the relative lull in the conflict owing to renewed violence between Israelis and Palestinians, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Faced with this new outbreak of violence, Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that there is no alternative to a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and urges the parties to exercise restraint and refrain from unilateral actions that can only damage and distance prospects for a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

My country values both the security of the State of Israel and the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. We reaffirm our firm support for the two-State solution, namely, peaceful coexistence within the 1967 borders. Consequently, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its call on the Israeli and Palestinian parties to show restraint in order to preserve the achievements won so far and create conditions favourable to a just and lasting peace.

We need hardly recall that the consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been disastrous for the people living in the Gaza Strip. That unprecedented humanitarian crisis is accompanied by a high youth unemployment rate of up to 47 per cent, as well as by incessant shortages of water and electricity. That is why my delegation calls for the opening of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians with a view to lifting the current blockade. We also encourage the Palestinian parties, on the basis of enhanced cooperation, to pursue dialogue for an effective return of the Palestinian

Authority to Gaza, which would enable humanitarian issues to be better addressed.

Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the budget deficit facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). That situation jeopardizes the effectiveness of the assistance and protection provided by that United Nations agency to more than three million Palestinian refugees. Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the pledges made by donor countries on the sidelines of the general debate of the General Assembly at its current session of \$122 million to UNRWA, which will enable it to fulfil its mission.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire would like to assure all stakeholders of its support for initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue promoting the achievement of lasting peace and stability between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as throughout the region.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing. The Kingdom of the Netherlands fully supports the Special Coordinator in his efforts to prevent a catastrophe in Gaza, and we thank him for his tireless efforts for peace aimed at bringing the parties closer together, despite all obvious obstacles.

Allow me to also thank Mr. El-Ad for his views on the situation as a guest of the Council, and I would like to underline the point made by our British colleague in that regard. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is a long-standing donor to B'Tselem and we are proud of our cooperation with that non-governmental organization. The presence of a strong and vibrant civil society, including human rights organizations like B'Tselem that speak truth to power, is crucial for a democratic and pluralistic society.

I align myself with the statement to be made later by the observer of the European Union (EU). In my statement today, I will focus on three key issues: the West Bank, Gaza and the importance of a renewal of the peace process.

My first point concerns the West Bank. Listening to Mr. Mladenov and Mr. El-Ad, it struck me that their briefings were packed with the latest troubling developments on the West Bank. Those developments raise concerns that the region is on a slippery slope, sliding towards a one-State reality. The Kingdom of

the Netherlands reiterates its opposition to Israel's settlement policy and to actions taken in that vein, including demolitions and confiscations of EU-funded projects, evictions and the forced transfer of local communities.

We are greatly concerned about the decision taken on Sunday by the Israeli authorities to advance plans to expand settlements in Hebron. Such settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace, and threaten a two-State solution. The Israeli settlement policy and the denial of opportunities for Palestinian development in Area C make peace more difficult. Khan Al-Ahmar, as others have said, is a case in point. We are concerned that the planned demolition and forced transfer of its inhabitants will undermine confidence in a negotiated two-State solution. It will also clear the way for further settlement expansion. That is illustrated by the announcement of new houses for settlements near Khan Al-Ahmar earlier this year in May.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands condemns the recent violent attacks in the West Bank, which led to the loss of Israeli and Palestinian lives. Such attacks illustrate the need for a sustainable solution that provides peace and security for Israel and prevents the resurgence of terrorism. Such a solution must provide security for Palestinians, respect their rights and demonstrate that the occupation is over. In short, we need a two-State solution.

That brings me to my second point, concerning Gaza, where the situation is a constant source of concern. People in and around Gaza live a daily reality that no one should have to endure. People there deserve a life in which peace and security can be taken for granted. Unfortunately, that is far from the current reality: early on Wednesday morning, an Israeli family in Beersheba narrowly escaped when they reached a bomb shelter seconds before a rocket from Gaza hit their home. We condemn the firing of rockets from Gaza. In response, the Israel Defence Forces struck multiple targets in Gaza, reportedly killing a 25-year-old Palestinian man. We call on all actors involved to exercise restraint in order to prevent a further escalation. Closing border crossings and reducing the fishing zone is not the answer and will only cause the humanitarian situation in Gaza to deteriorate further.

We are concerned by the growing violence during protests at the border and the continued use

of incendiary balloons and kites, as well as tunnel activity. The Kingdom of the Netherlands calls upon all relevant Palestinian parties to ensure that protests remain peaceful, especially so that children are not put in harm's way. We also repeat our call on Israel to ensure that its responses are proportionate and necessary at all times, in line with Israel's obligations under international law. An independent and transparent investigation into the events that led to so many victims over the past months is needed. We call upon Israel to finalize its own investigation as soon as possible and provide full transparency on its findings.

We fully support the efforts of Mr. Mladenov to improve the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza. We call upon all parties to create an environment in which such plans can be implemented. We join the calls of others upon the parties concerned to continue their cooperation with the Special Coordinator and to make sure that no effort is spared to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The implementation of his plans will bring sorely needed relief to Gaza.

Ultimately, a sustainable solution is needed to alleviate living conditions in Gaza. That means intra-Palestinian reconciliation leading to the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. We welcome ongoing Egyptian efforts to make that a reality.

We continue to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The services offered by UNRWA provide opportunity, hope and dignity for Palestine refugees. This year, with the help of many old and new donors from the region and globally, UNRWA managed to broaden its support base. Together with other donors, we will continue to work with UNRWA to close the remaining gap for this year. We encourage all partners of UNRWA to translate this year's generous contributions into predictable, multi-annual support.

My third point concerns the renewal of the peace process. Over the past years, we have noted many threats to the peace process. I regret that today we have been forced to discuss many negative steps that have been taken by all parties to the conflict. Again, we are only discussing measures needed to manage the conflict. However, conflict management is not what we are here for. We, the Council, the United Nations and both sides of the conflict have the same goal — to end the conflict. We remain firmly committed to that goal and call on all parties to combine efforts, return to the

negotiation table and restart a genuine peace process leading to a two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

First of all, I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing today. I also thank Mr. El-Ad, and, on behalf of the Security Council, apologize to him for the ill-treatment received by him today. I initially wanted to return to what happened to make a clarification concerning the human rights record of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, of which we are very proud, but that would show a lack of respect to the State and the people of Palestine. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the human rights of the Palestinians, which continue to be violated by the Israeli occupation, and not those of the Bolivians.

Accordingly, I will begin my statement by expressing Bolivia's firm rejection of the extreme violence with which the Israeli Defence Forces have been repressing the Palestinian civilian population. Such actions, which are unjustified no matter where they occur, only undermine the achievement of a long-sought, just and lasting peace for the Palestinian people, who have been living under the Israeli siege for more than 70 years. The illegal actions of the Government of Israel, including its settlement policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, constitute an obstacle and a threat to stability in the region, and, as members of the Security Council, we bear the unavoidable responsibility to act in order to prevent Israel from continuing to enjoy impunity as a State.

In that order of priorities, we categorically reject the clear intention of the Israeli Government to alter the demographic composition and territorial character of the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, which has been under occupation since 1967. All such actions are illegal and constitute a violation of the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, as reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016), on the legal invalidity of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories, which constitute a flagrant violation of international law.

Bolivia expresses its unequivocal rejection of Israel's expansionist and annexationist policy. One such example of that policy is illustrated by Israel's plan to demolish the Bedouin-Palestinian village of Khan

Al-Ahmar, located in Area C to the north-east of East Jerusalem in the West Bank, where the Israeli Defence Forces forcibly entered with heavy equipment to demolish the homes of almost 200 Palestinian civilians, who will be relocated by force and compelled to abandon their homes, their daily lives and their history. We therefore call on the international community, including the Security Council, not to recognize any change whatsoever to the 1967 borders. The Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, constitute a single territory.

We also demand that the Government of Israel end the blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has been living under a regime of collective punishment for 11 years, which deprives Palestinians of access to water and sanitation, infringes on their human right to health care and restricts their access to decent employment and the freedom of movement, together with a long list of violations that everyone in this Chamber has been witness to month after month and year after year.

As it has on previous occasions, Bolivia expresses its firm commitment to all international efforts leading to a peaceful solution to the occupation of Palestine. In that regard, we join in supporting initiatives, such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and others, that would ensure a just and lasting peace in which both peoples could live within recognized and secure borders.

I also sincerely commend the humanitarian work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, benefiting more than 5 million Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. We call on the States Members of the Organization to continue making their valuable contributions to the Agency so that it can finally overcome its current crisis, which is only resulting in the deterioration of the quality of life of all Palestinian refugees.

Bolivia believes that the only option for a long-term solution to the occupation is the two-State solution, whereby a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 internationally recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, can finally be established, pursuant to the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I also wish to inform all concerned that, with the consent of the members of the Security Council, I will suspend this meeting between 1.20 p.m. and 3 p.m.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me begin by commending the Permanent Mission of Bolivia on its competent management of the work of the Security Council for the month of October. I wish it every success. I also congratulate the delegation of the United States on its outstanding efforts during its presidency of the Council last month.

A few weeks ago, the leaders of our States met at the high-level segment of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. The statements of many of them reflected the real concerns of the international community about the future of multilateralism and the urgent need to maintain, defend and promote. The clearest manifestation of that need is embodied today in the Palestinian question.

The intensity, immensity and complexity of conflicts and tensions in the Middle East are growing at an unprecedented rate. The Palestinian question is currently at a critical juncture. In fact, the agreed principles for a political solution, based on international law and many international resolutions, are being systematically undermined. We must raise our voices from this very Chamber to underscore that multilateralism is the only way to resolve the problems facing the world, on top of which is the Palestinian question.

Lebanon has always considered the two-State solution to be the only sustainable political solution to this conflict, based on all resolutions of international legitimacy. That entails ending the occupation and establishing an independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, while fully ensuring the right of return of Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The foundations of just and comprehensive peace are completely embodied in the Arab Peace Initiative.

Peace is long overdue, and the Security Council must use its influence, authority and tools to achieve peace.

Despite delays, Lebanon is working hard to form a Government of national unity following the most recent parliamentary elections. We hope that the new Government will represent another important step towards strengthening the State institutional structure. Lebanon is currently undertaking a series of important commitments, in particular by following up on the recommendations emanating from the support conferences held earlier this year in Rome, Paris and Brussels. Lebanon seriously looks forward to implementing those recommendations meaningfully and optimally in order to support its security and economy.

Everyone knows that Lebanon continues to face major challenges as a result of regional crises, in particular the Syrian crisis. We continue to host more than 1.5 million displaced Syrians, which is significantly straining our economy, society, security and infrastructure.

The funding crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East puts more pressure on Lebanon, as it continues to host hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, while the chances of a political solution for the Palestinian question are dwindling, as we have heard today. In addition, Israel continues to violate the sovereignty of Lebanon and threatens its security through its ongoing occupation of Lebanese territory and daily air, land and sea violations.

On 31 August, the Council sent a strong message of support on the stability and sovereignty of Lebanon by adopting resolution 2433 (2018). That resolution once again reflected the united position of the Council and the international community on the priority need to preserve the stability of Lebanon by maintaining the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The Government of Lebanon stresses its full commitment to resolution 1701 (2006). In that context, the Lebanese Armed Forces are making great efforts to build and develop their capacities in order to ensure that they fulfil their role completely. They are cooperating on an ongoing basis with UNIFIL to implement Lebanon's relevant commitments, hoping to reach a permanent ceasefire, as stipulated in the resolution.

Lebanon is working with the Tripartite Mechanism to decrease tensions and preserve the security and stability of its southern borders. Despite that, in the General Assembly last month (see A/73/PV.10), the Prime Minister of Israel implicitly threatened to target Lebanese civilian and Government facilities, such as the international airport and national stadium. His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs responded to those threats by organizing a field visit for the diplomatic corps in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, Lebanon stresses from this Chamber the need for the Council and the Organization to prevent Israel from using any pretext to launching new aggression against Lebanon, which threatens the lives, safety and future of the Lebanese people.

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

Mr. Tayel (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing today and for his ongoing efforts to achieve a settlement to the Palestine question. I also thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad for his participation in today's meeting and his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

I do not believe that anyone present in the Council was surprised by the mention of violations against the Palestinian people under occupation or the injustice to which they are subjected. Council members and the international community are well aware of those violations. While some may feel bored by hearing of the same old problems, practices and various kinds of suffering periodically over and over again in the Council for long years, it is important for us to bear in mind that what we hear is not mere rhetoric or meaningless numbers and statistics. It is a reality being lived by Palestinian families on the ground, whose homes have been demolished or whose land has been taken in favour of the settlements. It is a reality being lived by entire generations of Palestinian refugees scattered throughout the world —generations born and live without a homeland, or under siege, or behind bars.

The Palestinian question has existed as long as the Council itself. Contrary to what some may believe, that is not due to division or inaction on the part of the Council. The resolutions adopted by the Council since 1967 have established a framework agreed by the international community and in line with international law and human conscience, beginning with resolution 242 (1967) up to resolution 2334 (2016), which contains

decisive elements for achieving a settlement, including the 4 June 1967 borders and the status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif within the two-State solution, in addition to clear law provisions with regard to settlements, homes demolition and the need to restart direct negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides.

In that regard, it is important to reiterate that those decisive factors have not disappeared or expired with the passing of time. They constitute inalienable rights. I note that the issue at hand has nothing to do with seeking a solution. A solution already exists that is known and conforms to the legal and humanitarian principles that we all acknowledge. What is lacking is the will to implement the solution and sometimes the political will. I recall the fact that a commitment to rights has never been the cause of the failure of a political settlement. On the contrary, forgetting and attempting to circumvent rights is the cause for the failure of the international community to achieve peace in years past.

The humanitarian tragedy endured for years in the Gaza Strip is a grave situation that is the consequence of the ongoing occupation and the failure to uphold international law. Gaza is an integral part of the Palestinian territories, and the issue of Gaza cannot be addressed separately from the political issue as a whole. The crisis in Gaza was not born in a vacuum. At this point, I wish to warn of significant pressures being applied on the residents of Gaza and of a potential explosion of the situation there as a consequence of the energy crisis, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) crisis, confrontations with the Israeli security forces that claim the lives of dozens of Palestinians, or the obstacles to movement in and out of Gaza Strip.

In that regard, Egypt is addressing the crisis based on its principled humanitarian commitment to and in solidarity with our Palestinian brothers. Despite the security conditions and the lack of legal responsibility,

we have opened the Rafah crossing for individuals in order to ease the crisis. That is an exceptional measure, but it is not enough if Israel fails to uphold its responsibilities under international law and if the Palestinian Authority fails to establish its authority throughout the Gaza Strip. Egypt has also made diligent efforts to prevent further clashes in Gaza. In that regard, we thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for supporting such efforts.

We continue to call for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, and on Palestinian parties to accelerate their response to Egypt's efforts to promote reconciliation. I also call on the international community and members of the Council, particularly those with the greatest influence, to support those efforts and to gradually build on them, particularly the steps already taken by the Palestinian National Authority to control the crossings in the Gaza Strip. It is important to consider how to build on that and to benefit from previous experiences regarding movement to and from the Gaza Strip.

In conclusion, we embrace any meaningful initiative for a comprehensive political settlement in the coming period. We stand ready to support any such initiatives, both politically and practically. We call on the Israelis and the Palestinians to reciprocate by making efforts based on upholding the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, in line with the resolutions previously mentioned. We reiterate that the Palestinian question remains the pivotal issue in the region. If any ideas or efforts are to achieve success, it is important not to overlook that reality or link the issue to other arrangements in the region.

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

The meeting was suspended at 1.20 p.m.