



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8449th meeting

Tuesday, 22 January 2019, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Singer Weisinger/Mr. Trullols. (Dominican Republic)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
France	Mr. Delattre
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mrs. Marsudi
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation.	Mr. Nebenzia
South Africa	Mr. Matjila
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Pierce
United States of America.	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

Expression of sympathy in connection with and condemnation of the attack on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the members of the Security Council, I should like to condemn in the strongest terms the outrageous, deadly and totally unacceptable attack perpetrated on 20 January 2019 against the camp of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in Aguelhok, Mali, which resulted in 10 peacekeepers from Chad being killed and several others injured. The members of the Security Council convey their deepest condolences to the families of the victims and to the people and the Government of Chad, as well as to MINUSMA. Those brave peacekeepers were operating under a mandate given by the Security Council in order to provide a more secure future for the people of the Mali. We commemorate their ultimate sacrifice in the cause of peace.

I ask those present to now rise and observe a minute of silence for those killed.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

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 Argentina, Bangladesh, Botswana, Brazil, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ecuador, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Maldives, Malaysia, Morocco, Namibia, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, the 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 Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining the meeting via video-conference from Geneva.

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 Mr. Gustavo Martín Prada, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations; and Her Excellency Mrs. Anayansi Rodríguez Camejo, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: I thank Mrs. Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, for joining us today.

As 2019 begins, we should have no illusions about the dangerous dynamics in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which continues to unfold before our eyes. In the past few months, understandably, our focus has been on the tragic situation in Gaza. Today I would like to return to the broader questions of peace and a sustainable resolution to the Palestinian question.

Over time, the possibility of establishing a viable, contiguous Palestinian State has been systematically eroded by facts on the ground. During the reporting period, Israeli authorities advanced, approved or tendered over 3,100 housing units planned in Area C settlements, including plans for approximately

2,500 units that were advanced and tenders for about 650 others. Nearly half of them are to be built deep in the West Bank, many in isolated settlements in the Nablus area and near Hebron. One of the plans effectively legalizes the outpost of Ibei Hanahal as a neighbourhood of the Ma'ale Amos settlement in the Hebron governorate.

Meanwhile, we have seen additional attempts to pass legislation that would directly apply Israeli law to the territory of the occupied West Bank, raising fears of future annexation. In December, the Government endorsed a bill to advance the legalization of 66 illegal outposts throughout the West Bank within two years. In the interim period, authorities must provide the outposts with funding, electricity and other services and freeze the implementation demolition orders.

While in early January Israeli security forces evacuated dozens of settlers from mobile homes illegally installed at the site of the former Amona outpost, at the same time a Government team has been tasked with legalizing outposts and housing units built illegally in settlements, including under Israeli law. Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures also continued across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Twenty-five structures were seized or demolished, citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. As a result, 32 people were displaced. With only 13 per cent of East Jerusalem designated for Palestinian construction and an estimated 13,000 outstanding demolition orders issued in Area C communities, demolition and displacement is a constant threat. I reiterate the United Nations long-standing position that settlements are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace.

On the Palestinian side, there are growing pressures on the foundations of the future Palestinian State, many of them imposed by decades of occupation and internal divisions. Despite the tireless efforts of Egypt and the United Nations, hopes for a genuine intra-Palestinian reconciliation are fading by the day as the sides blame each other for the lack of progress.

As ever, ordinary Palestinians bear the brunt of the suffering. The gap between Gaza and the West Bank is widening again. The early January arrests by Hamas of dozens of Fatah members in Gaza were particularly alarming and led to the Palestinian Authority's withdrawal of its personnel from the Rafah crossing

on 7 January. Those developments are a very serious blow to the reconciliation process. I call on Palestinian leaders to engage constructively with Egypt and act decisively to resolve the political impasse by ensuring the full implementation of the 2017 Cairo agreement. One thing is certain: Palestinian sovereignty and statehood will remain an impossibility without genuine unity. There can be no State in Gaza, and there can be no State without Gaza.

Meanwhile, economic growth in the West Bank is insufficient to keep the Palestinian economy afloat in the face of Gaza's dramatic economic contraction, the occupation and diminishing external support. The numbers speak for themselves — the West Bank gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 1.2 per cent in the third quarter of last year, while it contracted by 6.5 per cent in Gaza. As a result, the total GDP of Palestine contracted by 0.5 per cent in this period.

In other developments affecting Palestinian democratic foundations, on 12 December 2018, the Palestinian Constitutional Court declared the Palestinian Legislative Council dissolved and requested President Abbas to call for legislative elections within six months. I am concerned by the continuing vacuum of a functioning elected Palestinian legislative body until credible elections can take place.

There has also been a dangerous security dynamic unfolding in the West Bank over recent months, as a series of deadly terrorist attacks have taken place and the risk of destabilization has increased. The period witnessed an increasing number of Israeli military operations in Areas A and B of the West Bank. In Ramallah, for example, and elsewhere, the almost daily confrontations with Israeli security forces fuel anger and have raised questions among Palestinians as to the viability and relevance of the structures created under the Oslo Accords. Such operations disrupt the lives of civilians, increase tensions and undermine the Palestinian public's trust in their own security forces, as well as the morale of their personnel.

It has been over 25 years since Oslo opened a pathway to peace. The core of those agreements was long ago enshrined in a number of United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements that remain valid to this day. They also define the final-status issues that can only be resolved through negotiations between the parties with the goal of a two-State outcome. Over time, however, those agreements have eroded as the

prospect for credible negotiations has dimmed, only to be replaced by the lack of hope and the growing risk of a one-State reality of perpetual occupation, as outlined in the Quartet report of 2016 (S/2016/595, annex). If both sides were able to re-commit, with the support of the international community, to the basic tenets enshrined in bilateral agreements and to the principle that core issues can be agreed only through negotiations between the parties, that should provide hope for the future and impetus for peace and stability. A quarter of a century of investment in peace and State-building must not be allowed to wither under the pressure of violence, radicalization and suffering.

The agreements and the principles that have been established over the past 25 years must be respected by both sides if peace is to have a chance. The Palestinian economy must be allowed to grow through expanding opportunities for free trade; fiscal leakages must be fixed by modernizing existing arrangements; and the Palestinian Government must be able to expand the services it provides to its people. Security coordination should also continue. Those are just some examples of small steps that can be taken to strengthen the Palestinian institution-building effort and that must be supported by the international community, including through the mechanisms of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC). Those steps are not an alternative to final-status negotiations, which can be based only on international law. They are not, and cannot be, an alternative to statehood. Engaging in them, however, should provide some of the much-needed political and economic space that people need in order to regain their faith in a peaceful and just resolution of the conflict. For the international community, it is also important to know that both sides remain committed to existing bilateral agreements and arrangements.

The challenging dynamics I mentioned are unfolding as violent incidents have continued in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Eight Palestinians were killed during the reporting period by the Israel security forces, including during demonstrations, clashes, military operations and other incidents. No Israelis were killed by Palestinians during this period.

Protests at the Gaza perimeter fence continued during the past month, with seven Palestinians killed by live Israeli fire. The launching of incendiary devices into Israel also resumed after a lull of several weeks, and two rockets were launched by militants towards Israel. I

reiterate my call on Israel to use lethal force only as a last resort and in response to an imminent threat of death or serious injury. At the same time, Hamas in Gaza must also stop the indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars and ensure that protests remain peaceful.

Meanwhile, the upsurge in settler violence over the past year continues to be a serious concern. On Christmas Eve, the convoy of Palestinian Prime Minister Hamdallah was attacked with stones in the same location that a Palestinian woman, Aisha Rabi, was killed by Israeli stone-throwers in October. I urge the authorities to uphold their obligation to protect Palestinian civilians in the West Bank and to hold accountable those responsible for such attacks.

I would like to turn briefly to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. While the current temporary boost in the electricity supply has led to a general improvement in living conditions, including a 40 per cent reduction in the need for United Nations-provided emergency fuel, the situation remains desperate. Recent funding cuts by donors have forced the World Food Programme to suspend food assistance to approximately 27,000 people and reduce rations to another 166,000 beneficiaries.

At the September AHLC meeting, member States emphasized the need for increased efforts to revitalize Gaza's economy, including through cash-for-work programmes. The implementation of the package of urgent interventions continues. Donors have committed approximately \$90 million of the \$210 million needed for six months. Electricity supply to households has increased from three to 10 hours. About 4,200 jobs have been created and essential medicines have been delivered by the United Nations. I encourage donors to continue supporting our work, which is critical to avoiding another escalation.

Notwithstanding the enormity of the political challenges, the United Nations is working with the Palestinian Authority and all the relevant stakeholders to address some of Gaza's most pressing needs. The United Nations has also significantly enhanced its capacity to support project implementation on the ground. It is currently working with all key stakeholders to advance the package of socioeconomic and humanitarian interventions and to monitor ongoing projects. I urge donors to support all of our efforts. I would also like to take a moment to reaffirm our support for the critical work being done by the United Nations Relief

and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Gaza, the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, and across the region. I also urge donors to continue their support for the essential services provided by the Agency.

Turning to Lebanon, the country has been without a Government for over eight months. The formation of a cabinet seemed to be within reach but failed to materialize over political disagreements in December. I reiterate our call for all stakeholders to resolve their differences so that Lebanon can address the many pressing challenges it faces, including that of a struggling economy.

In the meantime, the situation in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line remained calm but tense. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was able to confirm that at least two of the tunnels discovered by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) crossed the Blue Line, and thereby constituted violations of resolution 1701 (2006). To date, UNIFIL has not been granted access to the confirmed entry points of a tunnel near Kfar Kila, on the Lebanese side. On 13 January, the IDF also announced that it had discovered a sixth tunnel near Zarit, south of the Blue Line, in the vicinity of Ramyah, in Sector West. On 9 January, the IDF initiated T-wall construction south of the Blue Line close to the Lebanese reservation area near Misgav Am. The construction featured prominently in the tripartite meetings on 10 January and 17 January.

On the occupied Golan, the ceasefire between Israel and Syria has been maintained, with relative calm and low levels of military activity in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) attributes that activity to controlled detonations of explosive ordnance as part of clearance conducted by Syrian security forces. The relative calm in the UNDOF area of operation was interrupted by events that occurred on 25 December and, most recently, on 20 and 21 January.

On 25 December, UNDOF observed a helicopter on the Alpha side fire four rockets that impacted on the Bravo side. On that day, UNDOF also heard and observed surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft defence guns, rockets and heavy machine guns fired on the Bravo side, but could not observe the points of origin or impact.

On 20 and 21 January, UNDOF observed and heard an increase in air activity over, and the firing

of missiles into, the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. UNDOF liaised with both sides to de-escalate the situation. The observations of military activity coincided with open-source reports of Israel's confirming that it had conducted a series of air strikes on targets in Syria in response to a missile fired from Syria and intercepted by Israel.

Such events demonstrate the volatility of the area and risk jeopardizing the long-standing ceasefire between the two countries. It is critical that both parties to the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement respect it at all times to prevent escalation across the ceasefire line and actions that undermine progress towards stability in the area.

Returning to the Palestinian question, I have said this many times, but let me repeat it once again — those who believe that the conflict can be managed in perpetuity are wrong. There is no status quo; there is only a deterioration that, if left unchecked, without a vision and the political will for peace, can lead only to endless conflict and the steady rise of radicalization on all sides. I am concerned that, within the current political landscape, those on both sides who seek to bridge the gap between Israelis and Palestinians are being undermined. Despite that, civil society continues to carry out critical work to find common ground and work towards resolving the conflict. Their efforts are inspiring and should be applauded and supported by all.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in English*): I extend our warmest congratulations to the Dominican Republic on its able presidency of the Security Council from the very outset of its tenure. I also thank United Nations Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing on the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem.

Today, we extend sincere congratulations to the other Security Council members that also began their terms on 1 January — Belgium, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa. We wish them all success, along with the rest of Council members, in upholding their lofty responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security.

In that connection, I would like to convey to my friend, Ambassador Matjila, the Permanent Representative of South Africa, and through him to the people and the Government of South Africa, my deepest condolences for the death of a dear friend, the late Permanent Representative of South Africa, Ambassador Kumalo. May his soul rest in peace.

We also welcome among us today Mrs. Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, and thank her for her presence and for Indonesia's strong support for and solidarity with Palestine.

Of course, we must also renew our deep appreciation to the countries and delegations of Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands and Sweden upon completion of their terms, during which they served with consummate commitment, skill and wisdom.

While there are many serious challenges before us, as humans tend to have, we begin the year with high hopes — hopeful that the better sides of humankind will prevail, that our common values will be upheld, that our obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and international law will be respected and that our commitments will be fulfilled so as to ensure a more just, peaceful and secure world for all, including the people of Palestine.

Although the past year tragically witnessed deep human suffering and loss as Israel's illegal occupation became more entrenched, brutal and extreme, and as the political process remained deadlocked — not only without prospects on the horizon, but with marked setbacks — there were some glimmers of hope. Alongside inspiring stories of Palestinian resilience and achievement, the following international events and trends have been critical to preserving our faith in international law and the international system, and even in the inevitability of justice.

Despite the unprecedented funding crisis faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the international community rallied, with generosity and compassion, to close an immense shortfall. Led by the Secretary-General and the Commissioner General, and supported by many traditional and new donor countries, those efforts helped ensure the continuity of operations for the provision of crucial humanitarian, development and emergency assistance to 5.4 million Palestinian refugees across the region, pursuant to UNRWA's General Assembly mandate pending a just solution.

The meaning of that collective mobilization cannot be underestimated. It has helped alleviate the refugees' plight amid widespread worries, fears and rising needs. It has ensured relative stability in their communities and host countries against a backdrop of volatility and conflict in the region. And it has served as a model of multilateralism at work and of tangible respect for humanitarian principles and political and legal responsibilities — all decisive factors in our collective ability to address the crises we face at a time when multilateralism is under such intense pressure.

The year 2018 also served to highlight a shared determination by the Palestinian people and their leadership, as well as by the international community, to preserve the foundations of a just and peaceful solution and protect Palestinian rights. That has included a near-consensus rejection of actions aimed at legitimizing illegal Israeli measures in occupied East Jerusalem, deeming such actions null and void and flagrant violations of resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016).

At repeated junctures — whether in this Chamber by nearly every Security Council member month after month or by other Member States at every debate or in the 18 December joint statement by present and outgoing European Union Council members and/or in the vast support for General Assembly resolutions on the Palestine question, including the 6 December resolution 73/89, entitled “Comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East” — important efforts have been made to reinforce the long-standing terms of parameters for a just solution, based on two-States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security along the pre-1967 borders, and for all final status issues, including Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

The international community must continue to reject attempts to erode this consensus and must match words and commitments with practical measures to ensure accountability for all violations. Only that can make impunity costly, bring it to a halt and truly make a difference in our collective search for peace. That must include serious efforts to implement the relevant resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016) and the clear obligations therein, including of non-recognition and distinction. As often stressed by the Secretary-General, there is no viable plan B to the two-State

solution. I repeat, there is no plan B to the two-State solution, as he often tells us. Immediate action to advance its realization is required before it is too late.

A final recent, positive event was the endorsement of the State of Palestine as Chair of the Group of 77 for the year 2019, tasking us with leading the Group's efforts to address issues of universal concern towards ensuring development, stability and prosperity for all humankind. We are humbled at being conferred that responsibility and pledge to uphold our collective principles and goals, in the true spirit of multilateralism, on behalf of the Group's 134 member States and with the rest of our partners and the international community.

Those have been the more hopeful developments. Unfortunately, as Special Coordinator Mladenov pointed out, the situation on the ground has been far less positive. The reality remains one of recurrent crises, cycles of violence and imminent dangers, as Israel, the occupying Power, exploiting the international paralysis, persists with its illegal policies and practices, inflicting more suffering on our people and relentlessly colonizing our land, pushing peace prospects further and further away.

Day by day, the occupation is destroying the two-State solution and sowing deep despair among our people. That despair is especially acute among our youth, who have known only the oppression and dehumanization of foreign occupation and blockade all their lives and who are losing hope for a better future and losing trust in the promises of peace and justice made to them by their leadership and the international community. That reality has been confirmed in briefing after briefing, including in the context of the Secretary-General's quarterly reports on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which should be presented in written format, as we and the majority of Council members have repeatedly called for.

Israel, the occupying Power, is flagrantly carrying on with its illegal settlement campaign, making a mockery of international law and of the Security Council's credibility. In blatant contempt of the Council's authority and global demands, Israel has persisted in confiscating and colonizing our land with settlements, the wall, checkpoints, Israeli-only roads and other occupation infrastructure, as well as demolishing Palestinian homes and forcibly transferring Palestinians, including vulnerable Bedouins, with

nearly 500 people, among them 216 children and 127 women, displaced and made homeless in 2018.

Israel has deliberately advanced the illegal construction of more than 5,600 settlement units in the past year, thereby facilitating the illegal transfer of thousands more Israeli settlers to our land. The majority of those settlement activities are taking place in areas deep inside the West Bank, and in particular in and around East Jerusalem. The obvious aim is to alter the demography, character and status of the occupied territory and de facto annex it, in grave breach of international law, and to obstruct the contiguity of our State and thereby the viability of the two-State solution.

Israeli Government officials and extremist settlers have also persisted with provocations and incitement against Palestinian Muslim and Christian communities and against our holy sites, particularly Al-Haram Al-Sharif, undermining the historic status quo, Jordan's custodianship and inflaming religious tensions. Most recently, that has involved dangerous rhetoric by an Israeli politician who called for the demolition of parts of the historic wall of the Old City of Jerusalem. Such provocations must be explicitly condemned, and Israel must be demanded to comply with all relevant resolutions, including for the protection and preservation of the city's historic, cultural and religious heritage.

The human toll also continues to mount as Palestinian civilians continue to be denied their fundamental human rights and the international protection that the Security Council and General Assembly have periodically called for across the five decades of this illegal occupation. Acts of violence and hatred against Palestinian children, women and men continue unabated, including by extremist settlers. Incited by a barrage of inflammatory rhetoric, even from the highest levels of the Israeli Government and military, violent raids and lethal attacks by occupying forces, including against unarmed civilian protesters in the Great March of Return in Gaza, continue to cause harm to civilians, take innocent lives and devastate Palestinian families, and Palestinian civilians continue to be arrested, detained and imprisoned by the occupying Power, which is fiercely targeting our male youth.

We will not forget the 295 Palestinians killed by the occupying forces in 2018, among them many children, or the 29,000 injured — the highest casualty toll since Israel's war on Gaza in 2014 — among them hundreds left disabled, including many amputees. We will not

relent in our calls for the perpetrators of those crimes against our people to be held accountable and for justice for the victims.

Human misery is also intensifying, with the poverty and dependence on aid borne of that injustice mounting daily. The situation is especially grave in the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip, where the depth of the humanitarian crisis defies description. Hearing the shocking figures reported monthly by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNRWA, the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and others may seem to have become the norm after all this time, but there is nothing normal about the calculated infliction of such human deprivation and indignity. The longer the international community tolerates this deplorable man-made crisis — whereby 2 million people are being forced to live in an open-air prison, in total isolation and desperation — the closer it will come to losing its sense of humanity.

We urge the Security Council to heed the cautions and appeals presented to it over and over and to give that matter urgent attention. We call for serious action, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the Council's own resolutions, to bring to a halt Israel's impunity, with a view to not only saving the possibility of a just peace, but actually promoting its achievement. Each State also has a responsibility to respect and ensure respect for the law by not rendering aid or assistance to illegal Israeli actions, including in Jerusalem, and by advancing accountability and peace.

On our part, we will remain resolute in calling for the application of international law and calling on the international community to uphold its political, legal and moral responsibilities to bring an end to the Israeli occupation and achieve a just solution to the Palestine question in all its aspects, including the fulfilment of our people's inalienable rights, including to self-determination and to return.

We reiterate our appeal to countries that have not yet done so to recognize the State of Palestine and, moreover, call for support for Palestine's request for admission to United Nations membership, which has been pending since 2011, to allow us our rightful place among the community of nations. Such steps would be in full conformity with the relevant resolutions, the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and independence and the two-State solution, which the international community has insisted upon, yet

neglected, for decades. It would also be significant in restoring hope and rebuilding trust, which is so vital in creating peace. We will also remain insistent in our pursuit of Palestinian reconciliation and unity, and once more, we especially recognize Egypt's valuable efforts in that regard and pledge our cooperation.

Moreover, despite the dismal situation on the ground and severe political deadlock, we remain committed to non-violence, dialogue and the objective of peace, including through negotiations based on the terms of reference enshrined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. It is on that basis that all final-status issues must be resolved and that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace can be guaranteed.

We call for the mobilization of regional and international efforts to help overcome the impasse and contribute to the realization of a just solution as a matter of urgency, in line with the Security Council's calls in resolution 2334 (2016). We urge all States to step up their efforts to uphold their commitments and obligations to bring a peaceful end to the Palestinian-Israeli tragedy. Peace cannot be achieved by dismissing international law and human rights; rather, upholding the law is the only path to peace.

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

Mr. Danon (Israel): On behalf of Israel, I congratulate the incoming members of the Security Council. I hope that this year the Council will engage in factual and constructive dialogue regarding the situation in the Middle East. I also congratulate the delegation of the Dominican Republic on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month.

Two days ago, the Iranian regime committed a grave act of aggression against Israel. The Iranian Quds Force fired a medium-range surface-to-surface missile into northern Israel from a position that was in close proximity to the Israeli border. Israel's Iron Dome air defence system intercepted that missile successfully. Israel responded by targeting Iranian military infrastructure in Syria, including intelligence command and control centres, weapon warehouses and training facilities. Israel holds the Syrian regime responsible for the missile that was launched against Israel from Syrian territory.

The international community and the Security Council must condemn Iran for that act of aggression. The firing of that missile proves, once again, Iran's deep-entrenchment in Syria. Let me be clear: Iran must fully withdraw its military presence and militia forces from Syria without conditions. It must do so immediately. Israel does not wish for any escalation, but Israel is ready and able to protect its citizens and its sovereignty from the Iranian threat. Anyone that threatens to wipe Israel off the map will be held fully accountable.

When it comes to countering terrorism, you must follow the money. When the world united against the Taliban, Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, we asked two fundamental questions. Where do they get their money, and how do we cut off their supply? By asking the right questions and following the money trail, the world was able to diminish the threat of terror.

When it comes to countering terrorism in the Middle East today, the international community must apply the same strategy. It must follow the money. In our region, the money trail of terror leads back to one common supplier. The world must acknowledge that supplier — the source that is the epicentre of modern terrorism. It must face the harsh reality that that source is a United Nations Member State. That Member State is proliferating a plague of terror from which no one is immune. Fortunately, in recent months, we have seen nations and unions of States from the Middle East to Europe and beyond beginning to take steps towards finding a remedy, but a remedy is not enough. We need to take preventive action. It is high time that the world stop the source, the main supplier and sponsor of terrorism — Iran.

After the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the international community was optimistic. It thought that Iran would use the billions of dollars it received to invest in its people, and maybe its infrastructure, reform its economy and rejoin the community of nations. That was wishful thinking. Iran has used the money to finance terrorism throughout the region and around the globe. The Iranian payroll emboldens the worst of terrorists. The money trail starts in Tehran. It reaches the border with Iraq. It stretches across the Arab Gulf to Yemen. It extends to the tyrants in Damascus. It lands in the bank accounts of its proxy Hizbullah. Iran is bankrolling a coalition of terrorists around the world. Its ultimate goal is to preach and export Ayatollah Khomeini's radical doctrine and

further the Iranian policy of expansionism. With the Iranian regime's complete backing, Hizbullah — the Iranian proxy — is turning Lebanon into a launching pad for terror. If those here do not believe me, they should believe Nasrallah — the head of Hizbullah — who stated proudly that all of Hizbullah's funding for weaponry, and even food supply, come from Iran.

On 19 December 2018 (see S/PV.8432), I presented right here undeniable evidence of Hizbullah's use of private property throughout southern Lebanon to build terror-attack tunnels underneath the Blue Line into Israel, in clear violation of Israel's sovereignty. As the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and several Member States have stated, those tunnels violate resolution 1701 (2006). The Lebanese army has taken no action in response, allowing Hizbullah to continue building those tunnels undisturbed. I also revealed the existence of four terror-attack tunnels beginning in Lebanon and ending in Israel. I outlined Hizbullah's grand plan to take over the Israeli Galilee.

Every year, Iran provides \$1 billion to its Lebanese proxy — Hizbullah. The Iranian regime has invested millions of dollars into each Hizbullah terror-attack tunnel. This is a result of the Iranian money trail when the world is silent. This is what happens when the world relies on wishful thinking. On 20 December 2018, Israel began a new phase of Operation Northern Shield. Operation Northern Shield was a defensive measure on our side of the Blue Line to destroy the terror-attack attack tunnels. Israel neutralized one tunnel by sealing it off with cement. When the cement overflowed from the other side, the evidence was crystal clear. Hizbullah's terror tunnel had begun inside private property in Lebanon, stretched underneath the Blue Line and infiltrated Israel's sovereign territory. Even then, with striking evidence, UNIFIL is still not fulfilling its mandate. On 26 December 2018, the Israeli Defense Forces discovered a fifth terror tunnel beginning in Kfar Ayta ash Shab, Lebanon, and ending in Shtula, Israel. Just last week, on 13 January, Israel discovered a sixth terror tunnel — the largest and most elaborate so far — spanning from Kfar Ramyah, Lebanon, into sovereign Israel. Operation Northern Shield has concluded, but Israel will continue to take any and all necessary defensive measures on its side of the border, including to neutralize all terror-attack tunnels violating its sovereignty. Israel will defend its people by any means, on the ground and underground. There is no price tag for the safety of our people.

If one follows the bloody trail of money starting in Tehran, one will arrive at the terror tunnels in Lebanon and Gaza and their weapons warehouses in Syria. It is now trying to infiltrate Judea and Samaria as well. The Iranian regime's obsession with Israel is not just well known, it is expensive. Seven billion dollars are directed annually to the never-ending attempts to destroy Israel — \$7 billion. In Syria alone, it invests \$4 billion dollars every year to help the Al-Assad regime. Iran gives \$1 billion in aid annually to its Shiite proxy. Iran also gives hundreds of millions of dollars to its proxies in Iraq, and tens of millions of dollars to rebels in Yemen. On Israel's border, Iran supports Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza with well over \$100 million every year.

The Palestinian observer did not mention anything about the connection between Palestinian terrorist organizations and Iran. Allow me therefore to do so. Iranian money has ended directly in the pockets of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria. Iran, in partnership with Hamas and with the help of Hizbullah, is pushing to build a military front in Judea and Samaria from which to attack Israel. The Iranian trail of terror unifies the efforts of Saleh Al-Aroui, who is the Deputy Political Chief of Hamas. He works very closely with Saeed Izadi, the Head of the Palestinian branch of the Iranian Quds Force, on behalf of Qasem Soleimani, Commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. The end goal of that gang is to establish terror networks throughout the Middle East. With the help of Al-Aroui and Izadi, Iran is trying to turn Judea and Samaria into the fourth military front against Israel. With Iran's blessing, Hamas is also growing closer to Hizbullah and sharing its preferred terror tactics, including the tunnels, which we now see in southern Lebanon. Hamas is also building a major military front in Lebanon, using it as another base from which to terrorize Israel.

All of a sudden, Iran is now speaking publicly about training Palestinian terrorists. High-profile Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists are meeting with high-ranking officials in Tehran. On 22 December 2018 — a few weeks ago — Hamas co-founder Mahmoud al-Zahar led a Hamas delegation to Tehran. As Saleh Al-Aroui said,

“The aid Iran provides to the resistance is not merely symbolic. Nobody but Iran gives us any military support”.

On 31 December, Ayatollah Khamenei rang in the new year by meeting with the head of Islamic Jihad, Ziad Al-Nakhalah, in Tehran. For his new year's resolution, Khamenei promised Al-Nakhalah that the Palestinian State would be established in Tel Aviv. I have news for Mr. Khamenei. He will not meet his new year's resolution — not this year, not ever.

In the light of those meetings, it is odd that in that same week the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, claimed with the utmost confidence,

“When did we say we want to annihilate Israel? Find one person that has said so. Nobody has said that”.

In fact, the entire Iranian regime has said that for 40 years, since 1979. For 40 years, Iranian missiles have borne the inscription, “Death to Israel”, and it is written in Hebrew. The so-called moderate Iranian President calls Israel “a cancerous tumour”. The Iranian Supreme Leader threatens to annihilate Israel himself and place the Palestinian State in Tel Aviv.

The Iranian machine of terror does not stop even for a moment. It is attempting to close in on us on four fronts, but it stands no chance against Israel. We will never let Iran win — not in Syria, not in Lebanon, not in Judea and Samaria, not in Gaza, not anywhere. The world cannot keep living in a rose-coloured reality. Iran is attacking Europe. It is entrenched in States on the other side of the planet. I am sure the Ambassadors of France, Belgium and Denmark know that, if Iran strikes their countries once, as it did in recent years, it will strike again. The European Union has taken a crucial step forward by imposing new sanctions on Iran. It is now the Council's turn to take that leap.

Israel means business. We know what Iran seeks to accomplish and we share it with our allies. We know the international community can rise to the occasion and join us in the fight against Iranian terrorism. We know that the world can answer the call of the Iranian people, who deserve a brighter future. We are waiting for the Security Council to designate Hamas, Hizbullah and Islamic Jihad as terrorist organizations, because weakening them is the first step to dismantling the epicentre of terrorism that sits in Tehran. We know the world is capable of responding. But, if we must, we will respond alone. We will defend our democracy, safeguard our sovereignty and protect our people. As former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin once warned,

“If an enemy of our people says it seeks to destroy us, believe him. Don’t doubt him for a moment. Don’t make light of it. Do all in your power to deny him the means of carrying out his satanic intent”.

If Israel must act, Israel will not hold back.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia.

Ms. Marsudi (Indonesia): First of all, congratulations, Sir, on your able presidency of the Security Council. I wish to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. I also wish to warmly congratulate Palestine for assuming the chairmanship of the Group of 77. It shows the international community’s vote of confidence in Palestine.

My presence here today is intentional. It is to show Indonesia’s consistent support for the Palestinian cause. It is a natural and legal right of Palestine to be a full Member of the United Nations. The road to Palestine’s membership has been, and will remain, bumpy. Everybody knows that. But I am sure that bumpy road will not stop Palestine and the international community from fulfilling that right. Palestine deserves the Council’s full attention. The Palestinian question defines the credibility of the Council. In that context, I wish to underline three main points.

First, all sides must comply with international law and the relevant resolutions, in particular 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), as a matter of urgency. Continued violence and the violation of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions reduce the Council’s credibility. That must be stopped and credibility must be restored. Compliance with international law also includes refraining from provocative actions or rhetoric. Two days ago, the Israeli media circulated news of the planned closure of schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in East Jerusalem next year. I truly hope that such news is a hoax. If not, it amounts to provocative action as well as a violation of Israel’s responsibilities under various international agreements. Furthermore, we reject the continued expansion of illegal settlements. It is provocative, not to mention morally and legally wrong. Palestinian families are driven unjustly from their homes. It has to end.

Secondly, the peace process requires legitimacy, and legitimacy comes when the process is under the guidance of a multilateral mechanism based on internationally agreed parameters. Any peace plans that fail to accommodate such parameters will not succeed. What we are witnessing now is disturbing, as agreed parameters have been undermined, including the attempts to move away from the two-State solution. Let me reiterate loud and clear: the two-State solution is the only option for solving the Palestinian issue. Unity and reconciliation are also of paramount importance. Therefore, I commend Ambassador Riyadh Mansour for his statement on Palestine’s determination to pursue unity and reconciliation. Moreover, we commend countries that have upheld principled positions in line with many United Nations resolutions, including on the status of Jerusalem.

Thirdly, humanitarian collapse, especially in Gaza, must be stopped. The 11-year blockade is unjust. It does not contribute to solving the problem and must be lifted. We appreciate those who have provided generous contributions to fill the UNRWA budget deficit and improve conditions in Gaza. Indonesia, too, has significantly increased its contribution to UNRWA, and we will step up our humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. Let me emphasize that UNRWA has a humanitarian mandate and is not a political agency. The plight of 5.4 million Palestinian refugees is at stake.

With regard to Syria and Yemen, continued efforts towards peaceful and inclusive political solutions must be further encouraged. Syria has seen more than a decade of suffering. We condemn the recent series of bombings that led to a number of casualties. We therefore welcome the latest efforts towards advancing a credible political process. We call on all parties to ensure the success of that Syrian-led, Syrian-owned United Nations-facilitated process, which would lead to a concrete pathway to peace.

Regarding Yemen, Indonesia welcomes the various United Nations-led processes, including the establishment of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement. The Mission is a critical step towards establishing peace and facilitating humanitarian access. Indonesia stands ready to contribute.

With respect to Lebanon, we pay tribute to the excellent work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in keeping peace. We are honoured

that 1,308 Indonesian peacekeepers, 45 of whom are women, are part of UNIFIL.

Finally, any violence and disproportionate use of force against civilians by anyone, anywhere, must be rejected. All parties must exercise maximum restraint and continue working in good faith to move the peace process forward. I underline that the spirit of multilateralism must be revived.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. I welcome Indonesian Foreign Minister Marsudi and thank her for joining us in the Security Council for today's briefing. We offer our deepest condolences to Chad on the loss of 10 peacekeepers in Mali over the weekend.

Turning to today's subject, as we have often said in the Chamber, the Security Council spends far too much time focused on Israeli-Palestinian issues, while not paying enough attention to the many other threats to international peace and security that exist in the Middle East. The approach of this monthly meeting not only has failed to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace but has distracted us and the world from looking at the region as a whole. We fail to focus on steps that would address the instability affecting the Syrians, Lebanese, Iraqis, Yemenis, Libyans and Iranians, among others.

In order to address the region's challenges, with our colleagues from Poland, the United States will jointly host a ministerial meeting to promote peace and security in the Middle East in Warsaw on 13 and 14 February. The ministerial meeting will provide an opportunity to share our experiences, insights and assessments as we work together to support a more stable and peaceful Middle East. The meeting will serve as a global brainstorming session, where we can develop the outline of a stronger security architecture in the region and establish clear benchmarks for measuring progress. Agenda items include a discussion on the humanitarian crises in Syria and Yemen, as well as sessions on missile development, extremism and cybersecurity.

It is also important to state clearly what the ministerial meeting is not. It is not a forum to relitigate the merits of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). While we have made our concerns about the JCPOA clear, we respect the decision by other States to support it. It is also not a venue to demonize or attack Iran. Indeed, the United States Secretary of State has outlined a clear strategy to reach a new comprehensive

deal with Iran, built on the shared global understanding that the country must cease its destabilizing activities.

Recent months have made clear the need for further international action on Iran's missile programme. Only last week, Secretary Pompeo called attention to Iran's firing of a space launch vehicle, which yet again demonstrates Iran's defiance of the Security Council and resolution 2231 (2015). Similarly, we see Iran's proxies taking dangerous steps that threaten international peace and security. Israel has exposed extensive tunnelling by Hizbullah under the Blue Line. As the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) made clear, such construction violates resolution 1701 (2006). We commend UNIFIL's work to keep the Blue Line under control. However, it is unacceptable that the Lebanese Government has not yet given UNIFIL access to the tunnel entrances on its side of the Blue Line.

Given the events over the weekend, let me state clearly that the United States condemns the launching of a rocket from Syria towards Israel. That was an unacceptably provocative act by the Iranian and Syrian regimes. We again call on Iran to withdraw all forces from Syria and to reaffirm Israel's right to self-defence.

The upcoming ministerial meeting in Warsaw will acknowledge such activities, among others, as drivers of instability in the Middle East. However, the scope of the discussion will be much broader than any one country or set of issues. As a testament to that, countries from around the world have been invited to participate. The meeting will provide an opportunity for all countries that attend to engage in a dynamic discussion and collaborative thinking with the goal of contributing to a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Middle East, which would also be a more productive and appropriate approach for these monthly Council meetings. We look forward to following up on the outcomes of the ministerial meeting with the Security Council in the coming months.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for a very comprehensive briefing. Allow me also to welcome among us Her Excellency Ms. Retno Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia. We are very pleased to see her here today.

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, unfortunately, there has not been any progress at all. On the contrary, we have failed to prevent further loss of life. We once again call on all sides to act with the utmost restraint in order to avoid further casualties. In recent violent episodes, civilians on both sides, including children, were killed or wounded.

The recent developments in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank remind us how important it is to continue the de-escalation process. Our priority is to restore a political horizon for the resumption of a meaningful peace process. We believe that a negotiated two-State solution and the resolution of all final-status issues, including Jerusalem, settlements, the future of Palestinian refugees, borders and security arrangements, still remain a realistic way to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of both parties and achieve long-term peace.

We appeal to both sides to refrain from unilateral steps that prejudice the outcome of final-status negotiations and expect them to demonstrate their commitment to peace through their action and policies.

In more general terms, let me underline that Poland supports a 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 and normalization of relations with Arab States. Unfortunately, so far, we have not seen significant positive moves towards achieving that goal.

Let me now touch briefly on the situation in the Gaza Strip, where the political and security conditions remain volatile. We are particularly concerned about the humanitarian situation of the 2 million people in the Gaza Strip.

We believe that only by returning to meaningful bilateral negotiations, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, which encapsulate the internationally agreed parameters, 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 the political process, will be possible only by working together with our regional and international partners, including the Middle East Quartet.

Unfortunately, the two-State solution seems to be at risk of fading away. Advancing Israel's settlement plans has the potential of splitting the West Bank into two parts, which would make the two-State solution almost impossible. We are worried also about the looming possibility of the demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar.

We followed closely the 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, allowing the Palestinian Authority to resume its full responsibilities in Gaza. A single, legitimate Palestinian Authority could represent an important step towards the unity of the future Palestinian State and the basis for a sustainable peace agreement.

Let me underline also the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the region. We strongly believe that stopping UNRWA's important activities could cause instability and create a vacuum, which would serve only the extremists. We should do our utmost to preserve the crucial role of UNRWA in this context.

The stabilization of the Middle East is key to global security. To that end, as mentioned by my United States colleague, a ministerial conference devoted to security in and the stabilization of the Middle East, co-hosted by Poland and the United States, will take place in Warsaw in February. We believe that the conference will bring added value to efforts towards peace in the Middle East by creating a positive vision for the region. We have invited representatives of more than 70 countries from all regions of the world. As has already been mentioned, the conference will focus on a range of horizontal issues that affect the whole region. We do not intend to focus on particular countries during the conference.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to sincerely thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing and for the work that he and his team are doing. I should like also to welcome the presence here today of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia.

As this is my first statement on this item as a member of the Council, I should like to underscore a number of points that are of vital importance to my country.

Belgium sees no option other than a negotiated solution based on the coexistence of two States, with the city of Jerusalem as their future capital, in line with agreed international parameters, all of which must be respected. International law and the relevant Council resolutions must be the basis for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace plan. Belgium believes that all credible diplomatic initiatives must be based on these parameters, which enjoy international consensus.

My statement today will focus on international efforts to facilitate the two-State solution — the only solution that could realize in a lasting manner the legitimate aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians. However, Belgium believes that such a solution will require a more peaceful international and regional environment — a far cry from the current one given the developments that have taken place recently, on which Belgium and the other members of the Security Council will have to express their views shortly.

The year 2018 reaffirmed the trend that started in 2017 of a relentless pursuit of the settlement policy, including in the heart of the West Bank, in areas that are strategic to the territorial continuity of a future Palestinian State. Belgium is also concerned about the fact that ongoing settlement activity on the ground is accompanied by legislative initiatives aimed at facilitating further such activity. In line with resolution 2334 (2016), we are resolutely opposed to that settlement policy and to the measures taken in this context, including forced displacement, evictions and demolitions, which also increased in 2018, in particular in East Jerusalem.

Settlement activity is illegal in the eyes of international law, undermines the establishment of the trust necessary to any peace process and contributes to fuelling tensions. We urge the Israeli authorities to reconsider and to rescind their decisions on that issue. Furthermore, we note with concern that there has been an increase in the use of violence not only by settlers, but also against them. We reiterate our firm condemnation of all use of violence, regardless of the perpetrators. These developments bring us closer to a point of no return for the two-State solution; they only diminish the already fragile prospects for peace between the two parties.

The situation in the Gaza Strip continues to command our full attention. Demonstrations intensified in recent weeks, with violent incidents. While we

recognize the right of Israel to ensure its own security, we condemn the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force. We urge Israel to respect the right of the Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully and to abide by its legal obligations to protect civilians.

However, irresponsibly inciting the inhabitants of Gaza to cross the perimeter fence into Israel and cause damage cannot be tolerated either. We condemn all acts of provocation and incitement to violence. Demonstrations must remain strictly non-violent and not be exploited for other purposes. We firmly condemn the rocket fire towards Israeli territory and urge all stakeholders to demonstrate restraint in order to avert a fresh cycle of violence.

I would like to draw the Council's attention to the fate of the most vulnerable in this conflict. In 2018, 57 children were killed, most of them in the context of the Great March of Return in Gaza. In no case did there seem to be any imminent threat that could have justified the use of live fire. We are concerned by this number, which is much higher than in 2017. Belgium urges Israeli leaders to strengthen oversight and accountability mechanisms, which should include in-depth, independent investigations into each case involving the death of a child.

The humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in the Gaza Strip must be urgently improved. We support the Special Coordinator's efforts to that end as well as the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

But a humanitarian response alone is not enough; a fundamental change in the situation in Gaza is necessary, one that would include a lifting of the blockade and the full opening of crossing points, while taking into consideration Israel's legitimate concerns regarding its own security. A political solution to the crisis also requires that control of the territory be returned to the Palestinian Authority.

We deplore the fact that intra-Palestinian reconciliation talks appear to be deadlocked and urge all parties to invest in dialogue and, to that end, commend the efforts made by Egypt. We take note of the dissolution of the Palestinian Legislative Council and express our concern at this development, since it is an elected body of the Palestinian Authority. We encourage Palestinian leaders to strive to build strong, inclusive, responsible and democratic institutions that are based on respect for the rule of law and human

rights. We urge the Palestinian Authority to work towards credible democratic elections.

I would like to conclude by repeating the fact that there can be no alternative to a two-State solution. A just and lasting peace can be realized only by responding to the legitimate aspirations of all the parties. Recent developments clearly show that the current situation is untenable. It is no longer the status quo. It is deteriorating and creating instability that the region definitely does not need. We should continue to work on the issue together with our Palestinian and Israeli friends.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Mladenov for his informative briefing on events in the Middle East and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Today, as violent conflicts — in Syria, Yemen and Libya — have continued to break out in the Middle East and North Africa, the lack of progress in resolving the Palestinian issue is seriously worrying. We have always said that the existing status quo is not viable. It only reinforces the negative trends that render the prospect of achieving peace in the heart of the Middle East ever more distant. But today what we are seeing is not even the status quo. As Mr. Mladenov rightly noted, we are witnessing a dangerous deterioration in the situation. As a result, and as the regular report of the Special Coordinator confirms, the parties are intensifying their unilateral activity, which only exacerbates the existing problems. Israel's settlement activity is picking up speed. The inflammatory rhetoric continues on both sides. Reports of violent incidents are more and more frequent. We urge both Palestinians and Israelis to refrain from acts of aggression and we firmly condemn terrorist attacks. We emphasize the unacceptability of any indiscriminate use of force and of purposeful attacks on civilian targets.

The only way out of the situation is by relaunching the political process with a view to resuming direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations as soon as possible on a generally accepted international legal basis, which includes the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map of the Quartet of mediators for a settlement in the Middle East. Only the implementation of the formula for a two-State solution, whereby the two States of Palestine and Israel coexist in peace and security, will enable the crisis to be overcome and

create the conditions necessary for sustainable progress towards a durable peace. We should point out that an overwhelming majority of Member States will not accept attempts to revise that basis for a Middle East settlement. That was confirmed once again during the vote in the General Assembly in December (see A/73/PV.47). We believe firmly that any actions and proposals that do not result from Palestinian-Israeli negotiations are doomed to failure. Nor will it be possible to resolve the so-called final status issues for the Palestinians and Israelis themselves, just as it has not been possible to achieve a lasting stabilization of the Middle East without a just and long-term resolution of the Palestinian question.

Russia will continue taking steps to restore positive momentum to the Palestinian-Israeli dossier. Our proposal for providing a platform in Russia for a personal meeting between the Palestinian and Israeli leaders is still on the table. We are certain that the Quartet still has its potential as the only mediation format approved by Security Council resolutions. We support reactivating it in its regular and close cooperation with the League of Arab States and all regional and world stakeholders who can contribute to overcoming the dangerous stalemate in the Palestinian-Israeli settlement. We will continue our efforts to help reunify the Palestinians. In the past few weeks the leadership of the Russian Foreign Ministry has conducted a series of intensive contacts with representatives of the various Palestinian factions. We hope that the Palestinians will be able to achieve a new rapprochement among themselves in order to put an end to the schism and reunite the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. We have noted and appreciate the efforts of Cairo and Amman in that regard.

We cannot ignore the dedicated efforts of humanitarian personnel in Palestine. We note the important work being done by the United Nations, particularly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in the occupied Palestinian territories and in refugee camps. Russia is also helping our Palestinian friends by making contributions both to the UNRWA budget and on a bilateral basis. We cannot permit a situation in which Palestinians find themselves in a position where they basically have nothing to lose. That fuels radicalism and is capable of blowing up the situation in the Palestinian territories and far beyond their borders.

We already have quite enough radicalism in the Middle East. If we are to combat that threat, we especially need the coordinated efforts of the entire international community on a daily basis. Once again, in accordance with the position that Russia's representatives have repeatedly expressed, including at the Security Council meeting held on 25 June last year that comprehensively reviewed the situation in the Middle East and North Africa (see S/PV.8293), we call for genuinely collective measures for integrated efforts to improve the situation in the region. It is essential to unite our efforts on the Palestinian-Israeli question, as well as in other areas, including Syria, Yemen and Libya. It is important not to cut back our support to the authorities in Iraq in their efforts to further stabilize their situation. The violations of Syria's sovereignty must end and we must all engage in the collective work of achieving a political settlement and reintegrating Syria into the Arab family. We have to support that process, not create obstacles to it from outside. We want to once again draw attention to our concept for developing confidence-building measures in the Persian Gulf, which is aimed at creating a region-wide security architecture.

Today in this Chamber we heard some delegations assert that the upcoming ministerial meeting in Warsaw has no specific national aspects. While I would very much like to believe that, I have to ask why Iran, one of the biggest and most important countries of the region, was not invited to it. Attempts to cobble together military and political alliances in the region, holding various conferences designed to paint a one-sided, simplistic picture of the problems in the Middle East, which are apparently all connected to Iran and Iran alone, are counterproductive and merely render the prospect of establishing a genuine, inclusive and comprehensive security architecture in the region ever more distant, just as there can be no truly inclusive and comprehensive regional security architecture without a just solution to the Palestinian question.

Ultimately, security is the fundamental and natural policy priority for every State in the region. We believe that devising rules of conduct that are acceptable to all can only be done within the framework of a negotiation process, perhaps one similar to Helsinki, as Secretary-General Guterres has said more than once. We fully support his efforts to develop that initiative.

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

question. We welcome the presence in the Council today of Ms. Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, and we thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the many complex challenges to peace and stability in the region affected by the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and the armed conflicts in Yemen and Syria.

The Israeli-Palestinian question is undoubtedly the most complex crisis that the international community has dealt with for the past more than 70 years. Compounding the political and security issues is the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which is in urgent need of coordinated solutions. With regard to this situation, my country, which values equally the security of the State of Israel and the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, reaffirms its firm support for a two-State solution in which both countries coexist peacefully within the 1967 borders. In order to achieve that, it is essential that the Israeli and Palestinian leadership show proof that they can rise above their differences by resuming their dialogue and building the foundations of a new understanding that guarantees just and lasting peace on the achievements of the past.

Numerous reports from the various United Nations agencies call the Council's attention to the structural vulnerabilities affecting the Palestinian territories, including unemployment, which is at a record 27 per cent, and the lack of decent housing, health infrastructure or basic social services such as access to drinking water and electricity. In view of the serious humanitarian situation, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its call to the Council to work together urgently with the United Nations specialized agencies and all partners to find ways to mobilize the assistance necessary for meeting the basic needs of the affected populations. In that regard, we urge international partners to continue their financial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We firmly believe that will make it possible to gradually make up the more than \$200 million estimated budget deficit of an agency that plays a key role in providing international assistance to populations in distress.

On the political front, my country calls on Fatah and Hamas to resume their dialogue in order to enable the Palestinian Authority, which has the primary responsibility for responding to the Palestinian people's social needs, to carry out its sovereign duties in Gaza

and the West Bank. We also reiterate our support for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute through dialogue. In that regard, we welcome the international consensus on the need for a resumption of the peace process as the only viable framework for mutually acceptable solutions on such crucial issues as the status of Jerusalem and the lifting of the blockade on Gaza. We encourage all parties to exercise restraint and urge them to engage in constructive dialogue and refrain from any unilateral action that could compromise the international community's efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

We continue to be concerned about the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, which all observers describe as the worst in the world. Millions of Yemenis are threatened by food insecurity, which in turn exposes them to famine and malnutrition. On top of that, civilians have limited access to drinking water and primary health care and are dealing with problems related to waterborne diseases and the risk of epidemics. In view of the alarming humanitarian situation, Côte d'Ivoire calls on the parties to the conflict to respect the ceasefire in order to ensure the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to people in distress, and urges them to focus on dialogue with a view to arriving at a political solution to the current crisis and to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Despite the continuing numerous challenges, we believe that the Stockholm Agreement, signed on 13 December 2018, and the resulting arrangements give hope for achieving lasting peace and stability in Yemen. The Council, which has endorsed this long-awaited peace agreement, should make every effort to implement its relevant provisions, including the cessation of hostilities in Al-Hudaydah governorate and the withdrawal by both sides of their forces from Al-Hudaydah city and the ports of Al-Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Issa, as well as prisoner exchanges and arrangements for Taiz city.

With regard to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, Côte d'Ivoire would like to raise the issues of the use of chemical weapons, the humanitarian situation and the political process. Regarding the issue of the use of chemical weapons, we appreciate Syria's continued cooperation with the relevant entities of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which has enabled progress to be made on the programme for destroying Syria's chemical weapons. However, we remain concerned about the

unresolved issues raised by the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration on its chemical weapons, and we urge the Syrian authorities to cooperate further with the OPCW Technical Secretariat on the issue.

The humanitarian situation is still a major concern for my delegation, owing to the military escalation and its impact on civilians in north-western Syria, including the demilitarized zone in Idlib governorate established pursuant to the agreement signed on 17 September 2018 by the Russian Federation and Turkey. My delegation is concerned about the capture of Idlib by the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham group, a former branch of Al-Qaida, which also raises fears of a further deterioration in the humanitarian organizations' working conditions. In that regard, my country affirms the importance of safe, prompt, unhindered and sustainable humanitarian access to persons in distress both in Idlib and throughout Syria. We therefore call on the parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights.

With regard to the political process, we deplore the fact that the resurgence of fighting in Idlib governorate and other parts of Syria could jeopardize the meagre achievements of the intra-Syrian peace process, which is why we encourage stakeholders to commit to engaging in the United Nations negotiations and the Astana and Sochi processes. We therefore once again urges the warring parties to agree on the effective establishment of the constitutional committee that will be tasked with drafting a new constitution.

Côte d'Ivoire would like to express its support for Mr. Geir Pedersen, the new Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General, and to wish him every success in carrying out his mission. We continue to believe firmly that there can be no military solution to the various crises in the Middle East. Only a bold and inclusive dialogue, supported by the international community, including the Council, can lead to lasting peace and stability for shared prosperity in the region.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his valuable briefing on the latest developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, reminding us once again of the ongoing tragedy there. We commend his efforts and endeavours to ensure de-escalation and contain the current tensions. We also welcome Her

Excellency Ms. Retno Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, and thank her for participating in today's meeting.

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the State of Palestine on its election by acclamation to chair the Group of 77 and China. We wish it every success. We agree with my colleague the observer of Palestine that this is a positive and hopeful development that confirms that the international community continues to support the cause of the Palestinian people.

The Security Council is once again meeting at the start of a new year to address the Palestinian question. The year 2018 was marked by detentions, the demolition of homes and destruction of property and the unprecedented expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. It was also marked by the forced displacement and killings of Palestinian civilians and by a tightening of the blockade that was first imposed on the Gaza Strip 12 years ago. Those practices have been factors in the daily lives of the Palestinian people for the past year. Unfortunately, the Security Council has not acted to compel the occupying Power to implement its resolutions, thereby giving Israel a green light to continue its practices aimed at perpetuating the occupation and undermining any prospects for a genuine peace that would grant the Palestinian people their legitimate and basic human rights, including the right to independence, sovereignty and a dignified life.

That is the situation of the Palestinian question at the beginning of its sixth decade. The international community remains unable to find a solution to it, not for lack of determination or will but due to the absolute rejection of any proposed solution by Israel, the occupying Power. History shows that successive Israeli Governments have refused to comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions or with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and have continued to violate them. I will focus on the suffering just this past year of the Palestinian people under occupation, by citing some statistics and numbers provided by United Nations reports, including those prepared by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

First, regarding settlement activities, in 2018 Israel, the occupying Power, continued to seize Palestinian territories by force and evict their original inhabitants. It began building at least 5,618 settlement units during the past year, most of them deep into the occupied West Bank, notably in East Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It has also recently approved the construction of an additional 2,500 settlement units. The number of settlers living in the occupied West Bank increased by 3 per cent, reaching 448,000, not including 200,000 more who live in occupied East Jerusalem. In that regard, we once again call for implementing resolution 2334 (2016), which stresses that Israel's settlement activity is a flagrant violation of international law and an obstacle to peace. We call on Israel, the occupying Power, to fully and immediately cease all its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Secondly, with regard to the demolition of houses and buildings, in 2018 Israel continued its policy of demolishing Palestinian houses, dismantling 460 structures in the West Bank, mostly in Jerusalem, and affecting the lives of around 7,000 Palestinian citizens. According to OCHA, more than 13,000 demolition orders were issued, including for 50 schools. All of those illegal practices show that Israel has continued its efforts to destroy all prospects for a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders.

Thirdly, with regard to settler violence, in 2018 we witnessed an increase in violations committed by the occupying army and settlers against Palestinians and their property, with a total of 4,318 violations — an average of 11 per day — including action at checkpoints, detentions, the confiscation of funds, vehicles and properties, and the destruction of agricultural crops. Acts of aggression by settlers against Palestinians, which are considered hate crimes, increased by 60 per cent in 2018 as compared to 2017.

Fourthly, with respect to deaths and injuries, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued its policies against Palestinian civilians suffering under the yoke of the occupation, in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. In 2018, no fewer than 295 Palestinians were killed and 29,000 injured, the highest number of casualties since the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip in 2014. In the Gaza Strip itself, 257 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the Great March of Return on 30 March 2018, including 181 during demonstrations.

Fifthly, with regard to detentions, in 2018 some 6,000 Palestinian people were detained, including 358 children, 128 women and seven parliamentarians.

The State of Kuwait condemns Israel's systematic and extensive practices and policies towards the defenceless Palestinian people, which according to international humanitarian law and international human rights law amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. We call on the Security Council to enforce its resolutions on the protection of Palestinian civilians, especially resolutions 904 (1994) and 605 (1987), which confirm the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory. This is a simple overview of the crimes, illegal policies and practices of Israel, the occupying Power. We would need more than these few minutes to accurately reflect the bitter reality that the Palestinian people are living through. There can be no question that those statistics and figures should compel us, as members of the Security Council, to shoulder our responsibility to support the rule of law and ensure accountability while ending the illegal policies that deny a people their legitimate rights. In that regard, we commend the efforts of the Secretary-General to address UNRWA's financial shortfall, as well as the generous response by donors, including Kuwait, to ensure that it can continue to provide its services to Palestinian refugees.

We reiterate our support for the Palestinian people's struggle to realize all their legitimate political rights and establish their own independent State on their land, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We fully support the right of the State of Palestine to become a fully-fledged Member of the United Nations. Conversely, as we condemn Israel's policies aimed at changing the demographics of Jerusalem and its continued violations of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, we call on States to refrain from establishing their diplomatic missions in Jerusalem, in line with international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 478 (1980), which stresses that Jerusalem is a final-status issue.

In conclusion, we call on the international community to fulfil its commitments and take the necessary measures to revive the peace process with the aim of reaching a two-State solution, putting an end to the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories occupied since 1967, and ensuring a just and lasting peace in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including

the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. I have listened carefully to the statements by the representatives of Palestine and Israel. I warmly welcome Mrs. Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, and thank her for her presence here today and her statement.

The question of Palestine is at the core and root of the Middle East issue. Its resolution is crucial to achieving peace and development in this region. At the moment, the conflict in the Gaza Strip continues. The West Bank is frequently attacked, and settlement activities are still going on, while Palestinian homes continue to be demolished. At the same time, we are seeing challenges to the possibility of a two-State solution. Efforts to achieve a resumption of the dialogue between Palestine and Israel show no progress, while the risk of escalation of the conflict cannot be ignored.

China is deeply worried about the current developments. The Council and the international community should maintain a united front and adopt a long-term perspective in advancing a political settlement of the Palestinian question. Using violence to quell violence will not solve any problems. China strongly opposes any acts of violence against civilians. We urge the parties concerned to bear in mind the security and safety of the local populations and the crucial importance of peaceful coexistence by exercising restraint and thereby preventing the situation from escalating. The grave humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip does not serve regional stability. We hope that the relevant parties will lift the blockade of Gaza quickly and entirely. China regrets Israel's decision to close schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in East Jerusalem, and we call on the international community to increase funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and help Palestine improve its economic circumstances.

The fundamental path to resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is through a two-State solution. The international community should adhere to the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, among other things, in working to intensify efforts for a resumption of talks

and for achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question. Any new initiative should be aimed at making a two-State solution a reality. Concrete action should be taken to implement resolution 2334 (2016) and to end all settlement activities in the occupied territories and the demolition of Palestinian homes and property. Steps should also be taken to prevent violence against civilians.

The question of the final status of Jerusalem is a complex and sensitive one. It underpins any future settlement of the Palestinian question as well as the future of a two-State solution. The parties should act with prudence and follow the principles of respecting historical pluralities, upholding fairness and justice, implementing international agreements, striving for peaceful coexistence and adhering to the relevant United Nations resolutions and international consensus so as to reach a solution through negotiations that accommodates the interests of all sides. The international community should stay united in advocating for a resumption of peace talks between the two sides as soon as possible. The parties should meet halfway, avoid any action or rhetoric that might exacerbate the situation and refrain from any unilateral measures that could undermine trust, with a view to creating the necessary conditions for a resumption of dialogue and expediting the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process. Parties that can bring serious influence to bear on the Middle East issue should also play a constructive role.

China has always been committed to moving the Middle East process forward and has been supportive of the Palestinian people's just cause, that of regaining their legitimate national rights. We support the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We support Palestine's greater integration into the international community. In line with His Excellency President Xi Jinping's four-point proposal promoting a political settlement of the Palestinian question. China will step up its communication and cooperation with countries of the region and work to maintain peace and stability, uphold fairness and justice and promote common development in the Middle East, thereby playing a proactive and constructive role for peace in the region.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to begin by thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his clear and detailed briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including

the Palestinian question. We hope that both he and the team he represents will continue to work this year with the same zeal and spirit of dedication and collaboration on this delicate issue. We welcome the delegations of Israel and Palestine, as well as the other delegations that have decided to make statements in this important meeting because of how important they consider the issue. We especially welcome Mrs. Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, and appreciate her presence here during our debate.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea has been closely following the developments in the Middle East, which has been the scene of numerous conflicts for several decades. Though they may be different from one another, while frequently related, and although they may vary in the degree of devastation they inflict, what they all share is the fact that they have claimed numerous human lives, destroyed a great deal of infrastructure and damaged all sorts of services, thereby wasting their populations' efforts to improve their lives and ensure a decent future for their children. That destruction has caused the displacement of considerable portions of the populations of Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Palestine and other neighbouring areas affected by these struggles. The persistence and ongoing exacerbation of this situation has not only left the region in a constant state of instability, it also continually jeopardizes international peace and security. It is therefore urgent and essential that the Security Council and the international community continue to put pressure on the parties who sustain these conflicts.

On the question of Palestine, we deplore the tension that has continued between the parties during the past year, with violent and deadly incidents that we have mainly witnessed since the Great March of Return began, on 30 March 2018, through December. In that regard, and now that we are beginning a new year, we want to call on the parties to refrain from taking unilateral actions that incite violence and could harm any future negotiation process. In the past there have been worse moments in the history of this conflict, with much bloodshed and destruction, but they have not brought the guarantee of security that the Israelis desire or facilitated the establishment of a Palestinian State recognized by Israel. We therefore once again reiterate our fundamental position, which is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be resolved through negotiations based on the idea of two independent

States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within mutually recognized borders. Violence is not and will never be the best way to resolve this dispute that pits Israelis against Palestinians.

However, my delegation wants to emphasize the importance of ensuring that Palestine's leaders address the security concerns of the Jewish State with sincerity and pragmatism. As always, we insist on the return of the Palestinian National Authority to the Gaza Strip. In recent years, most of the violent exchanges between Israel and Palestine have been related to Gaza. The Palestinian National Authority, supported by the international community, should be able to work more effectively to improve socioeconomic conditions and ensure a secure environment that guarantees peace and tranquillity both for the 2 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and for the people of neighbouring Israel. It is therefore essential to support and encourage the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process under Egypt's auspices. We have been closely following the situation on the border of the Gaza Strip, and we hope that the drop in the number of violent episodes in recent weeks will continue and can result in a mutual understanding on the transportation of goods and on maintaining the current atmosphere of tranquillity.

We also urge the Government of Israel, to the extent that it wants to find a solution to the conflict, to ease its policies in the occupied Palestinian territories with regard to issues such as the demolition of Palestinian homes and property, as well as the ongoing construction of settlements that will continue to pose a huge obstacle to achieving a reasonable agreement in future. We also urge the Israeli security forces, in cases where they are exercising their inalienable right to self-defence, to take into account their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and avoid actions that make it more difficult to resume dialogue.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea will agree to any approach that takes into account the various relevant resolutions of the United Nations and other current legal instruments that provide for a peaceful solution to this conflict. In that regard, we once again affirm our support for a solution based on two independent States of Israel and Palestine, within the 1967 borders, and in the hope that with the support of confidence-building measures, the two States can live side by side in harmony and with the other countries of the region.

Finally, my delegation welcomes the fact that the United States Administration intends to issue a plan for a resumption of the negotiation process. We hope and wish that it will be issued as soon as possible and will represent a genuinely positive starting point for a resumption of negotiations. In that regard, we invite the United States to ensure that its plan is impartial and fair to all the parties involved.

It is very likely that the elections planned for April in Israel will end up postponing the possibility of promoting the peace process during the electoral campaign. In that regard, we ask the Israeli Government to abstain from taking unilateral action as part of the campaign, which would have long-term consequences.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I thank you, Mr. President, for putting this topic on the agenda. I would also like to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his very impressive and, at the same time, worrisome statement.

Mr. Mladenov spoke clearly of the dangerous dynamic that he is observing and stated there is no status quo to preserve. He said that we are living in times of deterioration and radicalization. Therefore, I think a debate is warranted even though there are other crises in the region, such as Syria and Yemen, with very bleak ongoing humanitarian disasters.

I would like to begin by aligning myself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union (EU), who will lay out the common EU position. Let me make five points.

First, Germany is steadfast in its commitment to Israel, its security and Israel as a Jewish and democratic State. Germany will not remain silent when Israel's right to exist is questioned or compromised, as it is by Iran. The Israeli Ambassador reminded the Council that there are still Iranian missiles that are inscribed with the phrase "Death to Israel".

Secondly, Germany underscores the importance of the political process. We continue to promote and favour prospects for a political process, which we believe is urgently needed. In that regard, we support any attempt to restart meaningful, direct negotiations between the parties with the objective of reaching lasting peace. We must all work together to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. In that respect, almost everybody around the table said that they remained fully and firmly committed to the two-State solution. As the

Indonesian minister, who I welcome here today, said in her statement, the only option to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a two-State solution based on Council resolutions and the known parameters. That also applies to the status of Jerusalem. In that context, I also recall the relevant Security Council resolutions, such as resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), which are binding international law. Resolutions are not an à la carte menu. With regard to the political process, we believe that confidence-building measures and positive steps by both parties are essential and require leadership, political will and very hard work. We call on both sides to live up to their responsibilities so that future generations can live in peace.

Thirdly, we must focus on Israel's settlement policies. Israel's continuous expansion of settlement activity is a matter of great concern. I want to highlight what Mr. Mladenov said in his strong statement. I note the figures that he gave on permits and what he said about demolitions, displacement, seizures, as well as what he said about the fear of future annexation. I remind the Council that all of those settlement activities are illegal under international law. They jeopardize prospects for a future peace agreement on the basis of a two-State solution. They create enclaves, obstruct Palestinian development and incite violence on both sides. I therefore call upon Israel to freeze its expansion of settlements, its legalization of outposts, as well as its demolition of Palestinian property.

Special Coordinator Mladenov also noted that the increase in violence is a matter of great concern. Germany strongly condemns all attacks, including the firing of rockets and the use of incendiary kites and balloons from Gaza, which put Israel's security at risk. To those responsible, in particular Hamas, we affirm that those attacks are unacceptable and must stop. Violence, including terrorist attacks, and unrest increased in the final months of 2018 in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem. We strongly urge all parties to de-escalate, exercise restraint and refrain from putting the lives of innocent civilians in danger. Violence against civilians, especially if directed against the most vulnerable, such as children or disabled persons, is unacceptable and unjustifiable. Human rights need to be respected at all times. At the same time, protests have to be peaceful and the rights of demonstrators have to be respected. We call on all sides to refrain from the use of excessive force. On a more positive note, Germany encourages all people-to-people exchanges, some of which are

led by women. We want to explicitly commend such exchanges, which can contribute to easing tensions between the parties.

Fourthly, on the humanitarian situation, in addition to the increase in violence, the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza remains a matter of great concern. Our immediate priority must be to ease restrictions on movement and access. Humanitarian and financial assistance to Gaza must not be obstructed. We call on the Palestinian Authority to do its part to improve the living conditions in Gaza. Let me also commend the important work of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). To echo the words of Mr. Mladenov, the work of UNRWA is essential and critical for Palestinians. Nobody has been able to explain to me why cutting funds to Agency is good for peace prospects. All studies point to the fact that depriving young people of the possibility of enjoying education leads directly to terrorism and extremism. I once again thank all of those who have supported UNRWA. It is important for the youth in the region.

Lastly, on the process of intra-Palestinian reconciliation, not least for the situation in Gaza, it is very important for intra-Palestinian reconciliation to resume. On this topic, Special Coordinator Mladenov said that the hope for reconciliation is fading by the day. We still believe that we must do all we can, even though the situation is grim, particularly after the dissolution of the Palestinian Legislative Council. We have seen the prospects for reconciliation deteriorate and confidence further erode. I would like to commend our Egyptian friends for their relentless efforts to get Hamas and Fatah together. We encourage Egypt to continue its efforts despite the current situation. I call on Palestinian actors to show leadership in finding common ground to address the needs of the Palestinian people. We are ready to continue to work with the Palestinian Authority to strengthen democratic institutions. Instead of fighting among themselves, I think that the Palestinian leaders have an obligation to concentrate on how they can support the frustrated youth and have them go to school and work constructively so that they do not become radicalized.

Let me end by echoing the words of our colleague from Côte d'Ivoire, who focused not only on Middle East peace but also peace in Syria and Yemen. He said that for all of the problems that we face in the Middle East, only a political solution can lead the way forward.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I join others in welcoming the Indonesian Foreign Minister, who is a very good friend of the United Nations. I also join the American representative in expressing our deepest condolences to Chad for the loss of its peacekeepers. We send our condolences also to the victims' families.

As other speakers have noted, there are a range of issues in the Middle East today that deserve the Council's concern, but, as Mr. Mladenov was our briefer, I will confine my remarks today to the issues that he covered. I want to start by echoing the German representative's statement that Israel's security should not be put in doubt. We condemn unreservedly the rocket launches from Syria and Gaza into Israel.

I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing. As he set out, the situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories remains deeply concerning. Mr. Mladenov's statement about the erosion of prospects for establishing a Palestinian State as a result of the facts on the ground really should guide the Council's consideration. What he said about 25 years from Oslo is also a very salutary reminder of the fact that we do not have the luxury of time in which to make progress on the Middle East peace process.

Turning to the situation on the ground, and, again, as others have noted, the last three months of 2018 saw a dreadful increase in violence in the West Bank. Three Israelis, including a baby, were killed in Palestinian terror attacks for which Hamas has claimed responsibility. There is no justification for such acts of violence. During the same time in the West Bank and Gaza, 70 Palestinians were killed. On 14 January, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy died as a result of injuries sustained from live fire following a protest at the Gaza fence. We fully support Israel's right to defend itself, but the Israeli security forces should refrain from the use of excessive force against unarmed civilians. Lethal use of force should be exercised with maximum restraint and only as a last resort to protect life.

Turning to Gaza, the security remains precarious. Sporadic rocket attacks by militants continue, and a miscalculation could easily lead to renewed confrontation. We need to do everything we can to avoid another devastating war, which would compound the already dire humanitarian and security conditions in Gaza and threaten the security of Israeli border communities.

I wanted to draw the Council's attention to Gaza's health sector, which remains under significant strain, and to the problems with the shortage of essential drugs and limited access to clean water. Israel's movement restrictions, we believe, continue to affect the health of the population. In the longer term, renewed political resolve is required to improve the situation. Several speakers today have drawn attention to the reconciliation process begun under Egyptian auspices among the Palestinian Authority and others. We were very concerned by the Palestinian Authority's decision to withdraw their guards from the Rafah crossing point. It is vital that the Council impress upon the Palestinian factions that they need to work together to break the deadlock. We welcome continued Egyptian efforts in that regard.

On the West Bank, recent developments continue to undermine the achievements of the Oslo Accords and jeopardize the prospects for a two-State solution. Following the violent attacks in the West Bank, there have been a large number of incursions by Israeli security forces into Area A, and Palestinian movement in the West Bank has been significantly restricted and disrupted. Full security cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel remains crucial for the safety of both parties.

I wanted to express our disappointment at the fact that, on 27 December, just days after the Council discussed the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (see S/PV.8429), Israel advanced plans for the construction of nearly 2,800 illegal settlement housing units. It is doubly disappointing that more than half of these units are located east of the separation barrier in areas deep into the West Bank. Plans outlined by the Israeli Government on 26 December to construct a new settlement, Givat Eitam, close to Bethlehem represent a further threat to the territorial integrity of the future Palestinian State. If built, this new settlement would prevent the growth of Bethlehem and further fragment the West Bank.

We are closely following the developments in East Jerusalem. The eviction notice served to the Sabah family in Sheikh Jarrah, on 3 January, places 45 people at risk of losing their home. Therefore, I want to encourage the Israeli Government not to enforce this eviction, as we continue to urge it not to demolish the Bedouin community of Khan Al-Ahmar.

Turning to Israel/Lebanon, we are concerned by the recent rise in tensions along the Blue Line. We condemn all violations of resolution 1701 (2006). The United Kingdom has been clear in the Council on many occasions that we condemn Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty, whether by land or sea or air. Such actions undermine confidence and stability, and we look for all relevant Security Council resolutions — but notably 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006) — to be respected in full.

For too long we have witnessed Hizbullah blatantly disregard United Nations resolutions. Its continued possession of weapons outside of Lebanese State control and its reported attempts to acquire dangerous new missile capabilities remain deeply alarming, as do their statements threatening Israel. Without an end to these illegal activities by Hizbullah in Lebanon and the region, we will continue to see regional stability threatened. We condemn Hizbullah's aggressive activities, and we are clear that we should not allow them to go unchecked.

In conclusion, though prospects for peace may seem bleak, as Mr. Mladenov outlined, we should not give up on the two-State solution. It remains the only viable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For this reason, the United Kingdom remains committed to the internationally agreed parameters for a durable peace in the Middle East. It is critical that negotiations be resumed towards an agreement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States, and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the holding of this quarterly open debate and thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his very comprehensive briefing.

Peru is following with deep concern the developments related to the question of Palestine. We can only deplore the persistent hostile climate and the unacceptable and unsustainable stalling of the peace process. We note with alarm the serious and ongoing deterioration of security conditions for millions of Palestinians and Israelis, as evidenced in the indiscriminate attacks against civilians by Hamas and the clearly disproportionate Israeli responses.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation is worsening on the ground, where the lack of basic goods

and services is compounded by the isolation to which millions of Palestinians are subjected. This is an ideal scenario for those who promote violence and extremism and for creating a feeling of oppression and frustration.

Under these circumstances, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to the only solution that we consider viable and consistent with international law: the two-State solution, with internationally recognized and secure borders, to be negotiated directly between Israel and Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, which must lead to the determination of the final status of Jerusalem, in compliance with United Nations resolutions.

To that end, we consider it vital to refrain from all actions that undermine the necessary confidence and to undertake instead genuine steps aimed at reconciliation and commitment, beginning with a renewed willingness to engage in ongoing dialogue.

We strongly deplore the intensification of settlement, demolition and eviction practices that have been observed in the occupied Palestinian territories, which are in violation of the provisions of various Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). We are especially concerned over the possible demolition of a structures in Khan Al-Ahmar, which would have a very negative political impact.

We also deem it imperative to reject hate speech, anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination. In any society, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity must be appreciated as a value, and never as a threat. Similarly, we categorically condemn Hamas's use of violence and terrorist practices. We stress also the need to alleviate the tragic humanitarian situation that civilians in Gaza are facing. We urge continuity in infrastructure and development projects, and that further efforts be made to enable the Palestinian Authority to regain effective control of the area and to ensure the provision of stable and predictable funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

We commend the willingness shown by many countries to use their good offices, particularly those that have historically participated in this process. We underscore the work of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative and encourage them to continue with their efforts. In that regard, we emphasize that the Council must show itself able to reach a minimum consensus in order to make a decision and outline the steps to be taken, particularly in relation to the resumption of

political dialogue, in line with the lofty responsibilities that the international community has conferred upon it.

I want to very briefly comment on the situation in Yemen, given that it remains highly volatile, which continues to impact civilians and seriously jeopardizes the agreements reached in Sweden. Those agreements are a turning point in the bloody and prolonged conflict in Yemen, and under no circumstances can potential delays or breaches serve as justification to abandon the commitments made. We underline the importance of preserving the unity of the Council around its responsibility to protect the people of Yemen and its remaining attentive to the proper implementation of the agreement between the Yemeni parties and the provisions of its resolutions 2451 (2018) and 2452 (2019).

I will conclude by reiterating our appeal to the Yemeni parties and the various actors involved in the conflict to reaffirm their commitment to the inclusive political solution that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General has been advocating and to address the difficulties arising in the context of that complex process with prudence and in good faith.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin my statement by honouring the memory of the 10 Chadian Blue Helmets of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) who lost their lives on Sunday in northern Mali. I offer my condolences to the families of the victims and to the people and the Government of Chad. The heroic sacrifice of those soldiers places on obligation on all of us. It reminds us of how MINUSMA operates in a difficult security environment, and of the key role it plays in preserving Mali's stability and supporting the implementation of the Malian peace process. In the face of the enemies of peace, our resolve must remain strong.

I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his persuasive and once again alarming briefing, as well as for his daily commitment on the ground. I would like also to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia here today.

To echo what several of my colleagues — namely, from Germany and the United Kingdom — just stated, the undeniable truth so often observed in the Council remains more relevant than ever: the illusion of a status quo masks the daily deterioration of the situation, which could devolve into a fresh conflict at any given moment.

The violence that marked the end of 2018 — in Gaza in November and the West Bank in December — should serve as a warning. It must also remind us that when peace recedes on the ground, it recedes also in people's minds and in rhetoric.

Twenty-five years after the Oslo Accords, less than half of Palestinians and Israelis still believe in a two-State solution. Generation after generation, Palestinians and Israelis are losing hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. It is therefore more important than ever for the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to seek to preserve an open, pluralist space within their respective civilian populations that fosters the possibility of a true dialogue between them.

The President of the Palestinian Authority addressed the United Nations on 15 January during the start of his chairmanship of the Group of 77. His alarmist comments give us an idea of the gravity of the crisis and situation that we are currently experiencing.

First, I would like to return to the situation in Gaza. In mid-November, the Gaza Strip was on the brink of sliding into another deadly conflict, as has happened in the territory three times over the past decade. That threat remains today; we must take full measure of its seriousness, in a volatile regional context marked by renewed tensions in northern Israel.

The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip remains essentially the same, despite occasional improvements in the area of energy supply. In that catastrophic humanitarian situation, there have been repeated outbreaks of violence in Gaza for almost a year now, at a rate unprecedented since 2014.

The toll of the demonstrations along the separation barrier has been heavy, with more than 180 Palestinians killed and 6,000 shot and injured since 30 March — individuals who gathered in demonstration out of despair. France has condemned the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force and called on Israel to respect the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully. We have also denounced the instrumentalization of the demonstrations by Hamas and other armed groups.

In the political sphere, the stalemate of the inter-Palestinian reconciliation process is worsening the situation for the people of Gaza. The closure of the Rafah crossing point between Gaza and Egypt, which resulted from the withdrawal of Palestinian Authority

personnel, intensifies the blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip for more than a decade.

To restore immediate hope to the people of Gaza, we must first respond to the urgent humanitarian needs. The efforts of the Special Coordinator and of all United Nations agencies contribute significantly to that response. The conditions for a swift reopening of the Rafah crossing point must also be met quickly. Ultimately, it is only through lifting the blockade, along with providing the necessary security guarantees for Israel, that it will be possible to meet the needs of the people.

The role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in that context is more crucial than ever, in both Gaza and the region. The Agency is playing a key role at the humanitarian level, in addition to providing stability and security. Let us therefore continue to mobilize to support UNRWA after the American withdrawal; France has done so by doubling its contribution to the Agency this year.

However, there can be no lasting response to the crisis in Gaza without a restoration of Palestinian unity, which should enable the Palestinian Authority to regain all its prerogatives on the territory. We support that objective as part of the efforts undertaken by Egypt, which we once again commend. We call on all parties to resume dialogue so as to relaunch the inter-Palestinian reconciliation process. Beyond Gaza, the process will require the holding of parliamentary elections, as announced by President Mahmoud Abbas following his decision to dissolve the Palestinian Legislative Council. Those elections must be held in free and transparent conditions, and all avenues must be explored for them to take place throughout the Palestinian territories.

In the West Bank, the escalation from 9 to 13 December 2018, following the deadly attack on the outskirts of the settlement of Ofra, which France condemned in the strongest terms, also took place against the backdrop of a gravely worsening situation caused by the lack of any political horizon and the consequences of settlement activities. Settlement policy, on which Nikolay Mladenov briefed the Council last month (see S/PV.8429), continued in every aspect throughout 2018 at a sustained pace. In Jerusalem, it approached the depressing 2012 record level in terms of the number of announcements of new housing units. It was also seen in the continued policy of evicting Palestinians from

the city's Arab neighbourhoods such as Sheikh Jarrah. Such developments distance us every day further from the goal of making Jerusalem the capital of the two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security.

In the West Bank, the implementation of the settlement policy has also been pursued systematically, with a succession of announcements concerning new housing units in settlements that culminated in the approval of nearly 2,200 such units on 24 and 25 December 2018. Last year's increased number of announcements include isolated areas in the heart of the West Bank and particularly sensitive sites such as Hebron. Similarly, the recent decision by the Israeli Government to allocate land for the construction of the new settlement of Givat Eitam, in an area that is important for ensuring the viability of the two-State solution and the continuity of the Palestinian territories to the south of Bethlehem, is a worrisome new development. In addition, at another location critical for ensuring the two-State solution near the E-1 area, we continue to wait for the decision to postpone the demolition of the village of Khan Al-Ahmar to be converted into a permanent one and for the Israeli authorities to definitively abandon its demolition and the forced displacement of its inhabitants. Finally, we call for a halt to legislative initiatives aimed at the normalization of unauthorized settlement outposts, which are illegal even under Israeli law. In that regard, I reiterate our condemnation of settlement activity, which is illegal under international law and runs contrary to the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016).

Against the backdrop of the situation I just described, the Security Council was never able to speak as one voice last year. With every passing day, that deafening silence is increasingly incomprehensible for the peoples of the region, as well as for the world watching us. We therefore call for restarting and re-energizing our efforts this year.

Moreover, it is urgent that we restore a credible political horizon. Any negotiation must be part of an internationally agreed framework based on international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. Such parameters are not optional or to be chosen as one likes. They are to be taken together as the indispensable basis for any peace plan and future negotiations. We are close to the point of no return. The fragmented territorial landscape taking shape before our eyes is already

resulting in two peoples coexisting on unequal footing on the same territory. Should that trend continue, for the Palestinians it would mean abandoning their national aspirations based on the establishment of a State, and, for the Israelis, giving up the democratic character of the State of Israel.

But as we all know, the destinies of Israelis and Palestinians are intertwined. Neither of the two peoples will lastingly achieve its aspirations if it is to the detriment of the other. France is a friend to both the Israelis and the Palestinians. President Emmanuel Macron will meet with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin during the latter's visit to France, which began today, and Prime Minister Edouard Philippe met with Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah last month in Paris. France has only one goal — the implementation, through negotiations, of the two-State solution, with two States living side by side in peace and security with Jerusalem as their capital, as the only solution capable of bringing about a just and lasting peace. Rest assured that we will continue to spare no effort in that regard to foster peace.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): First, I would like to thank colleagues for their condolences and solidarity in connection with the passing of Ambassador Dumisani Kumalo. Ambassador Kumalo used to sit where I am sitting and always contributed to finding solutions aimed at bringing about peace and security and stability, issues of which the Security Council is always seized. Likewise, we would also like to convey our condolences to our brothers and sisters in Chad.

South Africa welcomes this quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, focusing on the question of Palestine. We thank Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. We also thank the observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel for their respective statements.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

We want to begin this debate by congratulating the State of Palestine on assuming the chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China. We also welcome Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia.

This is the first open debate in which South Africa is participating as a member of the Security Council during its current term as an elected member. We wish to use this opportunity to emphasize the importance of the Council ensuring that it remains committed to meaningfully contributing to the resolution of one of its longest-standing agenda items — the question of Palestine — of which it has been seized for more than 70 years. While the Council's monthly meetings and quarterly open debates afford an opportunity to have a significant influence on the Middle East peace process, this has not yielded the necessary results that it has the potential to lead to. The adoption of landmark resolution 2334 (2016) in December 2016 is one important such example of the potential outcome of Council deliberations on the matter. Unfortunately, there has been minimal effort to implement that resolution. That calls into question the credibility of the decisions of the Council, especially if it is the Council itself that does not take any action to ensure the implementation of its own decisions. In resolution 2334 (2016), we reaffirmed that Israeli settlements, which have steadily been expanding into Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a violation of international law. Furthermore, resolution 2334 (2016) recognizes that the settlements are a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The recent upsurge in tensions between Israeli settlers and the Palestinian people in settlements such as Ofra and the broader cycle of violence resulting from those heightened antagonisms are indicative of the obstacles created by the illegal expansion of settlement activity to the peace process. According to the recent report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, about 250 Israeli settlements have been established in the occupied West Bank since 1967, and approximately 611,000 Israelis — or 10 per cent of the Israeli population — have been pushed into Palestine and forcibly settled in flagrant violation of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, thereby replacing 12 per cent of the Palestinian population, which is similar to the apartheid-era forceful removal of black people from their ancestral productive land to barren, unproductive wasteland in the middle of nowhere. South Africa therefore calls for the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), including the timely submission to the Council of written reports of the Secretary-General every three months in order

for progress to be adequately monitored. The Council receives written reports on other matters with which it is seized, and the situation in Palestine should be no different. We must not allow the decisions of the Security Council to be undermined and blatantly violated in some areas.

Even more troubling is the deliberate targeting of children, the continued violation of human rights in the occupied territories and the continued imprisonment of Palestinian minors in military detention in Israel. The impact of such violations on the future of peace between the two parties cannot be underestimated. The fomenting of hatred and a culture of violence in the formative stages of development of those children will only make peace and reconciliation even more distant and unachievable. As long as the Council remains silent on such issues, a just peace becomes more and more out of reach. We cannot afford inaction and must instead inject much-needed urgency into resolving the conflict, including by safeguarding the gains made over decades of diplomacy and preventing any prejudging of outcomes on final-status issues, such as Jerusalem, security and the return of Palestinian refugees.

I wish to reiterate South Africa's support for a two-State solution. We would also like to reiterate that the primary responsibility for peace rests with the Palestinians and Israelis themselves. South Africa, as part of the international community, has always sought to encourage peace between the two parties. In that regard, we convened the Spier Presidential Peace Retreat in January 2002, to which we invited senior representatives of both Palestine and Israel with the aim of strengthening the peace camp in both Israel and Palestine, while sharing the South African experience in negotiations, peacemaking and the transition to democracy. We have also supported international peace efforts, in particular through the United Nations system. Those initiatives have demonstrated a spirit of commitment to dialogue and partnership for peace between the parties.

In line with the outcomes of the Spier Retreat, we continue to support and encourage the parties to work together towards peaceful dialogue and negotiation as the only way to find a lasting solution. The guidelines for those negotiations have been based on the established international legal framework, including General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, among other things.

We wish to once again recognize the importance of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has provided crucial socioeconomic assistance to Palestinian refugees for decades. Cuts in the UNRWA budget threaten the lives of many vulnerable people and undermine any confidence in a resolution to the conflict. Punishing civilians by cutting humanitarian funding cannot in any way be conceived as moving the peace process forward; rather, it serves only to entrench animosity and heighten tensions between the parties.

South Africa is deeply concerned about reports of Israel's plans to shut down UNRWA-run schools in East Jerusalem. Closing schools affects the most vulnerable refugee population — children, at their most vulnerable stage of development and in the formative years of their education. South Africa welcomes recent pledges made to support UNRWA. We affirm that such humanitarian support creates the conditions that contribute to easing the dire conditions of the Palestinian people.

The Council must do everything it can to remove all obstacles to peace between Israel and Palestine and no longer allow continued hatred, human rights violations and disregard for international law. Generations of Palestinians and Israelis have known only conflict and violence. We must do all we can now to create a culture of peace and foster hope for a future free of conflict for both communities.

Any time Palestinians want to bring the issue of Palestine's full membership of the United Nations to the Security Council, they will find South Africa ready to support them.

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

First, we thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his detailed and comprehensive briefing on the current situation in the region. We would also like to acknowledge the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Ms. Retno Marsudi.

The Dominican Republic, guided by respect for human rights and international law, is extremely concerned about the recent increase in tensions in the occupied Palestinian territory, and in the Gaza Strip in particular. We are also very concerned about

the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation. We therefore reaffirm our support for a two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders and on what is determined by the parties in the negotiation process. We understand that that is the only way to obtain a just and lasting peace to resolve a conflict that, for decades, has eclipsed international peace and security.

To that end, the Dominican Republic believes that it is vital to redouble efforts at reconciliation between the parties, with the support of the international community, in order to guarantee the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right of Israel to live in peace within secure and recognized borders. We consider those objectives to be incompatible with the continued construction and expansion of illegal settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, violence against civilians, including acts of terrorism, attacks against Israeli territory and incitement and the use of inflammatory rhetoric. We emphatically condemn all such acts, in line with resolution 2334 (2016).

Our country was appalled by the escalation of violence in Gaza and the West Bank in the last quarter of 2018. The tragic deaths of Israeli and Palestinian civilians and members of the military once again brought us dangerously close to a conflagration of greater proportions, which no one wants. Similarly, the Dominican Republic is extremely concerned about the serious deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which is reflected by the high levels of food insecurity and very limited access to basic services, including energy, water and health services. We call on the international community to respond effectively to the pressing needs of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip. At this juncture, we acknowledge the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which requires adequate funding for its critical work.

With regard to the Golan Heights, the Dominican Republic believes that only genuine will on the part of the parties to reach consensus, pursuant to resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), can end the conflict.

With regard to Jerusalem, we recognize its special status and reaffirm the need to protect and to preserve the plurality of its cultural and religious dimension, unique in the world.

As the international community, we must channel our best efforts towards achieving a negotiated solution between the parties on the basis of the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and previous agreements. We must not deviate from the goal of two democratic States, living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition. That vision must continue to inspire us to work tirelessly until all men, women and children of the region can live with the hope and security that they long for and deserve.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security 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 we will continue this open debate through the lunch hour, since there are a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, as well as the Dominican Republic on its non-permanent membership of the Security Council and on your assumption of the presidency of the Council. I also congratulate the other new non-permanent members of the Council and wish them every success in their new important duties.

I would also like to congratulate the State of Palestine on chairing the Group of 77 and China and to wish it every success in fulfilling that historic task, hoping that it will obtain full membership status at the United Nations. I would like as well to thank Mr. Mladenov for his useful but worrying briefing. I also welcome the presence of Her Excellency Ms. Retno Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, at this meeting. On behalf of Lebanon, I thank her and Indonesia for the important role that its troops are playing within the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Yesterday marked the anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther King Jr. I therefore recall his important words, which are very relevant to today's debate on the Palestinian question: "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice". Justice is precisely

what the Palestinian people have been denied for many decades. Today, that people still face an open war against them, their territories, their properties, their sons and their holy sites, as well as their historical right to self-determination.

The continuing Israeli occupation with impunity and lack of punishment has led to that deplorable situation and to the loss of justice. Even if the world has failed in its obligations towards the Palestinian people, it remains true that the Palestinian question continues to be a priority concern for the Arabs. Two days ago, the work of the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit concluded in Beirut. It affirmed support for the Palestinian people in their resistance to the increasing Israeli aggressions followed by the destruction of the Palestinian economy and infrastructure. Their right to establish an independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital is also undermined.

The State of Palestine is more important than ever owing to the Israeli practices, which seek to eradicate the Palestinian question by eliminating any final-status issues, such as the two-State solution, putting an end to the settlements and the occupation, as well as the right of refugees to return and the legal status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

In that regard, the Arab Summit in Beirut asserted the need to join efforts in order to ensure the necessary funding for the implementation of the strategic development project for East Jerusalem. The Summit also underscored the right of return and the need to compensate Palestinian refugees and their descendants in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular General Assembly resolution 194 (III), as well as the need to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Summit called on all States to uphold international law and the resolutions of international legitimacy on the issue of the legal status of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, not to recognize it as the capital of the Israeli occupation and not to move their embassies there. At the Summit the Arab leaders underscored their determination to take political and economic measures against any decision that undermines the legal status of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

Lebanon's position is clear and steadfast. It supports the inalienable right of the Palestinian people, in particular the right to self-determination. My country's

delegation stresses the role of the international community and the United Nations in safeguarding the foundations for a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in the Middle East by preserving the gains made during more than 70 years of international efforts for the Palestinian question, in particular by upholding United Nations resolutions, the most recent of which is resolution 2334 (2016), which calls for ending the settlement activities and protecting Palestinian civilians. It also calls for upholding international resolutions concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and especially resolution 497 (1981), which rejects the annexation of the Golan by Israel.

Today, the region has lost hope with regard to achieving peace and to having prospects for any political solution. The peace process now belongs to the past and there is no glimmer of hope for its possible resumption. There is no trust between the parties and dialogue has been suspended owing to each unilateral step taken by Israel against peace. What is required today is an international leadership that could be provided by the Council in order to restore hope and move forward towards achieving peace.

Concerning Lebanon, Israel continues to occupy Lebanese territory while maintaining its threats and violations against Lebanese sovereignty through flagrant violation of resolution 1701 (2006). In 2018, Israel violated the sovereignty of Lebanon and resolution 1701 (2006) no less than 2,034 times. That compelled our Mission to lodge protests with the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General of the United Nations no fewer than 22 times. In the first week of January, the number of Israeli violations amounted to 23 — 13 air violations, 4 sea violations and 6 land violations. In our letter dated 27 December 2018, we drew the attention of the Security Council to the threat posed by the Israeli air violations against civil aviation, which jeopardized the safety of air navigation by endangering the lives of hundreds of passengers. However, despite the complaint lodged by Lebanon with the Council, Israel also violated Lebanese airspace this week, once again threatening the safety of air navigation. Should we wait for a catastrophe to happen in order to deter Israel from violating Lebanese airspace and endangering civilian lives and air navigation?

The most recent Israeli violation represents the building of a wall and structures within Lebanese territory on reservation areas along the Blue Line. While that incident could have dangerously escalated

the situation, stability was maintained thanks to the coordination between the Lebanese army and UNIFIL, as well as the role of the tripartite committee in reducing tensions.

Lebanon reaffirms its commitment to every inch of its territory and every drop of its waters while always remaining ready to work towards settling border disputes within the framework of that tripartite mechanism. We call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and to issue a clear and unequivocal message condemning Israel for any violation against resolution 1701 (2006).

The adoption in August of resolution 2433 (2018), which extends the mandate of UNIFIL, demonstrates the commitment of all members of the Security Council to ensuring peace and security in Lebanon and in the region. Lebanon continues to shoulder its responsibilities with regard to achieving a comprehensive ceasefire on its southern borders. We are committed to all international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). We therefore expect the Council to take the necessary measures in order to compel Israel to shoulder its international responsibility in that regard.

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

Mr. Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil): I thank you very much, Mr. President, for organizing this important meeting. Let me start with some remarks concerning the Israeli-Palestinian question.

Brazil supports a two-State solution, with peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians. Recent developments in Gaza only underscore the need for a political solution to the question. In that regard, Brazil welcomes the United States initiative to present a peace plan. We understand that both sides will be asked to make difficult decisions and concessions in order to achieve peace, and we urge Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate in good faith and with open minds. We need to work towards a solution that is fair and just for all parties involved. We note with satisfaction the current rapprochement between Israel and the countries of the Arab and Muslim worlds, as demonstrated by the recent visits of heads of State and high-level authorities.

Regarding the situation in Syria, Brazil urges all parties to engage constructively with the new Special Envoy, Mr. Geir Pedersen, to whom we wish every success. Brazil calls for the convening of a

constitutional committee in Syria without further delay. That is a crucial step towards a much-needed political solution, based on the parameters set forth in the relevant resolutions, in particular resolution 2254 (2015), and the Sochi declaration. We are convinced that a political process mediated by the United Nations, while owned and led by the Syrian people, will bring the conflict to an end.

Concerning the situation in Yemen, Brazil welcomes the efforts of United Nations Special Envoy Martin Griffiths to reach a ceasefire in the port of Al-Hudaydah, through which crucial humanitarian aid can be delivered to the population affected by the conflict. We urge the parties to refrain from any measures that might lead to a breach of the truce established by the Stockholm Agreement. We believe that, at the present moment, United Nations mediation is fundamental to launching the negotiation process. We confirm that Brazil will contribute military observers to the new United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement, approved by resolution 2452 (2019).

The recent crisis along the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon underscores the importance of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for stability in the region. Brazil is proud of its ongoing role in UNIFIL, in which we currently deploy our largest contingent of troops and have been in command of the Maritime Task Force since 2011. We commend Israel and Lebanon for their restraint and for avoiding any provocative steps that could have further exacerbated the situation, as well as for their shared commitment to continue to work in coordination with UNIFIL to maintain the prevailing calm along the Blue Line.

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

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate your country, Mr. President, on its non-permanent seat on the Security Council, as well as to congratulate you on presiding over the work of the Council this month. I would also like to welcome Ms. Retno Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, and to congratulate the State of Palestine on chairing the Group of 77 and China.

The Israeli occupation forces once again yesterday committed a series of acts of aggression targeting the Syrian Arab Republic, using guided missiles that were

fired over Lebanese territory, as just mentioned in detail by my colleague the representative of Lebanon. Israel also launched missiles from the occupied Palestinian territory and Lake Tiberias in the occupied Syrian Golan to conduct its aggression. Those actions are in gross violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

Such acts of aggression would not have been committed if the Security Council had not failed, for decades, to impose the implementation of its relevant resolutions regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, and if there was not unlimited support for that rogue entity from certain permanent members of the Security Council. Such behaviour has encouraged Israel to continue to repeatedly commit crimes, violations and State terrorism without even the most nominal accountability, as demonstrated by the repeated Israeli aggression committed against my country and Israel's multifaceted support for terrorist organizations. Such actions have not been condemned and there have been no calls by the Security Council to ensure accountability, owing to the positions of the United States, Britain and France, which are partners and supporters of Israel and its aggression.

The policies of those three countries and their position in the United Nations run counter to the responsibility that they are supposed to shoulder in maintaining international peace and security, in line with international law and the provisions of the Charter. Those three countries continue to bear false witness and prevent the Security Council from shouldering its responsibilities. However, that will not stop us from exercising our legitimate right to self-defence and working to regaining the occupied Syrian Golan by all possible means.

Regaining the occupied Syrian Golan is the steadfast right of the Syrian Arab Republic and is not subject to negotiation, waiver or statutory limitation. The full withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces and a return to the border of 4 June 1967 is a commitment that should be fulfilled. That is an unwavering request based on the principles of international law and the resolutions of international legitimacy, including the Security Council's own resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981). Today we heard the Israeli representative talking about Israel's fevered attempts to change and alter that fact. He covered every topic except

the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such fevered Israeli attempts to alter the situation, including its aggressive statements and criminal acts, are doomed to failure. They will never undermine in any way the legal or sovereign rights of my country.

Some have invested in the terrorist war that is being waged against my country and have taken advantage of the circumstances of certain States in the region to overshadow Arab rights and stifle calls to implement resolutions of international legitimacy that call for the end of the Israeli occupation of the occupied Arab territories. Some have even tried to gain from the occupation and promote suspicious deals to invalidate the Palestinian question and the inalienable rights of the people and countries of the region. They have tried to ignite artificial and surreal conflicts among the countries of the region to divert attention from the real cause of the situation in the Middle East, namely, the lack of stability, prosperity and welfare resulting from the continued Israeli occupation, the Israeli settlements and Israeli attempts to stifle the Palestinian question.

In recent times we have witnessed dangerous and systematic practices by means of which the Israeli occupying forces have attempted to consolidate their control and impose their will on the occupied Syrian Golan. For example, Israel convened a meeting of its Government in the occupied Syrian Golan and attempted to organize illegitimate local elections there. It also signed deals and issued permits to plunder the natural resources of the Golan, including, most recently, to plunder the property of Syrian people and displace them to make space for a project to generate wind energy on about 6,000 acres in the vicinity of the cities of Majdal Shams, Ein Qiniyye, Bakata and Mas'adah.

Israel has continued its settlement activities, crimes and daily repressive practices against Syrian citizens who are living under the yolk of occupation, while also arbitrarily incarcerating them in Israeli prisons, as is the case with freedom fighters Sedqi Suleiman Al-Maqet — known as Syria's Mandela — and Amal Abu Saleh. The occupation has also subjected some to house arrest. Israeli officials have also repeatedly issued aggressive statements reaffirming the indifference of the occupying Power to international law, the resolutions of the Council and its determination to continue its occupation.

Unfortunately, all of those facts and their rejection by our people in the Golan did not grab the attention

of the Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov, and were therefore not included in his monthly briefings to the Council. Instead, Mr. Mladenov intentionally failed to call things by their true names. He talked to the Council about the Alfa and Bravo, sides as if everyone knows what that means. He should have issued a clear condemnation of the almost daily Israeli aggression against the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic, including the continued aggression against Damascus International Civil Airport. Such gross disregard represents a moral and political breach of his mandate, in a manner contrary to the applicable principles and rules of the United Nations, and therefore delegitimizes his work.

Is it not high time for the Council to take the necessary measures to stop the repeated Israeli attacks against my country's territories? Or should we attract the attention of the warmongers of the Council by exercising our legitimate right to self-defence and responding to the Israeli aggression against Damascus International Civil Airport by launching a similar attack on Tel Aviv Airport?

We are pragmatic. We recognize the different political stances of Council members. However, we urge members to focus on our common denominators, namely, international law, the Charter of the United Nations and Council resolutions. We therefore stress the need for the countries that support Israel and its policies and positions to review such policies, bear in mind those common denominators and work to restore legitimate rights to the owners of those rights, in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy and internationally agreed terms of reference. Otherwise, this international Organization will fail for the same reasons as the League of Nations did.

Let us all remember that many of the crises suffered by our countries were due to a violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations through the creation of illegal coalitions, such as those targeting Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Syria and others, and due to the call for meetings that transcend the Security Council, such as the Warsaw meeting and the Middle East Strategic Alliance, known by intelligence experts as the NATO of the Middle East. Those are coalitions that transcend the Security Council. They raise the following questions. From where do such coalitions and meetings derive their legitimacy? Are international relations governed by international law and the Charter of the United Nations, upon which our founding fathers made

every effort to agree? Are they governed by the will and destructive agendas of some countries? Are we wrong to warn the Organization that its fate might be similar to that of the League of Nations if we do not all take a stand against the policies of those States? The absence of United Nations sponsorship for the Warsaw meeting proves that such an approach will not contribute to drafting a common strategy on the Middle East, as was stated by the very organizers of the meeting, who said that it aimed to forge agreement on a common strategy to address the situation in the Middle East.

My country stresses its steadfast and principled position in support of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish an independent State covering all their territories, with Jerusalem as its capital, while guaranteeing the right of refugees to return in accordance with resolution 194 (III) of 1948. We reaffirm that any measures aimed at jeopardizing those rights are invalid and rejected, because they serve only to escalate tension and threaten peace and security in the region and the world.

In conclusion, I say to those who are trying to re-map the area according to their whims that our people have stood against the unprecedented international terrorist war imposed upon us. They will continue to stand against such miserable plans and will ensure that they fail, just as they have defeated other plans in past decades.

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

Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation wishes to congratulate the delegations of the Dominican Republic, Germany, Belgium, Indonesia and South Africa on recently joining the Security Council as non-permanent members for the period 2019-2020. We wish them success in performing their duties. We particularly congratulate the delegation of the Dominican Republic, as its first-time membership of this organ is historic. We are convinced that its dedication and ability will positively contribute to the work of the Council, especially during this month of its presidency.

We are also grateful for the convening of this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. This is an issue of vital importance for the international community and the Council, which has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, as only an atmosphere

of peace and security can foster the cooperation and development of nations.

Since the previous open debate convened by the Council on the matter, on 18 October 2018 (see S/PV.8375), we regret that the events of the two final months of last year continued to aggravate and deteriorate the humanitarian situation, with human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory. Deaths, attacks, arrests, violence and confrontations continue unabated.

According to reports by Mr. Jamie McGoldrick, United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, since 9 December 2018 Israelis and Palestinians have been killed as a result of the violence in the West Bank. Moreover, more than 400 Palestinians and at least 13 Israelis have been injured, while more than 200 Palestinians have been arrested. Palestinians continue to encounter obstacles in accessing health services, clean water and sources of livelihoods and education, among other amenities, and humanitarian workers face unprecedented challenges, including a lack of funding and an increase in attacks aimed at delegitimizing humanitarian action. The reality on the ground is a high-risk warning for international peace and security. Now more than ever, it is imperative that the Council take action to fully apply the fundamental principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

It is important to highlight the report covering the period of September to December 2018 on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which was presented on behalf of the Secretary-General by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. In general terms, he reported that Israel is not stopping its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem; on the contrary, Israeli authorities approved plans for approximately 2,200 homes in West Bank settlements, and progress is being made in the construction of 31 units in Hebron, which would be the first new construction in 16 years. He also reported that demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures by the Israeli authorities continued throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and that the overall situation is dominated by negative trends.

Likewise, other actions, such as the decision by the Ministerial Committee for Legislation to move forward

with draft laws, including so-called Regulation Law 2, which seeks to regulate hillside communities built beyond the Green Line in the past 20 years, and the announcement by Israeli authorities of the opening of Route 4370 in occupied Jerusalem, which consists of an eight-metre-high wall separating Israeli traffic from Palestinian traffic, shows the persistent, exclusionary and discriminatory settlement and expansion policies. They are in contravention of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) and jeopardize the possibility of the two-State solution. His report also revealed that no immediate measures have been taken to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, provocation and destruction. Provocative actions and statements encouraging violence and inflammatory rhetoric are ongoing.

Resolution 2334 (2016) sets out the most viable path to restoring peace in the region. The implementation of the resolution is vital to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian issue and cannot be divorced from the Security Council's action to ensure compliance with, and observance of, resolution 1322 (2000), which urges Israel, the occupying Power, to scrupulously comply with its obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. Moreover, our delegation once again places value on, and reiterates its support for, the various international initiatives that have taken place with the aim of restarting negotiations and peace talks between Israel and Palestine.

Our delegation reiterates its call on the international community to make tangible progress to support the advancement of a political, peaceful, definitive and just solution for the parties, based on the existence of two States: Palestine and Israel. It is imperative that the two-State solution be maintained as the only way to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East, restore rights to the Palestinian people and finalize the independent establishment of Palestine, incorporated into the United Nations as a full Member.

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

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to warmly thank you, Mr. President, and the Dominican Republic for your able presidency of the Security Council this month. I also congratulate Belgium, Germany, Indonesia, and South Africa on joining the Security Council as non-permanent members

for the next two years. I look forward to working with them and with all Council members to maintain peace and security in a world that is replete with challenges and crises. I also express my appreciation for the serious and tireless efforts of the outgoing members of the Security Council, namely, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands and Sweden. I wish those countries every success. I congratulate Palestine as well on chairing the Group of 77 and China.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his comprehensive briefing this morning, and I welcome Mrs. Retno Marsudi, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, to this meeting.

By virtue of its geographical location and close ties with the Palestinian people, Jordan has always been close to the Palestinian cause and the suffering of Palestinians. We have been on the side of their just cause since the Palestinians were first uprooted from their land and displaced until now. We have made every effort through peaceful means to advance the peace process and reach the noble goals of restoring all their land for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, so as to meet the aspirations of the brotherly Palestinian people and all the peoples of the region. That would end their suffering and great human plight while granting them their legitimate rights to freedom, a State and a dignified life on their land.

The two-State solution, which guarantees the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace and security alongside Israel, is the only way to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and bring about comprehensive regional peace. That would require intensified efforts to overcome obstacles impeding the resumption of direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. It also requires the cessation of all unilateral Israeli measures, foremost of which is the settlement construction.

The most important issue is Al-Quds Al-Sharif, which is a holy city for more than half of the world's population, including Muslims, Christians and Jews. We must all preserve Jerusalem, with its ancient history and various religions, a holy city that brings us together and is a symbol of peace. In that context, Jordan reaffirms its steadfast commitment to defend

and protect the holy places of Islam and Christianity in Jerusalem, within the framework of the historic mandate of the Hashemite custodianship over those holy sites in Jerusalem. In that regard, we underscore Jordan's firm stance that Jerusalem is a red line, as it is part of the final-status issues that must be resolved in negotiations in accordance with resolutions of the international legitimacy and while ensuring that East Jerusalem is the capital of the Palestinian State.

The issue of refugees is also part of the final-status issues that must be resolved based on resolutions of international legitimacy, foremost of which is resolution 194 (III), and the Arab Peace Initiative, that would ensure the right of refugees to return and be compensated. In that regard, we reiterate the need to continue to provide the necessary support and protection to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We will continue to work with the international community in order to ensure that UNRWA continues to provide its services to the refugees as part of a world commitment. Any attempt to reduce the role of UNRWA and the financial support provided to it would have disastrous consequences.

With the beginning of a new year, we must also turn a new chapter in dealing with the Syrian crisis. We must all continue to work towards a political solution to the crisis, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), so as to ensure Syria's recovery and that it becomes a pillar of stability in the region and a component of joint Arab action, while allowing for the voluntary return of refugees and the resumption of development and construction in Syria and the States of the region, which have politically, economically and socially suffered as a result of the crisis.

With regard to the crisis in Yemen, my country welcomed the political détente during the Stockholm negotiations, the Al-Hudaydah ceasefire agreement, the exchange of prisoners, the access by humanitarian convoys to besieged areas in the city and the establishment of a framework for future negotiations. The Kingdom of Jordan hosted a meeting between the Government of Yemen and the Ansar Allah group, which was convened by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen. The aim was to discuss the exchange of prisoners. We stand by our brothers in Yemen in order to resolve the crisis and stop their suffering.

Wars and crises have depleted our resources, frustrated our youth and deprived the region of the stability and security needed to achieve economic growth that meets the demands of developed societies. Finding solutions for the problems in the region requires addressing the deep-rooted causes of political, economic and social crises, as well as establishing policies and mechanisms so as to enable our young people to actively participate in peacebuilding and promoting a culture of tolerance and coexistence.

In conclusion, allow me to paraphrase the words of His Hashemite Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al-Hussein, who said that when all people, in particular the young, see a promising future, that will bring benefits to the international community in its entirety. When our region, which has strategic importance, becomes strong and successful, the whole world will benefit from our stability, security and development.

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

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I thank the delegation of the Dominican Republic for the invitation to participate in this debate. We congratulate you, Mr. President, on your excellent job in conducting the work of the Security Council this month. The peace process between Palestinians and Israelis is experiencing its most fraught moment since the Oslo Accords in 1993. The seriousness of the situation on the ground requires a collective effort to keep alive the prospect of a two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders, and to move forward in resolving all final-status issues identified in those agreements, namely, the issues of Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders and security measures.

Argentina resolutely supports all efforts aimed at achieving peace and stability in the region. We also support the efforts of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, and acknowledge the important contribution of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in preventing further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. We urge the countries friends of Israel and Palestine to work constructively to help the parties advance in the peaceful settlement of their differences, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Argentina reaffirms its support for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of a viable and independent State that is recognized by all countries, as well as the right of the State of Israel to live in peace with its neighbours within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Argentina reiterates its concern about the growth of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and urges Israel to cease such expansionist activities. As recognized by the Security Council in resolution 2334 (2016), the settlements are a breach of international law, hamper peace and weaken the prospect of a two-State solution whereby both live in peace and security, thereby promoting the perpetuation of an unsustainable status quo.

On the other hand, attacks against Israeli citizens are inadmissible and must cease immediately. My country vehemently condemns all terrorist acts, as well as the violent actions of Hamas and other Palestinian organizations, including the launching of missiles from the Gaza Strip and the construction of tunnels to infiltrate Israel.

In that context, we recognize the right of Israel to exercise legitimate self-defence. Without prejudice to that, however, we recall the need for Israel's actions to be compatible with international humanitarian law and take into account, inter alia, the principles of distinction between civilians and combatants, proportionality and military necessity in terms of the use of force.

Argentina reaffirms the special status of Jerusalem in accordance with the relevant resolutions, including resolution 478 (1980). In that regard, my country rejects any unilateral attempt to alter the status of the city of Jerusalem. Argentina therefore believes that, as a final-status issue, the matter should be decided by the parties in bilateral negotiations.

Turning to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Argentina supports a political solution achieved through dialogue and diplomacy, in accordance with international law and while respecting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. Argentina attaches special importance to the Geneva talks under the auspices of the United Nations. We appreciate the work of Mr. Staffan de Mistura in his tireless efforts as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General since 2014. We express our support for his successor, Mr. Geir Pedersen, in continuing negotiations to reach a peaceful solution to the crisis, in line with

the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015). Moreover, we recognize the contribution of the Astana agreements and other ceasefire agreements to de-escalate violence and alleviate the humanitarian situation on the ground, with a view to creating the conditions conducive to moving towards a definitive, inclusive and long-term settlement. The establishment and integration of the constitutional committee would be an important step in that direction.

Finally, with regard to Yemen, Argentina welcomes the establishment of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement, with the goal of supporting its implementation in the city of Al-Hudaydah and in the ports of Al-Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Issa, as established in the Stockholm Agreement. We hope that the Agreement will be the first step towards a peaceful and definitive settlement of Yemen's internal conflict so that the very grave humanitarian crisis facing the Yemeni civilian population can begin to be reversed quickly.

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

Mr. Gertze (Namibia): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on the Dominican Republic's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I also thank you for organizing this debate on the important topic of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

As we enter the year 2019, I wish to recall that we are now in the seventy-first year of this long-drawn-out process and the denial of the right to self-determination for the people of Palestine. While we appreciate the commitment of the Security Council, the United Nations and all interested parties in helping to resolve the matter, one is left to ponder the unthinkable question: Is it conceivable that, in another 29 years, it will have taken us 100 years to not do what is right and just? We must redouble our collective efforts to work more diligently and with more determination to bring the conflict to an end and to assist the two peoples of Israel and Palestine to come together and live side by side in peace, harmony, stability and dignity. The time has come for us to move with more urgency to deliver to the Palestinian people their legitimate right to independence and nationhood.

This month marks 10 years since Israel's first major military assault on the Gaza Strip. Two further major conflicts have taken place since then, and repeated outbreaks of violence have ensued. Most recently, the end of last year saw one of the worst outbreaks of violence. We once again take this opportunity to thank the United Nations and Egypt for intervening to de-escalate tensions, therefore preventing yet another conflict.

Those recurrent conflicts and outbreaks of violence have had a devastating effect on Gaza and its 2 million inhabitants. The economic and humanitarian situation remains dire. Nevertheless, thanks to funding provided by the State of Qatar, a number of positive developments have materialized. The United Nations was able to import fuel to operate the Gaza power plant and, as a result, the daily availability of electricity has increased to more than 11 hours, benefiting homes, schools, businesses and hospitals. I am sure that development is welcomed by all residents, after approximately two years of electricity being limited to four hours per day, or fewer. Another positive outcome is the noted 40 per cent increase in piped water supply, thereby almost fully meeting water demands for household purposes. We hope to see further positive developments as 2019 progresses.

As we enter a new year, secured and stable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) should remain a concern and a priority. We call on the international community to continue availing the required resources to sustain the important services provided by UNRWA for the year ahead of us.

In his report to the Security Council in December on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), Mr. Mladenov informed us yet again that no steps had been taken by Israel to implement that all-important resolution (see S/PV.8429). Settlement activity continued. During the reporting period from September to December 2018, plans for about 2,200 housing units in settlements in the West Bank were advanced or approved by the Israeli authorities. Most of them were advanced in East Jerusalem. The demolition and seizure of Palestinian properties also continued unabated. Those actions are illegal under international law and represent an impediment to peace and the two-State solution. Namibia reiterates its firm support for the General Assembly resolution on the status of Jerusalem (General Assembly resolution 72/15), which states

categorically that Jerusalem is a final-status issue to be resolved through negotiations in line with relevant United Nations resolutions.

Global support for Palestine was reaffirmed in the General Assembly in December 2018 with the successful adoption of a resolution entitled “Comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East” (General Assembly resolution 73/89). One week ago, at its hand-over ceremony, the Group of 77 and China firmly restated its support for Palestine as it became the Group’s Chair for the year 2019. We look forward to working closely with Palestine this year.

To conclude, Namibia reiterates its calls on the Israeli Government to cease its settlement expansion and destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure. We further reiterate the call for Israel’s complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We should harness reconciliation as a tool to overcome great societal barriers and work on mechanisms to address and heal the wounds caused to the Palestinian people many decades ago. Therefore, a return to the negotiations table to ensure a two-State solution, with both living side by side, is the only solution.

I remind Council members that that was the decision taken by the Council with the adoption of resolution 181 (1947), which called for the creation of two States to exist side by side. The Council has yet to fulfil the commitment made in that landmark resolution. The two-State solution must be based on the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions. It is the only way to ensure peaceful relations between Israel and Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Archbishop Bernardito Cleopas Auza, Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Auza: The Holy See thanks the presidency of the Dominican Republic for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, with particular reference to Israel and Palestine.

In his message for the 2019 World Day of Peace, focused on the theme “Good politics at the service of peace”, Pope Francis compared peace to a delicate flower struggling to blossom on the stony ground of violence. Such an image vividly captures the enduring situation between Israel and Palestine, where we know

how fragile peace is and how its tenuous existence is constantly threatened by harmful rhetoric, provocations and attacks, violations of human rights and unilateral actions hampering efforts towards a resolution, bringing about untold suffering and causing the deaths of innocent, defenceless civilians.

In such a context, the Holy See continues to appeal fervently to both Israeli and Palestinian authorities to resume dialogue and undertake a journey of peace that can put an end to a conflict that, for over 70 years, has rent the land that is not only home to those two peoples, but also of great historical and cultural importance for the whole world and a spiritual home for the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. With regard to its religious significance, the Holy See seeks international guarantees for the Holy City of Jerusalem, as recommended by the 1947 General Assembly resolution 181 (II).

Notwithstanding the fundamental importance of the holy places, there is the risk of transforming what is a territorial and political conflict into one about religion and identity. That must be avoided so as not to compromise further the search for a much-needed political solution. It therefore remains essential that those who hold political office use their authority in a responsible manner, while overcoming disputes by engaging in an open and honest dialogue to secure genuine and lasting peace, rather than simply maintaining an illusory peace that is, in essence, only a balance between power and fear. Genuine and lasting peace, on the other hand, is the fruit of a political project grounded in the mutual responsibility and interdependence of human beings — one that goes beyond the difficulties that characterize these times of mistrust rooted in the fear of others or of strangers or anxiety about one’s personal security.

A responsible political project spares no effort to protect the lives of all citizens, regardless of origin or religious affiliation, thereby creating the conditions necessary for a worthy and just future for all. In that regard, it is important not to lose sight of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the other occupied territories, as well as to highlight the generous response of the international community to the financial deficit faced last year by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Assistance to those most in need must always go before political considerations, and aid to Palestine refugees

must be allowed to continue unimpeded as long as the situation remains unresolved.

With reference to the grave humanitarian crises affecting several parts of the Middle East, it seems appropriate in this forum to reiterate Pope Francis' own remarks made in reference to the generous welcome and solidarity offered by Lebanon and Jordan — made possible not by what is in excess, but by the sacrifices of their citizens — to alleviate the suffering of those affected by conflicts in the region, including Palestinian refugees.

In his recent address to the diplomatic corps on the occasion of the traditional exchange of New Year's greetings, Pope Francis stated:

“The Holy See expresses the hope, too, that dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians will resume, so that an agreement at last can be reached and a response given to the legitimate aspirations of both peoples by ensuring the coexistence of two States and the attainment of a long-awaited and desired peace. A united commitment on the part of the international community is extremely important and necessary for attaining this goal, as also for promoting peace in the entire region”.

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

Mr. Warraich (Pakistan): My delegation wishes to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate today. We also thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing earlier today.

Last week, as the State of Palestine assumed the Chair of the Group of 77 and China for 2019, it was not only a vote of confidence by the international community on Palestine's ability to steer the Group, but also an expression of solidarity with the long-suffering Palestinian people. Unfortunately, such moments of hope and optimism have become increasingly rare in the parched political landscape of the region. For the Palestinians, the looming shadow of an illegal and oppressive occupation has grown only darker with every passing year. Their fundamental human rights continue to be violated with abandon. Their aspiration for a life of dignity and freedom remains a distant ideal. Besides generating endless hostility and discord, that has also diminished prospects for durable peace in the region.

The Special Coordinator already provided a grim assessment that the region stands on the brink

of another precipice. Unabated settlement activity in the occupied territory directly contributes to this worsening situation. As the Special Coordinator noted, instead of ceasing those illegal settlements, Israel has in fact stepped up construction of new housing units in the occupied West Bank. That trend is emblematic of the blatant Israeli disregard for international law and the collective will of the international community, including resolution 2334 (2016). It is also a setback to peace and a retreat from a two-State solution to a one-State reality. Creating alternate facts on the ground cannot change historic realities or neutralize the legal rights of people living under occupation — in Palestine or, indeed, elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the plight of the ordinary citizens of Gaza is not only an unabated humanitarian tragedy; it is also a moral outrage. That travesty must end. A viable, independent and contiguous State of Palestine, on the basis of internationally agreed parameters, the pre-1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is the only sustainable assurance for enduring peace in the Middle East. It is also a prerequisite for international peace and stability. Sufficient, predictable and sustainable financing for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is equally imperative.

The situation in the Middle East is a sobering reminder that the region remains engulfed in the throes of conflict, instability and violence. The conflict in Syria continues to exact an enormous human cost. An intra-Syrian process of inclusive political engagement remains the only pathway to achieve durable peace and stability in the country. We are confident that ongoing efforts under the aegis of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Geir Pedersen, will make a tangible contribution towards this end.

Pakistan also welcomes the renewed diplomatic momentum to find a political solution to the conflict in Yemen. The Stockholm Agreement was an important first step. It is now critical that the sides follow through on their commitments in a credible and transparent manner. This is vital not only for lasting peace in the country, but also for the well-being of millions of Yemeni people — including women and children — in desperate need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The forthcoming high-level pledging conference in Geneva will also be a good measure of the international community's continued support to the Yemeni people.

Outlining his priorities for 2019, the Secretary-General underscored the fact that the needs and expectations of people with respect to the United Nations can be met only by accelerating the surge in diplomacy. Nowhere is such a surge more urgently needed than in the Middle East, especially in Palestine. For far too long, the Palestinians have looked to this Chamber with expectant eyes and wondered, as President Abbas reminded us in February 2018: “If justice for all people cannot be attained here, where should we go?” (*S/PV.8183, p.10*)

We should not fail the Palestinian people, for what is at stake is the credibility of the Organization and the fundamental tenets of the Charter of the United Nations, based on the inherent dignity of the individual and respect for the fundamental human rights of all, including the right to self-determination.

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

Ms. Juul (Norway): Today I will focus on three themes: the conflicts in Syria and Yemen and the Middle East peace process.

On Syria, we would like to thank Special Envoy Staffan De Mistura for his tireless efforts to bring peace to the Syrian people. He has set an example for how peace processes must devise inclusive mechanisms and involve civil society and women’s groups. We wish the new Envoy, Geir Pedersen, every success in his efforts to forge a peaceful solution to the conflict in Syria. We strongly encourage Council members to come together and agree on a durable political solution for the benefit of the Syrian people.

On Yemen, Norway welcomes the Stockholm Agreement and the adoption of resolutions 2451 (2018) and 2452 (2019). As the situation on the ground remains very fragile, it is important to uphold the momentum achieved in Sweden. The concerted efforts of international, regional and national actors will be necessary to make sure that the Stockholm Agreement is implemented on the ground and that political and humanitarian progress is achieved. Women’s representation at all levels of the political process is key. Norway will continue to prioritize humanitarian aid to Yemen.

There is a strong international consensus that only a negotiated two-State solution can lead to durable peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Palestinian State-building and economic development remain essential building blocks to achieve this goal, but cannot substitute the need for a political resolution.

Norway will chair the next meeting of the international donor group to Palestine, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, hosted by the European Union in Brussels on 12 April. Leading up to the meeting, Norway will encourage progress on the outstanding fiscal issues between the Palestinian Authority and Israel and take concerted action to mitigate the risks to the Palestinian economy. The parties and the donors also need to move faster on implementing key infrastructure projects in the water and energy sectors, especially in Gaza.

The situation in Gaza remains of great concern. Increased access to energy, clean water, health services, job creation and movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza are crucial. The political brinkmanship in and around Gaza will not lead to any stability or development. The interests of the people of Gaza must be put first. Donors should mobilize support to the humanitarian package for Gaza in coordination with the Palestinian Authority. The monthly financial transfers to Gaza by the Palestinian Authority are a lifeline for the population and must continue. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East remains indispensable. It is vital that donors remain committed to supporting the organization.

Norway has been a consistent partner in promoting peace and security in the Middle East for decades. Our commitment to helping resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine is based on our firm support for the two-State solution. In the absence of political progress, we call on all parties and donors to do their utmost to preserve the institutional and economic foundation of a future Palestinian State.

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

Mr. Alshamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate the Dominican Republic on presiding over the Security Council for this month and I thank you, Mr. President, for holding this important debate. I also take this opportunity to express my delegation’s appreciation to the five outgoing members of the Council and to welcome the new non-permanent members, to whom we wish every success.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Bangladesh, and Libya on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Group of Arab States, respectively. We also thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing this morning.

The current situation in the Middle East requires the international community and the Security Council to find solutions to the crises in the region. That would prompt us to move from crises management to a comprehensive conflict resolution approach in order to prevent the outbreak of conflicts and work seriously toward establishing peace and stability. The international community — and the Security Council in particular — must confront the parties that continue to undermine regional stability and peaceful coexistence. That would enable the region to invest its energies and resources in building societies that enjoy peace, prosperity and tolerance free of conflicts, violence and terrorism.

My country believes that ending the Israeli occupation of all Arab and Palestinian territories; reaching a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian question; and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the borders of 4 June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the resolutions of the international legitimacy, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid principles, are all prerequisites for stability in the region. We emphasize the need for Israel to end all its illegal practices against the Palestinian people, particularly the construction and expansion of settlements and the violation of holy sites, as well as its law of Jewish nationalism, all of which undermine the two-State solution and hinder international peace efforts.

In that regard, we underscore the responsibility of the international community, under international law and the Charter of the United Nations, to take all measures that advance the peace process in the Middle East and end the Israeli occupation of all Palestinian and Arab territories. The United Arab Emirates commends the efforts of the Arab Republic of Egypt to promote Palestinian reconciliation.

In the absence of a just and comprehensive solution, the international community should continue to assist the Palestinian people in all areas, including education, health care and food security, in order to let them

cope with the challenges of occupation and attain the Sustainable Development Goals, just like other peoples. In 2017 and 2018, the United Arab Emirates donated more than \$173 million to assist Palestine and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We stress our historic commitment to supporting UNRWA and our brotherly Palestinian people directly.

We continue to assist in restoring peace and stability within the coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen by meeting the humanitarian needs of the Yemeni people and supporting the political process overseen by the United Nations with the aim of expediting a lasting and sustained political solution based on resolution 2216 (2015). In that context, the United Arab Emirates reaffirms its support for the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen to reach a comprehensive political settlement.

The coalition welcomes the Stockholm Agreement on Al-Hudaydah and resolutions 2451 (2018) and 2452 (2019). It has proved its commitment to implementing them at a practical level. The Houthi militias have not fulfilled their obligations and continue to violate the agreement on a daily and repeated basis, committing the most heinous crimes against the Yemeni people and threatening the security and stability of the region, as well as international navigation. They are also looting international aid. All of those acts are documented violations.

Those crimes and violations would not have taken place if the Houthis had not received support and care from Iran, which continues to violate resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015) by supplying the Houthis with weapons, ballistic missiles and drones, as documented by the reports of the Panel of Experts of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), as well as reports of the Secretary-General concerning the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

We are all aware of Iran's negative and destabilizing influence in Syria. The Iranian presence in that Arab country is obstructing any political solution that would allow the Syrians themselves to determine the future of their country without external interference. In that regard, we stress the importance of an Arab role in reaching a political solution. We express our full support for the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, in seeking a

Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political solution within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015).

On the situations in Syria and Yemen, it is clear that Iran is the common denominator in both conflicts. It represents a serious threat to the stability and security of the Middle East region. We therefore call on the international community and the Security Council to put pressure on Iran in order to end its destabilizing and expansionist intervention in the region, let alone supporting and arming terrorist and sectarian militias in the Arab countries.

The United Arab Emirates believes that the United Nations action plan for Libya represents the most viable framework for resolving the political crisis in that country. We welcome the progress made so far and reaffirm our full support for the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy for Libya, Mr. Ghassan Salamé, to implement the action plan, starting with the convening of a national gathering early this year, to include all Libyan actors, with the aim of agreeing a solution to the current political crisis. However, we express our concern at the growing threat of terrorist groups in Libya and emphasize the need to prevent their spread to all areas of the country and to vital Libyan infrastructure. More international efforts should be made to restore security and stability in Libya.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates reaffirms its cooperation with regional and international partners in order to achieve stability and progress in the region, combat terrorism, prevent extremism and reject external interference in the internal affairs of other countries. We should revitalize the Arab role in resolving Arab issues, while promoting values of moderation to protect communities and achieve prosperity.

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

Mr. Sparber (Liechtenstein): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving us this opportunity to discuss the situation in the Middle East. Developments in different parts of the region have made this an important and meaningful topic for discussion among the entire membership, which should also be afforded the same opportunity to express itself on other crises of which the Council is seized.

We continue to be disappointed by the failure of the Security Council to exert its leverage over the parties to the conflict in Syria as the conflict appears to move

inexorably towards a negative conclusion for the Syrian people. The conflict continues to be characterized by systematic and egregious violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law, including the use of chemical weapons, mass displacement, torture and forced disappearances. We continue to value and support the important work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic in investigating grave human rights violations, and we thank the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic for its continued efforts to bring to light details of chemical weapons use in Syria.

Liechtenstein welcomes the decision of the special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction to task the OPCW with identifying the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, as an important contribution to the efforts of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria to advance justice and individual criminal responsibility for those acts.

Accountability must be part and parcel of any political agreement to end the conflict in Syria. That has long been a demand of the Syrian people and countless Syrian civil society groups. Sustainable peace and the effective rebuilding of the country will be possible only if those who have perpetrated crimes against humanity and large-scale war crimes are held to account and excluded from the political leadership.

We are encouraged by the effective work being carried out by the Independent Mechanism, whose mandate encompasses crimes committed by all perpetrators, irrespective of affiliation. The work of the Mechanism is having a concrete impact, as we are seeing criminal proceedings move forward on the basis of universal jurisdiction in several European judiciaries. In addition, we reiterate our call on the Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court with a view to providing a comprehensive justice perspective to the Syrian people, echoing the clear call of the Secretary-General at the previous Brussels conference.

We share the Council's cautious optimism regarding recent developments in the efforts to end the war in Yemen and hope that the new support mission

will ensure that the agreements reached in Stockholm are fully implemented and can be further built upon. Liechtenstein supports the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen and his team, and hopes that the parties will be able to maintain the recent positive momentum.

As the peace process moves forward, it is key that the Council work to address atrocity crimes committed during the conflict. We note that two-thirds of current Council members are signatories to the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group code of conduct on mass atrocity crimes, which includes the commitments to not voting against a resolution in cases of mass atrocity crimes and to taking action to prevent and put an end to those crimes. Guided by the latter of those commitments, the Council should also take steps to ensure that accountability for atrocity crimes is included in any final peace settlement in order to prevent a return to conflict and to bring real, tangible justice to the people of Yemen.

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

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also congratulate your friendly country on its accession to membership of the Council, as well as Germany, Indonesia, Belgium and South Africa on theirs. We wish them every success in working to maintain international peace and security. I also thank the countries whose membership of the Council has come to an end and wish them every success in their work within other United Nations bodies.

The Palestinian people continue to suffer a tragic plight. Seventy years have passed and the world continues to bear witness to the most destructive human tragedy, in which a people has been displaced from the land that was rightfully its own and handed to those who did not own it. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms its unequivocal rejection of all Israeli policies, practices, void and illegal plans aimed at perpetuating racial discrimination against the Palestinian people, obliterating their national identity and infringing on their legitimate rights. We call on the international community in general and the Security Council in particular to shoulder their responsibilities by immediately intervening to put an end to Israeli settlement projects and to protect the Palestinian people.

Work must be done to ensure Israel's compliance with international resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), in order to lift the siege of the Gaza Strip, open border crossings immediately and definitively, and end the humanitarian and economic crisis facing the Palestinian people.

My country stresses the importance of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East as a strategic option to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict, in accordance with international benchmarks and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. That initiative, introduced by my country, includes the establishment of a Palestinian State on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the return of refugees and an end to the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories, including the Arab Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territories.

The Syrian people continue to suffer the worst crisis that humankind has yet witnessed this century. The former Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, completed his mandate without having achieved his desired objectives of making progress on a political process and convening the constitutional committee, owing to the intransigence of the Syrian regime and its unwillingness to reach a just political solution to put an end to the plight of the Syrian people. We welcome the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, wishing him every success and underscoring that he has the full support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in his efforts to reach a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015), which emphasizes the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

My Government stresses the importance of reaching a just political solution in order to put an end to the suffering of Syrians, both within and outside Syria. We call for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and foreign fighters — especially the Iranian forces and their militias — from all Syrian territories. We also condemn and reject any use of chemical weapons in Syria and call on the international community to hold to account those responsible for such crimes.

The region has recently witnessed new developments in the Yemeni file, the most prominent of which was the holding of consultations in Sweden in December 2018 resulting in the Stockholm Agreement, which is considered a new breakthrough towards achieving a political solution in Yemen. The Council

also adopted resolution 2451 (2018) in support of that agreement between the parties, emphasizing the need for a political solution to the Yemeni crisis in line with the provisions of resolution 2216 (2015).

However, the recklessness shown by the Houthis — who are supported by the Iranian regime — suggests that their intentions to adhere to the agreement are not sincere, as demonstrated through the brutal attack of the Houthis by an Iranian drone on Al-Anad military base that left six martyrs of Yemeni officers and many injured, as well as the attack against the Redeployment Coordination Committee in Al-Hudaydah, which was also carried out by Houthi militias. Independent observer reports have also shown that Iran continues to support the Houthi militias by providing them with weapons and military expertise. The Council must therefore compel Iran to abide by the relevant Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 2231 (2015), 2140 (2014) and 2216 (2015).

Houthi militias have violated the ceasefire agreement 679 times to date, in addition to the recent attack against the Redeployment Coordination Committee and the theft of humanitarian aid that was reported by the World Food Programme on 31 December 2018. The Houthis have shown a total disregard for all United Nations and regional efforts aimed at resolving the Yemeni crisis, proving that they are unwilling to engage in any efforts that seek to bring happiness back to Yemen. We stress the importance of reaching a comprehensive political solution in Yemen that will guarantee State sovereignty across its entire territory, with one national army. We reiterate our commitment to the three principles for peace in the region, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative, the outcomes of Yemen's National Dialogue Conference and the relevant Security Council resolutions — especially resolution 2216 (2015). My country will continue to support the brotherly Yemeni people and its legitimate leadership by responding to its humanitarian needs at any time.

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

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I wish to join previous speakers in congratulating the Dominican Republic on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We wish it every success in carrying out the work of the Council.

The dynamics in the Middle East continue to worry the international community, and Kazakhstan therefore wishes to echo the concerns that the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, has expressed today. We are alarmed to note the tragic loss of the lives of almost 300 civilians — including more than 50 children — as well as 29,000 casualties among Palestinian civilians in 2018. The Israeli security forces must calibrate the use of force and employ lethal force only as a last resort.

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

We fully 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. Jerusalem is the common homeland of different ethnicities and religions. Palestine and Israel must respect each other's right to existence and avoid taking provocative actions that might further escalate the situation. We condemn all acts of violence and terrorism, in particular against innocent civilians.

We would like to underline that the rapidly expanding construction of new Israeli settlements, in violation of resolution 2334 (2016), has become a major obstacle to peace in the region and has brought about intense suffering and hardship for the Palestinians. The deliberate policy of demolishing Palestinian buildings, the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the transfer of land for the exclusive use of one party undermine the viability of the two-State solution. The Council must ensure compliance with resolution 2334 (2016).

Turning to Gaza, the difficult humanitarian situation there should remain of great concern to all of us. Kazakhstan reiterates the critical need to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the light of a decade of blockades that have deprived the people of their basic rights and left two-thirds of the population dependent on humanitarian aid. At risk are education,

health care and emergency and social services that contribute to the dignity and hope of 5.4 million Palestinian refugees. More importantly, meeting human needs leads to social content and subsequently to the stability of the region. We also express our concern at Israel's intention to close UNRWA schools in East Jerusalem. Astana encourages Member States with influence, in particular the Arab countries, the United States, Russia and the European Union, to urge Israel and Palestine to return to the negotiating table. That should be done with the aim of reaching an agreement on mutually acceptable principles relating to the coexistence of two States based on international law and Security Council resolutions.

Turning to Yemen, Kazakhstan welcomes the adoption, on 16 January, of resolution 2452 (2019), on the establishment of the new, political United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement by implementing the Stockholm Agreement between the Government of Yemen and the Houthi militia in the city of Al-Hudaydah and the ports of Al-Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Isa. Another important step towards peace in Yemen that we recognized was the meeting between the parties to the conflict held in Amman on 18 January to exchange prisoners. We hope that the recent positive steps in the right direction will provide an opportunity to revive the economy, resolve the humanitarian crisis and restore basic public services in Yemen.

Finally, Kazakhstan reiterates its deep commitment to the multilateral effort to secure stability in the Middle East, which, at the same time, will hold great promise when peace prevails — a goal towards which we all should work.

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

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): The situation across the Middle East continues to be a source of grave concern. Terrorism, violence and humanitarian crises have escalated and engulfed millions of innocent people in the region. In the face of that grim reality, we must maintain our focus on the urgent need to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Failing to do so will continue to further destabilize the region and lead to more radicalization and extremism.

Despite the continuous calls of the international community, the Israeli violations of international law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, have been increasing at an alarming rate.

The continuation of settlement activities, which intend to create new realities on the ground, are particularly worrisome. That is unacceptable. Resolution 2334 (2016) is clear on the destructive effects of illegal settlement activities. The provisions of that resolution must be implemented. Israel should immediately cease all settlement activities as well as house demolitions, land confiscations and other policies that deny the Palestinians' right to development.

There have also been attempts to deny the historical and legal rights of Palestinian people. According to United Nations resolutions, Palestinians have the right to return to their homeland. That right cannot be withheld. The refugee status of the people of Palestine is a legitimate right — it cannot be used as a bargaining chip. The continuation of those practices will only deepen the sense of injustice and breed desperation. That is in nobody's interest.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is also deeply worrying. Gazans, who are under blockade, continue to live in tremendous despair and insecurity. That tragedy is compounded by the worst financial crisis in the history of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Until a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict is achieved, the work of UNRWA will remain vital. It is our collective and moral duty to support the Agency. As Chair of the UNRWA Advisory Commission and the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, Turkey will continue to contribute to the Agency's work and calls on all actors to do the same.

The latest developments remind us once again of the urgency of revitalizing the peace process. A two-State solution, with the establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, remains the only way for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. Any peace plan or initiative should be based on those established parameters. That could be achieved, and we should have reasons to be optimistic.

Last week, the State of Palestine assumed the chairmanship of the Group of 77 (G-77) and China. That is a historic development. We congratulate the State of Palestine and wish it success. Palestinians have first-hand experience of many of the major global problems. Their chairmanship is an opportunity for the G-77 and the General Assembly. We hope that the State of Palestine will soon be a Member of the United

Nations and that Palestinians will take their rightful place among us in order to contribute to the United Nations agenda across all pillars.

Let me also highlight a couple of points on Syria. We continue to support the advancement of the political process through our efforts to finalize the establishment of the constitutional committee. The involvement of the United Nations and a balanced composition are crucial for a legitimate and credible constitutional committee. In recent months, we have intensified our consultations with the other Astana guarantors and the Special Envoy for Syria to that end. We will continue to cooperate closely with the new Special Envoy, Mr. Geir Pedersen.

Turkey's resolve to fight terrorism in Syria is firm, which we have proven through two major counter-terrorism operations against Da'esh and the Democratic Union Party and Kurdish People's Protection Units. We will not tolerate the finding of safe havens for any terrorist organizations right next to our borders. We will not consent to the pursuit of any agenda that works against Syria's unity and the will of the Syrian people. As a global coalition member, Turkey is committed to ensuring the permanent defeat of Da'esh. Turkey and the United States have agreed to coordinate the withdrawal process to avoid the creation of a power vacuum to the east of the Euphrates. Turkey stands ready to continue to do its part for a stable, peaceful and democratic Syria, while preserving its political unity and territorial integrity.

In each and every open debate on the Middle East, we are obliged to focus on a dim picture. But these problems are not inherent to the history or culture of the region. We can overcome them, as long as we work together and in the right direction. We can start by collectively upholding international law. That requires unity, courage and resilience, particularly on the part of the Security Council.

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

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): I have the honour to deliver my statement on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Dominican Republic on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and welcome the new members of the Council. I also wish to express the

OIC Group's full support as they strive to uphold their responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations.

This meeting takes place at a time overshadowed by a series of unfortunate developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, that are deepening the suffering of the Palestinian people and further undermining the peace prospects. The limitless aggression of Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people and the intensification of colonial settlement policies, along with ongoing assaults on Islamic and Christian holy places, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque, are creating an ever-more unsustainable and volatile situation and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis of the Palestinian people, especially in the besieged Gaza Strip.

The prevailing crises and challenges cannot be seen in isolation from measures, statements and provocations by Israel, the occupying Power, or other parties aimed at forcibly and unlawfully altering the legal status of Jerusalem, including attempts to relocate some diplomatic missions thereto, in defiance of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. Such irresponsible acts threaten to weaken the international system, strengthen the Israeli policy of imposing a fait accompli and contribute to further deepening the current political impasse and jeopardizing opportunities for actualizing the two-State solution.

The dire situation on the ground is deteriorating and becoming more dangerous as a result of the illegal Israeli blockade and the escalation of military aggression and raids being carried out all over the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which have resulted in the tragic loss of civilian lives and a high level of casualties among Palestinian civilians, including many innocent children. We reiterate, in that regard, the responsibility of this organ to act appropriately so as to bring an end to such lawlessness and impunity for Israel, the occupying Power. The international community, with the Security Council at the forefront, must act to ensure accountability for all Israeli violations, in line with international law, including humanitarian law, human rights law and criminal law, and to provide protection to the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in the Gaza Strip.

Despite the hopes that the start of each new year ushers in, we once again regrettably observe that Israel, the occupying Power, has persisted with a further illegal policy of colonial settlement construction

in order to further entrench its illegal occupation, facilitate the exploitation of Palestinian land and natural resources, foreclose all prospects for peace and irreversibly undermine the two-State solution. As the Israeli colonial settlement policy constitutes blatant contempt for, and systematic violations of, numerous United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), we reiterate that the Security Council, the International Criminal Court and all key actors should fulfil their responsibilities in ensuring accountability, upholding the rule of international law and halting those illegal acts.

We reaffirm our support for the accession of the State of Palestine to international organizations and treaties that would establish its legal personality at the international level, which is an inherent right of the State of Palestine. That could facilitate strengthening the legal tools that provide protection for the Palestinian people. We reiterate our call upon the Security Council to positively consider and recommend the admission of the State of Palestine as a full-fledged Member of the United Nations. We therefore invite the States that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine to do so to promote the chances for peace and establish political and legal measures to protect and support the two-State solution.

The OIC Group remains deeply worried by the instability and insufficiency of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). While the impressive mobilization and solidarity of the international community, including OIC countries as well as traditional and new donors, helped the Agency to address its unprecedented financial crisis in 2018, the start of the new year serves to renew concerns about sustainable funding to ensure the uninterrupted provision of its vital services. We urge the international community to come forward generously and responsibly to ensure more predictable and sustained funding for UNRWA so that it may effectively carry out its General Assembly mandate in support of Palestinian refugees, pending a just solution to their plight, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation urges the Security Council to uphold its commitment and act responsibly to revive hope and opportunities for real progress on the stalled peace process. The engagement of international actors in constructively and effectively sponsoring multilateral political peace

efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative carries decisive moral and political weight with a view to enabling the Palestinian people to live in freedom and dignity in their Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Martín Prada: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. Moreover, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia align themselves with this statement.

Let me begin by reaffirming the European Union's commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-State solution and an agreement that ends the occupation that began in 1967, ending all claims and fulfilling the aspirations of both parties.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continued to deteriorate over the past three months, with no prospect of a clear political horizon. Violence, including terrorist attacks, and unrest increased in the final months of last year, both in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Civilians on both sides, including children, were killed or wounded in violent episodes. While acknowledging Israel's legitimate right to safeguard the security of the Israeli people, the European Union expects the Israeli authorities to adhere strictly to the principles of necessity and proportionality in its use of force and to take steps against the increasing settler violence.

The EU firmly condemns all acts of violence, terrorism and incitement to violence and hate, which are fundamentally incompatible with advancing a peaceful two-State solution. Today there is a risk of further escalation that would move Israelis and Palestinians further away from an end to the conflict. The risk is compounded by the advancement in December 2018 of Israeli plans for more than 2,000 settlement units and renewed plans to legalize West Bank outposts. The allocation of an area south of Bethlehem for the purpose of planning a new settlement constitutes a serious blow to the viability of the two-State solution.

The European Union's position on Israeli settlement policy, including the eviction of Palestinians — for example, in Sheikh Jarrah — and related activities in

the occupied Palestinian territory is clear and remains unchanged: all settlement activity is illegal under international law and erodes the viability of the two-State solution and the prospects for lasting peace, as reaffirmed by resolution 2334 (2016). In that context, we wish to underline once again that, although we welcome the fact that the planned demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar, including its school, has not taken place, we continue to call upon Israel to withdraw those plans indefinitely.

The political and security situation in Gaza remains volatile, and the dire humanitarian situation a matter of grave concern. Miscalculations could easily lead to the outbreak of a dangerous spiral of violence, which would be detrimental to both sides. The European Union, working closely together with the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, will continue its support for the provision of lifesaving health-care support, its engagement to increase access to clean water and energy supplies and its efforts to improve the overall humanitarian and economic conditions. Our priority remains to reduce tensions and avoid another conflict in Gaza.

Humanitarian and financial assistance directed to Gaza may help address the most urgent needs of civilians, but it cannot be a sustainable solution in the long term. Financial efforts by any member of the international community can have a constructive and lasting effect only if they are coordinated with the Palestinian Authority and the international community and underpinned by progress towards a political solution in Gaza. To ensure lasting results, a fundamental change of the situation in Gaza is crucial. That should include an end to the closure and the full opening of crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. The EU calls on all parties to ensure unfettered access inside the Gaza Strip for humanitarian assistance and the protection of civilians, including for all the relevant United Nations bodies.

The EU reiterates its call that Palestinian factions engage in good faith towards reconciliation. The return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip is needed to durably improve the conditions and the humanitarian situation. Punitive measures on Gaza need to end.

Despite commendable Egyptian efforts, intra-Palestinian reconciliation talks seem to have reached a deadlock. Prospects for an effective reconciliation deteriorated further after the decision of the Constitutional Court in December to dissolve the

Palestinian Legislative Council and hold legislative elections within six months. Only a few days ago, the Palestinian Authority withdrew its personnel from the Rafah crossing point, resulting in the border being closed. Again, those are negative developments for the people in Gaza.

The European Union calls on all Palestinian factions to find common ground and work together to address the needs of the Palestinian population. We expect the Government to work towards genuine and democratic elections for all Palestinians. Strong, inclusive and democratic institutions based on respect for the rule of law and human rights are crucial for the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. Palestinian divisions do not serve the interests of the people and undermine the prospects for a two-State solution. In that context, it is important to underline that the European Union will continue to support Palestinian aspirations to statehood. However, it is of the utmost importance that the positive results of the past not be lost and that Palestinian institutions grow stronger, more transparent, accountable and democratic.

The continued support of the international community for the important work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains crucial. Stopping UNRWA's assistance to Palestine refugees would affect a large number of Palestinian refugees, cause more instability — including beyond the occupied Palestinian territory — and create a vacuum that would only serve extremists. The European Union and its member States are collectively the largest contributors to the UNRWA budget. We will continue to support the agency in its efforts to put in place cost-saving measures and reforms. We are and will continue to be strong, reliable and predictable supporters of the Agency, and we will strive to enable UNRWA to continue its operations until a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the final status issue of Palestine refugees is reached.

Recent and increasing violence in Gaza and in the West Bank remind us that there is no such thing as the status quo. Restoring a political horizon for peace between Israelis and Palestinians is essential to reducing violence and containing extremism in the region.

Twenty-five years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, their achievements are under increasing threat because of negative developments on the ground, on both sides. Palestinian institutions are weakened. The

Palestinian economy is not growing to its full potential, not least because of the occupation and a lack of full implementation of the Paris Protocol. The ability of the Palestinian Authority to exert control over its own resources is still hindered, particularly in Area C. Lack of meaningful progress towards reconciliation and the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza continues to impact negatively the situation on the ground. As a result, the prospect of a two-State solution is being dismantled piece by piece.

However, there is no credible alternative to it. That is why the European Union remains committed to the internationally agreed parameters for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on international law, relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 1860 (2009) and 2334 (2016), and previous agreements. To be successful, any peace plan should recognize those internationally agreed parameters.

The European Union is truly convinced that serious efforts must be made towards a resumption of meaningful negotiations aimed at a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations to statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation and resolves all final status issues in order to end the conflict. The EU will continue to work with our partners, the Israelis and the Palestinians; with regional actors, such as Jordan and Egypt; and with our partners within the Middle East Quartet to that end.

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

Mr. Ahmad Tajuddin (Malaysia): At the outset, I would like to join others in congratulating you, Mr. President, on the Dominican Republic's accession to membership of the Security Council, joining the ranks of Belgium, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa. I trust that, with the mandate given, you will be able to implement great tasks ahead with the ultimate view of maintaining world peace and security, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

The growing tension in the Gaza Strip and West Bank in recent week, leaving dozens more innocent Palestinian civilians — including children — dead, with the continued illegal demolishing of Palestinian homes, continues to paint a bleak future for the prospects of a two-State solution. The situation in Palestine, as

illustrated by Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov, continues to spiral downward each day. Malaysia strongly condemns the excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate uses of force by Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and, particularly, the Gaza Strip.

We have heard repeated warnings by Secretary-General António Guterres and Special Coordinator Mladenov on Israel's expansion of illegal settlement activity, despite considerable international pressure for its immediate and complete cessation. As those violations continue and grow more prolonged, the prospects of a two-State solution could just as well become another utopian dream. In the interest of progress, Malaysia reiterates its call on the parties to the conflict concerned to exercise the utmost restraint with a view to de-escalating tensions.

After decades of Israel being allowed to commit violation after violation, Malaysia would like to reiterate its call on all United Nations Member States and the international community to continue pressing Israel and to demand that it cease immediately and completely all illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories, as well as all other violations of international law and international humanitarian law, and that it fully comply with all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), and the United Nations Charter.

The current deadlock in the Middle East peace process needs pragmatic solutions based on international law and norms. It is therefore important that the international community create such conditions for peace talks in advancing prospects for a peaceful solution to this long-standing conflict.

Malaysia remains steadfast in its long-standing and principled position in favour of the inalienable rights of Palestinians, including the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We are unequivocal in our belief that the Security Council must reassume once more its rightful role as the ultimate broker of peace, particularly with respect to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The long-standing trust deficit due to the Council's inaction must be overcome now.

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

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate and thank you, Mr. President. I also thank Mr. Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing and ongoing efforts to promote the peace process in the Middle East and maintain its terms of reference, as well as his attempts to contain the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip while continuously encouraging Palestinian reconciliation efforts.

Today's briefing and statements only reflect the injustice suffered by the Palestinian people. We all know it full well. Therefore, I will not touch upon the factors or reasons behind the situation, which is due mainly to the continued occupation and practices of Israel, which, despite the illegality of its actions, has been able to maintain an unacceptable situation on the ground. We have already witnessed the negative repercussions of those actions, and we will see further repercussions in the future if we maintain the status quo.

Instead, I will touch on the main points of the objectives that we must all work for so as to restore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and put in place the building blocks for security and stability in the region, including for the Israeli people themselves.

Therefore, allow me to reiterate the ongoing Egyptian efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation and the return of legitimate authority in Gaza. I would like to seize this opportunity to call on the parties to give priority to the interests of the Palestinian people and to recognize that the different strata of society in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank are those bearing the exorbitant cost of division. Restoring the rights of the Palestinian people and ending occupation requires united leadership, objectives and policies.

Turning to the core of the conflict and the crisis under consideration — that is, the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif since 1967 — it might be helpful to draw the Council's attention to the fact that the road to peace is still clear. We need the parties to recognize only that the fates of the Palestinian and Israeli people are intertwined. Bringing security to Israelis and achieving the true integration of Israel within its geographical parameters will not be accomplished by building walls or illegal settlements, or by maintaining the state of injustice that has been suffered by the Palestinian people on a daily basis since last century.

I understand the view of those who believe that talking about international law, Security Council resolutions or the Arab Peace Initiative is redundant. However, I differ from those who believe that the substance and content of such parameters have failed to bring about the desired peace. We have all heard that before in past years, both inside and outside the Council. However, we have never witnessed their implementation or any serious attempt to do so, and have thus never been in a position to honestly judge if they are able to bring about peace.

I therefore call on those who claim that such parameters represent injustice against Israel or an attempt to impose a settlement without negotiations to read the Arab Peace Initiative carefully or to compare it with the contents of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which established the State of Israel, or even international consensus following the 1967 occupation. Only then will they realize the level of flexibility reflected in that Initiative by Arab States on all aspects. I call on them to also study all resolutions adopted by the Council so as to realize that they all provide for negotiations as a path to settlement. They establish a path that takes into account the interests of the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples alike.

I reiterate that we are committed to a two-State solution based on international legitimacy, and negotiations on the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as the capital of Palestine. We agree with the affirmation that has been repeated by the Secretary-General to the effect that there is no plan B. Disregarding this path amounts to the destruction of 25 years of work since the signing of the Oslo Accords. What is more dangerous is that it entrenches the fact of a one-State solution, which both peoples reject.

In conclusion, I warn the Council against the illusion of maintaining the status quo. That is a false belief that clearly disregards the parameters I just mentioned. It would only lead Israelis and Palestinians towards a one-State solution rejected by all. There is no middle ground, which leads me to pose a legitimate question to all those who find it useless to refer to the framework or parameters of the two-State solutions: Has the surrender to the one-State solution become their final choice? I hope that the answer to that question is no.

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

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Cuban delegation deplores the fact that since the last open debate (see S/PV.8375) on this theme, no progress has been made in advancing the just cause of the Palestinian people. On the contrary, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, with unilateral actions such as the withdrawal of United States financial support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It is truly regrettable that, due to the repeated obstruction of the United States, the Security Council has not even denounced the escalation of violence and the tragic developments in the Gaza Strip since 30 March 2018.

The delegation of Cuba emphatically rejects the use of disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by Israel against Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem and particularly in the Gaza Strip, in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law. We once again condemn the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as the demolition or seizure of Palestinian properties. All such measures, compounded by the blockade of the Gaza Strip, contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention and erode the viability of a two-State solution.

We reiterate our call on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Council must demand that Israel put an immediate end to the occupation of Palestinian territories, aggressive policies and settlement practices, and that it implement all Council resolutions on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

We reaffirm our full support for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, based on a two-State solution that allows the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-determination, its right to an independent sovereign State with pre-1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of return for refugees.

We reject the unilateral action of the United States Government to establish its diplomatic presence in

Jerusalem, which further exacerbates tensions in the region.

We also reiterate our call for support for the proposal of President Mahmoud Abbas to convene an international peace conference based on the agreed parameters and terms of reference. We express our unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian Government and people, and support the accession of Palestine as a full-fledged Member of the United Nations. We welcome the adoption of General Assembly resolution 73/89, entitled “Comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East”, which endorses the two-State solution.

The delegation of Cuba once again demands the total and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the Syrian Golan and from all other occupied Arab territories. We note that any measure or action to modify the legal, physical and demographic status or the institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, or any Israeli measure to exercise its jurisdiction over and administration of that territory, runs counter to international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

We demand respect for multilateralism. Foreign intervention in domestic affairs, foreign aggression and sponsorship of terrorist groups to promote instability and conflict in the Middle East, and the fabrication of excuses and justifications in the Council to legitimize the unilateral use of force and aggression against sovereign States, must stop.

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

Mr. Atlassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month and on your initiative to organize this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the new members of the Council and to wish them success.

We also congratulate the State of Palestine on its election by acclamation to the chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China this year and wish it success.

I thank Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his important briefing on this agenda item.

We were disappointed last year by the various challenges, obstacles and frustrations that arose with regard to the Palestinian question, hampering all efforts to restore confidence and resume negotiations on the peace process. The situation in occupied Palestine continues to deteriorate as a result of the Judaization policies, settlement-building and systematic oppression of the Palestinian people by the Israeli occupying Power. Those policies have obstructed the two-State solution, exacerbated the situation and increased tensions, all of which only hinders the peace process, which has already been stalled for five years.

The use of force, the killing of unarmed civilians and the ongoing construction of settlements are all violations of United Nations resolutions and in particular resolution 2334 (2016). They impede the peace process and provoke the Palestinians and the international community. The lack of a dignified life does not help to create confidence or the appropriate framework for launching the peace process.

The Kingdom of Morocco, whose King His Majesty Mohammed VI presides over the Al-Quds Committee, underscores the importance of safeguarding the historic, legal and political status of Jerusalem, while calling the United Nations, especially the permanent members of the Security Council and the Quartet, to fully shoulder their responsibilities in order to prevent any action that could undermine the situation or impede international efforts to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. His Majesty has called many times for restraint from undermining the current political situation of Jerusalem, on the basis that Jerusalem is at the core of the final-status issues.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was another opportunity for His Majesty King Mohammed VI to reiterate Morocco's unwavering support for the historic and legitimate right of the Palestinian people to have a viable, independent State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy. In a letter of solidarity sent by His Majesty in November 2018 to the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and through him to the Palestinian people led by President Abbas, His Majesty noted that:

“The issue of Palestine is crucial for the Middle East and represents the core of the conflict in the region. Achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace as a part of a two-State solution is a strategic choice in accordance with Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, and not simply a political tactic. The question of Palestine is of crucial importance to the Arab and Islamic nation, as the Al-Aqsa Mosque is located in Jerusalem. It is therefore a symbol of tolerance and coexistence among religions. The unilateral measures that impact Jerusalem are completely unacceptable, illegal and illegitimate. They are gross violations of international law and United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980) and General Assembly resolution ES-10/20, adopted at its tenth emergency special session.

“The settlement of the Palestinian question in accordance with international resolutions prevents terrorism and extremism from taking any opportunity to prevail after investing in the lack of prospects for a solution of the Palestinian question and the issue of Jerusalem in order to justify their criminal approach in the region. The concern surrounding the illegal measures imposed against Jerusalem evokes religious sentiments and therefore takes the conflict along a path that is not political, but rather religious. That would be an extremely dangerous matter for international peace and security and for the desired coexistence among various civilizations and cultures.”

In conclusion, Morocco's stance towards the conflict is a steadfast one based on the Arab Peace Initiative and the terms of reference for achieving peace on the basis of the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 4 June 1967 borders, living side by side with Israel in peace, security and harmony.

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

Mr. Kelapile (Botswana): At the outset, my delegation takes this opportunity to sincerely congratulate you, Mr. President, and your country, the Dominican Republic, on your election as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the term 2019-2020. We also congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for

the month of January, immediately upon your election to the Council.

In the same vein, we convey our deepest congratulations to the other new members of the Council: South Africa, Belgium, Germany and Indonesia. We wish them well as they assume their duties in this very important organ of the United Nations.

At this juncture, allow me to convey our delegation's sincere condolences and sympathies to our dear brother and friend Ambassador Jerry Matjila and the people of South Africa on the passing of the former Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Ambassador Dumisani Kumalo. Representatives who knew him knew his contributions not only to the Security Council, but also in many other ways, including his leadership of the Group of 77 (G-77) and China.

My delegation further condemns in the strongest terms possible the recent acts of terrorism in Kenya and Colombia, both of which claimed many innocent lives and caused injury to many more. We also condemn the deadly attack on a United Nations camp in northern Mali, which claimed the lives of 10 peacekeepers from Chad. It is our hope that the perpetrators of these heinous crimes will be tracked, found and brought to justice.

My delegation conveys its sincere appreciation to your delegation, Mr. President, for convening this quarterly open debate on a matter of great importance to many of us, including my delegation — that is, the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his invaluable perspectives on this subject.

My delegation aligns itself in advance with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Allow me to further use this opportunity to congratulate the State of Palestine on its historic election to the chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China for 2019. Its election to that very important role demonstrates the confidence of a large number of Member States in the State of Palestine. There is no doubt that regional and other groupings — including the largest of all, the G-77 and China — play an

instrumental role in ensuring a harmonized approach to multilateral engagements and better coordination among the United Nations main organs, such as the General Assembly and the Security Council. It is not surprising that a large number of countries, including my own, stands firm in solidarity with, and support for, the Palestinian people in their inalienable right to self-determination and independence.

Botswana's pronouncement on this subject in various forums has always been that there is merit in the two-State solution. We still believe that Israel and Palestine can coexist as two sovereign States that not only share a common border, but a common desire for peace, security and prosperity.

However, we remain concerned by the ongoing impasse in the negotiations on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as that poses a serious threat to international peace and security and in the Middle East as a whole. We are of the view that there must be intensified efforts to eventually return to meaningful negotiations aimed at bringing about a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict. We therefore urge the international community to strengthen efforts towards finding a negotiated settlement, facilitated by the Middle East Quartet, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid terms of reference, as well as other actors, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions. We furthermore encourage all peace-loving nations, especially those in the Middle East region with a better understanding of the dynamics to the conflict and leverage, to summon the necessary will and courage to work towards embracing dialogue as a means to a lasting solution.

Certainly, both the old, who have endured the situation for far too long, and the younger generation in the Middle East, as anywhere else in the world, deserve a future of peace, tolerance and harmony. In the interests of peace and protecting the lives of innocent civilians, we wish to echo the call for all actors to fulfil their obligations under various international instruments and refrain from any steps that could undermine the momentum of the negotiation process.

We furthermore call for all the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), to be respected and given full effect, along with strict observance of basic international humanitarian law and human rights law by all parties to the conflict.

In the midst of the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza and other affected areas, we implore both parties to cease hostilities, return to peace talks and refrain from exacerbating an already deteriorating situation. We have the utmost faith in the international community's collective ability to put more pressure on the parties to resume dialogue and intra-Palestinian peace talks and relaunch the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

We note with regret that, despite global condemnation and pronouncements from the Security Council and the General Assembly, settlement activities continue in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. We reiterate that those actions violate international law and constitute a significant obstacle to achieving peace. Furthermore, we are gravely concerned about pockets of violence and tensions, which pose challenges to the deteriorated humanitarian, security and political situation, especially in Gaza.

In conclusion, I once again reiterate my delegation's long-standing position and conviction that there is no alternative to the two-State solution. We believe that to be the only long-term solution that can provide a safer, freer and sovereign Palestinian State, along the pre-1967 international borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We reaffirm Botswana's solidarity with the Palestinian people, as well as our unwavering support for their just cause. We renew our call for strengthening the coordination of international efforts to promote a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the situation in the Middle East, in particular the question of Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Kim Song (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): At the outset, my delegation would like to express its appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. My delegation has full confidence that the current debate will be a meaningful opportunity to contribute substantially to a settlement of Middle East issues.

The peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question is today one of the top priorities among the Middle East

issues that cannot be delayed and is directly linked to ensuring world peace and security. The Middle East issue, which was triggered by Israel's occupation of Arab territories in 1948, has not been solved to date, more than 70 years later, due to the high-handedness of Israel, coupled with the biased policies voiced by some. Israel's fast expansion of settlements, the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip and ruthless suppression of peaceful Palestinian protesters have sparked condemnation and rejection across the world, as they constitute a series of obstacles for the Palestinian people in their struggle to reclaim their occupied territories and establish an independent State.

The unlawful and unjust behaviour of Israel is closely linked to the double-standard attitude of a specific permanent member of the Security Council that bankrolls and sponsors Israel's territorial expansion. We cannot overlook the fact that permanent members of the Security Council insist, on the one hand, on the importance of ensuring peace while, on the other hand, back Israel's ruthless crackdown on the Palestinian people while arrogantly seeking to change the status of East Jerusalem. The status of East Jerusalem is a very sensitive issue. It must be treated fairly by restoring the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and through a comprehensive and lasting solution to Middle East issues.

In that context, my delegation asserts that it is important to fully implement resolution 2334 (2016), which sets forth requirements for establishing an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders, as well as the other relevant resolutions of the General Assembly calling for a complete halt to the expansion of settlements and the ruthless crackdown on the Palestinian people and opposing any attempt to change the status of East Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the Security Council should fully discharge its responsibility to ensure international peace and security, as desired by the international community. The Council is mandated to ensure international peace and security and should focus directly on the nature of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and take measures to fairly address those issues. It should also thoroughly investigate every type of illegal act committed by Israel, including territorial expansion, and take legally binding measures aimed at completely halting those acts.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to extend its unwavering support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle to end the occupation by Israel and regain their legitimate national rights, including the right to establish an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. At the same time, my delegation expresses its full support for and solidarity with the Syrian people in their struggle to regain the occupied Syrian Golan and achieve their country's territorial integrity.

In conclusion, my delegation avails itself of this opportunity to clarify once again the principled position of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that all controversial issues must be solved through dialogue and negotiations among the parties concerned without any foreign intervention.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Abdelaziz (*spoke in Arabic*): Today's meeting of the Security Council is being held in the absence of any clear prospect for a peace process in the Middle East, and in the light of intentional disregard for the main international terms of reference of the peace process, including Oslo and Madrid accords, including the Arab Peace Initiative, the international Quartet road map, the principle of land for peace, the two-State solution and the 4 June 1967 borders. That in itself constitutes a terrible failure of the international multilateral order and the steadfast positions laid out in the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, which indicate broad international consensus in support of the just Palestinian question and rejection of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and all unilateral Israeli practices in violation of international agreements.

The League of Arab States supports the commendable stand taken by States and peoples of all geographical groups to resist pressures to move their embassies to Jerusalem, which runs contrary to international legitimacy and all relevant United Nations resolutions. Accordingly, the League of Arab States reaffirms the illegality of the United States decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to move its embassy there. Furthermore, the League thanks those States that refused to cede to the pressure and decided not to relocate their embassies. We also express our gratitude to those States that rejected implementing

prior decisions in that regard as a sign of upholding international multilateral legitimacy. The League calls on all States to remain committed to rejecting the fierce campaign to remove the issue of Jerusalem from the five final-status issues.

We welcome the strong international support that has been provided for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), enabling it to carry out its noble mission to respond to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people and to counter the negative effects of the United States decision to cease its financial support for the Agency, which resulted in a budget gap that was more than bridged by States which believe in the just cause of refugees, most notably the Arab States.

In that regard, the League of Arab States reaffirms the need to guarantee the right of return of the Palestinian refugees to the occupied Palestinian territories, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948, and to uphold the cause of refugees as a final-status issue that must be settled definitively through direct negotiations between both the Palestinian and Israeli parties.

At the same time, the increased pace of Israeli settlement activities presents a great challenge to the peace process in the Middle East, as well as a gross violation of international law and resolution 2334 (2016). The League of Arab States therefore condemns all Israeli settlement activities, including attempts by Israel to control the nomad communities in Abu Nuwar and Khan Al-Ahmar in order to establish a connection between Israeli settlements and East Jerusalem, the capital of the Palestinian State. Israel also continues to besiege Jerusalem by surrounding the outer band of the city with settlements, in addition to other projects implemented under the guise of tourism, such as the high-speed train that is on its way to be expeditiously implemented. Another project is the creation of a recreational park connecting the Mount of Olives settlements facing the Al-Haram Al-Sharif from the east.

The League of Arab States calls on the Security Council to oppose those colonial and expansionist plans, which are intended to change the historic, legal and demographic status of occupied Jerusalem, in order to protect the religious sites, sacred to all religions, and defend the identity of the historic character of Jerusalem

by preserving the established and steadfast rights of the brotherly Palestinian people.

At the same time, it is incumbent upon the international community to reaffirm the illegality of such heinous racist laws as the new nation-State law adopted recently by the Knesset, which seeks to deny the Palestinian people of their rights to their historic territories by legislating settlement activities, the confiscation of land, the demolition of homes and the displacement of populations in flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. The League of Arab States calls attention to the ramifications of those laws and their racist effects, which undermine the solid, inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which are fully supported by the international community.

The Security Council should also intervene to protect the right of the Palestinian people to protest peacefully and express their legitimate stand against the occupation without being subject to vicious attacks by the occupying forces. Since the Land Day incidents of 30 March 1976, more than 300 Palestinians have been killed and tens of thousands of others wounded. The demonstrators in question were all peaceful, defenceless civilians demonstrating for the right of return to their occupied territory. The occupation forces attacked them with live ammunition, in flagrant violation of every relevant law, without any accountability whatsoever. There is a dire need to create a mechanism under the auspices of the United Nations to protect the Palestinian people through a group of observers who submit periodic and prompt reports to the Security Council.

The Secretary-General has submitted a report (A/ES-10/794) to the Security Council and the General Assembly on the establishment of an international mechanism to protect the rights of the Palestinian people, as requested in General Assembly resolution ES-10/20 of 13 June 2018. Despite that effort, the report remains dead letter and the Security Council has taken no measure relevant to it. In that regard, we call on the Council to take action aimed at establishing such a mechanism, based on the report and in cooperation with the Group of Arab States and the League of Arab States, and to ensure that it is under the supervision of the United Nations to protect the Palestinian people. Such action would be akin to the dispatch of 90 international unarmed observers by the Security Council to Yemen in order to monitor the situation there, in accordance

with Stockholm Agreement. That could be duplicated on a larger scale in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Despite the suspension of Syria's membership in the League of Arab States, which was done in accordance with the rules of the League, the issue of Syria remains a fundamental one for the Arab world, and the League remains interested in a comprehensive, peaceful settlement of the Syrian issue so as to ensure maximum protection for the brotherly Syrian people. The League reaffirms the need to promote its participation alongside the Arab States concerned in the negotiating process to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. In that regard, I underscore that the League of Arab States is strongly opposed to any and all illegal attempts to codify the occupation of Syrian or Lebanese territory — be it in the Syrian Golan or the Shaba'a farms. We call for Israel's immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal from those territories, in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy.

At the same time, the League of Arab States calls on the Security Council to deal effectively with the blatant Iranian interference in Arab affairs, in support of the implementation of the League's decisions adopted at summit and ministerial levels. The League also calls for the immediate withdrawal of Iran from the three Emirati islands that it occupies. That should take place in parallel with steady progress on other main issues connected with establishing peace and stability in the Arab world, foremost of which is the peace process in the Middle East; establishing the independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital along the 1967 borders; and restoring peace and security in Syria, Libya, Iraq, the Sudan, Yemen, Somalia and other hotbeds of tension and instability that continue to impede the efforts of Arab States to achieve progress and prosperity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

First of all, I would like to congratulate the Dominican Republic on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. The Committee also extends its congratulations to all new members of the Council.

As we meet for the first quarterly open debate of the year to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, we urge the Security Council to make 2019 a year of action and progress on the road to achieving just and lasting peace and the full exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We must collectively redress the historic injustice subjected upon an entire people under occupation, without independence and deprived of their basic dignity and rights, first and foremost the right to self-determination.

As further proof of the State of Palestine's existence as a full member of the community of nations, the largest group of States Members of the United Nations elected it to the chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China, which represents 80 per cent of the world community, to lead us in all our collective negotiations in 2019. That important event must be given due consideration.

Allow me to recall some events that marked the past year and that should serve as a reminder of the task ahead. The political paralysis and stalemate in the peace process continued; the lack of a political horizon remained a source of frustration for both Palestinians and Israelis and the region continued to be threatened by the constant risk of increased destabilization. Protests by Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip have been taking place since March 2018 and indiscriminate violence by the Israeli occupying forces has resulted in a large number of casualties, including the death of several children.

The Committee has repeatedly called on Israel, the occupying Power, to lift the illegal blockade of Gaza, which has lasted for 12 years. Military escalation and a catastrophic conflict must be avoided at all costs and an immediate response is needed to the grave humanitarian crisis, in particular through increased support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other United Nations organizations that provide vital assistance.

Regrettably, despite the ongoing efforts of Egypt and other actors, Palestinian reconciliation has not progressed. The Committee believes that Palestinian unity remains the best guarantee of a politically stable and economically viable future for the Palestinian people.

As we have just heard, the construction and planning of Israeli settlements and the demolition and confiscation of Palestinian property, including in

East Jerusalem, continue unabated, as do incidents of settler-related violence in violation of resolution 2334 (2016), among others. The recent announcement of plans for new settlements deeper in the West Bank, near Ramallah and Bethlehem, and for a new five-kilometre road divided lengthwise by a concrete wall to separate Israeli and Palestinian traffic and connect settlements on the outskirts of Jerusalem, constitute new serious violations of international law. Even the Israeli press has spoken of "apartheid on the road" in reference to the new route.

The illegal activities of the occupying Power, in particular the planned demolition of entire Bedouin villages, such as Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu and the relocation of its population, have only fleetingly captured the attention of the Council. The international community ignores not only the obligations of the occupying Power that are being violated, but also its own obligations as a third party under international law.

Resolution 2334 (2016) provides a checklist and a path towards a just and lasting settlement between two States living side by side in security, within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as the capital of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State. The Committee welcomes the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/614) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and looks forward to future reports in the same format. We also welcome the initial steps taken by some Parliaments to ensure national implementation of paragraph 5 of resolution 2334 (2016) and to encourage others to do the same.

Lastly, the Committee calls on all Member States to refrain from taking unilateral action on any final status issue in contravention of international law and United Nations resolutions. Such measures, if implemented, would only further jeopardize the two-State solution and the prospects for lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

On a positive note, I note that many Member States have increased their financial support to UNRWA to ensure the continuation of its vital operations following its unprecedented financial crisis in 2018. The Committee calls on all Member States to continue to fund UNRWA in a reliable and predictable manner until the refugee issue is resolved fairly and definitively on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Committee firmly believes that, although unilateral initiatives to overcome the current impasse

could be useful, the Security Council has a clear responsibility in that regard and is the key to resolving the conflict.

In conclusion, the Committee calls on all Member States that have not yet done so, in particular the members of the European Union, to join the majority of the States of the international community — 139 so far — and recognize the State of Palestine, supporting its efforts to become a full State Member of the United Nations and take its rightful place in the community of nations. That step would help make 2019 the year in which peace between Israelis and Palestinians becomes a reality and allow us to finally reach the goal we collectively set 71 years ago.

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

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): My delegation would like to express its high appreciation to the Dominican Republic's presidency for organizing this very important open debate. We also thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his updates on the recent developments and remaining challenges with regard to the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

A year ago, at the open debate on 25 January 2018, representatives expressed their hope for positive changes in the Middle East (see S/PV.8167). Throughout the year, the Security Council and other United Nations bodies made continued efforts to resolve those untenable problems. However, excessive and indiscriminate force continued to be used. Innocent civilians continued to be victimized. The death and casualty tolls were the highest in the past five years. People, especially women and children, continued to be displaced. The future of the peace process and the two-State solution remained uncertain. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) faced a major funding crisis.

The situation in the Middle East remains unstable. The plight of the Palestinian people is worse than a year ago. One of the main reasons is that Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016), have not been respected or implemented, and have even

been violated. There is clearly a lack of goodwill and practical steps by many of the parties concerned to comply with the Security Council and other United Nations resolutions. As a country that has been through many wars, Viet Nam shares the concerns over the unjustifiable suffering of civilians. We follow the situation closely, with a heavy feeling in our heart at every sad event that takes place.

Viet Nam would once again like to reiterate its solidarity with and support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights, as well as the two-State solution through the establishment of an independent State of Palestine living in peace with the State of Israel within the pre-1967 internationally recognized borders.

Viet Nam opposes the excessive and indiscriminate use of force and expresses concern over the escalation of tensions and violations of Security Council resolutions and international law. We urge all parties to uphold international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), and to resolve the conflict by peaceful means in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Moving forward, Viet Nam supports the regular consideration of such issues by the Security Council with a view to strengthening its efforts to ultimately achieve a long-lasting solution for the region. The unity of the Council is crucial. Concrete actions are urgently needed to uphold the Security Council resolutions, to put an end to the suffering of the people on the ground and to stop the violence and hostilities.

All efforts should seek to create an environment that is conducive to reaching a comprehensive, fair and sustainable solution that ensures the protection of human life, dignity and safety, as well as regional peace and security, while taking into account the legitimate interests of all parties concerned. The work of UNRWA and the efforts of the international community need to be supported in order to address humanitarian concerns.

We sincerely hope that in 2019, the Council will demonstrate its strong and effective leadership through action-oriented efforts and call on all parties concerned to abide by its decisions and resolutions with a view to achieving a peaceful and long-lasting solution. Viet Nam stands ready to support all efforts in that regard.

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

Mr. Elmajerbi (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We highly appreciate the efforts of your predecessor in his excellent conduct of the work of the Council last month.

I also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the State of Palestine on its election to the chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China and to wish it every success. We have confidence in the ability of the Palestinian delegation to fully undertake that task.

Last month, we heard a briefing by Mr. Mladenov in which he described alarming facts, the horror of which he has reiterated today (see S/PV.8429). Those facts reflect developments in occupied Palestine, including the continued Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories; the confiscation of land; the demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; and the expansion of settlements, which has become a genuine threat to the two-State solution. Those facts also reflect the dangerous escalation of violence against Palestinian protesters and demonstrators, the increased threat of war and the lack of any progress in implementing resolution 2334 (2016), which calls for an end to all settlement activities. However, that resolution is deliberately and blatantly violated every day by the Israelis, particularly in East Jerusalem,

Regrettably, today's briefing lacked any glimmer of hope. All such reports lead only to further frustration and disappointment among us as States Members of the United Nations. What about the Palestinian citizens who remain under the oppression of occupation on a daily basis and enduring the repressive blockade in Gaza?

In the light of all those violations of international legitimacy and Security Council resolutions, the situation in Palestine today makes it incumbent upon the Council to be more effective in order to preserve its credibility, which is jeopardized by the Palestinian question. The most important step that the Security Council and the United Nations can take is to implement General Assembly resolution ES-10/20, on the protection of Palestinian civilians, as mentioned in the report of the

Secretary-General contained in document ES-10/794. We urge all States and civil society organizations to ensure the protection of Palestinian civilians and to establish a practical and effective mechanism to implement the General Assembly resolution and the Secretary-General's report.

We also call on the Secretary-General to step up his efforts to facilitate the accession of the State of Palestine to full membership of the United Nations in order to preserve the two-State solution, which is currently in genuine jeopardy. We call on the Security Council to implement resolution 2334 (2016), which reaffirms that the Israeli settlements constitute a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to achieving peace.

We also call on the international community to respect the legal status of the holy city of Jerusalem and not to recognize any unilateral policy that would alter the legal status of Jerusalem, since such unilateral measures violate international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. We urge the United Nations to also work on finding a sustainable solution to the financial deficit faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East through predictable and sustainable mechanisms in order to avoid exacerbating the status of Palestinian refugees.

We must offer the Palestinian people a glimmer of hope. We have only described their plight, as Mr. Mladenov stated in his briefing. However, we must work to preserve the peace process in accordance with relevant international resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the terms of reference recognized by the United Nations.

Moreover, everything I have said also applies to the occupied Syrian Golan. In that regard, we stress the importance of the unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab territories and their freedom from occupation of all kinds, which is to be condemned. The occupying Power should not believe that what is happening in Syria today will persuade the Arab peoples to accept its occupation of the Syrian Golan, no matter what illegal measures it takes to alter the identity of the Syrian citizens in the Golan and detach them from their motherland Syria, as it sought to do by imposing municipal elections in the occupied Syrian Golan, in gross violation of international law.

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

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, I congratulate your friendly country on its accession to membership of the Security Council and on assuming the presidency of the Council. I also congratulate the new non-permanent members.

I thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his thorough briefing this morning.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Libya on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

Today's meeting is being held following a year of suffering for the Palestinian people, during which their rights were violated with increased violence. The number of victims of violence has nearly reached 300. In addition to the stalemate in the peace process, this deterioration of the security situation is another factor underscoring the urgent need to reach sustained solutions and for all stakeholders to work towards that goal.

Achieving a permanent, just and comprehensive peace requires the settlement of final status issues through a serious negotiation process between the two sides — Palestinian and Israeli — on the basis of agreed upon terms of reference, including the Arab Peace Initiative; the establishment of a viable Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital; the ending of the Israeli occupation of occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan and Lebanese territory; the immediate and complete cessation of settlement activities; the return of refugees; and the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The issue of Jerusalem is of particular importance owing to its centrality in the light of the ongoing tensions. In that regard, we reject any attempt to change the current status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and holy Muslim and Christian sites, especially Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The State of Qatar continues to uphold its position and policy in favour of playing a positive role in achieving peace, stability and a just, permanent and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question. The State of Qatar recognizes the importance of stability and an environment conducive to peace. We will therefore pursue our efforts to contribute positively to alleviating the humanitarian suffering of

our Palestinian brothers, especially in the light of the extremely deteriorated situation in the Gaza Strip due to the continued unjust blockade that has been imposed on Gaza for over a decade. The recent urgent humanitarian assistance provided by the State of Qatar contributed greatly to alleviating the severe electricity shortage and helped to prevent the closure of the schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East as a result of a shortage in funding.

The Syrian people continue to suffer from the catastrophic consequences of the ongoing Syrian crisis, especially the Syrian refugees and displaced persons who are enduring the harsh winter. In that regard, His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, allocated \$50 million to alleviate their suffering. That humanitarian response was undoubtedly essential. However, the only way to put an end to this suffering and to the threats to international peace and security arising from this crisis is through a political solution that meets the aspirations of all the Syrian people, in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015), and maintains the unity, territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Syria. Until a political transition is achieved and national reconciliation is completed, those who have perpetrated crimes that violate international law and international humanitarian law must be held accountable.

Despite the many serious crises in our region, an additional irresponsible crisis was created through the unjust blockade on the State of Qatar for over a year and a half in an attempt to harm the State of Qatar and tarnish its reputation. The campaigns of hatred and deception carried out by countries of the blockade failed to undermine the standing of the State of Qatar or the steadfastness of its people. However, this crisis has had dangerous consequences on the stability of the region and the collective efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council to address threats and common challenges.

Furthermore, the blockade has caused several serious violations of the human rights of Qatari citizens and all those residing in the State of Qatar. These continued illegal unilateral measures set a precedent and have had an impact on international relations based on international law and good-neighbourliness. A decisive stand should be taken against them to ensure an immediate end to this unjust and illegal blockade.

The State of Qatar is committed to resolving the crisis through dialogue in a way that guarantees its sovereignty and puts an end to those illegal measures. We have renewed our commitment to the mediation carried out by His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Emir of the sisterly State of Kuwait. We appreciate his efforts and those of other States to resolve the crisis. Qatar's wise approach to this crisis has been clear from the outset and is in accordance with international law and international mechanisms for settling disputes. This was reflected in the ruling issued by the International Court of Justice in July 2018 in favour of the State of Qatar against the United Arab Emirates for violating the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

I started my statement by speaking of the bleak picture of 2018. Perhaps it would be appropriate for me to conclude by expressing hope that the New Year will be different and that all stakeholders will undertake serious and genuine measures to resolve the Palestinian question in a just, permanent and comprehensive way and to wisely address all other crises in the Middle East.

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

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important open debate, and I thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov, for his valuable briefing.

The year 2018 was challenging in terms of the question of Palestine. In the absence of any political horizon, mutual distrust deepened and civilian casualties mounted. As a new year begins, we look to the parties to take concrete steps to restore confidence and build the right environment to eventually renew negotiations. We reiterate our call for the cessation of all acts of violence, provocations and incitement. Japan urges the Government of Israel to freeze its settlement activities. We call on the Palestinian parties to sincerely engage in reconciliation in order to bring Gaza back under the control of the Palestinian Authority. The Government of Japan is determined to continue its engagement to help keep the hope for a peaceful future alive.

Developing economic independence for Palestine is a prerequisite for achieving the two-State solution. Japan places importance on providing support in the area of information and communications technology (ICT), since ICT will enable Palestine to be connected to global markets despite its geographical limitations.

This year, at the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park, we intend to expand programmes to the ICT area, including by establishing, inside the Park, a Palestinian industrial capacity development centre focusing on ICT.

With respect to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in 2018 Japan provided its highest-ever contribution, focusing more on education and health care. We are committed to continuing our support to UNRWA and encourage others to do likewise.

During the last high-level week, Prime Minister Abe announced a new programme to invite elementary and junior high school teachers from Gaza to Japan each year. The first group of teachers will visit Japan in March. We hope that programmes such as those will help Palestinian youth find hope for the future rather than turn to radicalism. Ultimately, Japan continues to believe that the issue of Israel and Palestine, including final-status issues, should be resolved through negotiations, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and past agreements.

Let me also take this opportunity to the wider region. With regard to Yemen, Japan welcomes the breakthrough last month in Stockholm. We commend the work of the Security Council to support the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, including through the adoption of resolutions 2451 (2018) and 2452 (2019) and the establishment of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement. We hope that the Agreement will lead to peace in Yemen and provide a swift resolution to the immense humanitarian challenges the Yemeni people face.

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

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has the honour to speak on behalf of the 120 member States of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM) during today's quarterly open debate to address an issue to which we have historically attached particular importance — the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

As this is the first time we take the floor this month, allow us to express our best wishes to your delegation, Sir, in steering the work of this important organ this month. We would also like to extend our

sincere congratulations to all of the new members that have joined the Security Council this year, in particular Indonesia and South Africa, which, together with the Dominican Republic, are also joining the Council's Non-Aligned Movement caucus.

Another year has passed and the Palestinian question remains unresolved. Let us briefly review some important 2018 statistics. Two hundred and ninety-five Palestinians were killed and more than 29,000 were injured by the Israeli occupying forces, which may translate into the highest number of casualties since Israel's war on the Gaza Strip in 2014. At least 5,617 new settlements were built and at least 636 structures were demolished or seized in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which resulted in the forced displacement of hundreds of Palestinian civilians, including 216 children and 127 women. In addition, the occupying Power has issued more than 13,000 demolition orders on Palestinian homes and other properties, including 40 schools, which are still pending. To date, approximately 6,000 Palestinians remain in captivity under the brutal occupation and are subjected to extremely inhumane treatment without ever surrendering.

As we reflect on that harsh and sad reality, NAM takes this opportunity to reaffirm once again its permanent and unwavering support for the Palestinian people, their inalienable rights and their just cause, in particular given that the current situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is at a critical and clearly unsustainable point. In that regard, the member States of the Movement again reaffirm that the current Israeli occupation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a whole are a serious threat to international peace and security and require urgent attention and a solution, in accordance with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and, of course, the Charter of the United Nations and other multilateral diplomacy instruments. We firmly believe in multilateralism and, as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 73/127, promoted by our Movement, we remain committed to the settlement of disputes through peaceful mechanisms, including through diplomacy.

The Security Council has a clear responsibility. It must uphold its obligations under the Charter and act accordingly to implement its own resolutions. Those resolutions not only constitute the basis for a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict, but are also

legally binding on all States Members of the United Nations. That is why we are deeply concerned about the fact that, for far too long, the Council has been unable to fulfil its mandate on such an important issue, due to the use of the veto by one of its permanent members. We are also concerned about its failure to hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for all of its violations and disregard for the authority of the Council.

Notwithstanding everything I have mentioned, NAM continues to believe that resolution 2334 (2016) offers the most viable path to peace, by establishing the essential requirements and parameters for achieving a just settlement on the basis of the two-State solution, based on pre-1967 borders, and while respecting the terms of reference historically endorsed by the international community, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including the land for peace principle, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. That should ensure that the Palestinian people enjoy their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and independence in the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We therefore call for the full and effective implementation of the resolution. This important organ, which is responsible for maintaining international peace and security, must therefore insist that resolution 2334 (2016) be respected, in particular by the occupying Power.

Similarly, the member States of the Movement continue to call for full respect for, and the implementation of, all other relevant resolutions, including those related to the total cessation of all Israeli settlement activities and those related to the status of occupied East Jerusalem. That would create the necessary conditions to end the occupation, justly resolve the conflict in all its aspects and make Palestinian-Israeli peace and security possible, for the benefit of both peoples, the region and the international community as a whole. It is imperative that immediate action be taken, in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions, to remedy the current situation on the ground, reduce tensions and foster an environment conducive to the quest for peace. It is also essential to avoid the adoption of unilateral, provocative or arbitrary measures, which serve only to embolden Israel to continue its illegal policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The Movement continues to be very concerned about the situation in the Gaza Strip, particularly on the humanitarian front, where the situation unfortunately continues to deteriorate from day to day. We therefore reiterate our call for the Israeli blockade to be completely lifted, since it continues to inflict unspeakable humanitarian, social and economic suffering on the more than 2 million Palestinian men, women and children in Gaza. We want to emphasize once again that this crisis must be addressed comprehensively and in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law and all the relevant United Nations resolutions, in the context of the overall situation resulting from Israel's continued illegitimate, hostile foreign occupation of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967, and of all of the unequivocal calls for an end to an occupation that has lasted for more than half a century.

Furthermore, as Israel has clearly renounced its obligations as an occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect Palestinian civilians, the States members of the Movement reiterate their call to the international community to ensure Palestinians' protection in the Gaza Strip and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, in order to alleviate the occupied population's serious insecurity and prevent further losses of innocent lives. Failure to do so could further aggravate the situation and lead to the tragic loss of more civilian lives. In that regard, the Movement reiterates its deep concern that Israel will not be held accountable for all the violations it has committed, many of which could even be considered war crimes. The lack of justice only enables impunity and destabilizes the situation on the ground, which in turn diminishes the prospects for peace. That is why we continue to call for taking international action, especially by the Security Council, to put an end to the occupying Power's systematic violations against the occupied Palestinian civilians and make it accountable for those violations. Israel must abide by its obligations and responsibilities under international law.

With regard to the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, we reaffirm that any measures or actions that the occupying Power Israel may take or have taken — such as the illegal decision of 14 December 1981, aimed at altering the legal status, physical character, demographic composition and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's measures to implement its jurisdiction and

administration in this area, including attempting to exercise sovereignty over it by calling local elections in four Syrian localities — are null and void and have no legal effect. Accordingly, and in line with our principled position, we once again demand that Israel comply with resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, as outlined in resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

With regard to Lebanon, we reaffirm the need for Israel to withdraw from all Lebanese territories, including the areas of the Shaba'a farmlands, the Kfar Shuba hills and the Lebanese part of Al-Ghajar village up to the Blue Line. We also urge Israel to cease its persistent grave violations of Lebanon's territorial integrity and sovereignty, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions, particularly resolution 1701 (2006).

To sum up, at the beginning of this new year of 2019, the States members of the Movement would like to take this opportunity to reiterate its calls to the international community to act collectively and responsibly in upholding international law and intensifying every necessary effort in support of the Palestinian cause, with the ultimate goal of putting an end to Israel's foreign occupation of Palestine and East Jerusalem, an injustice that has lasted for more than 51 years, and after more than 70 years have passed since the disaster and tragedy that struck the Palestinian people in 1948, as a result of which they lost their homeland and were uprooted and forcibly displaced from their homes, becoming refugees whose suffering has lasted to the present day.

In conclusion, NAM reaffirms its permanent solidarity with the Palestinian people, as well as its unwavering support for their just cause. At the same time, it renews its commitment to continuing to strengthen and coordinate international efforts aimed at promoting a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including the suffering of Palestinian refugees, on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). It is our fervent hope that significant progress will be made this year in the Palestinian people's historic struggle for justice and the fulfilment of their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, including the right to self-determination, freedom and independence in an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

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

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, I thank you for convening today's meeting and congratulate the Security Council's new members. I welcome the Foreign Minister of Indonesia's participation in this important meeting.

I align myself with the statements made on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

We welcome Palestine's assumption of the chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China and call for its full membership in the United Nations.

Palestine's situation deteriorated last year. Israel killed at least 295 Palestinian civilians and injured more than 29,000. Many of the dead and about 7,000 of the injured were under 18 years old. That is a clear example of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Also in 2018, more Palestinian homes were demolished and more illegal Israeli settlements built in blatant violation of international law. And there are more new plans to demolish more Palestinian homes, confiscate more Palestinian lands and build more illegal Israeli settlements, which will mean the forced displacement of even more Palestinian families.

Last year, Israel also intensified its decade-long illegal inhumane blockade of Gaza, whose continuation will drastically worsen the already grave humanitarian situation. In 2018, by enacting a law designed to ensure Jewish supremacy over its other citizens, Israel legalized racism. Very recently, it inaugurated an apartheid highway that features a large concrete wall, one side of which is open only to Israeli vehicles and the other only to Palestinian vehicles. That is not surprising. Racism is in the very nature of the Israeli regime. First, it constructed a racial segregation wall, then it enacted a racial discrimination law, and it has now constructed an apartheid highway. That is extremely shameful. It must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

We should also strongly reject and condemn the recognition of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as the Israeli capital as well as the continued occupation of parts of Lebanon and the Syrian Golan by Israel. Such acts are material breaches of international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Last but not least, let us revisit the main question: why has the systematic violation of the inherent rights of Palestinians continued unabated over the past 70 years? The answer is simple: by shielding Israel, the United States has rendered the Council completely ineffective with respect to Israel. Consequently, Israel has been emboldened by impunity. Instead of facing punishment, it has been rewarded to continuously and brazenly commit all international crimes.

That is why, during its short lifespan, Israel has waged more than 15 wars, occupied the territories of Arab countries, invaded all its neighbours without exception, attacked other countries in the region and beyond, from the Middle East to Africa, and possessed every kind of weapon of mass destruction. The list goes on.

In recent years, Israel has repeatedly attacked countries in the region and brazenly assumed responsibility. What action has the Council taken against such material breaches of the Charter of the United Nations? Have we heard anything from the United States except biased statements in support of Israel? Have those breaches been condemned by certain Western members of the Council?

Israel has been emboldened to the extent that very recently, it stated that it had developed offensive missiles that could reach anywhere in the area and any target, thereby implicitly threatening all countries in the region. Likewise, some time ago, Israel threatened Iran with nuclear annihilation. That is, of course, a wishful dream.

The gross and systematic violation of the territory and sovereignty of countries in the region by Israel must stop. That country must be held accountable for all such breaches. Recalling Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, we stress that all countries in the region have an inherent right to defend themselves against any armed attack by Israel. No one can deny or suspend that right. They will decide how and when to exercise it.

The only option now is to put an end to such impunity by holding Israel accountable for its crimes against the Palestinians. That can ensure the application of international law and deter its future violation. That is why we believe that the world should continue to support the realization of Palestinian rights and reject any further occupation, aggression, oppression or intimidation. We will continue to do so.

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

Ms. Zahir (Maldives): My delegation wishes to thank the Dominican Republic for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the newly elected members of the Council — Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa, which became members of the Council this month.

The Government and the people of the Maldives attach great importance to the issue of the Middle East, especially the question of Palestine. I wish to reiterate my Government's steadfast support to the Council and to the Secretary-General in all ongoing efforts to bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

The conflict in Palestine has been going on for seven decades despite the numerous discussions, debates and resolutions adopted at the United Nations, including by the Council. To this day, the illegal occupation of Palestine continues with the demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned property, the building of illegal settlements and the gross violation of the basic human rights of the Palestinian people.

The Government of Maldives condemns those acts of aggression and calls on Israel to lift the blockade imposed on the civilian population in Gaza and to cease the disproportionate attacks on Palestinian civilians, including women and children. The restrictions imposed on the movement of people and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip must be lifted immediately to ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Security Council must take urgent action to protect civilians and to ensure the delivery of the basic humanitarian assistance much needed by millions of Palestinians.

Through resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), the Security Council declared null and void the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the annexation of the holy city of Jerusalem and the moving of the Israeli capital to Jerusalem. It also declared it illegal for any country to decide to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and to move its embassy there. Through resolution 2334 (2016), the Council called upon all States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. Yet we are witnessing that some countries are ignoring the Council's resolutions.

The Maldives has always believed that an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and harmony with Israel, is the best and only solution to the conflict. It is depressing to see that such a solution, to which all sides in the conflict once subscribed in the past, seems to move further and further away.

The Maldives therefore calls on Israel to fully implement the resolutions of the Security Council and to respect the legal obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. We also urge the Security Council and the entire United Nations membership to redouble their efforts to end the conflict so as to bring meaningful and lasting peace to the people of Palestine, as well as Israel.

The conflict in Syria has already claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, including children. It has levelled entire cities and towns to the ground and reduced them to rubble. The resulting environment of fear and uncertainty has caused millions of Syrians to flee the country. Neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey struggle to cope with that mass exodus of refugees, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis faced by the Syrian people. Yet the conflict is locked in a stalemate with no end in sight.

We are encouraged by the recent discussions, including the Brussels conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region, co-chaired by the European Union and the United Nations in April 2018. We acknowledge that the conference provided an opportunity to gather political support for the peace process and to mobilize aid for the Syrians. However, the United Nations and the international community must do more to reinvigorate talks in order to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

The war in Yemen has affected millions of civilians, and children are the hardest hit. The Maldives supports the United Nations-mediated ceasefire agreed to by all the parties in December last year and the establishment of humanitarian corridors supervised by the United Nations. The Maldives is encouraged by the Council's decision to adopt resolution 2452 (2019) on 16 January to establish a special political mission to support the implementation of the ceasefire agreement of 13 December 2018.

Conflicts such as those in Yemen and Syria are a breeding ground for terrorism, a global menace that pays

no heed to borders and does not distinguish between the young and the elderly or women and men or respect any religion or culture. It is a global threat to peace and security, and therefore requires a global solution rather than a local one. The international community needs better coordination, information-sharing and cooperative strategies to tackle the threat of terrorism.

The Security Council is the most vital organ of the United Nations. It has the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. It therefore needs to do more to ensure that its authority and legitimacy are not compromised. The Council needs to step up its efforts to ensure that its decisions are respected by everyone — every Member State and every member of the Council.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Bourgel (Israel): With regard to the statement made by the representative of Iran, the firing of surface-to-surface missiles by the Quds Force to Israel from Syrian territory is evidence of Iran's intention behind its entrenchment in Syria. Iran seeks for Syria, like Lebanon, to be a launching pad for the products of its missile programme, with Israel as the target. That is the very programme that was prohibited by resolution 2231 (2015). It is indicative of Iran's imperialistic and subversive enterprise that it is exporting missiles

and terror throughout the region, in violation of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1701 (2006) and 2216 (2015), and proliferating its destructive revolutionary ideology. Iranian missiles bear a chillingly unequivocal slogan, "Death to Israel". Threatening the destruction of a State Member of the United Nations is a blatant violation of the very core of the Charter of the United Nations. It jeopardizes global peace and security

With respect to the statement made by the representative of Lebanon, let me stress once again that Israel is not interested in escalation. But, as we all know, the Iranian web of terrorism took deep root in Lebanon. While Israel is dealing with an Iranian transnational proxy of terror, whose very existence is a blatant violation of the United Nations Charter, the protective measures we take — the destruction of Hizbullah's tunnels and the building of the security barrier — are entirely on our side of the Blue Line. The Government of Lebanon has a clear responsibility to preserve calm and prevent Hizbullah's illegal and destabilizing activities in Lebanon.

With regard to the statement made by the representative of Syria, to the world's great dismay, the Al-Assad regime, which has been terrorizing its own people for a decade, is now offering itself as a platform for Iranian terror. The international community should unite in countering that element of terror.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.