



Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

8706th meeting

Wednesday, 22 January 2020, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Dinh	(Viet Nam)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Ms. Baleci
	China	Mr. Cheng Lie
	Dominican Republic	Ms. Lorenzo
	Estonia	Ms. Lõuk
	France	Ms. Michel
	Germany	Mr. Licharz
	Indonesia	Mr. Soemirat
	Niger	Mr. Aougi
	Russian Federation	Mr. Kirpichenko
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Porter
	South Africa	Ms. Goolab
	Tunisia	Mr. Baati
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Gray
	United States of America	Mr. Barkin

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 10.10 a.m. on Wednesday, 22 January.

The President: 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. If delegations have longer statements, they are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a summarized version when speaking in the Chamber. I wish to inform all concerned that we will suspend this open debate at 1 p.m.

I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Aidid (Malaysia): Mr. President, I would like to join others in thanking the briefers and commend you for convening this open debate.

Malaysia wishes to align itself with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Azerbaijan and Bangladesh on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

Barely more than a week ago, the Security Council debated on the importance of upholding the Charter of the United Nations (see S/PV.8699, S/PV.8699 (Resumption 1) and S/PV.8699 (Resumption 2)). It is fitting then that we are having this debate now, as the question of Palestine is intrinsically linked to respecting the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter.

As we approach the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, it is regrettable that the question of Palestine remains unresolved. Although another decade has passed, the Palestinians continue to live under a brutal occupation and a repressive blockade. On a daily basis, they face discriminatory treatment and violations of their basic human rights. They are dispossessed of their homes and lands, deprived of natural resources and economic development, and restricted in their movements. Such enormous hardship and suffering continue to be inflicted on the Palestinians with impunity while the international community stands by, unable to alleviate the ongoing suffering caused by the occupying Power.

Time and again we witness Israel's repressive policies and practices, which blatantly violate numerous United Nations resolutions and international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Malaysia joins the

international community in condemning Israel's illegal settlements and its unlawful occupation of Jerusalem.

Malaysia will continue to extend its support for the Palestinian people in their quest for basic rights, particularly their inalienable right to self-determination, as well as their right to sustainable development. In that regard, Malaysia will open its Embassy accredited to Palestine in Amman and is working with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to achieve that objective. Malaysia will also continue to extend its support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as it is the responsibility of the international community to protect and promote the dignity and human rights of the Palestinian people.

Malaysia believes that a legitimate political process is the only way forward to end the illegal occupation of Palestine and address all final-status issues in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016). Serious efforts are needed for ending the illegal Israeli occupation and establishing an independent State of Palestine. The stalled Middle East peace process has served only to exacerbate the current situation in Palestine. Therefore, credible conditions must be created to revive the peace process as soon as possible.

We continue to believe that it is the responsibility of the Security Council to strive towards a two-State solution, whereby the Palestinians and the Israelis can live side by side in peace, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. The international community, particularly the Security Council, has the moral and legal responsibility to immediately end the inhumane acts and injustice perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinians.

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

Mr. Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this quarterly open debate on the Middle East.

As the situation in the Middle East continues to unfold, we should always bear in mind that long-term political stability and economic prosperity are mutually reinforcing. We encourage the international community to work as one towards strategies that create economic opportunities that translate into tangible improvements in people's lives in the region. Only then, will lasting stability be achieved.

Brazil is following with great concern the developments in Iraq. We join others in calling on all parties involved to work towards achieving a peaceful solution to the situation. Further escalation must be avoided at all costs, for it could have potentially devastating consequences, in particular for the most vulnerable populations in the region.

Turning to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Brazil wishes to reiterate its support for the negotiation of a peaceful and creative solution to the conflict, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security. Brazil encourages all parties to seek a constructive political environment conducive to a return to meaningful negotiations. The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains extremely fragile and serves to highlight the need for a fair, just and mutually agreeable political solution to the conflict. In this spirit, Brazil encourages all parties involved to engage in new diplomatic efforts with an open mind in order to reach a just and comprehensive settlement.

Brazil points out that the constantly changing dynamics of the reality on the ground in the region calls for a clear response by the international community under the aegis of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Regarding the situation in Syria, Brazil remains concerned about the escalation of violence throughout the northern part of the country. We reiterate the obligation of all parties to comply with humanitarian law and strongly condemn any attack impacting civilians, including those on medical facilities and workers, who must be protected at all times. We urge the parties concerned to ensure safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian aid in the region. In that regard, we acknowledge the extension of the authorization for the cross-border aid delivery mechanism by the Security Council, while regretting that two of the border crossings were not renewed, which might hamper humanitarian activities in the country.

Brazil once again underscores its support for the work of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and encourages the members of the Constitutional Committee to bridge their differences in order to maintain progress on the political track. We remain convinced that only a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led United Nations-facilitated political process with due regard for the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity will bring about lasting

peace and allow for the relief of the humanitarian suffering of the Syrian population.

Brazil remains deeply concerned about the worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, currently regarded as the gravest in the world. We call on the parties to refrain from any action that might lead to a further increase in hostilities and to take the necessary steps towards the full implementation of the Stockholm Agreement. We also encourage the Yemeni Government and the Southern Transitional Council to find common ground and implement the terms of the Riyadh agreement.

Furthermore, we urge the parties to continue to work with Special Envoy Martin Griffiths with regard to reaching a comprehensive political solution to the conflict and the provision of continued and unimpeded humanitarian assistance. Confidence-building measures, such as the release of prisoners announced at the end of 2019, are also welcome initiatives, as they contribute to fostering dialogue. Brazil welcomes the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement, for which we have agreed to deploy Brazilian military and police officers, and reiterates the importance of maintaining adequate conditions for the fulfilment of its mandate.

Finally, Brazil strongly condemns the recent military escalation in Libya, including the 4 January attack against the Hadaba Military College, as well as the indiscriminate shelling of civilians and civilian buildings in Tripoli. We call on all parties to the conflict to protect civilians and comply with the provisions spelled out in the Geneva Conventions. We are also following with concern the rising prospect of further foreign intervention in the country. Brazil reiterates that there is no military solution to address Libya's pressing political, security and humanitarian challenges.

We encourage all the relevant parties to comply with the ceasefire agreement announced on 12 January and welcome the peace efforts recently carried out through the convening of the Berlin conference. We support the work undertaken by Special Representative Ghassan Salamé towards a comprehensive political solution to the conflict, based on the implementation of the Libyan Political Agreement signed in Skhirat and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We maintain our hope that the Libyan national conference will be held at the earliest possible opportunity.

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

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): The Middle East is experiencing dangerous levels of escalation that must be of immediate concern to the Security Council. The rising tensions between the United States and Iran and the related military actions are a source of grave concern. We hope that all parties directly and indirectly involved will exercise maximum restraint and recommit to diplomacy in order to reduce tensions.

The Charter of the United Nations sets out clear benchmarks with respect to the use of force, in particular with regard to very restricted and well-defined cases in which it is legal to use force against another Member State. The recent developments undermine the fundamental provisions of international law, upon which our collective security depends and which the Security Council is mandated to protect on behalf of all of us.

There is an alarming trend of asserting the right to self-defence in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter as the legal basis for preventive military action without appropriate justification. Such justification would include at the very least evidence of the imminence of an armed attack, as well as of the necessity and the proportionality of measures taken in response. Excessively expansive and unchecked interpretations of Article 51 undermine the international rules-based order and are an obstacle to the United Nations mandate to maintain international peace and security. We attach the utmost importance to preserving the integrity and authority of the Charter of the United Nations in that respect.

Liechtenstein is concerned at the precarious state of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a milestone achievement of multilateral diplomacy that has yielded concrete results in terms of nuclear non-proliferation. We recognize the decision by the European signatories to trigger the dispute-settlement mechanism as an effort to preserve the security gains associated with the JCPOA. In addition, we recall that resolution 2231 (2015) continues to be binding on all States, with a special responsibility for all members of the Security Council.

Recent discussions on Syria in the Security Council have demonstrated once again that the Council still cannot muster the political will to prioritize the protection of the Syrian people. We thank those

members of the Security Council who put their collective weight behind achieving at least a minimal solution for the continued cross-border delivery of aid. They acted responsibly against strong political opposition, in keeping with their role as accountable members of the Council who serve on behalf of the United Nations membership. The same membership has expressed itself repeatedly and clearly on the need to ensure accountability for the worst crimes committed in Syria. While the Council continues to ignore those views, in particular the call for a referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC), the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) has now been established as a full-fledged subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, including in budgetary terms. The IIIM is a constant reminder of the essential role of criminal accountability for the future of Syria. Peace and justice cannot be separated in a political process aimed at sustainable and lasting peace.

Liechtenstein continues to support a two-State solution based on applicable international law as the only pathway to a sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Developments on the ground, including renewed settlement activities, risk undermining the very prospect of such a solution and are in violation of international law and relevant Council resolutions. We follow with interest the activities of the ICC Prosecutor and note in particular that her preliminary examination into the situation in Palestine concluded with the determination that all the statutory criteria under the Rome Statute for the opening of an investigation have been met. Such proceedings by a standing and authoritative international court are the expression of an effective international rules-based order as advocated consistently by large parts of the United Nations membership. We will continue our support for the ICC in providing justice undeterred and with the confidence of its broadly supported mandate.

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

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we emphasize our support for the statements to be delivered by the representatives of the Sudan, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, Bangladesh, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Azerbaijan, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Ursula Mueller, for their valuable briefings (see S/PV.8706), which reminded us of the gravity of the situation on the ground.

Regrettably, today's meeting is convened because of the delicate and dangerous circumstances as a result of continued aggression and repeated violations against the Palestinian people by Israel, the occupying Power. Over the past two years and as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, we felt the deep concern of the United Nations about the illegal Israeli policies that have threatened to cause total collapse and undermine any prospects for a two-State solution, as noted by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, here in the Chamber on many occasions.

Israel has adopted countless aggressive practices and policies during the years of occupation, but it is unacceptable that the Israeli occupying authorities continue those violations with impunity. The Security Council has been unable to hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for failing to implement the Council's resolutions, in particular for showing disregard and contempt as the occupying Power for the resolutions aimed at protecting the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and for engaging in illegal practices against Palestinians, their property, holy sites and fundamental rights, in violation of resolutions of international legitimacy and international humanitarian law. It is also unacceptable that 25 years have passed since the Oslo Accords without progress on a comprehensive and just peace regarding this question, which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Continuous Israeli acts of aggression aim to entrench occupation and undermine any prospects for genuine peace. In 2019, the occupying Power continued to conduct arbitrary arrests and demolish and seize Palestinian homes, for instance in July when it raided the village of Sur Baher, destroying homes and displacing scores of Palestinian families. It continues unprecedentedly to build many settlements and thousands of settlement units in the West Bank, while expanding settlements in occupied East Jerusalem and forcibly displacing Palestinian civilians, in flagrant violation of resolution 2334 (2016). Settlers are increasingly committing crimes against unarmed Palestinians and their places of worship, which are protected by the occupying Power,

which we hold totally responsible for the crimes and aggressions that are flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

The occupying Power has also tightened the blockade against Gaza for more than 12 years and continues to shoot live ammunition at Palestinian civilians, claiming, since the start of the Great March of Return, the lives of hundreds of martyrs, including dozens of children, and tens of thousands wounded. The occupying Power is also undermining the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It continues to attack Muslim and Christian holy sites and persists in altering the legal status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and dividing it in space and time. It insists on taking illegal unilateral decisions, such as to withhold part of the Palestinian tax revenues and to not renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, not to mention changing the historic character and demographic composition of Jerusalem and trying to impose a *fait accompli* while entrenching its control over the land that it occupies.

I raise one simple question. Has the time not come for the Security Council to act decisively to stop Israeli attacks and crimes? If it does not, we will witness another year of tragedies and lack of hope for us and the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, we reiterate the Arab position that we are committed to achieving peace as a strategic option and to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, international law and all the elements of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. That Initiative provides for comprehensive peace with Israel preceded by ending the occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1964, including Jerusalem, with the aim of realizing all the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people and establishing a Palestinian State on their territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

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

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): The Pakistan delegation welcomes this opportunity to discuss the situation in the Middle East. We listened carefully to the briefings by Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Mueller (see S/PV.8706).

The situation in the Middle East poses a grave threat to international peace and security. Even as old conflicts fester, new threats have emerged. Strategic rivalry in the region has assumed a sectarian hue. Competing and overlapping interests of regional and external Powers threatened to erode the foundations of peace and stability in the region and beyond. Civilian populations, including women and children, have become the principal victims of protracted violence and instability.

As recent developments in the Gulf region have demonstrated, the threat of dangerous escalation in the region is never far off. The region cannot afford another conflict. In the wake of the recent tensions between Iran and the United States, Pakistan has sought to defuse those tensions. On the personal initiative of Prime Minister Imran Khan, our foreign minister visited Tehran, Riyadh and Washington in the past few days. We underscored the need for mutual restraint, including non-use of force and the recourse to dialogue for the settlement of all disputes. The positive reaction from all sides is encouraging and could serve as a first step towards broad-based regional engagement. Pakistan will continue to be a partner for peace in the region.

There have also been diplomatic gains in other parts of the Middle East. Last week, the Security Council adopted resolution 2505 (2019), renewing the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement for another six months. That was a clear signal of the international community's commitment to a peaceful solution to the Yemen crisis. The full implementation of the Agreement will provide the requisite momentum towards peace in that country.

In Syria, the establishment of the Constitutional Committee has rekindled hopes for an inclusive political settlement. We echo calls by the Special Envoy for Syria that the Committee needs to be nurtured and genuinely supported by the Syrian parties and the international stakeholders.

The Berlin Conference on Libya must be followed by the fulfilment of the pledge by international powers to allow and enable space for a political reconciliation among the various factions within Libya.

The tragedy of Palestine, which is at the heart of much of the turmoil in the Middle East, however, shows no signs of ending. As illegal Israeli settlements expand into the occupied Palestinian territory, the vision of a two-State solution is being systematically reduced into

a one-State reality. Unilateral actions on the status of Jerusalem and Israeli settlements have further dimmed the prospect for peace.

The United Nations, including the Security Council, have a central role in responding to those challenges. The elements of a comprehensive settlement are well-known — the principle of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. The international community must continue to promote the aim of creating a viable, democratic, sovereign and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

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

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate on the situation in the Middle East.

The current situation is characterized by the fact that the occupying Israeli authorities continue to try to impose a fait accompli. Israel has announced its intention to construct many new settlements and to annex wide areas of occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank, which prevents any settlement of the situation. It continues its intransigence by violating international law and relevant agreements to end the conflict, which is the main reason for the crises that afflict the region. Israel continues to adopt legislation and anti-Palestinian policies in order to legitimize its settlement policy and deprive the Palestinian people of their rights.

We therefore once again call on the international community to compel Israel to respect the relevant international resolutions, failing which the region will continue to suffer the effects of this protracted conflict.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates its steadfast position — that the Palestinian question is our country's central issue. We will continue to defend it and champion the rights of the Palestinian people until they enjoy their inalienable rights and establish their independent State within the June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in line with the binding Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

It is also essential for Israel to put an end to its occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan and of Lebanese

territory. My country categorically rejects all statements intended to legalize the settlements in the West Bank and all claims that they do not contravene international law. Israel's settlements violate international resolutions and international law and prevent the achievement of peace and security in the Middle East and the two-State solution.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also rejects foreign interference in Libyan affairs, which has led to the presence of extremist fighters on Libyan territory. This is a violation of relevant Council resolutions and has exacerbated military confrontations, leading to greater suffering for the brotherly Libyan people.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates its position of support for the Libyan people and respect for their will. We recognize all the Libyan parties equally and call upon them to exercise restraint and prioritize the national interest while upholding the unity, integrity and sovereignty of Libya, which must be protected from foreign interference. We also support the efforts of the United Nations to put an end to the conflict and resolve the crisis through dialogue and political solutions.

My country's Government condemns the recent escalation by the Syrian authorities in their assault on civilians in Idlib. We call for calm and dialogue through the Constitutional Committee, which for the Syrian people provides a glimmer of hope that the long-standing conflict may be coming to an end. Recent years have made it abundantly clear that a military solution — against the wishes of the people and in violation of their sovereignty — would mean nothing. We must save Syria through political dialogue and solutions, not foreign interference. We call for the withdrawal of all foreign armed militias from Syrian territory in order to safeguard the territorial integrity of Syria, as well as its security and stability.

My country has always called for maximum restraint, calm and dialogue in the face of any conflict. The current levels of tension in our region can only be reduced through dialogue. Recent attacks in brotherly Iraq and the violation of its sovereignty are a very serious escalation that will, no doubt, have negative consequences. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia condemns those attacks and violations of Iraqi sovereignty and we once again call for all parties to exercise restraint. We must prevent escalation if security and stability are to have a chance of succeeding in Iraq and more broadly in the Arab Gulf region.

It is also essential for the international community to shoulder its responsibility to guarantee the security, safety and stability of the vital region of the Middle East for the entire world. The provocations and sabotage operations continuously undertaken by Iran in that region must be deterred.

My country has shown maximum restraint in response to the terrorist attacks on our Aramco oil facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais on 14 September 2019. The Houthi militias in Yemen have claimed responsibility for those attacks; however, the United Nations and international investigations have made it clear that the attacks were not launched from Yemeni territory but rather from the north.

Yemen has witnessed consecutive efforts at the regional and international levels to reduce tension and promote trust, leading to an improvement in the military, political and humanitarian situation during the recent period. The Riyadh agreement signed between the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council, which seeks to pave the way for the establishment of security, peace and development in Yemen, has now entered its second phase.

Regrettably, we see the Houthi militias, supported by Iran, pursuing their practices, which are at odds with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular resolution 2216 (2015). The most recent violation was the terrorist attack by the Houthi militias on a mosque in Ma'rib governorate. Dozens of people were killed and dozens more injured. We condemn that terrorist attack, which targeted a place of worship and led to the shedding of Yemeni blood. We reiterate the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its sisterly States of the coalition for the people and territory of Yemen. Those abhorrent terrorist attacks are deliberate acts to undermine the quest for a political solution.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls on the international community, and the Council in particular, to enhance its main role in maintaining international peace and security. We also call for de-escalation in the region so as to prevent international disasters. De-escalation, dialogue and maximum restraint are the main solution that will strengthen preventive diplomacy and prevent the outbreak of conflicts.

The President: 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 those developments, we must maintain our focus on the urgent need to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Despite the continuous calls of the international community, Israeli violations of international law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, have been increasing at an alarming rate. Settlement activities are particularly worrisome. Resolution 2334 (2016) is clear on the destructive effects of illegal settlement activities. Its provisions must be implemented.

Israel should immediately cease all settlement activities, as well as house demolitions, land confiscation and other policies denying the Palestinians' right to development. Attempts to deny the historical and legal rights of the Palestinian people violate international law. Those rights, including the right to return, cannot be withheld. The continuation of such practices will only deepen the sense of injustice and breed desperation. That is in no one's interest. The situation on the Gaza Strip is also deeply worrying. Gazans, who are under blockade, continue to live in tremendous despair and insecurity. Humanitarian organizations on the ground face immense challenges in the treatment of people suffering severe bone infections. The international community should be able to assist the wounded in the long and uncertain period of recovery.

The 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). At a time when the region is witnessing conflict and significant volatility, the impact of a potential disruption in UNRWA services would be gruesome. By extending the mandate of UNRWA, the General Assembly showed its overwhelming support for the Agency. We should also maintain efforts to put the financial situation of the Agency on a more predictable and sustainable footing. The operationalization of the Waqf Fund of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has been a significant step forward in that regard.

The latest developments again remind us 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, with

East Jerusalem as its capital, remains the only way to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. Any peace plan or initiative should be based along those established parameters.

I would also like to briefly touch upon the developments in Syria. In Idlib, the systematic targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure by the regime continues to cause massive waves of displacement. Millions of people are faced with ongoing cycles of violence. Since December 2019 alone, almost 350,000 people have been displaced in Idlib, 80 per cent of whom are women and children. Many left their homes in a rush to stay alive and were unable to bring any belongings vital to their survival.

Given the winter conditions, civilians have become even more vulnerable in Idlib. Their lives are threatened both by military attacks and by harsh weather conditions. The current crisis is compounding an already dire humanitarian situation in north-western Syria. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians under the pretext of fighting terrorism cannot be accepted. Respect for international humanitarian law is indispensable. Sustained, unimpeded and safe humanitarian access, including through the United Nations cross-border humanitarian mechanism, is vital. Turkey will maintain efforts to preserve the status quo in the Idlib de-escalation area.

Following the first two rounds, it is regrettable that the Constitutional Committee has stalled. It should be ensured that the Committee can function without any hindrance. The members of the international community should work together in order to help advance the political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We should all support the efforts of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen to that end. As the conflict in Syria enters its tenth year, there is an alarming need for a genuine political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

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

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): At the outset, let me briefly address wider regional issues. We have serious concerns about the recent heightened tensions in the region. The eruption of a new conflict, especially in the Gulf, could have disastrous consequences. We must continue to encourage all concerned to find a solution through negotiations. Japan urges all concerned to make maximum diplomatic efforts in order to avoid

further escalation of the situation. Prime Minister Abe has just returned from his visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman. Japan will continue its diplomatic efforts to ease tensions and achieve peace and stability in the region.

Even at this juncture, the Middle East peace process remains a top priority for the international community. Without finding a solution to the issue, lasting peace and stability in the region cannot be realized. Yesterday, we again heard of continued settlement activities, as well as the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures. Japan deeply deplores those activities and again strongly urges the Government of Israel to completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the implementation of construction plans that undermine the viability of a two-State solution.

We are also deeply concerned about continued violence. We strongly condemn terrorism and attacks against innocent civilians, including by rocket, and call upon the parties to take immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence, provocations and incitement.

Japan remains committed to supporting a two-State solution. The final status of Jerusalem should be resolved through negotiations based on the relevant Security Council resolutions and known parameters. Japan will remain engaged with both sides and will continue to promote confidence-building measures. As a humble step and building on many years of efforts, later this month Japan will invite 10 young people from both Israel and Palestine to support building confidence among them. The point here is to demonstrate that young people can shed light on the pathway to peace and security by offering hope to future generations.

Every three months, we repeat similar depressing statements in the Chamber. We sincerely hope that positive steps will be taken in the coming months, including the holding of general elections in Palestine. Japan will remain actively engaged, both politically and economically, in supporting progress in the peace process, in cooperation with international partners.

The President: I now give the floor the Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mrs. Raz: At the outset, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to congratulate

the delegation of Viet Nam on its able conduct of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I also wish to thank Viet Nam, as a brotherly observer State of the Committee, for its long-standing support of the just Palestinian cause. The Committee would also like to congratulate Estonia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and Grenadines and Tunisia on taking up their seats on the Council and to wish them every success in upholding their important responsibilities.

We thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Let me also thank Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for her comprehensive briefing on the humanitarian situation (see S/PV.8706).

As we gather in the Council in this new year and decade to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the heightened geopolitical tensions and turmoil in the region remind all of us that peace must never be taken for granted and that it must be preserved and nourished. We must uphold and fulfil the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, which remain our shared framework for preventing and resolving conflict and injustice.

Recent developments underscore the need, now more than ever, for today's debate on the Palestinian question lest it be sidelined or forgotten in the face of the current turmoil. May I remind representatives that, in the context of the stalled peace process and the evolving dangerous realities on the ground, leaving this question unresolved constitutes a serious negligence of our collective duties under the Charter and a threat to the peace and security of the region and beyond.

In particular, in the current volatile environment, the ongoing illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory and the worsening situation on the ground cannot be ignored as "business as usual". The year 2019 saw a 45 per cent increase in demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian homes in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as compared to 2018, according to figures released by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Moreover, at the beginning of this month, Israel approved the construction of an additional 1,936 new settler units in illegal settlements across the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Allow me to reiterate in the strongest terms that Israeli settlements in occupied areas are illegal under international law, as affirmed, *inter alia*, in resolution 2334 (2016). Claims that settlements are not illegal and may even advance Israeli-Palestinian peace are totally unfounded and offensive. Israel must halt settlement construction and expansion immediately and completely. The reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) should include reports by Member States on how they comply with operative paragraph 5, which calls on Member States to distinguish, in their dealings, between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as with regard to settlement activities.

Similarly, tensions triggered by attacks by the Israeli occupying forces on worshippers inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound threaten further destabilization, which must be averted. The Islamic Jerusalem Waqf is the sole institution responsible for administrating the affairs of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, including the maintenance of its interior and exterior walls. The Committee urges Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by all its obligations under international law and avoid actions that undermine an already fragile status quo.

In a positive development, on 13 December 2019, the General Assembly voted to extend the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) until 2023 (General Assembly resolution 74/85). The overwhelming vote in favour of the extension is an indication of the unwavering support of the international community for the Agency's mandate and necessary work in support of 5.5 million Palestine refugees. The Committee reiterates its call to all Member States to provide UNRWA with the reliable and sustainable funding necessary to deliver critical humanitarian services to the Palestine refugees, thereby contributing to the stability of the region.

Moreover, in December, the General Assembly adopted with an overwhelming majority all the resolutions on the question of Palestine, including those on this Committee's mandate (General Assembly resolution 74/10) and on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including the right to their independent State (General Assembly resolution 74/11), which gained the support of almost 90 per cent of the United Nations membership. That is once again a testament that such resolutions are firmly rooted in the United Nations Charter, international law and human

rights law and confirm the support of most of the world. That international consensus must be upheld and serve as the focal point for all of our collective efforts to promote a just, lasting and peaceful solution.

On 20 December 2019, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, based on a referral from the State of Palestine and following a thorough, independent and objective assessment of all reliable information available to her Office, decided to proceed with the investigation into alleged war crimes committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. The Committee welcomes the announcement by the Chief Prosecutor and trusts that such an investigation will serve the interests of justice and peace.

The humanitarian and economic situation of the 2 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip continues to deteriorate and has reached the critical juncture of which the United Nations country team warned in its report "Gaza 2020: A liveable place?", necessitating urgent humanitarian and political action. We reiterate our strongest calls for the lifting of the 12-year Israeli blockade of Gaza.

Allow me also to reiterate the support of the Committee for the reconciliation process led by Egypt and others, which are sparing no efforts in that regard. The Committee also expresses its full support for the holding of general elections in the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, with a view to reuniting the Palestinian people under a single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian national Government.

In these uncertain times, when the Middle East faces unprecedented levels of tension, we call on the Council, as the guarantor of international peace and security, to take up its responsibilities, to implement its relevant resolutions and to take overdue action on the Palestinian question for the sake of generations of Palestinians and Israelis who seek to live side by side in peace and security, along the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the independent Palestinian State.

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

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January, and to express my appreciation

for your efforts. I would also like to align Egypt with the statements of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Group of Arab States and the Islamic Group. I express my thanks and appreciation to the United Nations briefers for their briefings at the beginning of this debate. I would also like to welcome the new members who joined the Security Council at the beginning of this year.

The Middle East has started a new year and a new decade amid grave challenges and crises that loom over the region, undermining its security and stability, especially given that over the past few years the region has witnessed revolutions and radical changes that led to the collapse of some countries and the spread of terrorism. Such developments have increased the suffering that the Middle East has endured for decades as a result of protracted crises, most notably the lack of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

The Security Council has adopted numerous resolutions on the Palestinian question, the most recent of which was resolution 2334 (2016). Those resolutions provide the foundations for a just solution to that question, as do other terms of reference within the peace process, especially the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace. Nevertheless, the Palestinian question remains unresolved, while the prospects of a just and fair solution for the Palestinian people have diminished amid the continuous deterioration due to the practices of the Israeli occupation authorities.

Last year, the occupied Palestinian territories witnessed further deterioration of the conditions on the ground as the Israeli occupation authorities continued to confiscate more land, expel Palestinian citizens from their homes, demolish property and build settlement units in the West Bank — all of which runs counter to international agreements and all efforts to revive peace negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties.

This meeting of the Security Council is one of tens — or even hundreds — of meetings held by the Council on the Palestinian question, but the Palestinian people are still struggling as they seek to achieve their legitimate rights. How long will the current situation continue and how long will the Palestinian people have to suffer without a solution? It is no longer any use to hold monthly Council meetings on the Palestinian question to review the situation without any clear or concrete steps towards achieving a solution.

Egypt reaffirms that the Palestinian question is the core issue in terms of stability in the Middle East. There will be no stability in the region until the Palestinian people are granted their rights and all Arab lands occupied in 1967, including the occupied Syrian Golan, are liberated.

The many crises that plague the Middle East should not divert our attention from the reality of which we are all aware. Certain regional actors are interfering in the affairs of countries of the region, undermining their security and stability in order to pursue their own national interests, in blatant disregard of commitments or rights under international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The region has witnessed a grave rise in violence and tension, including in the Gulf, while a number of regional and international actors have resorted to the use of force and the cross-targeting of interests, including repeated attacks on civilian targets. Such actions clearly indicate the need to take immediate measures, including by the Security Council, to prevent any further escalation.

We urge all parties to fully comply with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and international law, particularly by refraining from the use of force, respecting the sovereignty of States and ceasing to interfere in their internal affairs under any pretext, as well as refraining immediately from supporting terrorist groups and illegitimate militias. Egypt underscores the importance of intensifying preventive diplomacy and confidence-building efforts in the Middle East in order to defuse tensions and spare the region the devastating consequences of further destructive military confrontations.

In that context, Egypt expresses its deep concern regarding the deteriorating situation in sisterly Libya, including flagrant violations of the arms embargo and destructive external interference, rendering the achievement of peace and stability in Libya even more difficult. Such circumstances serve only the interests of armed militias, terrorist organizations and organized crime networks, including human traffickers, who seek to take advantage of the situation in the country. They exacerbate the suffering of the Libyan people, lead to further violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and threaten stability in neighbouring countries, particularly in the African Sahel region, where the situation poses a grave threat to international peace and security.

Egypt welcomes the outcome of the recent Berlin conference on Libya, in which Egypt was an active participant. We reiterate our full support for all efforts aimed at creating the conditions necessary for the resumption of the Libyan political process on the basis of the Libyan Political Agreement signed in Skhirat in 2015. We believe that there is no military solution to the crisis in Libya; rather, the solution must be Libyan-led and Libyan-owned. Egypt calls on all countries and stakeholders that participated in the recent Berlin conference to commit to implementing its outcomes, especially with regard to upholding the arms embargo and sincerely cooperating within the framework of the international follow-up committee established at the conference, in order to achieve the desired peace and stop the bloodshed of the fraternal Libyan people.

In conclusion, Egypt hopes that the New Year will bring a glimmer of hope for the resolution of the Palestinian question, while the Palestinian people are granted their legitimate right to establish their independent State along the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also hope to achieve security, stability and development throughout the Middle East as we work towards a better future for the peoples of the region and for the generations to come.

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

Mr. Duarte Lopes (Portugal): I have the honour to speak on behalf of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, the United Kingdom and my own country, Portugal. Those 27 countries are all members of the European Union (EU).

Peace and stability in the Middle East remain imperative for the peoples of the region and are in the fundamental and strategic interests of the European Union. The European Union's position remains unchanged and centred on our firm commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a negotiated two-State solution. In particular, our goal is to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of both parties, including Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations to statehood and sovereignty, end the occupation that began in 1967 and resolve all final status issues

on the basis of international law, the internationally agreed parameters and the relevant Security Council resolutions. Ultimately, we want to see the State of Israel and a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security. Such an outcome is also in the interests of the parties themselves and would provide the basis for a democratic and prosperous future for Palestine and Israel alike.

The Middle East peace process remains at a stalemate amid continuing political uncertainty in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. At the same time, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, threatening the very viability of the two-State solution and prospects for a sustainable peace.

One area of concern is that of continuous Israeli settlement planning and construction. At the beginning of January, the Israeli authorities approved the advancement of almost 2,000 additional units, including the retroactive approval of already existing constructions, some of which were built on private Palestinian land. That decision follows other settlement-related developments in recent months, including, in particular, sensitive places such as East Jerusalem and Hebron. The EU position on settlement policy is clear — Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law, an obstacle to peace and a development that threatens to make a two-State solution impossible. The EU has also made clear that it will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties.

We expect both parties, including any future Israeli or Palestinian Government, to act in accordance with international law. The Israeli authorities should fully meet their obligations as an occupying Power under international humanitarian law and cease the policy of settlement construction and expansion. Moreover, there have been recent calls made for annexation, which would constitute a serious violation of international law.

The EU is also closely following the continuing demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures across the occupied West Bank. Recent months have seen a significant increase in such demolitions, notably in East Jerusalem and a significant number of those demolitions include humanitarian projects funded by the EU and its member States. For its part, the EU remains strongly opposed to such demolitions,

confiscations and forced transfers and evictions, as well as other actions taken in the context of Israel's settlement policy.

Building strong, inclusive, accountable and functioning democratic Palestinian institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights, is vital for the two-State solution. A strong, accountable, inclusive and functioning Palestinian Government, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights, is also vital for the two-State solution. In that context and taking note of the announcement made by President Abbas last September, the EU reiterates its call for a date to be set for the holding of elections in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Gaza.

Such elections could represent an important building block for the reunification of the West Bank and Gaza, as well as a positive step in terms of democratic legitimacy and accountability. The EU once again calls upon all Palestinian factions to unequivocally commit to democratic principles prior to such elections.

A further area of significant concern is the ongoing threat of violence, terrorist attacks against civilians and incitement to violence and hatred on both sides. We are concerned at reports of an increased number of attacks by settlers. The EU calls on Israel to fulfil its obligations, in line with its responsibilities as an occupying Power, to protect Palestinian civilians and to ensure accountability for any human rights violations.

In Gaza, a serious escalation occurred in November 2019, when over 450 rockets were fired indiscriminately at Israel and 34 Palestinians, including 8 children, were reported to have been killed as a result of strikes by the Israeli military. More broadly, the political and security situation in Gaza remains highly volatile, while the humanitarian situation and the suffering of ordinary people are also of deep concern. Last November's upsurge in violence reminds us that restoring a political horizon for peace remains as essential as ever.

The EU reiterates its condemnation of the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians. The EU also continues to oppose and condemn all forms of terror and firmly rejects any incitement to violence and hatred, which are fundamentally incompatible with advancing a peaceful two-State solution.

We once again call upon all parties to take urgent steps, in line with resolution 2334 (2016), towards a

fundamental change in the humanitarian, political, security and economic situation in Gaza, including through an end to the closure policy, full opening of the crossing points and unimpeded access for humanitarian actors, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. Such steps would also contribute to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and increase the chances for a two-State solution.

One of the fundamental parameters for peace in the Middle East is a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the Palestinian refugee issue, in accordance with international law. Until such a solution is reached, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains crucial for providing the necessary protection and essential services for Palestinian refugees and we will continue to support UNRWA in all its fields of operations, including in East Jerusalem. It is of the utmost importance that UNRWA can continue to provide Palestinian refugees with the necessary protection and essential services. The work of UNRWA is also important for the stability of the region.

Progress towards a solution to that conflict, based on an end to the occupation and a two-State solution, can also have a positive impact on efforts to resolve other crises in the region. In the absence of a renewed effort, the situation is likely to deteriorate further in the period ahead. We reiterate our readiness to work with both parties and our partners in the region and the international community towards the resumption of meaningful negotiations to resolve all final status issues and achieve a just and lasting peace.

Please allow me to now turn to the situation in Syria. The conflict is now in its ninth year and has led to the death of half a million Syrians and the displacement of half of the Syrian population. It has also had profound repercussions on the overall stability of the Middle East and has provided fertile ground for the rise of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh. The situation in Syria remains highly volatile.

The EU remains greatly concerned by the continued escalation of violence in north-west Syria and its devastating impact on civilians. The ongoing regime offensive has led to over 1,400 civilian deaths and has caused yet another wave of displacement, affecting more than 1 million Syrians. Only days after the announcement of the latest ceasefire, we have seen renewed attacks by the Syrian regime, including aerial

strikes on Idlib, leading to numerous civilian casualties. The presence of United Nations-listed terrorist groups in the area is a common threat that has to be addressed.

However, fighting those groups, as authorized by the United Nations, does not permit violations of international humanitarian law, such as the targeting of civilians. The EU continues to call upon the Syrian regime and its allies to permanently cease indiscriminate air strikes and shelling of civilians and to respect international humanitarian law.

In north-east Syria, volatility and insecurity persist, following Turkey's unilateral incursion in October 2019. The EU has firmly condemned that military operation, which has caused renewed civilian suffering and further displacement, and has called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of Turkish forces. We welcome the significant reduction in fighting.

The incursion has threatened the progress achieved to date by the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and risks having a negative impact on the United Nations-facilitated political process in Geneva. The EU has underlined on many occasions that Turkey's security concerns in north-east Syria should be addressed by political and diplomatic means and in full accordance with international law and international humanitarian law.

Throughout last year, we witnessed persistent and grave violations of international law and human rights across Syria, a worsening of the humanitarian crisis and a growing risk of Da'esh resurgence. For those reasons, the EU remains convinced that only a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), can lead to sustainable peace and stability in Syria.

In September 2019, the EU welcomed the establishment of the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned Constitutional Committee, under United Nations auspices. Regrettably, the second round of meetings of the drafting committee in November was unable to agree on an agenda for the joint discussions and no progress could be reached. Furthermore, no third round has yet been convened, largely due to preconditions requested by the delegation of the Syrian regime, which are in clear violation of the Constitutional Committee's rules of procedure.

While the Constitutional Committee could serve to open the door to a broader political process, all elements of resolution 2254 (2015) are vital to achieving an inclusive political transition and must be implemented, including the release of detainees, a nationwide ceasefire and the establishment of a safe and neutral environment in order for free and fair elections to be held, under United Nations supervision.

As so many years of war have demonstrated, we need to reiterate once again that there can be no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Europe will continue to maintain the Syrian crisis high on the agenda of the international community by promoting dialogue and mobilizing international humanitarian support for the Syrian people. In that regard, we welcome the decision by the Security Council on 10 January (see S/PV.8700) to extend the authorization for cross-border humanitarian assistance to people in need in Syria. In the light of the huge humanitarian needs in northern Syria, a failure by the Council to agree on an extension would have had catastrophic consequences.

However, the EU regrets the exclusion of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing point, between Iraq and north-east Syria, where unmet needs persist on a large scale, and looks forward to the upcoming report of the Secretary-General on alternative modalities in order to ensure the delivery of critical medicine and medical equipment to north-east Syria. Meeting acute humanitarian needs requires sustained and predictable access, and the Council must continue to act to safeguard meeting the humanitarian needs of the people in need in Syria. The EU will also continue to strongly support the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General's efforts to unblock the political process.

In accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), we will continue to promote a genuine political transition to pave the way for free and fair elections; support Syrian civil society, with particular attention to women's equitable and meaningful engagement in the political process; and identify confidence-building measures among the parties to the conflict, including on the issue of detainees and missing persons.

Promoting accountability and justice and combating impunity remain a high priority for the EU, as a fundamental part of any future process of national reconciliation in Syria. For that reason, we reiterate our support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation

and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, and welcome that the Mechanism will from 2020 onwards be financed in its entirety under the United Nations regular budget.

Our position on returns has not changed. As everywhere in the world, in Syria as well, we support the right of refugees and internally displaced persons to a safe, voluntary and dignified return. However, we consider that the conditions necessary for their return, as defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, are still not in place. We also wish to reiterate our well-known position on reconstruction. We will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties to the conflict on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué, is firmly under way. The EU has also reiterated that it will not provide stabilization or development assistance in areas where the rights of local populations are ignored or violated.

The President: I wish to remind everyone that there are more than 20 speakers remaining on the list of speakers. As we are running a little behind schedule, I wish to remind speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in length.

I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): I have the honour to deliver this statement at this quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The question of Palestine has historically been an issue of concern and vital importance to the Movement, and it is with deep regret that we witness the passing of yet another year without a resolution to the conflict. Constituting a matter of international peace and security and also being the cornerstone for peace in the Middle East region, the situation there remains critical and unsustainable, and therefore continues to require the immediate attention of the international community.

The statistics from 2019 are appalling. In the Gaza Strip, 44 Palestinian, including nine children and three women, were killed by Israeli security forces as a result

of air strikes during demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other incidents. Two thousand nine hundred and forty Palestinians were injured, including approximately 400 Palestinians by live ammunition, among them dozens of children. In the occupied West Bank, four Palestinians were shot and killed, including one woman, and 1,064 Palestinians were injured, including 23 children.

In 2019, it was documented that the Israeli occupying authorities seized or destroyed 617 homes and structures in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, forcibly displacing 898 Palestinians. An increased number of settler-related attacks, incitement and harassment, particularly around the olive harvest season in the Hebron area, are also deeply concerning.

In reflecting on this dismal reality, the Non-Aligned Movement seizes this opportunity to reaffirm its abiding solidarity with the Palestinian people, its unwavering support for their inalienable rights, including to self-determination, and its commitment to the alleviation of their plight, as well as to reaching a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine in every aspect. That solution is well-known and must be in line with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations itself. The tools provided by multilateral diplomacy are the way to achieve such a solution, which cannot be unilaterally, forcibly or unfairly imposed.

The Security Council has been entrusted with the clear responsibility to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security. Therefore, it must uphold its Charter duties and act to ensure the implementation of its own resolutions, which not only comprise the foundation for a peaceful solution to the conflict, but are, on top of that, legally binding for all United Nations Member States.

We are deeply concerned that, for too long, this organ has been unable to fulfil its mandate with regard to this important question. At this critical moment, this requires immediate action to hold Israel — the occupying Power — accountable for its violations. The absence of justice only fosters greater impunity and further destabilizes the situation on the ground, severely diminishing the prospects for peace.

The States members of the Movement deplore ongoing Israeli intransigence, illegal policies and measures that greatly undermine the realization of a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Movement also reiterates its grave concerns about the continued deterioration of the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and in particular the Gaza Strip, where the illegal and suffocating Israeli blockade has imposed a dire humanitarian situation and deplorable socioeconomic conditions.

The Non-Aligned Movement continues to believe that resolution 2334 (2016) provides the most viable path towards peace, setting forth the essential requirements and parameters for the achievement of the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with the long-standing terms for reference of peace endorsed by the international community, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. Hence, we call for its full and effective implementation.

Israel must be compelled to cease completely all illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the demolition of Palestinian homes and property, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, all acts of violence, provocations and incitement against Palestinian civilians, and other human rights violations, many of which may amount to war crimes.

Israel must fully comply with its duties and responsibilities under international law, including its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention as the occupying Power. It must immediately cease all policies and measures aimed at the alteration of the demography, character, identity and legal status of the occupied territories. It must also respect the historic status quo at the holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem, including at Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The Non-Aligned Movement also reaffirms its support for Jordan in preserving and administrating the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, including Al-Haram Al-Sharif, and for the Hashemite custodianship of the holy sites, as exercised by His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein of Jordan.

The Non-Aligned Movement commends the efforts of His Majesty King Mohammed VI as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The Movement welcomes the call for Al-Quds/Jerusalem, signed in Rabat on 30 March 2019 by His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco and His Holiness Pope Francis, to stress

the important role that Al-Quds/Jerusalem plays as a city of tolerance and mutual respect among the people of the three monotheistic religions and the need to preserve its specificities and features as a city of peaceful coexistence.

The Non-Aligned Movement demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and that it withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The members of the Non-Aligned Movement condemn the statement made by the President of the United States of America on 21 March 2019, regarding the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as the subsequent unilateral and arbitrary proclamation on recognizing the Golan Heights as part of Israel, and call upon the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility by clearly condemning that provocative statement and proclamation.

In the absence of a solution, the States members of the Movement reiterate their call for the continued provision of the required humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance to the Palestinian people, including Palestine refugees. The Movement expresses its deep appreciation for the invaluable work done and the essential assistance provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to the Palestine refugees and welcomes the extension of its mandate until 30 June 2023.

In conclusion, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its abiding solidarity with the Palestinian people, as well as its unwavering support for their just cause, and renews its commitment to further strengthening and coordinating the international efforts to achieve a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including the plight of Palestine refugees, on the basis of resolution 194 (III). We express our sincere hopes that this year will witness tangible progress in the heroic quest of the Palestinian people to attain justice and fulfil their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, including their right to self-determination, freedom and independence in their sovereign and independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

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

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I thank the President for convening today's debate on this important topic. I also thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and

Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for their briefings (see S/PV.8706). Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Portugal on behalf of 27 European Union member States.

Ireland, my country, remains committed to a negotiated two-State solution that ends the occupation that began in 1967, ending all claims and fulfilling the aspirations of both parties, including Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations to statehood and sovereignty, on the basis of international law, internationally agreed parameters and relevant Security Council resolutions. We know that such an outcome will greatly benefit both the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples and contribute significantly to stability in the wider region. This accords with the European Union's firm position, as set out on numerous occasions, and with General Assembly resolution 73/89 of 6 December 2018, on a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, which my country, Ireland, was proud to introduce and which was overwhelmingly endorsed by a majority of Member States.

Today's debate comes at a critical time. Three years have passed since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), but we have seen no progress, and the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. The acceleration of settlement activity, the continued occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the maintenance of the Gaza blockade, as well as the constant threat of violence, extremism, terrorism and incitement, are eroding the very viability of the two-State solution and the prospects for peace. In December, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, informed the Security Council that over 22,000 settlement units had been advanced or approved in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in the past three years (see S/PV.8690). We are deeply concerned by that acceleration in settlement activity and by recent statements on the annexation of the Jordan Valley. Annexation would constitute a very serious violation of international law.

We must not forget the deadly toll that this conflict continues to take. The past three years have seen the loss of hundreds of civilian lives, thousands of injuries to civilians and major damage to civilian objects, including due to airstrikes and to the indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel. In Gaza, a shockingly high proportion of casualties have been children.

Ireland's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney, again visited Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory in December. In his meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas, he reiterated Ireland's readiness to support efforts towards a two-State solution. He firmly conveyed Ireland's concerns about the impact of the occupation, including settlements and the blockade of Gaza, and met with communities both in Gaza and in Israel that are affected by the continuing violence. Minister Coveney reiterated Ireland's strong support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. He welcomed progress towards new Palestinian elections, which deserve international support. Those elections will constitute an important step towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, giving a voice to Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Gaza.

Minister Coveney's regular visits to the region reflect the high priority that the Irish people continue to give to the Middle East peace process. Long though this conflict has endured, we believe that we, the international community, have a responsibility to continue to hope and work for a solution. The Security Council has a particularly important role and we, as an aspiring member, will work to help ensure that it meets its responsibilities.

Before concluding, I would briefly turn to the situation in Syria. We remain deeply concerned about the plight of the Syrian people, particularly in the north-east and north-west of the country. In the north-west, the Government offensive has led to a large number of civilian casualties and new displacement. We welcome the decision of the Security Council to extend the authorization for cross-border humanitarian assistance, but are deeply disappointed that authorization was not extended for all border crossings. Ireland strongly condemns all violations of international law in Syria. Those responsible for such violations must be held accountable, and we reiterate our call for the situation to be referred to the International Criminal Court. We also reiterate our support for the Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. We welcome the recent decision of the General Assembly

to provide funding for the Mechanism from the United Nations regular budget.

As I conclude, I also wanted to say that, on Libya, Ireland welcomes the outcome of the recent Berlin conference and calls on all parties to rapidly agree to a ceasefire and move forward towards a much-needed political solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Monsignor Hansen (Holy See): The Holy See joins other delegations in thanking Viet Nam for convening this open debate.

In his recent address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Francis underlined anew his concern for the Middle East, where, since the start of this year, worrying news continues to arrive. We are witnessing a deterioration of the situation in the whole region, from the heightening of tensions between Iran and the United States to the crises in Iraq and Lebanon, setting the groundwork for a vaster conflict that all of us would want to avert. It is of the utmost importance that the support and the commitment of the international community keep the flame of dialogue alive and that these challenges be addressed with a holistic approach.

In particular, the Holy Father has affirmed that steadfast and effective engagement is needed to counteract the pall of silence that risks falling over the war that has devastated Syria over the course of the last decade. Pope Francis has stressed that it is imperative to devise suitable and far-sighted solutions capable of enabling the beloved Syrian people, exhausted by war, to regain peace and to begin the reconstruction of their country. Moreover, silence and indifference, as Pope Francis has warned, risk to worsen the conflict in Yemen, which is suffering one of the most serious humanitarian crises of recent history.

The Holy See and Pope Francis continue to focus particular attention on the Holy City of Jerusalem and its vocation as a city of peace, one called to be a symbolic place of encounter and of peaceful coexistence, where mutual respect and dialogue are cultivated. Indeed, the appeal for maintaining the status quo of the holy sites of Jerusalem — dear to Jews, Christians and Muslims in virtue of their religion and important for the cultural heritage of the whole human family — is one that has also been repeatedly made by this Organization.

Furthermore, the Pope used his traditional January address to reiterate the urgent need for the entire international community to reconfirm, with courage and sincerity, and in respect for international law, its commitment to supporting the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. As the Secretary-General starkly points out in his December 2019 report (S/2019/938), the sad alternative is that the situation is destined to steadily worsen, diminishing even further the viability of the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines.

What Pope Francis recently stated with regard to Israel and Palestine could apply to the wider region and indeed across the world at the threshold of the seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations of this Organization, where so many people — struggling but not discouraged — still await a time of peace, security and prosperity.

In conclusion, allow me to assure the international community of the Holy See's steadfast commitment to peace and its support for all initiatives that strive to ensure the advancement of negotiated solutions. To this end, the Holy See encourages all parties to promote open and constructive dialogue based on the principles upon which this Organization was built 75 years ago.

The President: I thank the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See for keeping to the allotted time limit when making his statement. There are 16 speakers remaining on the list of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Ms. Fatima (Bangladesh): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

This open debate takes place at a difficult juncture characterized by daunting challenges and a marked deterioration of the situation on the ground. Regrettably, Israel's illegal policy of settlement expansion and de facto annexation of Palestinian lands, especially in and around East Jerusalem, has intensified. This policy includes repeated, hostile threats to annex parts or all of the occupied West Bank outright, in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

As many have stressed, such threats and violations cannot go unchallenged. It is incumbent upon the international community to take concrete actions to compel Israel's respect for and compliance with

Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016). Israel must cease all illegal settlement and annexation measures in the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem. In this regard, we reaffirm our rejection of the most recent illegal Israeli decision to establish so-called nature reserves in the West Bank. That must be prevented, and the announcement condemned.

The OIC reiterates that the lack of accountability for Israel's ongoing violations has only encouraged such impunity, which is undermining any possibility for achieving a just peace based on the vision of a solution of two States existing within the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. In this regard, the OIC welcomes the International Criminal Court's decision to open an investigation into Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people and hopes that it will be expeditiously pursued.

Moreover, the OIC reaffirms that the unilateral measures and attempts to unlawfully alter the legal, historical and political status of East Jerusalem constitute a flagrant violation of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The OIC calls on all States to abide by their political, legal and moral obligations to uphold international law and ensure its respect, including under the Fourth Geneva Convention. We urge all States to act with urgency and contribute to international efforts aimed at ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

Additionally, we call for Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. We further affirm the need for all external parties to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and reiterate our support for a political solution of the Syrian crisis, consistent with resolution 2254 (2015).

The OIC remains gravely concerned about the deterioration of socioeconomic and humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip. We must urgently alleviate the humanitarian needs and suffering of the Palestinian people, including the Palestinian refugees. We encourage Member States to provide funds or to increase their contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations entities that are

working diligently to provide the needed assistance to the Palestinians. Additionally, the OIC condemns the announced plans to integrate UNRWA-run schools in East Jerusalem into Israel's education system.

In conclusion, the OIC urges the international community to uphold its obligations and engage constructively in facilitating a just peace, including by sponsoring a multilateral political peace process based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the internationally agreed terms of reference, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

Allow me now to make a statement in my national capacity.

Yet another turbulent year of despair has passed for the people of Palestine. An overview of the year shows that aggression by Israel, the occupying Power, has become the new normal in the Palestinian territory. The high number of Palestinian casualties, including of children, flagrant violations of the human rights of Palestinians, severe restrictions on their movements and the closure of the Gaza Strip all speak to the dismal situation on the ground and explain the mounting pressure on already enormous humanitarian needs. While the renewal of UNRWA's mandate (General Assembly resolution 74/83) is a welcome development, we are still concerned about its budgetary shortfall. The international community has to ensure enhanced, predictable and sustainable funding for its operation. The unabated expansion of Israeli settlements and demolition of Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank are changing its demography. Israel's intention to extend the settlements and its recent pronouncement on the annexation of Palestinian territories raise the spectre of change even more.

All those actions by Israel constitute egregious violations of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and are in direct contravention of all relevant Security Council resolutions. We join the international community in condemning these acts and ask Israel to refrain from such actions. We also ask for the maintenance of the sanctity of Islamic and Christian holy places at all costs, in particular the Al-Aqsa.

The international community has to turn the culture of inaction around and compel Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian territory. We look upon the Security Council to fulfil its Charter obligations and enforce its resolutions, in particular resolution

2334 (2016). The implementation of the road map for peace in the Middle East, the Arab Peace Initiative and the efforts of the Quartet are crucial building blocks. Ensuring accountability and justice for Israel's atrocities and human rights violations would serve to end the entrenched culture of impunity. Developments in the International Criminal Court are critical in this regard.

Our own struggle for independence and the painful experience of enduring the worst form of genocide in 1971 inspire us to always advocate for the oppressed people of the world. This has been the very premise of Bangladesh's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause. We will continue to firmly stand by our Palestinian brothers and sisters in their just and rightful struggle for self-determination, until the State of Palestine is established on the basis of the two-State solution, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

As we move towards the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, the resolution of the Palestinian crisis will remain a litmus test for retaining people's trust in multilateralism and in this body.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Abdelaziz (*spoke in Arabic*): At the start of 2020, the Middle East is facing one of its worst crises — one that could lead to a major military confrontation of catastrophic consequences, in which international Powers struggle with each other and with regional Powers adjacent to our region to settle their affairs on Arab territory. The ongoing crisis is compounded by another crisis of international legitimacy, the Palestinian question, which is deteriorating every day, as underscored in the briefings made by Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Mueller yesterday morning (see S/PV.8706).

Since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which affirms the illegality or illegitimacy of settlements, there has been a relentless increase in the number of Israeli settlements, right under the nose of the Security Council, at a dire rate not seen since the conclusion of the Oslo Accords in 1993. That was also confirmed by the announcement of the construction of 2,000 new settlement units from the beginning of this year and the transformation of large portions of Area C into nature reserves. There has also been an increase in the number of demolitions and further displacement in order to ensure geographical contiguity between settlements

and East Jerusalem. Therefore, hopes for a return to credible peace negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis on the five final status issues have waned because the Palestinian side no longer views Israel as a credible partner in the peace process and has given up hope in the neutrality and integrity of those responsible for the peace process.

The situation has been further exacerbated by the illegitimate Israeli decisions that have been recognized by the United States. Those decisions relentlessly seek to eliminate the prospects for the two-State solution, in contravention of all international parameters of legitimacy, to recognize Al-Quds as the capital of Israel and to eliminate the problem of refugees by attacking the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. They also seek to recognize Israel's sovereignty over illegitimate settlements and to impose that reality on the ground by using heavy military force, in contravention of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Despite the obstacles to implementing the international consensus to establish an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, along the 4 June 1967 borders, the Palestinian Authority believes in a just and comprehensive peace and continues to build the pillars of the Palestinian State by preparing for the holding of Palestinian presidential and legislative elections, including in East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. With the assistance of the League of Arab States, it has also stepped up its efforts to increase international recognition of the State of Palestine from States that have not yet recognized it officially, and to gain international recognition of the fact that the State of Palestine is eligible to fulfil the obligations of full-fledged membership in the United Nations, following its outstanding success chairing the Group of 77 and China with great efficiency in 2019, as acknowledged by all international and regional actors at the United Nations.

The members of the League of Arab States demand that the Council take a decisive position in order to stop the flagrant violation of international legitimacy and ensure respect for resolution 2334 (2016). We call for an end to all settlement activities and related confiscations, displacement and demolitions, which are at variance with international law. We call on countries that have yet to recognize the State of Palestine to

do so expeditiously in order to uphold international legitimacy, which is under threat.

We call on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to open investigations into violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The Prosecutor of the ICC has concluded that the conditions have been met for launching an investigation in order to promote the principles of accountability and prosecution. Israel has always been the exception where those principles are concerned because of pressure from some international Powers.

Despite the success we achieved in eliminating Da'esh and in restoring peace and stability in Iraq, the Middle East has seen a wave of grave escalation at the beginning of this year. More than ever before, our region needs de-escalation and calm, which will be brought about by ending foreign interference in the internal affairs of Arab States, in particular by non-Arab neighbouring countries. The League of Arab States has condemned and cautioned at the highest level against such intervention, which has negative repercussions on Arab regional security.

The League of Arab States stresses the need to respect the Charter of the United Nations, uphold its well-established rules and implement them within the multilateral framework, in accordance with presidential statement S/PRST/2020/1, adopted at the high-level debate convened by Viet Nam on 9 January, on upholding the United Nations Charter (see S/PV.8699 *et seq.*). We thank Viet Nam for organizing that debate.

Regrettably, such interference was not limited to foreign military action on Iraqi territory. It also included increasing foreign interference in Libyan affairs. The League of Arab States rejects foreign interference in Libya's affairs, including military intervention, and affirms the need to prevent the transfer of foreign fighters, mercenaries, terrorists and extremists to Libya. We reiterate our full support for the political process in Libya and we emphasize our ongoing readiness to work with the United Nations, the African Union and the European Union in order to peacefully resolve the crisis, including by implementing the agreement made recently at the Berlin conference.

At the same time, the League of Arab States underlines its interest in Syria's affairs and its commitment to Syria's unity and territorial integrity, while seeking to overcome the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country. We welcome

resolution 2504 (2020), on the renewal of the work of the cross-border aid mechanism for Syria. The League of Arab States reiterates its position rejecting the recent military aggression in northern Syria. We demand that the Security Council call for the withdrawal of the aggressor forces from Syrian territories and the removal of the illegal buffer zones that they have set up there.

In the same vein, the League of Arab States supports international efforts to restore calm and stability in Yemen. We are working with stakeholders to strengthen the commitment to a political solution and to implement the Stockholm and Riyadh agreements. We support the leading role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its efforts to achieve the desired political settlement.

The League of Arab States congratulates its brothers in Algeria and the Sudan on the peaceful transformations in response to the people's will. It reiterates its full solidarity with Lebanon and will continue to provide political and economic support to its Government and all its constitutional institutions.

In conclusion, the League of Arab States calls on the United Nations, including the Security Council and the Secretary-General, to make tireless efforts to ease tensions in the Middle East. They should encourage all parties to exercise the utmost restraint, stop foreign interference in the affairs of Arab States, including by neighbouring countries in the region, and instead promote political action, not military confrontation, in the context of good-neighbourliness, peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and fruitful and constructive cooperation with a view to achieving the common goals.

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

Mrs. Udida (Nigeria): I thank the delegation of Viet Nam for organizing today's open debate. Our special appreciation goes to the briefers for sharing their insightful perspectives on this very important subject. Nigeria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Nigeria notes with grave concern the alarming situation in many parts of the Middle East, particularly Palestine. In that regard, it is pertinent for all parties to make genuine and concerted efforts to find peaceful solutions and to cooperate closely with the United Nations and its agencies in order to achieve the shared

objective of a two-State solution, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law.

As the international community continues to seek avenues to advance the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian question, international efforts must remain focused on paving the way for Israel and Palestine to return to meaningful negotiations. We therefore highlight the cogency of multilateral diplomacy and reiterate that there is no substitute to an agreed multilateral approach in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conundrum in a sustainable manner.

Nigeria believes that achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the attainment of durable peace and stability in the Middle East. For that reason, we acknowledge the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution ES-10/19, on the status of Jerusalem, and once again call on all parties to respect the relevant United Nations resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

We therefore encourage Israel to take concrete measures to freeze all settlement-related activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. For their part, Palestinian leaders must also signal their readiness to return to the negotiating table by, inter alia, making enhanced efforts to forge unity and deal with militancy and other internal security challenges. It is beyond doubt that violence and unilateral actions will not resolve the long-drawn-out conflict.

My delegation reaffirms its full support for the rights of the Palestinian people, including the protection of their fundamental human rights, particularly their right to free movement and self-determination, as well as the maintenance of the dignity of the individual Palestinian person and their inalienable right to live without the fear of persecution. In that regard, we restate our belief that the Security Council must not fail in its duty and responsibility to the Palestinian people.

In that context, it is our expectation that this debate in the year 2020 will offer more suggestions as to how best to address the prevailing challenges and gaps in the implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council, on this subject matter.

In conclusion, Nigeria calls on States with influence over the parties concerned to encourage them to re-engage in dialogue on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Quartet

road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and other existing agreements. We reaffirm our unwavering support for a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine existing side by side.

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

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We support the statement made by the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

It is regrettable that, in the recent period, no measures have been taken to end the Israeli military aggression and occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), adopted by the Council, which remains silent while Israel, with impunity, consolidates its policy of expanding illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory and threatens to annex the Palestinian territories in the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

We condemn the occupation of Palestinian territory, the illegal settlement policies, practices and measures, including the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, the punitive demolitions, the seizure of resources from Palestinian institutions, the forced displacement of hundreds of Palestinian civilians and the blockade of the Gaza Strip. We reject acts of provocation, terror, incitement and violence and the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against Palestinian civilians, in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law.

Due to the repeated obstruction of the United States, this organ has not even been able to condemn the escalating violence and the tragic events in the Gaza Strip since 30 March 2018. We regret the precarious situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East as a result of the withdrawal of United States financial support.

The Security Council must fulfil its primary responsibility under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security and demand that Israel put an immediate and complete end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories and its aggressive policies and settlement practices.

We express our unwavering solidarity with the Government and people of Palestine and support for

the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

We reaffirm our unreserved support for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that enables the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to have an independent and sovereign State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and that ensures the right of return of refugees.

Washington's aggressive, unilateral and unjustified actions in the Middle East constitute a severe violation of the legitimate interests of Arab and Islamic nations and have led to a dangerous escalation in the region. We reiterate our condemnation of the so-called deal of the century, drawn up by the current United States Government. It fails to provide for the establishment of a Palestinian State, thereby scorning the two-State solution, which has enjoyed the historical backing of the United Nations, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, among other international actors.

The unilateral decision by the Government of the United States to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and establish its diplomatic representation in that city, disrespecting its historical status, as well as its decision to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Syrian Golan, all constitute flagrant violations of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We once again call for the complete and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the Syrian Golan and all occupied Arab territories.

We emphatically condemn the United States bombing of Baghdad airport and the targeted assassination it carried out using missiles, which constitute a clear violation of international law and the sovereignty of Iraq. Such aggressive, unilateral and unjustified actions by the United States represent a major escalation in the Middle East, where a large-scale conflict with incalculable loss of human life and grave consequences for global peace and stability is on the brink of eruption. We reiterate our full support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and condemn the United States withdrawal from the agreement, as well as the reimposition of unilateral sanctions and the military threats waged against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Against that backdrop, it is the duty of all States — and especially the members of the Security Council — to defend multilateralism and the purposes and principles of the Charter, in particular respect for the sovereign equality of States and their political independence, territorial unity and integrity, the peaceful resolution of disputes and refraining from the threat or use of force in international relations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this important debate.

As we begin this year's first quarterly discussion on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, we hope that the new decade will bring about a new start, not only for Palestine but for the region as a whole. Despite the growing number and complexity of the issues facing our region, principally the Palestinian question, the United Arab Emirates believes that there is an opportunity to reverse the path of negative trends and de-escalate the current situation in order to resolve the crises in the region and achieve regional and international stability. In order to do so, my country underscores the need to take several steps.

First, there must be a commitment to implementing international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Security Council's resolutions. In that regard, my country is concerned by Israel's continuation of its illegal practices against the brotherly Palestinian people, including further settlement-building activities that undermine the two-State solution and are in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, as well as the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Similarly, the demolition of Palestinian property, the confiscation of land, attempts to desecrate holy sites in the city of Jerusalem and the ongoing unjust blockade on Gaza are all illegal practices that hinder peace efforts and exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian people. On a broader scale, we believe that our region now needs to see the strengthening of international law, which is the basis for confidence-building between the parties and for preventing the spread of chaos and war, so as to achieve regional stability and security. In that regard, we stress the need for States to respect the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States.

Secondly, it is critical that we work towards de-escalation and calm by promoting political action as a fundamental choice to address any tensions that might arise in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or in the entire region. The primary endeavour of the international community must be to create an environment conducive to peace efforts in any State that suffers crisis in order to address any measures that could have numerous grave security, military and economic repercussions for the States concerned and the region as a whole.

The Berlin conference on Libya held earlier this week is an example of how international efforts can be mobilized to address any negative trends that could exacerbate crises. We commend Germany's efforts as the host of the conference, in which my country actively participated. We hope that it will lead to a political process under the auspices of the United Nations that enjoys the full commitment of all stakeholders.

Thirdly, we must strengthen multilateral action to break the current stalemate in the Middle East peace process, as such action constitutes the best means to urge the parties to reach lasting political solutions, whether in Palestine or in other countries of the region, such as Syria, Yemen and Libya. That must conform to the agreed terms of reference for achieving peace in a manner that meets the legitimate aspirations of the peoples concerned. In that regard, we highlight the important role of the United Nations and the envoys of the Secretary-General in strengthening mediation and preventive diplomacy efforts to resolve the conflicts in the region by peaceful means. In line with those efforts, regional organizations, including the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, should be encouraged to participate in consultations related to regional issues, especially as such organizations are qualified to develop effective political solutions to crises. In that context, we call on the international community to redouble its efforts to implement the two-State solution and declare an independent Palestinian State along the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Fourthly, and finally, we must bolster humanitarian assistance to people affected by conflict, while continuing to support development and reconstruction efforts. We must help those nations and peoples in need to achieve prosperity and implement the Sustainable

Development Goals. It is also imperative that we focus on addressing the deteriorating humanitarian and economic conditions in the Palestinian territories and support the vital sectors there, especially in the Gaza Strip, where the humanitarian conditions are appalling. For our part, my country will continue to extend humanitarian and development aid to Palestine. We are among the largest donors to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, having contributed more than \$630 million to finance various sectors in Palestine over the past five years.

In conclusion, we underscore that the Palestinian question will remain the central issue of the Arab and Islamic nations. Restoring stability to the region will not be possible without a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question. The United Arab Emirates, which will celebrate the year 2020 under the theme "Towards the Next 50", is launching a major national development strategy for the next 50 years across all vital sectors. We will spare no effort to achieve stability in the region and keep the wheel of economic and technological progress turning in pursuit of a better future for our country and for the countries of the region.

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

Ms. Zahir (Maldives): I wish to thank Viet Nam for organizing this important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate the newly elected members of the Security Council — Estonia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Viet Nam — who have assumed their membership of the Council this month. We wish them well as they take on this important responsibility.

We are beginning yet another year in somewhat the same manner as previous ones — with deep concern for the ongoing violations against the Palestinian people and apprehensions about the possibility of achieving peace in the region. The year 2019 ended with regrets and deep political uncertainties for any peaceful settlement of the conflict. Discriminatory policies towards the Palestinian people, violations of their basic human rights and severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza continue. While the challenges seem insurmountable, the Government and the people of the Maldives remain steadfast in

our support and advocacy to find a lasting solution for the many challenges facing the Middle East, and especially to uphold the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine.

We believe that the Security Council can and must do more to address this prolonged conflict. The Maldives has always believed that an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, established on the 1967 borders, living side by side in peace and harmony with Israel, is the best and only solution to this decades-long conflict.

We call upon Israel to fully implement the decisions of the Council and respect the legal obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. It is unacceptable that the illegal occupation of Palestine continues to this day, with demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned property, the building of illegal settlements and the continuing gross violations of the basic human rights of the Palestinian people. We call upon the Security Council to take urgent action to protect civilians. The restrictions imposed on the movement of people and goods in and out of the Gaza Strip must be lifted immediately to ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The crisis in Syria is indeed one of the gravest tragedies of our time. Thousands of people have been killed and many have been forced to flee their homes since the start of the conflict. Locked in a stalemate, the conflict is not only exacerbating the humanitarian crisis but also destroying the future of young Syrians. With over 11 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, the continued hostilities affecting civilians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure can only deteriorate the situation further. We cannot falter in our duties to bring back peace for the people of Syria. The Security Council and the international community must do more to reinvigorate talks to find a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

We are encouraged that the momentum to reach a political settlement in Yemen has been progressing. But we must remain steadfast and continue to strengthen and support the efforts to end the war in Yemen. We welcome the signing of the Riyadh agreement and commend the efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other countries involved in achieving that important milestone and opening the door for broader peace talks.

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. If we fail to uphold our obligations, we cannot ensure the peaceful resolution of these conflicts and wars. As we enter a new decade, let me call on all to give peace a chance and a home for the people of Palestine.

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

Mr. Mustafa (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Sudan is honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States as Chair of the Group, under the agenda item “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”.

As the United Nations celebrates the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Charter of the United Nations in 2020, the Palestinian question remains unchanged. While it is the most significant challenge facing the world, no progress was achieved in 2019 on the implementation of United Nations resolutions on the Palestinian question or on resolving the Middle East conflict. The conflict poses a serious threat to world peace and security. As such, its settlement would be the linchpin in achieving stability throughout the region, while a failure to address it would have grave repercussions on the entire Middle East region, which is already engulfed in turmoil.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories deteriorated over the past year. In Gaza alone, 44 Palestinians were killed, including nine children and three women, by the Israeli occupation authorities as a result of air strikes, protests, clashes, security operations and other sporadic incidents. Approximately 2,490 Palestinians were injured, including dozens of children. In the West Bank, another four civilians were killed, including one woman, while 1,064 were injured, including 23 children.

The Israeli occupation authorities demolished or confiscated 617 houses and buildings in the occupied West Bank in 2019, including in East Jerusalem, and forcibly evicted 898 Palestinians. Also worrisome is the fact that incidents of attacks, harassment and incitement by Israeli settlers have also increased, especially as we approach the olive harvest season and in the city of Hebron.

The Arab Group is closely following the deteriorating situation and takes this opportunity to stress its steadfast solidarity with the Palestinian people and its continuous commitment to their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination. We are committed to ending the tragedy of the Palestinian people through a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question in all its aspects. That solution is well known and must be based on international law, the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Charter of the United Nations and the two-State solution. That remains the only viable solution, as the international community, including the Security Council, will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 border, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, which must be implemented, especially resolution 2334 (2016), and in respect of the principle of peace, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace. The Arab Group calls for the effective implementation of all of that.

The Security Council is responsible for maintaining international peace and security. That is why it must uphold the principles of the Charter, especially during its seventy-fifth anniversary. The Council's relevant resolutions on the matter do not only reflect the spirit and text of the Charter but are also legally binding for all the States Members of the United Nations. We are gravely concerned that the Council has long been unable to fulfil its mandate in that regard.

Our region is awash in a complicated situation as a result of regional and international crises. That is why Israel, the occupying Power, must be compelled to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions. It must be held accountable for all violations against Palestinian and Arab peoples, who have been suffering under the yoke of occupation for centuries. The absence of justice enhances impunity, and thereby exacerbates the situation on the ground and diminishes the prospects for peace.

The States of the Arab Group are appalled by the Israeli intransigence and the illegal policies that undermine the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We reiterate our deep concern about the continuing deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and especially in the Gaza Strip, which has been suffering from a severe illegal Israeli blockade.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is truly dire, and the economic and social situations there are deplorable. We need a sustainable solution to the human suffering in the Gaza Strip, which requires lifting the illegal Israeli blockade once and for all and the speedy delivery of humanitarian aid to all the besieged people in Gaza.

Israel, the occupying Power, must be compelled to stop its expansionist activities, demolition of houses and property, forced displacement of Palestinian citizens and practices of violence, provocations and incitement, in addition to other violations of human rights that amount to war crimes against Palestinians living in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. Israel must uphold all its responsibilities and commitments under international law. It must also refrain immediately from pursuing policies aimed at changing the demographic character of the occupied territories. It must respect the identity and legal status of the occupied territories and the historic status of the holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The Group of Arab States supports the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which is responsible for managing and safeguarding the Muslim and Christian sites in Jerusalem, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Group also supports the Hashemite guardianship of those sites represented by King Abdullah II Bin Al-Hussein. The Group further welcomes the 30 March 2019 signing in Rabat of the appeal for Jerusalem by His Majesty King Mohammed VI and His Holiness Pope Francis. The appeal emphasizes the important role of Jerusalem as a city of tolerance and mutual respect among the followers of the three heavenly religions. We must preserve its characteristics and features as a city of peaceful coexistence.

The Arab Group reaffirms that Israel must abide by resolution 497 (1981), and fully withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 1967 borders, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Arab Group condemns and rejects any unilateral action involving the occupied Syrian Golan. We call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility by explicitly condemning such provocative and illegal unilateral actions.

The Arab Group reiterates its repeated calls for sustaining humanitarian and socioeconomic aid to the Palestinian people and refugees. We highly value the important work and support of the United Nations

Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and we welcome the extension of the Agency's mandate to 30 June 2023. We thank and appreciate all the contributing countries to UNRWA and the Palestinian people, especially Arab countries.

In conclusion, the States of the Arab Group reaffirm their firm solidarity with the Palestinian people and their continuous support for the just Palestinian question. We are seriously committed to strengthening and coordinating international efforts to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question in all its aspects, including Palestinian refugees, in line with the United Nations resolutions. We hope that this year will see tangible progress towards realizing the legitimate national goals and aspirations of the Palestinian people to enjoy their fair rights, especially the right to self-determination, freedom and an independent sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Finally, I congratulate Viet Nam on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. We thank the United States for its presidency in December 2019, and we congratulate Tunisia, the Niger, Estonia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as newly elected members to the Council. We wish them every success.

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

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (spoke in Arabic): At the outset, I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this very important open debate. I also thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for their briefings yesterday (see S/PV.8706).

Several days ago, the Security Council and a large number of delegations debated an issue of overall consensus, namely, upholding the Charter of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security (see S/PV.8699). Delegations stressed the fact that the Charter provides Member States with a blueprint for achieving peace, security, stability and progress. In order to avoid crises, the world needs to uphold the Charter in letter and spirit.

One pertinent example is the Palestinian question, given that, in relation to it, there is no commitment to the Charter, international law or international resolutions. We reject the Israeli occupation and illegal

settlements in the occupied territories, as well as Israeli practices of oppression of the brotherly Palestinian people, which is in non-conformity with the Charter and international law.

In order to resolve the Palestinian question, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan and Lebanese territories, must be stopped. Settlements in occupied territories must end and the blockade on Gaza Strip must be lifted. Illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territories must cease. Refugees must be allowed to return and all practices that jeopardize the realization of the two-State solution must be stopped. An independent and viable Palestinian State must be established within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

It is high time that we realize a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question that grants the Palestinian people their rights and lets them meet their legitimate aspirations, through dialogue and meaningful negotiations in line with the Charter of the United Nations, international law, the international resolutions, the agreed terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. The international community must spare no effort to achieve this envisioned goal so as to halt the long-standing suffering and instability and avoid putting the region and the world at further risk.

The State of Qatar has been eager to play its role at every level to create an environment conducive to lasting and comprehensive peace. Aware of the deteriorating humanitarian situation, in particular in the Gaza Strip, the State of Qatar has continued to support the budget of the Palestinian Authority and provide humanitarian needs. We have also supported multiple projects, in particular the provision of electricity to Gaza, and United Nations temporary employment programmes to improve the living conditions of our Palestinian brothers.

With regard to Syria, the crisis continues, accompanied by exacerbated humanitarian suffering and serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It is high time that the brotherly Syrian people were able to see their legitimate demands for peace, security, a dignified life, unity, sovereignty and independence answered. Only a political solution, in line with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254

(2015), will lead to achieving those goals. At this point, the Constitutional Committee must be promoted as a step in the right direction, and we will continue to support such efforts to eliminate obstacles to reaching a political solution in line with the United Nations and legal terms of reference.

Concerning Libya, the military operations carried out by militias targeting the capital Tripoli and the attacks on the legitimate Government recognized by the international community threaten the unity and stability of Libya. We call on all actors to uphold their responsibilities, respect the will of the Libyan people for a peaceful solution, end the violence, achieve national consensus and implement the Security Council's resolutions. In that regard, we fully support the efforts of Mr. Ghassan Salamé, Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

With regard to Yemen, the Yemeni people deserve an end to the conflict and their acute humanitarian suffering. Actors must participate in dialogue geared towards achieving a political solution and national reconciliation, in accordance with resolution 2216 (2015). That would ensure the unity of Yemen and restore security and stability. We also support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and reiterate the need to uphold international law, safeguard human rights and meet the basic needs of all the Yemeni people by facilitating access of humanitarian assistance.

Concerning Iraq, the State of Qatar is closely following developments there and the evolving sensitive situation in our region. That requires us to deploy collective efforts, mend communication bridges and relying on multilateralism instead of unilateralism in order to find solutions. We underscore the importance of depending on wisdom and reason to reduce tensions and achieve de-escalation. The State of Qatar has always stressed the importance of preventive diplomacy and the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflicts through dialogue and mediation.

Today, our position remains steadfast. We call for respect for international law and friendly relations among countries. The international community must uphold its responsibilities by guaranteeing stability and security in our region. We will spare no effort, in cooperation and collaboration with friendly and brotherly countries, to reduce tensions and restore calm through diplomatic channels.

The State of Qatar remains fully committed to its principled positions concerning the continued unjust blockade and illegal unilateral measures imposed on my country for more than two and a half years. That is a serious violation of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. It destabilizes our region and threatens regional and international peace and security. The countries imposing the blockade on my country have also engaged in campaigns of allegations and incitement reflecting their failure. The State of Qatar is steadfast in its position in favour of a peaceful resolution of this crisis through unconditional constructive dialogue that preserves State sovereignty, in keeping with the United Nations Charter, international law and cordial relations among countries. In order to defuse tensions and achieve international peace and security, we remain committed to mediation in seeking a solution to the crisis. In particular, we commend the efforts of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the sisterly State of Kuwait.

In conclusion, the Middle East is now more than ever in need of ending all tensions that have serious consequences on international peace and security. The Security Council has a responsibility to take necessary measures in order to end all grave violations of international law and crises, leading to a safe region for its people and achieving peace, stability, development and prosperity.

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

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to sincerely congratulate the delegation of Viet Nam on its successful presidency of the Security Council in January. I also thank Ms. DiCarlo and Ms. Mueller for their valuable briefings.

A new year has begun, and the Palestinian people continue to endure the Israeli occupation of their territories and the daily violation of their legitimate rights. The Palestinian territories continue to endure practices that violate United Nations resolutions and international humanitarian law, including continued settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as the demolition of houses and systematic attacks against the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Such acts affect the socioeconomic situation of the Palestinians and undermine prospects for peace in the region. In that context, the Kingdom of Morocco and King Mohammed VI, who chairs the Quds Committee

of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, reiterate their solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for the achievement of their legitimate rights and the establishment of an independent State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Kingdom of Morocco reiterates the need to stop settlement activities and implement resolution 2334 (2016). The Kingdom of Morocco considers East Jerusalem to be a Palestinian territory that has been occupied since 1967 and should be the capital of the Palestinian State. It is one of the final-status issues that have yet to be resolved through negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis; it is at the heart of the Middle East conflict and is key to a genuine political solution between Palestinians and Israelis.

Furthermore, we reject any unilateral measure against Jerusalem that would contravene Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980). We must preserve the historic and legal status of Jerusalem in accordance with the values of tolerance and coexistence among religions that Morocco has always supported. His Majesty King Mohammed VI, together with Pope Francis, signed the Al-Quds/ Jerusalem declaration when the Pope visited Morocco in March 2019. On that occasion, His Majesty the King and the Holy Father stressed the need to preserve the city of Jerusalem so that it can continue to be part of the world heritage of all humankind. Jerusalem must be promoted as a multi-faith city and free access to the city must be ensured for all believers of the monotheistic religions. The role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, headed by His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al-Hussein as custodian of all the holy sites in Jerusalem, is important and must also be preserved.

The Kingdom of Morocco also reiterates its support for the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and for the Agency's efforts to alleviate their suffering in countries of the region while enabling them to access basic services and medical care, especially for children. The Al-Quds Committee continues to carry out its mission to protect Jerusalem and support the well-being of its people through the implementation of various projects aimed at protecting the city's cultural and architectural heritage, while preserving the national Palestinian archive. The Agency has also launched phase two of renovating and reforming the Moroccan Cultural centre in Jerusalem, the Moroccan House.

The Kingdom of Morocco continues to believe in the existence of solutions to the Palestinian question, but the absence of negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis has prevented an end to the violence and led to a lack of trust between them. The international community must take control of the situation and work actively to bring Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table in order to achieve a two-State solution within the 4 June 1967 borders and to ensure that East Jerusalem becomes the capital of the State of Palestine. Such negotiations must be conducted in good faith and on a clear basis with a view to restoring confidence between the parties and to laying the foundations of a viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, in accordance with international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. We also appreciate international efforts to achieve lasting peace and security in the Middle East region.

The President: As we are running a little behind schedule, I thank speakers for keeping their statements brief and request the other delegations to respect the time limits.

I now give the floor to the representative of Iran.

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Once again, we are here to discuss the world's longest crisis — the question of Palestine.

In the early days of the year marking the United Nations seventy-fifth anniversary, it is very timely to ask why the Council is unable to end the decades-long occupation of Palestine, to protect the very basic rights of millions of oppressed Palestinians at home and abroad and to confront an occupying regime that has committed all four core international crimes, not once but several times.

The answer is clear. The United States, by violating the peremptory norms and basic principles of international law, disregarding all standards of international conduct and breaking all principles of humanity and morality, as well as by abusing its status as a permanent member of the Council, continues to completely, systematically and unreservedly shield the Israeli regime. One example is its use of the veto to protect Israel 44 times, thus further emboldening that regime to commit more brutal crimes with more brutality and in total impunity.

Moreover, the United States has been engaged in other destabilizing activities in our region. In

pursuit of its intrinsic animosity towards Muslim nations, particularly in the Middle East, the United States continues military adventurism in our region, the latest example of which is the recent horrific assassination of the martyr Qasem Soleimani and his companions at Baghdad International Airport. The assassination was a clear manifestation of State terrorism, which constitutes a gross violation of the fundamental principles of international law and entails the international responsibility of the United States. We categorically reject all United States fabrications to justify that heinous crime, including by resorting to sham claims that Mr. Soleimani was planning to target American interests in the region. The United States is well aware that, in addition to his decisive role in fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria, Mr. Soleimani was also a highly influential and respected politician, working hard for stability in the region. Without a doubt, that extremely provocative move was a pre-planned plot aimed at escalating tensions in our region.

The assassination clearly invalidated the United States claim that it is fighting terrorism. It is, in fact, fighting those who combat terrorists. The martyr Soleimani's demise was a big gift from America to ISIS and other regional terrorist groups. Rallies and crowds in the region commemorating the martyr Soleimani's role in fighting terrorism and denouncing his assassination, as well as the fact that millions in our capital alone participated in his funeral procession — the second largest in the history of our nation and the entire region — demonstrate how beloved he was nationally and regionally. If anything, United States adventurism testified to one fact — that after the cowardly assassination, the region is less secure and less stable. Consequently, the most effective way to ensure regional peace and security is the withdrawal of United States forces from the region, as they have always been the source of instability in our neighbourhood.

The Council needs to address its deepening trust deficit and diminishing legitimacy and credibility emanating from its inaction in cases of clear violations of international law, such as its silence on the assassination of Martyr Soleimani. In order to correct its past mistakes in the Middle East, the Council must uphold its responsibility by preventing the imposition of all the unlawful policies of the United States and the Israeli regime against the entire region. The Council must remain vigilant about the deceitful nature of

the Israeli regime and must not allow it to abuse the Council's open debates to play victim in an effort to distract attention from its oppressive policies in our region.

That is exactly what the representative of the Israeli regime did yesterday (see S/PV.8706) when, instead of explaining why it continues to flout international law and maintain its inhumane practices in the occupied territories, he attempted to level accusations at my country through a series of lies and fabrications, which I reject completely and do not want to dignify with an answer.

It is no accident that, in a coordinated move, the United States representative also did likewise, keeping completely silent on the topic of the meeting — the question of Palestine — and instead ventured to give a rosy picture of Israel, justifying its illegal practices while orchestrating a disinformation campaign, which we totally repudiate, against my country.

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

Ms. Yáñez Loza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the convening of today's debate under the presidency of Viet Nam and associates itself with the statement made earlier today by the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. As we have expressed in previous debates, the question of Palestine has historically been an issue of concern and importance to Ecuador. We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his informative briefing.

Last December marked three years since the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2334 (2016). Since then, the situation on the ground has only deteriorated. We deeply regret that, after yet another year, the conflict has not been resolved. No action was taken during the reporting period to end settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory as required by resolution 2334 (2016). On the contrary, demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian-owned structures continued throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, resulting in the demolition or confiscation of 150 structures and the displacement of 260 people, including 133 children and approximately 60 women. We reiterate our concern about the implementation of those measures.

We are also deeply concerned about the number of deaths and injuries from violence and terrorist attacks against civilians. As a result of air strikes and in the course of demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other incidents, 44 Palestinians were killed, including nine children and three women, while 2,940 others were injured. A total of 46 Israelis — 41 civilians, including women and children, and 5 members of the Israeli security forces — were injured in the attacks, skirmishes and other incidents.

We reject all incitements to violence, which propels us further from a political, peaceful, definitive and fair solution for both parties. We reiterate the call of resolution 2334 (2016) on both parties to act in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law, and to demonstrate calm and restraint, refraining from acts of provocation and incitement.

We are extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation, human rights violations and non-compliance with international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory. We call on all parties to make collective efforts to start credible negotiations and to intensify regional and international diplomatic efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East without delay.

Unfortunately, the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2019/938) does not indicate any progress in that regard. We believe it is imperative that the Council act and adopt actions aimed at the full implementation of the fundamental principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, as has been repeatedly requested of it. We agree with the report that,

“no amount of humanitarian or economic support on its own will resolve either the situation in Gaza or the broader conflict” (S/2019/938, para. 59).

Political solutions based on justice, human rights and international law are needed. Preventive diplomacy is a critical tool for defusing tensions before they escalate and worsen. My delegation once again calls on the international community to make tangible progress in supporting the advancement of a political, peaceful, definitive and just solution for the parties based on the existence of two States — Palestine and Israel — living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders on the basis of the 1967 borders, a consensus reaffirmed in Council resolution 2334 (2016).

Finally, after listening to the briefing by Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, we believe that we ought to pay particular attention to how many children are affected on a daily basis — in terms of their enjoyment of rights, access to education and mental health — by this unresolved situation.

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

Mr. Carazo (Costa Rica) (spoke in Spanish): I would like to begin by congratulating the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on its presidency of the Council for the month of January, its first month as a non-permanent Council member. We also welcome the beginning Council term of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as a representative country from the Latin America and the Caribbean region. Finally, we also welcome the other incoming Council members — the Niger, Estonia and Tunisia.

As we commemorate 75 years of operation of the United Nations, this is a moment to pause and reflect on the Organization we want. Given the constant sources of tension in the Middle East, in particular the conflict between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine, which is mired in a permanent paralysis that promotes extremism and instability in the area, we must take clear, concrete and sustainable measures in the short, medium and long term that will help achieve a definitive political solution — never military — to the long and complex conflict between the two States.

The Security Council has spent decades discussing the situation in the Middle East without achieving the results desired by the Palestinians, Israel or the international community. The lack of consensus, including on previously agreed parameters, only increases the complexity of the conflict. As we mark our seventy-fifth year, this is undoubtedly one of the Organization's greatest failures.

As established by the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council has the primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security and improving its work in the area of conflict prevention, while taking into account human rights considerations. That is why we urge the Council members to take concrete and sustainable action to promote dialogue and peace in the Middle East. War cannot be fought through more wars. Peace is built through dialogue, solidarity and international cooperation. It is time for action and

it is time for the members of the Security Council to assume their responsibilities under the Charter.

As the famous saying goes, insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results. Time is running out. The conflict continues to escalate. Now is the time to find definitive solutions. We must be familiar with history in order to understand the mistakes of the past and avoid repeating them. That is why Costa Rica reiterates its strong support for a negotiated and definitive solution to the conflict — one that is reached peacefully and is legally binding on all parties.

We know that we cannot or should not work in isolation. We must work together in a coordinated manner and in pursuit of shared objectives in order to deal with the crises, in particular the humanitarian crises, that require an urgent response. In that regard, Costa Rica warmly welcomes the renewal of paragraphs 2 and 3 of resolution 2165 (2014), which will ensure that humanitarian assistance, including medical and surgical supplies, reaches people in need throughout Syria. We underline, however, that humanitarian aid should have no conditions or limitations whatsoever as long as it is in line with the basic principles of independence, impartiality, neutrality and humanity.

In the view of Costa Rica, blockades on the provision of humanitarian and medical assistance to civilians constitute a flagrant violation of State obligations under international law. That is why we deplore the fact that the recent extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement has curtailed humanitarian assistance operations, which, above all, must ensure human dignity.

We recall that nearly 27 years have passed since the Oslo Accords were signed to open up a path to peace, yet the lack of political will has left them at a standstill. As stipulated in resolution 2334 (2016), Israel's establishment of settlements in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and an impediment to the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. We therefore call upon the State of Israel to cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

We urge the State of Israel and the State of Palestine to resume, as soon as possible, negotiations that should lead to the establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian

State, on the basis of the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Similarly, we call for calm and restraint and on the parties to refrain from provocative actions and the use of inflammatory rhetoric. We reject and condemn the disproportionate use of force, including the firing of rockets, mortars and incendiary devices, by Palestinian militants in Gaza against civilians in Israel and the use of lethal force by Israel against Palestinians. The only solution to the conflict is dialogue and the political will of the parties, with the acceptance of their mutual right to exist.

Costa Rica reiterates its unwavering commitment to multilateralism, peaceful conflict resolution, mediation and dialogue, as fundamental tools for achieving peace. Costa Rica will remain committed to building peace in the Middle East and will support all efforts aimed at achieving the noble objective that its people demand and deserve.

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

Mr. Blanchard (Canada): I would like to thank United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for his tireless efforts to promote peace, as well as Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for their valuable interventions yesterday.

This quarterly debate falls just days before International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Canada's Governor-General will be in Jerusalem this week to join leaders from around the world in the fifth World Holocaust Forum at Yad Vashem and to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Canada remembers the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust and the millions of others persecuted and killed by the Nazi regime. As we look forward, it is always important to recall the past, particularly in the context of a global rise in anti-Semitism and hatred of all kinds. As the Secretary-General said yesterday, never again means telling the story of the Holocaust again and again.

Alongside all Member States, Canada closely follows developments in the Middle East, including the deliberations of the Council.

Before I begin, I would be remiss if I did not mention the tragedy of Ukrainian Airlines Flight PS-752, which killed 176 people, including 57 Canadians. Canada offers its condolences to all the families of the victims

and all the countries whose citizens perished in the tragedy. All of Canada mourns the loss of those bright individuals. As our Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs have said, Canada will not rest until the families of that terrible tragedy get the closure, accountability, transparency and justice from Iran that they deserve.

We are working with other grieving nations to ensure a thorough and credible investigation, followed by full accountability, including compensation. Iran has taken responsibility for the tragedy, which we appreciate and which brings consequences. We will continue to judge Iran by its actions.

(spoke in French)

The tragedy occurred at a time of heightened tensions in the region. As Mr. Mladenov said, we are well aware of the new flashpoints in the region. We are fully committed to supporting any and all efforts to promote de-escalation. Canada understands all too well that failure to do so could have tragic consequences for civilians in the region and around the world. So many lives have been needlessly lost as a result of this time of tension, including the lives of those aboard Ukrainian Airlines Flight PS-752.

As Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said, if there had been no tension or recent escalation in the region, those Canadians would be at home right now with their families. That is what happens when there is conflict and war. Innocent people become victims. It reminds us of the importance of efforts to de-escalate and — looking ahead — to reduce tensions.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Canada has advocated diplomacy and international cooperation and called on all parties to honour their obligations. Indeed, that is in keeping with Canada's international relations since the founding of the United Nations. Approximately 10 days ago, during the open debate on the Charter of the United Nations (see S/PV.8699), we recalled the leading role Canada's then-Foreign Minister Lester B. Pearson played in defusing the Suez Crisis and creating the United Nations first large-scale peacekeeping force.

(spoke in English)

Today, Canada contributes to numerous United Nations peace operations worldwide, including the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, the United

Nations Truce Supervision Organization and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. We also work in close partnership with the Government of Iraq, where Canada leads a NATO training mission of Iraqi Armed Forces and supports the efforts of the Global Coalition against Da'esh. In Iraq, the Government continues to confront internal and external challenges as it seeks to consolidate the territorial defeat of Da'esh.

Canada continues to be deeply engaged in development, humanitarian, military and diplomatic efforts to support Iraq. Our priority remains a stable and united Iraq and preventing the resurgence of Da'esh.

In Jordan, we are working with the Government to train local leaders, particularly women, to identify early signs of violent extremism in their communities. Jordan hosts thousands of Palestinian, Iraqi, Yemeni and, most recently, Syrian refugees. Jordan has done so for generations, often without full appreciation by the international community of the impact that that has had on its society.

Lebanon and Turkey, which host the highest number of refugees per capita and the most in total, respectively, also remind us how the region and the world as a whole have been deeply affected by the crisis in Syria.

Much of the focus of this open debate is on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Today, I reiterate Canada's long-standing support for a two-State solution, brought about through direct negotiations between the parties. That is just, in line with international law and can deliver lasting peace to the region and security and prosperity to both Israelis and Palestinians.

We also unequivocally condemn rocket attacks on Israel by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which have targeted, killed and injured civilians. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad are terror groups that control a vulnerable population. We are thankful to Mr. Mladenov and to Egypt for their concerted diplomatic efforts regarding Gaza. The humanitarian and political situation in Gaza has become critical. If the security situation were to deteriorate any further, we could face another humanitarian catastrophe in the region. Canada urges all members of the international community to take the necessary action to avoid that outcome.

Our ties to the region are deep, broad, diverse and long-standing. They are based on historic but evolving and ever-expanding relationships between Canadians

and their friends, families, colleagues and business partners across the Middle East, from the Maghreb to the Gulf. There are millions of Canadians who trace their origins back to that region. Each has enriched Canada's social fabric, including the more than 60,000 Syrian refugees who have arrived since 2016 and are becoming Canadian citizens, such as Tareq Hadhad, the founder of a family-run company in Nova Scotia, Peace by Chocolate, which now employs 55 people. That is what we mean when we say diversity is our strength.

It is in that spirit of commitment to diplomacy and international cooperation that Canada continues to be firmly committed to working with its partners in the region to combat the terror and violent extremism that have afflicted far too many countries represented here today.

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

Mr. Hatem (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): We wish to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, which is becoming increasingly complex in the light of developments that constitute a threat to international peace and security. We would like to congratulate you on your able leadership of the Security Council during the month of January. We would also like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for their valuable briefings.

In order to establish security and stability in the Middle East and in the world, we need joint political will and collective integrated action. We need to create the positive conditions that will ensure the success of political settlements. We need to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of States and to ensure that States affected by conflicts can restore their sovereignty, security, stability and territorial integrity.

The Kingdom of Bahrain reiterates its position in support of the right of the brotherly Palestinian people to establish an independent State along the lines of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the Arab Peace Initiative, the two-State solution and the relevant international resolutions. In that regard, we stress that just, comprehensive and durable peace in the region will be possible only if we resolve the Palestinian question and grant the Palestinian people all their legitimate rights, just like other peoples in the

world. To that end, the international community must spare no effort to reach a just and durable solution to that central question.

The Kingdom of Bahrain emphasizes that terrorist acts committed by Houthi militias seek to hamper efforts to reach a political solution that preserves the unity and territorial integrity of Yemen and that fulfils the aspirations of the brotherly Yemeni people for security, stability and prosperity. The Kingdom of Bahrain strongly condemns the terrorist act of Houthi militias, supported by Iran, that targeted a mosque in Ma'rib governorate in the sisterly Republic of Yemen and killed and injured dozens of people. We express our sincere condolences to the families of the victims and we wish the injured a rapid recovery. That terrorist act is shameful and is inconsistent with human, ethical and religious values.

The Kingdom of Bahrain welcomes the final communiqué adopted at the Libya conference held in Berlin, the Federal Republic of Germany. We welcome the agreement among participants regarding a comprehensive plan to resolve the crisis in Libya and their pledges not to interfere in the internal affairs of Libya and to disarm the armed groups and other binding commitments. We welcome all such commitments, which represent an important step towards a comprehensive political settlement in Libya.

We commend the Federal Republic of Germany and the participating States as well as their pledge to restore security and stability in Libya. We hope for increased efforts in that regard and look forward to the implementation of the Skhirat Political Agreement, signed in 2015 in the Kingdom of Morocco. The Agreement is the political framework accepted by the international community and all the parties in Libya. It is therefore a strong foundation for fulfilling the aspirations of the brotherly Libyan people to achieve stability and security and for resolving the crisis while preserving the safety and territorial integrity of Libya, leading to an end to violence and the eradication of extremism and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

In conclusion, in order to achieve stability and security in the Middle East, we must be united and overcome existing and emerging challenges. The Kingdom of Bahrain will cooperate with the international community to resolve conflicts by

peaceful means and to achieve security and stability in the region and worldwide.

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

Mr. Rodrigo (Sri Lanka): At the outset, I wish to thank the presidency of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for organizing this very important and timely open debate. My delegation also notes with appreciation the comprehensive briefings by Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Mueller. Sri Lanka aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The briefings by the Under-Secretary-General and the Assistant Secretary-General highlighted the fragile situation in the Middle East and the grave situation in Palestine. This debate is taking place at a crucial time, when the region faces an escalation of tension and pressures. We join the calls by the Secretary-General and the international community for the parties concerned to exercise restraint, and we urge greater diplomacy and dialogue.

This year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. However, a solution to the Middle East conflict continues to elude us. Peace cannot come to the Middle East until the question of Palestine is addressed comprehensively and a just and lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-State solution, where both sides can coexist, is reached.

We remain deeply concerned about the deterioration of the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories with the increase in settlement expansion, related attacks and the demolition of Palestinian homes and structures and the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians. All illegal settlement activities by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories must cease forthwith and comply with the provisions and responsibilities under international law. Policies and measures aimed at altering the demographic character, identity and legal status of the occupied territories must also stop.

We remain concerned about the critical situation in Gaza as a result of the ongoing blockade and closure, which are entering their fourteenth year and have created a dire and deplorable socioeconomic situation for the Palestinian people. With half of its population of 1.8 million under the age of 15 years old, the blockade

has had a grave effect on over 840,000 children. We join the international calls for the lifting of the blockade and for concerted action to improve the living standards of the Palestinian people.

My delegation reiterates its support for resolutions 242 (1967), 497 (1981) and 2334 (2016), concerning the question of Palestine, as well as the implementation of all resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, ending the occupation of the Palestinian territories and the cessation of all illegal settlement activities. Both parties to the conflict must create the necessary environment to facilitate peace. There is also an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures to support efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations.

Sri Lanka continues to reaffirm its unwavering support and solidarity in the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights and national aspirations, including their right to self-determination and for the establishment of an independent and sovereign State. Let us, as the international community, redouble our collective efforts and commitment to helping forge a peaceful, durable settlement of the situation in the Middle East and that of the question of Palestine.

In conclusion, I wish to state that the sustained provision of vital humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance to the Palestinian people by the United Nations and the international community is commendable. The update from the briefing on the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was heartening. My delegation was fortunate to have first-hand experience, having visited an UNRWA-funded school and medical centre in Jordan last year, and can testify to the crucial role it plays in providing essential services to the Palestinian people. Sri Lanka reiterates its full support for UNRWA's work and welcomes the extension of its mandate until the end of June 2023.

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

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate and I would like to thank our briefers from yesterday — Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs — for their statements (see S/PV.8706).

On Monday, we celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day. It is so fitting to celebrate his birthday the same week of the debate on the situation in the Middle East. Everything that Martin Luther King Jr. believed in and fought for — civil rights, human rights, justice, non-violence, inequality and non-discrimination — is on display in the Middle East today. All of those issues present the most difficult challenges that exist across the Middle East and are devolving into violence and conflict with dire consequences. The region is currently home to the largest humanitarian crises and refugee influx in its history, and yet also to the smallest chance of peace and security for its peoples.

The situation in the Middle East presents a difficult challenge to the international community and to the United Nations. The conflicts are many and multiplying but, most importantly, violations of the Charter of the United Nations and its principles are being committed in total disregard of international law, especially international humanitarian law. For instance, turning to the Palestinian issue, as we heard yesterday from the briefers and other Member States, the situation is dark and worsening by the day. I am sure that we all heard about the total despair of the Palestinian people in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' briefing to the Council.

What can one expect from a people who have been living under occupation for seven decades and whose human rights, legal rights, civil rights and rights to their land, water, and dignity have been taken away from them? What kind of lives can people lead when their cities are described as large prisons? The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, recently said that we are always no more than two to three days away from another war in Gaza. What kind of future do the Palestinians have when youth unemployment is at 60 per cent and, as Ms. Mueller said, one in every two Palestinians is in need of humanitarian aid? These are desperate people and desperate people do desperate things.

At the political level, they have no horizon and no hope for a peaceful settlement. The two-State solution has been emptied of every element essential for a Palestinian State and all final-status issues — the basis of an equitable solution to the conflict — have been dismantled by unilateral Israeli actions such as annexation, which will render the two-State solution an impossibility. The expansion of settlements, the confiscation of land and Israel's actions in Jerusalem

are making it impossible for East Jerusalem to be the future capital of a Palestinian State. The situation is leading not only to despair but also to a loss of faith in the international community and in peace. The pessimism of the Palestinians was captured in a survey conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross when it found that 52 per cent of Palestinian millennials believe that the conflict will never end. There is an urgent need for a different path, a different construct and a new page in the Middle East. The status quo is not tenable anymore.

In Lebanon, a new Government headed by Prime Minister Hassan Diab was formed last night after three months of political crisis and a wave of demonstrations never seen before in the history of the country. The new Government, dubbed the "salvation Government", is facing a major challenge to get Lebanon out of the current crisis. We are counting on the support of all Lebanon's friends in the international community, because Lebanon's stability is important for the entire region.

The new Prime Minister promised the demonstrators that he will work to fulfil their demands. The new Government has formed a committee to draft its policy statement in order to win the confidence vote in Parliament. The situation in the south of the country is calm, as the United Nations has reiterated, but Israeli violations of resolution 1701 (2006), as well as of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity, continue unabated. The Lebanese defence forces recorded 2,620 violations, including land, sea and air violations, in 2019. Those violations run counter international legality and are fuelling tensions in the south of Lebanon. Air violations in particular terrorize the Lebanese population on daily basis.

The situation in the Middle East requires the Council and the international community to unite around the idea that, as my German colleague said yesterday, international law is not an *à la carte* menu. The Council needs to implement its resolutions — whether on Palestine, Lebanon, the Golan Heights or other parts of the region — in order for justice and peace and security to be restored to the Middle East.

The President: The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Bourgel (Israel) (*spoke in French*): We have taken note of the concerns expressed by certain

members regarding the subject matter that my delegation chose to focus its statement on during this debate (see S/PV.8706). In that connection, we recall that the theme of this open debate is “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. It is therefore naturally up to each delegation to freely decide on the subjects it chooses to address, in accordance with its positions and concerns. That is the very essence of the wealth of our exchanges and we cannot imagine that some would seek to impose a single way of thinking on this matter from which it is prohibited to deviate.

As far as my delegation is concerned, we do indeed believe that, at the risk of repeating ourselves, it is essential to recall that Iran’s destabilizing activities constitute a serious threat to peace and security in our region. Iran is spending approximately \$7 billion dollars a year to finance its networks — of course, to the detriment of its own citizens and their

needs — and is exporting its missiles, as well as excessively disseminating its devastating ideology in violation of Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 1559 (2004), 1701 (2006), 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015).

Iran has openly called for the destruction of Israel, a State Member of the United Nations since 1949. It is therefore incumbent upon the Security Council and the international community to firmly condemn Iranian violations and to take all necessary measures to ensure that they are brought to an end at any cost.

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

Before adjourning, I would like to thank the interpreters for their efforts.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.