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**The situation in the Middle East**

**Question of Palestine**

**Security Council  
Seventy-fifth year**

## **Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted in accordance with the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 15 of its resolution [74/11](#). The report, which covers the period from September 2019 to August 2020, contains replies received from the parties concerned to the note verbale sent by the Secretary-General pursuant to the request contained in resolution [74/11](#), as well as the observations of the Secretary-General on the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on international efforts to move the peace process forward, with a view to achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

\* [A/75/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 74/11.
2. On 2 July 2020, pursuant to the request contained in paragraph 15 of resolution 74/11, I addressed the following letter to the President of the Security Council:

“I have the honour to refer to resolution 74/11, which the General Assembly adopted on 3 December 2019, at its seventy-fourth session, under the agenda item ‘Question of Palestine’.

“Paragraph 15 of the resolution requests the Secretary-General, including through his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, to continue his efforts with the parties concerned, and in consultation with the Security Council, including with regard to the reporting required pursuant to resolution 2334 (2016), towards the attainment of a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the promotion of peace in the region and to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session a report on these efforts and on developments on this matter.

“In order to fulfil my reporting responsibilities under this resolution, I should be grateful if you would kindly convey to me the views of the Security Council by 20 July 2020.”

3. As at 15 August 2020, no response to that request had been received.
4. In a note verbale dated 22 May 2020, I sought the positions of States Members of the United Nations, in particular the Governments of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the State of Palestine, regarding any steps taken by them to implement the relevant provisions of the resolution. As at 15 August 2020, replies had been received from Israel, Namibia, the Philippines, Qatar and the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine.
5. The note verbale dated 29 May 2020 from the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations reads as follows:

“For decades, the General Assembly has affirmed its authoritative stance on the question of Palestine by adoption of its annual resolution ‘Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine’, most recently resolution 74/11. The provisions and principles reaffirmed therein reflect the fundamental parameters for achieving a just solution. Overwhelming support for the resolution confirms the long-standing international consensus in this regard.

“At its seventy-fourth session, the Assembly’s debate was again characterized by calls for ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967; realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence; and responsible international action to justly resolve the Palestine question in all aspects, in accordance with international law, the relevant resolutions and the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, which remains unfulfilled since the adoption of resolution 181 (II) (1947) and the decision to partition Mandate Palestine, the consequences of which persist to this day.

“The international community reaffirmed its resolve to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through actualization of the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders based on the pre-1967 borders, based on international law, United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, and a just solution for the Palestine refugee question based on resolution 194 (III).

Moreover, near-unanimous support was reaffirmed for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the imperative to ensure continuity of its vital assistance to over 5.6 million Palestine refugees in the Agency's fields of operation in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, pending achievement of a just solution.

"Palestine is grateful for such principled positions by the global majority. Yet, the passage of time and compounding of the conflict show starkly that statements and resolutions alone cannot end this historic injustice and the grave violations and hardships that the Palestinian people continue to endure, nor will they prevent Israel, the occupying Power, from further advancing its illegal colonial ambitions. Only concrete action to uphold international law, implement those resolutions and hold Israel accountable for its violations can change this dismal equation.

"After 53 years of Israel's occupation and 72 years of the dispossession, displacement and oppression of Palestinians in an ongoing Nakba since 1948, collective, practical efforts are urgently needed to implement resolution 74/11 and all relevant resolutions. Otherwise, the occupying Power will continue flouting the law, violating human rights and solidifying its illegal occupation, eroding the two-State solution and entrenching a one-State reality of apartheid, with grave consequences for the prospects for a peaceful settlement.

"Since the adoption of resolution 74/11, Israeli violations have only escalated, as have provocative declarations by Israeli officials of plans to commit more crimes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, including threats to annex parts or all of the West Bank, beginning with the illegal settlements and the Jordan Valley, in flagrant breach of the Charter prohibition on the acquisition of territory by force. Whereas the international community calls for the complete, immediate cessation and reversal of settlement activities, Israel instead aggressively pursues such illegal actions. This includes plans for the construction of thousands more settlement units, particularly in areas in and around Occupied East Jerusalem and Bethlehem, including in the sensitive so-called 'E-1' area; construction of the Wall; confiscation of large parcels of land and exploitation of natural resources; demolition of hundreds more Palestinian homes and properties; and forced displacement of thousands more Palestinians, further fragmenting the contiguity of the Palestinian territory and destroying the viability of the two-State solution.

"Israel's Prime Minister, right-wing Israeli officials and extremists are escalating their annexation push. Calls for annexation of all or parts of the West Bank have shockingly become commonplace, including as fodder in Israel's election campaigns in 2019–2020. Many politicians openly declare intent to destroy the two-State solution and obstruct the Palestinian right to self-determination. Such actions further confirm Israel's rejection of the peace that the Palestinian leadership remains committed to achieving, alongside the rest of the international community, and undermine efforts by regional and international partners to foster the conditions and political horizon for its achievement.

"These developments are not occurring in a vacuum. Israel's hostile rhetoric and annexation measures reveal how far it has been emboldened by the lack of accountability for its crimes and a permissive political environment, particularly under the current United States administration, which offers unbridled support for Israel and its occupation while acting punitively against the Palestinian people and leadership.

“The Israeli non-governmental organization Peace Now estimates that, since President Donald Trump took office, Israel’s average annual settlement construction rate has risen by 25 per cent. His administration’s support has extended to declaring that it does not consider settlements illegal under international law; unilaterally declaring Jerusalem as Israel’s capital on 6 December 2017 and transferring its embassy to the city; and refusing to acknowledge Israel’s presence in Palestinian territory as an occupation, contravening the law, United Nations resolutions and global consensus on the two-State solution on the 1967 lines.

“Regrettably, these moves were followed, on 28 January 2020, by President Trump’s presentation of a ‘plan’ to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that departs from the internationally endorsed terms of reference and parameters for a just, comprehensive and lasting solution and dismisses the rule of law and the Palestinian people’s inalienable rights. The United States Ambassador to Israel is even now heading a joint United States-Israel ‘Committee’ to ‘map out’ areas of the Occupied West Bank slated for illegal annexation. This plan thus attempts to legitimize Israel’s illegal occupation and colonization of Palestinian land, deeming crimes such as the settlements, the wall and the forced displacement of thousands of Palestinians as mere ‘realities’ that must be accepted; endorses Israel’s illegal annexation of Occupied East Jerusalem; and validates further annexation schemes, effectively dismantling the two-State solution and turning the rules-based order on its head.

“This plan has rightly been rejected by the international community. This was reflected in statements issued by many capitals and in the 11 February 2020 meeting of the Security Council, which was addressed by President Mahmoud Abbas, who reaffirmed Palestine’s commitment to the terms of reference and parameters of a just solution, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. This position, consistent with the provisions and principles enshrined in resolution 74/11, is starkly contrasted by the combative positions and illegal practices of Israel, the occupying Power, which continues violating resolution 74/11 and all relevant resolutions, gravely breaching the Fourth Geneva Convention and disparaging the General Assembly, the Security Council and the entire international community, ridiculing efforts to uphold the law vis-à-vis the conflict.

“Israel clearly perceives the Trump plan as a green light for its annexationist agenda. Settlement plans in and around East Jerusalem previously frozen due to international pressure have been boastfully relaunched, as the Israeli government exploits the circumstances – whether international inaction or distraction due to the grave challenges of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic – to move forward with these illegal schemes. Extremist Israeli settlers have equally been emboldened, demanding full annexation of the West Bank, seizing Palestinian land and escalating attacks against Palestinian civilians.

“Against this backdrop, Israel continues its military operations and raids, wilfully killing and injuring Palestinian civilians; detention and imprisonment of thousands of civilians, including children; restrictions on movement and other fundamental freedoms and rights, including to education, health care, worship, development and water; imposition of a 13-year blockade on Gaza, isolating and collectively punishing the 2 million Palestinians under humanitarian conditions deemed to be dire, if not inhuman and unliveable; incitement and inflammatory rhetoric on Jerusalem and provocations against Muslim and Christian holy sites, particularly targeting Haram al-Sharif and violating the historic status quo.

“Absent tangible steps by the international community to hold Israel accountable, such actions have further hardened the political deadlock, undermined peace prospects and deepened despair among Palestinians, diminishing belief that a just solution can be found and that the international community will live up to its responsibilities to assist them in attaining their inalienable rights, foremost their *erga omnes* right to self-determination.

“Despite this dismal reality, the Palestinian leadership remains committed to the path of peace and international law as the guarantor of justice. This includes a firm commitment to non-violence and the pursuit of peaceful, political, diplomatic, legal and popular means to realize the Palestinian people’s rights and a sustainable solution that would ensure peaceful coexistence and security. The Palestinian commitment to the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders based on international law and all relevant United Nations resolutions has been repeatedly reaffirmed, including at the highest levels by President Abbas and the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

“For over 30 years, Palestine’s position has mirrored the global consensus on the two-State solution. This began with the Palestine National Council’s acceptance of the solution in the 1988 Declaration of Independence, a major compromise agreeing to establish the Palestinian State on only 22 per cent of our historic homeland, for the sake of realizing Palestinian rights and establishing lasting peace. This compromise remains the primary testament of our commitment to peace and, with the Arab Peace Initiative, the boldest contribution to solving the conflict.

“This commitment is reinforced by our abiding pledge to respect the Charter, international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, as confirmed, *inter alia*, in the 28 September 2011 application by the State of Palestine for admission to United Nations membership; in Palestine’s accession to international treaties and conventions; in Palestine’s official communications and interventions at the United Nations; in relevant provisions of declarations by the League of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Group of 77 and China; and in the 2019 chairmanship of the State of Palestine of the Group of 77, which reaffirmed its adherence to multilateralism and the core principles of international development, peace and stability.

“Palestine has consistently striven to uphold United Nations resolutions and urged the international community to fulfil its obligations and demand compliance towards tangibly contributing to de-escalating tensions, protecting civilian life, reversing negative trends on the ground and advancing peace prospects. Despite significant setbacks and Israel’s persistent bad faith, Palestine’s leadership has cooperated with all credible international and regional efforts for nearly three decades, beginning with the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, to the Oslo Process that began in 1993, to every negotiation process thereafter, engaging in good faith and respecting the long-standing parameters of a just solution, as reflected in resolution [74/11](#).

“For the sake of peace, Palestine’s leadership also engaged with the current United States administration from the start, affirming readiness to partake in negotiations, until the December 2017 decision by President Trump on Jerusalem and the subsequent transfer of the United States embassy to the city, in violation of United Nations resolutions. The United States administration’s so-called ‘peace to prosperity’ plan, which contradicts the global consensus and the fundamental legal principles underpinning it, has further hampered efforts

to create conditions conducive to meaningful negotiations and undermined the United States role as a credible, impartial peace broker.

“The State of Palestine stresses that peace cannot be achieved without restoring the primacy of international law to efforts to resolve the conflict, including all final status issues – Jerusalem, Palestine refugees, settlements, borders, security, prisoners and water. Unlawful imposition of facts on the ground will never create peace. As affirmed in the Secretary-General’s agenda, peaceful resolution of conflicts requires a human rights, justice and development perspective, not just a security perspective, and the root causes of the conflict must be fully, properly addressed.

“Palestine does not seek anything beyond what we are entitled to as a people, as per international law, as legislated in United Nations resolutions and affirmed in the July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. We will accept nothing less.

“It is for this reason that we, along with the vast majority of the international community, rejected the United States plan as unacceptable as a basis for peace and only prolonging the conflict and injustice. This message was conveyed by President Abbas in his address to the Security Council and echoed by nearly all Council members, who reaffirmed the global consensus on the established terms of reference and parameters for a just solution. President Abbas has reiterated the call for a multilateral process in the form of an international peace conference to achieve a just solution, and we have continually prioritized peace efforts in all engagements with regional and international partners, bilaterally and multilaterally.

“In this regard, we have consistently engaged with the Security Council members and Quartet members – the Russian Federation, the European Union, the United States and the United Nations – individually and collectively, appealing for respect of obligations and exertion of serious efforts, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and with the vital support of OIC, NAM and all peace-loving nations, with the latest communications with the Quartet members conveyed in May 2020, yet to no avail. We have also fully adhered to the Arab Peace Initiative and continue to call for its reciprocation and implementation.

“Palestine also continues efforts to confront the occupation’s humanitarian, socioeconomic and security consequences to prevent further destabilization and preserve peace prospects. We seek to serve the needs of our people, including in health care and education, alleviate hardships, ensure calm and security, promote reconciliation and restore hope that the occupation will end, that rights and dignity will be realized and that a better, peaceful future is within reach. Such hope is critical for shoring up public support for peace efforts and for countering the extremism plaguing the region, especially among youth.

“These efforts are being undertaken in cooperation with international partners and with their solidarity and generous support to Palestine, its national institutions and civil society, and with United Nations agencies that are providing vital assistance to the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees. UNRWA, along with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and other humanitarian organizations,

along with the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights, has been instrumental in assisting the Palestinian people in line with international humanitarian law and the Palestinian National Development Plan and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians also remains highly relevant in this regard.

“At this time, such efforts have regrettably been complicated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the additional vulnerability and needs it has imposed and by the occupation’s illegal practices undermining these efforts. Moreover, while Palestine supports the Secretary-General’s responsible call for a global ceasefire, Israel has regrettably ignored it, exploiting this time of pandemic to instead advance its illegal plans to annex more Palestinian land.

“Palestine also continues to underscore the obligation to ensure the protection of civilians, an obligation being grossly and systematically violated by Israel. The Palestinian civilian population under its occupation and blockade is in need of protection, as per the Fourth Geneva Convention and international human rights law and resolutions concerning the safety and well-being of civilians in all situations of armed conflict. Protection measures contribute to peace efforts; they do not detract from them.

“Yet, beyond alleviating the human suffering and insecurity caused by this situation, action must be taken to bring an end to this travesty of justice. Despite all good-faith intentions, the international community is failing to fulfil its legal, political and moral obligations in the face of Israel’s total disrespect of the law. It is high time to mobilize the political will to implement the United Nations resolutions central to achievement of a peace settlement and to enact measures to compel Israel’s compliance.

“While Israel’s disrespect for the law and contempt for the Security Council’s authority are central to this failure, so is the paralysis caused by use of the veto by one permanent member. The prospect of a peaceful future for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples will remain elusive as long as the occupying Power is shielded from accountability, even as it breaches the law and destroys the two-State solution.

“It is time for accountability measures, including by the Security Council and the General Assembly, and concrete action by States to uphold third-party obligations, in line with article 1 common to the Geneva Conventions, Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#) and all other relevant provisions of international law and United Nations resolutions. This is also vital for restoring the credibility of the United Nations and the authority of the international rules-based order, which is under threat.

“The 12 February publication of a database of businesses engaged in Israeli settlements by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as mandated by the Human Rights Council, was a recent step in the right direction. It is also hoped that accountability efforts being pursued by the State of Palestine at the International Criminal Court will soon lead to an official investigation towards bringing perpetrators to justice, deterring further war crimes and paving the path for a just solution.

“It must be clearly signalled to Israel that its continued defiance will not be tolerated and that it must halt all violations or bear the consequences. This is critical for fostering an environment conducive to the credible dialogue and efforts needed to bring an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967; to



help the Palestinian people finally realize freedom and the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and to establish lasting peace, security and coexistence between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples on the basis of the two-State solution and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution [74/11](#).”

6. The note verbale dated 29 July 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations reads as follows:

“Even before Israel declared its independence, its people sought to live in peace beside their Arab neighbours. This vision of a shared future was reflected in the Jewish people’s embracement of multiple endeavours, such as the Balfour Declaration (1917), the Royal Commission of Inquiry to Palestine (1936) and the Palestine Plan of Partition (1947). Since declaring independence, Israel has maintained a pragmatic and constructive posture, paving the way for the signing of historical peace agreements with Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

“Unfortunately, the Israeli approach, which led to the normalization of relations with two neighbours, has been met with repeated refusal by the Palestinians, accompanied by surges of violence and terrorism against Israeli civilians, many times with the implicit support of the Palestinian leadership. This aforementioned Palestinian support for violence is well documented and includes the financing of terrorist activities, the use of violent rhetoric by leaders and the indoctrination to hatred in its education system.

“Since the adoption of resolution [74/11](#) in December last year, two major events have transpired, affecting the global and regional landscape – the outbreak of COVID-19 and the unveiling of President Trump’s peace initiative. These events, though distinct in nature and impact, have perfectly exemplified the tragic situation highlighted in the above paragraph, in which Israel faces outright Palestinian ‘rejectionism’.

“Following the outbreak of COVID-19, Israel tightened and strengthened its humanitarian and medical cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and relevant United Nations agencies in order to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak. This unique cooperation was welcomed by the international community, the Security Council and relevant United Nations officials. However, the Palestinian Authority has chosen not only to minimize this achievement, but also to politicize the issue in a bid to delegitimize and demonize Israel.

“President Trump’s peace initiative, presented on 28 January 2020, presented another historic opportunity to revitalize Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The plan was repeatedly referred to, by both American and allied countries, as a valuable starting point and guideline for peace talks, and was embraced as such by Israel. Unsurprisingly, the Palestinian Authority chose to reject it and has since embarked on an international campaign to counter any deliberations or follow-ups regarding the initiative. This latest rejection by the Palestinian Authority to begin negotiations highlights its unwillingness to break the deadlock on the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

“The ongoing attempts by the Palestinian Authority to internationalize the conflict by calling on international institutions for recognition and promoting one-sided resolutions, such as resolution [74/11](#), is yet another attempt to avoid direct negotiations while maintaining legitimacy. Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), which Israel rejects, is another example. The resolution is unreservedly hostile towards Israel and will only make peace harder to achieve.



“The Palestinian Authority’s refusal to negotiate is accompanied by its refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state – based, *inter alia*, on its continued denial of any historical connection between the Jewish people and its land, which remains one of the main obstacles to peace.

“Israel continues to extend its hand in peace and believes that the conflict will be resolved only through direct bilateral negotiations without preconditions. Attempts to impose solutions or to dictate parameters and timetables will only drive peace farther away.

“If the international community wishes to support a solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, it must reject the Palestinian Authority’s attempts to avoid negotiations by internationalizing the conflict and encourage the Authority to come to the negotiating table. It must also echo Israel’s right to exist in peace as the nation State of the Jewish people and oppose any attempt to undermine Israel’s legitimacy.”

## II. Developments

7. International efforts to promote the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine continued during the reporting period. The envoys of the Middle East Quartet (the Russian Federation, the United States of America, the European Union and the United Nations) consulted one another informally throughout the year and, on 26 March and 22 May, held conference calls to discuss the prospect of Israeli-Palestinian peace. The United Nations reaffirmed its commitment to achieving a negotiated two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements, and reiterated its call to all stakeholders to refrain from any unilateral action that harms the prospects of meaningful negotiations and peace. Discussions are ongoing, notwithstanding substantial differences among Quartet members regarding the way forward.

8. On 28 January, the United States released its proposal entitled “Peace to prosperity: a vision to improve the lives of the Palestinian and Israeli people”. Senior Israeli officials welcomed the proposal, saying that they would be willing to use it as the basis for direct negotiations. The Palestinian Government has rejected the proposal. The League of Arab States and OIC also released statements rejecting the proposal, saying that it did not meet the minimum rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people. The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy said that the proposal departed from “internationally agreed parameters”. Some Member States expressed their hope that the release of the vision would be an opportunity to bring the parties back to the negotiating table, in the interest of advancing a two-State solution.

9. Throughout the reporting period, Israeli officials continued to make statements regarding the potential annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank. On 10 September 2019, the Prime Minister of Israel declared his intention, if re-elected, to “apply Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea” as a first step towards applying Israeli sovereignty over “settlements in Judea and Samaria, as well as additional areas with significance for [the country’s] security, heritage and future”. Following the release by the United States of its vision, senior Israeli officials vowed to unilaterally annex large portions of the West Bank, including all Israeli settlements and the Jordan Valley. On 17 May 2020, a new emergency national unity Government was sworn into office in Israel following a year of political uncertainty that included three general elections. The new coalition Government was formed on the basis of an agreement signed on 20 April, which stipulates that, from 1 July, and following consultation with the Alternate Prime Minister, the Prime

Minister of Israel can present “the agreement to be reached with the United States on the application of sovereignty” over parts of the occupied West Bank for approval in the Government or Knesset. The agreement also calls for the promotion of peace agreements with the country’s neighbours and regional cooperation. On 13 August, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States issued a joint statement announcing “the full normalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates” and stating that “Israel will suspend declaring sovereignty over areas outlined in the [United States] President’s vision for peace”.

10. On 19 May, in response to the stated intentions of the Government of Israel to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Authority announced that it considered itself absolved “of all the agreements and understandings with the American and Israeli Governments and of all the obligations based on these understandings and agreements, including the security ones” and called upon Israel to assume its obligations as the occupying Power. In the statement, the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, also reaffirmed the Palestinian “commitment to a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on the two-State solution ... on the condition that negotiations will be held to achieve that under international auspices (the Quartet plus) and through an international peace conference based on international legitimacy”. He reaffirmed the Palestinian leadership’s willingness to “achieve a just and comprehensive peace”, on basis of the Arab Peace Initiative and United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#). On 20 May, the Palestinian Prime Minister instructed Cabinet members to immediately commence implementation of the Palestinian leadership’s announcement, while making assurances that the Palestinian Authority would not allow security to deteriorate. On the same day, Palestinian officials formally notified Israeli counterparts of the termination of security coordination. On 3 June, the Palestinian Authority announced that it would refuse to receive the clearance revenues that Israel collects on its behalf under the Protocol on Economic Relations between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, as part of the decision to disengage from bilateral agreements. The Palestinian leadership has repeatedly stated its willingness to resume negotiations on the basis of international resolutions, calling for the convening of an international peace conference.

11. In the period from 27 February to 17 March, the Russian Federation hosted a series of bilateral discussions with representatives of various Palestinian factions. On 2 July, leaders from Fatah and Hamas held a rare joint video press conference in an effort to set aside their differences and commit themselves to a unified Palestinian front against annexation. Palestinian factions welcomed the move, hoping that it would pave the way to advancing reconciliation. However, intra-Palestinian divisions remain entrenched.

12. Against the backdrop of continued Israeli closures and the absence of a political horizon, the security situation in Gaza remained volatile. However, there was a significant decline in violence and the number of casualties compared with the two preceding years, due largely to the end of the weekly protests and clashes along the perimeter fence in late December and the overall maintenance of a fragile calm between Israel and Hamas as a result of mediation efforts led by the United Nations and Egypt. Overall, 49 Palestinians, including 13 children and 3 women, were killed by Israeli security forces as a result of air strikes and during demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other incidents, and 2,304 Palestinians were injured, including some 434 by live ammunition. A total of 37 Israeli civilians were injured in attacks, clashes and other incidents. In addition, one Israeli woman died on 17 September as a result of wounds that she sustained when a rocket hit her house in the town of Ashqelon on 12 November 2018.

13. On 1 November 2019, 10 rockets were launched from Gaza towards Israel, 1 of which hit a house in Sderot, causing damage but no injuries. In response, the Israel Defense Forces targeted what they identified as various Hamas military sites across Gaza. One Palestinian militant was killed and two others were injured.

14. Over a 48-hour period of escalation, from 12 to 14 November, following the targeted killing by Israel of a commander of Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, Palestinian Islamic Jihad launched more than 500 rockets towards Israel. According to the Israel Defense Forces, the interception rate by the Iron Dome system was 90 per cent, while some rockets landed in Israeli towns and cities, causing property damage. Shelters across large parts of the country were activated, schools and businesses remained closed for at least a day, and 78 Israelis were treated for injuries or shock. In response, the Israel Defense Forces conducted a number of strikes against what they identified as Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militant targets in Gaza, killing 33 Palestinians, including 3 women and 8 children, and injuring 109 others, including 51 children and 11 women. Approximately 25 of those killed were identified by the Israel Defense Forces as Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants. Eight members of a family, including five children, were killed in a single Israeli strike in Dayr al-Balah. Another family member succumbed to his wounds a few days later. In addition, one Palestinian was reportedly killed by a rocket launched by Palestinian Islamic Jihad that had fallen short inside Gaza. Following an intense mediation effort, calm in Gaza was restored.

15. The situation escalated briefly again on 26 November, when two rockets were fired by Palestinian militants towards Israel. According to the Israel Defense Forces, one rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome system and the other landed in an open area in southern Israel. In response, the Israel Defense Forces struck a number of what they identified as militant targets in Gaza. No injuries were reported.

16. On 23 February 2020, two Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants attempted to place an explosive device along the fence. One was killed by the Israel Defense Forces, who retrieved his body using a bulldozer inside Gaza and withheld it in an incident that caused outrage and a serious escalation. In the following two days, Palestinian Islamic Jihad launched over 100 rockets and mortar shells towards Israel, including one that landed in a playground. Israel responded by firing at what it identified as Palestinian Islamic Jihad targets in the Gaza Strip. Overall, 18 Palestinians and 16 Israelis were injured in the exchanges before mediation efforts succeeded in restoring calm on 24 February.

17. On 27 March and 6 May, Palestinian militants launched one and two rockets, respectively, which landed in open areas of Israel. In response, the Israel Defense Forces fired nine tank shells, reportedly targeting an alleged military observation post in Gaza. Israeli drones furthermore fired three missiles reportedly targeting Hamas military sites in Gaza. No injuries were reported.

18. Over several days in mid-August, Palestinian militants launched incendiary balloons and rockets from Gaza, which caused fires and material damage in southern Israel. In response, the Israel Defense Forces targeted what they identified as Hamas military targets in the Gaza Strip. No injuries were reported. However, damages were reported to UNRWA schools in Bayt Hanun and near Gaza City. In response to the incendiary balloons, Israel also shut the Gaza fishing zone and closed down the Kerem Shalom crossing, including for fuel, prompting the halt of the Gaza power station and bringing electricity supply down to three to four hours per day.

19. During the reporting period, in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 22 Palestinians were shot and killed, including 1 woman, and 3,802 Palestinians were injured, including 801 children, by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other incidents. In addition, a woman

was killed during a search-and-arrest operation in Janin city in still unclear circumstances. Some 60 Israelis, including 16 members of the Israeli security forces, were also injured, according to Israeli sources.

20. In East Jerusalem, the situation remained relatively tense, with violent incidents, protests, operations by Israeli security forces, arrests by Israeli police of Palestinian officials and clashes between them and Palestinian residents, in particular in the Isawiyah neighbourhood and in the Old City. On 6 February, a Palestinian shot and wounded an Israeli soldier at the Lion's Gate in the Old City, and on 22 February, another Palestinian reportedly carried out a stabbing attack in the same place. Both were killed by Israeli security forces. On 30 May, Israeli security forces shot and killed an unarmed autistic 31-year-old Palestinian man in the Old City. Senior Israeli officials expressed regret over the incident, and an internal investigation into the killing was opened. During the reporting period, the Palestinian Authority Minister of Jerusalem Affairs and the Palestinian Authority Governor of Jerusalem were detained several times and interrogated over allegations of violating an Israeli law prohibiting Palestinian Authority activities in Jerusalem without coordination.

21. On 12 May, the Israeli authorities approved the seizure of municipal planning authority at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs from the Palestinian Municipality in Hebron. The Israeli authorities justified the decision as necessary in order to make the site accessible to those with disabilities, while stating that the project "will not change prayer arrangements or the status quo". The Palestinian leadership, the Hebron Municipality, the Waqf and the Islamic authorities, among others, have condemned this move, arguing that it violates the 1997 Protocol concerning the Redeployment in Hebron.

22. Throughout the reporting period, the Israel Defense Forces continued to conduct search and arrest operations and to detain Palestinians, including children. The Palestinian Authority continued its arrests of suspected Hamas affiliates in the West Bank, and the de facto authorities in Gaza summoned and, in some cases, detained Fatah affiliates in Gaza. At the end of June 2020, at least 357 Palestinians, including 2 children and 1 woman, were being held by Israeli authorities under administrative detention. OHCHR has raised serious concerns over the legality of the detentions, fair trial standards and the risk of ill-treatment in and outside detention.

23. In a statement released on 20 December 2019, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court announced that the Court's preliminary examination into the Situation in Palestine "has concluded with the determination that all the statutory criteria under the Rome Statute for the opening of an investigation have been met". She expressed her view that, among other things, "war crimes have been or are being committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip". She also stated her position that the Court's jurisdiction applies to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. She nonetheless sought a ruling from the Pre-Trial Chamber on the territorial scope of the Court's jurisdiction in the situation in hand. The Court adjourned in July without a decision on this point.

24. During the reporting period, Israeli authorities advanced or approved some 8,000 housing units in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, marking a decrease compared with some 12,000 units during the previous reporting period. Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures also continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. As at 15 August, citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which remain almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 593 structures, resulting in the displacement of 687 people, including 347 children and 177 women, and leaving about 18,860 others affected. A further 73 structures were demolished by their owners, leaving 238 people displaced, including 122 children and 55 women.

Demolitions and seizures continued despite the COVID-19 outbreak and some indications from Israeli authorities of a temporary freeze on the demolition of inhabited buildings in the light of the pandemic. During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, 42 structures were demolished, which is a significant increase compared with previous years (13 in 2019; one in 2018; none in 2017). Israeli authorities also demolished structures and homes built by settlers in unauthorized settlement outposts.

25. On 12 November 2019, the Court of Justice of the European Union issued a ruling determining that “foodstuffs originating in the territories occupied by the State of Israel must bear the indication of their territory of origin, accompanied, where those foodstuffs come from an Israeli settlement within that territory, by the indication of that provenance”, in order for the indication of origin to be correct and not misleading for the consumer. On 12 February 2020, OHCHR issued a report on the database of all businesses involved in activities related to settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ([A/HRC/43/71](#)), as requested by the Human Rights Council in its resolution [31/36](#), adopted on 24 March 2016. As noted in paragraph 19 of the report, the work done by OHCHR to produce the database “does not purport to constitute a judicial or quasi-judicial process of any kind or to provide any legal characterization of the listed activities or business enterprises’ involvement in them”. Proceedings are ongoing in the Federal Court of Canada related to the labelling of products originating in Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.

26. During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 80 violent incidents involving Israeli settlers, resulting in 139 Palestinians injured, including 14 women, and property damage. In the same period, according to Israeli sources, 44 Israelis, including 10 women, were injured as a result of stone throwing, the use of live ammunition and stabbing attacks. A high number of incidents were also recorded in relation to the olive and wheat harvesting season, including the physical assault and harassment of Palestinian farmers by Israeli settlers, as well as damage to thousands of olive trees and saplings and dozens of dunams of agricultural land.

27. In Gaza, the United Nations and its partners continued to implement the package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions endorsed by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in September 2018. With these efforts, the energy supply to households in Gaza has significantly increased, and some improvements were felt in the economy. Qatar funded the supply of fuel for the Gaza power plant, and the daily availability of electricity more than doubled during the reporting period, leading in turn to an increased supply of desalinated water and a significant reduction in the amounts of untreated wastewater pumped into the sea.

28. During the reporting period, Palestinians faced immense socioeconomic impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, as did Israelis. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have lost their jobs, small and medium-sized enterprises are unable to operate, and violence against women and children has increased. Several expert analyses, including from the World Bank, estimate that the Palestinian economy will contract by approximately 10 per cent in 2020, depending on the severity of the pandemic and the length of the necessary shutdowns.

29. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the already dire humanitarian, economic and political situation in Gaza. Recent job losses come on top of an already high unemployment rate in Gaza of 45 per cent at the end of 2019. The fragile and underfunded health-care system in Gaza is particularly worrying in the context of the spread of COVID-19 in the region. Furthermore, Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, which makes it a particularly high-risk case for the COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations is working to increase its support for the health-care system in Gaza, including in the context of the COVID-19 response.

### III. Observations

30. During the reporting period, I delivered four reports to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) (S/PV.8625, S/2019/938, S/2020/263 and S/2020/555), in which I expressed my concern regarding the continued lack of implementation of the provisions of the resolution. In my reports, I took note of international efforts and reiterated the commitment of the United Nations to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and end the occupation, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements, and to realizing the vision of two States – Israel and Palestine – living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

31. I welcome the suspension of the implementation of the plans of Israel to annex parts of the occupied West Bank in the context of the announcement by Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States on 13 August regarding the normalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. This agreement will hopefully create an opportunity for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations that will end the occupation and realize a two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements. I have consistently called upon Israel to abandon its annexation plans. Annexation would constitute a most serious violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. It would be devastating to the two-State solution and threaten efforts to advance regional peace and broader efforts to maintain international peace and security. Concern and opposition to annexation are widespread and shared throughout the region and the international community.

32. The implementation of the announcement of 19 May by the Palestinian leadership could alter local dynamics and trigger instability across the Occupied Palestinian Territory and beyond. Particularly worrying is the decision to stop accepting clearance revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Combined with the fiscal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of clearance revenues has caused an overall reduction in Palestinian Authority revenues of approximately 80 per cent. Given the economic uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the reduced donor support, this decision contributes only to the hardship of the Palestinian people and threatens the viability of Palestinian institutions. The parties must quickly find a way out of the present fiscal emergency. Moreover, it is critical that humanitarian and other assistance not be delayed or stopped as a result of such policies. In the longer term, however, modernizing the outdated framework governing the Israeli and Palestinian economic and administrative relationships would be warranted.

33. Discussions on holding Palestinian general elections should continue. If held, these would be the first since 2006, renewing the legitimacy of national institutions. The international community should support this process, with a view to strengthening national unity rather than division. It is critical that the important Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts also continue. The United Nations stands firm in its support of the efforts by Egypt in this regard, and I call upon all Palestinian factions to make serious efforts to ensure the reunification of Gaza and the occupied West Bank under a single, democratic, national Government. Gaza is and must remain an integral part of a future Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution.

34. Reports of violent incidents throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remain of concern. I unequivocally condemn all attacks on Palestinian and Israeli civilians and call upon all sides to refrain from violence and to clearly and

unequivocally condemn attacks when they occur. All perpetrators must be held accountable for their crimes.

35. The dispute over the construction work planned by the Israeli authorities at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron risks fuelling tensions in a highly sensitive part of the occupied West Bank. Any changes to the delicate balance at holy sites not agreed to by all stakeholders threaten stability and should not be taken unilaterally. I urge both parties to resolve this issue through dialogue and in a coordinated and respectful manner.

36. I reiterate the call for the status quo at the holy sites to be upheld in line with the special and historical role of Jordan as custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

37. As stated in my reports to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), I continue to urge leaders on all sides to stop incitement and to condemn, consistently and unequivocally, acts of terror and violence in all their forms.

38. The general state of human rights and freedoms in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remains of concern. I reiterate my earlier calls to end the practice of administrative detention and either to charge all detainees or to release them immediately. All children should be treated with due consideration for their age, and they should be detained only in situations justified under applicable rules of international humanitarian law and international or applicable human rights law.

39. I remain deeply troubled by the continued settlement activities in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I reiterate that Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation under international law. The establishment and expansion of settlements fuel resentment, hopelessness and disillusionment among Palestinians, are key drivers of human rights violations and significantly heighten Israeli-Palestinian tensions. They entrench the military occupation of Israel and undermine the prospect of achieving a viable two-State solution by systematically eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous, independent and sovereign Palestinian State. I urge the Government of Israel to stop the advancement of all settlement plans immediately.

40. Continued settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is of deep concern. I urge Israel, as the occupying Power, to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population and to investigate and hold the perpetrators of attacks accountable.

41. Despite the efforts of the United Nations and its partners to implement urgent humanitarian and economic interventions in Gaza, the situation remains dire, and the health system in Gaza remains on the brink of collapse. Despite some positive steps by Israel in the reporting period, it is not possible to genuinely and sustainably improve the socioeconomic situation without significantly easing restrictions on the movement and access of goods and people to and from Gaza. It is critical for the Palestinian Authority to increase the support to the health system in Gaza, in particular in relation to COVID-19 response. The ultimate goal remains the lifting of all restrictions in line with Security Council resolution [1860 \(2009\)](#) and the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic, national Government. At the same time, it is crucial to ensure sustained calm in order to gradually introduce longer-term projects that will support the development of Gaza. I reiterate my call upon Hamas to provide full information regarding the Israeli nationals who are being held in Gaza. I also remain deeply concerned at the continued Israeli practice of holding the bodies of killed Palestinians and call upon Israel to



return withheld bodies to their families, in line with international humanitarian law and human rights law.

42. The increased violence in Gaza and southern Israel precipitated by the launching of incendiary balloons by Palestinian militants is of concern. The indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian population centres is prohibited by international humanitarian law and must cease immediately. Israeli security forces have the responsibility to exercise maximum restraint and to use intentional lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

43. The impact on women of the ongoing humanitarian and economic crisis in Gaza is of particular concern. The participation of women in the labour force in Gaza is among the lowest in the world, and some 70 per cent of women are unemployed. These poor employment prospects result in female-headed households facing greater poverty and food insecurity. In turn, poverty and a lack of economic opportunities are key factors driving violence against women in Gaza, while the humanitarian crisis has resulted in a large number of health issues for women. The United Nations continues to assist Palestinian women and girls across a broad range of areas, but much more needs to be done to address their needs and vulnerabilities.

44. The United Nations response to COVID-19 in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has been swift and effective and has directly supported the Palestinian Government's own efforts. The humanitarian country team's inter-agency response plan and the United Nations country team's development system response plan, as well as the Palestinian Government's own response plans, urgently need donor support. Israeli-Palestinian cooperation to respond and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory during the first months of the pandemic is commendable. It is critical that humanitarian and other assistance and cooperation continue to address the current surge of infections.

45. The financial situation of UNRWA remained a serious concern during the reporting period, with the lowest ever cash flow levels and a significant outstanding funding shortfall. I applaud the leadership that Jordan and Sweden have shown in mobilizing support for the Agency. I urge Member States to continue their support for UNRWA, which is not only a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees, but is also critical for regional stability.

46. I would like to express my deep appreciation to my Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, for his outstanding service in what remains a challenging context. I am also grateful to the outgoing Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Pierre Krähenbühl, and his successor, Philippe Lazzarini, and for the remarkable work on behalf of Palestinian refugees carried out by the staff of the Agency. I pay tribute, too, to all United Nations staff who work under difficult circumstances in the service of the Organization.

47. I will continue to ensure that the United Nations works towards a resolution of the conflict that would end the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and establish an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace, security and mutual recognition, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, within the framework of a comprehensive regional settlement, consistent with Security Council resolutions [242 \(1967\)](#), [338 \(1973\)](#), [425 \(1978\)](#), [1397 \(2002\)](#), [1515 \(2003\)](#), [1850 \(2008\)](#), [1860 \(2009\)](#) and [2334 \(2016\)](#) and in accordance with the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and international law.