

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 29 March 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefing provided by Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, Estonia, France, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam in connection with the video-teleconference on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” convened on Thursday, 25 March 2021.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, this briefing and these statements will be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Linda **Thomas-Greenfield**
President of the Security Council



Annex I

Briefing by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I will devote this briefing to presenting his seventeenth report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), covering the period from 11 December to 23 March.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Israel to “immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem,” and to “fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard”. Settlement activities nevertheless continued during the reporting period.

On 17 and 18 January, Israeli authorities advanced plans for some 800 housing units and tendered some 1,900 units in Area C settlements. An additional 210 units were tendered in East Jerusalem. Some 40 per cent of those units are in settlements deep inside the occupied West Bank. More than 200 units are in outposts, illegal also under Israeli law, that Israeli authorities are regularizing retroactively.

On 19 January, the Jerusalem District Court denied an injunction to freeze the tendering process for some 1,200 units in Givat Hamatos. The winning bids were announced on 20 January. The establishment of that new settlement will further consolidate a ring of settlements along the southern perimeter of Jerusalem that would significantly damage prospects for a future, contiguous Palestinian State.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, 325 structures were demolished or seized by Israeli authorities or demolished by their owners to avoid heavy Israeli demolition fees. These actions resulted in the displacement of 465 people, including 253 children and 105 women.

On five occasions in February, most recently on 22 February, the Israeli security forces demolished or confiscated 80 structures in the Palestinian Bedouin community of Humsa al-Bqai’a in an Israeli-declared firing zone in the Jordan Valley. The actions repeatedly displaced some 63 people, including 36 children. The Israeli authorities informed the community that it must relocate to a site near the village of Ein Shibli.

On 15 February and 2 March, the Jerusalem District Court rejected appeals against the evictions of 13 Palestinian households, some 52 people, in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. The appeals process to the Supreme Court is ongoing. Israeli courts also upheld eviction orders against six Palestinian families, some 80 individuals, living in the Silwan neighbourhood.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls for “immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction”. Unfortunately, the violence continued daily.

Overall, four Palestinians, including two children, were killed by the Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, security operations, attacks against Israeli security personnel and other incidents. A total of 480 Palestinians, including seven women and 66 children, were injured, including 55 by live ammunition. One Israeli woman was killed and 12 members of the Israeli security forces injured. In addition, 18 Israeli civilians, including three women and five children, were injured by Palestinians in clashes, rock- and Molotov-cocktail throwing, attacks and other incidents.

In Gaza, Palestinian militants launched six rockets and one incendiary balloon from Gaza into Israel. In response, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) fired 11 missiles

into Gaza, striking what it said were Hamas positions, as well as open areas. Seven Palestinian civilians were injured in those incidents, including one child.

In the occupied West Bank on 20 December, a 52-year-old Israeli woman was killed by blows from a stone near the settlement of Tal Menashe. On 24 December, Israeli forces arrested a Palestinian man near Jenin, who they said confessed to the killing.

On 21 December, a 17-year-old Palestinian opened fire at an Israeli police post in the Old City of Jerusalem and was subsequently shot and killed by the Israeli security forces.

On 1 January, further south in the occupied West Bank, a Palestinian man was paralysed after being shot by Israeli forces during a dispute over the seizure of an electricity generator. An initial IDF internal probe found that the shooting was accidental, an account disputed by Palestinian eyewitnesses. The IDF opened a further inquiry into the incident.

On 5 January, a Palestinian man was shot and killed by the Israeli security forces at the Gush Etzion junction in the occupied West Bank after reportedly attempting to throw a knife at Israeli security forces personnel.

On 26 January, a 17-year-old Palestinian boy tried to stab a female Israeli soldier near the settlement of Ariel and was subsequently shot and killed by the Israeli security forces. Israel has withheld the body.

On 31 January, a 36-year-old Palestinian man was shot and killed by the Israeli security forces as he ran, reportedly carrying an improvised weapon, towards officers stationed at the Gush Etzion junction.

On 19 March, the Israeli security forces killed a Palestinian man during a demonstration in Beit Dajan, near Nablus. The man was reportedly shot in the head with three bullets while he was using a slingshot to throw stones at the Israeli security forces.

Settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank continued. There have been 116 attacks by Israeli settlers and others against Palestinians, resulting in two Palestinians killed, 37 injuries and damage to Palestinian-owned properties. Palestinians perpetrated some 170 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians, resulting in 18 injuries and damage to property, according to Israeli sources.

On 3 January, an Israeli woman was critically injured by a rock thrown at her vehicle while she was driving near Deir Nidham, close to Qalqilya.

On 5 February, a Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israeli settlers at the Sadeh Ephraim farm outpost in the northern West Bank after reportedly attempting to break into a house. The Israeli security forces characterized the incident as a terrorist attack while stating that the man was unarmed and that no weapons were found in his possession.

On 23 February, the Israeli authorities filed an indictment against a 17-year-old Israeli boy accused of throwing stun grenades into Palestinian homes in the West Bank village of Sarta, causing property damage.

On 13 March, Israeli settlers attacked a Palestinian family, including seven children aged 1 to 14, in Shi'b al-Buttum, south of Hebron. The father was hospitalized with serious injuries. Israeli police have opened an investigation.

On 5 February, the International Criminal Court (ICC) Pre-Trial Chamber decided that the Court's jurisdiction extended to the occupied Palestinian territory. On 3 March, the ICC Prosecutor confirmed in a statement that her Office had initiated

an investigation with respect to the situation in Palestine covering crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court alleged to have been committed since 13 June 2014.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls for the parties to refrain from acts of provocation, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric. Some Palestinian and Israeli officials continued to use such rhetoric during the reporting period.

A senior Fatah official said that Israel was carrying out a “second Holocaust” against Palestinians. A Palestinian Authority (PA) official used anti-Semitic language to describe Jews, while another PA official accused Israel of “striving to destroy the Al Aqsa mosque”. A senior Hamas official called for “annihilating the monstrous State [of Israel],” saying that “the Zionist enemy” seeks to “corrupt all of humanity.”

A member of the Knesset praised the establishment of outposts, saying that the settlers who live in them are “preventing with their own bodies any possibility of the future establishment of a Palestinian terror State in the heart of the State of Israel”.

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterated calls by the Middle East Quartet for

“affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse the negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution”.

Some positive steps were recorded during the period.

On 15 January, Palestinian President Abbas issued a decree calling for legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections.

On 9 February, Palestinian factions concluded talks in Cairo resolving several long-standing differences. The areas of agreement include recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; the establishment of an electoral court with appointments made by consensus; and the release of all detainees held on the basis of their political affiliation or opinion. On 20 February and 1 March, President Abbas issued decrees to enact the agreements. Initial reports suggest that a number of detainees have been released. The factions met again in Cairo on 15 March. Despite requests to ease restrictions on prospective candidates, the faction leaders reaffirmed current modalities for conducting the elections.

On 17 February, the Palestinian Central Elections Commission concluded voter registration and announced the registration of more than 91 per cent of eligible voters. The candidate nomination period was opened by the Commission on 20 March and will conclude on 31 March.

Meanwhile, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic remains a persistent health threat that has had major socioeconomic consequences across the West Bank and Gaza. In February and March, new COVID-19 cases increased significantly in the West Bank. Numbers in Gaza remain low but have increased again after a significant decline.

The Palestinian vaccination campaign has begun, although the availability of vaccines remains a key concern. The global COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility Advance Market Commitment delivered its first batch of some 60,000 vaccines to the West Bank and Gaza on 17 March. Approximately 70,000 additional vaccines were reportedly delivered to Palestinians, including in Gaza, by donations from the Russian Federation and the United Arab Emirates. Israel, where the vaccination campaign is progressing at a quick pace, indicated that the vaccination of the Palestinian population was the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority. Nevertheless, Israel has facilitated deliveries across the occupied Palestinian territories and extended its vaccination programme to some Palestinian

populations, including in East Jerusalem. That includes Israel's provision of some 5,000 vaccines to the Palestinian Authority as well as the vaccination of more than 100,000 Palestinians holding permits to enter Israel, including Palestinian health workers in Israel. In the last days of the reporting period, there were reports of progress in talks about increased vaccine provision, including by Israel.

The COVID-19 pandemic, alongside the impact of the occupation and the protracted humanitarian crisis, has worsened the socioeconomic conditions of women across the occupied Palestinian territories. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs, gender-based violence has soared 300 per cent since the pandemic began; women's labour-force participation rate has shrunk to 16 per cent; and only 14 per cent of senior positions in the public sector are held by women.

On 23 February, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee met virtually. The parties renewed their commitment to enhancing cooperation, and the donor community called on them to take specific steps to improve their economic relations, facilitate critical infrastructure and assistance projects and refrain from unilateral actions that could undermine the resumption of negotiations. The donor community also pledged increased assistance to the Palestinians, including in support of the Government's COVID-19 vaccination effort.

Humanitarian concerns in Gaza persisted. Owing to a lack of funding, there continued to be a serious shortage of medical supplies in Gaza's health system, including essential drugs.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) narrowly avoided a financial collapse at the end of 2020, at a time of acute need in the Palestine refugee community. This year UNRWA faces a financial shortfall of more than \$200 million for its core programme budget. By April, the Agency will face a serious cash flow crisis. After years of austerity measures and investment in efficiency, the Agency has reached its limits. It must receive additional funds to sustain all essential services and support national plans to contain the pandemic, including vaccination roll-out. Funding shortfalls facing the World Food Programme and UNRWA may also impact food distribution across the occupied Palestinian territories in the coming months if not addressed by donors.

On 9 February, Egypt reopened the Rafah crossing in both directions until further notice. On 31 January, the Government of Qatar announced that it had significantly increased its financial contribution to Gaza. It concluded, *inter alia*, an agreement with the United Nations Office for Project Services through the end of 2021 to provide fuel to the Gaza power plant that will generate more than 12 hours of electricity per day.

In its resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council called upon all States "to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967". No such steps were taken during the reporting period.

Resolution 2334 (2016) also called upon "all parties to continue ... to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations".

On 11 January and 11 March, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan met in Cairo and Paris, respectively, to discuss ways to advance the Middle East peace process, including through collective efforts with the Middle East Quartet.

On 21 December, the United States Congress passed legislation that allocates \$250 million over five years for programmes that help build the foundation for peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians and for a sustainable two-state solution.

On 23 December, 15 February and 23 March, the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet met virtually to discuss the latest political developments and the situation on the ground. All agreed to meet on a regular basis to continue their engagement.

On 8 February, the League of Arab States issued a statement reiterating its support for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State based on the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In closing, I would like to share some broad observations concerning the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period.

I am deeply concerned by the continued Israeli settlement expansion, particularly into highly sensitive areas, which entrench the Israeli occupation, erode the possibility of a contiguous, independent and viable Palestinian State and further threaten the prospect of achieving a two-State solution. I reiterate that settlements have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of international law. I urge Israel to cease the advancement of all settlement activity immediately.

We have witnessed a spike in demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures, which include internationally funded humanitarian projects. I urge Israel to cease demolitions and evictions, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law, and to approve plans that would enable these communities to build legally and address their development needs.

COVID-19 continues to have a devastating effect on Palestinians. In addition to the brutal impact on public health, the recurrent lockdowns, school closures and reduction of commercial activity have severely undermined living conditions. In view of these challenges, I commend the Palestinian Government's efforts to plan and implement its vaccination campaign. United Nations agencies, in particular the World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNRWA and their partners will continue to support vaccination efforts. Israeli facilitation of vaccine deliveries remains essential, and I appreciate this cooperation. Support for the Palestinian COVID-19 response should be significantly enhanced to ensure that Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory receive a fair and timely share in the distribution of vaccines.

By every measure, 2020 was a year of setbacks for the Palestinians, their institutions and their economy. Yet we begin 2021 with a degree of guarded optimism. The restart of coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority places the Palestinian Government in a more solid fiscal position and could portend greater communication between the sides on a variety of critical issues. Despite an increase in infections in the West Bank, since early February vaccines have begun arriving in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, one of the earliest middle-income countries to receive shipments of COVID-19 vaccines. This is a critical first step towards recovery and a more sustainable reopening of the economy. I welcome the commitment shown by donors at the February AHLC meeting to support Palestinian efforts to respond to and recover from the pandemic. I reiterate my call on Israel to increase the number of permits for Palestinian workers, and I call on both sides to address outstanding fiscal files and issues related to corresponding banking relations.

Nevertheless, I remain concerned by the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza. The threat of another major escalation has not disappeared. The Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism remains critical to facilitating reconstruction, as well as to supporting vital infrastructure projects designed to bolster Gaza's water and energy networks. However, humanitarian and economic support will not alone overcome Gaza's challenges. It is vital that Hamas and other factions end militant activity and the military build-up. Taking into consideration its legitimate security concerns, I urge Israel to ease the restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from

Gaza, in line with resolution 1860 (2009), with the goal of ultimately lifting them. Only by fully lifting the debilitating closures can we hope to sustainably resolve the humanitarian crisis.

Palestinian unity is essential for progress, and free, fair and inclusive elections throughout Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are a first step. I am encouraged by the steady advance towards the holding of Palestinian elections and urge the parties to carry on their dialogue and overcome remaining differences. The United Nations will continue to support the Palestinian people, including through facilitating and supporting preparations for these important elections, which are crucial for renewing the legitimacy of national political institutions.

Let me underscore how critical it is to preserve political space within the context of elections, but not solely in that regard. I call on authorities on all sides to ensure that political actors, civil society representatives and human rights defenders are able to exercise their democratic rights free from intimidation and threats.

Let me also welcome the important efforts of civil society organizations working towards peace. The significant new funding for these organizations approved by the United States Congress is a crucial vote of confidence at a challenging moment and a positive signal of renewed support for the search for peace in Israel and Palestine. I encourage additional States Members of the United Nations to continue and to increase their assistance for these activities.

I am deeply concerned by the daily violence that continues to fuel mistrust and drives us further from a peaceful resolution of the conflict. I am particularly concerned that children are so often the victims. Children should never be the target of violence by any party, nor be exposed to violence. I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. Pertinent authorities must carry out thorough, independent, impartial and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force. Settler-related violence also remains of great concern, and I urge Israel to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population, in line with its responsibilities under international law. I underscore that all perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice.

I also emphasize that there can be no justification for any act of terrorism, which must be unequivocally condemned by all. Likewise, the launching of indiscriminate rockets and incendiary devices towards Israeli population centres violates international law and must stop.

I would like to reiterate that the fate of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two Israel Defence Forces soldiers held by Hamas in Gaza remains an important humanitarian concern. I call upon Hamas to provide full information related to their condition, as required by international humanitarian law. I also remain deeply concerned at the continued Israeli practice of holding the bodies of killed Palestinians and call on Israel to return withheld bodies to their families in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

I remain seriously concerned by UNRWA's financial situation. UNRWA is not only a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees, but it is also critical for regional stability. Collective support for UNRWA and common responsibility for its funding are essential for its sustainability and a critical element for regional stability. At the same time, humanitarian partners continue their efforts aimed at assisting the 1.8 million most vulnerable Palestinians, including 1.4 million in Gaza, through targeted assistance and programming. To date, only 21 per cent of the \$417 million Humanitarian Response Plan for the occupied Palestinian territory has

been funded. I encourage donors to consider additional support for 2021 to avoid further deterioration.

In closing, the COVID-19 pandemic remains a very real threat to the health, security and prosperity of Palestinians and Israelis alike. A collective, robust approach is crucial to tackling this deadly adversary and rebuilding the lives and livelihoods of all those impacted by the virus.

The Palestinian election process continues with a successful voter-registration exercise. The finalization of electoral lists and candidates is ongoing. The international community must continue, Throughout the process, to support Palestinian efforts aimed at restoring democracy and legitimacy to their national institutions. This includes the deployment of observation missions, despite the challenges presented by COVID-19.

Finally, I remain committed 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 in pursuit of fulfilling the vision of two States. This means Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. And I reiterate my call on the members of the Middle East Quartet, key Arab and international partners, as well as to Israeli and Palestinian leadership, to strengthen efforts to return to meaningful negotiations towards a viable two-State solution.

Annex II**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Geng Shuang**

[Original: Chinese]

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

After an extended period of impasse and setbacks, the Middle East peace process is finally showing positive signs. The international community should seize the opportunity, stay the course for the two-State solution and, on the basis of international parameters underpinned by the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, strive to facilitate the resumption of the dialogue and negotiation process. I wish to highlight the following three points.

First, major parties have recently frequently interacted on the Palestinian-Israeli question. The emergency meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States demonstrated the unity of Arab States on the Palestinian question. The Quartet reaffirmed the general direction of two-State solution, sending out encouraging signals. Building on that, we need to amplify the voice of countries of the region, mobilize international support and forge synergy to promote talks for peace. We must uphold the authority of the United Nations and the Security Council and maximize the role of relevant mechanisms. China supports President Abbas's initiative to convene an international conference on peace in the Middle East and supports the establishment of an expanded multilateral mechanism for peace.

We welcome the second round of national dialogue between Palestinian factions and hope that the dialogue will help enhance Palestinian unity, ensure the smooth holding of elections and better protect and promote the interests of the Palestinian people. At the same time, the international community should continue to focus on the root causes of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and speed up the political process.

Secondly, this year marks the fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). This resolution responds to the legitimate concerns of the Palestinian people and reflects the general demands of the international community. Regrettably, five years on, settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory continue to expand in size and the number of Palestinian houses being demolished keeps growing, while the Council resolution has yet to be implemented effectively.

Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security is the only option. The issue of settlements is a key item of the final-status negotiations on the question of Palestine. A proper solution to this problem will greatly enhance mutual trust between the two sides and help the Middle East peace process break out of its vicious circle and get into a phase of virtuous interaction. China calls on Israel to act on resolution 2334 (2016), stop settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and take measures to prevent violence against civilians. At the same time, Israel's rights to survival and legitimate security concerns need to be fully respected and guaranteed.

Thirdly, Palestine is faced with prominent challenges in survival and development, which have been exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The international community should take concrete actions to help Palestine fight the pandemic and improve people's lives. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has made a positive contribution to improve the humanitarian conditions of Palestinian refugees. The international community needs to deliver on its commitments as soon as possible, consolidate its political support for UNRWA and effectively ease the Agency's financial stress.

In the aftermath of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, China dispatched a team of medical experts to Palestine, donated multiple batches of anti-pandemic supplies and, through UNRWA, provided anti-pandemic assistance to Palestinian refugees. China donated COVID-19 vaccines, which will be delivered to Palestine soon. Following last year's Ramallah city road project, China will continue to assist Palestine this year in building schools and repairing wells, so as to boost its development and generate more benefits for its people.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that as a faithful friend of the Palestinian people, China firmly supports Palestine in its just demands and supports the Palestinian people in establishing a fully sovereign and independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi is currently visiting the Middle East region. China respects the will of the countries of the region and actively responds to their demands. We will take the opportunity of Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to have in-depth exchanges of views with relevant countries in a positive effort to contribute to the comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question as well as the achievement of peace and prosperity in the Middle East at an early date.

Annex III**Statement by the Political Coordinator of Estonia to the United Nations, Kristel Lõuk**

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Estonia remains committed to supporting a two-State solution, based on international law, relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

We call for and support the active engagement of the members of the Middle East Quartet as well as the countries in the region to help create favourable conditions for the resumption of direct meaningful negotiations on all final-status issues. Finding a long-lasting solution to this conflict is in the interest of the whole region and beyond.

We also call for continued practical steps by the parties to strengthen bilateral cooperation and rebuild mutual trust and confidence. We welcome the cooperation in combating the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and urge the parties to undertake further coordinated efforts, ensuring access and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine to all Palestinians. There is also room for increased cooperation to overcome the economic crisis. Such steps would be to the benefit of both parties. We hope that this week's Israeli elections increase political stability and improve dialogue.

Unfortunately, the situation on the ground continues to be worrying, as we also heard in the Special Coordinator's briefing. Estonia condemns the recent rocket attack in Beer Sheva by Hamas. We reiterate our call to all parties to implement resolution 2334 (2016) and refrain from any unilateral steps that increase tensions or undermine the viability of the two-State solution.

We regret the continued settlement activity by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem. It is also worrying that the demolition and confiscation of Palestinian structures and properties is continuing at a growing pace. We urge Israel to halt these activities as they are contrary to international law.

Another matter of concern is the persistent acts of sporadic violence. We call upon all parties to refrain from fuelling incitement to violence and hate speech and make further efforts to break the cycle of violence.

We welcome the continued engagement of the Palestinian factions to prepare for the upcoming legislative, presidential and National Council elections. We call upon all Palestinian factions to commit to democratic principles and urge the Israeli authorities to facilitate the holding of elections across the entire Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Annex IV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: French]

I thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing.

Just over four years ago, the Security Council, in adopting resolution 2334 (2016), reaffirmed the importance of achieving a just and lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At that time, we reiterated our commitment to the implementation of agreed parameters and international law, reaffirming the goal of the creation of two democratic States, living side by side in peace, within secure and recognized borders.

We also jointly declared that the status quo was unsustainable and that there was an urgent need to reverse negative trends on the ground and create conditions for the success of the final status negotiations.

Finally, by this resolution, we affirmed that no change to the 1967 lines, other than those agreed between the parties, would be recognized and that all States had the obligation to make a distinction in their communications between the territory of Israel and the territories occupied in 1967. This distinction must be reflected in particular both in bilateral agreements and in trade, for example through the differentiated labelling of products from settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This framework, defined by Council resolutions, is the only one that will make it possible to stabilize the region on a long-term basis and ensure the security of all, Israelis and Palestinians alike. Any solution imposed by force can only fuel a spiral of despair and violence.

Today, in 2021, we must pursue our efforts to achieve lasting peace.

The need is more urgent than ever to implement resolution 2334 (2016) as the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process has just recalled. Israeli decisions of recent months on the expansion of settlements, particularly those in sensitive areas, increase the risk of de facto annexation of Palestinian territories, threaten the viability of the two-State solution and constitute a major obstacle to peace. France has condemned them.

We are also very concerned by the record increase in the demolition of Palestinian structures, which particularly affects infrastructure financed by France and the European Union.

France calls on Israel to reverse these decisions and to stop the demolitions. It calls on all parties to refrain from any unilateral measure that undermines confidence and calls into question the possibility of a two-State solution.

In this context, it is important to recreate the conditions for dialogue by identifying small, concrete steps in order to overcome the mistrust that exists between the parties. This is the goal of our efforts with Germany, Egypt and Jordan, which we intend to pursue.

The resumption of coordination between the parties, particularly on civil, security and health matters, is encouraging. But we must go further. That is essential if we are to address the economic consequences of the pandemic and to ensure the vaccination of all populations. We wish to work on these issues with the parties, as well as with the members of the Quartet, whose mobilization has the same objective — the eventual resumption of direct negotiations between the parties.

The holding of elections, announced by President Abbas, must be an opportunity to give a voice to Palestinian civil society and to renew the democratic

legitimacy of its institutions. France and its European partners are ready to support the organization of transparent, free and impartial elections. France calls on all actors to act constructively to complete this process. These elections must be held throughout the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Finally, there is an urgent need to renew our political and above all financial support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose action is essential to the stability of the region.

France calls on the Council to take a big step forward in order to reaffirm the framework of agreed parameters and finally relaunch a positive, multilateral dynamic.

Annex V

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, Geraldine Byrne Nason

I would like to thank our Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. I thank you, Tor, for your briefing this morning, in particular on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

Those who have experience of prolonged, seemingly at times intractable conflict know the painstaking work and difficult compromises that are needed to pave the way for peace. It is, in part, because of a shared experience of conflict that the Israel-Palestine conflict resonates deeply with us.

It's also why Ireland remains committed to a comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, in accordance with internationally agreed parameters. We believe that a two-State solution, with a viable State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, alongside the State of Israel and with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, offers the only prospect for sustainable peace.

More than four years ago in 2016, the Council adopted a resolution stressing that "the status quo is not sustainable" (*resolution 2334 (2016), tenth preambular para.*). And yet, the very activities that undermine the viability of a two-State solution, which that resolution sought to address, have not stopped. Last year saw continued settlement expansion, alongside infrastructure projects in Area C, which are designed to meet the needs of ever-increasing settlements and which entrench division and inequality.

Settlements negatively impact Palestinian communities daily. They degrade adjacent Palestinian agricultural land, severely affecting the olive harvest in particular. They are also affecting the availability of already scarce water resources and causing pollution.

Settlements are an obstacle to peace and undermine Israel's own security. Ireland once again condemns Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Ireland assures the Council of our commitment to the principle of differentiation and the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

Ireland is extremely concerned at the increased rate of demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. So far this year, more than 280 structures have been demolished across the occupied Palestinian territory.

Recent demolitions in Humsa Al-Bqai'a, in the Jordan Valley, are particularly troubling, given the vulnerability of the affected population. We remain deeply concerned at the confiscation and impediment of humanitarian assistance. We are also concerned at the increased threat of evictions and demolitions, especially in East Jerusalem, particularly in Silwan, Al-Walaja and Sheikh Jarrah.

Ireland condemns all acts of violence committed on both sides, which are contrary to resolution 2334 (2016). They erode trust between the parties and have a corrosive effect. Tor, we echo your call for restraint on both sides. Ireland is concerned about the impact of occupation and violence on children and reminds parties of their obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law.

Ireland is extremely concerned that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is a vital source of stability and security for so many vulnerable Palestine refugees, this year faces

a \$200-million shortfall. More immediately, UNRWA faces a cash-flow gap of \$50 million next month. We encourage all States, including those on the Council and in the region, to join Ireland and others in providing sustainable, predictable and sufficient funding to UNRWA's critical operations and to assist with its immediate cash flow challenges.

Ireland reiterates its call on Israel to end the blockade of Gaza, where unemployment is at an all-time high, partly due to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. We call on Israel to exercise its responsibility as the occupying Power in ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for the Palestinian population in Gaza and throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

Ireland and its European Union partners stand ready to support inclusive elections across the occupied Palestinian territory and welcome the constructive meeting of Palestinian groups in Cairo last week.

Ireland asks Israel to facilitate elections across the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular in East Jerusalem. We strongly encourage steps to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the elections and the engagement of young people in the democratic process. I have personally witnessed the political engagement of Palestinian women at the Commission on the Status of Women, and they have participated in events in Ireland, sharing experiences of peacebuilding. They have so much to contribute. We need their voices to help break through the stalemate. We must bring them in to the process.

Ireland recognizes the vital contribution that a vibrant civil society can make, especially in supporting the electoral process; we wish to stress the importance of safeguarding open, free and fair independent civil society engagement in the occupied Palestinian territory and in Israel.

We believe that both sides need to take concrete steps to advance a two-State solution and avoid unilateral measures that make it more difficult to achieve. Ireland remains convinced that continued international engagement is also essential, and Ireland stands ready to engage with the parties and the international community to help build a reinvigorated approach by the Quartet and others, under the aegis of the Council.

Annex VI**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Michael Kiboino**

I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, for his overview of the current state of play regarding the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

As we reaffirm the actualization of the long-held vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines, the practicality and full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will need to include and go beyond the issue of settlements, territorial contiguity and the viability of the two-State solution.

It will have to address the immediate socioeconomic connotations of acts that violate all aspects of the resolution and the violations that continue to entrench the economic isolation of parts of the region from the wider regional and global markets. All these elements have implications for the peace and security and stability of the Middle East region.

I reaffirm Kenya's condemnation of all acts of violence by all parties, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation, incitement, evictions, destruction and demolition of civilian infrastructure.

Based on today's briefing, I will make two points.

My first point relates to the political, socioeconomic and humanitarian impacts of the coronavirus disease pandemic. It is quite commendable that Israel is currently one of the fastest vaccine distributors globally. Kenya welcomes the ongoing vaccination efforts among Palestinian workers and the recent rollout of vaccines through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access initiative in Gaza and the West Bank.

We call for strengthened cooperation to ensure the safe movement of health and other essential workers, equity in access to vaccines, and definitive medical care to allow for equitable socioeconomic recovery, including for East Jerusalem.

The strengthened role and reinforced funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East will also go a long way towards mitigating the political and socioeconomic challenges in the delivery of basic food and medical services, particularly for populations in internally displaced and refugee situations.

My second point relates to the recommendation of reinforced efforts aimed at achieving the stabilization of the situation, reversing negative trends on the ground and creating conditions for successful direct final-status negotiations. We have seen positive initiatives and dynamics in most of these areas. We believe that commitment to the principle of building bridges on multiple platforms will contribute to the comprehensive implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

We have taken note of the progress made in the registration of voters and acknowledge the efforts for intra-Palestinian reconciliation geared towards the upcoming legislative and presidential elections, including through the two rounds of talks held in Cairo in February and this month.

Additionally, Kenya supports the call for the reinvigoration of the Middle East Quartet and the recent resumption of meetings with the participation of all parties. It is important for the Munich format and other confidence-building initiatives in the Gulf and the broader subregion to complement the work of the Quartet.

It is our hope that there will be meaningful commitment to these processes in order to inject a fresh momentum into the Middle East peace process, in alignment with international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the Council's resolutions — including resolution 2334 (2016) — and the Arab Peace Initiative.

And as mentioned in the Middle East consultations that the Council held last month, Kenya welcomes the normalization of relations between Israel and multiple majority-Arab States. It is our hope that this development will make it easier, rather than harder, to actualize the normalization of relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians at both the grass-roots and the national levels.

Annex VII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez**

[Original: Spanish]

I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his detailed briefing.

We welcome the holding of the general elections last Tuesday in Israel. We hope that the various Israeli political forces will soon reach agreement on forming a Government.

As free, inclusive and regular elections are an essential element for the strengthening of democratic values and institutions, we urge the Israeli Government to facilitate the organization of the next Palestinian electoral process in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

In this regard, we recognize the efforts towards rapprochement between various factions, under the auspices of Egypt, and to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation. We call on the leaders of all Palestinian political movement to remain committed to participating, in a constructive and inclusive manner, in the upcoming elections. This is a crucial moment — a window of opportunity is indeed opening that must be fully exploited.

Moreover, we reaffirm our support for all initiatives that are aimed at preserving the two-State solution and that contribute to creating an environment conducive to peace and stability in the region. We welcome the meeting held earlier this month among Jordan, Egypt, Germany and France to continue advancing efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine.

We reject actions that threaten the two-State solution and specifically those that obstruct the viability of the Palestinian State. We also reject the construction and expansion of settlements in the Palestinian territories, which contravene international law, as well as the demolition of civil structures, including residential houses, schools and health centres, or drinking water, drainage and electricity networks. We call on the Government of Israel to stop demolitions that lead to the displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016).

The indiscriminate destruction of buildings not only causes forced relocations, but also creates a coercive environment conducive to incitement, abuse and outbreaks of violence. We condemn violence and the disproportionate use of force. We also acknowledge the relative calm in southern Israel, but strongly condemn the most recent attack, this week, from Gaza.

Particularly worrying is the increase in the detention of minors by Israeli law enforcement agencies. We call on Israel to immediately release the more than 150 detained Palestinian children.

We also reject the crackdown on popular demonstrations and urge the Palestinian authorities to protect and promote the freedom of expression of journalists, activists and human rights defenders in Gaza and the West Bank. Those who have been detained by the Palestinian security agencies must be treated with dignity and their human rights must be respected.

The revocation of the travel permit of the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Mr. Riad Al-Malki, is also regrettable, as it violates his freedom of movement. We hope that this incident will be clarified and that this action will be reconsidered.

We applaud the allocation of 60,000 vaccines, through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access mechanism, destined for the Palestinian population. We urge Israel to continue expanding the facilities for the transfer of vaccines in order to address the pandemic in the Palestinian territories. We call on Israel, which has so efficiently moved forward in vaccinating its population, to increase the supply of vaccines destined for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. In this sense, we reiterate the calls of the Council and the General Assembly concerning the importance of international cooperation in guaranteeing universal access to vaccines, without exclusions, if we truly want to form an effective front against the pandemic.

Finally, we wish our Israeli friends a Happy Easter and *Hag Sameach*.

Annex VIII**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Niger to the United Nations**

[Original: French]

If there is one dossier on the Council's agenda that arouses a sense of helplessness, discouragement and despair in equal measure, it is the situation in the Middle East, with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at its heart.

Indeed, in other cases, glimmers of hope lead to progress, however small; in the Middle East, on the rare occasions such glimmers appear, they last only for the duration of a lightning strike.

That is the case with such innovative initiatives as those that recently led to the normalization of relations between the State of Israel and some of its Arab neighbours, which have not had the rightfully anticipated impact, in particular in terms of improving the living conditions and existence of the Palestinian people.

However, it remains understood that any normalization of relations between Israel and its neighbours must take into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to a viable, independent State living in peace with Israel.

Mr. Tor Wennesland's briefing, which we have just followed and for which I thank him, resembled those that preceded it. Their accounts of the frenetic pursuit by Israel of its policy of occupying Palestinian lands, building new settlements, violating Palestinian rights and maintaining its blockade of Gaza, all of which violate resolution 2334 (2016), are all the same.

Since we no longer have any other choice but to repeat our certainties and assert our truths, my country firmly believes that neither the wait-and-see policy nor the policy of fait accompli through unilateral actions can lead to a just and lasting solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem; the demolitions and seizures of Palestinian properties, including schools and farmland; and the resurgence of attacks and violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, especially women and children, constitute flagrant violations of United Nations resolutions and the principles of international law. My delegation strongly condemns these acts and calls for their immediate cessation. Likewise, the acts of provocation and incitement to hatred and rocket fire against residential areas in Israel, which only exacerbate the climate of tension and mistrust, must end.

My country commends the recent initiatives that culminated in the ministerial meeting in Paris on 11 March, as well as that of the Quartet's Special Envoys, held on 23 March, which all recalled the cardinal principles of dialogue and negotiation as the only path capable of leading to the two-State solution, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

It is our hope that the elections that have just been held in Israel, and those to be held in Palestine, will lay a new foundation for relaunching direct peace talks between the two parties.

In addition, the Niger welcomes the decision taken on 3 March by the International Criminal Court to launch investigations into the allegations of crimes committed in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem since June 2014. On this issue, as in all others, accountability is essential, because it alone can help fight impunity and pave the way for true reconciliation between the parties to the conflict.

Regarding the humanitarian situation in the occupied territories, it is clear that there is no credible alternative to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), on which almost the entire population of Gaza and other refugee camps depend for their livelihoods and for the provision of essential services.

The difficulties caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic compound those linked to the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, food insecurity, overpopulation, high youth unemployment, restrictions linked to imports and the free movement of people, and the precariousness of the health system. Faced with all these challenges, UNRWA must continue to enjoy the means to enable it to continue providing vital services to the Palestinian populations, especially in this time of pandemic.

In conclusion, the picture of the situation in the Middle East that we have just painted, like those that preceded it, is still far from rosy. Yet, rather than succumb to weariness and discouragement, we will rather have to redouble our ardour and imagination in supporting and encouraging the various actors in that tortured region to embark resolutely on the path of peace. We must also continue to give our firm support to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process so that the flame of hope that we owe it to ourselves to keep alive is finally rekindled.

Annex IX**Statement by the First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Dmitry Polyanskiy**

[Original: Russian]

We thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

The Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process briefed us on the progress in the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). In this context, we reiterate the principal position of that document, according to which the construction of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory that has been under occupation since 1967, including East Jerusalem, constitutes a violation of international law and one of the main obstacles to a settlement based on the two-State solution. We are gravely concerned by the fact that the pace of the issuance of construction permits and the expansion of settlements is not declining. The same can be said about the scope of demolitions, the expropriation of Palestinian property and evictions. We call on the Israeli authorities to abandon unilateral steps that create irreversible developments on the ground.

We also stress the need to assist the Palestinians in responding to acute humanitarian and socioeconomic problems in the occupied territories and in Gaza, especially amidst the coronavirus disease pandemic. We note the importance of Palestinians and Israelis interacting with each other in the interests of countering the pandemic, including in the context of vaccination. We attach great importance to the ongoing work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in support of Palestinians both in the occupied territories and in the neighbouring Arab States. We call for galvanized international support for the Agency's activities.

Russia consistently supports the two-State principle that envisages the creation of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, which should rest upon the international legal basis, including United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. There is no alternative to direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis on all parameters of the final settlement, including the problems of refugees, borders, water and the status of Jerusalem. At the same time, all Israel's security concerns must be taken on-board.

In conjunction with our Egyptian friends, we will continue to help Palestinians restore unity based on the platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization. We proceed from the understanding that the pending Palestinian elections also provide an opportunity to overcome controversies and strengthen power institutions.

On our part, we take steps to support collective efforts aimed at achieving equitable peace in the region and maintain contacts with the key regional and international stakeholders. As per the previous agreement achieved by the members of the Quartet of international mediators, we work to put set meetings on a regular basis. Therefore, we convened another video-teleconference on 23 March, where we focused on the current situation in the region, the progress in preparations for the Palestinian elections and the situation in the West Bank and in Gaza. We stressed the need to resume direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in order to unlock prospects for a peace process. The Russian side put forward a proposal to look into organizing a ministerial meeting of the Quartet.

We are committed to continuing discussions with the interested sides to consider convening a meeting of the Quartet plus Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab

Emirates and Bahrain, plus Palestinians and Israelis, with the possible inclusion of Saudi Arabia, as the author of the Arab Peace Initiative. Such a meeting could provide a review of the current state of affairs and outline key tracks for joint work so as to get over the standstill in the settlement process. We hope this idea will enjoy broad support, and we encourage all interested sides to share their comments and proposals in order to ensure thorough preparatory work for the meeting.

Annex X**Statement by the Second Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Halimah DeShong**

I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his thorough briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and for his commitment to the Middle East peace process.

We are meeting again at a critical juncture. As Israeli settlement activities continue, it is crucial that the Security Council, reflecting the will of the international community, clearly condemn these illegal acts and declare them null and void.

The Security Council must affirm respect for the vital principles of international law. In particular, it must, by all appropriate means at its disposal, safeguard the territorial integrity of the State of Palestine and promote a peaceful settlement of the decades-long dispute.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reaffirms the need for a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in line with all the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), international law and internationally agreed parameters. In our view, any unilateral actions will undermine the foundations and the viability of the two-State solution. My delegation therefore urges Israeli and Palestinian leaders to restart meaningful direct talks and negotiations with the objective of achieving a comprehensive settlement and establishing a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Turning to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reiterates its call for the full implementation of this and previous resolutions on the question of Palestine. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as of 21 March 2021, Israel's policy of home demolitions had resulted in the destruction of 291 Palestinian-owned structures, resulting in the displacement of 443 people, including children, from their homes across the West Bank. These actions are contrary to international law. Moreover, these demolitions contravene the Charter of the United Nations, which prohibits the acquisition of territory by force, as well as the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention.

We note with great concern the dire humanitarian, economic and political situation in Gaza, which has been further compounded by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. We applaud the delivery of 61,400 vaccines to the Palestinian Authority through the United Nations COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility programme and appeal to the international community to deliver promised vaccines to the Palestinians. Additionally, we urge Israel to end the blockade of Gaza and to allow unhindered access to humanitarian assistance and goods.

Equally, we reiterate our strong support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which requires renewed international financial provision, to assist and protect millions of Palestinian refugees.

We are encouraged by the relevant Palestinian parties' recent steps to prepare for the legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections slated for 22 May, 31 July and 31 August, respectively. These democratic exercises will bolster the peace process. It is imperative that these elections be held throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

My delegation welcomes the conference call held between the envoys of the Middle East Quartet on the 23 March. We also encourage the Quartet to support

President Abbas' call for an international conference, take affirmative steps to address the threats that are imperilling the two-State solution and offer practical recommendations to enable an eventual return to meaningful negotiations in order to end the occupation and establish an independent Palestinian State based on the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Finally, as a State party to the Rome Statute, we reaffirm our support to the International Criminal Court in all of its work. We note with concern the reported confiscation of the travel pass of the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs and call for reason and justice to prevail.

Allow me to conclude by underscoring that it is high time for the Security Council to adopt a clear stance with respect to the annexation of the occupied Palestinian territory and to give top priority in its concerns to the basic objective, which is to achieve a just and comprehensive peace, based on the Arab Peace Initiative and United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Annex XI**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Tunisia to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his valuable briefing. We appreciate the continued efforts by the Secretary-General in championing the peace process and supporting security and stability in the Middle East.

Once again, as we listened to the briefing by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the Security Council is faced with the intransigence of the occupying Power and its refusal to comply with Council resolutions related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the most recent of which was resolution 2334 (2016).

According to reports issued by United Nations bodies, international organizations and international non-governmental organizations working in the occupied Palestinian territories, the occupying Power continues to intensify settlement activity, home demolitions, displacement of Palestinians and efforts to cut the geographical connection between East Jerusalem and the West Bank. In response to those deeply alarming developments, the Security Council and the international community must take a firm stance and compel Israel, the occupying Power, to bring to an immediate halt its systematic plans to seize more Palestinian land and undermine the two-State solution, as such actions constitute a serious obstacle to the prospect for reaching a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

In view of those violations, we reiterate the international community's call for the Palestinian civilian population to be protected, in line with General Assembly resolution ES-10/20. We also call for an end to the unjust blockade of the Gaza Strip and all other forms of collective punishment imposed on Palestinians by the occupation authorities.

Given the threat posed by the coronavirus disease pandemic and the effects of the economic restrictions imposed by the occupiers, Tunisia urges regional and international actors to step up the humanitarian response in the occupied Palestinian territories. We emphasize the importance of responding to the appeal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for its financial needs to be met. We welcome the announcement by the United States of America regarding the resumption of its economic and humanitarian support for the Palestinians.

Despite the continued stalemate in the Middle East peace process, we sense that a consensus is developing within the international community that there must be a change in how the Palestinian question is addressed and that there is a desire to start serious and credible negotiations on the basis of international law and the agreed-upon terms of reference. This presents us with a real opportunity to continue working together so that we can build on this momentum and translate it into genuine action in the service of security, peace and stability in the region.

In that connection, we welcome the constructive efforts by the Middle East Quartet and the agreement reached by its members to meet regularly to discuss the Middle East peace process. We once again endorse the proposal to hold a ministerial-level meeting of the international Quartet in the near future to facilitate the launch of serious negotiations on the basis of established principles, in preparation for an international conference on peace in the Middle East, as called for by the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas.

Tunisia values the constructive positions expressed by the members of the Quartet in recent communications with the expanded Arab troika in New York. We

commend Security Council members for taking positions in support of international authority and strengthening the Council's role in resolving this conflict.

We welcome the progress made in organizing general elections in Palestine and call for this process to be facilitated in all the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We also welcome efforts to achieve intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

In conclusion, Tunisia reaffirms its steadfast support for the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people, which demands do not lapse with time, particularly the right to exercise self-determination and establish an independent, sovereign Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the agreed-upon terms of reference, internationally recognized resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We reaffirm that choosing peace as a strategic solution, championing international authority and rallying around the multilateral international system is the best way to guarantee that justice will be served, rights will be restored and peace will be established, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Annex XII**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Jonathan Allen**

My thanks to Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Wennesland for his briefing.

Following Israeli elections this week and looking ahead to the prospect of Palestinian elections later in the spring, I wanted to start by reflecting on the opportunity we have for renewed energy and commitment, to reverse negative trends and secure meaningful progress towards peace. We call on all parties to seize this opportunity.

We have seen some positive steps following the resumption of coordination in November 2020. We welcome cooperation on fiscal issues and encourage the parties to go further, with support from the international community, particularly by re-establishing formal Israeli-Palestinian mechanisms, such as the Joint Economic Committee and its subcommittees.

We welcome the launch of the Palestinian Authority's national vaccine rollout and were encouraged by Israel's decision to vaccinate those Palestinians who work in Green Line Israel and Israeli settlements. We urge the Government of Israel to seriously consider the provision of surplus vaccines to the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza, its nearest neighbours.

Such routine cooperation is positive and to be encouraged. However, given the scale of the challenge, it is not enough. We need both sides to renew their commitments to avoiding unilateral actions. We should be under no illusions over declining prospects for peace. As we have heard in today's briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), settlement building — which is illegal under international law and constitutes a threat to the physical viability of a two-State solution — is ongoing. Demolitions of Palestinian buildings and evictions of Palestinians from their homes across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continue to undermine the Palestinian presence. The people of Israel deserve to live free from the scourge of terrorism and anti-Semitic incitement. We also condemn any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinian civilians.

The parties must seize the opportunity of democratic renewal, with the support of the international community, to take forward ambitious confidence-building measures, with the aim of returning to dialogue and resuming direct negotiations. These actions are necessary if the parties are to build on existing steps towards regional prosperity and security and create an environment that is conducive to achieving a negotiated, sustainable solution to this long-standing conflict.

The United Kingdom will continue our efforts to support this goal. Our position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the same. We continue to support a negotiated two-State solution, based on the 1967 lines, with agreed land swaps and a just and fair settlement for refugees.

Annex XIII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield**

Let me start by thanking Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Wennesland for his informative briefing.

Today, I would like to talk about three aspects of the Middle East peace process: first, the United States' continued support for Israel; secondly, our desire to see both Israelis and Palestinians take steps toward a two-State solution; and thirdly, our goal of delivering aid to the Palestinian people.

First, President Biden has been a strong and consistent supporter of Israel throughout his career, as have I. The United States will continue to steadfastly stand by Israel, especially when it is unfairly singled out by one-sided resolutions and actions in international bodies.

I want to note that while we focus each month on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in these meetings, there are other issues in the region that are threats to international peace and security and deserve more of the Council's attention.

Let me be clear — not all criticism of Israel is illegitimate. But too often, that criticism veers dangerously into anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism, as with all forms of hate, works directly against the cause of peace. So, we will vigorously oppose one-sided efforts. After all, as many of us recognized last week, we have a shared obligation to address the disturbing resurgence of all kinds of prejudice and hate around the world — including anti-Semitism.

Secondly, under President Biden's leadership, the United States has recommitted to the vision of a mutually agreed two-State solution, one in which Israel lives in peace and security alongside a viable Palestinian State. We believe that this vision is the best way to ensure Israel's future as a democratic and Jewish State, while upholding the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations for a State of their own and to live with dignity and security.

Our approach is to advance freedom, security and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians in tangible ways in the immediate term. That is important in its own right. But these gains will also advance the prospects of a negotiated two-State solution, consistent with international law and in line with relevant United Nations resolutions. It is essential that both sides take concrete steps to advance the two-State solution.

The United States calls on the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to refrain from all unilateral actions that make a two-State solution more difficult to achieve, whether settlement activity, home demolitions, incitement to violence or providing compensation for individuals imprisoned for acts of terrorism. We call for an end to all acts of violence, including acts of terrorism, as well as incitement to violence and acts of provocation and destruction.

Since January, our diplomatic engagement has been guided by the premise that sustainable progress towards peace must be based on active consultations with both sides. To that end, our administration will take steps to reopen diplomatic channels of communication that were halted during the last Administration. Our engagements all have the same aim — to build support for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Thirdly and finally, we are particularly concerned that the pandemic has put a serious strain on both the economic and the humanitarian needs of Palestinians. We were therefore encouraged to see Israel's initiative to vaccinate Palestinian workers.

We urge Israel and the Palestinian Authority to continue cooperation on ensuring that coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines reach more in need.

For our part, President Biden is restoring United States assistance programmes that support economic development and humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people. Specifically, the United States is pleased to announce today \$15 million in humanitarian assistance to support the most vulnerable communities in the West Bank and Gaza.

With this assistance, the United States Agency for International Development is supporting Catholic Relief Services COVID-19 response efforts in health-care facilities and for vulnerable families in the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, this assistance will support emergency food assistance programming to communities facing food insecurity, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This urgent, necessary aid is one piece of our renewed commitment to the Palestinian people. The aid will help Palestinians in dire need, which will bring more stability and security to Israelis and Palestinians alike. That is consistent with our interests and our values, and it aligns with our efforts to stamp out the pandemic and food insecurity worldwide.

The United States looks forward to continuing its work with Israel, the Palestinians and the international community to achieve a long-sought peace in the Middle East.

Let us strive to achieve that peace and prosperity for all.

Annex XIV

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Viet Nam remains concerned about developments on the ground that run counter to resolution 2334 (2016). Since its adoption in 2016, the resolution has been expected to bring about significant progress. Instead, we have only seen the opposite.

While the expansion of settlement shows no sign of halting, demolitions of Palestinian structures continue. The number of demolitions in the first months of 2021 has already exceeded that of the whole of 2020. Many of the destroyed structures were financed by international donors for humanitarian purposes. The demolitions have seriously affected the life of the Palestinian people.

Those unilateral activities will only push the parties away from one another, destroy efforts to resume negotiation and thereby cause hindrance to a future just and lasting solution for the Palestinian question.

We call upon the Israeli authorities to put an end to those unilateral activities and to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. An immediate cessation of all such activities, required by resolution 2334 (2016), is essential to building trust and creating a favourable environment for any meaningful talks between Israel and Palestine.

Turning to the peace process, we are encouraged by the new positive dynamics from the relevant parties and members of the international community. We reiterate our support for all efforts aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on international law, relevant Security Council resolutions and agreed parameters.

Viet Nam welcomes the strengthened engagement of the Middle East Quartet and their statement of 23 March. We also welcome the recent efforts of Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan and their joint statement at the Paris meeting on 11 March. We are committed to supporting all initiatives and new engagements that can help advance the peace process and take into account the security concerns of all parties. We also call upon the parties to refrain from actions and rhetoric that could complicate the situation and make it more difficult to achieve a two-State solution.

Regarding the situation in Palestine, we are delighted at the progress made in preparing for Palestinian elections and call on all parties to respect the electoral process. We call on Israel to facilitate the preparation and conduct of the voting process, as well as to ensure free access to polling sites, including in East Jerusalem.

We, however, remain concerned about the dire living conditions and humanitarian situation of millions of Palestinian people, in particular women and children, throughout the occupied Palestinian territories. The recent sharp increase in unemployment and the poverty rate is alarming. We reiterate our strong support for the work of United Nations agencies, particularly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, in providing humanitarian assistance to the people in need. We appreciate and call upon all parties, including Israel, to continue facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance and coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines to control the surge of COVID-19 infections and prevent the collapse of the health-care system.

To conclude, Viet Nam once again reiterates its support for the two-State solution, including the establishment of the State of Palestine with East

Jerusalem as its capital, within secure and internationally recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016).
