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Seventy-fourth year

Provisional

8690th meeting

Wednesday, 18 December 2019, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mrs. Craft/Mr. Barkin (United States of America)

Members:

Belgium	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
China	Mr. Wu Haitao
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Moriko
Dominican Republic	Mr. Trullols Yabra
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
France	Mr. De Rivière
Germany	Mr. Schulz
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru	Mr. Velásquez
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
South Africa	Mr. Van Shalkwyk
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Allen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2019/938)

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2019/938)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and Ms. Adele Raemer.

Ms. Raemer is joining via video-teleconference from Tel Aviv.

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/938, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016).

I now give the floor to Special Coordinator Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: On behalf of the Secretary-General, I will devote my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to presenting the twelfth report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2019/938). The report covers the period between 12 September and 6 December 2019. As members have already received the written report, in today's briefing I will provide a brief update on developments related to the provisions of the resolution that have taken place following the submission of the report to the Council.

As detailed in the report, no steps were taken during the reporting period to "cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem", as demanded by the Council in paragraph 2 of the resolution.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures also continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Since 6 December, an additional eight structures were demolished or seized by the Israeli authorities, resulting in the displacement of some 20 people.

In its paragraph 6, resolution 2334 (2016) also "calls for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians". Unfortunately, the violence continues, even during the few days since the submission of the report. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 16 Palestinians were injured in various incidents, including in clashes with the Israeli security forces during demonstrations, security operations, settler-related attacks and other incidents since the end of the reporting period.

Protests at the Gaza perimeter fence have also continued. While most demonstrations remained relatively peaceful, some protesters engaged in violent activities. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) responded with riot-dispersal means and live fire, injuring some 38 people. On 17 December, a Palestinian was killed by an Israeli drone as he approached the perimeter fence. According to the IDF, the man was armed. Three rockets were also launched by Gaza militants towards Israel, causing no injuries.

On 9 December, assailants slashed the tires of more than 160 Palestinian cars in the Shuafat neighbourhood of East Jerusalem and sprayed anti-Arab graffiti. Additional vehicles were vandalized or set on fire in two villages in Bethlehem and in another two villages in Ramallah. The Israeli police are investigating the Shuafat incident.

Several dozen Israeli activists from the Tag Meir forum visited the Shuafat neighbourhood following the attack in order to express their rejection of the violence and their solidarity with Shuafat's residents. They were hosted by Hussein and Suha Abu Khdeir, whose son Mohammad was murdered in a terror attack in 2014.

Resolution 2334 (2016), in its paragraph 7, calls upon the parties "to refrain from provocative actions, incitement, and inflammatory rhetoric". Unfortunately,

such actions and rhetoric have continued. The resolution also reiterated calls by the Middle East Quartet for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution.

In recent weeks, the United Nations has continued its engagement with senior Palestinian officials and different factions towards holding inclusive elections throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. In preparation for possible 2020 parliamentary and presidential elections, and upon the request for technical assistance from Palestine's Central Elections Commission, a United Nations electoral needs assessment mission was deployed to the occupied Palestinian territory earlier this week. On 10 December, the Palestinian Authority announced that it had officially sent a request to Israel to allow Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem to participate in potential presidential and legislative elections.

I would like to focus on some of the observations concerning the implementation of the resolution's provisions. In the three years since the Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), plans for over 22,000 units have been advanced or approved in West Bank settlements, including in East Jerusalem. Tenders for approximately 8,000 units have been issued. Those numbers should be of serious concern to all who continue to support the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State alongside Israel. Resolution 2334 (2016) clearly states that the establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. Settlements must therefore cease immediately and completely.

The continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian structures, including internationally funded humanitarian projects, is also of significant concern. That practice is not in line with international humanitarian law and must stop. Affected populations must be duly compensated for damages incurred. Similarly, the high number of Palestinian households in East Jerusalem with eviction cases filed against them is alarming. As an occupying Power, Israel must abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law.

I remain gravely concerned about the continuing violence, terror attacks against civilians and incitement

to violence, which greatly exacerbate mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians and are fundamentally incompatible with a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian population centres is prohibited by international humanitarian law, and Palestinian militants must immediately cease that practice.

The security situation in Gaza remains very fragile. The use of force by Israel at the Gaza perimeter fence and the number of Palestinians killed and injured also remains a significant concern. Security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when strictly necessary and in response to an imminent threat of death or serious injury. Hamas must stop the firing of rockets and ensure that protests remain peaceful. Children should never be the target of violence or be used or put in harm's way.

Reports of increased numbers of settler-related attacks and harassment are also deeply concerning, particularly around the olive harvest season and in Hebron. Further measures must be taken to ensure that Israel fulfils its obligations to protect Palestinian civilians from violence, including by settlers, and to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for such attacks.

Provocative and inflammatory rhetoric during the reporting period continued to deepen the divide and fuelled further mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians. Leaders and officials must set a tone that encourages tolerance and facilitates increased dialogue.

I am particularly appalled by the racist and inflammatory statements that aim to spread fear and hatred among people. I call on all to join the United Nations to condemn all such statements. Regrettably, statements on the prospect of annexation of the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank also continue. Such steps, if implemented, would constitute a serious violation of international law and would be destructive to the realization of the two-State solution and the prospects for peace.

September marked one year since the start of the implementation of the United Nations package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions for Gaza. The efforts to date have achieved important results, yet the situation remains very fragile. Security risks abound, movement and access restrictions remain severe and there has been no progress towards intra-Palestinian unity. Some of the investments made

to date, as a result of efforts by the United Nations, will end on 31 December. Without additional funding and a durable Israeli and Palestinian commitment, the situation in Gaza could once again be pushed to the brink of collapse. The stakes are too high to allow that to happen. All stakeholders must act to prevent the ongoing crisis in Gaza from deepening further.

On its own, no amount of humanitarian or economic support will resolve either the situation in Gaza or the broader conflict. Gaza ultimately requires political solutions. 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, with the goal of ultimately lifting them. Only by fully lifting the closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009), can we hope to sustainably resolve the humanitarian crisis. It is also critical to end the militant build-up in Gaza and the constant threat of rocket fire, and to reunite Gaza and the West Bank under a single, legitimate Palestinian national authority, in accordance with the recommendations of the 2016 Middle East Quartet report (see S/2016/595).

In that context, it is critical that the important Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts continue. The United Nations stands firm in its support of Egypt's efforts in that regard. I call on all Palestinian factions to make serious efforts to advance Palestinian unity.

I welcome ongoing discussions on the holding of Palestinian general elections. If elections materialize, they would be the first Palestinian elections since 2006, giving renewed legitimacy to national institutions. The international community should support that process.

As I emphasized in my previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.8669), three critical elements are required for elections to be credible — first, they must be organized across the occupied Palestinian territory, in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza, in line with the Palestinian basic law, electoral legislation and international best practices; secondly, both legislative and presidential elections are necessary and should be held within a clearly identified and reasonable time frame; and, thirdly, broad intra-Palestinian agreement must be reached on the modalities of holding such elections.

Palestinians have been denied their democratic right to vote for too long. I am hopeful that the Palestinian President will very soon issue a decree scheduling

legislative and presidential elections and that Israel will allow voting in East Jerusalem.

Despite the partial agreement reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on 3 October on clearance revenues, it remains critical that both sides engage in a constructive manner with the goal of restoring the revenue transfers in full, in accordance with the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations.

The financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, unfortunately, has also continued to worsen. Urgent disbursement of donor funds is essential to ensure that operations can be sustained through the end of the year.

I also call on Member States to support the 2020 humanitarian response plan for the occupied Palestinian territory, launched on 11 December. The plan calls for approximately \$348 million to provide basic food, protection, health care, shelter, water and sanitation to about 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

This month marks three years since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). The situation on the ground since then has only deteriorated. Settlements have expanded significantly, demolitions have accelerated, violence and incitement have continued, achieving intra-Palestinian unity remains elusive and credible negotiations have yet to be launched. I remain greatly concerned by the persistent lack of progress towards ending the occupation and realizing a negotiated two-State solution. As I have consistently stated, it is not enough to call for the renewal of our collective efforts to that end. We must take concrete action.

Absent the renewed commitment of the parties and the international community to pursue concrete measures that will lead to genuine political progress, the situation will continue to worsen. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in a fragile phase, with the occupation deepening, political uncertainty prevailing and volatile regional dynamics threatening to further destabilize the situation.

I once again urge leaders on all sides to summon the necessary political will to take concrete steps in support of ending the occupation and realizing a lasting peace, resulting in two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, within secure

and recognized borders and with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Raemer.

Ms. Raemer: I thank you, Madam President, for inviting me to address the Security Council today. It is an incredible honour, and while I speak to the Council representing the residents of the Eshkol region in Israel along the frontier with Gaza, my views and opinions are my own and reflect my personal experiences living in Kibbutz Nirim on the border with the Gaza Strip since 1975.

Has anyone here ever had to literally run for their life? When I hear the red-alert early-warning system for incoming rockets, I know that I have from 5 to 10 seconds to get to someplace safe, regardless of where I am in my little kibbutz house. From my kitchen, I can sprint to the safe room in about three seconds. If it catches me while I am in the shower, I am out of luck. There is no way I can jump out and make it to the safe room before impact without slipping. If I am out walking my dogs, I either throw myself down next to a wall or just lie down wherever I am, cover my head and hope that whatever falls does not fall too close.

Until two years ago, we did not have the Iron Dome system to protect us. Now we do, but that brings its own dangers of deadly, falling debris when it makes impact with the rocket. Every siren means that something — be it rocket impact or an intercept — will explode nearby, and, during the 11 rounds of escalated rocket fire that we have had in the past year and a half, there were numerous alerts every single day. One thousand eight hundred rockets were launched at our communities in the Eshkol region alone during that period — 1,800. What would anyone here do if that number of projectiles were launched over their country's border?

On 26 August 2014, on what was to become the final morning of the last major operation — Operation Protective Edge — my bedroom was invaded by deadly shrapnel from a mortar that exploded just outside and ripped through the walls. The electricity of our entire community was knocked out in that same barrage, which could have killed me had I been in my bedroom rather than in my safe room. And here I am, five and a half years after that bloody summer, speaking before

this great international body, and nothing has changed. If anything, it has gotten worse.

My community was a paradise for raising children when mine were growing up, but today, as my two little granddaughters romp on our lawns, I do not have the same sense of security for them that I had when raising my children. Just last week, I stood with Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon — and possibly others in attendance here today — in the bowels of a now-neutralized terror tunnel, a mere five minutes' jog from my house. It is sinister and frightening, built with a complex infrastructure for communications and electricity that was developed solely for purposes of death.

Can those here imagine how our children feel when they know that terrorists could come bursting through a tunnel under our community at any time? Thanks to technology, that threat will soon be eliminated, but there are other threats that throw a shadow over our lives here in what we like to refer to as "95 per cent paradise and 5 per cent hell".

Within the past two years, Hamas has been organizing weekly riots along the border — every Friday after the group's prayers. The Great March of Return is, in fact, weekly, violent riots, which involves throwing Molotov cocktails and grenades, vandalizing our border fence and attempted infiltrations, which often spiral into retaliatory rocket fire after someone is killed from among the rioters.

Every Friday, rather than welcoming in the peaceful Sabbath, as most of the Jewish world does, we on the border brace ourselves for the possible escalation of violence and rocket fire. In fact, we never know when we will wake up to find our lives put on pause and roads and schools closed for one to two days, or possibly longer, owing to rocket and mortar fire. Just last night, the people in my community were on alert as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) killed another armed terrorist attempting to cut through the border fence and infiltrate Israel through our fields, as Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov mentioned earlier.

During the past two years, we have also had to live with a new threat — balloons, kites and drones that have brought over flaming coals and incendiary explosives that detonate overhead or ignite our crops. They have burned down 35 square kilometres of agriculture, forests and nature reserves. That is comparable to igniting a little more than half the island of Manhattan.

They have sent over balloons attached to explosive booby-trapped books and toys. During the past two years, 17 more terror tunnels have invaded our borders and have been discovered and neutralized.

As a result, the rate of people seeking psychological aid in our region has risen by 231 per cent in the past five years, since Operation Protective Edge. More than half of them have been children. Yet despite everything and against all odds and seeming logic, our region continues to grow and thrive. Our 95 per cent heaven comprises an award-winning educational system, innovative agricultural endeavours and beautiful expanses of desert, which come alive with red poppy blooms in late winter. All that, in addition to a strong sense of community pride, encourages young families to come and settle here despite the challenges.

All of the residents in our region, both on the Israeli side and the Gazan side, are hostages of Hamas — some even more literally than us. I am referring to the two Israeli citizens being held in Gaza and the bodies of our two fallen soldiers, Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul. Eleven times in the past two years, I personally have been held hostage by Hamas rockets. My life was put on hold. Work, routines and plans were cancelled. Hamas, and Hamas alone, decides when there will be a ceasefire. Even today, Hamas chooses to construct terror tunnels rather than buildings to house their people or factories to generate industry. They keep their population poor and unemployed by funnelling funds from the international community into their own pockets rather than to those for whom the aid was intended — their citizens. Luckily for me, Israel builds safe rooms to protect its citizens. Every home within 7 kilometres of the border has a reinforced, rocket-proof safe room built on its premises paid for by the Government of Israel. Hamas, on the other hand, builds safe rooms to protect its weapons. Hamas brings Gazans, including women and children, to the border riots to lose life or limb. Hamas aims its rockets at Israeli civilian communities, including my own, from within schools, mosques and homes, knowing full well that the IDF is reluctant to retaliate where there are innocent civilians nearby who could be harmed.

I know that not all Gazans are part of Hamas. I know that most Gazans want the same things that I do — safety for their children, food on their tables and to enable their children to have a horizon of hope. I have that horizon because I have seen it. When I came to live in my kibbutz, we used to drive to the beach

or the market in Gaza, and Gazans used to come to my area. I have that horizon because I am personally in contact with Gazans who want to educate their children to have different hopes and realities. I have that horizon because I have spoken with Gazans and worked with them recently on educational projects, for which they risk their lives. I have even had a chance to hug a Gazan woman who lives just on the other side of our border from my home, a couple of weeks ago, right here in Tel Aviv, while taking part in the women's leadership seminar, run by the Geneva Initiative.

It is only a fence that divides us. We all know that Gaza and the western Negev mirror each other, with the same climate, fauna and flora. A border fence can keep people in or out, but it cannot stop the pollution that threatens the underwater aquifers that supply water to both sides of the border, due to the crumbling sewage system in Gaza caused by the conflicts of recent years and by Hamas's failure to prioritize civilian infrastructure.

In preparation for this talk, I spoke with our mayor, Mr. Gadi Yarkoni, who lost both legs in one of the rocket attacks on the last day of Operation Protective Edge. Mr. Yarkoni said that he knows that the only solution is for us to live together. He told me that he and the other mayors of the region have extended their hands in peace, cooperation and collaboration. I asked him how they did that. That is when he told me about the plans that we have for building an electricity plant to provide electricity to Gaza, with the backing of Arab and European investors. He also described the plans that they have for another collaboration to answer the needs of Gazans, a plant for treating sewage in Gaza and turning it into electricity, because Gazans do not have electricity 24/7, thanks to the infighting between Fatah and Hamas. The people of our region in Israel know that if we want our lives to be good and that for our region to thrive and prosper, we need to see to it that our neighbours, too, can thrive and prosper.

I live in the shadow of the threat of rockets and attack tunnels, and I know only too well that until the Gazans have something to live for, they will only have reasons to die for. I understand that until the unemployment level drops and their ability to put food on their tables increases, our safety will remain compromised. I have no doubt that until Palestinians in Gaza are able to construct housing, they will continue to construct tunnels and rockets, and that until they are able to raise their children in homes rather than in

the rubble of the conflict, they will be raising another generation of Israel-haters, and my grandbabies will not be able to play outside without their mother worrying about the eventuality of a blaring siren.

Coexistence begins with education and responsibility. I hold Hamas responsible for finding a way to stop investing in terrorism and incitement to hatred, and to start making choices that will enable the people of Gaza to thrive and prosper. I call on my Government and the leaders of the Palestinian side to get to the table to work out a long-term political agreement. I call on the countries of the world and their representatives, the members of the Security Council, to compel Hamas to abandon its path of violence and empower all the people in our region, on both sides of the border, and provide them with the conditions they need to live in a way in which the human rights of all of us will be truly respected.

We all need to be able to raise the next generation to respect our neighbours, not to fear them. That is clearly not a conflict that can be resolved by weapons. It can be resolved only by courageous leaders and diplomacy. I warmly invite you, Madam President, and the Ambassadors in attendance today to come visit me in my 95 per cent heaven and see it first-hand.

The President: I thank Ms. Raemer for her briefing.

I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his twelfth report (S/2019/938) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which is a written report in line with the provisions of the resolution and presidential note S/2017/507, as is the case with all other items on the Security Council agenda. We look forward to receiving at least two written reports every year in that regard.

We commend the efforts of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, and reaffirm our full support to him in his efforts to carry out his mandate. We also thank Ms. Adele Raemer for her briefing and Mr. Mladenov

for his update on the situation of the implementation of this important resolution, which we will be highlighting in our statement today. We will also shed light on the illegal settlement policy. Resolution 2334 (2016) stresses that Israeli settlement activities are a blatant violation of international law and an obstacle to peace. Unfortunately, however, that has not deterred Israel, the occupying Power, from expanding its policies to annex Palestinian territories at an unprecedented rate. The Secretary-General's report clarifies that Israel took no steps during the reporting period to end its settlement activities, which means that Israel, the occupying Power, has paid no attention to the calls of the Security Council, as outlined in the resolution, to fully and immediately end its settlement activities.

Israel, the occupying Power, has carried out plans to build, expand, fund and license its settlements that have led to an increase in crimes against innocent Palestinian people, their properties and their holy sites. Sadly, that has gone on under the protection of the occupying authorities, which are fully responsible for the crimes and aggressions that violate international law, international humanitarian law, the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention and other international conventions that guarantee peace and security for people on occupied land. We therefore strongly condemn Israel's illegal expansionist settlement policy in all its forms on all the territories of the State of Palestine occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. We reaffirm that Israeli settlements are null and void and cannot be accepted as a *fait accompli*.

We are not exaggerating when we say that the future of the Palestinian question is on the line. We cannot achieve a breakthrough in the peace process if any of the parties fail to comply with the international terms of reference for the peace process in the Middle East, that is, the resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace and a two-State solution, which would bring the Israeli occupation to an end. It is therefore essential that all Member States that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine do so in order to put an end to occupation, save the two-State solution and promote the prospects for peace, especially in these critical circumstances.

The States concerned must also practice neutrality when they mediate to achieve peace, given that taking unilateral measures that contravene the relevant United Nations resolutions represent a real threat to peace and security in the Middle East and throughout the

world. They may have repercussions that could help to fuel frustration as well as instigate extremism and violence in the Palestinian territory and the region as a whole, especially given that Israel, the occupying Power, insists on depriving the Palestinian people of their legitimate rights and is determined to entrench its occupation. In addition, it has tightened the blockade imposed on Gaza for more than 12 years and restricted freedom of movement for individuals and goods. It continues to carry out attacks on holy sites and seeks to alter the historic status and character of Jerusalem as well as its demographic composition. It undermines the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which provides basic services to Palestinian refugees in areas such as health, education and relief. Israel, the occupying Power, has also taken other unilateral unjust decisions, such as not renewing the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron and freezing part of the Palestinian tax returns.

In conclusion, we reaffirm the Arab position, which holds that peace is the strategic choice and is the solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict, in line with the relevant legitimate international resolutions, international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which stipulates that comprehensive peace in Israel must be preceded by ending the Israeli occupation of all Arab and Palestinian territories since 1967 as a prelude to realizing all legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people and establishing an independent Palestinian State on their land, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Velásquez (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting. We thank Mr. Mladenov and Ms. Raemer for their valuable briefings.

Peru is deeply concerned about the increasing deterioration of the political and humanitarian conditions underpinning the Palestinian issue. The situation is unsustainable and destabilizing for the Middle East and for the international community.

We must continue to condemn the ongoing indiscriminate attacks against civilians by Hamas and other radical Palestinian actors, as Ms. Raemer apprised us, as well as the disproportionate Israeli responses. International law and human rights are openly flouted, creating a climate of impunity that exacerbates the conflict. That dynamic, together with

the Council's inaction and the passivity of certain key actors, has negative repercussions in an environment that is already highly volatile. Putting an end to that serious situation is a major undertaking but it is urgent.

In these difficult circumstances, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to the only solution that we believe to be viable and consistent with international law: that of two States with internationally recognized and secure borders, to be negotiated directly between Israel and Palestine on the basis of the borders in force until 1967, which should also lead to the resolution of the final status of Jerusalem.

It is imperative, in the immediate term, that the leaders of both sides show real signs of genuine commitment and political will, replacing unilateral actions that undermine the trust required with genuine signs of compromise. We refer specifically to the noted intensification of settlement, demolition and eviction practices in occupied Palestinian territories, which specifically undermine the two-State solution and violate the provisions of the Council pursuant to resolution 2334 (2016). Those illegal practices must cease.

We also believe it essential to condemn hate speech, anti-Semitism and discrimination in all its forms. In any society, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity must be seen as an asset and never as a threat. In line with its sensitive responsibility to maintain international peace and security, the Security Council must also be able to achieve minimum consensus and act when the situation on the ground so warrants.

The emphasis placed on political and security developments should not in any way detract from the urgent need to immediately address in parallel the humanitarian crisis looming over the Palestinian people, aggravated in recent years by recurrent episodes of violence and reductions in the funding of assistance programmes. In particular, we believe it vital to meet the basic needs of the people of Gaza, since poverty and marginalization are fertile ground for radicalization and violent extremism. It is important to continue to promote a lasting peace by linking humanitarian assistance with development plans that provide hope and opportunities to the youngest. We also call for stepping up efforts to advance the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process, as its success would alleviate the humanitarian situation and give impetus to the resumption of dialogue with Israel.

I would like to conclude by expressing our gratitude for the written report (S/2019/938) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which was requested of the Secretary-General by 10 members of the Council. We hope that that practice will be maintained in a semi-annual format, since it brings greater transparency to the consideration of this sensitive issue.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and for the work that he and his team do in difficult circumstances. I also thank Ms. Raemer for her briefing and the perspective that she shared, which was of great interest.

Three years since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) by the Council, the United Kingdom notes with concern the Secretary-General's assessment that the situation on the ground since then has only deteriorated. In the light of the continued increase in Israeli settlements, we reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of a two-State solution.

The United Kingdom notes the Israeli Defence Minister's instructions to act for the advancement of a new Jewish neighbourhood in Hebron. We understand that that does not signal the start of a formal planning process. However, if such plans were to advance, it would be of grave concern given the sensitivities of the location.

Demolitions of Palestinian-owned homes and structures have also increased. The United Kingdom is concerned in particular by the targeting of donor-funded structures in Area C, which are provided on humanitarian grounds to support vulnerable communities. As we have made clear before, any suggestion that parts of the occupied Palestinian territories should be annexed is contrary to international law and damaging to peace efforts and could not pass unchallenged.

As the United Kingdom made clear last month (see S/PV.8669), following the escalation of hostilities in Gaza, the indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad were completely unacceptable. All countries, including Israel, have a legitimate right to self-defence and the right to defend their citizens from attack. In doing so, it is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with international humanitarian law, and are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties.

It is critical that the Palestinian leadership continue its efforts to tackle terror and incitement. The Israeli security forces must also avoid the use of excessive force, and we encourage Israel to properly investigate all potential breaches of law, holding those responsible to account.

The United Kingdom is concerned to hear of a further increase in the number of attacks by settlers on Palestinians. As the occupying Power, Israel has a responsibility to protect the Palestinian population. We urge Israel to thoroughly investigate every instance and bring those responsible to justice.

Turning to positive steps, the United Kingdom welcomes the progress made on the implementation of the package of interventions for Gaza endorsed by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians. However, we remain concerned about the dire humanitarian situation. We again call on Israel to ease restrictions on water, electricity, movement and access, which impact the livelihoods and life prospects of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza and breed resentment.

We welcome the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and encourage partners to step up with more funding and more predictable disbursements, as the United Kingdom has done. We also welcome continued work towards genuine and democratic national elections for all Palestinians, which is crucial for the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State.

Finally, at this highly sensitive time in the region, we call on the parties to show real leadership, including the willingness to make tough compromises, in order to achieve a secure Israel standing alongside a sovereign Palestinian State.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the most recent written report submitted by Secretary-General Guterres on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2019/938). We thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. We also listened carefully to Ms. Raemer's remarks.

In December 2016, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016) on the question of Palestine, reflecting the common expectations and aspirations of the international community and in response to a call for justice from Palestine and Arab States.

Regrettably, however, three years later, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has witnessed no improvement; in fact, it has deteriorated even further. Settlement activities continue to advance and expand significantly as we speak. More Palestinian homes are being demolished. Acts of violence and inflammatory rhetoric by the parties concerned are escalating, and the Middle East peace process has stalled.

China finds all the foregoing deeply concerning. We call on all parties to earnestly and effectively implement resolution 2334 (2016), stay on track towards a political solution, adhere to the fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and give full play to the key role of the United Nations so as to form a synergy between regional and international efforts aimed at pushing for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli question at an early date.

First, we must adhere to the two-State solution as the basis for the ultimate goal of establishing an independent Palestinian State. Foreign occupation is the underlying cause of the decades-long Palestinian-Israeli issue. The parties must remain committed to the overarching goal of the two-State solution and pursue dialogue on an equal footing and political negotiation on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as other international consensus and norms so as to resolve the differences between the Israeli and Palestinian sides and find a mutually acceptable solution.

Resolution 2334 (2016) clearly stipulates that the establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, constitutes a violation of international law. The parties concerned should immediately cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and refrain from demolishing Palestinian homes and destroying Palestinian property.

Secondly, we must promote a rapprochement between Palestine and Israel and encourage the relaunch of peace talks as soon as possible. Historical grievances lie at the root of the intricate and complex Palestinian-Israeli question. Fighting violence with violence will get us nowhere; it is only with the gradual building of mutual political trust, for the benefit of common security, can there be a steady and solid long-term solution. The parties concerned should proceed from the overall interest of providing safety for local communities and

peace and stability in the region, exercise calm and restraint in seeking rapprochement, cease military actions and refrain from inflammatory remarks. They must also cease and desist all acts of violence against civilians, with a view to enabling an effective easing of tensions, rebuilding and accumulating mutual trust and creating favourable conditions for the restart of the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks. China supports all efforts of the international community that are conducive to peace between Palestine and Israel, and we appreciate the good offices of Special Coordinator Mladenov and Egypt, among other parties. We firmly oppose any irresponsible remarks made by any country.

Thirdly, we need to follow the Palestinian economic and humanitarian situation closely and work to improve it by adhering to a holistic approach that promotes peace through development. At present, the economic and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Gaza, remains grim. The international community should scale up its input, place a greater focus on economic reconstruction and prioritize livelihood-related projects so as to make a real difference in the lives of the Palestinian people. China supports the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as it continues to play its important role. The adoption by an overwhelming majority of General Assembly resolution 74/85, on the extension of UNRWA's mandate, also speaks to the international community's support for and recognition of UNRWA's work. China calls on the parties concerned to fully implement the relevant resolutions and immediately and completely lift the blockade on Gaza.

China supports the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We stand ready to continue to uphold justice and fairness and play our part as a steadfast builder of peace in the Middle East, a facilitator of stability and a contributor to the region's development.

Mr. Moriko (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation wishes to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his excellent briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We also welcome Ms. Adele Raemer's contribution to this meeting.

Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the ongoing deterioration of the security situation, the continued violence and violations of relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016). Despite the repeated calls of the international community for the de-escalation of tensions, we have not witnessed any progress. In fact, my country notes with regret that, in his most recent report (S/2019/938), the Secretary-General once again highlights the lack of implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) in a list of acts contrary to the spirit of the resolution. So as not to undermine the two-State solution for peacefully coexistence, it is urgent that the parties refrain from any provocative actions or statements that would exacerbate tensions, which often degenerates into violence against the populations.

These deadly acts of violence remind us of the urgent need to work for the relaunch of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, which unfortunately has not seen any significant progress since the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995. Côte d'Ivoire therefore urges the international community to tirelessly pursue its mediation efforts towards the resumption of the political process among the various parties, with a view to reaching a just and lasting solution based on mutual recognition of the legitimate aspirations of all concerned, including the right to self-determination for the Palestinians and the right of Israel to live in peace and security. Any new initiative must therefore be aimed at achieving the two-State solution within the 1967 borders — a solution to which my country remains profoundly attached.

My delegation also remains concerned about the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which remains strongly affected by the blockade in force, water and electricity shortages in a context of acute economic crisis, and mass unemployment among young people. We call on the international community to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in need, as well as to work towards the economic recovery and reconstruction of the Gaza Strip through adequate funding and investment. My country also welcomes the announcements of contributions to the budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, with a view to reducing the budget deficit it is facing.

In parallel to the need to de-escalate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Côte d'Ivoire believes that inter-Palestinian unity is essential to advance national aspirations for independent statehood and sovereignty.

My delegation therefore encourages Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to pursue dialogue in order to achieve the Palestinian Authority's effective return to Gaza, which would allow for better management of the current humanitarian situation. Furthermore, my country welcomes the prospect of the first Palestinian elections since 2006 being held in 2020 and hopes that the elections will be held throughout the Palestinian territory on the basis of a broad consensus.

It is important that the Security Council, which has the primary responsibility of maintaining of international peace and security, regain its unity in order to send a single message to all parties to reduce tensions and invite them to reopen peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations.

Since this is the last time that Côte d'Ivoire will speak in the Council on the situation in the Middle East, given that our term of office ends at the end of this month, my delegation would like to reiterate its full support for Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his tireless efforts towards a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for his determination to create the conditions necessary for finding a definitive and lasting resolution to that conflict. A lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an absolute necessity not only for the Palestinian and Israeli populations, but also for the security and stability of the region.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset let me thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. Let me also thank Ms. Adele Raemer for her input. Regrettably, as we have just heard from the Special Coordinator, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. The reporting period was characterized by acts of violence, including the firing of rockets by Palestinian militants from Gaza against civilians in Israel, on the one hand, and by Israel's use of lethal force against Palestinians, on the other hand. Casualties occur on both sides of the conflict.

In 2016, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), reaffirming its previous resolutions with regard to applicable international law and the parameters of a peaceful solution through the Middle East peace process. The only way forward for the Palestinians and Israelis is to negotiate a two-State solution — the State of Israel as an independent and democratic State and a viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza, the two living side by side in peace and security, with borders negotiated on the basis of the 1967 lines.

Poland's position on the Israeli settlement policy is clear and remains unchanged. It is also the European Union's position. All settlement activity is illegal under international law. The illegal Israeli settlements erode the viability of the two-State solution and the prospects for a lasting peace.

We also reiterate our concern about the calls for a possible annexation of areas in the West Bank. Such a move would constitute a serious breach of international law and deeply damage peace efforts. Poland would like to echo the concern with respect to the demolitions and seizures of donor-funded humanitarian projects.

Let me now turn to the situation in Gaza, which remains dire. We call on all parties to take urgent steps towards achieving a fundamental change in the humanitarian, political, security and economic situations in Gaza by ending the closure policy and facilitating the sustained opening of the crossing points important for the daily lives of the people of Gaza. At the same time, we must address Israel's legitimate security concerns.

On the political track, we have to acknowledge that the process is currently almost entirely blocked. Intra-Palestinian division only aggravates the situation of the people of Gaza and weakens the national aspirations of the Palestinians. Poland welcomes ongoing discussions on the holding of Palestinian general elections — the first Palestinian elections to be held since 2006. They must be organized across the occupied Palestinian territory, and a broader intra-Palestinian agreement must be reached on the modalities of these elections. It is critical that the important Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts continue.

We remain gravely concerned at the continuing violence, terrorist attacks against civilians and incitement to violence that greatly exacerbate mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians, and which are incompatible with a peaceful resolution. There is no justification for terrorism. The indiscriminate rocket and mortar attacks against the Israeli civilian population are totally unacceptable and must stop. Such attacks are prohibited by international humanitarian law, and Palestinian militants must cease the practice immediately.

The security situation in Gaza remains very fragile, with three serious military escalations occurring in 2019. The killing of the nine members of a family in an

Israeli air strike, whose home was mistakenly targeted, must be investigated. The situation continues to be at risk of a major escalation, and the immense suffering of the people continues.

Let me stress that the Israeli security forces must fully comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality when using force. On the other hand, relevant authorities and protest organizers in Gaza must ensure that protests remain peaceful. Furthermore, both sides have a legal and moral obligation to fully protect the rights of children and prevent violations and abuses of their rights. Neither Palestinian nor Israeli children must suffer the consequences of this conflict.

Allow me to conclude with a word about the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Agency remains a key contributor to the stability and security of the region. Accordingly, Poland welcomes the General Assembly's renewal of the UNRWA's mandate last week (resolution 74/83). We will continue to support the Agency in its efforts aimed at providing necessary services and assistance to Palestinian refugees.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Let me begin by thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing. Council members may rest assured that we will continue to support his work. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2019/938). We also heard Ms. Adele Raemer's story, from which it is quite clear that we need to faithfully implement resolution 2334 (2016).

The Security Council must also conduct a field visit to Gaza and the West Bank of the occupied Palestinian territory. I have been wondering — and still fail to understand — why the Security Council is not able to effectuate an official visit there, but it does show that clearly much still needs to be done.

Indonesia fully concurs with the Secretary-General that illegal settlement activities continue to undermine the prospects of ending occupation and achieving the two-State solution. We heard from Mr. Nickolay Mladenov that the situation has deteriorated and that much still needs to be done. We therefore join other Council members in again urging Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East

Jerusalem. Against this backdrop, I would like to stress the following points.

First, the Council must devise the necessary means to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). When the Council adopted the resolution three years ago, it set the right course for reviving the peace process based on international law and agreed parameters. The resolution rejected any efforts that undermined international consensus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the settlement issue. It also entailed preserving and protecting the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem, in line with the special and historical role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites.

It is clear that the occupying Power has much to do to ensure the full implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016). The deteriorating situation on the ground compels the Council to urgently devise practical and effective ways and means to end the illegal settlements. We cannot continue with business as usual. Failure to devise such measures would be a case of the Council undermining its own authority and decisions, which would further destabilize the situation in the occupied territory and the wider region.

Secondly, with regard to the need for more concerted action to support the Palestinian cause, if we are truly serious about our support for the Palestinian cause, surely it is time for more concerted action. We need to reinvigorate our commitment to the peace process in order to achieve the two-State solution, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters. Given the current negative trends, we are doubtful that a credible process will ever materialize. To reverse those trends, members of the international community have the obligation to undertake necessary actions against Israel and its settlement policy, including by distinguishing between Israel and the territories occupied since 1967 in their relevant dealings with that country. The recent ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union — that foods from Israeli settlements should be specially labelled, encouraging consumers to mull over ethical considerations while shopping — is a commendable example.

Lastly, on the need to sustain humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people, while we defend the fate of the two-State solution, let us not forget the humanitarian crisis facing the Palestinian people in

Gaza, the West Bank and in various refugee locations. In that connection, we reiterate our call to the international community to extend its utmost support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East with urgency and by whatever means possible. We need to remain steadfast in our efforts to assist the Palestinian people not only in humanitarian terms but also in enhancing the capacity of the Palestinians to fully govern themselves. As for Indonesia, the Government and its people have stood and will always stand by our Palestinian brothers and sisters. We support the plan to hold a Palestinian general election and fervently hope that it will unify all Palestinians towards their dream State of Palestine.

In conclusion, let me once again remind members of the international community that resolution 2334 (2016) is much more than a mere document produced by the Council. It is a beacon of hope for the Palestinian people and a pillar that upholds international law against the fabricated reality being advanced by the occupying Power. Our action or inaction against that false reality will determine not only the credibility of the United Nations but also the fate of the Palestinian people and of the Middle East.

Mr. Trullols Yabra (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): As always, we are grateful to Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing, as we are to Ms. Adele Raemer.

Unfortunately, the current state and trends of the situation in the Middle East continue to cause us great concern. We are witnessing an ever-worsening downwards spiral, jeopardizing the possibility of achieving just, lasting and comprehensive peace based on the only viable solution to the protracted conflict — two States that align with the 1967 borders and supported by serious dialogue between both parties.

We would once again like to reiterate our position concerning the Israeli settlement activities taking place throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem. The Dominican Republic considers the Israeli policy to be illegal under international law, including under resolution 2334 (2016), and that its continuation also has serious consequences for the civilian population, which is forced to move without protection guarantees. Not only do the settlements contribute to an escalation of tensions on the ground, but they increasingly hinder

and reduce the possibility of a peaceful two-State solution based on social inclusion and hope for lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

At the same time, the Dominican Republic recognizes the need for an intra-Palestinian reconciliation process that allows for the national consolidation necessary to advancing the country's legitimate aspirations and paves the way for a process of political renewal based on free and inclusive elections. We encourage the Palestinian leadership and the international community to direct all their efforts towards strengthening national unity and supporting the election process. Restoring hope among Palestine's young people should be a priority for the authorities, which bear the responsibility for a better future for them and future generations.

The Gaza Strip continues to be a theatre for persistent violence that undermines the right of both Israelis and Palestinians to coexist in conditions of peace and security. While the humanitarian situation in that area is less severe, the constant threat of fresh violence makes it more fragile and hampers economic development, leading to an increase in poverty, unemployment and food insecurity, as well as other central drivers of humanitarian need. We therefore support the 2020 humanitarian response plan for the occupied Palestinian territory and encourage donor countries to contribute to its full funding so as to meet the most basic needs of the Palestinian population living under occupation and working to lay the development foundations to break free from it.

In conclusion, the Dominican Republic reiterates its emphatic condemnation of rocket launches on areas populated by civilians. There is no justification whatsoever for carrying out those indiscriminate attacks that end the lives and dash the dreams of real people. It is imperative that we undertake all efforts necessary to achieving a speedy, comprehensive and definitive de-escalation of the situation. We urge all parties to act with the utmost restraint in order to guarantee the maintenance of the ceasefire and the protection of the civilian population.

Mr. Van Shalkwyk (South Africa): Let me also add our voice of thanks to Mr. Mladenov for his briefing and to Ms. Raemer for the perspectives that she shared with us.

South Africa thanks the Secretary-General and welcomes the second written report for 2019 on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2019/938).

We hope that the practice of written reports continues and look forward to the next written report in June 2020.

South Africa fully supports the negotiations in pursuit of the two-State solution and the agreed peace processes aimed at ensuring two viable States coexisting side by side to the mutual benefit of all peoples in the region. The continued disregard for those prevailing and longstanding internationally accepted concepts cannot be allowed, particularly with regard to the circumvention of final-status issues such as the borders, the status of Jerusalem and the right of return of refugees.

As we and other Member States have stated on numerous occasions, the only way to achieve sustained peace and security in the Middle East is through reaching a lasting agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis themselves, based on the agreed peace process and the relevant United Nations resolutions and international terms of reference, including the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, among others.

That can be done only if all sides abide by their obligations under international law, including Security Council resolutions. In that regard, South Africa remains extremely concerned about the continued settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory. As reported by the Secretary-General, over 3,000 housing units were advanced or approved in the occupied West Bank, including 300 units in East Jerusalem, during the reporting period alone. In relation to the expansion of illegal settlements, the seizure, destruction or demolition of Palestinian property has led to the displacement of 260 people, including 133 children.

Additionally, the Secretary-General's report highlights incidents of Israeli security forces in Hebron firing teargas canisters and stun grenades at schools in response to children throwing stones at a military patrol. Such disproportionate and undue reaction by the Israeli security forces cannot be allowed and must be condemned. We cannot allow children to fear places that are supposed to be places of learning and refuge.

South Africa emphasizes that those actions undermine the prospects for peace and contravene the decisions of the Council, effectively undermining its own credibility. If the Council is unable or unwilling to uphold its own decisions, it loses its effectiveness. In that regard, my delegation will continue to insist on the

full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and all other Council resolutions on the matter.

The situation in Gaza is of grave concern to South Africa. The recent increase in tensions has led to further killings and a perpetuation of the conflict. South Africa calls on all parties to cease those violent attacks, which only drive the parties further away from each other and diminish any hope for the restoration of negotiations.

South Africa welcomes the significant progress made on implementing the package of intervention for Gaza of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, particularly in the delivery of electricity and health-care services. However, despite those interventions, the humanitarian and socioeconomic situations remain dire. We echo the Secretary-General in that the provision of health care should not be determined by political considerations but should be based on the needs of the people of Gaza. We commend and support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in ensuring that those and other vital needs of the Palestinian people are met.

In conclusion, South Africa welcomes the efforts of the Special Coordinator to ensure that inclusive Palestinian elections are held in the near future. We note Hamas's acceptance of the proposed election plan of President Abbas and call on all parties to ensure that safe and inclusive elections are held throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his intervention and Ms. Raemer for her testimony. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2019/938). Three years after the adoption of the resolution, France regrets that it has not been implemented.

The Secretary-General's report is unequivocal. There is an unprecedented intensification of settlement activities, with decisions affecting more than 22,000 housing units at different stages of the approval process, as well as 8,000 others that have been put out to tender since the adoption of the resolution, in December 2016.

France recalls that Israel's settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territories is contrary to international law. We are very concerned about

ongoing colonisation in areas likely to undermine the territorial continuity of the future Palestinian State, particularly in Gilo. We are concerned about reports of the construction of new housing units in particularly sensitive areas, such as in the Nof Tzion settlement in East Jerusalem and in the former market in Old City of Hebron. France deplores the infrastructure works aimed at strengthening integration among all the settlements in the Jerusalem area and between those settlements and central Israel. The destruction and seizure of Palestinian property have also been on a steep rise this year in East Jerusalem and Zone C. We note with concern the destruction of 26 elements of infrastructure financed by the international community, including by the countries of the European Union, over the past three months. Finally, the repeated announcements by Israeli officials on the annexation of settlements or entire parts of the West Bank are a major source of concern. If implemented, they would constitute a serious violation of international law.

We therefore call on the Israeli authorities to renounce any project leading to faits accomplis that would run counter to the two-State solution. We will remain particularly attentive to developments in the situation and ready to react, in conjunction with our European partners.

The situation in Gaza also remains fragile. France has unequivocally condemned the firing of rockets from Gaza into inhabited areas of Israel, in violation of international law. We recall our unwavering commitment to Israel's security. We have also recalled the right of both Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace, dignity and security and have deplored the civilian casualties on both sides. It is now important that the ceasefire reached on 14 November through the efforts of Egypt and the Special Coordinator be fully respected.

Beyond the need to respect the ceasefire, there will be no lasting stability in Gaza without a lifting of the blockade paired with credible security guarantees for Israel or without the return of the Palestinian Authority, in the context of inter-Palestinian reconciliation. The holding of credible Palestinian elections in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem would be an essential step towards inter-Palestinian reconciliation and the strengthening of Palestinian institutions established pursuant to the Oslo Accords. In that context, I call on the Palestinian authorities to continue their efforts to that end and reiterate our readiness to support them in those efforts.

I would like to recall that there is no alternative to an agreement negotiated by the parties on the basis of internationally agreed parameters. Only the two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, will fulfil the aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians by enabling them to live side by side in peace and security and bring lasting peace to the region. Any solution that deviates from the parameters agreed by the international community would necessarily be doomed to failure.

There is no status quo on the ground but, rather, a deterioration of the situation that is unsustainable in the long term; that is not in the interest of either party. It contributes to increased tensions, undermines the two-State solution and postpones lasting peace, which can only fuel despair and the temptation of extremism.

The mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will remain crucial until a lasting peace that provides a just, realistic and lasting solution to the refugee issue is found. In that regard, France welcomes the renewal of the Agency's mandate for three years and calls for a surge in international mobilization to make up its financial deficit by the end of the year. For its part, France doubled its contribution to UNRWA this year.

Three years after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), it is time to implement it. The credibility of the Security Council and of us all depend on it. In that connection, the Secretary-General's report refers to the decision of the European Court of Justice of 12 November on the labelling requirement for products from the occupied Palestinian territories and Israeli settlements. The labelling measures meet the requirement of resolution 2334 (2016) to introduce a differentiation policy. France will continue to engage to ensure the implementation of the resolution.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and Ms. Raemer for her remarks.

Three years have passed since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), but as the Secretary-General notes in his latest report (S/2019/938), the situation on the ground has continuously deteriorated over that period. We thank the Secretary-General for his balanced report. We are greatly concerned by his observations with regard to the implementation of the resolution and the current status of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Germany remains firmly committed to a negotiated two-State solution based on the internationally agreed parameters. We continue to believe that the two-State solution is the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs, fulfils Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967, resolves all permanent-status issues and guarantees equal rights for all inhabitants.

We support any effort that is aimed at reviving the political process as long as it is in line with international law, ensures equal rights and is acceptable to both parties, Israelis and Palestinians. Unilateral actions or creating facts on the ground will, however, neither help to reach a just and lasting solution nor lead to a sustainable peace. We therefore call on all the parties to the conflict, but also on all international stakeholders, to refrain from taking any measures that risk undermining the viability of a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the internationally agreed parameters.

One of the main obstacles to a political settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the ongoing Israeli occupation and the continued settlement activities in the territories occupied since 1967. We reiterate our position that Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law and undermine the prospects for ending the occupation and achieving a negotiated two-State solution.

The year 2019 marks a record year in the expansion of Israeli settlement activity and the legalization of settlement outposts since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). This is a matter of serious concern to us. We also remain gravely concerned about an increased number of demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures across the West Bank, including donor-financed humanitarian projects and evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem. As noted by the Secretary-General in his report, these demolitions also affected 26 structures financed by international donors. We therefore call upon Israel to end the expansion of settlements, the legalization of settlement outposts, the confiscation of Palestinian land and evictions from and the demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures.

We remain extremely concerned about repeated statements alluding to or even announcing an intended

annexation of the Jordan Valley and other parts of the occupied West Bank. Should such statements turn into actual Government policy or law, that would constitute a clear violation of international law. We strongly advise any Israeli Government against taking any steps in this direction as they would have serious, negative repercussions on the viability of the two-State solution and the entire peace process.

We also reiterate that Germany will continue to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967 and that we will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties.

Resolution 2334 (2016) needs to be fully implemented, not only with regard to settlement activities but also with regard to acts of terror, violence against civilians, incitement, provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric. We welcome the fact that the report of the Secretary-General also focuses on these obstacles to achieving peace and share his grave concerns about the continuing violence, terrorist attacks against civilians, incitement and provocative rhetoric and actions.

Germany condemns all attacks on Israel in the strongest possible terms, including the repeated firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad must stop firing rockets into Israel. There is no justification for the firing of rockets into Israel or any other form of terrorism. We remain steadfast in our commitment to Israel's security and stress Israel's rights to self-defence and to react adequately and proportionally to attacks against its territory. Incidents with innocent civilian victims must, however, be thoroughly investigated and accountability for violations of international law must be ensured.

I should like to say a word on the situation in Gaza. The three serious military escalations in 2019 in and around Gaza are deeply concerning and highlight the urgent need for a sustainable, long-term solution to the ongoing humanitarian and economic crisis in Gaza. We call upon both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to do their respective part in order to improve the situation in Gaza. In this context, we welcome the ongoing intra-Palestinian discussions on the holding of legislative and presidential elections in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza, as this could

give renewed democratic legitimacy and strengthen national unity.

Before I conclude, let me also say a word on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Germany welcomes the renewal of the UNRWA mandate for three years as UNRWA continues to contribute to stability in the region by providing humanitarian assistance, health services and education. As the largest bilateral donor, Germany remains firmly committed to UNRWA and continues to significantly contribute to the UNRWA budget. Against the background of the critical financial situation of UNRWA, we encourage other donors to similarly continue their financial support to the Agency by disbursing the funds they have pledged.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, as well as Ms. Raemer for their briefings. We welcome the consistent practice of receiving two written reports per year.

The date of 23 December marks the third anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) and there is no reason to be optimistic. The situation on the ground is bogging down, making a solution seem more distant than ever. We regret to note that the negative developments on the ground go hand-in-hand with the questioning of the fundamental legal principles on which the settlement of the conflict is based.

One of the fundamental legal principles is the illegality of the settlement policy. The Belgian and, more broadly, the European position is clear in this respect. Settlement-building is a flagrant violation of international law, including resolution 2334 (2016). It makes the prospects for a two-State solution more remote.

However, we must note that, since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), the settlement policy has been pursued at a steady pace in the West Bank, targeting particularly symbolic locations, such as the old city of Hebron or East Jerusalem. The settlement policy is implemented through actions like demolitions and evictions, the total number of which have sharply increased over the past two years, according to the 2019 figures. We call on Israel to end this policy. In that context, we also emphasize the importance of preserving the status quo of the holy places in Jerusalem. We reiterate our deepest concern at the declarations relating to a possible unilateral annexation

of all or part of the West Bank. Such annexation is illegal under international law and will not be recognized by Belgium.

Finally, we reiterate our deep concern at the worrisome increase in demolitions and the confiscation of infrastructure and humanitarian projects in Area C. We urge the Israeli authorities to put an end to that practice and to restore or grant compensation for the damage incurred.

The security situation in Gaza remains extremely fragile. We recall the critical obligation of parties to respect the rules of international humanitarian and human rights law. We call on all parties to continue to exercise the utmost restraint in order to avoid another violence episode. Thorough investigations must be carried out with respect to accusations of international humanitarian rights violations.

We reiterate the importance of respecting the right to peaceful protest and the responsibility of the organizers to ensure the peaceful conduct of such demonstrations.

There will be no lasting solution in Gaza without the return of the Palestinian Authority. In that view, we reiterate our call on the Palestinian factions to engage in the reconciliation process in good faith. We encourage Palestinian leaders to work to build strong, inclusive, accountable and democratic institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights. It is important that elections take place throughout Palestinian territory in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip. We call on all parties, including Israel, to facilitate the process to this end.

We remain convinced that there is no other option than a negotiated solution, based on the coexistence of two States, with the city of Jerusalem as the capital of both States, in accordance with internationally agreed parameters. Belgium will continue to work to that end in order to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): As always, we thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his very comprehensive and clear briefing this morning. In the two years in which we have seen his and his team's work close up, we have noted their tremendous dedication, honesty and commitment, all very praiseworthy qualities. We encourage them to continue on that path in order to facilitate the Council's

work concerning the region. We also thank Ms. Raemer for her briefing.

We welcome the fact that consideration is being given to the request that many members have frequently made to have the reports on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), as well as other reports submitted to the Council on other items on its agenda, distributed in written form before the relevant meetings, in order to avoid the possibility of mistaken analyses. Assuming no emergency situations arise during the remainder of this month, I think this will be my delegation's last statement on the question of Palestine. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to once again express our deep concern about the fact that no visible progress has been achieved over the past two years either in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or in the relationship between the main Palestinian factions. When Equatorial Guinea began its term on the Security Council in January of last year, resolution 2334 (2016) had reached its one-year anniversary. At the time, there was no sign of any meaningful improvement regarding the resolution's demands, and today, three years on, almost nothing has changed.

According to the report before us (S/2019/938), the situation on the ground has only deteriorated over the past three years. Settlements have expanded significantly, demolitions have accelerated and violence and incitements to violence also persist. We note that the situation has continued to contribute to the tension between the parties, endangering the lives of Israelis and Palestinians and compounding the severe socioeconomic destabilization in the Gaza Strip. As a country that has friendly relations with both Israel and Palestine, and in accordance with international law, Equatorial Guinea considers the settlement activities to be an obstacle to peace, and their expansion is a categorical threat to the physical viability of a two-State solution. We therefore urge the Government of Israel, in line with its stated aim and desire to seek a resolution to the conflict, to relax its policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including by ending its demolition of Palestinians' homes and property and all of its settlement activities in general. We nevertheless also recognize Israel's right to legitimate self-defence.

As we all know, most of the Israeli attacks on Gaza, while they are sometimes disproportionate, are responses to insurgent acts from within the Gaza Strip itself. As the largest Palestinian force in the area, Hamas must abandon its path of arms and terror and

instead work diligently to prevent any provocations or attacks aimed at civilian areas in Israel. Those attacks, and the unacceptable exchanges of years past, are the main causes of the insecurity, lack of services and all the socioeconomic inequalities facing the inhabitants of the region today. In that regard, we urge the Palestinian political elite to work seriously on a strong, definitive Palestinian reconciliation that prioritizes the interests of all of its people rather than those of individual factions. Palestine needs to be united and to address issues that will enable its people to live dignified and safe lives, as well as ensure prosperity for current and future generations. In that regard, we support the efforts of Egypt, which to date has continued to work with the parties.

As I did in January (see S/PV.8449), I would like to remind the parties that there have been difficult periods in the history of their conflict, including very bloody and destructive events, and yet despite that, Israel has not achieved the security it seeks, nor has a Palestinian State been established that is recognized by Israel and the international community. Violence is therefore not the best option for resolving this conflict, nor will it ever be. We believe that both parties have the right to live in peace and security.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming the position of Equatorial Guinea, which, in line with the United Nations resolutions and other international instruments in force, supports a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, based entirely on negotiations between the parties and ensuring their safe and friendly coexistence in harmony with the other countries of the region.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his informative report on the situation in the Middle East and the occupied Palestinian territories. We also listened carefully to Ms. Adele Raemer's briefing.

We can only concur with the Special Coordinator's key conclusion that negative trends with regard to a settlement in the Middle East are not simply dominant but are approaching a critical point. We have been seeing dangerous tendencies in that direction recently, with the growing use of unilateral steps and aggressive revisions of previously concluded agreements. The voting in the General Assembly this month and last month on the Middle Eastern block of resolutions has affirmed the unity of an overwhelming majority of States Members

of the United Nations with regard to the generally recognized principles for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Russia has always supported a just solution to the Palestinian issue on a basis of the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, which provide for the establishment of an independent, sovereign, and territorially contiguous Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We disagree profoundly with the United States' recent decision that it would no longer consider Israeli settlement activities to be a violation of international law, claiming as its excuse that it is recognizing what it calls the real situation on the ground. It is of a piece with the United States Administration's decisions on Jerusalem and on its illegitimate recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan, which are flagrant violations of international law. In that context, we once again want to affirm that the Golan Heights are unquestionably part of Syrian territory. We believe that attempts to remove the task of finding a lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the agenda are counterproductive. The only reliable way to resolve all the existing disputes is through direct negotiations between the parties. In our view, it is pointless and dangerous to abandon the aim of relaunching the negotiations and replace them with economic initiatives that are mere palliatives.

Unfortunately, in our recent discussions on this subject we have been going in circles and repeating the same things again and again. The fact that there is still no resolution of the Palestinian problem, which is key for the entire region, continues to fuel extremist attitudes inside and outside it. Armed clashes around the Gaza Strip erupt periodically and discontent is growing among ordinary Palestinians and Arabs. The Israeli settlement activity and the demolition of Palestinians' homes remain constant sources of contention and their expanding use is mentioned in the Secretary-General's recent related report (S/2019/938).

In the circumstances, it is more important than ever to mobilize the efforts of the constructively disposed representatives of the international community in support of the generally recognized foundations of a settlement in the Middle East. We want to coordinate our efforts with international stakeholders with influence and with the United Nations. It is essential to continue working with our Palestinian and Israeli partners and

with the States of the Middle East and North Africa. Sending a Security Council mission to the region would seem timely in that regard.

In the interests of calming the situation and creating conditions conducive to the quest for political solutions, we urge the Israeli and Palestinian sides to refrain from aggressive rhetoric or action. We consider settlement activity, the demolition of Palestinian homes, attacks on Gaza and announcements about plans to annex the Jordan Valley unacceptable, as are rocket strikes on Israeli territory and incitements to violence.

Israel and Palestine have important religious significance for millions of followers of the monotheistic religions. The city of Jerusalem has a unique status and is a place where the need to find ways to ensure peaceful coexistence for the followers of all religions is acutely felt. We want to point in that regard to the historical role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as the custodian of Jerusalem's holy sites. Establishing lasting peace in these places is in the interests of all Christians, Muslims and Jews.

We also consider it extremely important to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We have said many times that UNRWA's activities possess a political dimension as well as a humanitarian one, and they have a stabilizing effect on the Palestinian territories and the countries of the Middle East. In that regard, we consider attempts to discredit UNRWA and deprive it of its funding short-sighted. It is naive and dangerous to hope that the problem of Palestinian refugees will disappear along with the Agency, and we hope that the Agency's change of leadership will not affect its activities, which have shown their relevance and effectiveness for decades.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing. As always while addressing the political process, he never loses sight of the well-being of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. I would also like to thank our second briefer, Ms. Adele Raemer. Far too often, we talk about this issue without truly understanding the human impact of the violence that emanates from Gaza. In this season of lights, it is important for the Council to take stock of the things that we see clearly and the things we fail to see. What I must note yet again is how the Council seems either unwilling or unable to see the reality

that Israelis live in constant fear of attack. Instead of recognizing that reality, the Council tolerates an endless string of condemnations of Israel. But I will not stand for that. I have said it before and I will say it again today that Israel has no better friend than Kelly Craft. It will surprise no one in this Chamber to hear me say that the Trump Administration strongly opposes resolution 2334 (2016). It is one-sided and unfairly critical of Israel. Had I been Ambassador at the time of the vote on the draft resolution, I would have vetoed it. We would not normally dignify this resolution with further discussion of its contents.

However, given the comments we heard this morning about rocket attacks that threaten innocent people, it would be of some benefit to explore one element of this resolution. Resolution 2334 (2016) is unambiguous in one important respect. It condemns all acts of violence, including acts of terror, provocation and incitement. Lest we dismiss rocket fire as something other than an act of violence, we should recall that millions of Israelis live under the threat of attack each and every day. A little more than a month ago, Ms. Raemer was one of the many Israelis trapped in bomb shelters in her home as more than 150 rockets launched by Palestinian Islamic Jihad rained down around them. During those kinds of attacks, Israelis cannot leave their homes, so they do not. During those attacks, it is impossible to go about a normal life, so they do not. It hardly needs saying, and yet I feel that I must, that unguided rocket fire affects both Israelis and Palestinians. In Gaza, Palestinian women were also forced to take shelter as rockets fired by terrorists from crowded civilian neighbourhoods flew overhead. That constant threat of attack is the painful reality of daily life for hundreds of thousands of people, Israelis and Palestinians. It is the continued threat of such a violence to so many that precludes the possibility of lasting peace.

Moreover, these acts of violence are clearly condemned by resolution 2334 (2016). So I must ask — will the Council also condemn them? Will it even take them seriously? While Israel's poor treatment in United Nations venues is now so commonplace as to have become unremarkable, what truly is remarkable is the resilience of the people of Israel. Because despite living among the echoes of rocket fire, the people of Israel promote and defend freedom. They build universities, they win Nobel prizes and conduct innovative research. Israel is a gleaming light for the world. Is it to be condemned? No. It is to be emulated.

It is the spirit of determination, of resilience in the face of threat that keeps alive the hope for a peaceful solution, one that promotes and protects the security of Palestinians and Israelis alike. But that solution will be forged only when the two parties can return to the negotiating table. For that to happen, the Council and the parties in question must take more seriously the threat of violence from Gaza, especially from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. So when our task ahead is difficult and the political world is dark, let us be the ones to bring the candles to illuminate the way.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council during this month. We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his presentation of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/938). We also listened to Ms. Raemer's briefing.

As Christians around the world prepare to celebrate Christmas, Palestinian Christians join them in decorating trees, singing carols and praying for peace in the Holy Land and across the globe. But the reality of occupation has not spared them, even in this special period of the year. Palestinian Christians from Gaza have been barred by Israel from celebrating Christmas in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the two twin cities separated, for the first time in history, by a shameful wall. As Palestinians prepare to welcome another year, their ordeal is nowhere close to an end. They continue to fear for their lives, their families, their homes and their future. And yet every day they find the courage to persevere. The Palestinian people are a very resilient people. They remain steadfast in the face of adversity and carry the hope that they will be able to live and thrive on their own land in dignity and freedom.

Here I would like to draw a map of our reality, which can be summarized in two words — confinement, for Palestinians, and expansion, for illegal Israeli settlements. When I say “confinement”, the members of the Council may have in mind, and rightly, the 2 million Palestinians besieged in the Gaza Strip. But Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have also been confined to the areas where they already lived in 1967. In the so-called Area C, which represents 60 per cent of the West Bank and includes the resource-rich

Jordan Valley, only 1 per cent has been planned for Palestinian development, while 70 per cent of the area is included within the boundaries of the regional councils of illegal Israeli settlements. Similarly, only 13 per cent of East Jerusalem, much of which is already built up, is zoned for Palestinian construction, while 35 per cent of the land in East Jerusalem has been confiscated for Israeli settlement use. The purpose of that policy is crystal clear — to acquire the maximum amount of Palestinian land with the minimum of Palestinians. The illegal annexation of Palestinian land is not an unexpected result of the Israeli occupation. It is its overarching objective.

Three years ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), reaffirming the international consensus concerning a just and lasting peace, based on international law and identifying the obligations of the parties and the international community at large. Had there been enforcement and accountability, I assure the Council that the report of the Secretary-General today would certainly be different. Instead, Israeli exceptionalism and impunity have continued, emboldening Israel to pursue and entrench its illegal occupation, to the detriment of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights. Peace requires the fulfilment of those rights, not acceptance of their continued denial.

This morning, the General Assembly adopted resolution 74/139 on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including the right to their independent State. The resolution has garnered the support of more than 90 per cent of the United Nations membership, with 160 Members voting in favour and five against. Is such support for our right to self-determination, which is a principle enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and has been a cornerstone policy of the United States of America since President Wilson, an expression of bias against Israel? Can resolutions on Palestinian rights, the peaceful settlement of the conflict and Jerusalem or against Israeli settlements be characterized as anti-Israeli?

The General Assembly resolutions on Palestine are firmly rooted in the Charter of the United Nations, international law, human rights and the resolutions of the Council itself. Yet it is cynically called biased and one-sided, with the Israeli representative calling the countries making up the General Assembly “morally bankrupt”. The General Assembly is not morally bankrupt. Those who are occupying us and promoting occupation are morally bankrupt. The

General Assembly is more universal and representative today than at any point in history. Israel therefore cannot celebrate resolution 181 (II) — as the Israeli representative celebrated it not long ago in the General Assembly — and commend the General Assembly for adopting it 70 years ago, while dismissing all other resolutions adopted since then. Israel's very selective approach to United Nations resolutions and international law, claiming rights and dismissing obligations, should never be condoned or encouraged.

The claim that the United Nations adopts a disproportionate number of resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a distortion that disregards key facts and the relevant context. Any reference to the number of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the Palestine question must be seen in the context of the paralysis of the Security Council when it comes to the conflict. Therein lies the real imbalance and bias.

In the past decade, out of 636 Security Council resolutions, only two have been adopted on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — only two over the past 10 years — namely, resolution 1860 (2009), to stop the war of aggression against our people in Gaza in 2009, and resolution 2334 (2016). Likewise, out of 271 presidential statements adopted over the past decade, only three concerned Palestine and Israel — only three out of 271.

Therefore, claims that the United Nations is singling out Israel through an inordinate number of resolutions are selective and misleading at best and biased at worst, as such claims ignore the situation in the Council, where the opposite is true and any effort to address Israel's blatant contempt for international law, the authority of the Council and its resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), as conveyed once again in the Secretary-General's report, is obstructed.

The Security Council has not adopted any resolution regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict under Chapter VII, although more than 50 per cent of the resolutions adopted concerning other conflicts in the past 10 years have been under Chapter VII. Of 50 per cent of the 636 resolutions that were adopted under Chapter VII over the past 10 years, not a single one has had to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although the situation demonstrates the need for such an endeavour.

The fate of the region depends to a great extent on the ability of the international community to demonstrate that the international will to achieve peace is stronger than Israel's will to colonize Palestinian

land. We call on the Council and all States to act now to advance accountability, justice, freedom and peace for the sake of the Palestinian people, the Israeli people, future generations, regional and global peace and security, and the international rules-based order.

Before concluding, I would like to take a moment to express our deep appreciation to the outgoing Security Council members on the completion of their service on the Council with principle and distinction. We thank and congratulate the delegations of Kuwait, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Peru and Poland. I also wish everyone happy holidays.

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

Mr. Danon (Israel): I would like to start by congratulating you, Madam President, on assuming your role as President of the Security Council. Your leadership and moral clarity have already had a palliative effect on the work of the Council, and I am sure that they will continue to do so.

I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing, and I also thank Ms. Raemer for sharing her touching story with us today. Her courageous testimony was moving and enlightening. I hope that Council members will take it to heart.

Ms. Raemer's testimony illustrated how Iranian-funded Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad have been terrorizing civilians living on the border of the Gaza Strip for more than a decade. An entire generation has never known a life without having to be aware at all times of where the closest bomb shelter is located. An entire generation suffers from the trauma caused by the fear that the noise heard at night is that of a terror tunnel being dug under the bed.

We have been reminded by Council members today, as we have been reminded many times before, that it is also hard to live on the other side of the border, and they are right. It is indeed hard to be a civilian in the Gaza Strip. In fact, it is hard to be a civilian in all places where the Iranian regime's tentacles of terror have reached. The Iranian regime is dedicated to forcing a radical and dangerous revolution on the region. Central to that strategy are its proxies. Wherever they are, they spread terror and violence against innocent civilians. The regime's proxies do not care about the host countries' civilians. They use those civilians as

shields in the pursuit of Tehran's extremist ideology. They traumatize the innocent and hurt the vulnerable.

That is why it is hard to be a civilian in Israel next to the border. It is hard to be a civilian in the Gaza Strip, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Syria. The Iranian regime abuses civilians on both sides of the border of the Gaza Strip. It funds Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. It directs them to aim rockets at Israeli civilians. It helps Hamas use the funds provided by some members of the Council to build terror tunnels and rockets, instead of hospitals and schools.

Just last week, the 2020 humanitarian response plan was issued in this building, with the aim of providing hundreds of millions of dollars to the Gaza Strip. We hope that it will go to help the people of Gaza. It will not. Instead, I can assure those present that it will once again be wasted on furthering an extremist agenda through terror tactics and harming civilians, Israelis and Palestinians alike. While there is a need for funds in Gaza, we can be sure that the money will not serve its purpose, so long as Hamas is in power with the support of Iran.

Nineteen-year-old Amir Abu Oun was one of thousands who took to the streets in Jabalia to protest against Hamas' policies in March. On his first day of peaceful protest, he was beaten by Hamas forces. On the second day, he was detained for five days, during which he was deprived of food and, once again, beaten. The Islamic Republic does not care about the civilians of the Gaza Strip; it cares only about its extremist ideology.

It is not only in Gaza that the Iranian regime abuses civilians, but also in Iraq. Iranian Shiite militias violently crushed the recent protests in Iraq. They share responsibility for the death of more than 400 Iraqis and wounded more than 20,000. Those civilians were protesting the economic conditions and corrupt Governments that are the result of Iranian interference in the country. Twenty-three-year-old medical student, Ayat, tweeted that there were demonstrators on the streets near Tahrir Square in Baghdad. Her patients were teenagers. She said, "At any moment, they could fire at us. At any moment, we could die." The Islamic Republic does not care about the civilians of Iraq; it cares only about its extremist ideology.

The Iranian regime abuses civilians in Lebanon. The Iranian regime created Hizbullah in the 1980s. For over three decades, Hizbullah has worked to further the extremist ideologies it shares with the regime.

Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah has been quoted saying that Hizbullah believes in Ayatollah Khamenei more than it believes in the Lebanese Constitution. Last month in Beirut, protesters chanted: "This is Lebanon, not Iran". In response, they were beaten and attacked by Hizbullah. The Islamic Republic directs Hizbullah to use civilian homes and schools to store rockets and to build tunnels into Israeli towns and villages. Very critical for us is the fact that the regime provides Hizbullah with kits to convert rockets into precision-guided missiles that could provoke war in the region — a war that would endanger Lebanese civilians only to promote the regime's ideology. The Islamic Republic does not care about the civilians of Lebanon; it cares only about its extremist ideology.

The Iranian regime also abuses civilians in Yemen. The regime funds arms and trains the Houthi forces. The Houthis' flag bears the slogan: "Allah is the greatest of all, death to America, death to Israel, curse upon the Jews, victory to Islam". That is the exact same rhetoric that comes out of the Islamic Republic. The Iranian regime allows the Houthis to use weapons that they provide them to arm young children. The Houthis have over 18,000 child soldiers in their forces. Yemen's humanitarian crisis is the largest in the world. Some 80 per cent of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 12 million children. The Iranian regime's support of the Houthis is responsible for prolonging that crisis. The Islamic Republic does not care about the civilians of Yemen; it cares only about its extremist ideology.

Syria is another example. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps ground forces, the Quds Force and intelligence services have all been deployed to keep Bashar Al-Assad in power, no matter the cost — billions of dollars — although 400,000 Syrian civilians have lost their lives in the civil war, many of them killed by people who were trained by the Iranian regime and were using the weapons that the regime had provided them. I repeat again that the Islamic Republic does not care about the civilians of Syria; it cares only about its extremist ideology.

The Iranian regime abuses civilians even in its own country. Iranian citizens recently took to the streets to exercise their basic right to criticize their Government's policies — policies that place the regime's expansionist ideology over the well-being of Iranian civilians. In response, the Iranian regime killed more than 200 civilians and injured thousands more. Pouya Bakhtiari,

a 27-year-old electrical engineer, was shot and killed during the protests, which he attended with his mother and sister on 16 November in Mehrshahr, Iran. Pouya had an active Instagram account, with over 14,000 followers, on which, despite threats, he shared his opinions on the regime. On his way to the protest, during which he was murdered, he recorded a video message for his followers, saying,

“People, do not miss this opportunity. Once and for all, let us destroy this criminal and corrupt regime that for 40 years has made the dear Iranian people miserable.”

While blood is flowing in the streets of Tehran, cash continues to flow to the regime’s proxies and allies, causing further bloodshed across the region. Meanwhile, it is expected that by March 2020, 57 million Iranians will be living below the absolute poverty line. It is therefore no wonder that protesters are chanting in Iran: “No to Gaza, no to Lebanon. I give my life only for Iran”. But the Islamic Republic does not care about its civilians; it cares only about its extremist ideology.

Wherever the Iranian regime’s tentacles of terror reach, civilians suffer. The Islamic Republic remains the biggest threat to security and stability in the region, yet many members of the Council and the international community try to appease the regime. For years, Israel has warned that the regime’s nuclear and expansionist ambitions pose a threat to the entire world. We have

warned that the regime will sacrifice everything, even innocent civilian lives, to promote its agenda. Such appeasement has done nothing to slow it down.

Today we heard from Ms. Raemer from Israel about what it means to be a civilian affected by the Islamic Republic for years. We could have heard today from a civilian in Gaza, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria or Iran, and his or her experience of living under the influence of the regime would have been similar. Civilians across the Middle East are risking their lives to protest the regime’s presence in their countries. They are doing all they can to hold back the regime’s regional ambitions.

It is time that the international community took action and join them. Let their courage serve as a catalyst. More pressure must be applied on the Iranian regime to stop its terror in the region and around the world and to stop promoting its nuclear programme. We must follow in the footsteps of our American ally, leave the Iran deal and apply more sanctions. The Iranian regime does not care about the civilians in the region, but the civilians of the region are counting on the hope that the Security Council does.

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

I now invite council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.