



Security Council

Distr.: General
26 April 2021

Original: English

Letter dated 26 April 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefings provided by Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General; and Mr. Rein Paulsen, Acting Director of the Coordination Division, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, Estonia, France, India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, the Niger, Norway, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam in connection with the video-teleconference on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”, convened on Thursday, 22 April 2021. Statements were also delivered by the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members for this video-teleconference, the following delegations and entities submitted written statements, copies of which are also enclosed: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, the European Union, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, the League of Arab States, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Peru, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

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

(Signed) **Dang Dinh Quy**
President of the Security Council



Annex 1**Briefing by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Tor Wennesland**

Allow me to begin by wishing all Muslims of the world a blessed Ramadan.

I brief the Security Council today as Palestinians and Israelis are immersed in consequential political and electoral processes. Preparations continue for the Palestinian Legislative Council elections, scheduled for 22 May, while Israelis are engaged in efforts to form a governing coalition after the elections held on 23 March. Such developments may have significant implications for the prospects for advancing peace in the months ahead.

The holding of credible elections in Palestine is a crucial step towards renewing the legitimacy of national institutions and re-establishing Palestinian national unity. I encourage international support for those efforts. The United Nations has engaged regularly with the Palestinian parties and the Central Elections Commission (CEC) to facilitate preparations for the elections and will continue its support for the election process. To date, the CEC has performed its duties with professionalism and integrity, enhancing trust in the electoral process. In particular, I welcome the CEC's efforts to plan for and implement special measures to ensure safe voting in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. I also underscore the critical role of election observers to ensure respect for the results of a credible and transparent process.

The candidate registration period concluded on 31 March. On 6 April, the CEC announced that all 36 registered electoral lists were approved. On 11 April, the CEC announced that, of the 231 objections submitted to the CEC against registered candidates, 226 had been rejected, four withdrawn and one accepted. The Electoral Court upheld the CEC decisions on 18 appeals brought before the Court. That concludes the legal process to challenge the electoral lists. Final lists are expected to be published on 30 April, the start of the official campaign period.

I emphasize that any disputes should be resolved in a peaceful manner and through official legal mechanisms. All sides must provide for and protect the rights of Palestinians across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza to participate in credible and inclusive Palestinian elections, as well as to stand for election free from intimidation. In particular, I urge all parties to refrain from any arrest, detention or interrogation based on freedom of opinion, freedom of expression or freedom of association.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose a formidable threat throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. I am seriously concerned by the significant rise in active cases in Gaza, where the daily infection rate is reaching its highest level since the onset of the pandemic. In the West Bank, many hospitals remain at or near full capacity. My colleague from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will brief Council members after me and will provide greater detail on that situation.

As the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic has significantly exacerbated a seemingly never-ending fiscal and economic crisis in both the West Bank and Gaza, support for the Palestinian Government's response must continue to be a priority.

The Palestinian Government vaccination campaign, which officially began in the West Bank and Gaza last month, continued throughout the reporting period. The Palestinian Ministry of Health has received more than 300,000 vaccine doses to date. Israel has continued its efforts to vaccinate segments of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, as well as more than

100,000 Palestinians holding permits to enter Israel. I welcome all efforts carried out thus far to vaccinate the Palestinian population, but the process needs to be accelerated and more vaccines are needed.

In a positive development, on 7 April, the United States announced plans to restart its economic, humanitarian, development and security assistance to Palestinians, including some \$150 million in funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). I welcome the resumption of United States support, including to UNRWA. I appeal to all Member States to remobilize support to UNRWA, whose services are not only a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees but also critical to stability throughout the region. Funding the United Nations response is the fastest and most efficient way to address urgent needs in the occupied Palestinian territory.

On 5 April, the Palestinian Government adopted the second national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). I welcome the efforts of the Government to translate international frameworks into commitments and actions. I reiterate United Nations support for the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda in Palestine.

The demolition and seizure of Palestinian property throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continued during the reporting period. OCHA will provide details on relevant developments shortly. However, allow me to reiterate my call upon Israel to cease that practice, in line with its obligations under international law, and to allow Palestinians to develop their communities.

On the basis of an Israeli law, passed in 1994, which bars activity in Jerusalem by the Palestinian Authority without prior approval, on 6 April, the Israeli security forces shut down a meeting related to Palestinian elections at the Ambassador Hotel in East Jerusalem, calling in for questioning the hotel manager as well as the director of the Fatah office in Jerusalem.

Daily violence also continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. In Gaza, on 24 March, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) fired some 10 missiles at what it said were Hamas targets in retaliation for a rocket fired towards Israel the previous day. On 15 and 16 April, militants in Gaza fired two rockets towards Israel. The rockets landed in open fields, causing no damage or injury. In retaliation for each incident, the IDF fired at what it said were Hamas-linked targets in the Gaza Strip. No injuries were reported.

In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, clashes, attacks, search and arrest operations and other incidents resulted in the death of one Palestinian and injuries to 29 Palestinians, including five children and one woman. Eight Israelis, including one woman, were injured in the course of those events.

Since the beginning of Ramadan, there have been repeated clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces and Israeli civilians in and around Jerusalem's Old City, leading to injuries and arrests. I call on all sides to take steps to de-escalate tensions and maintain calm.

On 6 April, the Israeli security forces shot and killed a 45-year-old Palestinian man at a checkpoint set up during an operation of the Israeli security forces in Bir Nabala village, north of Jerusalem. The man died of his injuries and his 35-year-old wife, also in the vehicle, was injured. The Israeli security forces initially said that the man had attempted a ramming attack — an account disputed by the man's wife and eyewitnesses. The Israeli security forces opened an investigation into the incident.

Meanwhile, settlers and other Israeli civilians perpetrated some 20 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in eight injuries and damage to property. Palestinians perpetrated some 20 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians in the West Bank, resulting in seven injuries and damage to property.

I underscore that all perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice. I reiterate that the Israeli security forces must exercise maximum restraint and may use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. Particular care should be taken to protect children from any form of violence. In addition, the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centres violates international law and must stop immediately.

Turning to the region, on the Golan Heights, the ceasefire between Israel and Syria has been generally maintained despite the continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement by the parties, leading to increasing tensions. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force continues to liaise with both parties to remind them of their obligation to respect the terms of the Disengagement Agreement and prevent the escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line.

In Lebanon, a new Government has still not been formed, delaying the implementation of crucial reforms and related international support, which are urgently needed to address the ever-worsening socioeconomic situation and growing humanitarian needs.

In the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations the situation remained tense, including due to incidents of weapons pointing between the IDF and the Lebanese Armed Forces across the Blue Line. UNIFIL remains engaged with the parties to contain incidents and defuse tensions, including through its liaison and coordination efforts and robust presence on the ground.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that expectations for the holding of elections in Palestine are high and come after a long wait of almost 15 years. Since my last briefing (see S/2021/302), a growing number of young people are expected to participate in shaping their political future and having the opportunity to vote for the first time. Now that the legal registration and challenge period has concluded, there remain no key technical obstacles to the holding of elections in a practical manner.

In recent interviews conducted by UN-Women with young people in Gaza and the West Bank, one young woman, whose view was not unique, said the following: “Although I am not into politics, I am a member of this society and want to have a voice. Even if those I vote for do not win, at least I will have exercised my right to vote.”

The successful completion of inclusive Palestinian elections is a critical step towards renewing the democratic legitimacy of the Palestinian Government. The elections should also pave the way to uniting Gaza and the West Bank under a single, legitimate national authority, which would be an important step towards reconciliation and could advance Middle East peace.

The path forward will not be easy and will require political courage from all sides. Despite the myriad challenges, we remain focused on the goal of advancing a two-State solution — an independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

It is crucial that the international community, and particularly the Middle East Quartet, signal a way forward towards an end to occupation and the achievement of a sustainable peace. That includes creating a clear political horizon and encouraging practical steps by all sides to set the stage for a successful return to negotiations.

The United Nations remains committed to working, through the Quartet and with other regional and international partners, to support Israelis and Palestinians in those efforts.

Annex 2**Briefing by the Acting Director of the Coordination Division, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Rein Paulsen**

I thank you very much, Mr. President, for the opportunity to update the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mr. Mark Lowcock. I echo the wishes of the Special Coordinator, Mr. Wennesland, in expressing my warmest wishes for the holy month of Ramadan.

A protracted protection crisis continues in the occupied Palestinian territory, with Palestinians struggling to exercise their basic rights and leaving close to one in every two out of a population of 5.2 million in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, the majority of whom live in the Gaza Strip. The challenges brought by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis have exacerbated the situation, deepening vulnerability. In the past year, 346,000 Palestinians have slipped from moderate to severe need.

The total number of COVID-19 cases is now 313,000, with 280,000 people having recovered from the virus. Fatalities stand at nearly 3,350 people. Those numbers indicate a nearly 20 per cent increase in active cases this month, due mostly to new variants. Cases in Gaza have increased by 150 per cent in April, with 187 deaths recorded so far, as compared to 61 deaths in March. Gaza now has 66 per cent of all active cases in the occupied Palestinian territory despite representing 30 per cent of the total population.

According to the World Health Organization, the surge in Gaza, where the occupancy rate of COVID-19 dedicated hospital beds this week was 79 per cent, with 92 per cent of intensive care unit beds in use, presents real concerns for the health sector and its ability to cope. In the West Bank, infections are declining slowly, but the situation remains serious. Due to the recent surge, there are critical shortages of laboratory testing, infection protection and control supplies and case management drugs and disposables. Health cluster partners are requesting an additional \$17 million to respond to the epidemic.

By 19 April, some 378,000 vaccines had arrived in the West Bank and Gaza, including more than 130,000 through the Gavi COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Advanced Market Commitment Facility. Another 340,000 to 500,000 vaccines are in the pipeline through the COVAX Facility. As of last week, just over 156,000 people had been vaccinated in the occupied Palestinian territory by the Palestinian authorities, representing about 3 per cent of the population.

Almost 5 million, or 53 per cent, of the Israeli population are fully vaccinated. Israel is continuing its vaccination programming, which is also available to Palestinians in East Jerusalem. The Israeli Government is also vaccinating more than 120,000 Palestinians, which includes individuals from the West Bank with permits to enter Israel, such as staff of United Nations agencies, international organizations, embassies and consulates, as well as workers who are employed in Israel or in Israeli settlements.

In the Gaza Strip, COVID-19 containment measures have further isolated its 2 million inhabitants. The prolonged closures and severe economic and movement restrictions, which, in effect, amount to a blockade, make it even more challenging to reduce needs and aid dependency in Gaza. As the Secretary-General has noted, the lifting of the closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009), is essential to addressing the needs of the population.

Turning to the West Bank, during the reporting period, the Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 25 Palestinian-owned structures, including six homes, displacing 25 Palestinians, including 15 children. Nearly all of those structures were demolished on the grounds of a lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which Palestinians can almost never obtain under the planning regime applied in the West Bank.

Some 970 Palestinians are at risk of eviction in East Jerusalem due to cases brought before Israeli courts, primarily by settler groups. Concerns are high for four Palestine refugee families in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood who have been ordered to vacate the homes that they have lived in since the 1950s, which could be as early 2 May.

Also, during the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 19 incidents where people known, or believed, to be Israeli settlers injured Palestinians or reportedly damaged their property. Perpetrators, believed to be Palestinians, stoned Israeli-plated vehicles travelling on West Bank roads, damaging 14 vehicles, according to Israeli sources.

The combined impact of acts of violence, demolitions and threat of evictions, alongside other measures, have made Palestinians feel unsafe, even in their homes. That has placed pressure on many families to leave their communities.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Member States that continue to support humanitarian programming in the occupied Palestinian territory. Despite the constrained funding, in 2020, humanitarian partners reached 1.2 million Palestinians with critical assistance in the areas of food, livelihoods, health, protection, education and shelter. In 2021, humanitarian partners are targeting 1.8 million Palestinians. As of today, only 22 per cent of the \$417 million requested for the United Nations plan to respond to all humanitarian needs has been secured, leaving significant gaps across most sectors.

I would also like to welcome the resumption of United States support, including to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Those funds will help sustain essential services to millions of Palestine refugees, respond to the deteriorating humanitarian situation and support COVID-19 national response plans, including vaccinations. I would like to echo the call of the Secretary-General for Member States to provide the necessary resources for UNRWA. Funding the United Nations response is the fastest and most efficient way to address urgent needs in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Annex 3**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Geng Shuang**

[Original: Chinese and English]

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Mr. Paulsen for their briefings and welcome the Palestinian and Israeli representatives attending today's meeting.

For some time now, the Middle East peace process and the occupied Palestinian territory have been receiving increased international attention. The region has seen changed dynamics and the question of Palestine a new state of play. In the context of what we heard earlier from the briefers, I would like to underscore the following points.

First, the question of Palestine is at the root and source of instability in the Middle East. It must be kept front and centre on the international agenda. The international community cannot afford to halt its effort in the face of challenges and balk at the obstructions. Recently, there have been frequent interactions between and among the principal parties of the Palestinian-Israeli issue, creating a positive momentum, which we find encouraging. The international community must seize this opportunity and step up efforts to translate that momentum into firm support for the two-State solution, marked improvements in the situation on the ground and substantive progress in the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks.

In that process, the parties concerned should avoid taking any actions that undermine mutual trust and further antagonize each other. Israel should cease its settlement activities and take steps to prevent violence against civilians. Meanwhile, Israel's right to exist should be respected and secured and its legitimate security concerns addressed.

China firmly supports the Palestinian people in establishing a fully sovereign and independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In March this year, during his visit to the Middle East, Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed a five-point initiative on achieving security and stability in the Middle East, noting that nothing represents equity and justice in the Middle East more than a sound solution to the question of Palestine and the earnest implementation of the two-State solution. China reaffirms its commitment to and support for a two-State solution, and will continue to invite peace advocates from Palestine and Israel to China for dialogue. We also welcome Palestinian and Israeli representatives to China for direct negotiations.

Secondly, the international community should create enabling conditions for the Palestinian elections, for which preparations are under way. The holding of elections is a key agreement reached by Palestinian factions at the national dialogue earlier this year and is the most important political event for Palestine this year. They will be the first Palestinian elections since 2006. As such, their importance to reconciliation and unity cannot be overemphasized. We commend Palestine for having done a huge amount of work in preparation for the elections and acknowledge the positive progress achieved to date. We have also noticed new developments and obstacles that have recently emerged around the elections. China is of the view that it is the common aspiration of the Palestinian people that elections be held as scheduled peacefully and smoothly across the length and breadth of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and that the international community should play a positive and constructive role and work together to help ensure that the elections go ahead as planned so as not to undermine the hard-won momentum that we are witnessing today.

Thirdly, efforts should be intensified to improve the situation of the Palestinian people. The already dire humanitarian situation in Palestine has been made more fragile by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The international community should invest more to support Palestine in responding to the pandemic, developing its economy and improving its people's livelihoods. We welcome the recent announcement by the United States that its assistance to Palestine will resume. We hope that that development will lead to and catalyse further positive initiatives. The international community should keep its sights on the full lifting of the blockade of the Gaza Strip and help to ensure that essential services, humanitarian relief and vaccination include all the people in need in the occupied territory.

China has consistently maintained its support through tangible actions for Palestine's COVID-19 pandemic response and livelihood improvement efforts. On 29 March, 100,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine, donated to Palestine by the Chinese Government, arrived and were delivered to help bolster Palestine's vaccination programme. Earlier this month, a solar power project at a children's hospital in Gaza, funded by the Chinese Government, was completed. It will help to meet the power shortages faced by the children's hospital so that the hospital is in a better position to treat Gaza's patients.

Annex 4**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Sven Jürgenson**

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Mr. Paulsen for their briefings.

Estonia calls for the active engagement of the Security Council, the members of the Middle East Quartet and the countries of the region in creating favourable conditions for the resumption of direct meaningful negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Finding a long-lasting solution to the conflict is in the interest of the whole region and beyond.

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

I would like to encourage the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to continue practical steps to strengthen bilateral cooperation and rebuild mutual trust and confidence. We welcome the cooperation in combating the coronavirus disease pandemic and urge the parties for further coordinated efforts, ensuring increased provision of the vaccine to the Palestinians.

We also reiterate our call on all parties to refrain from any unilateral steps that undermine the viability of the two-State solution.

We call on Israel to halt the continued settlement expansion and demolitions in the occupied Palestinian territories, as they are contrary to international law. We are concerned by the Israeli authorities' plans for the construction of settlement units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including in Har Homa. It is also worrying that the demolition and confiscation of Palestinian structures and properties by Israel are continuing at a growing pace.

We repeat our call for preventing all acts of violence against civilians, acts of terror, incitement and acts of provocation. Despite the relative calm between Israel and Gaza, there can be no justification for the continued occasional launching of rockets and incendiary devices towards Israel or any other form of violence targeting the civilian population.

We welcome the continued engagement of the Palestinian factions to prepare for the upcoming legislative, presidential and National Council elections. We call upon the Palestinian factions to ensure free, fair and inclusive elections and to commit to democratic principles.

We call on the Israeli authorities to facilitate the holding of elections, with the participation of international observers, across all the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in line with the Oslo Accords.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the important role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for the stability of the region. We welcome the United States announcement regarding the resumption of funding to the Agency and encourage other donors to restore or, if possible, increase their contributions, as well.

I would like to state that Estonia aligns itself with the statement submitted on behalf of the European Union (annex 28).

Annex 5**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: French]

I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland and Mr. Rein Paulsen for their briefings.

At a time when this prospect is being called into question, it is more necessary than ever to recall that only the two-State solution will bring lasting peace to the region.

In accordance with the agreed parameters and Security Council resolutions, that means the establishment of a Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel, within secure and internationally recognized borders based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. That is the only solution that can meet the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for sovereignty and the Israeli people for security.

France is therefore very concerned about the risk of de facto annexation of Palestinian territories. We call on Israel to halt the expansion of settlements, in particular the construction of 540 housing units in the settlement of Har Homa in East Jerusalem. Settlement activity is contrary to international law, threatens the viability of the two-State solution and is a major obstacle to peace, especially when it involves areas essential to the viability of a future Palestinian State.

We call on Israel to stop the demolition of Palestinian structures, including those funded by France and the European Union. These are reaching a worrying level. They are contrary to Israel's obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. We are particularly concerned by the possible evictions in the coming weeks of Palestinian families from the Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem.

France also reiterates its firm condemnation of the firing of rockets from Gaza into populated areas of Israel, also in violation of international law. It will never compromise on Israel's security.

In that context, we must redouble our efforts to get the parties back to the negotiating track. France is working with its German, Egyptian and Jordanian partners to recreate the conditions for dialogue. We wish to work with the members of the Quartet, which share that objective.

Increased coordination between the parties is necessary to enable an effective response to the coronavirus disease pandemic, which continues to spread, particularly in Gaza. France would like to see equitable access to the vaccine. The contrast between the vaccination rate in Israel and that in the occupied Palestinian territories is stark.

We welcome the resumption of funding by the United States to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose action will remain essential until a permanent solution to the refugee issue is found.

Finally, I would like to return to the Palestinian elections. They must be an opportunity to give a voice to Palestinian society and to renew the democratic legitimacy of its institutions. France calls on all actors to act constructively to bring the electoral process to a successful conclusion. In accordance with the principles consistently promoted by the European Union, France recalls the importance of the principles of international law, non-violence, Israel's right to exist and respect for past agreements.

France calls on Israel to allow the elections to be held throughout the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. It also calls on Israel to facilitate the deployment of a European mission.

France is pleased that the Security Council is once again speaking in unison in support of the two-State solution, which it has itself endorsed. That unity is more necessary than ever given the continuing deterioration of the situation on the ground. But we must now move from words to action to create a new momentum for peace.

Annex 6**Statement by the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, T.S. Tirumurthi**

I welcome the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, and the Acting Director of the Coordination Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Rein Paulsen, to this meeting and thank them for their briefings.

We are pleased to note the positive progress in the holding of Palestinian legislative elections, scheduled for 22 May. We also take note of the Special Coordinator's observations with regard to the impediments to those elections. As a democracy and as a long-standing friend, India has always supported a fair, credible, transparent and inclusive electoral process in Palestine, including by participating in electoral observation and providing election-related training to the Palestinian Central Elections Commission. India will continue to remain supportive of that process.

India's position on the Israel-Palestine conflict is well known. A negotiated two-State solution, achieved through direct and meaningful negotiations, is the only viable solution to the conflict. Such a solution should meet Israel's security needs, fulfil Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty and resolve all final-status issues.

As we reiterated earlier, resolution 2334 (2016) adopted by the Security Council calls for advancing this two-State solution through negotiations, as well as reversing negative trends on the ground. This will create conditions for launching credible negotiations on all final status issues. We urge both parties to refrain from unilateral measures that vitiate conditions necessary for promoting peace and instead focus on bridging the trust deficit.

The international community should also encourage the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties. India supports all efforts by the international community that seek to achieve durable peace for both Israelis and Palestinians. We acknowledge the important role of the Middle East Quartet in this regard.

We remain concerned about the current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation in Palestine. The recent spike in overall cases is once again threatening local health systems and disrupting economic and humanitarian activities, especially in Gaza. We commend the steps taken by the Palestinian Authority in addressing the current crisis. We welcome the efforts of the United Nations and its agencies to support the Palestinian Authority in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Palestinian territories.

COVID-19 is a common threat that knows no boundaries and endangers the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike. We welcome the cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and encourage the continuation of such efforts, including through the smooth movement of vaccines, medical supplies and equipment, in particular to the population in Gaza. We are pleased that the first shipment, consisting of 25,000 Indian vaccines, reached Palestine on 29 March.

We also appreciate the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on the Palestine refugee community in its areas of operation despite the severe challenges posed by the pandemic. In particular, the Agency's relief interventions have played an important role in addressing the growing poverty among Palestinian refugees during the current pandemic. India is committed to contribute \$10 million to UNRWA for the biennium 2021-2022.

Before concluding, let me once again reiterate India's unwavering commitment to finding a just solution to the cause of Palestine and to its friendship with the Palestinian people. We have always focused on the importance of improving the overall quality of life in Palestine through our development assistance projects and capacity-building programmes for Palestinian youth. Even amid the pandemic, we have signed memorandums of understanding with authorities in Palestine for implementing quick impact projects, which will benefit local communities. I reaffirm India's continued support for Palestine and its people.

Annex 7**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, Geraldine Byrne Nason**

At the beginning, I would like to wish a sincere *Ramadan Mubarak* to all. I also want to thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Mr. Paulsen for their comprehensive briefings today. I also want to warmly welcome the Ambassador of the Observer State of Palestine and the Ambassador of Israel among us today.

A comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East is possible. Ireland's position on how to achieve that is long-standing. Our position is based on respect for international law and agreed international parameters. We repeat it here on this screen every month. It bears repeating again today.

A two-State solution, with a viable State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, alongside the State of Israel and with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, offers the strongest prospect for sustainable peace.

For that two-State solution to be viable, strong, inclusive and accountable democratic Palestinian institutions based on respect for the rule of law and human rights are critical. So too are free, fair and inclusive elections.

Ireland and our European Union partners support the holding of elections across the occupied Palestinian territory and welcome the constructive engagement by the Palestinian factions. Giving all Palestinians a voice will lend renewed legitimacy to and ownership over their national institutions. This shared objective deserves our full support.

In line with commitments made in the Oslo Accords, we urge Israel to facilitate the holding of elections across the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular in East Jerusalem. We also call on Israel to facilitate the participation of international observers.

Ireland wishes to see the completion of free, fair and inclusive elections in the occupied Palestinian territory. We look forward to working with a future Palestinian Government that upholds the principles of international law, non-violence and democratic governance, including respect for human rights and existing agreements, a Government that works towards the peaceful establishment of a Palestinian State, based on the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States.

Elections are about giving people their say. Palestinian women want to be heard and they want to see themselves represented where it matters. That means as voters, but also as candidates on the ballot paper. As co-Chair of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, Ireland looks forward to supporting these Palestinian women, who have so much to contribute. I want to underline that participation is a right, not a request.

Just as we want to see women participate fully, we also want to engage young people, to encourage young people to be fully engaged with democratic processes. Young people, like Oren Gian and Malak AbuSoud, who addressed the Security Council only two months ago (see S/2021/218), should be given the opportunity to shape the future that they will inherit. Promoting and safeguarding open, free and independent civil society engagement is also vital.

Last month, we heard yet another deeply concerning briefing from Special Coordinator Wennesland (S/2021/302, annex I) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). The Council has been receiving such briefings for more than four years. Let us be clear. Settlements were an obstacle to peace then and they remain an obstacle to peace now. I want to reiterate Ireland's long-standing condemnation

of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

We are gravely concerned by the Israeli authorities' advancement of approval for construction in Har Homa East. The implementation of the plan would effectively cut off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, threaten the contiguity of a future Palestinian State and severely undermine the viability of a two-State solution.

Ireland is extremely concerned by the increase in demolitions, evictions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We call on the Israeli authorities to cease these activities and provide adequate permits for legal construction in and development of Palestinian communities.

In particular, the recent increase in the number of Palestinian families at risk of eviction in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan are of grave concern. We underscore the importance of maintaining the status quo at the holy sites, in particular at Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

Acts of violence, including rocket attacks, continue to erode trust between the parties, and within their own communities, making a political settlement more difficult to achieve. Ireland condemns these and condemns all acts of violence.

We are concerned about the increase in settler violence and the particular impact of the occupation and violence on children. We remind the parties of their obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law.

We renew our call on Israel to end the blockade of Gaza. We also reiterate our call on Israel as the occupying Power to ensure equitable access to coronavirus disease vaccines for the Palestinian population in Gaza and throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

I want to take this opportunity to most warmly welcome the announcement by Secretary of State Blinken of the resumption of United States funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We encourage other States, in the region and elsewhere, to restore their contributions and if possible to increase their support.

As an island that has experienced and overcome conflict, it is our firm belief that divisions can be bridged and long-standing enmities set aside. As I mentioned at the beginning, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East is possible.

However, we must all continue to work towards this end. We believe that it is incumbent on the Security Council, on the Quartet and on the international community to remain fully engaged with these important issues in the critical period ahead.

Finally, I want to touch briefly on the situation in Syria. Ten years since the start of this terrible conflict, we are as far away as ever from a political solution. We commend the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen and urge that a meaningful meeting of the Constitutional Committee take place soon. Ireland and its European Union partners will continue to provide and work to safeguard essential humanitarian support to the Syrian people.

Annex 8**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Martin Kimani**

I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and Mr. Rein Paulsen, Acting Director of the Coordination Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings. I also thank the representatives of the State of Israel and the Observer State of Palestine for their briefings.

The continued acts of violence and clashes between Palestinian and Israeli forces, including the incident in Gaza this past weekend, are concerning. I reaffirm Kenya's condemnation of all violations of the agreed international mechanisms, including the Security Council's resolutions, by all parties.

Our interest as Kenya is in supporting an end to this lasting threat to the peace and security of the Middle East, whose damaging domino-like effects reach many other parts of the world.

We call on all parties to the Palestinian question, and their supporters and facilitators, to act on the understanding that any political aims, no matter how urgent, are ultimately robbed of sustained success by any deployment of terrorist strategies.

Guided by that insight, we strongly condemn all Hamas rocket attacks that deliberately target civilians with the aim of causing fear and despondency as a way to shift policy.

Kenya also notes with concern the increasing demolitions of homes and civilian infrastructure by the Israeli Government. The expansion of settlements, particularly in sensitive areas, and the proximity of demolitions to these settlements have implications for territorial contiguity and the actualization of the two-State solution within secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines.

We make these observations not to equate their moral or ethical worth, but rather to urge both sides to work harder to meet in the middle if either is to ever enjoy handing real peace to their children. The extremes can feed one another at the expense of the overwhelming majority who only desire safety and well-being. As intractable as the conflict may seem, in the past, there have been political breakthroughs that have overcome even the steepest and oldest barriers.

It is up to the leadership of the Israeli and Palestinian people to reach for a more powerful vision of mutual peace, and to then support and empower those among them that want to build bridges of understanding and respect particularly during this time of political transition.

We also look forward to a free and fair election that serves as an important step to peace and security, not to the escalation of enmity.

While we wait for such inspired leadership to take hold and its actions to be scaled up, we in the international community must do our utmost to support stability, especially to help sustain instances of relative calm amid deeper fragile peace.

Kenya therefore welcomes the continued efforts of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. They are contributing to the stability of the region. We expect all parties to create environments and take actions that ensure the safety of the personnel and the fulfilment of their respective mandates.

On the upcoming elections, Kenya takes note of the progress made in the registration of voters, including in East Jerusalem, based on the Palestinian Central

Elections Commission report. We urge that the preparations and conduct of both the legislative elections scheduled in a month's time and the presidential elections in July be timely, free, fair and participatory with all parties abiding to the agreed commitments. These are agreements that come with responsibility, including the recent Cairo talks and the foundational Oslo Accords Protocol Concerning Elections.

The surge in coronavirus disease cases and infection rates, particularly in Gaza, and the increasing disparity in the availability of vaccines is also a matter of concern. Kenya continues to call for strengthened cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian authorities to ensure the safe movement of health and other essential workers, equity in access to vaccines and medical care.

The role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East remains critical particularly in the delivery of basic food and medical services for populations in internally displaced persons and refugee situations.

As I conclude, we look forward to tangible outcomes of the resumed Middle East Quartet discussions. We commend the continued efforts of the Special Coordinator, and all involved parties, in ensuring that the Munich format and other confidence-building initiatives in the Gulf, and the broader subregion, complement the work of the Quartet.

Annex 9**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez**

[Original: Spanish]

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Mr. Paulsen for their briefings. We also welcome the delegations of Israel and Palestine.

Mexico welcomes the active civil and political participation in the upcoming Palestinian elections. We note the registration of 36 lists of candidates, which indicates a keen desire for popular involvement in Palestinian political life; we recognize the constructive participation of young people and women. We agree with our colleagues that transparent and regular electoral processes are the basic foundation of any democratic State.

In that regard, we call on the Palestinian Authority to continue with the timely organization of the elections and hope that the process will proceed peacefully with broad citizen participation. The organization of those elections, particularly in East Jerusalem, must not be hindered. We condemn the harassment of Palestinian political activists by Israeli law enforcement agencies in East Jerusalem. Political rights, the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of peaceful association must be preserved at all costs.

We welcome the recent announcement by the United States Administration on its resumption of financial contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA). UNRWA's work is essential to meeting the basic needs of more than 5.7 million Palestinian refugees. Its actions take on added relevance in the context of the global fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

We welcome the arrival, through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility, of additional batches of vaccines destined for the Palestinian population from China, the United Arab Emirates, India and Russia, and we also recognize and commend Israel for vaccinating 100,000 Palestinian workers. It benefits all of us to continue facilitating the delivery and distribution of vaccines so that, in coordination with the various humanitarian agencies, vaccination campaigns can be implemented quickly and efficiently.

We reiterate our call on Israel to lift the blockade on Gaza and allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including medical supplies. We likewise urge them to guarantee free transit to humanitarian workers and Palestinian patients requiring medical assistance.

The announced construction of 540 additional housing units and the bill recently introduced before the Knesset to legalize outposts in the occupied territories constitute unilateral measures that undermine the two-State solution and the viability and territorial contiguity of the Palestinian State. Likewise, we regret the destruction of water, sanitation and hygiene structures in the Palestinian territories. We urge Israel to abide by resolution 2334 (2016). The demolition of structures and the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied territories are flagrant violations of international law.

We note with concern the clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces in the vicinity of the Temple Mount. We call on the parties to exercise maximum restraint as well as to guarantee freedom of worship. We also strongly condemn the recent missile attacks from Gaza and Syria against Israel.

Finally, I reiterate our full support for the actions of the Middle East Peace Quartet. Mexico supports political dialogue as the means to overcome the differences between Israel and Palestine, based on the two-State solution, that is, the right of Israel and Palestine to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders. We applaud the efforts of the Special Envoy to relaunch the Quartet, and we support the activism of regional and international partners promoting alternatives in support of peace.

Annex 10**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Niandou Aougi**

[Original: French]

I should like at the outset to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland and Mr. Rein Paulsen for their very informative briefings on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. I also thank the representatives of Israel and of Palestine for participating in this meeting.

This quarterly debate is being held amid renewed diplomatic momentum to relaunch the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which has been stalled for years. The recent normalization of relations between Israel and some of its Arab neighbours, the 11 March ministerial meeting in Paris and the 23 March meeting of the Quartet's Special Envoys are all positive developments that should serve as a springboard to relaunch the process of direct peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.

However, still no attempt to revive the peace process can prevail as long as Israel continues its aggressive policy of occupying Palestinian land, building new settlements, daily violations of Palestinian rights and continuously blockading Gaza, all in violation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, demolitions and seizures of Palestinian property and the upsurge in attacks and violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, in particular women and children, all constitute flagrant violations of United Nations resolutions and principles of international law. The Niger condemns these acts and calls for them to cease immediately. The same goes for acts of provocation and incitement to hatred, rocket attacks against Israeli residential areas and the subsequent disproportionate reprisals. Here, as everywhere else, accountability is essential because it alone can help fight impunity and pave the way to genuine reconciliation between the parties to the conflict.

We also take note of the timetable for the Palestinian legislative and presidential elections in May and July. We hope these elections, if conducted under optimal conditions, will strengthen cohesion among Palestinian factions and lead to a return to dialogue with Israel. We call on the international community, in particular the United Nations, to fully support this process.

While we welcome the start of the vaccination campaign, albeit timid, in the occupied Palestinian territories, it is clear that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues to spread at an alarming rate. Gaza's health services, for example, reported nearly 1,000 new cases per day over the past two weeks. This situation requires urgent action, since the population density in Gaza makes respect for social distancing and other relevant precautionary measures difficult.

As Israel allows its citizens to return to pre-COVID-19 life following its successful vaccination campaign, it must, as occupying Power, ensure that the vaccine reaches the territories under its occupation so as to facilitate efforts to effectively fight the spread of the virus.

We must also recall the difficulties, in addition to those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting from the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, high youth unemployment, restrictions on imports and on the free movement of people, and the fragility of the health system. Faced with all these challenges, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) must continue to be adequately resourced to enable it to continue providing vital

services to the Palestinian population, especially amid the pandemic. In this regard, we commend all donors continuing to support UNRWA as well as the decision of the authorities of the United States of America to resume humanitarian assistance and restore diplomatic ties with the Palestinians.

In conclusion, my delegation calls on all actors to redouble their efforts to commit definitively to the path of peace and pledges its steadfast support to the Special Coordinator in his efforts to breathe new life into the Middle East peace process.

Annex 11**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, Mona Juul**

Thank you to Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Since the Oslo Accords, Norway has been a consistent partner for building Palestine as a free, democratic and prosperous State, with security, the rule of law and living in peace and mutual recognition with Israel. We therefore welcome the announcement of Palestinian elections. The expectations of the Palestinian people are high, and it is essential that the elections be executed as planned.

We are encouraged by the Palestinian people's great enthusiasm for what will be the first elections for many years and note that more women than before are included on lists as candidates. We have urged the Palestinian Authority to take steps to better include youth as well. The dialogue between factions to ensure that elections are held in a free, fair and competitive manner is encouraging.

We have urged the Palestinian Authority and Israel to cooperate to facilitate the elections, abiding by their commitments in the Oslo II Accord. Here in the Security Council, and in all our engagements before and after the elections, we must make our best efforts to support the Palestinian people in building a legitimate Government in Palestine. I would like to reiterate our expectation that any Palestinian Government, in its composition and political platform, provide a good basis for cooperation with partners, and the pursuit of State-building and peace efforts.

We expect Palestinian Governments to adhere to the Palestine Liberation Organization's commitments in previous agreements, through both their words and their actions. Under those agreements, the Palestine Liberation Organization recognized Israel's right to exist and committed to upholding non-violence and continuing peaceful negotiations.

Norway remains ready to contribute to the resumption of meaningful negotiations towards a political solution, and we hope that successful Palestinian elections will contribute to such an end, as well as to strengthening cooperation between the parties. While it may be too early to define the format or modalities of such negotiations, it is increasingly urgent to solve the territorial issues before settlement expansions and other developments totally undermine the two-State vision. Negotiations should build on the previous agreements between the parties and be based on international law, the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

We remain concerned about the continued negative developments relating to settlement activities, including demolitions and evictions, as well as the incidents of violence against civilians, as reported by Special Coordinator Wennesland. The plans to evict 37 families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, in East Jerusalem, are particularly worrisome.

Norway is, however, encouraged by progress on issues that were highlighted at the last meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in February, and which will be on the agenda for the forthcoming ministerial meeting this autumn. More and more Palestinians are receiving the coronavirus-disease vaccine, and we commend the Palestinian Authority for rolling out its vaccination programme, Israel for facilitating vaccine distribution and for vaccinating Palestinians, and the United Nations and the international community for their crucial logistical and other support. While this is all encouraging, there is still an urgent need for support for increased access to vaccines.

Several crucial projects to build basic infrastructure across Palestine are also showing progress, in particular in the areas of water, sanitation and energy. They will benefit all Palestinians and ensure that Gaza continues to be habitable. In this respect, we call on the parties to sign the long-awaited and nearly finished technical agreements. Agreements are needed to make significant progress in several key projects relating to customs, water, electricity and other matters.

Norway also calls on donors to maintain in their financial and technical support. We welcome the willingness of several donors to take the lead in coordinating support within key sectors, including the efforts to better balance the fiscal and financial situation of the Palestinian Authority.

In conclusion, let me welcome the decision by the United States of America to resume economic, development and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We urge other donors to step up and contribute towards securing the continued work of the Agency for Palestine refugees.

Annex 12**Statement by the First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Dmitry Polyanskiy**

[Original: Russian]

We thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Director of the Coordination Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Rein Paulsen for briefing us on the status of the Middle East peace process and the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories.

We advocate for finding a just solution to the Palestinian problem on the basis of the two-State principle and the internationally recognized legal framework for creating an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. Through direct negotiations, the sides should also agree on other final-status aspects, including the problems of borders, refugees and water resources. Israel's security concerns must be taken into account in this process.

For our part, we are taking steps to support the collective efforts aimed at achieving equitable peace in the Middle East. We continue to engage with all interested stakeholders in the region, the Security Council and the Quartet of international mediators. Among other things, we are negotiating the convening of a ministerial meeting of the Quartet as well as organizing a meeting in the "Quartet plus" format, which would outline key tracks for our joint work aimed at overcoming the standstill in the Middle East peace process. Also, we believe it reasonable to support the initiative of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to convene an international conference on the Middle Eastern peace process.

We call on the sides to exercise restraint and refrain from any provocative steps that may undermine the settlement efforts. This is especially relevant in the light of the recent elections in Israel and those forthcoming in the Palestinian territories. We hope that the electoral process will foster internal consolidation on both sides, including regarding the need to relaunch negotiations. We proceed from the understanding that Palestinians throughout the entire territory must be guaranteed a right to elect and be elected.

We note the positive impact of the elections on overcoming the internal Palestinian disagreement on the Palestine Liberation Organization platform, as well as the role of our Egyptian friends in this regard. We are ready to provide assistance to these efforts.

We are concerned over Israel's continuing settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem. It undermines the prospects of creating a territorially contiguous Palestinian State.

Palestinians need assistance in responding to acute humanitarian and socioeconomic problems on the occupied territories and in Gaza, especially amid the spread of the coronavirus disease. It is particularly important that Palestinians and Israelis engage in the interests of countering the pandemic, including in the context of vaccination. We attach great importance to the continuation of the effective work of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which renders support to Palestinians both on the occupied territories and in the neighbouring Arab States. We call on the international community to mobilize resources to support the Agency. Russia provides assistance both to UNRWA and to Palestinians bilaterally.

In conclusion, I would like to express our deepest regret regarding the major technical issues that occurred during this video-teleconference, mostly impacting

our American colleagues. This clearly demonstrates that the Security Council cannot fully rely on the Internet in its work. We trust this is a good reason for all of us to finally make a decision to resume our in-person meetings in the Security Council Chamber. As you know, Russia has consistently uphold this position since October last year. We call on the Vietnamese presidency and its Chinese successor take practical steps to resolve this long-overdue question.

Annex 13**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Inga Rhonda King**

We thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Mr. Paulson for their briefings. We also welcome the presentations by the distinguished Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

As we heard from the briefers, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory demands urgent attention and action from the Security Council. The Council has an obligation to cooperate in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Too much time has already been lost. It is critical that we collectively address the challenges facing Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The expansion and acceleration of illegal settlement activities in the occupied West Bank, ongoing demolitions, seizures of Palestinian-owned property and evictions continue to irreversibly undermine the peace process and the two-State solution. Moreover, we condemn Israel's most recent decision to advance the construction of 540 illegal housing units in the Palestinian neighbourhoods of Beit Safafa and Sharafat. Israeli settlement activity "has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law," according to operative paragraph 1 of resolution 2334 (2016). Once again we call on the Israeli authorities to stop the building of new settlements and the extension of existing ones, and cease all home demolitions, forced evictions and confiscation of land in the occupied territory, including in East Jerusalem.

Allow me to reiterate my Government's position that a two-State solution remains the only path to ensuring that Palestinians and Israelis can both realize their legitimate aspirations, living side by side in peace and security in the context of a solution based on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

In the Gaza Strip, the living conditions remain dire. There is an urgent need to end the blockade and to address the humanitarian and human rights situation as well as the free movement of both goods and people into and out of Strip. Without the support that is flowing into the Gaza Strip from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), it would certainly be an even more dire situation. Consequently, we welcome the resumption of United States funding to UNRWA and reiterate our call for sustained and predictable contributions to the Agency, especially considering Gaza's coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis.

As the incidence of COVID-19 increases around the world, we commend the continuing efforts of the Palestinian Authority to protect its citizens. We welcome the second shipment of 72,000 vaccine doses through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility programme for the West Bank and Gaza and the provision of vaccines directly from other countries. Similarly, we encourage the international community, including Israel, to ensure the availability of vaccines to Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory and throughout the region.

Turning to the upcoming Palestinian national elections, we support the Palestinians as they work towards the holding of peaceful, free, fair and inclusive elections. It is also imperative for Israel to permit voting throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, namely, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. A postponement of elections on account of access to voting in any of these areas would be unfortunate.

In the absence of a full resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is incumbent upon the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, to make clear that any attempt to undermine the peace process is unacceptable. Equally

important is the need for the Council and the Middle East Quartet to promote the resumption of meaningful dialogue and confidence-building between Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

Annex 14**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Tunisia to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I would like to thank Tor Wennesland and Rein Paulsen for their important briefings. We reiterate our appreciation for the Secretary-General's continued efforts and determination to achieve the two-State solution and support security and stability in the region.

The forty-fifth annual Land Day was observed on 30 March. The occasion commemorates the struggles of the Palestinian people to defend its land against occupation, confiscation, settlement and annexation.

Without regard for internationally recognized resolutions, Israel, the occupying Power, continues to oppress and attack the Palestinian people, pursuing its expansionist policies and settlement plans and demolishing Palestinian homes. It commits those grave violations with total impunity, in open contravention of international law.

Given that Israel continues to flout international law and stand in the way of efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict, Tunisia once again calls on the Security Council and the international community to bring greater pressure to bear in order to compel the occupying Power to comply with internationally recognized resolutions, the most recent of which is resolution 2334 (2016), immediately halt its settlement plans, and definitively abandon its plans to annex the Palestinian territories and undermine the two-State solution.

In the coming weeks in Palestine, preparations will be under way to organize legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections. The elections, which have been welcomed by the international community, constitute an important step towards strengthening democratic governance and Palestinian State institutions. However, attempts by the occupying authorities to disrupt the electoral process and restrict Palestinian candidates and officials, particularly in East Jerusalem, are of great concern because of the threat they pose to this vital electoral process.

We therefore call on the international community to do what is necessary to ensure that general elections are allowed to take place in East Jerusalem and to enable Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to vote without any interference from the occupying authorities, as stipulated in international norms and instruments.

We also reiterate the need to put a stop to Israeli measures restricting the freedom of Palestinians to participate in their religious rituals in Jerusalem, especially during the holy month of Ramadan.

Given the threat posed by the coronavirus disease pandemic and the effects of the economic restrictions imposed by the occupiers, Tunisia urges regional and international actors to step up the humanitarian response in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It is important to respond to the appeal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its financial needs for 2021 to be met, so that it can continue to fulfil its mandate and provide services to more than 5.5 million Palestine refugees pending a just and lasting solution to their legitimate cause is found, in accordance with United Nations resolutions.

Tunisia hails the positive response of many donors to the Agency's appeals and once again welcomes the decision by the United States Administration to resume its provision of economic and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, including by financing UNRWA.

The occupying authorities are subjecting the population of Gaza to an unjust siege and collective punishment and depriving it of its fundamental, legitimate rights. We therefore call once again on the Security Council and other actors to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to put an end to the siege. We also reiterate the international community's call for the Palestinian civilian population to be protected.

Lastly, we reaffirm that concerted international efforts are urgently needed to give a strong impetus to the Middle East peace process, so as to end decades of occupation and restore the Palestinian people's legitimate rights to exercise self-determination, live in freedom and dignity, and establish an independent State within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In this context, we look forward to intensified efforts by the Middle East Quartet to relaunch the peace process and to prepare to convene an international conference on peace, something that would promote regional and international peace and security.

Annex 15**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Jonathan Allen**

My thanks go to Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

Let me open today by welcoming the decision taken on 7 April by the United States to restore funding to the Palestinian people and to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. That move will improve the lives of thousands of Palestinians, particularly those hit hardest by the occupation and the coronavirus disease. Secretary Blinken said on 2 April that Israelis and Palestinians should enjoy equal measures of freedom, security, prosperity and democracy. These are sentiments with which the United Kingdom readily agrees.

It is our hope that positive moves such as these will help to build an atmosphere of trust between the parties. The United Kingdom will continue to encourage deeper cooperation on economic issues and will work with the parties, and our international partners, to push for the re-establishment of formal Israeli-Palestinian mechanisms such as the Joint Economic Committee and its subcommittees.

Following the elections held in Israel on 24 March, we look forward to working with a new Israeli Government when it is formed. We also strongly support the forthcoming elections in the occupied Palestinian territories. Palestinian voters deserve free, fair and inclusive elections. The Government of Israel must help facilitate those elections in line with the Oslo Accords; that means allowing voting to take place in East Jerusalem. The recent disruption of meetings in East Jerusalem, and the arrest of candidates, is unacceptable and must stop.

We have been watching recent events on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif very closely. We recognize that Jerusalem holds huge significance and holiness for Jews, Muslims and Christians. We reiterate the fundamental necessity of maintaining the status quo at the holy sites, in particular the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. We continue to value Jordan's important role as custodian of the holy sites and remain fully supportive of its efforts to maintain calm; we expect all parties to support Jordanian efforts.

Unilateral actions that inflame tensions run counter to the atmosphere of trust that we all need to redouble our efforts to build.

Illegal Israeli settlement-building remains the biggest physical threat to the two-State solution. Plans by Israel to advance settlements in Har Homa, in south-east Jerusalem, north of Bethlehem, risk causing further damage to the prospects for a viable Palestinian State with its capital in East Jerusalem. We call on Israel not to advance those plans.

Demolitions of Palestinian buildings and evictions of Palestinians from their homes — across the West Bank, but in particular in East Jerusalem — have a similar detrimental impact on the physical character of a future Palestinian State. The Special Coordinator rightly draws our attention to threats facing Palestinians in Silwan, Al-Walaja and Sheikh Jarrah. In the latter, some 30 people face being evicted from 2 May.

Incitement, antisemitism and acts of terrorism are utterly unacceptable, and the United Kingdom is swift and clear in its condemnation of any such acts.

As we have heard, daily violence has continued throughout the reporting period. We share the concerns expressed by United Nations experts last week about the rising levels of settler violence across the West Bank. We also remain concerned

by accusations of excessive use of force. In all instances where there are accusations of excessive use of force, we advocate swift and transparent investigations.

The United Kingdom will continue to pursue a negotiated, sustainable solution to this long-standing conflict. It is our firm belief that the contours of such a solution remain: a negotiated two-State solution, leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, based on the 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States.

Annex 16**Statement by the Political Coordinator of the United States of America to the United Nations, Rodney Hunter**

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, and the other members of the Council for bearing with us as we have dealt with some technical issues this morning. I also thank once again Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Acting Director Rein Paulsen for their briefings today. They were very useful for us in understanding what is going on.

This Administration has been very clear about the United States' commitment to advancing a negotiated two-State solution in which Israel lives in peace and security alongside a viable Palestinian State. We have also been clear about our desire to re-engage with the Palestinians and to restore United States assistance programmes that support economic development and humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people.

On 7 April, the United States announced the resumption of economic, development and humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people totalling \$235 million. That includes \$75 million in economic and development assistance and \$10 million for peacebuilding programmes in the West Bank and Gaza — both through the United States Agency for International Development. It also includes \$150 million in humanitarian assistance for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); that is in addition to the \$15 million in humanitarian assistance that we announced in March. We are also resuming vital security assistance programmes. Taken together, that \$250 million commitment is a meaningful one.

Our economic assistance includes support for small and medium-size enterprises' recovering from the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19); it includes support for households to access basic human needs such as food and clean water, and also includes assistance for Palestinian civil society.

The United States is also resuming support for UNRWA services to ensure that humanitarian aid, including critical COVID-19 assistance, reaches Palestinians in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA is a lifeline for millions of Palestinians, and we are committed to serving as a strong partner to the Agency so that it may provide the most effective and efficient assistance possible.

We must recognize, however, that the resumption of United States contributions is not a silver bullet with respect to the Agency's funding crisis. As the Council knows, global humanitarian needs far exceed available resources. The United States remains the single largest humanitarian donor globally, and we are very proud of that. However, burden-sharing is not an option; it is a necessity. We call on other partners to step up their funding to the Agency as well.

The United States will also reengage with UNRWA, its donors, host countries and other Member States to address the long-standing challenges that UNRWA has faced over the years. The resumption of United States financial support for UNRWA is the first step — not the last — in our engagement with the Agency on critical reforms.

We are committed to working with UNRWA to uphold its neutrality, including zero tolerance for racism, discrimination and anti-Semitism. We will work bilaterally with the Agency, and multilaterally with partners, to improve its transparency, accountability, internal governance and oversight, and its sustainability. It is critical that the Security Council and other international donors also work with partners to amplify efforts toward meaningful reforms and financial sustainability.

The United States' comprehensive re-engagement with the Palestinians is one part of our strategy to advance prosperity, security and freedom for both Israelis and Palestinians. That assistance provides critical relief to those in need; it fosters economic development; it supports Israeli-Palestinian understanding and security coordination and the rule of law; and it promotes regional stability. It is also consistent with United States interests and values, as well as those of our regional partners — to include Israel.

As we work towards a more positive and constructive atmosphere on the ground, we also encourage both the Palestinian Authority and Israel to refrain from unilateral steps that exacerbate tensions and undercut efforts to advance a negotiated two-State solution, such as the annexation of territory, settlement activity, demolitions, incitement to violence and the provision of compensation for individuals imprisoned for acts of terrorism.

Before I close, I want to acknowledge the upcoming Palestinian elections, which we believe are a matter for the Palestinian people to determine. The United States and other key partners have long been clear that participants in the democratic process must accept previous agreements, renounce violence and terrorism, and recognize Israel's right to exist.

Annex 17**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy**

I would like to start by thanking Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Rein Paulsen, Director of the Coordination Division at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their informative briefings.

I welcome the representatives of Israel and Palestine to our meeting today.

In the past few months, new dynamics relating to the Middle East peace process emerged from within and without the region, reigniting hope for a two-State solution and a just, long-lasting, comprehensive peace for the Israelis and the Palestinians. We would like to make several points on how to maintain that momentum.

First, we reaffirm our strong support for all efforts and initiatives that can help advance the Middle East peace process. We call for stronger and more active engagement of the members of the Middle East Quartet, as well as the countries of the region, to help create favourable conditions for the resumption of meaningful negotiations. We reiterate our support for President Abbas's call to convene an international conference on peace in the Middle East and welcome all efforts to that end.

We also welcome cooperation between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority in certain areas, and urge all parties to pursue confidence-building measures and refrain from unilateral actions that could undermine the prospects of negotiations. We express our concern about the recent increase in settler-related violence and call upon the Israeli authorities to take the necessary measures to address that issue.

Secondly, we welcome the progress in the preparations for the upcoming elections in the occupied Palestinian territories. The high rate of registered voters is an encouraging signal for the success of the elections. We join other members of the Council and the international community in calling upon the Israeli Government to facilitate the elections process across the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

Thirdly, we continue to be concerned about settlement activity by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially construction plans in areas deep into the West Bank that would make it harder to establish a viable and contiguous Palestinian State. It is also worrying that Israeli demolition and confiscation of Palestinian structures and properties continue to grow. Those activities and other measures that make the lives of the Palestinians more difficult must be stopped. They not only run counter to international law, but also widen differences, hinder dialogue and undermine the prospect of a long-standing, sustainable resolution of the Palestine issue.

Fourthly, we note with great concern the dire humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, with a surge of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) infections in the past few weeks. We are particularly concerned about the situation in Gaza, where the daily death toll due to the pandemic has soared to a record high. As a result, the health-care system has been pushed to its limits and the socioeconomic conditions continue to deteriorate.

In that context, we welcome the announcement of the United States to restore humanitarian and development assistance to the Palestinian people, including a contribution of \$150 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for

Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We applaud the World Health Organization for the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines to the Palestinian Authority through the United Nations COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility programme. We also commend international donors for their medical aid, including much-needed vaccines, to help the Palestinian people to combat the pandemic. We call upon all relevant parties and the members of the international community to uphold their humanitarian commitment to the Palestinians, including through contributions to UNRWA, so that the surge of COVID-19 in areas at highest risk of infection can be controlled.

Finally, we would like to reiterate Viet Nam's support for the two-State solution, including the establishment of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within secure and internationally recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Ramadan Mubarak to Palestinians and Muslims all over the world.

Annex 18**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine, Riad Al-Malki**

Allow me at the outset to congratulate Tunisia on its skilled presidency of the Security Council and to express our appreciation for the convening of this high-level open debate. In addition, I wish my brother, Othman Jerandi, and President López Obrador of Mexico a swift recovery. May this year witness an end to this terrible pandemic. Let me note in that regard that the occupying Power has not provided any vaccines to the Palestinian Government for the benefit of the Palestinian people under occupation, insisting instead that it is under no obligation to do so.

Allow me to also thank Foreign Minister Lavrov for his participation. I also take this opportunity to thank Russia for its leading role in the Middle East Quartet amid the most difficult of circumstances, and President Putin for his repeated efforts to bring the parties together, as well as the Foreign Ministers of Ireland, Mr. Simon Coveney; Mexico, Mr. Marcelo Ebrard Casaubón; and Norway, Ms. Ine Eriksen Søreide, colleagues with whom I have worked closely to advance peace, and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Estonia, Mr. Rein Tammsaar, for participating in this meeting.

I congratulate Mr. Tor Wennesland on assuming his functions as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We look forward to working with him in his new capacity in order to advance a just peace. I also welcome my brother Mr. Aboul Gheit, who remains a tireless advocate of peace.

I also wish today to express our appreciation to the States that concluded their term on the Security Council — Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa. I thank them for their commitment to international law and peace, and for their support for the rights of the Palestinian people. I congratulate India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway on beginning their term on the Council and wish them every success.

The countdown for the demise of the two-State solution is under way. Some say the time has already elapsed. It is our collective responsibility to salvage the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders before it is too late.

Some wonder if this is the right time for peace. But the very reasons that demonstrate how difficult achieving peace is going to be, including the situation on the ground, the mistrust and the unilateral illegal actions, should prompt more, not less, international involvement, especially since we all agree that we are running out of time.

How much trust was there when the parties to the conflict met in Madrid 30 years ago? How ready were they to negotiate? How willing was Shamir, who was then Israeli Prime Minister, to make peace? How pleased were the Palestinians that the Palestinian Liberation Organization could not even send its own delegation? What did the situation on the ground look like?

The world decided it was time to solve this conflict and was not going to take “no” for an answer. I can tell you with certainty that without Madrid we would not have made it to Oslo. The momentum for peace is something we create, not something we wait for, and I know that there is no lack of willingness around this table and beyond to see peace prevail.

We therefore reiterate our call for a collective approach mobilizing the international community and demonstrating its resolve to achieve peace. In that context, we call for the revival of the Quartet and its engagement with partners and the parties, as well as for the continued mobilization of the Security Council. We also reiterate our call for the convening of an international peace conference that could

signal a turning point in this conflict, like the Madrid Conference did three decades ago, and the launching of final-status negotiations based on the international terms of reference and parameters. Our call for multilateral engagement is not an attempt to evade bilateral negotiations, but rather an effort to ensure their success.

Does anyone here believe that Israel has really dropped its annexation plans? Or is it in reality finalizing those plans in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as we speak? Israel has advanced over 3,000 new settlement units in the past few weeks alone, accelerating the demolition of Palestinian homes and the displacement of our people, with settlers' violence reaching an all-time high and with repeated provocations at holy sites, especially Al-Haram Al-Sharif?

Israel's goal has always been the same — to grab maximum Palestinian geography with minimum Palestinian demography. We know the outcome of that policy — millions of Palestinians enduring oppression, discrimination and blatant segregation, denied their most basic rights and deprived of control over their land, their resources, their borders and their lives. Who would accept that? We cannot. Would any of you? The question therefore remains how to convince Israel to choose peace, not annexation, or, in the words of former United States President Jimmy Carter, peace, not apartheid?

In 2016, the Quartet stressed the urgent need for affirmative steps to reverse the negative trends on the ground in order to “prevent the entrenchment of a one-State reality of perpetual occupation and conflict that is incompatible with realizing the national aspirations” (*S/2016/595, annex, p. 2*) of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. In response to the rapid deterioration of the situation on the ground, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), a road map to salvaging the two-State solution and achieving peace.

In a speech explaining why the United States did not resort to the use of the veto, Secretary Kerry explained that the two-State solution was not only a Palestinian interest, an Israeli interest, a regional and international interest, but also a United States interest. He stressed that the “critical decision about the future — one State or two States — is effectively being made on the ground every single day”, noting that “the status quo is leading towards one State and perpetual occupation, but most of the public either ignores it or has given up hope that anything can be done to change it”, adding that “with this passive resignation, the problem only gets worse, the risks get greater and the choices are narrowed”.

This lucid assessment about the urgency to act to salvage the two-State solution was followed by four years during which the Trump Administration used the might and influence of the United States to support Israel's unlawful efforts to entrench its occupation and control, breaking with decades of United States diplomacy. Even the most vulnerable — millions of Palestine refugees — were not spared as the Trump Administration withdrew United States funding from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in an attempt to dismantle the Agency despite international consensus on its indispensable role, pending a just solution. What if these considerable resources were used to advance freedom, justice and peace, not annexation and apartheid?

The last four years have tested our collective resolve, yet international consensus has endured and prevailed. The members of the Council, the Quartet, the Munich Group and the international community, as a whole, stood up against annexation, reaffirmed their support for Palestinian rights, backed UNRWA and continued to work for a just and lasting peace. Now is the time to heal and repair the damage done by the previous United States Administration.

President Abbas congratulated President Biden on his election and expressed our hope for the resumption of relations and positive engagement. We look forward to the reversal of the unlawful and hostile measures undertaken by the Trump

Administration and to working together for peace. We welcome the decision of the new Administration to rejoin the international law-based order, and hope that the United States will play an important role in multilateral efforts to establish peace in the Middle East.

This is not a time for passive resignation, but for resolute action. Without such action, neither reversing negative trends on the ground — first and foremost illegal settlement activities — nor resuming meaningful final-status negotiations, will be possible. The deterioration of the situation on the ground is directly linked to the attempts of one party to prejudge and dictate the outcome of negotiations and to pursue annexation, which would destroy any prospect of a sovereign and contiguous State of Palestine, and to do so while pretending to accept a two-State solution.

There are those who ask — what can be done that has not been tried already? But did the world truly use the toolbox available to it to end this occupation and conflict?

How does the world deal with other conflicts? Does it say that the parties shall negotiate and simply wait for them to be ready and agree? Or does it find the necessary resources to push parties towards negotiations and away from unlawful unilateral actions, including by upholding the obligations of third parties? Does it merely condemn violations or does it make sure that their cost far outweighs their benefits by creating incentives for compliance and disincentives for non-compliance? When adopting resolutions, does the Council complement them with the means to ensure their implementation, per its Charter duties, or does it offer resolutions as mere advice for the parties to decide whether or not to heed them?

Since both parties say they are committed to peace, why not allow the deployment of international observers truly empowered to assess compliance? Why fear consequences for whoever breaches their legal obligations? Why not conduct final-status negotiations under international auspices? Why reject the idea of binding time frames? This is the path to changing the unfolding tragic reality in Palestine. We stand ready to do our part and will continue fulfilling our obligations.

An entire nation is yearning for freedom and its calls must be answered. We do not ask for more than what the Charter of the United Nations prescribes for all peoples, nor will we accept less. We cannot accept a future of walls, blockades, humiliation and subjugation. We will spare no effort to advance an independent, sovereign, viable, contiguous and democratic State of Palestine along the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We will do so through peaceful means only, even in the most challenging of circumstances.

As we pursue our long journey to freedom and peace, we call for the immediate protection of our people, who are entitled to security until such time when we can ensure their protection as a sovereign State.

President Abbas issued a decree calling for Palestinian legislative and presidential elections, as well as elections for the Palestinian National Council. This is an integral part of efforts to resume our democratic life and achieve national reconciliation and unity. We thank those that support such efforts and ask for international support and assistance to ensure the integrity of these elections, including by helping to avert and remove all Israeli obstacles to said elections, notably in East Jerusalem, and ask that their outcome be respected.

In this period of electoral campaigns, some, in trying to secure votes, remain committed to international law, the two-State solution and peaceful means, and some instead announce settlements, advance annexation and persist in their provocations. May people not be duped by the ills of demagoguery, supremacy and domination and choose instead the path of equal rights, mutual respect and shared dignity. With your help, may our future be one of freedom, security and prosperity for all, a future of peace, not apartheid.

Annex 19**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, Gilad Erdan**

They were peacefully protesting and merely expressing their right to free speech. Now, five young Iranian men are locked up in jail waiting to be executed. Their crime — waging war on God.

Hadi Kiani, Mohammad Bastami, Mehdi Salehi, Majid Nazari and Abbas Mohammadi will most likely join the thousands of others murdered for speaking out against the world's most abusive regime. And yet today's debate will focus once again on Israel.

Iran's relentless attempts to acquire military nuclear capabilities, its terrorist proxies that continue to destabilize the region and its grave human rights violations remain the most substantial threats to peace and security in the Middle East. These should be the focus of debates on the region. Sadly, some members of the Security Council completely ignore the threat posed by the regime. I truly hope that that is not the case today.

In recent weeks, the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that Iran has escalated its nuclear extortion and begun enriching uranium to 60 per cent. It is clear to everyone that there is no need for Iran to enrich uranium to that level if it is intended for civilian purposes. But Iran's nuclear ambitions are not civilian; they are blatantly military.

Any Iranian claims of wanting to develop nuclear capabilities for civilian purposes should be seen for the lies that they are. There is no civility in Iran's nuclear programme. If the regime truly wanted nuclear capabilities for civilian purposes, it could have achieved this years ago. It could have chosen a route similar to other countries: no enrichment of fissile material on their soil, only through import. But Iran refuses to accept this structure.

What more does Iran have to do to prove it is not trustworthy? How long can the international community ignore Iran's provocative and dangerous behaviour?

Just a few short months ago, Iran held a widescale military exercise dubbed "The Great Prophet 15". As a part of the exercise, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps displayed the capabilities of multiple surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, some of which have the ability of delivering nuclear warheads. Such display was in complete violation of paragraph 3 of annex B of resolution 2231 (2015).

In February, Iran unveiled its new space launch vehicle. Analysis of this vehicle indicates that it can carry a one-ton warhead as far as 5,000 kilometres. These capabilities cast further doubt on the regime's claims that its space programme is for "peaceful purposes". What peaceful purpose requires a one-ton warhead?

The ayatollahs also continue to pursue their objective of creating radical regional hegemony by supporting and arming their terrorist proxies throughout the Middle East. Be it the Houthis in Yemen, Shia militias in Iraq, Hizbullah in Lebanon and Syria or Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip, Iran spreads its tentacles of terror across the Middle East. It supports, arms and funds these terrorist organizations, which, under its control, murder countless people and destabilize the entire region. The only thing the Iranian regime cares about is its tyrannical and murderous objectives. It will say and do whatever is needed to reach that goal.

The regime is also a serial human rights violator. It persecutes minorities and executes protesters, journalists, women, members of the LGBTQ community and thousands of others.

And yet the Security Council does not take the steps necessary to stop the country. It continues to ignore the most pressing matter in the Middle East and, instead, wastes the time of these debates recycling useless discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even though the Abraham Accords have clearly proven that that is not the issue — Iran is.

Over the past few months, despite Iran's continued illegal nuclear development and escalated regional violence, the international community has attempted to re-engage with the murderous, genocidal regime in an effort to rejoin the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

We believe that that would be a serious mistake. Today, everyone understands that what Prime Minister Netanyahu said back in 2015 is true — that the deal is fundamentally flawed and does not prevent threats from Iran. Members of the international community call for an improved agreement that does not expire in under a decade and which has better and more enforceable inspection mechanisms. Unfortunately, many of them also believe the right way to reach such a deal is by first rejoining the JCPOA and then trying to negotiate a longer and stronger deal with the Iranians. For us, that is hard to understand, for once the international community gives up its leverage, why would Iran agree to negotiate a new deal?

Just like in 2015, the fanatical Ayatollahs will use sanctions relief to fund their terrorist activities and continue to secretly develop their military nuclear programme. All they will have to do is wait for the restrictions in the agreement to expire in 2030. They will then have international legitimacy to have thousands of advanced centrifuges enriching uranium, and their breakout time will be almost down to zero, as President Obama himself admitted.

What will the Security Council do if that happens? Why wait until then when its members could respond right now? How will the Council act in the face of Iran's continued violations and its possession of uranium enriched to 60 per cent? It is clear to everyone that the capabilities and knowledge that Iran is developing right now are irreversible and that no agreement can roll them back.

The fact that world leaders state they are committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons may be encouraging but it is simply not enough. Iran continues to pose an unacceptable threat to Israel and the countries of the region. The international community also wanted to prevent North Korea from becoming a nuclear Power; the lessons from that time still need to be learned.

There is consensus among international intelligence agencies around the world that Iran's nuclear programme is intended for military use, not for civilian purposes. Since that is the case — and for us to be safe — Iran must not be allowed to have nuclear capabilities today or at any time in future. We cannot trust that Iran's enrichment capabilities will not be diverted to military use.

The JCPOA did not address any of these concerns. All it did was buy time. For the moderate nations in the Middle East, this is not enough. As Council members know, Israel is in a unique position. It is the only country in the world that the Iranian regime threatens to annihilate. For Israel, Iran poses an existential threat. That is why we will not see ourselves bound by any agreement that does not fully address the threats against the existence of the State of Israel. And every single member of the Security Council would do the same if it were in our shoes, particularly in the light of the Holocaust.

Even though Iran is, without a doubt, the most pressing issue in the region and even though Israel has time and again raised these concerns in speeches and letters, debates on the Middle East ignore the dangers of the tyrannical Iranian regime. If the members of the Security Council intend to once again use time to make statements to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I hope that they will at least address how this institution will be able to continue to work with the Palestinian Authority if Hamas increases its power in the upcoming elections and becomes an official part of the Authority.

That is the most important issue to address with respect to the conflict — not old, recycled false accusations about demolitions that are carried out because of illegal construction by the Palestinians. Hamas — the anti-Semitic, genocidal terrorist group — calls for the destruction of the Jewish State and for the murder of Israelis. The fact that Hamas is being allowed to run in the upcoming elections and is predicted to increase its power should be worrying for this body. It should indeed be worrying for everyone.

Terrorists who deny Israel's right to exist are being allowed to participate in the elections. Hamas's list of candidates includes such names as Jamal Abu Al-Hayja, who carried out numerous terrorist attacks, Nael Barghouti, one of the longest-serving inmates in the Israeli prison system, and Tawfiq Naim, another convicted terrorist.

As then-Senator Biden mentioned in his remarks at the time on the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006, the political rise of Hamas presents a challenge. Hamas does not even come close to meeting the Quartet's three requirements of acknowledging Israel's right to exist, renouncing violence and accepting all previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

The Abraham accords have taught us that peace in our region can be reached only through dialogue and acceptance, not through threats and terrorism. The success of the peace between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and the Sudan is rooted in the fact that it is a people-to-people peace. It is the citizens of our countries who have embraced the message of coexistence and tolerance and, as a result, each other.

For there to be a chance for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, they need to educate for reconciliation, not hate. They need to teach their children to build bridges, not how to blow them up. They need to completely change the discourse.

Part of changing that discourse must start in this Chamber, with the Security Council. The rhetoric used in this place needs to be balanced and conducive to reconciliation. The Palestinian leadership's incitement and choice to continue their pay-for-slay policy instead of using those resources to help their citizens must be criticized by the Security Council. This forum must also call for the critically needed reforms in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The textbooks used by UNRWA encourage violence and terrorism. They include anti-Semitic content and further entrench the conflict. UNRWA itself has admitted to having found material inconsistent with United Nations values, but there is no evidence to indicate that it has taken any meaningful steps to rid itself of this deplorable content. The Agency has long become a political institution that distorts the definition of a refugee, and, without a complete overhaul, has no legitimacy to exist.

We cannot end without addressing the outrageous claims made against Israel with respect to the coronavirus disease, instead of it being praised for all that it has

done. Since the beginning of the pandemic Israel has worked with the international community to assist the Palestinians in dealing with the crisis. We see it as our moral obligation to help the Palestinians, and we understand that it is also in our interest to help our neighbours. Despite this productive cooperation, which, by the way, has been recognized by consecutive Special Coordinators for the Middle East Peace Process, the Palestinian Authority has attempted to slander Israel, as Council members have heard, with some of them echoing the Palestinian Authority's false claims.

If we truly want to encourage productive dialogue and build trust between the sides, perhaps the Security Council should discuss how, despite having no legal obligation to do so, Israel has vaccinated many, many Palestinians. We have provided 5,200 vaccines to the Palestinian Authority and have vaccinated over 100,000 Palestinian workers in Israel. We have also facilitated the transfer of 61,000 vaccines through the World Health Organization's COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access programme, 60,000 from the United Arab Emirates, 10,000 from Russia and 100,000 from China. Israel has also vaccinated all foreign diplomats stationed in Israel, including United Nations workers and force personnel.

It should be understood that, pursuant to the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority has the responsibility for all medical issues, including vaccination. To that end, it has signed a deal for 2 million doses and should be receiving over 400,000 of those units by June.

These are turbulent times in the Middle East. Iran continues to be the biggest threat to peace and security in the region and beyond. If the Council wants to play a role in bringing stability to the region, it must focus on the most pressing issues facing the region and take action. Furthermore, it must be sure to adopt approaches to bringing peace that have been proven to work, and not cling to approaches that have failed time and again because of the Palestinians' rejectionism and only because of that.

Annex 20**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations**

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). At the outset, we would like to congratulate the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for its successful presidency of the Security Council this month and express our appreciation for the opportunity for the Non-Aligned Movement to present its position on the question of Palestine, which has historically constituted an issue of concern and vital importance to the Movement.

The Non-Aligned Movement takes this opportunity to reaffirm its abiding solidarity with the Palestinian people, its unwavering support for their inalienable rights, including to self-determination and return, and its commitment to the alleviation of their plight until a just solution is achieved. The Movement continues to appeal for and support all efforts to achieve a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine in line with international law, the United Nations Charter and relevant United Nations resolutions, and stands ready to engage with and support initiatives on this basis.

Since the last quarterly debate (see S/2021/91), the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has regrettably continued to deteriorate and become increasingly destabilized, and yet the Security Council remains paralysed on this matter. This body must uphold its Charter duties and act to ensure implementation of its own resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). These resolutions comprise the foundation for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

We are deeply concerned that this body has been unable for too long to fulfil its mandate on this important question. At this critical moment, immediate action is required to hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for its violations. It is patently clear that the absence of justice, across decades in this case, only fosters greater impunity, compounds the conflict and the human suffering it is causing and further destabilizes the situation on the ground, severely diminishing the prospects for peace. The international community must translate its principled positions and commitments into urgent action.

While the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has been critical for years, the intensity of human rights violations and crimes perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, against the backdrop of the current global crisis caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, is unprecedented. Israel is blatantly exploiting the state of emergency and lockdown to accelerate its illegal settlement policy, through, inter alia, the continued demolition of Palestinian homes and properties, including water and sanitation structures, and withholding humanitarian assistance, as well as daily military raids, arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, and settler attacks on Palestinian civilians. Such illegal actions, along with the constant collective punishment of the civilian population, severely undermine the Palestinian efforts aimed at combating the pandemic, particularly in the Gaza Strip, which is already facing dire humanitarian and socioeconomic conditions under the weight of Israel's 14-year illegal blockade.

The States members of the Movement deplore the ongoing Israeli intransigence and illegal policies and measures that continue to undermine the realization of a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. NAM reiterates its call for an end to the illegal Israeli occupation and for the restoration of justice and rights to the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination. These are fundamental pillars for the achievement of a peaceful solution.

The Non-Aligned Movement continues to believe that resolution 2334 (2016) provides the most viable path to peace and calls for its full and effective

implementation. That resolution sets forth the essential requirements and parameters for the achievement of the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, in respect of the long-standing terms of reference of peace endorsed by the international community, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative. The Movement urges international efforts to de-escalate the situation on the ground and advance the prospects for peace, including efforts through an expanded Quartet, in line with its Security Council mandate.

Accountability measures are essential. Israel must be compelled to cease immediately and completely all illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the demolition of Palestinian homes and property and the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians. All acts of violence, provocations and incitement against civilians must cease. The occupying Power must also cease all other human rights violations against the Palestinian civilian population, many of which may amount to war crimes, including the massive collective punishment of 2 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The illegal and inhumane blockade of Gaza must be completely lifted. Israel must fully comply with its duties and responsibilities under international law, including its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention as the occupying Power, without exception. It must immediately cease all policies and measures aimed at the alteration of the demography, character, identity and legal status of the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem.

The Non-Aligned Movement also demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Moreover, the States members of the Movement urge Israel to cease its violation of Lebanon's territorial integrity and sovereignty, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly resolution 1701 (2006).

In the absence of a just solution, the States members of the Movement also reiterate their call for the continued provision of the necessary humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance to the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees. The Movement expresses its deep appreciation for the invaluable work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its provision of education, health care and vital relief and social services to the Palestine refugees, including essential emergency assistance provided to help Palestine refugees to confront the COVID-19 pandemic. We welcome the recent resumption of funding by the United States to that vital humanitarian agency and once again call for the sufficient and predictable funding of UNRWA to enable the continuity of its operations, in line with its General Assembly mandate, pending a just solution.

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

Annex 21**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, Rabab Fatima**

I commend Viet Nam for its successful stewardship of the work of the Security Council in April. I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Rein Paulsen, Acting Director of the Coordination Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their comprehensive briefings.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement submitted by the delegation of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (annex 20). I wish to add the following points in my national capacity.

The coronavirus disease pandemic remains a persistent health threat that has had major socioeconomic consequences across the West Bank and Gaza. In addition to the brutal impact on public health, the recurrent lockdowns, school closures and reduction of commercial activity have severely undermined living conditions. In view of those challenges, support for the Palestinian coronavirus disease response should be significantly enhanced to ensure that Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, receive a fair and timely share of the distribution of vaccines. A collective, robust approach is crucial to tackling this deadly adversary and rebuilding the lives and livelihoods of all those impacted by the virus. However, instead of doing so, the Israeli authorities continue to exploit the pandemic and aggressively advance their settlement, colonization and annexation schemes, entrenching Israel's 54-year illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Recent Israeli actions to expand illegal settlement plans have led to further displacement of the Palestinian population, including women and children. We express our deep concern over, and condemnation of, such blatant acts of aggression, which constitute a flagrant violation of international law. They are also in direct contravention of all the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). We call upon the international community to compel Israel to cease its systematic violations of international humanitarian law and human rights principles. That is all the more abhorrent as it is taking place during the pandemic crisis.

The Security Council must act now and fulfil its mandated responsibility to bring an end to such violations by upholding the rule of international law and ensuring accountability.

Bangladesh welcomes the upcoming legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections, which will take place on 22 May, 31 July and 31 August, respectively. We ardently express the hope that throughout the process the international community will continue to support Palestinian efforts to restore democracy and legitimacy to their national institutions.

We also reiterate our unwavering support for the people of Palestine and fully endorse the calls to ensure the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right of self-determination, based on the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Security Council must remain at the forefront to ensure the protection of the rights of the Palestinian people, using all international legal mechanisms, including, if necessary, sanctions, to end the occupation of the State of Palestine.

Annex 22**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations**

Brazil would like to thank Viet Nam for convening this quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a cause of concern for stability in the Middle East. Brazil wishes to reiterate its commitment to a negotiated solution to the conflict, in line with international law and a two-State solution. Such an outcome entails Israel living side by side, in peace and security, with an independent, democratic and prosperous Palestinian State, within secure and recognized borders.

To that end, we encourage the parties to resume negotiations and to engage in new diplomatic efforts. We are hopeful that the momentum generated by the signing of the normalization agreements can be useful to restart negotiations between the parties. We also take note, with interest, of President Abbas's call for an international peace conference.

Regarding the coronavirus disease pandemic, Brazil commends Israel's successful vaccine roll-out, as well as the launching of the Palestinian vaccination campaign. We encourage continued cooperation to address the economic consequences of the pandemic and to ensure that all populations are vaccinated.

The upcoming elections in Palestine are an important opportunity to renew the democratic legitimacy of Palestinian institutions. We were pleased to see the high number of people registered to vote, a sign that the Palestinian society is committed to the process. Brazil calls upon all parties to act constructively to ensure that the elections are free, fair and transparent.

Finally, as a member of the Advisory Commission of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Brazil reaffirms its willingness to cooperate with the Agency, in accordance with its capabilities, as we did throughout 2020.

Last March marked 10 years since the start of the Syrian conflict, a decade riddled with death, destruction and displacement on a large scale. Brazil reiterates its condemnation of the indiscriminate attacks against civilians, the targeting of medical and humanitarian workers and the forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and summary killings, which have become all too common throughout the conflict.

The situation has been made worse by the pandemic and its effects on the economic well-being of the most vulnerable populations. Given that grim reality, the humanitarian exemptions for any sanctions programme related to Syria must be observed to ensure that sanctions do not undermine access to food and essential health supplies. Humanitarian deliveries, both in their cross-line and cross-border modalities, should be intensified and closely monitored.

Progress on the political track is urgent. Brazil reaffirms its support for the efforts of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen in facilitating a solution to the conflict through the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We urge the members of the Constitutional Committee to bridge their differences and make substantial progress in its upcoming sessions. Brazil remains convinced that only a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led, United Nations-facilitated political process, with due regard for the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity, will bring about lasting peace and provide relief for the suffering of the Syrian population.

Regarding the situation in Yemen, Brazil is following with concern the ongoing escalation in Ma'rib and elsewhere in the country. We are also alarmed by the increasing number of cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia. Those attacks

are tragic reminders of the need to make progress on the path towards peace in Yemen. We renew our call on all parties to renounce the escalation of violence and to engage in good faith in direct talks under the leadership of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, who has our full support. In that context, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2564 (2021) by the Council last February.

The dire humanitarian situation in Yemen has left millions of Yemenis struggling with food insecurity. As the World Food Programme (WFP) and other United Nations agencies have warned, the window to prevent famine in Yemen is narrowing, and concerted action and support are necessary. Brazil joined the efforts of the international community by contributing to the WFP operation in Yemen. We hope that our contribution can help alleviate the distress of the Yemeni people until the urgent cessation of conflict is finally achieved.

Brazil welcomes the new Government of National Unity in Libya, led by Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah. That is an important step towards reconciliation in the country, which also comprises securing the integrity of the upcoming elections in December. We hope that progress on the political track will have an impact on the situation on the ground, helping to improve the daily lives of Libyans and to consolidate a lasting and comprehensive ceasefire. The arms embargo is also an indispensable element to de-escalate the conflict, and we reiterate our call for its full implementation. In that regard, Brazil welcomes the adoption of resolution 2570 (2021) on 16 April, which further contributes to implementing a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned ceasefire mechanism.

As we consider the situation in the Middle East, it is necessary to bear in mind that long-term political stability and economic prosperity are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Efforts to support the peaceful resolution of conflicts should be coupled with initiatives to promote socioeconomic growth, which are key to building resilient and inclusive societies.

As a candidate for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the 2022 to 2023 term, we are fully aware of the challenges ahead on the road to de-escalation, peace and recovery in Middle Eastern conflicts. Should the General Assembly entrust Brazil with this responsibility, we will continue our long-standing tradition of seeking the constructive engagement of all parties, including the members of the Security Council, while keeping in mind the centrality of the protection of civilians, respect for international humanitarian law and support for peace and mediation efforts.

Annex 23**Statement by the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Cheikh Niang**

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, at the outset, I would like to congratulate Viet Nam on its able presidency of the Security Council this month and acknowledge its long-standing support for the Palestinian cause also as an observer on the Committee.

Despite the growing optimism in 2021, in part as a result of the launching of a global vaccination campaign, many challenges and difficulties continue to be faced by the Palestinian people on all fronts.

The Committee urges Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by its responsibilities under international law, supply prompt and adequate vaccine protection to all in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and avert the further spread of the virus and further damage to the health and well-being of the Palestinian population under its occupation, who already face greatly diminished humanitarian and socioeconomic conditions.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people continue to be denied, and the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, regularly addressed in the Council, is now entering its fifty-fourth year. Yet a solution is not in sight; on the contrary, settlement activity, demolitions, the seizure of Palestinian-owned structures by the Israeli authorities across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the forced displacement of Palestinian families have accelerated at an unprecedented pace, posing a real threat to the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders.

We are indeed at a pivotal point as the international community embarks on renewed efforts to restart meaningful negotiations within a credible peace process, based on the long-standing international parameters for a just solution. In recent weeks, the Committee has reached out to key stakeholders to offer support for initiatives, including by the Middle East Quartet and in view of the holding of an international peace conference leading to a two-State solution, as highlighted in the 23 March statement of the Middle East Quartet envoys. In its outreach to Member States, the Committee encourages all supporters of the two-State solution to assist the parties to negotiations towards the achievement of a peaceful settlement, in line with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. Charting a course to a just peace requires de-escalation and full compliance with international law, including respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people. Let me now highlight some negative developments and trends on the ground that continue to undermine the prospect of a two-State solution.

The occupying Power has continued to expand its illegal settlement network in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem and deep in the West Bank, reaching the highest number of over 9,000 settlement units built over the last few years and leading to the transfer of thousands more Israeli settlers to the occupied territory, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Let me reiterate in the strongest terms that Israeli settlements in the occupied territory are illegal under international law, as reaffirmed, *inter alia*, in resolution 2334 (2016). They constitute an obstacle to peace and are destroying the viability of the two-State solution. The Committee calls on Israel to immediately halt all settlement construction and expansion and all measures of *de facto* annexation.

The Committee further highlights paragraph 5 of resolution 2334 (2016), calling on Member States to distinguish in their dealings between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and urges concrete

measures in line with international law to hold Israel accountable for its violations in this regard.

The Committee also condemns settler violence against Palestinians, such as the 13 March incident in southern Hebron when a Palestinian family was attacked by 10 Israeli settlers, some of them armed. Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk has reported more than 210 incidents of settler violence in the West Bank and one Palestinian fatality since the beginning of 2021. Such actions, carried out with impunity, cause harm to civilians, their properties and livelihoods, aggravate tensions and undermine prospects for peace.

The Committee calls for a stop to ongoing Israeli violations at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the latest of which took place on 14 April involving Israeli police breaking into the Islamic Museum and cutting the wires to the external loudspeakers of the Mosque, preventing the call to prayers during the month of Ramadan. The Committee calls on the Israeli authorities to respect the sanctity of the Mosque and the legal and historic status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Old City, in accordance with international law.

On this topic, the Committee welcomes the UNESCO Executive Board resolution of 14 April that calls on Israel to halt its illegal and unilateral procedures against the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Old City of Jerusalem and its walls.

On 9 February, the International Criminal Court (ICC) ruled that it has jurisdiction over grave crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian territory, including potential war crimes, as a major move towards ending impunity and ensuring justice and accountability. The Committee calls on Israel to cooperate fully with the ICC investigation, while respecting its obligations under international law as well as the Court's independence.

The Committee welcomes the holding of the upcoming Palestinian legislative and presidential elections, scheduled on 22 May and 31 July. They represent a crucial step to broadening the political space for Palestinians, as well as civil society organizations, allowing them to participate fully in the democratic life of the State of Palestine.

The Committee is encouraged by the ongoing preparatory work of the Central Elections Commission, including the publishing of the list of 36 parties and independent candidates set to participate in the legislative elections on 22 May. It is estimated that between 800,000 to 1 million new young eligible voters will take part in an election for the first time, together with a growing number of female voters and candidates. Out of a total of 2.55 million voters, 1,247 million are women, corresponding to 48.95 per cent of the electorate, and out of 1,389 candidates, 405 are women, corresponding to 29.15 per cent. This trend, as highlighted at the event on Palestinian women organized by the Committee on 10 March, will foster more inclusive national institutions as well as a more equal and just society. The holding of elections is an important step forward towards a united and democratic Palestinian State.

Let me also reaffirm the Committee's commitment to supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in its crucial role of providing much-needed assistance to Palestine refugees. On 7 April, the Committee held a virtual event with UNRWA Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini. The briefing provided an opportunity to hear from UNRWA about the challenges facing the refugee community and for Member States to express their solidarity. Member States' support is essential in sustaining the Agency's vital humanitarian and development programmes and as a contribution to stability in the region. Mr. Lazzarini announced the holding in the coming months of a conference

in support of UNRWA, which is being organized jointly by Jordan and Sweden, and called on Member States to provide predictable and reliable funding for the direct and life-saving assistance, including education and health services, at the core of the Agency's mandate.

On the same day, the revived focus on the Palestinian question and renewed commitment to the two-State solution was confirmed by the United States Administration's announcement that it would provide a total of \$235 million in aid to the Palestinians, including resumed funding for UNRWA and other economic and development assistance. The Committee is grateful to the United States Government for the resumption of support to the Palestinian people.

In the coming months, the Committee will continue to engage with Member States and relevant stakeholders, including regional organizations, with a view to garnering wider global support for the advancement of the Palestinian cause. In line with its General Assembly mandate, the Committee will support every initiative aimed at the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and a just solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions that ensures two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security along the pre-1967 lines and with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State, as well as a just solution for the Palestine refugees in line with resolution 194 (III).

Annex 24**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations, Maritza Chan Valverde**

Allow me to begin by congratulating Mr. Tor Wennesland of Norway as the new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. Please know that you have Costa Rica's full support in all your endeavours.

Costa Rica also congratulates Viet Nam for its active presidency of the Security Council during the month of April.

Costa Rica reiterates its long-standing position that only a negotiated two-State solution can bring peace and security to the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples, based on the 1967 borders and with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. In this regard, please allow me to stress two points.

Costa Rica welcomes the announcement made by the Israeli Central Elections Committee on 26 March regarding the final result of the elections that took place on 23 March. We call on the winning parties to resume peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and halt any settlement activity or the implementation of the annexation plans. Regarding the upcoming elections in the Palestinian territory, Costa Rica welcomes the joint statement made last February by Hamas and Fatah agreeing to an election timetable in Gaza and the West Bank. The joint statement sets forth an ambitious electoral calendar with parliamentary elections scheduled for 22 May, while a presidential election is scheduled to take place on 31 July.

Costa Rica calls for these elections to be free, fair, transparent and inclusive and thus organized in all the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. International electoral observation missions and civil society organizations play a crucial role in the oversight of elections to ensure their integrity. Let us not forget that international and regional treaties protect the freedom of movement, which is considered essential during the electoral process, not only for political parties and voters, but also for poll workers and election observers.

Accountability for serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continue to be a high priority on the international community's agenda. In this regard, Costa Rica welcomes the recent ruling by the International Criminal Court (ICC) recognizing that its jurisdiction extends to the occupied territories by Israel in 1967, namely, the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. The decision clears the way for the ICC's Prosecutor to investigate, arrest and try any individual — on both sides of Israeli and Palestinian militant groups — whom it finds has committed serious violations of international law in those territories. While Costa Rica deeply regrets Israel's position in rejecting the Court's jurisdiction over Israeli nationals, it reiterates its unwavering support for the Court and the pursuit of international justice. The pursuit of justice remains an often onerous task, but it is a task that we can and must pursue together alongside the ICC if we are to fulfil the expectations that others have of us for justice, but ultimately also for reconciliation, sustainable development and peace.

Annex 25**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

We support the statement submitted by the delegation of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (annex 20).

We reiterate our deep concern about the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the countries of the Middle East. In particular, the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people continues to worsen. Infections in the Gaza Strip are increasing at a worrisome rate, and in the West Bank the numbers remain high, while many hospitals are not able to operate at full capacity. Confronting the pandemic requires joint actions that prioritize cooperation and solidarity over political differences.

Amid this complex scenario, the Security Council continues to fail to take action to put an end to the Israeli military aggression and occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in accordance with its resolution 2334 (2016). Israel, with impunity, is continuing the occupation and entrenching its annexation policies, increasing its illegal settlement practices and measures, including the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, punitive demolitions, the seizures of resources from Palestinian institutions, the forced displacement of hundreds of civilians, the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the threat to annex the Palestinian territories in the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

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

We express our unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people and Government. We support the accession of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations. We reiterate our support for its President's call for an international peace conference.

The aggressive, unilateral and unjustified actions of the United States in the Middle East severely violate the legitimate interests of the Arab and Islamic nations and lead to a dangerous escalation in the region. We reiterate our rejection of the so-called "deal of the century" drawn up by the United States Government, which disregards the two-State solution, which has enjoyed the historic support of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and other international actors.

The unilateral decision of the United States Government to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, to establish its diplomatic representation in that city, disrespecting its historical status, as well as to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Syrian Golan, constitute serious violations of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We hope that the current Government will reverse such decisions, which, far from helping, further distances the possibility of a negotiated solution.

We call once again for Israel's full and unconditional withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and all occupied Arab territories.

We support the search for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the situation imposed on Syria, without external interference and with full respect for its

sovereignty and territorial integrity. We reiterate our strongest condemnation of the implementation of the Caesar Act, which hinders the reconstruction of that country, even more so in the complex scenario of COVID-19.

We reaffirm our full support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran and our rejection of the withdrawal of the United States from the agreement.

Unilateral coercive measures against certain countries violate the human rights of their peoples, international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and their application generates additional difficulties in the current context of confronting the pandemic. We demand an immediate and unconditional end to those arbitrary and illegal measures imposed against sovereign States.

We support the Secretary-General's urgent call to end armed conflicts, hostilities and wars and instead create opportunities for diplomacy and cooperation, enabling us to confront this devastating pandemic together. The right to peace remains a fundamental priority.

It is the duty of all States to uphold multilateralism and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including respect for the sovereign equality of States and their political independence, unity and territorial integrity; the peaceful settlement of disputes; and to refrain from the use or threat of use of force in international relations.

Annex 26**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ecuador to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

First of all, I would like to congratulate the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on its successful presidency of the Security Council during the month of April 2021.

Ecuador addresses the Security Council to reiterate its position on the question of Palestine, reaffirm its solidarity with Palestine and reiterate its commitment to alleviating the difficult situation faced by its people, which will be achieved only with a political, peaceful, lasting and just solution for the parties, based on the existence of two States: Palestine and Israel, within the recognized 1967 borders.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic remains a major problem in the Palestinian territory, given that more than 3,000 people have died from it in Palestine since the beginning of the pandemic. We call on the international community to strengthen the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility and other initiatives to promote and expand the national vaccination campaign in Gaza and the West Bank.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), demolitions continue at an alarming rate. The properties destroyed include houses, animal shelters, latrines and solar panels, which are essential for the livelihood, well-being and dignity of community members, which is further aggravated by the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this regard, the international community must reject any kind of illegal settlement policy, in particular demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian-owned structures, including water, sanitation and humanitarian assistance structures, throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

According to OCHA, between January and March, 314 Palestinian structures were demolished, displacing 468 people. At the current rate, demolitions and the resulting displacement will exceed last year's figures — 854 structures demolished and 1,001 people displaced. Ecuador expresses its concern over the humanitarian situation, human rights violations and disregard for international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Likewise, Ecuador rejects all forms of incitement to violence, which take the parties further away from a solution. We reiterate the call made by the Security Council in resolution 2334 (2016) for both parties to show calm and restraint and act in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law.

We express our deep concern about annexation measures, which constitute serious breaches of international law, seriously impact the viability of a two-State solution and undermine the prospects for renewed negotiations.

We call on all parties to make collective efforts to initiate credible negotiations and intensify regional and international diplomatic efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East without delay.

Finally, the Security Council must ensure the effective implementation of resolution 2532 (2020) and of a worldwide ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.

Annex 27**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I appreciate your efforts to lead the Council's work amidst the many challenges and crises on the agenda.

I also thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing. Egypt aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Egypt has long maintained that a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East cannot be attained until the Palestinian people are able to exercise their legitimate rights by establishing an independent State of Palestine on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the agreed terms of reference. The only way to achieve that objective is to launch serious negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties in order to prevent the situation from deteriorating further, as such deterioration would, over time, make a Palestinian State less viable.

As part of that vision, Egypt has recently been in contact with all regional and international partners in order to support efforts to revive the peace process and confer an active role on the Middle East Quartet. Egypt, in cooperation with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, convened an emergency meeting of Arab ministers for foreign affairs this past 8 February to affirm the Arab position on the parameters of the Palestinian question. At the meeting, the ministers stressed that the question of Palestine remains the central issue of the Arab nation in the consciousness of every Arab.

At the meetings of the Munich Format countries, Egypt underscored the need to ensure that the Palestinian question remains a priority on the agenda of the international community throughout the coming period, and to remain committed to the agreed international terms of reference, in particular the Arab Peace Initiative, the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference, the principle of land for peace and the two-State solution. Egypt also emphasized that it was vital to take action, especially humanitarian action, on the ground in order to build trust between the two parties and revive hopes that negotiations can resume and lead to peace.

This past February and March, Egypt also hosted meetings between the Palestinian factions in order to reach an agreement on final arrangements for holding legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections. The meetings should help to unify the Palestinian ranks, overcoming the effects of more than a decade of division and fostering intra-Palestinian cohesion at a time when the question of Palestine is confronted with serious challenges.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has continued to deteriorate recently, with the significant expansion of settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the attendant expulsion of Palestinians, confiscation of land and demolition of Palestinian buildings and houses. Moreover, there has been an increase in violence perpetrated by the occupying forces and settlers against unarmed Palestinian civilians.

Continued Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank, particularly in East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, will undermine the two-State solution, as we have repeatedly insisted. Settlement activity also constitutes a violation of international

law and United Nations resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016). Accelerated settlement activity is creating facts on the ground, forestalling any future negotiations between the parties. It also amounts to de facto implementation of the Israeli annexation plan, whose suspension had previously been announced.

Deteriorating conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, compounded by the repercussions of the coronavirus disease pandemic, have significantly exacerbated the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the situation of Palestine refugees, against the backdrop of the recent decline in the desired and necessary funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Egypt takes this opportunity to call once again upon all donor countries to provide the necessary support to the Palestinian people and UNRWA so that the Agency can fully deliver on its mandate to serve refugees. Egypt also appreciates the announcement by the United States of America that it will resume its provision of assistance to the Palestinian people and its funding of UNRWA. The decision by the United States may encourage other donors to fund the Agency once more.

At the regional level, Egypt endorses the call for a global ceasefire, including the appeal made by the Secretary-General, to enable the peoples of the region to address the enormous challenges arising from the pandemic and lay the groundwork for a comprehensive political process based on the terms of reference set out in the relevant Council resolutions on resolving protracted regional conflicts. The United Nations must ensure that efforts to resolve the crises in Syria and Yemen peacefully are guided by the peoples of those countries, free from foreign intervention, and that the countries' sovereignty and independence, and the unity and integrity of their peoples and territories, are maintained.

Egypt also supports the efforts of the Special Envoys of the Secretary-General for Syria and Yemen to reach a political settlement, a comprehensive ceasefire, in accordance with the parameters set out in the relevant Security Council resolutions, and emphasizes the need for the Security Council to play a more active role in efforts for the political settlement of those crises.

Egypt reiterates its deep concern about the continued launch of attacks by vessels on other vessels at sea and the attendant threat to international freedom of navigation. It condemns in the strongest terms the attacks against Saudi Arabia and the escalating use of force outside internationally agreed frameworks by certain parties in the region, a course of action that violates international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and threatens regional and international peace and security. Also of concern is the continued interference by certain countries in the internal affairs of other States. That trend requires a coordinated and urgent international effort to establish calm, promote dialogue and build confidence between countries in the region, under Security Council auspices, with a view to establishing a stable and sustainable security system that will achieve equal and just security for all countries in the Middle East.

Egypt continues to support all efforts to reach a political settlement in Libya in order to restore the peace, stability and prosperity that the Libyan people deserve, and reiterates that Libyans themselves must take the primary responsibility in that regard. In that connection, Egypt welcomes the approval of the formation of the transitional Libyan Government and the selection of the President, the members of the Presidency Council and the new Prime Minister. It wishes the new Libyan Government every success in carrying out the important tasks that await it. Foremost among those tasks is creating conditions conducive to holding presidential and parliamentary elections on schedule in December 2021, without delay, so that the

Libyan people is able to choose its government freely and fairly on the date set by the road map.

Egypt hopes that the Security Council will perform its role of supporting Libya in navigating this transitional phase. In the context of the draft resolution being prepared, the Council should emphasize the need to abide by the deadline for holding elections and to ensure that all foreign forces, whatever their designation, leave Libya and that the mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the Libyan-led ceasefire agreement monitors the departure of all those individuals from Libyan territory without further delay.

A just and comprehensive peace can be achieved in our region only if there is full compliance with internationally recognized resolutions and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, especially respect for the sovereignty and regional integration of States and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of States, and only if all occupied Arab territories are liberated, especially in Palestine and the Syrian Golan, in order to forge a better future for the peoples of the region.

Annex 28**Statement by Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, in its capacity as observer**

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The EU reaffirms its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, living side by side, in peace and security, with mutual recognition.

The EU reaffirms that there is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution. The status quo is not an option, as the viability of the two-State solution is constantly being eroded by new facts on the ground. The EU urges both parties to demonstrate their stated commitment to the two-State solution through concrete actions. Actions by either side that call into question their stated commitment to a negotiated solution must be avoided. The EU will actively support the parties to restore confidence and create an environment of trust necessary to engage in meaningful negotiations as soon as possible.

In this regard, the EU welcomed the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and a number of countries in recent months, including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, the Sudan and Morocco. The EU believes that these developments represent a positive contribution to peace and stability in the Middle East.

The preservation of the viability of the two-State solution is at the core of EU policy and will remain a priority. In this regard, and recalling that settlements are illegal under international law, the EU reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions taken in this context, such as building the separation barrier beyond the 1967 line, demolitions and confiscation — including of EU-funded projects — evictions, forced transfers, including of Bedouins, illegal outposts, settler violence and restrictions of movement and access. These actions seriously threaten the two-State solution. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States. The EU will continue to closely monitor developments on the ground and their broader implications and remains ready to take further action in order to protect the viability of the two-State solution.

The EU calls for all parties to take swift steps to produce a fundamental change to the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, including the end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. Rocket fire by militant groups is unacceptable. All stakeholders must commit to non-violence and peace.

Strong, inclusive, accountable and functioning democratic Palestinian institutions based on the respect for the rule of law and human rights are vital for the two-State solution. In this context, the EU welcomed the decree-law by President Abbas on holding legislative, presidential and National Council elections in the coming months, starting with legislative elections on 22 May. This is an important development, as participatory, representative and accountable democratic institutions are key for Palestinian self-determination and State-building. The EU calls on all Palestinian factions to unequivocally commit to democratic principles prior to the elections. The EU has consistently supported the work of the Central Elections Commission and reaffirms its willingness to engage with relevant actors in support of the electoral process. We call on Israel to facilitate EU monitoring of the electoral process, and, in this context, we hope that the EU election expert

mission will soon receive the authorization to travel. The EU also calls on the Israeli authorities to facilitate the holding of elections across all of the Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, in line with the Oslo Accords.

The EU reiterates its deep and genuine appreciation for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and of its dedicated staff, who are working in an extremely difficult and challenging context. UNRWA is an essential provider of vital services to millions of Palestine refugees, and a stabilizing force in the region. Until a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the Palestine refugee issue, in accordance with international law, is found, UNRWA remains crucial for providing the necessary protection and essential services for Palestine refugees, and we will continue to support UNRWA in all its fields of operations, including in East Jerusalem. The EU welcomes the additional financial support from other and new donors and calls on all partners to increase their contributions to UNRWA.

Securing a just and lasting peace will require an increased common international effort. The EU will work actively on a renewed multilateral approach to the peace process, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including partners in the Quartet, notably the United States of America, in the region and the Security Council.

Please allow me to turn to the situation in Syria. Just a few weeks ago, at the fifth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, co-chaired by the EU and the United Nations and held on 30 March, the international community once again reiterated its faith in and commitment to a sustainable solution to the Syria conflict through a genuine, inclusive political transition, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), to be negotiated by the Syrian parties under the auspices of the United Nations-facilitated Geneva process.

Yet, after a decade of conflict, that solution has yet to be achieved. Conflict, violence and instability in Syria continue to have profound repercussions for the stability of the entire region, causing further enormous human suffering, with millions of Syrians still displaced or living as refugees in other countries. The economic situation in Syria is deteriorating in alarming fashion. The coronavirus disease pandemic only adds to the gravity of the situation.

The recent Brussels Conference encouraged international donors to offer a significant level of pledges to alleviate the humanitarian and economic challenges faced by the people of Syria, in Syria — in line with the parameters and principles for United Nations assistance — and as refugees throughout the region, and in support of refugee-hosting countries.

That was an important result. Yet within Syria, violations of international law, including abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law, by all parties — particularly the Syrian regime and its allies — remain persistent.

In the north-west, the situation remains highly insecure. The ceasefire agreed in March 2020 is fragile and must be upheld, civilians must be protected at all times, and attacks on civilian objects, including hospitals, must cease completely. The EU also notes with concern the ongoing insecurity in the north-east of Syria. Military action by any party in any part of Syria renders ordinary life dangerous and intolerable for all parts of the civilian population.

The EU once again echoes the call made on a number of occasions by the United Nations and the Security Council for the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2532 (2020).

While the EU welcomed the decision taken by the Security Council on 11 July 2020 (resolution 2533 (2020)) to extend the authorization for cross-border humanitarian assistance to people in need in Syria for a further 12 months, the authorization of only one crossing point, in the north-west, was disappointing. The renewal by the Council of the authorization for cross-border assistance in July 2021 is vital and should fully reflect the humanitarian needs on the ground. As the largest humanitarian donor across the whole of Syria, with more than €24 billion provided by the EU and its member States since 2011, the EU continues to demand that all parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian regime, allow safe, unimpeded and sustained access for humanitarian convoys and humanitarian actors to the Syrian population in need in all parts of Syria.

Turkey is a key partner of the European Union and a critically important actor in the Syrian crisis and the region. Turkey's security concerns in north-east Syria should be addressed through political and diplomatic means, not by military action, and in full respect of international humanitarian law.

The EU continues to call upon the Syrian regime and its allies, and indeed upon all parties to the conflict, to fully respect international humanitarian law, and in particular to permanently cease indiscriminate air strikes and shelling of civilians and humanitarian workers.

The EU welcomes the release of the second report by the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The report concludes that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian regime used chemical weapons during an attack in Saraqib, Syria, on 4 February 2018. The EU insists further that the Syrian regime must fully cooperate with the OPCW, including its investigations of the use of chemical weapons in the conflict, and deplores the continued lack of cooperation of the regime with the OPCW. We continue to encourage all States parties to fulfil their responsibility and uphold the credibility of the Convention. We welcome the adoption of decision C-25/DEC.9 by the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, and we reiterate our call on the Syrian Arab Republic to fully implement that decision. As a member of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, the EU reiterates that the use of chemical weapons is a violation of international law and unacceptable anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances, and that impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated.

The EU welcomes the latest report of the Commission of Inquiry into the disappearances and associated torture that have been practised by the parties to the conflict, overwhelmingly by the regime; the EU expresses its grave concern at the findings in the report.

All those responsible for breaches of international law and human rights law, some of which may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, must be held accountable. The EU reiterates its call to have the situation in Syria referred to the International Criminal Court. In the absence of avenues for international justice, the prosecution of war crimes under national jurisdiction where possible, now under way in several EU member States, and the initiative of the Netherlands to invoke Syria's responsibility for human rights violations represent an important contribution towards securing justice. Moreover, the EU will continue to support efforts to gather evidence with a view to future legal action, including by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria.

The EU remains committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian State and recalls that any sustainable solution to the conflict requires a

genuine, inclusive political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) negotiated by the Syrian parties within the United Nations-led Geneva process, with the full, effective and meaningful participation of women.

The EU fully supports the efforts of United Nations Special Envoy Geir Pedersen towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) in the context of a comprehensive approach and continues to encourage the work of the Syrian-led Constitutional Committee, under United Nations auspices. It is disappointing that the fifth round of talks that took place in January turned out to be fruitless, in the absence of genuine engagement by the regime. The EU urges that a sixth meeting take place as soon as practically possible, this time on the basis of a clear understanding of working methodology and objectives. The EU insists on engagement in good faith in the work of the Committee with the aim of achieving meaningful progress on constitutional reform.

The EU reiterates the necessity of the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), including the issue of detainees and missing persons and the establishment of a safe and neutral environment in order for free and fair elections to be held under United Nations supervision.

The presidential elections organized by the Syrian regime later this year will not fulfil the criteria set out under resolution 2254 (2015) and therefore cannot contribute to the settlement of the conflict or lead to any measure of international normalization with the Syrian regime. The European Union would be prepared to support free and fair elections in Syria in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and under the supervision of the United Nations, to the satisfaction of the governance and in keeping with the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate.

The Syrian refugee crisis is the largest displacement crisis in the world, with 5.6 million registered refugees and another 6.2 million people displaced within Syria, and with conditions not in place for their safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return in line with the parameters defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and in accordance with international law. The EU stresses that the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin will be encouraged only once those conditions have been met. The underlying causes of the refugee and displacement crisis must be addressed through the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). The EU continues to warn against any further displacements in any part of Syria, as well as against the potential exploitation of such displacements in for the purposes of social and demographic engineering.

The EU, in line with EU Council conclusions, will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, in the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process, is firmly under way. So long as the repression continues, targeted EU sanctions on leading regime members and entities will be renewed at the end of May.

As the Brussels Conference in March once again reiterated, a political solution to the conflict has the potential to bring about stability and to open the way for Syria to become once again the united, sovereign, prosperous and free country we all want to see.

Annex 29**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, Mohammad Koba**

Let me begin by thanking Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his update on the latest developments in the occupied Palestinian territory.

From his briefing, we are regrettably continuing to hear grimmer and grimmer reports from the ground. It is also regrettable to learn that the unilateral steps being taken by the occupying Power are moving the parties further away from constructive dialogue.

Against that backdrop, I would like to make the following pertinent points.

First, any provocation, violence or disproportionate use of force towards Palestinian civilians by the occupying force must be stopped. In the same vein, the expansion of illegal settlements, forced evictions and the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures, which continue to cause immense harm to the Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, must also be stopped immediately.

The expansion of illegal settlements clearly violates Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016). Those continued violations by the Israeli authorities stem from decades of systemic impunity. Indonesia therefore continues to urge the international community to reaffirm the illegality of the settlements and to act together to end impunity and to hold Israel accountable for its deplorable actions.

Secondly, I turn to the issue of continued support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The coronavirus disease crisis has triggered a massive economic fallout. It is obvious that the Palestinian economy contracted and may take years to recover. Therefore, in these challenging and difficult times, we need to provide our utmost support to UNRWA to enable it to continue to work on the front lines of the crisis in providing education, health care and social services.

That said, the Agency continues to confront a dire financial crisis that is jeopardizing its ability to provide any services or assistance in the region. Indonesia therefore again appeals to the international community to extend its full support to UNRWA's vital work, and in that regard welcomes the planned conference organized jointly by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Sweden to provide predictable and reliable funding for UNRWA.

My third and final point concerns our support for the successful holding of the upcoming Palestinian legislative and presidential elections. We were pleased to learn that the total number of registered voters has reached 93 per cent of all eligible voters, including an encouraging number of women and new young eligible voters. That strong public participation in the democratic process in Palestine is indeed encouraging to see.

We are also very much encouraged by recent efforts to increase the participation of women in the Palestinian elections, not only as voters but also as candidates. That is an important step towards increasing Palestinian women's equal, meaningful participation and leadership in decision-making at all levels and all aspects of life in Palestine. Indonesia believes that there can be no peace or stability without the involvement of women.

As has been simply stated by our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Retno Marsudi, "If we want to invest in peace, then we should invest in women".

We must continue to show our support for the Palestinian people with respect to those important elections. The holding of free and fair elections across the occupied Palestinian territory is a crucial step towards re-establishing Palestinian national unity.

In closing, we once again urge the occupying Power to adhere to international law, particularly international humanitarian law and related Security Council resolutions. We call upon the international community to demand accountability and ensure that any violations by the occupying Power will have consequences in order to protect the Palestinian civilian population under occupation and salvage the prospects of a just and peaceful solution.

Indonesia reaffirms the validity of the Palestinian struggle to achieve a contiguous independent State, within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Let me once again assure the Council that Indonesia, including through the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, will remain steadfast and unyielding in its support of the Palestinian cause.

Annex 30**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi**

The situation in Palestine once again has been exacerbated, acts of brutality by the Israeli regime against the Palestinians have continued unabated, and the adventurist and destabilizing practices of the Israeli regime have intensified.

Meanwhile, the dead silence and the decades-long, utter and inexcusable inaction of the Security Council — resulting from the systematic shielding of the Israeli regime by the United States — with respect to Palestine has further emboldened the Israeli regime to commit more crimes with even greater brutality while enjoying total immunity. That in turn has resulted in a trust and confidence deficit and in a credibility and legitimacy crisis for the Council.

While the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further worsened the situation in Palestine and made life more difficult for the Palestinian people, who have already been under the wanton oppression of the occupying forces, the Israeli regime has also exploited the state of emergency and lockdown to accelerate some of its oppressive measures against the Palestinians.

For example, in furthering its unlawful settlement plans, the Israeli regime has continued the confiscation of Palestinian land, homes and property, in particular in and around Al-Quds Al-Sharif, leading to the forced displacement of many Palestinians. All such settlement-related measures are unlawful, violate international law and binding Security Council resolutions and must therefore come to an immediate end.

In that context, the objective of the regime, pursued through the forced displacement of Palestinians and their replacement with settlers, is to alter the demographic composition and character of Palestine, particularly the demographic composition and Islamic and Arab identity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

That indeed is not mere discrimination and apartheid; it is, rather, a deliberate systematic and massive ethnic cleansing aimed at the Judaization of Palestine. All such oppressive and inhumane practices are clear violations of international human rights and humanitarian law and, as manifestations of war crimes, entail the international responsibility of the Israeli regime.

The international community, particularly the Security Council, must therefore hold the Israeli regime accountable for commissioning such crimes and compel it to immediately cease all those acts.

Another criminal act committed by the Israeli regime, which has continued for the past 14 years, is the unlawful blockade of the Gaza Strip. That is the systematic collective punishment of the civilian population, causing serious humanitarian and socioeconomic crises. That inhumane blockade, the negative impacts of which have also been severely exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, must immediately come to an end. The silence and inaction of the Council with respect to that unlawful act is unacceptable.

We also condemn all provocative measures by the Israeli occupying forces against the Al-Aqsa Mosque as well as the acts of aggression against worshippers during the holy month of Ramadan.

At the regional level, the Israeli regime has continued its military adventurism and destabilizing practices, including by invading some countries of the region, particularly Syria. The Security Council has a special responsibility to put an end to this situation. It must therefore compel the Israeli regime to end the occupation of all Palestinian territories, the occupied Syrian Golan and parts of Lebanon.

The Islamic Republic of Iran reiterates its support for the just cause of the Palestinian people and the full realization of all their inalienable rights, particularly their inherent right to self-determination and to establish an independent Palestinian State throughout Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Before concluding, I must categorically reject all fabrications and accusations made today against my country by the representative of the Israeli regime. His desperate attempt to portray Iran's peaceful nuclear activities as a threat is aimed at diverting attention away from the nuclear weapons of the Israel regime, which continue to threaten the peace and security of the region and beyond.

It is no surprise that the Zionist regime is furious about the ongoing discussions in Vienna for the full implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The same regime that did its best to sabotage the nuclear talks held between 2013 and 2015 is hard at work to derail current talks.

Indeed, through systematic deception and by playing the victim, the Israeli regime intends to cover up its oppression and crimes, as well as its adventurist regional policies — the latest of which is its dangerous, reckless sabotage of Iran's Natanz fuel enrichment plant, thereby disrupting the operations of that nuclear facility.

The deliberate targeting of a highly sensitive safeguarded nuclear facility, given the high risk of potential release of radioactive material, constitutes reckless criminal nuclear terrorism, and those who planned, ordered, participated and carried out that cowardly act must be held accountable.

The Security Council must fulfil its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations to put an end to the Israeli regime's provocative and disruptive measures, which continue to threaten the peace and security of the region and beyond. Iran, for its part, reserves its right to vigorously defend its interests and citizens against any unlawful acts.

Annex 31**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, Ishikane Kimihiro**

First and foremost, I would like to reaffirm Japan's commitment to a two-State solution based on the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. Although there has been progress on cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, including with regard to security, Japan shares international concerns about continued worrisome developments on the ground, such as settlement activities in the West Bank and violence by both Israelis and Palestinians. Japan calls upon all parties to halt any activity that could hinder the full realization of peace in the Middle East.

Democratically elected Palestinian leaders and Government are also a prerequisite to realizing a two-State solution. The first of the series of elections in Palestine, announced by presidential decree on 15 January, will be for the members of the Palestinian National Council, and will take place on 22 May. Japan believes that the holding of this first election will mark an important step towards establishing a future democratic and independent Palestinian State. We urge all parties to ensure the successful holding of those elections in a free, fair and inclusive manner, such that the Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem are guaranteed a vote. Japan is ready to support this important event, including by dispatching an election observation team.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues to pose serious risks to human security — threatening people's survival, livelihoods and dignity around the world. Palestine is no exception, and the pandemic is compounding the already difficult situation for the Palestinian people. Japan welcomes the cooperation between Israeli and the Palestinian authorities to combat the pandemic, such as Israel's vaccination campaign for more than 10,000 Palestinians working in Israel.

In addition, Japan highly values the invaluable work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in support of the Palestinian people, and commends its efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19. In that regard, Japan welcomes the announcement by the United States regarding the resumption of aid to the Palestinians, which includes \$150 million in humanitarian assistance for UNRWA. Japan believes that this aid will contribute to improving Palestinians' livelihoods. It will also strengthen the roles and mission of UNRWA, to which Japan attaches great importance and has lent substantial support. Japan will continue its efforts in cooperation with the international community, including the United States.

In recognition of the Palestinians' long-standing aspirations to statehood, Japan will continue to help the parties build confidence and to provide assistance for Palestinians' State-building efforts. We will also continue to promote our own initiatives to that end. The Jericho Agro-Industrial Park is the flagship project of Japan's Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative. As of today, 16 local Palestinian enterprises have started businesses there, employing approximately 200 Palestinian workers. Based on trilateral dialogues between Japan, Palestine and Israel, Japan will further facilitate the project to help build confidence among the parties. The Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD) is another key initiative spearheaded by Japan. Despite the difficult times resulting from the pandemic, Japan has seen tangible progress on future business between Palestine and Indonesian companies, which was facilitated in a business-to-business event under a CEAPAD trade development initiative.

Japan once again reiterates its support for a two-State solution, with Israel and a future independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security. Following successful elections in Palestine, Japan will be committed to making even greater efforts to build mutual trust between the parties so as to create positive momentum towards the realization of peace in the Middle East.

Annex 32**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Jordan to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We appreciate your important role in enabling the Council to perform its mandate of maintaining international peace and security. I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his valuable briefing.

It is not possible to build a more peaceful world without a stable Middle East, and stability in the Middle East will remain elusive unless a just and comprehensive peace is attained, providing for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, on the basis of the two-State solution, international law, internationally recognized resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In order to achieve that objective, efforts must be redoubled to protect the peace process and the right of the peoples of the entire region to live in security and peace. A just and lasting peace based on international law is the only way of achieving the two-State solution. It is a strategic Arab choice, a regional and international necessity, and a right for all the peoples of the region.

The Council of the Arab League at the ministerial level, at the extraordinary session convened in Cairo on 8 February 2021, responding to a joint Jordanian-Egyptian initiative, highlighted the unified Arab position on the Palestinian question, sending the message that the two-State solution on the basis of internationally recognized resolutions is the only way to end the conflict.

The joint statement issued by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, Egypt, France and Germany — the Munich Group — who held a meeting on the Middle East peace process in Paris last month, also reaffirmed that there is no substitute for a settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the two-State solution to achieve comprehensive peace in the region. The four countries emphasized that they remained firmly committed to enabling and supporting all efforts aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on international law, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the internationally agreed terms of reference.

However, the chances of achieving the two-State solution — and, therefore, a comprehensive and lasting peace — are receding every day as a result of ongoing illegitimate Israeli actions that undermine that solution and the land for peace principle, which underpins the peace process.

The continued construction and expansion of settlements violates international law and undermines the chances of peace, and the international community must take a clear stand against it. The continued violations in and around the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Haram Al-Sharif are also a breach of the legal obligations of Israel as the occupying Power and a provocation liable to result in escalation. Effective steps must be taken to end the violations in order to protect the right to peace.

We therefore condemn the continued Israeli violations at the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Haram Al-Sharif, which contravene international law and the historical and legal status quo. The most recent violation is the unilateral action taken by the Israeli police in the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Haram Al-Sharif without regard for the holy month of Ramadan or the sanctity of the mosque. The staff of the Jerusalem Waqf and

Aqsa Mosque Affairs Administration of Jordan were harassed, some of the doors of the Haram Al-Sharif were vandalized, the wires of its external loudspeakers were cut and large numbers of extremists were given the protection of the Israeli police. Mindful of the Hashemite dynasty's historical duty of custodianship of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, under His Majesty King Abdullah II as guardian, Jordan will continue its efforts to protect the holy sites and to preserve the city's legal and historic status, so as to ensure that Jerusalem remains the key to peace and the city of harmony.

A genuine, effective effort is needed to relaunch serious negotiations to establish the political prospect of restoring confidence in the peace process and make the necessary progress towards the two-State solution. No lasting, comprehensive peace can be achieved without an end to the conflict on the basis of the two-State solution, international law and the Arab Peace Initiative, which remains the most comprehensive proposal to put an end to the conflict and uphold the right of the region and its peoples to genuine peace. That peace would allow all energies to be directed towards development and a future filled with opportunities and achievements rather than oppression and conflicts. Jordan will remain a force for just peace and will work with our sisters, brothers and friends, with all of you, to achieve it.

The Quartet must play its essential role in these efforts. We welcome the position and approach of the United States Administration on the issue.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) must continue to provide the vital services it is mandated by the Organization to provide pending a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine refugees that would uphold their right of return and compensation in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly General Assembly resolution 194 (III), in the context of a comprehensive solution to the conflict on the basis of a two-State solution bringing an end to the occupation that began in 1967. In coordination with the United Nations, Jordan and Sweden are preparing to hold a donor conference for the Agency in the coming period, to mobilize political support that translates into sustainable and predictable financial support that will enable UNRWA to carry out its mandate. In that regard, we welcome the decision by the United States Administration to resume providing financial support for the Agency, which is facing a severe financial deficit. That important positive step will have a significant impact on the Agency's ability to meet the humanitarian, educational and health-care needs of refugees, which needs have been compounded by the coronavirus disease pandemic and its consequences.

All of us must work to preserve the prospects for peace. This just peace is the right of all peoples of the Middle East, the key to regional stability and a must for global security.

Annex 33**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Kuwait to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I would like to express the solidarity of Kuwait with the people and Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in the aftermath of the eruption of the Soufrière volcano, especially given that this crisis comes at the most difficult of moments, amidst the global effort to combat the novel coronavirus disease pandemic. We wish our friends in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines safety and success in overcoming this crisis.

I congratulate you and the staff of the Permanent Mission of Viet Nam on successfully steering the work of the Security Council during the month of April. We wish you all the best as you preside over the rest of this month's meetings. I also thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing to the Council, and I reiterate our support for him and for all efforts to calm the situation and restore stability in the region.

The Security Council is holding its quarterly open debate under the item on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, against the backdrop of the international community's ongoing effort to combat the novel coronavirus. Regrettably, while the international community is focused on that decisive struggle, Israel, the occupying Power, persists in its relentless policy of aggression against the Palestinian people, reminding us once again that it has not backed down an inch from plans to annex more Palestinian territories in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Such policies and practices show yet again that Israel seeks to entrench the occupation by extending its illegal activities and policies through the expansion, construction and establishment of thousands of settlement units and the annexation of land, in an open violation of Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016). Mr. Wennesland's briefings and all recent United Nations reports have confirmed that the situation in the Palestinian territories has continued to deteriorate as a result of several factors, including the rise in settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, after the Israeli Government continued to approve the construction of thousands of illegal new housing units.

We are also concerned that, concomitantly with the Israeli authorities authorizing illegal settlement construction, Israeli settlers and security forces are committing acts of violence against defenceless Palestinian civilians and destroying Palestinian buildings and property, along with structures built using international donations and contributions for purely humanitarian purposes, such as schools and health-care facilities. These acts constitute yet more war crimes to add to the litany of atrocities perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people and to its blatant violations of human rights, the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations and international law. Israel, the occupying Power, aims with its policies to destroy the Palestinians' prospects or hopes of establishing an independent, contiguous, viable, lasting and sovereign Palestinian State.

Such practices require us, more than ever before, to leverage international political and legal mechanisms to hold Israel accountable for the ongoing and constant violations of the rights of the Palestinian people — rights that are guaranteed under international law — so as to put an end to the arbitrary arrest campaigns, the demolition of Palestinian buildings and destruction and seizure of Palestinian property, the forced displacement of civilians and the death of Palestinian civilians at the hands of settlers, not to mention the tightening of the blockade imposed on Gaza

for approximately 13 years now and the repeated attacks on Islamic and Christian holy sites.

In conclusion, in view of these extraordinary circumstances and the Israeli acts of aggression, Kuwait reiterates that it remains committed to the Arab, Islamic and international position that peace is a strategic choice and that a lasting, comprehensive and just settlement must be based on the two-State solution, in accordance with the agreed terms of reference, namely, the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. Such a settlement would enable the Palestinian people to exercise its legitimate political rights and establish an independent State within its own territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Annex 34**Statement by the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz**

[Original: Arabic]

This open debate is being held today against the backdrop of complex situations in the Arab region. We cannot watch and wait or ignore the destructive repercussions for regional and international peace and security. The Security Council needs to play a more effective role in addressing and resolving those situations. Foremost among them is the question of Palestine, which is the central issue for Arab States and the League of Arab States. But there are many other important issues at stake, among which are those of Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, the Sudan and Iraq.

Since the Council's last open debate, an Arab consensus has emerged with great clarity. It crystallized at the emergency meeting of the League of Arab States on the question of Palestine held at the ministerial level on 8 February 2021. Arab States came together to press for a solution and to capitalize on all the recent steps that have been taken towards convergence with a view to achieving that overarching Arab goal. That consensus was further underscored at the periodic meeting of the Council of the League held on 3 April and the intense efforts made by the Munich Group to maintain the momentum of the recent period. Other regional groups and forces have taken a stand that does them credit, including the European Union, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Caribbean Community. The Security Council has reached near-consensus that there is no alternative to an immediate start to negotiations towards a definitive solution on the basis of two-States. Such a solution would build on the ground-breaking steps taken by the Palestinian Authority to convene legislative and presidential elections, and to improve the prospects of a successful Palestinian reconciliation, resulting in the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the borders of 4 June 1967.

Nevertheless, the League of Arab States continues to wait for a strong international mobilization at the United Nations level to tackle the Palestinian issue effectively. It hopes that the Quartet will scale its meetings up to the ministerial level and extend participation to the Palestinian and Israeli sides and to other Arab stakeholders. Such efforts should culminate in the international conference called for by the Palestinian President, Abu Mazen, in his statement before the high-level segment of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. Such a conference would launch direct negotiations underpinned by full respect for the fundamental internationally agreed terms of reference, which have been endorsed by all parties in the Security Council and in this distinguished Organization. Those terms include the Arab Peace Initiative put forward by the League of Arab States at the summit level in 2002.

The League of Arab States had been expecting the Council to take a more forceful stance on the issue of rampant illegal settlement activities in the Palestinian territories. As the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy have said, those activities plainly violate the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), which was adopted during the previous Democratic Administration in the United States. Israel has ignored that resolution every day without being held to account. The international community has repeatedly asserted that the situation on the ground must not be changed in a such a way as to affect the anticipated negotiations between the two sides on the five final status issues.

The League had also expected that the Council would set about holding accountable the individuals responsible for these and numerous other violations

of the human rights of the Palestinian people, which has faced the most horrific repression and whose inalienable rights have been denied. The Council has not been able to defend the position of the international community or to hold the perpetrators to account. It had a golden opportunity to do so when the International Criminal Court recently decided to exercise jurisdiction in respect of Israeli violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Security Council had — indeed, still has — an opportunity to press for Israel and the perpetrators to defend themselves for their violations.

The League of Arab States believes quite simply and unequivocally that Middle East issues, particularly the question of Palestine, must be at the forefront of the Council's endeavours to address the international issues of which it is seized. The Council should work with the new American Administration to act on its previous commitments. Other issues cannot be allowed to come first. Those efforts must take place in the context of the United Nations and, in particular, the Security Council, in order to strengthen the foundations of international law and achieve the international goals towards which we have worked for decades.

The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Ahmed Abul Gheit, has welcomed the statements made recently by the American President, in which he emphasized his commitment to the two-State solution as the basis for a settlement to the conflict between Palestine and Israel. He has also welcomed the Secretary of State's announcement that economic, development and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people will resume, as will support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The League of Arab States sees that as a positive step reflecting the goodwill of the American Administration and its intention to launch a genuine peace process leading to a just, comprehensive and definitive settlement to the question of Palestine.

In view of those encouraging positions, the League looks forward to intensive and pivotal multilateral international action, through the Security Council, including the following points.

First, the role and unity of the Security Council should be restored with a view to putting a stop to the systematic settlement activities designed to promote the Israeli agenda of de facto annexation of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, prevail on Israel to fully implement resolution 2334 (2016) on settlements, and assert the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination.

Secondly, action should be taken through the Quartet, at the highest levels, with the participation of the two parties and of regional Arab stakeholders, with a view to implementing the initiative put forward by President Mahmoud Abbas to convene an extended international conference this year, with the cognizance of the United Nations, bringing together all relevant parties, to explore ways to find a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Thirdly, action should be taken to build on the outcomes of the Munch Group and other initiatives that have been accepted at the Arab and Palestinian levels in order to revive genuine negotiations between the two sides. In successive meetings, the Palestinian side emphasized that it was fully prepared to resume peace negotiations and support the peace process by effectively reviving the role of the Quartet.

Fourthly, it should be emphasized that the two-State solution is the only way to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, leading to the establishment of an independent, contiguous and viable State of Palestine in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations and the relevant terms of reference.

Fifthly, the process should concentrate on the provisions and principles set forth in the Arab Peace Initiative as a basis for building genuine relations between the Arab and Israeli sides grounded in good neighbourliness and mutual respect.

Sixthly, full support should be extended to the Palestinian side in order to ensure that Israel does not hinder the flexible and transparent implementation of the forthcoming Palestinian presidential and legislative elections in accordance with the aspirations of the Palestinian people. Support should also be given to Palestinian reconciliation efforts in order to pave the way for a politically unified State of Palestine.

In view of the geopolitical developments on the international scene, and the significant challenges and grave threats facing the Middle East region, coordination and joint action have intensified between the Security Council and the League of Arab States, in the manner emphasized and confirmed in presidential statements issued in recent years under the Security Council presidencies of Kuwait and Tunisia, and previously by Egypt. Such joint action requires greater confidence-building between the two sides — not only between Secretaries-General, as is already happening to good effect, but also, and concurrently, through action to build and implement a shared vision of regional and international peace and security.

The League of Arab States therefore hopes that the Security Council will focus more on enabling the Arab side to play a pivotal role in resolving the Syrian crisis, which has dragged on for more than a decade, through all relevant processes, including the Sochi and Astana tracks. Although Syria's membership of the League has been suspended, it has always been and will remain an Arab country and an integral part of our Arab world. The League is focused on the range of processes involving politics, humanitarian affairs and weapons of mass destruction. It has been following up those processes with the Special Envoy and the United Nations with a view to a settlement that would bring an end to the suffering of the Syrian people.

The League also hopes that the Council will provide stronger support for the work of the Libya Quartet, which held its sixth meeting at the highest level two days ago upon the initiative of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States to coordinate joint support for all concerned organizations. Such action is important in view of the positive developments in Libya. There are now prospects for a political solution, economic development, and reconstruction based on unity and joint action among Libyan groups further to the adoption of the outcomes of the Libyan political dialogue, the road map, the endorsement of the transitional Government, and support for the efforts of the Libyan people to hold transparent and credible national elections at a time to be agreed by Libyans. The League hopes that the Council will provide stronger support for the initiative of Saudi Arabia to declare a comprehensive peace in Yemen, including a comprehensive ceasefire throughout Yemeni territory, the reopening of Sana'a International Airport, and the reopening of the port of Al-Hudaydah and its environs. The League asks the United Nations envoy to resume Yemeni negotiations with a view to reaching a peaceful solution and the necessary peaceful negotiated settlement based on the three terms of reference. The initiative of Saudi Arabia has been broadly welcomed in the region and around the world, including by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The League also hopes that the Council will provide greater support for a response to the issues of the Sudan, Somalia, Iraq and many others that require stronger joint action.

More generally, addressing Arab issues requires putting an end to external intervention in Arab States, whether by neighbouring States in the region or by international forces with designs on Arab land. The League has adopted numerous resolutions in that regard, which it has formally transmitted to the Council and the Secretary-General of the United Nations; but it has yet to see any path to implementation. There are still those who address the Iranian nuclear issue

independently of the Middle East region and who address the Syrian and Libyan issues independently of foreign, regional and international interventions that seek to forcefully affect the political process and achieve interests that have nothing to do with Arab States.

We have a great deal of work to do. The League of Arab States reiterates that it is committed to working with the Security Council and the United Nations, hand in hand, to support regional and international peace and security in the Middle East.

Annex 35**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, Amal Mudallali**

Unfortunately, the situation in the Middle East remains volatile, and the risk of escalation looms large. What we saw yesterday evening is the latest example of the dangers and precariousness of the situation. The continued tensions and the Israeli strikes in Syria, some of which made use of Lebanese airspace, in violation of Security Council resolutions, is making the fragile status quo more worrisome. It is a pressing reminder that peace and security in the region should be of the utmost priority for the Security Council.

In Palestine, there is renewed political effort to achieve peace based on international law and a just and comprehensive solution. In a recent virtual meeting, the Middle East Quartet expressed the need to return to meaningful negotiations that would lead to a two-State solution, and included concrete steps to advance freedom. The Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, Egypt and Jordan also met twice this year to discuss ways to advance peace. On 8 February, the League of Arab States reiterated its support for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State based on the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The new American Administration's policy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the renewed commitment to the two-State solution, alongside renewed American humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians, reignited hope that peace efforts and a credible negotiating process for a solution for the Palestinians and Arab-Israeli conflict may be on the horizon. This renewed momentum was also behind the guarded optimism statement that the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process gave to the Council last month (see S/2021/302).

These are important announcements and steps, but they now have to be translated into action — because there can be no progress whatsoever when settlement activities continue unabated, when Palestinian homes continue to be destroyed and when Palestinians continue to be deprived of their basic rights every day by the occupying Power.

One of the basic rights of the Palestinians is the democratic right to hold elections in all the occupied Palestinian territories since 1967, including the right of Palestinians in East Jerusalem to participate in the upcoming Palestinian parliamentary elections.

We thank all countries, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for providing much-needed critical humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance to the Palestinian people. In that regard, Lebanon can only welcome the resumption of United States funding to UNRWA.

As critical as this assistance is, we should keep in mind that only a political solution, based on international law and a just and comprehensive solution, on the basis of all the relevant United Nations resolutions, can solve the long-overdue issue of the occupation of Palestine and give the Palestinian people their freedom and inalienable right to peace and security on their land. Time is of the essence. Time and vacuums are the enemies of peace because, in the absence of a peaceful horizon, they are filled with conflict and suffering.

Lebanon welcomes the resumption of the talks in Vienna to revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as well as all efforts to lower tension in the region and re-establish diplomacy and negotiations as the only means to resolve differences and for the peoples to live in harmony and peace.

Lebanon is going through multiple crises and very challenging times. Every day, the Lebanese people are coping with the hardships posed by the economic, humanitarian, social and political crises. Naturally, the situation is exacerbated by the pandemic and, in the absence of equitable access to vaccines, will continue to deteriorate. Consultations on the political front to form a mission-driven Government are still under way, but no progress so far has been achieved.

In the south of Lebanon, daily breaches of Lebanon's sovereignty by Israel have become the norm. These are all documented in complaints Lebanon has submitted on a daily basis to the Security Council, and we do not need to remind Council members that such breaches are in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). We reiterate Lebanon's commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety, and, time and again, we call on the Security Council to compel Israel to abide by its obligations under this resolution.

In this context, we also reiterate the stabilizing role that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has been playing in south Lebanon, and we are grateful to UNIFIL's leadership, troops and staff for their untiring dedication, as well as their strong and steady cooperation with the Lebanese Government and Lebanese Armed Forces.

Lebanon welcomes the appointment of Ms. Joanna Wronecka as the new United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and wishes her luck as she takes up her new position. I know everybody is waiting to welcome her to Lebanon. Her diplomatic skills, combined with her knowledge of the region, are an asset to a strengthened cooperation between the Special Coordinator and the Lebanese authorities, and she can count on my country's support.

On 16 April, the General Assembly approved a subvention for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to cover the Tribunal's shortfall in funding. We thank Member States and the Secretary-General for their cooperation and efforts in ensuring the financing of the Tribunal during such difficult times, so it can complete its work. It is a clear manifestation of the Member States' determination to work towards international justice, ending impunity and upholding the rule of law.

Annex 36**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, Syed Mohamad Hasrin Aidid**

At the outset, allow me to thank the Vietnamese presidency for convening today's important open debate. Malaysia aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (annex 37) and Azerbaijan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (annex 20).

Palestinians have been forced to mark yet another Ramadan under occupation and continue to face hostile and disrespectful actions in violation of international law. Israel must be called upon to respect the sanctity of holy sites, freedom of worship and freedom of religion.

Malaysia is also appalled at the continuing illegal settlements, forced evictions and the demolition of houses, schools and other infrastructure by the occupying Power. It is also regrettable that Israel continues its acts of provocation and violence with impunity, further exacerbating the deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and the occupied Syrian Golan.

Israel must be made to fully comply with all its obligations prescribed by relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Defying Security Council resolutions must have consequences. We call on the Security Council to demand accountability and bring an end to this injustice.

Malaysia also calls on the Security Council to revisit the recommendation contained in the Secretary-General's 2018 report on the deployment of United Nations-mandated armed forces or unarmed observers to improve the protection of Palestinians (A/ES-10/794). We must spare no effort in ensuring the safety, protection and well-being of the Palestinian civilian population, which has been living in dreadful living conditions under Israeli occupation.

Malaysia's position on the question of Palestine remains clear. It is based on respect for international law and the agreed international parameters. We remain steadfast in voicing our support for the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as the only viable solution to this long-standing conflict. We will continue to support concrete and genuine efforts aimed at achieving this just and lasting solution, which we trust will significantly contribute to peace, justice and stability in the region.

As many speakers and the United Nations have reaffirmed, nothing can replace direct negotiations between the two parties to resolve the conflict. Furthermore, there will be no alternative to sustainable peace without a negotiated political settlement of a two-State solution. It is therefore vital for the international community to support the creation of a favourable atmosphere for such talks. In this regard, Malaysia is supportive of the efforts by the international community, including by the Secretary-General and the Middle East Quartet, to find a mutually agreeable path for the parties to re-engage, with a view to reaching a negotiated peaceful settlement. Malaysia also supports the appeal by President Mahmoud Abbas for convening an international peace conference to advance a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Further, Malaysia calls on the international community and Israel to support the Palestinian parliamentary and presidential elections in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to affect the occupied Palestinian territory, with a rising number of active cases being recorded

in the West Bank and Gaza. Malaysia stands with the Palestinian people as they battle this deadly virus. In addition to our bilateral assistance to Palestine, Malaysia also reiterates its support for the important role the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is playing to ease the dire conditions of the Palestinian people, especially during the pandemic crisis. We also commend the United States for its recent decision to restore assistance for the Palestinians, including \$150 million to UNRWA.

Beating the pandemic necessitates international cooperation, including effective and unimpeded vaccination for all. In this context, Malaysia is pleased that on 19 April 2021 the Palestinian Authority received a second batch of COVID-19 vaccines under the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access initiative. However, we note that Israel has failed to fulfil its international legal responsibility and obligation to ensure the vaccination of the Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian territory. The number of vaccines received so far by the Palestinian people represents only a drop in the ocean in terms of addressing the overall vaccination needs and containing the COVID-19 pandemic. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories issued a press statement on 25 March 2021, entreating Israel to urgently comply with its international legal obligations to ensure that Palestinians and Syrians under occupation have access to available vaccines in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Malaysia remains steadfast in championing the Palestinian cause. We continue to reaffirm our unwavering support and full solidarity with the Palestinian people in realizing their inalienable rights to self-determination, freedom and independence. We trust and hope that the Security Council will seize every opportunity to advance the prospects for a sustainable peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

Annex 37**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Morocco to the United Nations**

At the outset, I would like to thank Viet Nam for its successful presidency of the Security Council this month. We appreciate the Vietnamese delegation's efforts and those of its predecessor, the United States of America, in presiding over the work of the Council.

On this occasion, the Kingdom of Morocco reiterates its unwavering position with regard to the Palestinian question, which is based on the two-State solution, as internationally agreed, as well as its commitment to negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties, as the only way to achieve a final, lasting and comprehensive settlement to this conflict.

As Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, His Majesty King Mohammed VI continues to firmly insist on the need to preserve the special status of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and to respect the freedom of the followers of the three monotheistic religions to practice religious rites, and to safeguard the Muslim aspect of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The Kingdom of Morocco acknowledges the importance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which plays a crucial role in the region's stability, as it supports the education, health care, social services, protection and microfinancing for 5.7 million Palestinian refugees. The Kingdom of Morocco would like to commend UNRWA's efforts aimed at preventing the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic and its socioeconomic consequences.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about UNRWA's critical financial situation, particularly in these challenging times. For its part, the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency, the executive branch of the Al-Quds Committee, continues to support development plans and projects in Palestine and the Holy City to promote the economic empowerment of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the need to renew direct negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis to find a solution that guarantees the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and contributes to the establishment of security, peace and prosperity in the Middle East region.

Annex 38**Statement by the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimen**

This quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, bears witness to the international community's long-standing concern about the serious threat to peace and security in the Middle East region and beyond posed by the ongoing Israeli colonial occupation. Indeed, ongoing violations by Israel, the occupying Power, of the human rights of the Palestinian people and of the principles and rules of international law, including those enshrined in United Nations resolutions, have evoked not only greater world concern, but also, and more importantly, an urgency for pursuing a path of justice that can ensure the fulfilment of rights and set forth conditions for the achievement of lasting peace and stability.

In that vein, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) welcomes the recent decision of the chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to open a formal investigation into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian territories, which constitutes an appropriate step in the efforts aimed at achieving justice and accountability, which are the indispensable cornerstones for peace and security.

I would like to state today that the OIC welcomes the recent announcement by the United States of America that it will reinstate its economic and humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people and restore its contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. This important decision will undoubtedly contribute to mitigating the suffering of the Palestinian people, including Palestine refugees, and represents a constructive motion in support of international efforts needed to alleviate conditions and promote an environment conducive for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the vision of the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 lines, to which the OIC remains unflaggingly committed.

Through its illegal policy of colonial settlement extension, land confiscation and home demolition, Israel, the occupying Power, continues to illegally establish de facto realities on the ground that pose a direct threat to the integrity and contiguity of the territory of the State of Palestine, as well as to the viability of the two-State solution. Likewise, Israel's Judaization policy continues to illegally alter the historical, legal and political status and character and identity of the occupied city of Jerusalem and to isolate it from its natural Palestinian environs, in defiance of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and United Nations resolutions, which affirm that Jerusalem is an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967. In this regard, the OIC urges the Security Council to uphold its responsibility to ensure Israel's respect for and scrupulous compliance with Council resolutions related to the occupied city of Jerusalem.

The OIC cautions the Council in particular about the urgency of bringing a halt to all provocations and acts of incitement by the Israeli occupying forces and extremist settlers against holy sites in the city, including Al-Aqsa Mosque, and expresses its grave concern about recent aggressions against worshippers and the Waqf at Al-Haram Al-Sharif in this holy month of Ramadan. The OIC appeals to the international community to be vigilant in calling on Israel, the occupying Power, to respect its obligations under international law, including with respect to the freedom of worship, mindful of the imperative to avert the fuelling of a religious conflict that would have dire ramifications.

Also with regard to Jerusalem, while we applaud Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's announcement of parliamentary elections in the Palestinian

territories, including East Jerusalem, to be held on 22 May 2021, we urge the international community to put pressure on Israel, the occupying Power, to adhere to international law and signed agreements and enable the Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem to exercise their right to participate in the upcoming Palestinian legislative elections, by casting their votes, running as electoral candidates and campaigning alongside the rest of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In the evolving regional dynamics, we share the view that the stalemated peace process diminishes hope for a better future, leads to increased frustration and makes the two-State solution more untenable than ever. At this crucial juncture, the launching of a multilaterally sponsored international peace conference with the participation of all parties concerned, including the international Quartet, would create a strategic political opportunity that must be seized in order to realize a just and comprehensive peace based on a two-State solution that relies on the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and international law and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, I reiterate the OIC's unwavering support for the just cause of the Palestinian people and their ongoing endeavours to regain their inalienable national rights, including the right to return, self-determination and the independence of their State on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to achieve a just solution to the question of the Palestine refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The OIC urges the Security Council to give meaning to its deliberations by acting forthwith to implement its resolutions on the Palestine question and contribute to the realization of that just solution and the lasting peace and security we all seek.

Annex 39**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

We thank the Vietnamese presidency for convening today's quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East. We also express our thanks to Mr. Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing.

Peru is following with great anticipation the recent developments in the political component of the Palestinian question. We refer specifically to the various meetings in recent months that have brought together actors historically involved in this process, such as Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan, representatives of the Middle East Quartet, and the League of Arab States. We hope that this momentum towards revitalizing the political track will lead to the only solution we believe to be viable and consistent with international law, that is, two States within internationally recognized and secure borders negotiated directly between Israel and Palestine on the basis of the 1967 lines, including resolving the final status of Jerusalem.

We encourage the political and religious leaders of Israel and Palestine to join those efforts aimed at achieving lasting peace by acting responsibly, ending acts of violence and investigating and effectively punishing all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

In that regard, Peru commends the significant progress made in the process of inter-Palestinian reconciliation, which have resulted in the calling of legislative and presidential elections this year. We hope that the elections will set the foundation for the resumption of a stepped-up dialogue with Israel.

Nevertheless, we note that the success of those efforts is inextricably linked to the Israeli Government ensuring the end of the increasing acts of settlement-building, demolition of structures and displacement in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, which undermine the two-State solution and run counter to what the Council established in resolution 2334 (2016). Those illegal practices must stop.

Peru also underscores the urgency of immediately and in parallel addressing the humanitarian crisis afflicting the Palestinian population, which in recent years has been aggravated by recurring cycles of violence and cuts in financing to assistance programmes.

In that connection, we commend that the United States Government recently re-engaged on the Palestinian question, including the decision taken by Congress to devote significant financial resources towards humanitarian and economic development assistance in Gaza and the West Bank. We hope that this focus will be augmented with concrete steps on the political front through a leading role by the United States and the Quartet, or in a new political dialogue format convened with the greatest urgency.

Peru also encourages continuity in the crucial support provided by the United Nations and its agencies, so as to face up to the serious socioeconomic consequences on the Palestinian population resulting from the closure and the lack of opportunities. To that end, among other things, it is crucial to provide stable and predictable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

We also hope for more dynamic cooperation and solidarity between Israel and Palestine in order to provide a more effective response to the scourge of the coronavirus disease pandemic in Gaza and the West Bank, taking into consideration Israel's vaccine surplus.

I conclude by reiterating Peru's full support for Mr. Wennesland in his efforts to reverse the cycle of destruction, address the underlying causes of this prolonged, bloody conflict and achieve a resumption of direct negotiations between the parties.

Annex 40**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani**

[Original: Arabic]

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for convening this important meeting. I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Developments on the ground in the period under review reflect the continuing absence of security, peace and stability. I therefore wish to emphasize that Qatar supports all sincere international efforts to make genuine progress towards a lasting settlement to the Middle East question. For that purpose, the Security Council should continue to show concern, and the international community should continue to express its solidarity with the Palestinian people until it can exercise its full rights and bring an end to its suffering, and until conditions conducive to the peace process can be put in place. Reaching a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine would be in the interests of Palestinians and Israelis alike, not to mention the stability of the region as a whole.

The foundations of a lasting peace are well known to all. They consist of a commitment to the two-State solution grounded in international law, the authoritative resolutions of the United Nations and the Arab Peace Initiative. That commitment should result in the establishment of a Palestinian State on the borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in security and peace; an end to the occupation of Arab land; and a just solution to the refugee issue. The expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the attempts at annexation, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the expulsion of Palestinian and other such illegal practices are detrimental to the two-State solution. The Israeli forces' policies of Judaizing the city of Jerusalem, encroaching on holy sites and using excessive force against Palestinian civilians are not conducive to building the confidence that is needed to push the peace process forwards.

The next few months will mark an important phase, with the holding of Palestinian elections. It is essential that the elections be held successfully with the full participation of Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

During this phase, there is still a need to revive the Palestinian economy, especially given the negative effects of the coronavirus disease epidemic. It is therefore particularly important for the international community to offer its support, especially through the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, of which Qatar is a member. There is still an urgent need for the necessary international funding to be provided with a view to ensuring that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) can continue to offer its services, which are indispensable. We therefore welcome the decision of the United States to resume funding in support of the Palestinians. That decision will help to alleviate their suffering and support efforts to tackle the pandemic.

For its part, Qatar is one of the main donors contributing to the budget and projects of UNRWA. In view of the country's responsibility to stand by the besieged Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Emir of Qatar, has made a grant of \$360 million to the Gaza Strip for 2021 with a view to covering staff salaries, providing financial assistance to families in hardship, restoring electrical power stations, curbing the deterioration in the

humanitarian situation, and tackling the difficult living conditions in the Gaza Strip. The grant is in addition to the assistance provided by Qatar to its Palestinian brethren with a view to meeting emergency and development needs and overhauling the infrastructure. Such assistance has totalled some \$1.5 billion.

The last month marked the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of peaceful demonstrations in which the Syrian people asserted its legitimate aspirations. The Syrian regime met those demonstrations with excessive force and grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The ensuing crisis has had grave repercussions for international and regional peace and security, and has brought indescribable suffering.

It is clear by now that military solutions will not work. The solution must come through a political process guided by the United Nations in accordance with the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and through the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) in such a manner as to safeguard the sovereignty, independence and unity of Syria. Qatar underscores the important role of the Constitutional Committee. It remains prepared to support that body in cooperation with the United Special Envoy and in continuous liaison with the parties in Syria, and to support the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to Syria. We will continue our constructive efforts alongside international partners. In particular, we wish to highlight the joint ministerial statement issued at the first consultative meeting of Qatar, Turkey and the Russian Federation on 11 March 2021 in Doha.

There is a need for measures to build confidence and protect human rights, particularly with a view to urgently addressing the issue of prisoners. There remains a need to facilitate the access of humanitarian assistance to those who need it throughout Syria without obstacles, including cross-border assistance provided through the United Nations mechanism. Qatar is committed to its responsibility to provide assistance to the Syrian people, totalling more than \$2 billion. Last month, at the donor conference, it pledged \$100 million. Qatar is also committed to supporting the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. That support stems from its legal and moral responsibility to uphold justice and accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity, and thereby to help sustain peace. The atrocities committed in Syria are well documented. They include the use of prohibited chemical weapons against civilians, which has been corroborated in numerous international reports, most recently in the report of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons issued last week.

Turning to the crisis in Libya, Qatar welcomes the positive developments of recent months. The representatives of the temporary executive power were recently elected, and the temporary Government of national unity received a vote of confidence from the House of Representatives. Qatar fully support the new Government in its efforts to fulfil the aspiration of the Libyan people for development, stability and prosperity. We are hopeful that the new Government will find a way to a comprehensive political solution that will preserve the unity of Libyan territory, respect the rights of the Libyan people and establish a State based on the rule of law and civilian institutions. We wish to emphasize the need for all Libyan parties to comply with the schedule for elections and work towards a comprehensive reconciliation. Qatar appreciates the role of the United Nations mission in achieving stability in Libya and helping to end the crisis.

Lastly, given the joint crises and challenges facing our region, which include the coronavirus pandemic, it is essential that we work to de-escalate tensions, bring

an end to crises, cooperate fruitfully and consolidate the principles of neighbourly relations and mutual respect. Qatar believes in the peaceful settlement of conflicts, multilateralism and compliance with international law. Accordingly, it will work to attain security and stability in the region through constructive dialogue for the benefit of all States and peoples of the region.

Annex 41

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, Cho Hyun

At the outset, I would like to thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing and to reaffirm my Government's full support for his tireless efforts.

The Republic of Korea reiterates its commitment to continue supporting Israelis and Palestinians to resolve the conflict in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions as well as international law and bilateral agreements. We join the Special Coordinator in calling on the members of the Middle East Quartet, key Arab and international partners as well as the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to strengthen efforts to return to meaningful negotiations towards a viable two-State solution.

We welcome Palestine's plans to hold legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections later this year and reiterate our strong support for Palestinian efforts to reinforce solidarity and unity among the Palestinians through free and fair elections, and also for indispensable assistance of the United Nations in this regard.

The Republic of Korea expresses its concern over the Special Coordinator's report that violence continues daily, and together with the international community, calls for an immediate end to all violence against civilians.

We emphasize the importance of respecting resolution 2334 (2016) and of international law. My delegation reiterates the importance of confidence-building measures to create a more favourable environment for dialogue and the need for the parties to refrain from unilateral actions that make a peaceful resolution of the conflict more difficult to achieve.

The Republic of Korea expresses concern over the persistent health and socioeconomic threat that the coronavirus disease pandemic poses to Palestinians, and it reiterates its full support for the efforts of United Nations agencies to facilitate vaccination.

The Republic of Korea will continue to join hands with the United Nations and the international community in advancing peace and stability in the region, and it reaffirms its commitment to continue its constructive role to this end.

Annex 42

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations, Abdallah Y. Al-Mouallimi

[Original: Arabic]

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the assumption by Viet Nam of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and express my country's appreciation for your outstanding efforts. We wish you every success.

This past 17 April marked the commemoration of the Day of the Palestinian Prisoner, which reminds us of one example of the hostile Israeli policies against the Palestinian people that have played the most prominent part in undermining the peace process and the two-State solution. The most recent such example was the attack by Israeli forces on the blessed Aqsa Mosque and worshippers in its courtyards. That incident constitutes an assault on the sanctity of holy sites, human rights instruments and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Saudi Arabia underscores that the Palestinian question is its top priority. It maintains its steadfast position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and it reaffirms at every opportunity the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, the restoration of their land and the establishment of a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on the basis of internationally recognized resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. Saudi Arabia calls on Israel to withdraw completely from all occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Lebanese territories and the occupied Syrian Arab Golan.

Saudi Arabia reiterates its call on the international community and the Security Council to stand firm against these Israeli policies and to move the peace process forward to reach an agreement that restores the Palestinian people's legitimate rights.

Saudi Arabia has presented an important initiative to resolve the Yemeni crisis, including a number of steps that can contribute to attaining the desired political solution in Yemen, in line with United Nations efforts and in accordance with the three terms of reference, resolution 2216 (2015), the Initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference. My country notes that the Security Council welcomed the Saudi Arabian initiative, and it urges the Council to place more pressure on Houthi militias to seize this opportunity and accept the initiative, in order to move towards alleviating the Yemeni people's suffering, which is continually exacerbated by the militias' tawdry policies in support of the destructive agendas of Iran in the region. As part of its support for the Yemeni people, my country recently signed an agreement to provide a \$422 million oil derivatives grant.

Saudi Arabia condemns the systematic attacks by Houthi militias on Saudi Arabian oil facilities, civilians and infrastructure. It denounces the destructive role of Iran in those and other attacks on its territory, as mentioned in a number of United Nations reports, including some of the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) and reports of the Panel of Experts of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014). It calls on the Security Council to stand firm against those attacks, which imperil not only its security but that of the international energy supply as well, in addition to placing the lives of many civilians at risk.

Saudi Arabia calls on Iran to engage in serious nuclear negotiations, avoid escalation and refrain from further inflaming tensions in the region and undermining its stability. The international community must reach an agreement with more

stringent and longer-term parameters that provides for the implementation of monitoring and oversight measures to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and developing the necessary capabilities to do so. Such an agreement must take into account the deep concern of the countries of the region about the measures of escalation taken by Iran to undermine regional security and stability, including through its nuclear programme.

Annex 43**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations, Bassam Sabbagh**

[Original: Arabic]

I would like to express our deep appreciation for your successful and outstanding management of the work of the Security Council this month. We reaffirm our support for your work and the Council's mandate of maintaining international peace and security, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

The continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, the Syrian Golan and the Shaba'a Farms in southern Lebanon for five decades and counting, reminds us yet again that the Security Council has long failed to uphold its responsibility to maintain international peace and security, and that it has been unable to compel Israel to comply with the will of the international community and the relevant resolutions, or to induce it to end its occupation of Arab territories, which is the main factor responsible for fuelling tensions and perpetuating conflict in our region.

Over the past five decades, certain permanent members of the Security Council, foremost among them the United States of America, have done everything in their power to protect and sponsor the Israeli occupying forces and cover up their systematic criminal and repressive practices against our people in the occupied Arab territories, guaranteeing that the representatives of the occupying Israeli authorities will be completely shielded from accountability and punishment for the war crimes, crimes against humanity and grave violations of human rights that they have committed. Such behaviour on the part of those States runs counter to their responsibilities and obligations to uphold the principles of the Charter and maintain international peace and security.

The flagrant bias of the United States in favour of Israel reached an unprecedented extreme under the previous United States Administration, which took unilateral, provocative and illegal measures. Those acts were met with ringing condemnation from the Syrian Arab Republic and the overwhelming majority of Member States. Trump's decisions on Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan are nothing more than unilateral acts coming from a party that lacks the political, legal or moral capacity to decide the fates of peoples or dispose of lands that are an integral part of the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic and occupied Palestine.

The Security Council's failure to fulfil its responsibility as the United States continues to sponsor Israel has encouraged the Israeli occupying authorities to continue their systematic attacks on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, in flagrant violation of resolution 350 (1974) on the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Israel persists in its quest to entrench its occupation of the Syrian Golan by imposing a policy of *fait accompli*, racial discrimination and arbitrary and inhumane practices against our people in the occupied Syrian Golan, openly flouting international law and issuing an unprecedented challenge to the will of the international community and to the relevant United Nations and Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has persistently exposed the countless illegal Israeli policies and practices. Today, I would like to recall some of these brutal practices, which have had catastrophic repercussions on various aspects of the lives of our people under Israeli occupation in the Syrian Golan:

First, the Israeli occupation authorities are escalating their expansionist policies in the occupied Syrian Golan by increasing and accelerating settlement activity on the ruins of Syrian villages and territories destroyed and seized by the

Israeli occupation; acquiring the territory of Syrian Arab citizens; approving tourism and settlement projects; and beginning construction of a project to erect enormous wind turbines over an area equivalent to one-fifth of the remaining agricultural land owned by the people of the Golan — the last green lung in the occupied Syrian villages — in addition to displacing the population from their homes and land.

Secondly, the Israeli occupation authorities continue to perpetrate racial discrimination; arbitrarily detain more than two thirds of the population of the occupied Syrian Golan; abduct, torture and displace the population; effect demographic change; attempt to impose Israeli citizenship and educational curricula; steal the Golan's natural resources by continuously prospecting for underground wealth; plunder Syrian archaeological heritage; and falsify and vandalize historical and archaeological sites and monuments in order to erase and Judaize the Syrian Arab identity of the Golan.

Thirdly, since 1967, the Israeli occupation authorities have prevented all fact-finding missions established by the United Nations, including those established under resolutions of the World Health Assembly, from gaining access to the occupied Syrian Golan to investigate conditions and make recommendations. Israel also prevents the World Health Organization from gaining unconditional access to the people of the occupied Golan to assess their situation and attend to their humanitarian needs, particularly during the coronavirus disease pandemic, in total disregard of its obligations under international humanitarian law as an occupying Power, and of the relevant United Nations resolutions, including the resolutions of the World Health Assembly.

Fourthly, since 27 August 2014, the Israeli occupying authorities have closed the Al-Quneitra crossing, the only authorized crossing point through which the people of the occupied Syrian Golan are able to remain in contact with their motherland.

Fifthly, the occupying Israeli authorities continue to plant, renovate and develop minefields in the occupied Syrian Golan, maiming and killing mostly children in the Golan. They also continue to bury nuclear waste in a number of sites in the Syrian Golan, in grave violation of international law and the relevant international agreements, posing an imminent environmental threat to the region and its inhabitants.

In view of the foregoing, I would like to recall resolution A/HRC/46/L.16, recently adopted by the Human Rights Council, in which the Council once again condemns the violations of the rights of the people of the occupied Syrian Golan by the occupying Israeli entity and demands that it desist, comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions and stop its repressive practices. In the resolution, the Human Rights Council also condemns the implementation of the colonial annexation and settlement policies pursued by the occupying Israeli entity and demands that it stop its attempts to change the legal status and the demographic and physical character of the occupied Golan, which attempts are in violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981). The Human Rights Council emphasizes that the displaced persons of the population of the occupied Syrian Golan must be allowed to return to their homes and to recover their property; deplores the approval given by the occupying authorities to commence construction works on a wind turbine project on agricultural land owned by Syrian citizens; and demands that Israel stop immediately all action on the project and all attempts to create facts on the ground and thereby to prolong the occupation.

I also recall Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/46/L.30, in which the Human Rights Council reaffirms that the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are illegal and calls upon Israel to end its occupation of the territories occupied since 1967, to reverse the settlement policy in the occupied territories and

to stop immediately the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan. In the resolution, the Human Rights Council urges States and international organizations to ensure that they are not taking any actions that amount to a recognition of all the Israeli entity's illegal practices and measures in the occupied Arab territories and to refrain from providing any assistance for purposes related to Israeli settlements.

It is regrettable that the reports of the Secretariat continue to ignore the dangerous reality, the systematic Israeli practices and violations against our people under occupation, and the grave potential implications of that neglect for international peace and security. We therefore renew our call on Tor Wennesland, United Nations Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to carry out his mandate in an impartial, professional and transparent manner, to give the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan the necessary attention, and to prioritize in his mandate and efforts the issue of the violations and practices perpetrated by the occupying Israeli authorities. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates that the Golan is an integral part of Syrian territory and that it will work to recover it by all means guaranteed by international law and practice, because its right to do so is eternal and cannot be extinguished by the passage of time. The Syrian Arab Republic calls on the Security Council to act urgently to implement resolution 497 (1981) and compel Israel to cease its illegal settlement policies and oppressive measures against our people in the occupied Syrian Golan and to withdraw from the entire occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 497 (1981) and 2334 (2016). Syria also calls on the international community to pressure Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately and without delay reopen the Al-Quneitra crossing, which is the artery that connects our people in the occupied Syrian Golan to their motherland and the lung through which they breathe.

In conclusion, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, the establishment of an independent State over all of its national territory, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of refugees to return to their homes in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Any decisions, measures or deals that are inconsistent with the relevant United Nations resolutions or fail to safeguard the established rights of the Palestinians are not remotely viable and should be rejected in form and substance. My country insists once again that Palestine must be allowed to become a full-fledged Member of the United Nations.

Annex 44**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun H. Sinirliöđlu**

We are gravely concerned by the worsening situation and rising tensions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Despite repeated calls, Israeli violations in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, continue to increase at an alarming rate. Not a day goes by without Palestinians being forced to demolish their own houses in their own homeland. Coupled with systematic settlement expansion policies, this trend clearly shows that de facto annexation continues on the ground.

We also condemn Israel's approval of plans for new illegal settlements, as well as decisions of forced eviction, demolition and confiscation targeting Palestinians in the occupied territories. The blatant escalation of settlement-building, intended to create new realities on the ground, constitutes a major obstacle to peace. Inaction in the face of persistent non-compliance with international law and Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), further emboldens Israel's recklessness.

We are further alarmed by the continued Israeli attempts to change the status of Jerusalem. The measures aimed at altering the demographic composition and character of Jerusalem and unilateral decisions to that end threaten the possibility of coexistence. We would like to underline that opening embassies in Jerusalem would constitute a clear violation of international law.

We call upon all members of the international community to respect the historical and legal status of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a holy city for all three monotheistic religions. It is the responsibility of all humankind to preserve its historic status. Yet, it is regrettable that the Israeli Government obstructs the Palestinian people's freedom of worship during Ramadan by imposing restrictions over the Al-Aqsa mosque.

Widespread acts of violence against Palestinian civilians by Israeli settlers is another concern. Israeli security forces turn a blind eye to these incidents, which is perceived by Israeli settlers as a green light for their attacks. Such incidents clearly demonstrate that Israel intends to consolidate its occupation rather than aim for peace. Turkey will continue to reject such unlawful and inhumane practices entrenching the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories and destroying the vision of a two-State solution.

The gravity of the situation is aggravated by the fact that these illegal activities are carried out in an environment of prevailing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic conditions. The ability of the Palestinians to fight the pandemic has been undermined by Israel's continued disregard for its commitments to halting the demolitions and targeting critical facilities during the COVID-19 crisis. Israel refuses to provide sufficient COVID-19 vaccine to Palestinians in the occupied territories. As the occupying force, Israel is responsible for the health of the Palestinian population in these territories.

Palestinians also bear the heaviest brunt of the economic fallout of COVID-19. According to a recent study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Palestinian economy is projected to grow by only 3.7 per cent annually until 2025, barely keeping pace with population growth, while unemployment is expected to hover around 30 per cent. The study predicts that it will take at least two years for the Palestinian economy to recover from the pandemic if COVID-19 is contained. Sustainable socioeconomic recovery in the occupied Palestinian territory requires lifting the blockade on Gaza, easing restrictions

imposed by occupation in the West Bank, expanding the policy space and increasing donor support. As revealed in an earlier UNCTAD report, the cumulative cost of the Gaza Strip blockade, together with military operations, amounts to \$16.7 billion. The continuation of the Gaza Strip blockade is not only inhumane but also imperils the economic recovery of the Palestinian population in its entirety.

We condemn Israel's interference with the Palestinian democratic electoral process, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem. Israel's obstructive and hostile actions, including the arrest of several Palestinian candidates in the West Bank and the summoning of Jerusalemite candidates for interrogation, are unacceptable. Israel must cease all measures aimed at disrupting the Palestinian elections. The international community needs to put pressure on Israel to allow and facilitate elections in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to operate in difficult circumstances and the challenges it faces have further increased due to the pandemic. UNRWA is indispensable for providing vital health, relief and emergency assistance to millions. During COVID-19, the services provided by UNRWA have become a matter of survival for many Palestinians. It is our collective and moral duty to step up our support to the Agency. In response to the Agency's request, Turkey transferred its annual voluntary contribution of \$10 million in March 2021, at an earlier stage than in previous years. Turkey will also continue to provide in-kind support to the Agency. We welcome the decision of the United States Administration to resume its financial support to UNRWA. We call on all donors to step up their support and work together to address the structural reasons for the Agency's chronic funding shortfall.

Turkey supports a two-State solution that would lead to the establishment of an independent, sovereign and contiguous Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Turkey supports the call of President Mahmoud Abbas for an international peace conference, under the auspices of the United Nations, and for a return to the path of negotiations through the revitalization of the peace process.

For a negotiated two-State solution, achieving intra-Palestinian reconciliation is an urgent necessity. Therefore, we appreciate the progress made in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process. We attach the utmost importance to the successful conduct of Palestinian elections and the establishment of an inclusive Palestinian Government with full democratic legitimacy. Turkey is ready to extend any support needed to the election process in Palestine.

The ruling of the International Criminal Court that it has jurisdiction over the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is a step towards holding Israel accountable for its crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory. We hope that this ruling will also contribute to the implementation of resolution ES-10/20, on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population, which was adopted by the General Assembly during Turkey's summit presidency of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

I would like to conclude by reiterating that revitalizing the Middle East peace process is essential to fulfilling our long-overdue promise to the Palestinian people of a life in dignity. It is also indispensable for the stability of our entire region. Collectively, we must support the resumption of negotiations for a two-State solution. The international community must clearly demonstrate that Israel's illegal actions will not be tolerated.

Annex 45**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

Convinced that there is a collective responsibility to maintain regional and international peace and security, and based on an unwavering commitment to the Palestinian people, the United Arab Emirates supports a peaceful, comprehensive and just solution to the Palestinian question on the basis of all relevant United Nations resolutions, the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the roadmap.

The United Arab Emirates will continue to work with all local and international partners to find a solution to the Palestinian question that fulfils the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. We reaffirm the steadfast and historic commitment of the United Arab Emirates to supporting the Palestinian people in the exercise of all its legitimate rights as guaranteed under international law. In that regard, the United Arab Emirates would like to underscore the following recommendations.

First, the existing international momentum should be harnessed in order to advance the Middle East peace process and to take advantage of the extraordinary opportunities that have emerged since the opening of channels of communication between Arab States and Israel. In that context, the United Arab Emirates supports regional and international efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Palestinian question on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the roadmap proposed by the Middle East Quartet.

Secondly, the effort to build trust between the parties should continue, including by calling for a halt to unilateral actions, seeking to safeguard the prospects for peace and establishing the two-State solution. Last year, the United Arab Emirates succeeded in halting the annexation of the Palestinian territories through its vigorous political and diplomatic efforts, in response to repeated calls by the international community to safeguard prospects for peace by signing the Abraham accords peace agreement with Israel. My country believes that signing this agreement will enable it to play a larger positive role in bringing peace to the Middle East and building a more stable and secure future for the peoples of the region and its future generations.

Thirdly, vital sectors in Palestine, particularly the health sector, must be supported in the face of the deteriorating humanitarian, economic and health conditions in the Palestinian territories, especially with the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The United Arab Emirates has sent nearly 60,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to the Gaza Strip this year. It has also sent emergency medical assistance to the Palestinian people, delivering 36.6 tons of medical equipment in 2020 as part of its international humanitarian efforts to support people in need around the world and help them fight the pandemic.

In addition, the United Arab Emirates continues to emphasize the vital role that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays in improving the lives of Palestine refugees. My country remains committed to providing assistance to the Palestinian people, including by supporting United Nations agencies; it has contributed more than \$840 million in assistance between 2013 and 2020. The United Arab Emirates is one of the largest donors to UNRWA; in 2018 and 2019 it provided \$100 million to the Agency. Since chairing the UNRWA Advisory Commission in July 2020, we have also sought to

strengthen the Agency's work in such areas as the digital transformation of education, the empowerment of women and girls, youth empowerment and environmental sustainability.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates will continue to work with all local and international partners to find a solution to the Palestinian question that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. As a candidate for an elected seat on the Security Council for 2022-2023, the United Arab Emirates will support the Council's efforts to find a lasting solution to the Palestinian question in line with the Arab and international consensus and international law.
