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Seventy-fourth year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Germany	Mr. Schulz
	Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	South Africa	Mr. Matjila
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Hunter

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: Today I will devote my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to presenting, on behalf of the Secretary-General, the tenth report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which covers the period from 25 March to 10 June 2019.

Let me reiterate that developments during this reporting period cannot be divorced from the broader context of Israel's continued military occupation of Palestinian territory and settlement activity; Hamas' continuing hold over Gaza and its militant activity; the persistent threat of war; unilateral actions that undermine peace efforts; and severe challenges to the fiscal viability of the Palestinian Authority. All those developments collectively erode the prospects of a two-State solution.

From the outset, I would like to also highlight that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to face significant financial challenges. It is now operating on the basis of a projected shortfall of \$211 million of its \$1.2 billion budget for the year and is facing serious cash-flow issues. That could impact operations, including UNRWA's ability to maintain food assistance to over 1 million Palestine refugees in Gaza. I note that UNRWA's annual pledging conference will take place on 25 June here in New York. I call upon Member States to continue their support.

Paragraph 2 of resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Israel to

“immediately and completely cease all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, [and to] fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard”.

No steps were taken to that effect during the reporting period.

During the reporting period Israeli authorities advanced, approved or tendered nearly 6,000 housing units in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. That constitutes the largest settlement advancement in two years and includes plans for approximately 4,450 units in Area C settlements, of which at least 200 have reached the final stage of approval.

Those plans include 700 units in Efrat and 600 units in Ma'ale Adumim — two large settlements in strategic locations that hamper the possibility for a contiguous Palestinian State and north-south, east-west connectivity. Another of the plans would retroactively regularize, under Israeli law, the illegal outpost of Haresha by incorporating it into the existing Talmon settlement. Tenders were also announced for some 950 housing units in Area C settlements, and for 550 units in East Jerusalem. Approximately 20 per cent of all the plans advanced or tendered are in settlements in outlying locations deep inside the West Bank.

In addition, on 3 June, Israel's National Infrastructure Committee rejected a series of objections against a controversial plan to construct a cable car between West Jerusalem and the Old City and submitted the plan for Government approval. The plan has raised concerns among Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem and Israeli non-governmental organizations that it seeks to deepen Israel's control over the area.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures by Israeli authorities also continued during the reporting period. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, 92 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished or seized, resulting in the displacement of some 104 people. As the Middle East Quartet highlighted in its 2016 report (S/2016/595, annex), those permits are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. Demolitions in East Jerusalem also peaked in April, reaching 58 — more than any other single month since the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) started monitoring in 2009.

The situation in the Wadi Yasul area, in the Silwan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, is also of concern. Eleven people, including seven children and two women, were displaced on 30 April, after their homes were demolished. Some 50 legal cases concerning other homes and structures in that area are pending in Israeli courts. Punitive demolitions also continued during the reporting period, with the authorities demolishing four homes belonging to families of Palestinian perpetrators of various attacks. As a result, three families comprising 13 people, including six children, were displaced.

In addition, the Israeli army continues to conduct military training exercises in areas designated by the army as firing zones in the Jordan Valley and the West Bank. As a result, approximately 184 Palestinians, 80 per cent of whom are women and children, from the Tell Al-Khashaba, Lifjim and Humsa Al-Baqai'a communities were forced to temporarily evacuate their homes on 11 occasions, including during Ramadan. On 22 May, the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected a petition against the recurrent displacements of those communities.

Paragraph 6 of resolution 2334 (2016) calls for

“immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including all acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction”.

However, the reporting period saw a very dangerous escalation of violence in Gaza and continued violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I reported to the Council last month (see S/PV.8532) that over the course of 48 hours, on 4 and 5 May, Gaza saw the worst escalation since 2014, with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad launching more than 700 projectiles towards Israel: several houses, two kindergartens, a school and a hospital were directly hit by rockets fired from Gaza. Four Israelis were killed and 200 were injured during those incidents.

Meanwhile, in Gaza, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) stated that, in retaliation, it had hit more than 300 militant targets. Twenty-one residential buildings were hit by air strikes, one of which was a residential building in northern Gaza. Twenty-seven Palestinians, including two children were killed and 150 injured.

On 30 March, 50,000 Palestinians demonstrated, largely peacefully, marking the anniversary of the Great March of Return, and, although violence at the Gaza perimeter fence declined during the reporting period,

nine people, including three children, were killed by Israeli fire during the demonstrations.

Incendiary kites, balloons and other devices also continued to be launched from Gaza, starting fires in southern Israel. At least 70 fires were reported, resulting in the burning of over 30 hectares of land during the reporting period. The period also saw continued violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Four Palestinians, including one child, were killed by the Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes and various security operations. Meanwhile, two Israelis were injured by a Palestinian in a stabbing attack.

On 27 March, a 17-year-old Palestinian medic was shot by the Israeli security forces near the Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem, dying of his wounds later. On 24 April, following the arrest, tying and blindfolding of a 15-year-old Palestinian boy on allegations of stone-throwing, soldiers shot him twice in the lower body as he attempted to escape while still blindfolded.

On 31 May, in a stabbing attack, a Palestinian severely injured an Israeli civilian and a child in the Old City of Jerusalem. The perpetrator was shot dead by the Israeli security forces. Later the same day, a 16-year-old boy was killed and a 21-year-old man was injured by the Israeli security forces as they attempted to cross the separation barrier between West Bank and Jerusalem near Bethlehem.

The situation at the holy sites also remained tense during the reporting period. For the first time in decades, Israel's Jerusalem Day commemoration coincided with the final days of Ramadan. Israeli authorities announced that Jews would not be allowed to visit the compound towards the end of Ramadan, in keeping with previous practice, but later declared that limited visits would be permitted based on the circumstances on the ground. Against that backdrop, on 2 June clashes erupted between Israeli police forces and Palestinians inside the compound.

Settler-related violence also continued during the reporting period. According to OCHA, one Palestinian was killed, 32 were injured and 41 incidents of damage to property by settlers were reported. On 17 May, on two separate occasions, Israelis were filmed torching Palestinian lands in Nablus, and the Israeli security forces later confirmed that one of the perpetrators was an off-duty soldier, who has since been suspended pending a police investigation. In the same period,

OCHA reported that seven Israelis were injured and 22 incidents of damage to property by Palestinians were reported.

During the reporting period, there were some developments regarding ongoing cases before Israeli authorities pertaining to the perpetrators of various acts of violence. On 14 May, the Israeli minor accused of killing Aisha Al-Rabi, the Palestinian mother of eight, in 2018, was released on bail to house arrest with electronic monitoring. Prosecutors also reached a plea bargain with the Israeli suspected of conspiring to carry out the 2015 arson attack that killed the Dawabsheh family. According to the deal, the suspect, who was a minor at the time of the attack, will plead guilty to conspiracy to commit arson out of racist motives, as well as for other hate crimes. His trial over the remaining charge of membership in a terrorist organization will proceed.

Meanwhile, on 15 May, the Israeli Military Police Criminal Investigation Division closed its investigation into the killing of a double amputee at the Gaza fence demonstrations in December 2017. It concluded that there was no evidence that the man was killed by direct Israeli army fire.

Several Palestinians were prosecuted for involvement in attacks on Israelis, including one indicted for planning under Hamas' instructions a suicide car bombing on Israel's election day, and two other men for planning a shooting attack at Tel Aviv's beach.

Paragraph 7 of resolution 2334 (2016) calls upon the parties "to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric". Unfortunately, such actions continued during the reporting period. On 15 May, a senior Hamas official addressed a rally in Gaza and warned Israelis that the "day of your slaughter, extermination and annihilation is near". He called for them to leave and search for a place "in Europe, or in hell, or in the sea". The official Hamas television channel also repeatedly continued to glorify perpetrators of terror attacks against Israelis, and broadcast songs with graphic lyrics encouraging viewers to blow up Jews. Fatah's official social media pages also continued to glorify perpetrators of terrorist attacks.

Israeli officials continued to make highly provocative statements as well. An outgoing member of the Knesset confronted families of Palestinian prisoners and threatened to "eliminate them [and] bury them with pigs". Another politician called on the Prime

Minister to allow hunger-striking Palestinian prisoners to die, while many boasted about the damage Israel was causing in strikes in Gaza in response to rocket attacks.

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterates calls by the Middle East Quartet for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution. Some positive developments were witnessed during the reporting period, most notably with regard to addressing the critical humanitarian and socioeconomic needs in Gaza, but they were significantly overshadowed by the negative trends.

The international community has continued its efforts to address the dire situation in Gaza. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians met in Brussels on 30 April and reiterated its support for the implementation of a package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions in Gaza by the United Nations.

On 7 May, the State of Qatar announced its continued provision of financial assistance to the Palestinian people, including a pledge of \$480 million, of which \$180 million is intended for humanitarian assistance to Gaza, some of it to be implemented by the United Nations; \$250 million as loans for the Palestinian Government; and \$50 million as grants for projects in the West Bank. That commitment has made a very positive impact on the efforts to de-escalate the situation in Gaza. However, what remains is the necessity to find a sustainable and comprehensive solution that addresses the dire economic and humanitarian conditions and establishes the conditions for lasting peace. In that regard, the United Nations currently has funding to extend the fuel programme that will provide electricity to Gaza until the end of the year. In parallel to that effort, we are actively working on more sustainable solutions in the energy sector.

The United Nations is also advancing on the creation of dignified jobs for Gaza's men and women. The ongoing temporary employment programmes, which the United Nations Development Programme and UNRWA started with Swiss and Qatari funds, are already making a critical difference to people's lives. So far, more than 7,500 people have been employed in temporary jobs, with at least 2,500 more likely to follow. The programme, we hope, can be expanded soon.

Nevertheless, as I said, negative trends continue to overshadow positive developments. In Gaza, despite

the intensified efforts, the humanitarian, security and political situation remains deeply worrisome, as the Egyptian brokered intra-Palestinian agreement in October 2017 on the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza remains unimplemented. The situation was also worsened by the temporary closures of the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings and a series of reductions in the fishing zone introduced by Israel as tensions continued to fluctuate. Seized fishing vessels have yet to be returned to their owners by the IDF.

The reporting period also saw serious movement and access constraints being placed on national staff from United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Gaza. Some 250 personnel, including 149 United Nations staff and 103 NGO staff, are prohibited from obtaining Israeli-issued permits for travel from Gaza to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, for a period of 12 months. Those numbers reflect a significant increase from 2017, when only 40 United Nations staff faced similar prohibitions.

The reporting period also saw no resolution of the Palestinian Authority's financial crisis, following Israel's decision to withhold part of the clearance revenues of the Palestinian Authority. That was followed by the Palestinian leadership's refusal to accept any transfers from Israel less than the full amounts owed to it. The fiscal crisis and related austerity measures are severely impacting the Palestinian economy, with the outlook for the private sector remaining very bleak.

Paragraph 5 of resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Member States

“to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967”.

We are not aware of any such steps taken during the reporting period. Paragraph 8 of the resolution also calls upon

“all parties to continue [inter alia] to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations”.

No credible efforts have been made in that direction either.

In conclusion, I would like to share some broad observations concerning the implementation of the resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period. The expansion of Israeli settlements has no legal effect

and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, as stated in resolution 2334 (2016). It must cease immediately and completely. Settlement expansion in occupied East Jerusalem, which further undermines the viability of the two-State solution with Jerusalem as the future capital of both Israel and Palestine, is particularly concerning. During the Israeli election campaign, statements were made by some politicians expressing support for the unilateral annexation of all or parts of the West Bank. Such a prospect would be devastating to the potential of reviving negotiations, regional peace and the very essence of the two-State solution.

The persistent threat of demolitions and the displacement of Palestinians in Area C, East Jerusalem and Hebron's H2 area are also of concern. Only 13 per cent of East Jerusalem is designated for new Palestinian residential construction, an estimated one-third of housing units in East Jerusalem are built without a permit, and an estimated 13,000 demolition orders issued against Palestinian-owned structures in Area C since 1988 are still outstanding. The demolitions and displacement in Area C and East Jerusalem affect women and girls in particular. Women have to shoulder additional daily responsibilities to ensure their own survival and that of their families in unfamiliar circumstances. A 2018 report by UN-Women on Palestine has shown that the burden of family responsibility, coupled with the anguish and trauma of sudden loss, takes a huge toll on the women's health and well-being.

Israel has declared some 18 per cent of the West Bank as firing zones for military training, while civilian presence is prohibited by military order during training exercises. There are 38 Palestinian herding communities and a population of over 6,200 people located within these areas who are impacted by a range of measures, including evacuations. There are also 11 Israeli outposts located either partially or completely in the designated firing zones, which have not been subjected to similar evacuations. The practice of evacuating Palestinian communities located in these areas should also cease.

The situation in Gaza continues to be perilous, with the persistent threat of another major escalation and the continued suffering of the population. It is tragic and unacceptable that people continue to be killed and injured unnecessarily during demonstrations by indiscriminate rocket attacks or other hostile acts. The launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian

populations is prohibited by international humanitarian law, and Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad must cease this practice immediately. Consistent with international human rights standards, Israeli security forces have the responsibility to exercise restraint and should use lethal force against demonstrators only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

I unequivocally condemn all attacks on Palestinian and Israeli civilians and call on all to refrain from violence and on leaders to clearly condemn such acts when they occur, as called for by resolution 2334 (2016). All perpetrators must be held accountable for their crimes.

The situation of the Palestinian population and human rights defenders in the H2 area of Hebron following the withdrawal of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron remains worrying. United Nations staff and the diplomatic community have been harassed and intimidated since the departure of the Temporary International Presence. Humanitarian actors and human rights defenders must be allowed to carry out their activities freely and safely and to ensure that any attacks are thoroughly, impartially and independently investigated and the perpetrators held accountable.

I am deeply concerned about developments relating to the clearance of revenues of the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Government is facing a very serious financial crisis that, unless resolved, risks triggering a series of dangerous developments that will be difficult to mitigate and contain, including the potential collapse of the Authority and the undermining of 25 years of international investment in supporting the two-State solution and the Oslo process. I echo the call of Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayeh on Israel to restore the revenue transfers in full and call on both sides to engage in a constructive manner to ensure compliance with the Protocol on Economic Relations between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

I remain deeply concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza. Funding received to date has enabled the temporary increase in energy supply. However, sustainable solutions for the energy crisis must be advanced without delay. At the same time, while acknowledging its legitimate security concerns, Israel must continue to ease restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from Gaza, with the goal of ultimately lifting them. It is crucial

to ensure that calm is sustained in order to gradually introduce longer-term projects that will support Gaza's development.

I reiterate my call on all Palestinian factions to actively engage with Egypt on reconciliation. Despite the challenges, it is critical that these efforts continue. The United Nations remains steadfast in its support of Egypt's efforts in that regard, and I call on all factions to take concrete steps to ensure the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic and legitimate national Palestinian Government. Gaza is and must remain an integral part of a future Palestinian State as part of the two-State solution.

Finally, I take note of the upcoming workshop convened by the United States and the Kingdom of Bahrain to discuss the potential for economic investments and initiatives that would be made possible by a future Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement and a solution to the final-status issues. Humanitarian and economic support for the population is crucial to creating an environment conducive to viable negotiations. However, I must emphasize that the conflict cannot be resolved through economic measures alone. Such steps can only be complementary to a legitimate political process that ends the occupation and addresses all final-status issues in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

In closing, let me reiterate that I remain deeply concerned by the state of our collective efforts and the weakening of the international consensus on achieving an end to the occupation and the realization of a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the 1967 lines, international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and previous agreements.

In the absence of any progress to resolve all final-status issues, creating conditions for the parties to return to meaningful bilateral negotiations remains critical. Yet we must be clear. On its own, no amount of humanitarian or economic support will resolve the conflict. It requires political solutions. In Gaza, our efforts consist in continuing to try and de-escalate the situation and provide a semblance of hope to the population, but Gaza's future will rest on the ability of leaders to summon the political will to devise concrete and sustainable solutions to the crisis. At the same time, the West Bank continues to simmer as it faces a range of challenges that threaten to upend decades

of Palestinian and international efforts to support a Palestinian State.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

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

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): I thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing and tireless efforts on this portfolio.

As Special Coordinator Mladenov mentioned, the United States, in partnership with Bahrain, will be hosting the Peace to Prosperity economic workshop in Manama next week. The workshop is a pivotal opportunity to convene Government, civil society and business leaders to share ideas, discuss strategies and galvanize support for potential economic investments and initiatives that could be made possible by a peace agreement. The workshop will facilitate discussions on an ambitious, achievable vision and framework for a prosperous future for Palestinians, including enhancements to economic governance, development of human capital and facilitation of rapid private-sector growth. We have been very clear that our full plan will address all final-status issues. The economic plan is a complement to the political plan.

We understand that only through a solution to the final-status issues will the economic vision be possible. Sustainable Palestinian economic growth is not achievable in the current environment. The economic vision is a road map that includes a detailed portfolio of real projects and capacity-building programmes that have the potential to unleash sustainable, private sector-driven growth if and when there is peace.

We want to underscore that this is why it is so important that everyone keep an open mind. The Council meets here month after month. Many in this Chamber use the same talking points to describe situations that have not changed. What actions have positively changed the reality on the ground? The United States encourages all to keep an open mind, read through these ideas and then make suggestions. All of us here today care deeply and want to see peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. We hope everyone here will remain constructively engaged with us moving forward.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the

Middle East Peace Process, for his very detailed and informative briefing and for his quarterly report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

We are extremely concerned about the deteriorating security situation in Gaza. The clashes last week once again highlight the fragility of the ceasefire.

After the flare-up in early May and as Gaza remains in a critical situation, we must do everything we can to prevent an escalation that could turn into a new conflict. We therefore call on the parties to exercise the utmost restraint. In that regard, I would like once again to commend the de-escalation efforts of Egypt and the Special Coordinator.

These developments are taking place in the context of a serious humanitarian and political crisis in Gaza. The humanitarian situation is dire. In that context, I reiterate France's full support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and we call on all donors to maintain their level of financial commitment this year at the Organization's donor conference to be held on 25 June. For its part, France has already announced a doubling of its contribution to UNRWA in 2019. Ultimately, there will be no solution in Gaza without the lifting of the blockade accompanied by credible security guarantees for Israel.

Politically, Palestinian unity is now more important than ever. There is therefore an urgent need to relaunch the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process. As we know, there will be no lasting stability in Gaza without a political solution, including the full return of the Palestinian Authority. Ultimately, the future of Gaza cannot be separated from the objective of establishing two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. There will be no Palestinian State without Gaza and no lasting political solution in the region without a Palestinian State.

That brings me back to the intensification of the settlement policy in the West Bank, which is undermining the foundations and the viability of the two-State solution. Since the beginning of the year, more than 4,500 new housing units have been approved in the West Bank. France is also concerned about the announcement on 30 May by the Israeli authorities of tenders for the construction of settlements in East Jerusalem, including more than 800 housing units. With more than 600,000 settlers, including 200,000 in Jerusalem, we are close to the point of no return. The

various initiatives to implement Israeli law in the West Bank are part of a de facto annexation policy. We take those developments all the more seriously as they have been accompanied by worrying statements about the annexation of all or part of the occupied territories.

In that regard, I would like to recall that, in accordance with international law and Council resolutions, beginning with resolution 242 (1967), France does not recognize any Israeli sovereignty over any of the occupied territories. And in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, we consider it illegal to acquire territory by force, be it in Jerusalem, the West Bank or the Golan Heights.

If those trends were to continue, it would mean the Palestinians abandoning their national aspirations, which require the establishment of a State, and the Israelis renouncing the democratic nature of the State of Israel. In addition, it is crucial to put an end to hate speech and incitement to violence, which, as the Special Coordinator just recalled, continue and which France condemns.

In that context, it is now more necessary than ever to reaffirm the parameters for the two-State solution agreed by the international community. In the absence of any political perspective, there may be a temptation to break away from the agreed framework, based on international law and the resolutions of the Council, and to replace it with unilateral decisions. We must all fully appreciate the danger of that temptation.

We noted the holding of an economic workshop in Manama on 25 and 26 June, at the initiative of the United States and Bahrain. As we said, France stands ready to support any effort, including economic, as long as it is in line with the approach that we have defined together: the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State, genuine conditions for Palestine's economic recovery and, beyond that, the construction of a stronger and more integrated regional economy. But economic peace cannot replace the pursuit of a genuine political settlement, based on the two-State solution and on all the internationally agreed parameters, which are themselves anchored in international law and the resolutions of the Council. Any attempt to deviate from those collectively defined parameters would be doomed to failure. There is no viable or realistic alternative. The solution to this conflict is above all a political one.

France, which is a friend of both the Israelis and the Palestinians, has only one objective: the implementation,

through negotiations, of the two-State solution and the establishment of fair and lasting peace on the basis of parameters agreed by the international community. We will assess any initiatives taken on that basis.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): It is always emotionally difficult to talk about the Palestinian question, for it makes South Africans relive their difficult past. I would like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

We are all aware of the expression that the Roman Emperor Nero was reputed to have fiddled while Rome burned. If the Council, and indeed the international community, continue to deal with the question of Palestine in the manner in which we are currently doing so, history will no doubt judge us as the abominable Nero. We are fiddling while the reality of an independent, safe, secure and self-sufficient Palestinian State is slowly dwindling. Compounding the effects of the illegal Israeli occupation, earlier this week the Governor of the Palestine Monetary Authority, Mr. Azzam Shawwa, highlighted the dire financial constraints on the Palestinian Authority, which makes it very difficult to deliver basic services to its people.

On 22 November 1967, the Security Council adopted resolution 242 (1967), which called on all parties to end territorial claims and respect sovereignty and for Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. In 2019, 52 years later, that has still not happened. Two generations later, it has not happened. In reality, Israel has illegally expanded its occupation with no consequences whatsoever from the Council.

From 1967 to January of last year, 250 settlements were constructed in the West Bank, housing 611,000 people, or 10 per cent of Israel's population, and moved 12 per cent of the Palestinian population from their land. Since then, over the past 18 months that figure has sharply increased, as the Council has heard.

Those historical injustices against Palestine and its people must be addressed. The Council must uphold its responsibilities mandated by the Charter of the United Nations and act. It is long overdue for the Security Council to reassume its responsibility and act decisively to assist Israel and Palestine in finding a lasting peace in the Middle East.

Over the years, established legal frameworks have been agreed upon, including the Madrid principles,

the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. It is now time to put those guidelines into action.

We have taken note of the Bahrain meeting, which will be convened by the United States sometime this year.

A vital aspect of ensuring lasting peace, security and stability in the Middle East is for the parties to talk to each other directly and negotiate directly towards finding a credible path to peace that is acceptable to Israelis and Palestinians alike. Those direct discussions must include all final-status issues, particularly with regard to borders, the status of Jerusalem and the return of Palestinian refugees. Eroding those core issues through detrimental unilateral action severely undermines previous peacemaking efforts and damages the prospects for durable peace for Israelis and Palestinians alike. The Security Council and its partners in peace must exert every effort to bring all sides to the negotiating table in order to allow them to find long-term peaceful solutions.

With regard to the humanitarian and human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, there too we have all failed. Palestinians continue to live in unacceptable environments where their movement is restricted, their land and property are seized and they have very little control over their own future. In Gaza, Israel's illegal blockade has harshly and negatively impacted the economic and social development of the area. That has been further exacerbated by Israel's illegal withholding of tax and customs revenues that rightfully belong to the Palestinian Authority to dispense as it sees fit. In that regard, South Africa calls for the immediate lifting of the illegal blockade and the release of all tax and customs revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

On the West Bank, we see continued expansion of illegal settlements and the confiscation and destruction of Palestinian property and land in direct violation of international law, including resolution 2334 (2016). Again, the Council has not acted to rectify that injustice. The detailed reports of recent developments regarding settlement expansion should at least compel the Council to act.

As we heard last month and was acknowledged by many members of the Council, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the

Near East (UNWRA) plays a vital role in the lives of most Palestinians through the provision of health and education services and employment opportunities in many fields. Its important work must be fully supported and encouraged, and we hope the upcoming UNWRA conference later this month will be supported. We place on record our appreciation of those countries that, under difficult circumstances, have continued to help UNWRA, as Mr. Mladenov noted.

If you want to deny people means of self-reliance, livelihood and future and turn them into desperate beggars, take their land and restrict their movement. That is what has been done and continues to be done to the Palestinians. The Council has watched and watched and talked and nothing has happened for 70 years, nothing.

On a positive note, we congratulate the State of Palestine on successfully joining the International Atomic Energy Agency as an observer on 18 June. That is a further step towards full acceptance by the international community of the reality that Palestine is indeed a State.

The international community has acknowledged that the only credible solution is one that is based on the two-State solution, with the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as the capital of the independent and sovereign State of Palestine, and the State of Israel. Any peace plan proposed by anyone must acknowledge those facts and not pre-empt them, and must ensure a Palestinian State that has sovereignty, territorial integrity and prosperity.

As we have repeatedly said in the Chamber, no people can be oppressed forever. That will never happen. They will resist and resist. Even if there is only one left standing, that one person will resist. That was true for all of us and it will be true for Palestinians. If all but one Palestinian is killed, that one remaining Palestinian will resist oppression and occupation. The Council must take note of that.

Peace in Israel is a wish all of us pray for every day, because we all pray for peace for Israelis. They are our people. But it will happen only when Palestine is free and enjoying peace. The Council should assist both those two communities — Israelis and Palestinians — in finding peace for the sake of their children and future generations.

Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to welcome this briefing on the latest developments in the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I congratulate Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his enlightening briefing, which once again reminds Council members of the need to coordinate their efforts to restore lasting peace and stability in the region.

Many decades after the partition plan for Palestine proposed by the United Nations in 1947, the international community is still struggling to find definitive solutions to a crisis that is becoming increasingly intense and complex. The political and security situation is continuing to deteriorate and to have a negative impact on the humanitarian situation in a worrisome way, in particular in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as Mr. Mladenov just reminded us in great detail and as my colleague from South Africa, Ambassador Jerry Matjila, has explained. My delegation therefore urges Israeli and Palestinian leaders to rise above the circumstances by resuming negotiations based on relevant United Nations resolutions.

To that end, my delegation reiterates its commitment to Israel's security and the inalienable right of Palestinians to self-determination. Furthermore, the solution of two States coexisting peacefully within the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as their capital, is the one we support.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has reached an impasse despite numerous mediation efforts by the United Nations and other international actors. In addition to the political and security challenges that are taking on increasingly alarming proportions every day in the Palestinian territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, there is a humanitarian crisis that undermines the hope for lasting peace that the 1993 Oslo Accord and its subsequent Protocol had raised. The virtual absence of an appropriate framework for political compromise between the warring parties and the inflammatory ideology and rhetoric displayed on both sides exacerbate tensions and expose civilian populations to armed violence. In view of the prevailing delicate situation, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its call for restraint to all stakeholders and calls on them to strictly comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions under international law, in particular resolution 2334 (2016).

My country's strong propensity for dialogue as the preferred means of settling disputes between peoples, as well as its consistent position in favour of the security of the State of Israel and the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, form the basis of its call for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. In the face of the current impasse, and also of the violence observed in the Middle East, my delegation reiterates its support for the international consensus on the need to relaunch peace talks between the parties concerned, and from this point of view, we look forward to the outcome of the conference convened in Bahrain by the United States.

My country also remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which is characterized by increasingly difficult access to health care, as well as the ongoing water shortages and power outages. This humanitarian crisis, aggravated by a difficult socioeconomic situation, with the consequence of irregular payment of civil servants' salaries and a high unemployment rate, particularly among young people, seems absolutely unacceptable to us. Côte d'Ivoire therefore welcomes the material and financial support of the United Nations specialized agencies and international partners for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and reiterates its call on them to confirm their vital actions for the benefit of populations in distress at the support conference on 25 June 2019.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire wishes to express its support for all initiatives aimed at creating the conditions for a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and calls for reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas to enable the Palestinian Authority to fully exercise its functions in both Gaza and the West Bank. It reiterates its support for Mr. Nickolay Mladenov in his commitment to promoting constructive dialogue with a view to a lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which will restore peace and stability throughout the region.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing, which was, as always, very precise and informative.

Let me turn first to the situation on the ground, which is extremely worrisome. In recent days, we have once again learned about a potential escalation of violence in Gaza. The firing of rockets into Israel, which fortunately did not harm anyone, must be condemned

in the strongest possible terms. We have also observed other activities, such as the use of incendiary balloons launched from Gaza. In this context, let me reiterate that we recognize the legitimate right of Israel to self-defence and to ensuring the security of its citizens. Such acts represent a dangerous escalation that could quickly spiral out of control. Hamas and other actors in Gaza must refrain from violent actions and provocations against Israel, including the aforementioned incendiary kites and balloons launched with the aim of damaging Israeli property and assets.

We should uphold the existing international consensus that the only way forward for the Palestinians and Israel is the negotiation of a two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza living side by side in peace and security, with borders negotiated on the basis of the 1967 lines and mutually agreed land swaps. Today our main aim should be to restore a political horizon for the resumption of a meaningful peace process to that end. A resolution of all final status issues, including Jerusalem, should be found through the negotiated two-State solution.

We must be frank with ourselves — on the political track, we have to acknowledge that the process is currently almost entirely blocked. The intra-Palestinian division only aggravates the situation of the people of Gaza and weakens the national aspirations of the Palestinians. There is an urgent need to relaunch the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process. Everyone must be committed to the Egyptian efforts in this respect.

Poland has long supported and continues to support parameters for a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that are based on respect for international principles enshrined in international law. Regrettably, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, and the idea of a two-State solution continues to be dismantled piece by piece, in particular by an expansion of Israeli settlements. We are very close to the point where it could be difficult, if not impossible, to establish a viable Palestinian State.

Poland's position on the Israeli settlement policy in occupied Palestinian territory is clear and remains unchanged; it is also the European Union's well-known stance. All settlement activity is illegal under international law. It not only erodes the viability of the two-State solution and the prospects for a lasting peace, but also — we have to be honest with ourselves — it is an

obstacle to peace. The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) provided a strong reaffirmation of the international consensus on this matter. The resolution underlined the illegality of the Israeli settlements, stressing that the cessation of settlement activities is essential for salvaging the two-State solution. We are also very worried about planned demolitions of the Palestinian village of Khan Al-Ahmar, and we continue to ask Israel to abandon these plans entirely.

Allow me to conclude by praising the collective efforts of the international community to allow the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to fulfil its mandate to provide essential relief, development and protection services to Palestinian refugees and those displaced by the conflict. In our opinion, UNRWA remains a key contributor, providing, as it does, humanitarian assistance, stability and security in the region. In this context, we look forward to the UNRWA conference to be held at the end of this month in New York.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Before I start on the Middle East, I would just like to say how sorry we were to hear about the terrorist attack on 16 June in Nigeria, near Maiduguri, which killed at least 30 people. The press statement on that attack (SC/13852) that the Security Council just issued is welcome, but our sympathies and condolences go out to those affected and to Nigeria.

Turning to the Middle East, I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing. I think some common themes are emerging. For the United Kingdom, we share the Secretary-General's views on the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It was disappointing that, on 30 May, the Israeli authorities published tenders for the construction of over 500 settlement units in East Jerusalem. That is a decision that we condemn. As others have pointed out, the continued escalation of settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is contrary to international law as reaffirmed by resolution 2334 (2016). An annexation of any part of the West Bank would also be contrary to international law, not to mention destructive to peace efforts. I just wanted to set that out clearly.

Turning to Gaza, the United Kingdom condemns the rocket attack by Palestinian militants against southern Israel on 13 June. We strongly condemn all acts of terrorism and call on Hamas and other terrorist

groups to put a permanent end to their incitement and rocket fire against Israel. We were saddened by reports of a Palestinian medic who succumbed to wounds received last month when he was hit in the face by a rubber-coated bullet at the Gaza periphery. It is very hard to comprehend the killing of those delivering medical services.

We would therefore like to take this opportunity once more to urge all parties concerned to take action to reduce the risk of violence and make renewed progress towards a long-term agreement. It is only through a long-term political solution that brings the Palestinian Authority back to Gaza that communities in Israel and Gaza can be free from the threat of violence.

In response to the fragile humanitarian situation, on 29 May the United Kingdom announced the \$2 million package of support for the World Health Organization to help address the gap in trauma and emergency care in Gaza, and will help establish a new-limb reconstruction unit. We hope that package of support will help relieve the pressure on Gaza's hard-pressed health services.

I wish now to turn to the altercations on Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount on 2 June. Given the religious importance and political sensitivity of the holy sites, we look to all parties to maintain the status quo and engage in dialogue to ensure calm, especially during religious observances such as the holy month of Ramadan.

Turning to a solution to the conflict, along with other Member States, the United Kingdom continues to promote a just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions. It is our understanding, and it seems that the understanding is shared by most Council members, that a sustainable peace requires a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State based on 1967 borders with the agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees. There need to be security arrangements that, for Israelis, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and, for Palestinians, respect their sovereignty, ensure freedom of movement and demonstrate that the occupation is over.

To that end, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage our United States colleagues to bring forward detailed proposals for a viable Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that addresses the legitimate concerns of both parties. We continue to believe that the only way to

achieve that is through substantive peace talks leading to a two-State solution.

There will be a meeting in Bahrain next week about the economic situation and proposals. That is welcome. More needs to be done to enable the Palestinians to trade freely with the rest of the world. In turn, that requires greater movement of goods and people and the easing of Israeli restrictions. Ultimately, in order for the Palestinian economy to flourish, a political solution to the conflict needs to be found.

Lastly, others have mentioned the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and I would like to reiterate that the United Kingdom also remains a committed supporter of UNRWA and of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. We welcome UNRWA's efforts to broaden its donor base. I would like to encourage others to step up with more funding and more predictable disbursements. In that context, we look forward to a successful pledging conference here in New York next week.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and thank Mr. Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing.

Peru is following with profound concern the persistent cycle of destruction around the question of Palestine, whereby episodes of escalating violence, as over recent months, are followed by fleeting periods of relative calm. This pattern, coupled with the Security Council's inaction and the inertia of certain key actors, has a negative impact in what is already a highly volatile context and generates unpredictable consequences for the Middle East and for the world in general. We are alarmed that the prospects for a political solution seem to grow ever weaker and that unilateral actions risk triggering an even greater escalation of tension and violence.

Peru reiterates its firm condemnation of the launching of rockets and incendiary devices by Hamas, which threatens the lives of the Israeli civilian population, cause material damage and further undermine the potential for a political solution.

At the same time, we underscore that, pursuant to international humanitarian law, the legitimacy of Israel's self-defence hinges upon its strict adherence to the principles of proportionality, distinction and precaution. In that regard, we must recall its obligation

to abide by the resolutions of the Security Council. In particular, we believe there is an urgent and pressing need to put an end to increased settlement activity, home demolitions and evictions in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016). Those actions are contrary to international law, seriously jeopardize the territorial integrity of the Palestinian State and undermine the prospects for achieving a two-State solution.

We note with concern the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank, and how it contributes to fuelling increased radicalization and extremism among the population. We welcome the significant financial contributions intended to improve living conditions in Gaza, which have helped to improve electricity supply, create jobs and to provide medical services. Nonetheless, we underscore the temporary nature of such measures and that they must be followed by political agreements that bring to an end the suffering of millions of Palestinians. That means, among other things, making tangible progress in the process of intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which entails the restoration of Palestinian Authority control throughout the area. It also means ending the Gaza blockade under conditions that guarantee the security of Israel.

Moreover, we are concerned at the destabilizing effect of the Israeli Government's decision to withhold a significant proportion of Palestinian taxes. In that regard, we welcome the willingness of Arab countries to consider options for providing assistance at a forthcoming meeting to be held in Cairo. Nonetheless, we note for the definitive solution to the problem lies in strict respect for the obligations governing the economic relations between the parties.

In conclusion, I reiterate our commitment to the two-State solution, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Organization. For that to be achieved, the support of the international community and a constructive role on the part of the Security Council are essential.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

We are concerned about the continuing clashes and confrontations in Gaza and at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the steadily escalating situation. We took note of the fact that the basic principles for settling the Palestinian question were reaffirmed at the emergency summit

of the League of Arab States and the summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, recently held in Saudi Arabia. Safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the Palestinian people is the shared responsibility of the international community. I would like to stress the following points.

First, to effectively implement resolution 2334 (2016), the parties concerned must immediately stop all settlement activities in the occupied territory, cease and desist the demolition of Palestinian homes and the destruction of Palestinian property and take measures to prevent violence against civilians. All legislative acts and unilateral moves aimed at legitimizing settlement activities must be stopped immediately and practical measures must be taken to eliminate their effects.

Secondly, the parties must seek a proper settlement to the issue of the final status of Jerusalem — a complex and sensitive matter that is fundamental to settling the Palestinian question and crucial to regional peace and tranquillity. Recent clashes at the Al-Aqsa Mosque are worrisome. All parties must act with caution, based on the principles of respect for the plurality of history, thereby upholding fairness and justice, implementing the international consensus and achieving peaceful coexistence, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. They must also hold talks to reach a solution that can balance everyone's interests.

Thirdly, the parties must remain seized of the economic and humanitarian situation in Palestine and take measures to improve it. The prolonged blockade of the Gaza Strip has led to severe humanitarian situations in the region and is not conducive to regional stability. Immediate measures must be taken to lift the blockade in Gaza in full so as to prevent any potential escalation. China is concerned about the actions of certain parties to withhold some of the tax receipts collected on behalf of Palestine. We call on the parties concerned to fulfil the obligations under relevant international treaties, such as the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations, and fully implement United Nations resolutions on the issue. The international community should provide more support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We look forward to the successful conclusion of its upcoming pledging conference.

The Middle East needs peace and stability. There is no alternative to the two-State solution — the only

correct answer to the Palestinian-Israeli question. In line with the Arab Peace Initiative, the principle of land for peace and the relevant Council resolutions, the international community must adhere to a negotiations-based approach for advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question so as to achieve the ultimate goal of establishing a fully sovereign State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Any new initiative should meet those international guidelines.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): I wish to thank Mr. Mladenov for his usual comprehensive update on the situation on the ground.

Again, we are disappointed about the continuing provocative actions by the occupying Power, including its destabilizing actions and violations of the situation and historic status of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, thereby potentially creating tensions not only in the region but also in the surrounding areas.

We are deeply concerned about the fact that no concrete measures have been taken, including by this body, in relation to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). In that regard, the Council should spare no effort in creating an atmosphere that is conducive for all parties to implement the resolution.

We also took note of the statement by Mr. Mladenov on the various provocations in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular in Gaza. We call on all parties to refrain from making further statements that may escalate tensions. We share the view of Mr. Mladenov that highlighted that economic measures cannot be considered as the only element that needs to be solved when addressing the issue of Palestine.

With those comments in mind, I wish to highlight three important points in my remarks today.

The first point is the humanitarian crisis in Palestine. While there is no sign of political talks in sight, the living conditions of the Palestinians continue to deteriorate every day, whether in Gaza or in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Palestinians continue to be deprived of their rights. Their hope for a better future is fading away. Before our eyes, the occupying Power continues to dismantle past political deals and perimeters that are the foundation of the two-State solution. Widespread and persistent practices such as continuous violence, the expansion of settlements and increasing threats by settlers, the

blockade of Gaza, the demolition of property and evictions aggravate the economic situation and pose a serious security threat. Israel continues to withhold the transfer of Palestinian tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority — a dangerous measure by the occupying Power. Let me again stress that we cannot question the Palestinian Authority's refusal to accept a transfer that is less than the full amount owed to it, but must demand that Israel not take what does belong to it.

That brings me to my second point, namely, the significant role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) amid worsening economic and social conditions in Palestine. As an organization providing basic services to half of the people of Gaza, UNRWA provides a small glimmer of hope. The generous contributions of many countries are a clear demonstration of the support and responsibility of the international community with regard to the existence of UNRWA for the benefit of the Palestinian people. UNRWA is vital to Palestinian refugees and to Palestinians at large. It is also the least the United Nations can do to help the Palestinians, given the failure of the Security Council to act authoritatively on its own resolutions as they relate to Palestine. The United Nations is indebted to Palestine and we must discharge that debt, now or in the future. With respect to that point, I wish to remind all of us here that on 25 June, just a few days from now, there will be a pledging conference for UNRWA. We did a tremendous job last year, which helped prevent UNRWA from collapsing. I urge all delegations to demonstrate the same sense of commitment again this year.

My third point is the maintenance of the historic status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, to which I alluded at the beginning. Al-Haram Al-Sharif has always been the epicentre of violence because of what it represents, spiritually and culturally. It is critical that we remind ourselves that what happens there affects not just the immediate region, but ripples to far distant areas of the world. In that regard, it is worth recalling that earlier this month, during the last 10 days of Ramadan, during a time when there is a great concentration of people in Al-Haram Al-Sharif, there was another provocation by settlers and security forces of the occupying Power trying to gain access.

Once again, that was a violation of the status quo. What is even more deplorable is that the aggression took place during the celebration of the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967. Not surprisingly, a number

of Palestinians were injured during the incident. The delegation of Indonesia would like to warn that turning the conflict into a religious one is something that we must prevent, as the consequences could be very serious. I believe all of us here agree on that. We call on Israel to respect history and the status quo and to avoid any measures or insensitive policy that might result in a destabilizing effect.

Finally, on a positive note, I welcome the agreement between the State of Palestine and the International Atomic Energy Agency on a safeguards agreement, which has placed the State of Palestine on an equal footing with other members.

Once again, we call on this body to exercise its authority with regard to the situation in Palestine. Let us be fair and place justice above all.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): As in the past, we thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for presenting today's report to us, while recognizing the significant challenge that his work entails in the most adverse of circumstances. Unfortunately, the current state of the situation in the Middle East and the direction it is taking continue to be a cause of great concern and outrage for us, as we witness a progressively worsening trend that is bringing us dangerously close to the brink of the impossibility of achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution — the only viable one.

Making our feelings heard, however, as we often do in this Chamber, does not relieve us of the primary responsibility conferred upon the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security, the success of which demands taking firm and effective action in tandem with our positions and in consonance with the authority and respect that this beacon of world order deserves. Given the absence of significant political will and process and the division among positions, the inertia that we are experiencing with regard to the Israel-Palestine issue threatens to perpetuate the status quo leading to actions that are contrary and in clear violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

We continue to observe how the hopes of the Palestinian people to establish their own State are fading away in the face of the systematic expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, underpinned by a policy that seeks to

legitimize them. The civilian population, both Israelis and Palestinians, including women and children, continue to be the victims of an environment marked by constant violence, fuelled by provocations and incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, which puts their lives in jeopardy and deprives them of the possibility of well-being, compounded, at the same time, with the inability to embark on a path leading towards a process of intra-Palestinian reconciliation to build a nation.

Consistent with its guiding principles, the position of the Dominican Republic remains the same, including, *inter alia*, respect for the sovereignty and self-determination of peoples, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations with respect to the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. We reject the expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Accordingly, we stress that, with regard to Jerusalem, we recognize, in line with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the character and special status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, its spiritual, religious and cultural dimension and heritage, as a sacred place for the three monotheistic religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, and we are opposed to any measure that alters or seeks to alter that character and status.

At the same time, we condemn in the strongest terms all acts of violence continuing to take place throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including the use of lethal force during demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other actions in Gaza and the West Bank, which involve children, women and medical personnel, none of whom should ever be targeted. We also condemn the firing of rockets and the launching of incendiary devices and explosives from Gaza into Israel by Hamas and other Palestinian militants.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains critical, heightened by an alarming environmental situation limiting access to drinking water and subsequently affecting health, food security and development, which is compounded by widespread insecurity, the electricity crisis and the lack of opportunities. We therefore commend the vital work on the ground by the relevant organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East,

as well as the support of friendly countries, to alleviate suffering and to bring about change.

I should like to conclude by saying that we will not achieve peace merely by making statements month after month. Let us not deceive ourselves. If we really want to achieve peace, the first step to that end is to end the hate speech by both sides. That is our opinion.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): First of all, let me thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing.

We remain fully and permanently committed to a negotiated two-State solution, based on the internationally agreed parameters, as the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967 and resolves all permanent-status issues in order to end the conflict.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, first and foremost, a political conflict that requires a political solution. In anticipation of the upcoming Bahrain workshop to be held next week, we will look into any proposal that is aimed at improving the socioeconomic living conditions of Palestinians. Addressing the economic aspect of the conflict, however, cannot replace a solution negotiated between both parties in order to achieve lasting peace. We will support any meaningful initiative that aims at reviving the political process that is acceptable to both parties and based on the internationally agreed parameters.

One of the main obstacles to achieving a political settlement is the ongoing Israeli occupation and the continued settlement activities in the territories occupied in 1967. We reiterate our position that settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law and undermine the prospect for a negotiated two-State solution. The continuous expansion of settlement activities by Israel is a matter of great concern to us. That includes the recent approvals of construction of, and tenders for, hundreds of new housing units in settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, including those dating from the end of May. We reiterate our rejection of any unilateral steps that jeopardize a two-State solution. That also includes the construction of settlements in violation of international law and the related demolition of Palestinian structures in Area C. We call on Israel to end the expansion of settlements, the legalization of

outposts and the demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures.

We are also extremely concerned about repeated statements from various sides alluding to a possible annexation of part of the West Bank. There is no right to annexation. Should such statements be translated into Government policy or law, that would constitute a clear violation of international law. We strongly advise against taking any steps in that direction, as it could lead to serious consequences. We reiterate that Germany will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations. In its relevant dealings, Germany will continue to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.

Resolution 2334 (2016) needs to be fully implemented not only with regard to settlement activities, but also with regard to acts of terror, violence against civilians, incitement, provocative action and inflammatory rhetoric. We welcome the fact that the latest report of the Secretary-General also focuses on those obstacles to achieving peace, and the Special Coordinator gave some appalling examples in that regard during his briefing. Germany condemns all attacks on Israel in the strongest possible terms, including the latest firing of rockets from Gaza, which are putting Israel's security and the lives of civilians at risk. Germany remains steadfast in its commitment to Israel's security as a Jewish and democratic State, and we will not be silent when Israel's security or right to exist are questioned or compromised. We call on Hamas and other groups to stop firing rockets from Gaza into Israel, and we strongly urge all parties to de-escalate, exercise restraint and refrain from provocative rhetoric and actions.

It is obvious that joint efforts to restore a political perspective on the resumption of the peace process are urgently needed. We support all attempts to restart meaningful direct talks and negotiations between the parties with the objective of creating a lasting peace. At the same time, we must avoid any unilateral measures and work collectively to counter the negative developments on the ground that are undermining the viability of a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the internationally agreed parameters.

Before I conclude, I want to make one last point. In the meantime and until a solution is found, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains indispensable to the provision of humanitarian assistance and essential services in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria as well as within the Palestinian territories. UNRWA is the key to stability in the region, and we continue to firmly support its mandate and encourage others to similarly continue to support the Agency's work, politically and financially.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his detailed briefing and for his and his team's tireless efforts.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is becoming bogged down, the situation on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continues to deteriorate, and we are seeing evidence that this conflict, the subject of many Security Council resolutions, will have a positive outcome only if we ensure that those same resolutions and international law are respected following a negotiated process between the parties.

A peace can be comprehensive, just and lasting only if it meets the legitimate aspirations of each of the parties to achieve their national destiny in peace and security, within a stabilized region. The goal that the international community must work towards is unquestionably the coexistence of two States, with the city of Jerusalem as the future capital of both, in accordance with the internationally agreed parameters. In Belgium's view, that is the only way to provide the necessary response to the Israelis' desire to live in security in a State that is recognized by all and the Palestinians' legitimate aspirations for a sovereign, democratic and viable State. That possibility can be supported by economic measures, and here I want to remind the Council that the European Union is the world's largest donor to the Palestinian people. But economic measures cannot replace a political solution. The Palestinian economy cannot fully take off until the occupation ends and Palestinians have free access to their land and resources, freedom of movement and access throughout their territory and the ability to integrate into a regional market.

The continuing settlement policy is a flagrant violation of international law and the Council's resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Settlement activity, which is accompanied by expropriations, demolitions and people's displacement, undermines respect for Palestinians' basic rights. It also fundamentally compromises the two-State solution that we support, and it will soon be irrevocable. The recent publication of several requests for offers of tender to enable more than 800 housing units to be built in settlements in East Jerusalem is a new example of that policy, and Belgium firmly denounces and condemns such developments. In that context, we are also extremely concerned about the increase in tensions and violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. Any resort to violence, regardless of who commits it, is unacceptable, and impunity must not prevail. Belgium appeals to the parties to avoid any kind of provocation. We are particularly concerned about the deteriorating situation in Hebron and East Jerusalem, including in the Old City. We want to remind the parties of the obligation to respect international law, which applies to all, and of Israel's responsibility, as the occupying Power, to ensure the protection of Palestinians in Hebron, Jerusalem and all of the occupied territories.

The recent escalation of violence in Gaza is also damaging the prospects for a lasting and stable peace. We would like to remind the parties of their obligation to respect international humanitarian law, including the principles of proportionality and distinction, and to ensure the protection of civilians. If the trends in Gaza are to be reversed, it will be crucial to invest in both the humanitarian and political arenas. We urge all the parties to ensure free access to humanitarian actors. On the political front, only lifting the blockade and fully opening the crossing points, while keeping Israel's legitimate security concerns in mind, can constitute an appropriate solution. Restoring that territory to the control of the Palestinian Authority is also key. We reiterate our call to all the parties to engage constructively in intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

Lastly, we reiterate our request to be provided with a written report as part of this briefing, in accordance with the usual practice of the Council, based on the note by the President contained in document S/2017/507, at least twice a year.

In conclusion, Belgium calls on all parties to the conflict to work towards a solution in accordance with international law, with a view to achieving a just and lasting peace and a stable regional environment.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Having come this far in the month, we are pleased with the excellent way in which you and your team are steering the work of the presidency, Mr. President. We congratulate you and encourage you to maintain that momentum throughout the month. We also thank Special Coordinator Mladenov and his team for his detailed and informative briefing.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to head in the wrong direction, as we saw from the incidents that occurred last week, which is very worrying. Following the extreme violence in May, in which four Israelis and 25 Palestinians lost their lives, a ceasefire agreement was signed between Israel and Hamas, under the joint auspices of the United Nations and Egypt. Although no one was killed in last Thursday's cross-border attack, it violated the spirit of that agreement and demonstrates the mutual distrust and deeply rooted spirit of confrontation that prevail on both sides of the conflict, endangering the lives of Israeli and Palestinian civilians and undermining the efforts of the international community.

My delegation recognizes the right of Israel to defend its population from acts of insurgency and therefore to adopt measures necessary for that, but such measures should always fall within the existing framework of international law, in particular international humanitarian law. No retaliation for Islamist militia action in Gaza should have an impact on the local civilian population. We deplore the fact that dozens of Palestinian civilians were injured last Friday during the March of Return along the fence separating Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories. Whenever demonstrations are peaceful the people's human rights must be respected by the Israeli security forces. Palestinians have the right to demand the return of their loved ones, and the protests are the only political tool through which any citizen can freely exercise that right. In that regard, we urge the Islamist militias not to interfere in these demonstrations for their own purposes as insurgents.

We have to reiterate the concerns we have raised previously about the ongoing incidents that arise from the fact that Palestinians and settlers are living side by side in the occupied Palestinian territories. In places such as Hebron we are seeing these incidents more and more often, and ensuring protection by the Israeli occupation forces is now more essential than ever,

as they must guard the rights of the citizens of both sides equally.

Despite the continued efforts of the international community, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains critical. Widespread insecurity, the shortage of jobs, the inadequacy of basic services and a lack of food and drinking water all constrict the lives of Gaza's 2 million inhabitants, more than half of whom depend on the humanitarian support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In view of the situation, my delegation appeals to the Government of Israel to revise its blockade policy, which is damaging the local economy, while also urging the international community to advance the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process, which is essential if the Palestinian Authority is to return to Gaza, and encouraging international donors to provide UNRWA with more financial support in order to prevent the collapse of its humanitarian services, which have been suffering financially since last year and which a majority of Palestinians in Gaza depend on.

Before concluding, I urge Israeli and Palestinian politicians to try to find ways to reach a definitive political solution to their differences and to work together to consider any initiative that could enable them to find that solution, bearing in mind that no result can be accepted by the parties unless they can reach a consensus on it.

Finally, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea continues to align itself with the purposes and principles of the Security Council concerning the settlement of conflicts, and we hope that any outcome for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be based on these principles.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the situation in the Palestinian occupied territories.

Resolving the Palestinian question and achieving a comprehensive Middle East settlement based on Security Council resolutions must remain a priority for world diplomacy. We say that because the Middle East is still in the grip of destabilizing trends, many of them intentionally introduced from outside. The result is that new crises are piled on top of old ones. In our opinion, the recent growing tension in the Persian Gulf is being artificially whipped up. That crisis is threatening peace and security in the region along with the international

efforts to resolve the crises and conflicts there, including between Palestine and Israel.

This is an urgent warning. Any adventurist attempts using force, should they be carried out, will at the very least bring disaster. It is not hard to predict that there would be outbreaks of violence and new waves of migration, and the consequences for anyone making such attempts would be horrifying. What we need is immediate de-escalation and efforts to seek a negotiated settlement of the current disputes. Confrontation must give way to dialogue, right now. We want to once again remind the Council of the mandate whereby resolution 598 (1987) requests the Secretary-General to examine measures for the security of the region in consultation with the parties in the region. Security is indivisible. It is one and the same for everyone, without exception, and no preference for any individual State. A formula that says what is permitted for some is forbidden for others is not going to work.

We cannot allow a new fault line to nullify the positive trends that we have been seeing recently in the region. Life in most of the Syrian Arab Republic is gradually returning to normal. Iraq, which has chosen to make good-neighbourly relations a priority of its foreign policy, is receiving political and economic assistance. The Special Representatives of the Secretary-General are working actively to find formulas for resolving other conflicts in hotspots in the region. Work is being done to bolster efforts to combat the threat of terrorism, which can be defeated only by putting together a front that is as united as possible.

However, the quest for a solution to the key Middle East issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is still at an impasse. This area has recently been dominated by dangerous trends, in the form of unilateral measures and aggressive revisions of previously settled agreements. In our view, the international legal basis for a settlement in the Middle East, including the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted by the Heads of State of the Arab world, and the Madrid principles, remains inviolable. We see no alternative to a two-State solution. Any proposals for improving the economic situation in the Palestinian territories must be part of a package with the political components of a settlement, or the peace initiatives are doomed to failure. We want to point out that there has been an international consensus on this issue for many years. The status of the occupied Palestinian territories and other occupied territories, including the

Syrian Golan, is determined by the relevant Security Council resolutions. No unilateral steps can change that reality.

We believe firmly that no breakthroughs can succeed in isolation. History has shown that. We consider the Middle East Quartet of international mediators to be a unique mechanism, endorsed by Security Council resolutions, and a relevant and essential format. We would like to remind Council members of the Quartet's 2016 report, which includes a detailed road map for the resumption of a sustainable political process.

Historically, Russia has supported trusting, friendly relations with both the Israelis and the Palestinians. That is why we believe that establishing a political process to implement a two-State formula not only meets Palestinians' expectations but also satisfies Israel's security concerns. We believe it is vital to involve the countries of the region and the League of Arab States more actively in the efforts to achieve peace in Palestine and the Middle East as a whole. We support a strong and united League with regard to a number of international issues, including the Palestinian question. Russia will continue to cooperate in establishing a positive agenda for a settlement in the Middle East. Our proposal for holding a summit in Russia between the leaders of Palestine and Israel remains on the table. It is high time to implement the Russian initiative for a Security Council mission to the Middle East. We have been working for decades to establish contacts with all the parties, and we can help to restore unity among the Palestinians. We greatly appreciate the efforts of Egypt in that regard.

We also need active international measures aimed at improving the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. However, any assistance for Gaza must be provided in coordination with the legitimate authorities under President Abbas and should be part of the efforts to restore Palestinian unity. We assume that this principle will guide the work of the United Nations and all the parties concerned. We will continue our active support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which has a serious political dimension as well as a humanitarian one.

The instability in the Middle East requires united measures. We urgently need to take steps to overcome the impasse in the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Measures must be taken to spread a culture of peace among

religious groups, which will help to prevent new upheavals based on ethnicity or religion and protect the Christians and other religious minorities who have lived in the Middle East for thousands of years and have been a vital cultural and civilizational element, professing principles of tolerance, but who have had to leave the region having become targets of genocide.

However, rather than imposing an outdated herd mentality aimed against the other, we should act with a view to creating platforms for dialogue that will enable us to pursue the quest for solutions to the security issues in the Middle East. We want to once again draw attention to the related Russian initiative on a security architecture for the Middle East. Russia is ready to cooperate constructively with partners on all issues on the Middle East agenda on a platform — to which there is no alternative — for seeking political ways to overcome the existing challenges. Establishing joint political rather than military efforts for the Middle East demands that we renounce any arbitrary concepts of a rules-based order and return to respect for the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Kuwait.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing. We emphasize Kuwait's full support for his efforts and we look forward to receiving at least two written reports annually on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), as is the case with the various other items on the agenda of the Security Council and in line with presidential note S/2017/507.

We regret that what we heard today echoed Mr. Mladenov's previous nine briefings in bringing the message that Israel has made no progress in implementing the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) and has not ceased its settlement activities. It continues to build settlements and seize Palestinian territories, in flagrant violation of the resolution. Today we would therefore like to ask a number of important questions with a view to reminding the Council of the importance of implementing that resolution in order to achieve the peace we all desire.

First, how can there be any real progress in the peace process when Israel, the occupying Power,

is continuing its illegal and illegitimate settlement activities, in complete violation of its commitments stipulated in international resolutions, agreements and treaties? They all affirm that Israel's establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory that it has occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of a two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. They also stress that ending all Israeli settlement activities is essential if a two-State solution is to be salvaged. We call on Israel to immediately and completely cease all its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and fully respect its legal obligations. It must also cease any unilateral measures such as annexing land by force or freezing parts of Palestinian tax revenues, and must pay those tax revenues in full to the Palestinian Government.

Secondly, how can we see any true progress in the peace process when acts of violence by settlers against Palestinian civilians increase on a daily basis? It has been painful to witness the ongoing Israeli attacks even during the holy month of Ramadan, in addition to threats, provocations and hate speech, in flagrant violation of the international resolutions that call for taking immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of provocation and destruction. We reiterate the importance of reviewing the options mentioned in the Secretary-General's latest report on the protection of Palestinian civilians.

Thirdly, how can we see genuine progress in the peace process when the blockade of the Gaza Strip is now in its twelfth year and is a direct cause of the dire situation there that has left millions of civilians on the brink of economic, medical and humanitarian collapse? The Israeli forces have continued to target unarmed civilians participating in the demonstrations of the Great March of Return, and the death toll has reached 279 Palestinians, including 56 children.

Fourthly, how can we see genuine progress in the peace process when Israel, the occupying Power, continues to violate the sanctity of Christian and Muslim holy sites by implementing measures and policies aimed at changing the historic character of Jerusalem — in violation of resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), which condemn any attempts to change the demographic composition and character of the Palestinian territory that has been occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem — as well as building or

expanding settlements, moving Israeli settlers, seizing land, destroying homes and displacing Palestinian civilians in violation of international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions. The Council will not recognize any changes to the borders of 4 June 1967, including those regarding Jerusalem, except when they are agreed to by both parties, through negotiations.

Fifthly, how can we see real progress in the peace process and the settlement of the conflict when the Security Council fails to address all of these and many other violations? The international community cannot remain silent while the crimes continue to be committed against the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation. We must act to uphold our commitments under international humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, and to guarantee protection of and respect for the civil rights of those living under occupation, without exception.

In that context, we renew our support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its role of providing the necessary educational, health and social services to the Palestinian refugee community. We look forward to the donor conference for UNRWA, which will be held next week in New York. It is our pleasure to see the State of Kuwait is on the list of the Agency's main partners. In the past four years alone, we have provided the Agency with voluntary contributions of \$113 million.

It is more important than ever to implement all the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), which provides a realistic mechanism for rebuilding trust between parties and relaunching the negotiation process based on resolutions of international legitimacy and agreed

international principles. That was reaffirmed at the latest Arab Summit, held in Tunisia; the first Arab-European Summit, held recently in Sharm El-Sheikh; and the fourteenth Organization of Islamic Cooperation Summit, held on 31 May in Mecca. Those summits confirmed once again that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal and that it is important to remain committed to the two-State solution in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions. That is the only realistic way to end the occupation that began in 1967, including of East Jerusalem, and to reach a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

In conclusion, we renew our commitment to peace as a strategic choice and to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, international law and all provisions of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. The Initiative stipulates that comprehensive peace and normalized relations with Israel must be preceded by an end to the occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories it has occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. Israel must recognize the State of Palestine and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their rights to self-determination; to establish their independent State on their territories, with Jerusalem as its capital; to return; to compensation for Palestinian refugees; and a fair solution to their issue, based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.