



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Hoxha	(Albania)
<i>Members:</i>	Brazil	Mr. Costa Filho
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon	Ms. Bongo
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	India	Mr. Raguttahalli
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Norway	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Arab Emirates	Ms. Shaheen
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America	Mr. Mills

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to participate in this meeting.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: The Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which Council members have already received, covers the period between 19 March and 16 June. I will devote my briefing today to developments since the end of the reporting period and highlight some key observations from the report.

Before turning to the most recent developments, I would like to express my alarm over the level of violence that we have witnessed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel over the past months.

In recent months, violence has continued at a high level, leading to scores of Palestinian and Israeli casualties. Since mid-March, 49 Palestinians have been killed in demonstrations, clashes, Israeli security operations, including in Area A, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis and in settler-related violence. The reporting period was also marked by the most serious terrorist attacks inside Israel in years, in which 11 Israelis and three foreign nationals were killed.

The firing of a rocket from Gaza towards Israel — the first since April — is also a concerning reminder of the fragility of the situation in the Gaza Strip. The mounting violence has been further fuelled and exacerbated by provocative steps and inflammatory rhetoric.

It is crucial that all parties take immediate steps to lower tensions and reverse negative trends that undermine the prospects for a peaceful two-State resolution of the conflict, with a contiguous, independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State. That will require not only specific actions to defuse

crises and maintain calm, but also redoubled efforts to strengthen the Palestinian Authority and support a broader strategy that can ensure that collective efforts by the parties and the international community are geared towards establishing a two-State reality.

In the period since 16 June, violent incidents have unfortunately continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

On 17 June, Israeli security forces shot and killed three Palestinians and injured six others in the context of an Israeli military operation and subsequent armed clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians in Jenin. In a statement, Israeli security forces said soldiers had returned fire towards a vehicle after armed men inside it had shot at them. The men were later claimed as members of Palestinian militant groups.

On 19 June, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian man near the separation barrier in the West Bank city of Qalqilya. A spokesperson of the Israeli security forces said that the soldiers had shot at "a suspect who vandalized" the barrier. The man was reportedly trying to reach a worksite in Israel.

On 21 June, an Israeli settler killed a Palestinian man, stabbing him during a scuffle that broke out when Israeli settlers set up tents on Palestinian-owned property near the village of Iskaka, in Salfit. Israeli police arrested a suspect.

On 24 June, the Israeli security forces shot a 16-year-old Palestinian near Silwad village, near Ramallah, who later succumbed to his wounds. An Israel Defense Forces spokesperson said that he was shot during an arrest operation among a group of young people throwing stones at vehicles.

On 25 June, Israeli settlers from Adei Ad outpost assaulted and injured two Palestinian farmers, one critically, and set fire to three Palestinian vehicles near Al-Mughayyir village, northeast of Ramallah.

Turning to Gaza, on 18 June a rocket was fired by Palestinian militants in the Strip towards the Israeli city of Ashkelon. The rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome system, causing no injuries or damage. In retaliation, the Israel Defense Forces struck Hamas targets in the Strip, including several observation posts near the Gaza perimeter, with no injuries reported.

I will now turn to several observations concerning the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period.

Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remains deeply troubling. Settlements constitute a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and international law. They undermine the prospect of achieving a two-State solution by systematically eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous, independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State.

I call on the Government of Israel to cease the advancement of all settlement activity immediately.

The continued demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures, including internationally funded humanitarian projects, is also disturbing. In particular, I am deeply concerned by the potential implications of the Israeli High Court's ruling on Masafer Yatta and the humanitarian toll on the communities in question if eviction orders are enforced.

I call upon the Government of Israel to end the demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned property, prevent the possible displacement and eviction of Palestinians, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian and international human rights law, and approve plans that would enable Palestinians in Area C and occupied East Jerusalem to build legally and address their development needs.

I remain gravely concerned by the continuing violence against civilians, which exacerbates mistrust and undermines a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The violence must stop, and all perpetrators must be held accountable.

I condemn the terrorist attacks carried out by Palestinians and Arab Israelis against civilians in Israel in recent months. Those attacks, the deadliest in years, can never be justified and must be clearly condemned by all.

I also condemn the killings of Palestinians, including children, by the Israeli security forces, related in particular to incidents where they did not appear to present an imminent threat to life. I note that to date in 2022 15 Palestinian children have been killed in the West Bank as compared with nine children killed there during the same period last year. Children must not be the targets of violence or put in harm's way. I reiterate that the security forces must exercise maximum

restraint and intentionally use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

I am appalled by the killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and disturbed by the behaviour of some members of the Israeli security services in the context of her funeral. I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an independent and transparent investigation into her killing and the need to ensure that those responsible are held accountable. Journalists must never be the targets of violence.

I reiterate that the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centres is prohibited by international humanitarian law and must stop immediately.

I also remain concerned by the multiple instances in which officials have used dangerous and hateful rhetoric that has raised tensions and sparked violence during the reporting period.

The fragility of the political and security situation, particularly in the occupied West Bank, is highly concerning. The persistence of conflict drivers and the absence of political will to change course have empowered extremists and are eroding the perception among Palestinians and Israelis alike that a resolution of the conflict is achievable.

In Gaza, the situation remains fragile, and the risk of escalation persists. Efforts by the United Nations and international partners to improve Palestinian lives and measures by Israel to ease restrictions and facilitate more economic activity, including increasing access to the Israeli labour market for workers from Gaza, have enabled the fragile ceasefire to continue.

Keeping the calm, however, is neither sufficient nor sustainable. More needs to be done to alleviate the humanitarian situation and enable the economy to grow, with the eventual goal of a full lifting of the Israeli closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). Only sustainable political solutions will relieve the pressures on the long-suffering population of Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority's financial crisis — compounded by the constraints of the occupation, the absence of serious Palestinian reforms and unclear prospects for donor support — requires urgent attention. In that regard, I welcome the renewed financial support from the European Union, which will give critical temporary relief to the Palestinian Authority.

As commodity prices spike, humanitarian needs and costs are rising across the occupied Palestinian territories. The cost of some basic food items such as wheat flour has increased by some 20 per cent in the West Bank and more than 40 per cent in Gaza. The cost of shipping alone is more than 25 per cent higher than last year. To sustain current operations in the occupied Palestinian territories until the end of the year and offset increasing costs, the World Food Programme requires an additional \$36 million. Facing similar constraints across the occupied Palestinian territories and the region, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) shortfall remains at \$100 million.

I thank all Member States that have already funded the Agency this year and those that confirmed additional funds at the pledging conference on UNRWA in New York last week. I encourage donors to provide the financial resources necessary to meet those growing costs. Ensuring that basic services continue and humanitarian needs are met is not only a humanitarian imperative but also vital to stability going forward.

As events over recent months have demonstrated yet again, managing the conflict in perpetuity is not a viable option. There is no substitute for a legitimate political process that will resolve the core issues driving the conflict.

I urge Israelis, Palestinians, the States of the region and the broader international community to take steps that will enable the parties to retake the path towards meaningful negotiated solutions and, ultimately, peace.

The United Nations remains actively engaged in advancing those efforts with all relevant parties and is committed to supporting the efforts of Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and end the occupation through the achievement of a two-State solution, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

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

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

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

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. The United States continues to appreciate his tireless efforts to work closely with the parties to reduce tensions through dialogue.

The current tension on the ground, as he mentioned, is palpable and dangerous. The United States has repeatedly registered its outrage over the string of terrorist attacks against Israelis this year, and we condemn the rocket attacks launched from the Gaza Strip again this month, which, as Council members know, broke a two-month pause in rocket fire from Gaza.

Many Israelis, especially those who reside close to the border with Gaza, live in perpetual fear that they or their families could come under attack at any time. That must stop. We also deplore the escalation of settler violence against Palestinians, including the death of Ali Hassan Harb, a Palestinian in the West Bank who was killed on his family's agricultural land.

We take note of the May 2022 report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that found over a thousand Palestinians were injured by live ammunition fired by Israeli forces in 2021, seven times the number of those injured by live ammunition the prior year.

We are also deeply concerned about the potential evictions at Masafer Yatta, which were upheld by Israel's Supreme Court. We urge that these evictions do not take place. We once again call on all parties to refrain from unilateral actions that increase tensions and undercut efforts to make progress on a negotiated two-State solution, such as settlement activity, demolitions, incitement to violence and evictions.

President Biden will travel to the region in July to meet with Israeli and Palestinian leaders to urge calm and explore ways to promote equal measures of security, freedom and opportunity for both Israelis and Palestinians. The current United States Administration continues to affirm its strong support for a two-State solution, which remains the best way to ensure Israel's future as a democratic and Jewish State alongside a sovereign viable Palestinian State.

We, like others on the Security Council, are concerned with the killing of Palestinian American

journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. We continue to stress the importance of accountability for Abu Akleh's tragic death. The United States will not relent in our calls for transparent accountability for those responsible for this tragedy until justice is done.

Separately, we are troubled by the ongoing practice of using human remains as a bargaining chip. Last month Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield met again with Leah Goldin, a mother whose son's remains are being held by Hamas. We continue to be disheartened by the cruelty of denying a family the ability to properly mourn their loved one. Many Palestinian families also know this suffering, as there are Palestinian remains that have similarly not been returned to their families. Human remains must be returned to their families immediately and unconditionally.

In the meantime, we should not lose sight of the hardship facing Palestinian refugees. Some 1.8 million Palestinians were suffering from food insecurity in March of this year. More than 80 per cent of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza are living in poverty and are struggling to afford the food needed to feed their families.

Special Coordinator Wennesland has correctly taken note of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which plays a critical stabilizing role for the region, but lamentably UNRWA's capacity to deliver food, education and health care to Palestinian refugees is hindered by its long-standing financial instability. The United States is the Agency's largest donor, contributing \$338 million in 2021, and we have already announced \$79 million for 2022. We intend to provide additional support this year, and we also welcome the contributions announced at the 23 June UNRWA pledging conference. In order to support the Palestinian people, we urge all donors to provide robust, reliable funding and to join us in supporting reforms to increase the Agency's oversight, accountability and transparency.

Finally, the United States once again affirms its commitment to a two-State solution and notes the importance of an inclusive process, one that involves the participation of women, youth and civil society.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and for the continued efforts of his team.

Last week the United Kingdom's Minister for Asia and the Middle East, Amanda Milling, visited Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. The Minister met many inspirational Israelis and Palestinians doing vital work to improve the situation, including Palestinian business leaders who, despite the challenges, are driving success in the Palestinian economy. The Minister also met Israelis in Lod who were working to bridge gaps and foster tolerance and coexistence in their communities.

However, the visit took place against the backdrop of ongoing violence and instability across the occupied Palestinian territories. As the Secretary General's report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) highlights, we are seeing continued negative trends and unnecessary loss of life. The Minister saw for herself last week the pain and suffering evictions and demolitions are causing Palestinians in Masafer Yatta and Sheikh Jarrah. Protecting human rights and ensuring accountability for illegal actions and abuses are essential.

Turning to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Minister observed first-hand the critical role the Agency plays in helping to maintain stability through its delivery of core services and humanitarian and protection assistance to Palestinian refugees. The United Kingdom was proud to announce this week its new multi-year funding agreement with UNRWA and to provide £15 million this year. We are alive to the challenges facing the Agency and commit to ensuring that it is on a more viable financial footing. We call on all donors, especially those from the region, to provide predictable multi-year funding so the Agency can continue its vital work.

We must not ignore the toll this prolonged conflict has taken on the people of Gaza. We continue to call on the Israeli authorities to end restrictions on movement, access and trade. Fifteen years of these restrictions have caused significant damage to the living standards of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza. Supporting prosperity for Gazans is firmly in Israel's long-term interests. We encourage a time-bound commitment for a durable solution for Gaza.

The ongoing tensions underline that a just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue. We urge the parties, with the support of the international

community, to do all they can to rebuild, trust and take the path back to dialogue.

Ms. Bongo (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his inspiring briefing.

The peace in the Middle East that we all seek essentially depends on the establishment of peace between Israel and Palestine. Such a prospect requires the firm commitment of all parties and the international community. My country believes in the two-State solution. The update on the situation on the ground that we have just heard from the Special Coordinator reveals that the road to this goal is still strewn with many stumbling blocks and challenges, particularly of a political, humanitarian and security nature.

The pursuit of the policy of expanding illegal settlements, demolishing homes and evicting families, which is being expanded in East Jerusalem and the occupied territories in defiance of resolution 2334 (2016), constitutes a major obstacle to the peace process between Israel and Palestine. The 12 May decision by the Israeli authorities to approve plans to move forward on more than 4,000 units in various locations in the West Bank exacerbates the territorial fragmentation of the West Bank. In the same vein, the 1 June demolition of nine Palestinian structures in the area is a source of tension. The precariousness of many Palestinians who risk being dispossessed of their land as a result of the Nahal Og reserve project is another cause for concern. We call on the Israeli authorities to desist from any expansionist plans, demolition or dispossession of Palestinian property and to refrain from any actions that would undermine international efforts for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Furthermore, for decades, Palestine has been in the grip of a political crisis with devastating consequences for the civilian population. We note the decision of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in Brussels on 10 May to focus on key economic issues including Palestinian Authority fiscal reforms, revenue enhancement, trade, water and energy.

Escalating violence during the reporting period has made the situation on the ground even more volatile. Police violence that accompanies multiple mass arrests with live ammunition of Palestinian civilians, including women, youth and children, is unacceptable. Similarly, acts of terrorism and the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel must stop.

We call on political leaders on both sides to prevent, combat and suppress hate speech and the rhetoric of intolerance, which sow belligerence and undermine peace efforts. Opinion leaders have a crucial role to play in easing communal tensions. They must be uncompromising against all expressions of hatred and glorification of terrorism.

In that respect, we welcome the condemnation by the President of the Palestinian Authority of terrorist acts targeting Israeli civilians and the condemnation by members of the Israeli Government of racist and stigmatizing speeches against Palestinians. We also welcome the commitment of Israeli and Palestinian civil societies to peacebuilding.

We take note of the results of the United Nations preliminary investigation into the circumstances of the tragic death of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, killed in the line of duty, and call on both parties to work together to ensure that justice be done.

On the painful issue of the return of the human remains to families, we call on the parties to find an agreement that can contribute to creating a climate of confidence conducive to peacebuilding.

The political and security crises have an impact on the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories in the context of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

The strong commitment of the international community is essential in order to ensure predictable funding for humanitarian assistance. We welcome the holding on 23 June of the pledging conference on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

In addition, we call for the full lifting of the blockade of Gaza, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009), so that humanitarian aid can be distributed without hindrance.

We urge the parties to relaunch negotiations to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and achieve a real and lasting peace. We also invite regional actors and the Middle East Quartet to intensify their efforts to bring the Israeli and Palestinian leaders back to dialogue in good faith. Finally, we reiterate our support for Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his tireless efforts to find a peaceful solution to this conflict in a complex environment.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

France is concerned about the trends on the ground that threaten the viability of the two-State solution. We continue to consistently defend the two-State solution, both with Jerusalem as their capital, as defined by the agreed parameters, the resolutions of the Council and international law. In the absence of viable alternatives accepted by the parties, this is the only just and lasting solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of both peoples and ensures Israel's long-term security interests and the stability of the region. France will never compromise with Israel's security.

France condemns the advancement of settlement plans that threaten the viability of a future Palestinian State and calls on Israel to halt ongoing procedures to expand or create new settlements, in particular the plans to expand Area E-1.

We are concerned about the first demolitions in Masafer Yatta, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and call on Israel to definitively suspend the evictions of Palestinian families, as well as demolitions. Those measures fuel despair and play into the hands of extremes on all sides. This deleterious context makes it urgent to relaunch a political process.

France welcomes the decisions taken by the Bennett Government to increase the number of work permits for Palestinians, especially from Gaza. However, more must be done to improve the lives of Palestinians. Those economic opportunities will not address the issue of respect for international humanitarian law and human rights or prevent an escalation similar to that of May 2021 while the political root causes of the conflict remain. That is why France is determined to act to recreate a political horizon. France remains mobilized to that end alongside its partners, notably Jordan and Egypt.

Finally, France will continue to support humanitarian actors and civil society. That is why it has increased its contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to a historic level this year, reaching \$35 million.

France reiterates its concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority. We reaffirm that justice must be done regarding the assassination of Nizar Banat.

France also urges a transparent investigation into the circumstances of the death of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh.

My country will continue to defend the civic and humanitarian space, in particular through its continued support for the six non-governmental organizations recently condemned by the Israeli authorities.

At the same time, we echo the calls of the United Nations for the rapid organization of Palestinian legislative and presidential elections, which have been postponed for more than a year.

France will not recognize any changes to the 1967 lines other than those agreed by the parties. We remind Member States of their obligations in terms of differentiation and take note of the decision of certain Member States to bring themselves into line with European legislation on labelling.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Let me start by thanking Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing, which, in conjunction with the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), is a cause for great concern about the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. Under the Israeli occupation, Palestine's viability has been squeezed to the limit.

We note with great concern that 18 per cent of Sector C in the West Bank has been designated by Israel as a zone for military exercises, and 50 per cent has been designated for other purposes — effectively closing off the area for Palestinian construction, economic and development activities.

In defiance of opposition from the international community, Israel has been entrenched in its plan to advance more than 4,000 housing units in various areas, including Kiryat Arba and Shilo, thereby threatening the eviction of 1,200 Palestinians from Masafer Yatta.

What is more concerning is that the continued expansion of settlements has encroached upon Palestinian land and natural resources, violating Palestine's right to self-determination and making a geographically contiguous, independent and sovereign State of Palestine ever-more elusive. Every brutal inch of settlement expansion is making the prospect of a two-State solution that much harder to achieve. We urge Israel to stop flouting resolution 2334 (2016), cease all settlement activities and refrain from further undermining the foundation for the two-State solution.

Over the most recent period, the security situation in the occupied territories remained volatile. We strongly condemn the continued violence by the Israeli security forces and the settlers, which has resulted in heavy Palestinian casualties, including children. Six weeks ago, Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was killed while reporting on Israeli security forces operations in the West Bank city of Jenin. The Council expressed its condemnation of that incident in a press statement (SC/14891). We take note that a few days ago, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said that it was the Israeli security forces that opened fire, killing Abu Akleh and injuring her colleague. We urge Israel to launch a criminal investigation into this incident as soon as possible and to release its findings in order to ensure accountability and provide justice to the victims, as well as to explain itself before the international community, which it must do.

The question of Palestine is a litmus test of international justice and fairness. A number of Member States attended the pledging conference organized by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) last week. While the fact that UNRWA has been in operation for more than 70 years is an indication of the international community's solidarity with the Palestinian refugees, unfortunately it also means that for more than 70 years the question of Palestine has remained unresolved and international justice has been denied.

The Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, recalled at the pledging conference that in Gaza, a 12-year-old child has lived through four armed conflicts and lived all her or his life under blockade. How can we make a generation that has grown up in a context of conflict, violence and the blockade believe in peace and the future? It is a matter that calls for the serious attention and consideration by the international community, including the Security Council.

It has been shown repeatedly that the question of Palestine is the crux of peace in the Middle East. Piecemeal crisis management is not a substitute for a comprehensive and just settlement. Limited economic and humanitarian measures cannot erase political and security debt, while individual national policies cannot replace a long-established international consensus and multilateral process, including the resolutions adopted one after another by the Security Council and the General Assembly.

What is needed for the time being is urgent and decisive action to prevent the complete derailment of progress on the Palestinian and Israeli situation. We call upon the international community, especially those with significant influence on the parties concerned, to make genuine efforts to advance the peace process in the Middle East. We must promote the two-State solution with the utmost urgency, rather than waiting for ripe conditions for dialogue.

We must adhere to the concept of the indivisibility of security, giving equal importance to the security concerns of both parties, rather than tacitly allowing one side's security to be founded on the insecurity of the other. We must also persevere in maintaining a responsible approach, rather than allowing policy uncertainty and reversals to further complicate the peace process. Ultimately, we must abandon the double standards and uphold an objective and impartial position rather than engage in the long-term practice of creating roadblocks for the Council's handling of the Israeli-Palestinian question.

From 23 to 24 June, the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) held the fourteenth BRICS Summit and issued the Beijing declaration, in which the leaders of those five countries reiterated their support for peace and prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa and called on the international community to support peace efforts in the Middle East.

As a responsible member of the international community, China will always support peace and justice, human conscientiousness and fairness, and the right side of history. We will firmly support the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights and will continue to make unremitting efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and sustainable peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, for his report on Israel's settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We are concerned about the continuation, and even the escalation, of unilateral measures leading to irreversible steps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the past year, Israel approved the construction of more than 12,000 housing units and more than 1,000 Palestinian homes were demolished. The Israeli

authorities' plans to double by 2026 the number of Israelis living in the West Bank and the occupied Golan Heights directly contradict the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Convention. In that regard, we reiterate Russia's unwavering position that it does not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which is an integral part of Syria.

We regret to note that the level of violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem continue to increase steadily, including through the harassment of Christians and Muslims and the imposition of restrictions on their access to the holy sites.

At the same time, arbitrary arrests of Palestinians and the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli armed forces continued during so-called operations that often targeted women and children. The killing of *Al-Jazeera* correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh on 11 May, while she was covering the Israeli army's operation in Jenin, is also revealing. We note the conclusions of the representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, following their analysis of that tragic incident, that the responsibility for the killing of the journalist lies with the Israeli army.

On 10 June, the Israeli Air Force once again launched strikes against Syria, targeting Damascus International Airport. The airfield sustained serious damage and the runway was damaged, resulting in the suspension of all flights, including humanitarian flights.

Israel seems to have been given *carte blanche* to take unilateral unlawful actions in the region, with the tacit consent of Washington, which has effectively blocked any chance of reviving the peace process. In return, our colleagues in the Council seek to impose economic peace on the Palestinians without allowing them to create their own independent State or satisfy their legitimate aspirations.

The fact that the international community is essentially ignoring the systematic violations of Palestinian rights is a clear reflection of Western countries' double standards regarding the provisions of international humanitarian law and the protection of human rights, which we are also experiencing with respect to the situation in Ukraine.

We believe that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can be resolved only on the basis of the universally recognized two-State formula.

In addition, a sustainable long-term solution will not be possible without achieving inter-Palestinian unity. In that regard, we support Egypt's initiatives and Algeria's plans to host the next round of talks between the representatives of Fatah and Hamas. Our proposal to use the Moscow platform also remains on the table.

Under the current circumstances, it is essential to continue to provide comprehensive humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in need, both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and in neighbouring Arab countries. In that regard, we support the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as the main international entity for the provision of assistance to Palestinians in the areas of education, health care, social services and improving infrastructure and living conditions in the refugee camps.

Mr. Ragutthalli (India): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

Resolution 2334 (2016) reaffirmed the international community's commitment to the two-State solution, called upon parties to prevent all acts of violence against civilians and demanded that all settlement activities cease. It also underscored the need to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations.

We remain deeply concerned by developments in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza. Violent attacks and the killing of civilians took many Palestinian and Israeli lives during the reporting period. Acts of destruction and provocation also continued. We have consistently advocated against all acts of violence and reiterate our call for the complete cessation of violence.

We are also following the developments in Masafer Yatta with concern. Tensions have risen over the potential legal eviction of Palestinian families. Other unilateral measures that unduly alter the status quo on the ground and undercut the viability of the two-State solution must be eschewed. It is extremely important for the international community and the Council to send a strong message against any step that could prevent the possibility of durable peace between Israel and Palestine.

We take note of the Israeli initiative to increase the number of work permits to work in Israel for Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. More needs to

be considered to alleviate the humanitarian situation. Dialogue among the relevant stakeholders is needed.

The continued precarious financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains a matter of concern, as the lack of funding to the Agency can adversely affect the delivery of humanitarian services to the Palestinian refugee community in Palestine and elsewhere. At the meeting Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to UNRWA held last week, we reiterated our commitment to support the Agency through our annual financial contributions. India has already contributed \$20 million over the past four years and has also pledged \$5 million for UNRWA's 2022 programme budget. As a member of the UNRWA Advisory Commission, we also actively participated at its recent meeting in Lebanon.

India's financial assistance to UNRWA and its developmental partnership with Palestinian Authority to support its nation-building efforts reflect India's firm and unwavering commitment to the peaceful resolution of the Palestine issue. India has consistently called for direct peace negotiations between the parties, which, we believe, is the best path towards achieving the goal of a two-State solution. Such negotiations must be based on the internationally agreed framework, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for statehood and Israel's legitimate security concerns. The absence of direct talks on key political issues has asymmetrical costs for Israelis and Palestinians and does not augur well for long-term peace in the region.

India has always supported a negotiated two-State solution leading to the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders side by side at peace with Israel. India will continue to support all efforts towards achieving a comprehensive and lasting two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and stands ready to contribute constructively to such efforts.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his important briefing to the Security Council this morning pursuant to resolution 2334 (2016). I also thank him for highlighting the measures being taken by the United Nations and other stakeholders to restore calm between the key parties and work towards a peaceful solution of

the protracted conflict, which has negatively impacted not only Israel and Palestine, but the entire Middle East region.

The briefing of the Special Coordinator to the Council is quite troubling. It reflects a further departure from the Council's expectation in 2016 that its call for Israel to cease its settlement activities would have been complied with in the facilitation of the peace and security necessary to launch a credible negotiation process on all final-status issues in the Middle East Peace process.

My delegation is particularly concerned that the period under review has seen the highest increase in the number of settlement activities since October 2020 and deeply regrets the 12 May decision of the Israeli authorities to approve plans to move forward and build more than 4,000 housing units in various locations in the West Bank. Equally of concern is the risk of the forced eviction of approximately 1,200 Palestinians, including more than 500 children, from a cluster of Palestinian villages in the West Bank area of Masafer Yatta.

We therefore call for the utmost restraint in settlement activities which, as all of us can observe, do not enhance the security of Israel or the prospects for peace and stability. In that regard, we recall the Israeli authorities' duty to take significant steps consistent with the transition covered by prior agreements, especially against expansion projects, evictions and demolitions, which undermine the prospects of achieving a two-State solution.

We also express our concern about the recent spate of killings of more than 60 Palestinians and call on the Israeli authorities to thoroughly investigate all incidents involving the alleged disproportionate use of force against Palestinians, in accordance with its obligations and responsibilities under international humanitarian law. Accountability is required to repair the broken trust necessary for direct negotiations between the parties.

The Middle East Peace process cannot be put back on track on the rails of insecurity, instability and mistrust. The recent spate of terrorism in Israel therefore cannot under any circumstances be considered useful to the Palestinian cause. We reiterate our unequivocal condemnation of all such acts of terrorism and aver that no justification can enable overlooking such acts. We encourage the Palestinian leadership to demonstrate zero-tolerance for such acts, as well as all parties to condemn all forms of violence.

As a Council, we have the responsibility to assist the parties to adopt measures that would help de-escalate the situation on the ground when they themselves are unable to do so in a way that fosters peace and stability. In that regard, we must live up to our historical responsibility for the benefit of both the Palestinian and the Israeli people, who deserve to live side by side in peace side, as envisaged in the two-State solution.

In conclusion, Ghana calls on both parties to show maximum restraint and refrain from unilateral actions that could escalate tensions and undermine the peace and mutual trust that are urgently needed, first, to stabilize the situation and reverse negative trends on the ground and, secondly, create the conditions of peace and stability necessary for subsequent negotiations and for reinvigorating credible negotiations for the two-State solution and all final-status issues related to the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Costa Filho (Brazil): Allow me to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Brazil remains concerned about the continuous incidents of violence involving Israelis and Palestinians. The mounting tension that was witnessed this past month, with the string of attacks against Israeli citizens and military raids in Palestinian territories, came to a head with rocket fire targeting Israeli territory. We deplore any terrorist attack and thoroughly condemn the launching of rockets that put civilians in harm's way.

Brazil urges the parties to refrain from any acts that could further incite violence and tensions in the region. That includes the use of dangerous and hateful rhetoric, as well as unilateral actions that can jeopardize reaching a negotiated two-State solution. De-escalating the situation on the ground and rebuilding trust and confidence are urgent measures needed to rekindle the peace process.

Brazil is also concerned about the Palestinian Authority's financial crisis. A broad political process cannot thrive in the absence of appropriate economic conditions. In that regard, coordinated international assistance to provide the Palestinian Authority with a fiscal footing must be an integral part of the efforts for peace and stability. It is equally important to address the structural impediments imposed on the Palestinian economy, which needs support to strengthen its industrial and agricultural production.

Moreover, with regard to financial resources, we lament the chronic challenges faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In lacking the means to mobilize the necessary funds, it falls short of providing the protection and assistance that the United Nations mandates. As the global scenario currently demonstrates, the insufficiency of economic aid for the region is less a matter of financial availability than it is of political priority. Despite budgetary constraints at the national level, Brazil has made efforts to respond to UNRWA's appeals for funding. Last week, we were pleased to announce an additional financial contribution. We support the renewal of UNRWA's mandate at the next session of the General Assembly.

On a more positive note, Brazil praises concrete initiatives aiming to provide economic opportunities for Palestinian workers in Israel. We welcome the resumption of the policy of setting quotas for Palestinians from Gaza and expect to see more initiatives in that regard, given their longer-term benefits for economic integration.

Concerning the electoral scenario in Palestine, Brazil commends Palestine's Central Election Commission for successfully concluding the voting processes for local councils. We continue to believe that presidential and legislative elections would further contribute to political stability in the region. Brazil encourages intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which is a crucial step to resume a genuine dialogue in the peace process. The full and equal participation of women should also be sought.

There is no alternative to a genuine commitment to the two-State solution, as Mr. Wennesland reminded us today. We expect a reconciled Palestinian Government and the incoming Israeli leadership to renew their efforts towards a legitimate political process and to show openness and flexibility in that endeavour.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his remarks.

It is clear from the Secretary-General's report that resolution 2334 (2016) is not being implemented. Settlement-building, demolitions and evictions have continued since 2016. We are especially concerned about plans to demolish several villages in the Masafer Yatta area and, as we have heard from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Israel has already started military training in

the area. The inhabitants are vulnerable and have lived there for generations. If those plans are carried out, the humanitarian consequences will be dire, and 1,200 residents — over 500 of whom are children — will lose everything, including their homes, schools and access to water.

Let me reiterate that all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition of the occupied areas are in violation of international humanitarian law. We therefore urge Israel to refrain from carrying out this plan. Furthermore, we repeat our call on the Israeli authorities to halt all settlement expansions, evictions and demolitions.

We underscore that all civilians, including children, must be protected. Everyone has the right to live in security. Let me also highlight the high number of Palestinian civilians killed this year. Of the 48 Palestinians killed between January and May, 14 were children. That situation is untenable and cannot continue. Security forces must act proportionally and in line with international law.

There have also been several terror attacks, killing 10 Israeli and three foreign civilians. Let me reiterate Norway's condemnation of all forms of terrorism. We also condemn rockets and attacks from Gaza towards Israel. We recognize Israel's need to defend itself against such attacks, while underlining that any measures taken must comply with international law.

I shall now turn to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Agency's funding crisis — as well as increased food prices globally — has the potential for dramatic consequences, including for regional stability. UNRWA plays a critical role in promoting the rights and serving the essential needs of Palestinian refugees. We urge donors to increase their contributions, and we support increased cooperation with other organizations within the limits of UNRWA's mandate.

Norway also remains deeply concerned by the Palestinian Authority's ongoing financial crisis. We are committed to working with the parties to move the Palestinian Authority onto a firmer fiscal footing. We encourage the parties and development partners to implement all commitments made during the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians held in Brussels in May. We also welcome the recent expansion

of the approved quota for Palestinians from both Gaza and the West Bank to enter Israel for work.

Let me conclude by reiterating Norway's commitment to the two-State solution, whereby Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side, in peace and prosperity. That is the only viable solution to secure the rights and safety of both peoples. Norway will continue to work towards that goal.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I wish to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing today.

In resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council reiterated its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and that it fully respect all of its legal obligations in that regard. The assessment in the Secretary-General's report in relation to the Security Council's demand is clear and stark: no such steps were taken during the reporting period, as settlement activities continued. That is simply unacceptable.

I reiterate the long-standing position of Ireland and the European Union (EU) that settlements are illegal under international law; that they constitute a major obstacle to peace; and that they gravely undermine the prospects of a two-State solution. Yet again, the reports of Special Coordinator Wennesland and the Secretary-General have highlighted the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, with the highest number of settlement units advanced since October 2020.

In 2021, only 10 building permits were granted for Palestinians, as compared to 2,526 housing starts in settlements. Israel's cessation of further settlement-building could preserve the possibility of an eventual negotiated solution between the parties. Israel must also cease evictions and demolitions, including of donor-funded structures, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

I reiterate Ireland's position on the decision last month on the Masafer Yatta eviction case in the South Hebron Hills in the occupied West Bank. That increases the risk of the forcible transfer of some 1,150 Palestinians and the demolition of their homes. The establishment of a firing zone is not an imperative military reason to transfer a population under occupation. We are also concerned by reports of increased movement restrictions for the communities and those providing humanitarian assistance.

In resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council calls for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror. Ireland condemns all acts of violence. There has been a horrible series of attacks against civilians in Israel. In addition, the killings of Palestinians, including children, in Jenin and elsewhere is becoming all too frequent. During the reporting period, the Israeli security forces killed nine children. Those responsible must be held accountable, and the Council must do more to address the issue. Ireland condemns recent attacks from the Gaza Strip. It is imperative that all parties strive to maintain the calm.

More needs to be done to alleviate the humanitarian situation, facilitate economic development and lift the blockade, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). Ireland is also gravely concerned by the situation in the West Bank. Economic hardship is increasing for the Palestinian people in the context of rising fuel and food prices, while the Palestinian Authority's fiscal position remains very difficult. The increased encroachment of settlements on land and natural resources, especially on water, also undermines Palestinian economic potential. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East plays a vital role and must get sufficient support. Ireland and its EU partners will continue to play our part.

The Palestinian Authority has an important role to play. Ireland therefore calls on the Palestinian Authority to do more to intensify the process towards elections, as Special Coordinator Wennesland has already said, to strive towards Palestinian reconciliation and reduce levels of tension and violence in whatever ways it can.

Ireland shares Tor Wennesland's concerns at the tensions in Jerusalem and the unacceptable challenges to the status quo at the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif. The custodian role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is essential and must be fully respected.

In a context of flagrant violations of international law and a lack of accountability, the role of civil society becomes all the more important. Ireland's support for civil society is steadfast, and we reiterate our concern at Israel's designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terrorist organizations.

The freedom of the media is also essential. We echo the comments of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. It is deeply disturbing that the Israeli authorities have not conducted a criminal investigation into the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh.

I thank Tor Wennesland for his briefing to the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security. Ireland would welcome more regular reporting by him to the Council on the engagement and participation of women in peace and security in the region, and we would like to have a systematic analysis of the implications of the conflict, particularly the occupation, for women and girls.

In conclusion, the Council has an obligation to ensure the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We are clearly failing in our duty to do that.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. Given the views expressed and the content of the Secretary-General's most recent report, we must regret the fact that no progress has been made in implementing resolution 2334 (2016), since the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory continues. As mentioned, those Israeli settlements are illegal under international law and represent an obstacle to the two-State solution. We echo the calls for a halt to activities such as eviction and the destruction or demolition of Palestinian property, as well as population transfers.

In that regard, we reiterate the call for the Supreme Court to reverse the 4 May ruling on Masafer Yatta, which threatens the forced displacement of 1,200 Palestinians.

Given the steadily increasing number of violent incidents on both sides, it is impossible to claim that the status quo equates to maintaining peace, and neither is it an option to settle for managing the conflict. The volatility on the ground makes it clear that the root causes remain unaddressed.

However, such frustration cannot be used as a justification for indiscriminate attacks. Mexico strongly condemns the firing of missiles and incendiary devices from Gaza into Israeli urban centres.

We also urge the Israeli security forces to avoid the disproportionate use of force. The Security Council should call on Palestinian and Israeli leaders alike to refrain from provocations and incitement to violence, as well as the use of inflammatory rhetoric.

The number of Palestinian minors detained by Israeli law enforcement agencies is also a cause for alarm. The detention of minors must be a last resort, and those currently in detention should be released.

Furthermore, we reiterate the calls of the Council and the Secretary-General for an independent investigation into the murder of the journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Those responsible for that must be brought to justice.

The success of the Palestinian agenda contributes to the prosperity and security of Israelis. However, the lack of structural reforms hampers the multiplier effect of the contributions that donor countries and United Nations agencies provide to the Palestinian territories.

Progress on the economic front must be accompanied by parallel steps conducive to an inclusive political dialogue that effectively contributes to resolving the issues. In that regard, we emphasize the importance of holding free and transparent general elections in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem as soon as possible and of promoting the broad participation of the Palestinian population, in particular women and young people.

I am pleased to report that, on 23 June, the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation delivered essential medical equipment and supplies to the hospital of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Qalqiliya, in the West Bank. That will improve the capacities of the emergency services of a hospital that primarily serves Palestinian refugees. My delegation expresses its appreciation for UNRWA's humanitarian and stabilizing role.

In conclusion, I reaffirm Mexico's position on the two-State solution, which addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and the establishment of a sovereign and politically and economically independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing and overview of the Secretary-General's report.

As regards the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), there has unfortunately been no meaningful progress since its adoption five years ago. The objectives of that resolution speak to the urgency of stabilizing the situation and reversing the negative trends on the ground, which are undermining the prospects of the two-State solution and the creation of conditions for

successful final-status negotiations, which remain largely unimplemented.

Today, and as reflected in the Secretary-General's report, we heard about the evolving situation on the ground, including in Masafer Yatta.

Cycles of tensions at the holy sites and in and around the Old City persist, propelled by incitement, provocations and inflammatory rhetoric. Settlements, demolitions and evictions continue to increase at an alarming rate in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in violation of international law.

Violence and clashes characterize day-to-day living in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem — a normalization that should not be acceptable.

Today we also heard the disturbing statistics flowing from violent incidents and fatalities involving children and young people.

In line with resolution 2334 (2016), Kenya continues to condemn, and call for accountability and strengthened efforts to combat, the continuing wave of terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militant groups in Israel.

We also call for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians that have tragically claimed both Israeli and Palestinian lives, including the recent incidents in Jenin. Such instances all point to the need to look beyond expressions of concern and the listing of incidents.

As Kenya has stated before, while the quarterly reports remain essential in keeping the Security Council informed, there is a need to present broader trends and provide a sober analysis of their implications in the context of the current realities on the ground, including the prospects for the two-State solution whereby Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines.

More important, while recognizing the importance of direct negotiations and irrespective of the existence or resumption of such negotiations, the report, in line with paragraph 11 of resolution 2334 (2016), should present clear objectives, timelines and feasible solutions to resolve pending issues in a way that will better position the Council to examine practical ways and means to secure the full implementation of its relevant resolutions on this protracted conflict.

That is not to say that the onus of ending the conflict lies solely with the Security Council. The uniqueness of resolution 2334 (2016) lies in the fact that it is propositional, not prescriptive. Indeed, its implementation requires the political will of both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities if it is to succeed. That is the only way to bring about political traction on the ground immediately, not just in future.

Kenya recognizes and commends the progress made through regional mediation efforts, including calls to ensure resilient, united and representative governance institutions for stability.

We take note of the steps taken by the Israeli Government to approve work permits and improve the regular flow of goods and people through the Gaza crossings, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). Addressing the economic isolation of Gaza from the wider regional and global economy will be critical to the peace, security and stability of the broader Middle East region.

The just-concluded pledging conference for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East further reinforced its vital role in providing humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance within Gaza and the broader Palestinian population in extremely difficult circumstances.

We therefore reiterate the need for all concerned parties, in the interest of the promotion of peace and security, to support the daily dividends of constructive grass-roots efforts in mitigating against cycles of conflict practically and consistently.

Here Kenya would like to commend the Special Coordinator's participation in the 24 June meeting of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, which highlighted the gender dimensions of this file, including the call for a strengthened role of local women in peace processes and cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli women peacebuilders.

In conclusion, Kenya once again urges both parties to exert collective efforts to launch peacebuilding and peacemaking processes that will demonstrate a political commitment to the desirable and obtainable objectives of resolution 2334 (2016).

Ms. Shaheen (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his thorough briefing and significant efforts.

Five years ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), with a view to reaffirming the position of the international community demanding an end to all Israeli settlement activities as an imperative to salvage the two-State solution. Regrettably, however, the Secretary-General's latest report notes the persistence of negative trends on the ground, including the construction and expansion of settlements, demolitions and forced displacement — the most notable of which was the decision regarding the displacement of Palestinians from Masafer Yatta in the West Bank — and the threat to demolish homes in various parts of East Jerusalem.

We note that the construction and expansion of settlements jeopardizes the geographical contiguity of the occupied Palestinian territory and affects the lives of the population, especially women and children, including by limiting their movement and by depriving farmers of access to their land and water sources. Those settlements are also points of tension and are among the factors that perpetuate violence. They also undermine peace efforts and constitute a violation of international law and United Nations resolutions.

On a larger scale, and as Mr. Wennesland highlighted, the security and political situations continue to deteriorate, especially in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as events have exacerbated current tensions, threatening to ignite violence at any moment. As the Secretary-General makes clear in his report, those situations are becoming more dangerous in the absence of prospects for peace and the failure to address root causes of the conflict. It must be emphasized here the necessity to abide by resolution 2334 (2016) regarding the prevention of all acts of violence against civilians, as well as all acts of provocation, incitement and destruction, especially in the light of those escalating tensions.

Against that backdrop, the fragile situation should not be left unaddressed. Regional and international diplomatic efforts must be intensified to ensure that proactive measures are taken that maintain calm and contribute to creating an environment conducive to peace. In that regard, we look forward to the upcoming visit of United States President Biden to the region next month, especially his visits to Israel and Palestine. We believe also that strengthening cooperation between the parties at all levels would contribute to building trust between them and give way to credible negotiations.

In the context of the worsening humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in the Gaza Strip, amid a spike in commodity prices, we stress the importance of alleviating those conditions by taking concrete measures to revive the economy and facilitate the movement of workers and trade flows. We reiterate the United Arab Emirates ongoing and historical commitment to support the brotherly Palestinian people, including with humanitarian aid and support for the health and education sectors.

We welcome last Friday's meeting of the Security Council's Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, which focused for the first time on the peace process in the Middle East and highlighted the status of Palestinian women and their contributions to peace and security. There was also consensus on the need to pay greater attention to strengthening the role of Palestinian women in that field and empowering them in various sectors, given their vital role in building peaceful and stable societies.

In conclusion, my country reiterates its firm and supportive position for achieving the two-State solution, which calls for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State based on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace, security and mutual recognition.

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

I thank the Special Coordinator for his update on the situation on the ground.

We meet every month to discuss the situation in the Middle East and the state of play of the peace process. The key message that we highlight over and over again is the absolute need to do everything in our power to break the cycle of violence and prevent a further intensification of the conflict.

We firmly believe that full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) is a vital means to that end. We reiterate it today, with a sense of urgency, in a situation when the peace process remains stalled. Resolution 2334 (2016) established that settlements in Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, constitute a violation under international law and a major obstacle to the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders.

We observe with regret that that landmark resolution has not been implemented and that settlements have continued to expand, dimming hopes for a meaningful peaceful resolution, which is a precondition for peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians, living in two States, a viable Palestine State that lives in peace with a democratic Israel, with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

We have said it before and will continue to say it loud and clear: the security of Israel will never be in question. But settlements do not contribute to the security of Israel. Settlements lead to violence and loss of lives on both sides.

Israel is a democracy. The backbone of every democracy is the rule of law. Albania remains fully committed to the rule of law domestically and internationally.

We remain deeply concerned about the threats to the preservation of the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem and incendiary and hate speech that further exacerbates tensions. Hate speech and incitement to violence should not be tolerated anywhere. They have even less place in the holy sites and should be condemned universally and unequivocally.

We are also deeply troubled by the increase in everyday violence. We strongly condemn terrorism in all its forms and incitement to commit such heinous acts. We therefore support the legitimate right of Israel to defend itself against such acts, with due regard to proportionality and the protection of civilians.

Demolitions and evictions, including in Masafer Yatta, can and should be prevented, as they turn the lives of people upside down and only exacerbate the animosity and distrust between both peoples.

The killing of Shireen Abu Akleh and the storming of her funeral procession by the Israeli police require an independent and impartial investigation to establish the truth. Truth brings trust. We urge both the Palestinian and Israeli authorities to cooperate in carrying out a thorough, fair and impartial investigation, so as to ensure accountability, as called for by the Security Council.

The troubled history of the Middle East tells us that the extreme sensitivity and fragility of the situation has always been easily exploited by those who do not want peace and do not work for peace. Regrettably, with time, their grip has strengthened. We should not have to contemplate this dangerous predicament, which

could transform the prospects of a peaceful solution from a wish into a souvenir. This bleak outlook is a cry for the resumption of peaceful negotiations on the bases of the legal framework created by the United Nations and relevant regional initiatives, and we very much look forward to the visit of President Biden in the region. That is why we welcome all initiatives to unblock the status quo, including by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which met in Brussels last month, and the measures taken but the Israeli Government to expand the issuance of work permits to Palestinians.

We also commend the vital support that the European Union is giving to the Palestinian people, including to the United Nations Relief and Works

Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Such measures will never be enough; they are not really game-changers. Yet they are important since they help reverse the negative trends and keep the hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflict alive. The Palestinians and Israelis have suffered enough from this tragic conflict. They all need peace. We must do whatever we can to help them achieve that end.

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 11.35 a.m.