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Provisional

President: Mr. Vershinin/Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Spasse
Brazil	Mrs. Espeschit Maia
China	Ms. Wang Yingtong
Ecuador	Mr. Egas Benavides
France	Mrs. Morghad
Gabon	Mr. Doumbeneny Ndzigina
Ghana	Mr. Osei-Mensah
Japan	Mr. Nishiyama
Malta	Mr. De Bono Sant Cassia
Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Ms. Tantawy
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Gibbon
United States of America	Mr. Postel

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to conclude its work on time.

I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, for holding this important meeting, presided over by His Excellency Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. I would like also to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing. I would highly recognize and welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Khalifa Shaheen Al Marar, Minister of State of the sisterly United Arab Emirates, and His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the sisterly State of Palestine.

We are meeting at a critical juncture for the Palestinian question, especially for Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Unfortunately, we are currently witnessing escalating tension in the city of Jerusalem owing to the stalemate of and the disrespect for the Middle East peace process, which is mainly characterized by the desecration of the holy sites and the spread of the culture of violence and hatred throughout the region. Moreover, the unilateral and systematic measures in violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions and the provocative actions that undermine the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people undermine the two-State solution agreed by the international community. On 5 April, the Kingdom of Morocco condemned the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli forces, their aggression against the worshippers and their terrorization of them during the holy month of Ramadan. The Kingdom of Morocco under His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, has underscored the need to respect the legal, religious and historical status quo in the city of Jerusalem and the holy sites, while rejecting all practices and violations that will lead only to undermining the peace prospects in the region. The Kingdom of Morocco stressed its rejection to such practices, which will further complicate the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and undermine the efforts made to de-escalate the situation and rebuild confidence.

His Majesty King Mohammed VI, as Chair of Al-Quds Committee, continues to spare no effort at the political and diplomatic levels and on the ground to preserve the distinctive status quo of that Holy City. In that context, His Majesty stressed in the appeal signed by His Majesty King Mohammed VI and His Holiness Pope Francis regarding Jerusalem during his visit to the Kingdom of Morocco on 30 March 2019 the need to maintain the legal, cultural and religious status quo of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as it is a common heritage of humankind and a symbol of peaceful coexistence for the three Abrahamic religions. The Al-Quds Committee is tirelessly assuming its political and practical role in supporting the Palestinian people in general and the inhabitants of Al-Quds in particular. It combines the political efforts made by His Majesty King Mohammed VI with the field work undertaken by the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Agency upon Royal instructions. As the field arm of the Al-Quds Committee, the Agency continues to pursue its mission, namely, to protect the Holy City within the framework of its annual plan, taking every measure necessary to ensure its funding with the participation of Al-Quds inhabitants. The Kingdom of Morocco will fund more than 86 per cent of the Agency's budget.

In 2022, the Agency managed to carry out a number of projects in the city of Al-Quds, for \$3.2 million, in many fields, including social assistance, health, education, housing, youth, sports and culture. In 2023, the Agency launched its programme for the month of Ramadan, which cost more than \$200,000.

The valuable and relentless efforts undertaken by His Majesty King Mohammed VI as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee are appreciated and commanded by the Palestinian leadership and people along with the international community, as attested to by the statement delivered this morning on behalf of the Group of Arab States and the statements to be delivered on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Those statements only reiterate the resolutions and declarations that were adopted by those groups at the level of their Heads of State and Foreign Ministers.

The Kingdom of Morocco reiterates its full solidarity with the legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people based on international legitimacy and the two-State solution, as recognized by the international community, with a view to establishing an independent Palestinian State, along the 4 June 1967

borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, a viable State living side by side with Israel in security, safety and peace.

The Palestinian question will continue to be the key to peace and stability in the Middle East region. That is why it should be decoupled from whatever undermines its importance and kept apart from futile political considerations by certain parties that should have defended the Palestinian question but, instead, subjected it to bilateral disputes that they have fabricated in order to serve hostile and geopolitical agendas that unfortunately negatively affect the Arab and Islamic stance in support of the Palestinian question. Staying away from those agendas was the request of the Palestinian leadership.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat the message delivered on 12 February by His Majesty Mohammed VI at the high-level conference held in Cairo to support the city of Jerusalem:

“Since we believe that peace in the Middle East region is an inevitable strategic option, the Kingdom of Morocco will continue to spare no effort and to leverage all its capabilities and distinguished relations with all parties and international stakeholders to contribute to all international efforts to resume dialogue and negotiations, as that is the only way to put an end to the conflict and to achieve security, stability and prosperity in the Middle East region.”

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): Pakistan commends the Russian presidency for convening this timely debate on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We welcome the participation of Foreign Minister Lavrov in this meeting, and we also welcome the Foreign Minister of Palestine.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan condemns Israel's brutal crackdown during the holy month of Ramadan, using stun grenades and tear gas against innocent Muslim worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is Islam's the third-holiest site. Violation of its sanctity offends Muslim across the world.

Israel's actions are in violation of the historical and legal status quo. They violate the right to the freedom of worship, enshrined in article 18 of the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and endorsed by General Assembly resolution 36/55, of 1981.

International law, furthermore, unequivocally restricts Israel, the occupying Power, from seizing land and building settlements in occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. Resolutions 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), inter alia, prohibit Israel from altering the demographic composition of Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.

In a recent statement, the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living and on the human rights of internally displaced persons, stressed, inter alia, that:

“Palestinians under Israeli occupation continue to be forced out of their homes and dispossessed of their land and properties on the basis of discriminatory laws. Israel's transfer of its own population into the occupied territory confirms a deliberate intention to colonize the territory it occupies — a practice strictly prohibited by international humanitarian law. It amounts to a *prima facie* war crime”.

Pakistan welcomed the adoption of General Assembly resolution 77/400, which seeks an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Security Council, once it receives that opinion, will have to adopt further measures to ensure full compliance with international law.

In particular, Israel must comply with its international obligation to respect the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Given the *erga omnes* character of the right to self-determination, it is also incumbent on all States, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, to ensure that any impediment to the exercise by the Palestinian people of its right to self-determination be immediately brought to an end.

The international community cannot accept the fait accompli that Israel is seeking to impose in order to destroy Palestinian nationhood. There will be no durable peace in the Holy Land until we see the creation of an independent, viable and contiguous State of Palestine, established on the basis of pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Despite Israel's illegal and disruptive actions, the Middle East witnessed several positive developments in recent months. Pakistan warmly welcomes to the normalization of relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. We commend the sincere and successful efforts made by the leadership of the People's Republic of China to make that historic diplomatic breakthrough possible.

Pakistan also welcomes the diplomatic and political measures initiated to restore peace and normalcy in Syria and Yemen. We hope that all the countries of the Arab and Islamic world will soon succeed in ending strife and restoring peace and stability across the Middle East and the Islamic world.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank Russia for organizing this important and timely open debate.

For 75 years, the Palestinian people have been victims of the Israeli regime's unrelenting aggression, violence and injustice. The occupation of their land continues, with cities behind a blockade, property and farm lands being destroyed and confiscated and people being forced to evacuate their homes.

Since the beginning of the year, Palestinians have been subjected to excessive violence, suppression and terror by both illegal Israeli settlers and armed forces. Those horrific acts are part of a larger pattern of systematic violations of the fundamental human rights of Palestinian people by the Israeli regime. They represent a clear violation of international law and established principles and norms of human rights.

We are deeply concerned by the repeated assaults and incursion by extremist settlers, with the support of Israeli occupation forces, against the sacred Al-Aqsa Mosque during the holy month of Ramadan. The brutal attack on worshippers, including women and children, as they recited their prayers and performed rituals in the courtyards of the Al-Aqsa Mosque is reprehensible and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. Those atrocious crimes are a clear example of the Israeli regime's illegal and apartheid actions, which have exacerbated the suffering of the Palestinian people and have eroded the foundations for the establishment of just and sustainable peace in the region.

It is regrettable that the Security Council has remained silent, rendering United Nations resolutions ineffective and leaving the Palestinian people to suffer ongoing atrocities. The absence of accountability has emboldened this despicable regime to continue violating all United Nations resolutions, including those adopted by the Security Council.

We remain steadfast in our belief that the conflict in Palestine can be resolved only through ending the occupation and recognizing the inalienable right of self-determination of the Palestinian people. This requires the full restoration and protection of these rights, leading to the establishment of Palestinian sovereignty over all of Palestine. However, such a resolution cannot be achieved if the Security Council fails to act. We call on the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility to take decisive action to bring an end to the occupation and ensure the protection of the rights of Palestinians. Mere sympathy is no longer sufficient.

The Islamic Republic of Iran regards it as its duty to support the Palestinian people's legitimate rights to resist the operations and aggression of the Israeli apartheid regime, in line with the right of self-determination. This will be its principal policy until the occupation ends.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize the importance and legal nature of the advisory opinion currently being considered by the International Court of Justice. The General Assembly adopted resolution 77/247, which calls for this opinion to address the legal consequences of Israeli ongoing violations of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination through prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of Palestinian territory. We hope that the Court's opinion will shed more light on the ongoing atrocities and violations, contribute to the end of the occupation and facilitate holding those responsible for atrocities and violations against the Palestinian people accountable for their actions.

Once again, the representative of the Israeli regime abused this Chamber and resorted to lies and fabrications to make unfounded claims against my country. It is not surprising or unexpected, given that deception and lies have long been part of his regime's tool box. The purpose is clear: to divert attention from the urgent matter on the agenda of today's meeting, namely, the atrocity crimes committed by this apartheid regime against the Palestinian people. Such false and unfounded claims do not merit a response.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to Mr. Skoog.

Mr. Skoog: I want to express our appreciation for the briefing earlier today by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and acknowledge the presence of Foreign Minister Al-Malki in the Chamber. We regret the fact that the other side has left the room and is not listening to this debate.

I speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 27 member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union and its member States are deeply concerned at the increasing violence and extremism in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, which are leading to appalling numbers of Israeli and Palestinian victims, including children. We continue to call on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to de-escalate the situation and refrain from actions that will increase tensions. We commend the efforts of the United States, Jordan, Egypt and Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process to de-escalate the situation and support commitments taken by the parties in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh. All parties should observe these commitments in good faith.

This upsurge in violence followed days of tension and clashes at the holy sites. The EU condemns the violent incidents that have occurred at the holy sites, recalls that the use of force must be proportional and calls for upholding the status quo put in place in 1967 for the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, in line with previous understandings and with respect to Jordan's special role. Underlining the necessity to respect as well as the status quo for the Christian sites, which are under increasing pressure, the EU reiterates the importance of maintaining the peaceful coexistence of the three monotheistic religions.

The EU condemns the indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza and the territories of Lebanon and Syria. We firmly condemn recent terror attacks in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, as well as all forms of terrorism. We deplore the tragic loss of lives, including those of European citizens, and we remain committed to Israel's security and the prevention of and fight against terrorism and violent extremism. There must be an immediate end to terror attacks, which should be condemned by everyone, and to the practices that support them.

In line with the EU's commitment to implementing resolution 2334 (2016) and recalling that settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible, the EU reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions taken in this context. We also condemn indiscriminate violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, including the destruction of homes and other properties. Israel must stop the expansion and legalization of settlements, prevent settler violence and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. The EU will not recognize changes to the 1967 lines unless agreed by the parties.

Military operations must be proportionate and in line with international humanitarian law. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip requires further easing of restrictions, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns.

The EU reaffirms its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition and with Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States. It is vital to restore a political horizon towards a two-State solution. Only a negotiated agreement offers a chance of security and peace for all.

On 13 February, the High Representative and Vice-President of the European Union, Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles, the Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Prince Faisal bin Farhan A.F. Al Furhan Al-Saud, and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, agreed to explore ways to revive and safeguard the prospect of the two-State solution and achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. The EU reaffirmed its proposal of an unprecedented package of economic, political and security support in the context of a final-status agreement, as endorsed in the European Council conclusions of December 2013. In this effort, we look forward to working closely with Arab and other international partners.

The EU will continue to call upon the Palestinian Authority to hold free, transparent and inclusive national elections without further delay. It urges all Palestinian factions to engage in good faith in the reconciliation process, adhere to previous agreements, renounce

violence and terrorism, recognize Israel's right to exist and commit to democratic principles, including the rule of law. Democratic Palestinian institutions based on respect for the rule of law and human rights are vital for the Palestinian people, and, ultimately, for the two-State solution.

Palestinian civil society must be allowed by all parties to carry out its important tasks freely, while freedom of expression must be upheld. The EU is proud of its continued support for civil society, which contributes to peace efforts and confidence-building between Israelis and Palestinians. We call on Israel to refrain from any action that would prevent these organizations from continuing their critical human rights, humanitarian and development work in the occupied Palestinian territory. Anti-terrorism legislation should not be used to undermine civil society and its valuable work and contributions to the pursuit of accountability.

In preparation for the next Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in Brussels on 3 and 4 May, the EU calls for implementation of the commitments made at the previous meetings.

Until there is a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the refugee issue in accordance with international law, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains crucial for providing the necessary protection and essential services for Palestine refugees and for supporting peace and stability in the region. The EU will continue to support UNRWA in all its fields of operation, including in East Jerusalem. The EU will closely monitor developments and their implications on the ground and remain ready to contribute further to the protection and the viability of the two-State solution.

I would now like to say a few words about Syria. On 15 March 2023, we marked the twelfth anniversary of the beginning of the peaceful protests throughout Syria that were brutally repressed by the Al-Assad regime, provoking a conflict that continues to this day. Adding to this tragedy, on 6 February 2023, northern Syria and Türkiye were struck by devastating earthquakes, further exacerbating the suffering of the Syrian people in the region. The President of the European Commission, Mrs. Ursula von der Leyen, and the Prime Minister of Sweden, Mr. Ulf Kristersson, co-hosted an international donor conference on 20 March, in Brussels, to support the people in Türkiye and Syria

affected by the earthquakes. Some €50 million in grants were pledged for Syria. Following the earthquake, the European Union has allocated €100 million, out of which €75 million are for humanitarian assistance. The emergency response includes the distribution of food, tents, blankets and medical assistance.

The European Union and its member States are the largest donor and since 2011 have provided €27.4 billion to meet the needs arising from the Syrian crisis, including more than €4.8 billion at the sixth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region. Syria will continue to be a high priority for us. We will host a seventh Brussels Conference on 15 June, preceded by a day of dialogue with civil society, in order to both focus international pressure for a political solution to the conflict and to generate pledges of humanitarian support for Syria and in support of Syrian refugees and their host communities in the region. We are looking forward to welcoming the international community to the Brussels Conference and call for everyone's continued generosity and support.

The European Union remains persuaded that the only path to sustainable peace for Syria is a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015), with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and in line with the 2012 Geneva communiqué (see S/2012/522, annex). After more than a decade of conflict, it is essential that the international community continue to pursue a sustainable and comprehensive political solution in Syria. The EU stands firm in its commitment to that goal, supporting the continued efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen to make progress on all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015), including his steps-for-steps approach in furthering the political process and a resumption of the work of the Constitutional Committee. We reiterate again that no normalization, lifting of sanctions or reconstruction will be possible until the Syrian regime engages in a credible, sustainable and inclusive political transition within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). In the light of the recent earthquakes, the EU notes the humanitarian exemptions in place for United Nations sanctions within the framework of resolution 2664 (2022).

Accountability and justice for victims is essential for a stable, peaceful Syria. All the parties responsible for breaches of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights, including sexual and gender-based violence, must be held accountable. We reiterate our call to have the situation in Syria referred to the International Criminal Court. In the absence of

international justice proceedings, the prosecution of war crimes and other serious crimes under national jurisdictions, where possible — and which is now under way in several EU member States — represents a crucial contribution towards securing justice, as does the Dutch-Canadian initiative to hold Syria to account for breaching the United Nations Convention against Torture. We will continue to support efforts to gather evidence with a view to possible future legal action, including by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria and the work of the Commission of Inquiry.

The EU commends Syria's neighbours for hosting large numbers of refugees for more than a decade. We would like to remind everyone that the underlying causes of the refugee and displacement crisis must be addressed under resolution 2254 (2015). We continue to warn against any further displacements in any part of Syria, as well as against the potential exploitation of such displacements for the purposes of social or demographic engineering. Syrian refugees in those neighbouring countries are still unable to go back home, since the conditions for their safe, dignified and voluntary return, in line with the parameters defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and in accordance with international law, have not been fulfilled. It is the responsibility of the Syrian regime to remove those obstacles, and we will be in a position to support returns only once those conditions are satisfied.

As we have reiterated numerous times, the Syrian regime must fully cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its investigations of the use of chemical weapons in the conflict, including the attack in Douma, as well as on the completion of the dismantling of its chemical-weapon programme. The EU, as a member of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, will continue to work to ensure full accountability in that regard.

The European Union welcomed the unanimous adoption in January of resolution 2672 (2023), mandating the continuation of United Nations cross-border assistance to Syria. The uninterrupted delivery of United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance remains vital for Syrians living in north-western Syria, and the EU will continue to advocate for all the parties to depoliticize the issue and allow the unimpeded and continued delivery of humanitarian aid to all in need. The EU noted the United Nations-brokered deal securing the opening of additional border crossings in the aftermath of the February earthquakes, and we call for continuing

to use all possible measures to secure the delivery of aid to all in need in Syria. Civilians must be protected at all times. The European Union echoes the calls by the Security Council for the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire. Türkiye's security concerns with regard to northern Syria should be addressed through political and diplomatic means, and with full respect for international humanitarian law.

Early-recovery projects are important to supporting resilience, community capacity-building and the self-reliance of the Syrian people and their future. EU-funded projects are intended and designed for those in genuine need and to strengthen the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the humanitarian response. The EU will not fund early-recovery efforts that could support social or demographic engineering.

As we reiterated in the Interactive Dialogue on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic held on 28 March with the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Union supports the establishment as soon as possible through the General Assembly of an independent mechanism to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and to provide adequate support to victims and to the families and survivors of the missing. The objective of that endeavour is humanitarian, to alleviate the pain and suffering of families whose loved ones have been living in suspense during the entire time that their loved ones have been missing. The EU welcomes the ongoing work of the other actors on the issue, including Syrian civil society, the International Commission on Missing Persons, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We emphasize the need for enhanced cooperation and look forward to engaging constructively in the upcoming discussions to establish the new mechanism.

Finally, let me say again that the EU remains committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian State and will continue to call on all the parties to the conflict, particularly the Syrian regime and its allies, to advance a credible, sustainable and inclusive political solution, based on the full and comprehensive implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), as the only route to sustainable peace in Syria and the way for Syria to once again become the united, sovereign, prosperous and free country we all want to see.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): Viet Nam is deeply concerned about the escalating violence in the West Bank and Israel, as the Special Coordinator highlighted in his briefing. If that disturbing trend continues, this year will be the deadliest since 2005. We therefore urge all the parties to exercise the utmost restraint, maintain the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem and refrain from unilateral measures and provocations.

We are also greatly troubled by the intensified settlement activities, as well as the seizures and demolitions of Palestinian-owned buildings. We urge the international community to address the ongoing forced evictions and displacement of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and to work to prevent a further escalation of the conflict. In addition, it is important to maintain access to essential services for Palestinian refugees, as well as to ensure safety during religious events and ceremonies.

The Palestinian people's prolonged deprivation of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and independence, is unacceptable. And the international community's inaction on the issue is regrettable. The consensus on a just, comprehensive and sustainable solution to the conflict is unquestionable, and we believe that multilateral, political and diplomatic tools are available to that end. In that regard, we acknowledge the recent meetings held between senior officials from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, the United States, Egypt and Jordan in Sharm El-Sheikh and Aqaba. While those discussions have led to agreements on curbing violence and improving economic conditions for Palestinians, they need to directly tackle the critical issues, such as settler violence and demolitions.

In the long term, there is no alternative to a two-State solution, with the establishment of a State of Palestine that co-exists peacefully alongside the State of Israel, with East Jerusalem as its capital and secure and internationally recognized borders based on the pre-1967 lines and negotiated settlements. Resolution 2334 (2016) outlines the essential requirements and parameters for achieving that outcome. The international community should enhance its support for a resumption of meaningful dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Viet Nam reiterates its call on all parties to commit to the peace process, abstain from violence and respect international law. We urge the

relevant stakeholders, especially the Quartet, to develop specific and urgent plans to advance the Middle East peace process.

Lastly, concerning the other tensions in the region, we commend the diplomatic efforts to contain hostilities and prevent escalation along Lebanon's southern border. We call on all parties involved to engage in constructive dialogue and cooperation to promote peace and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Pérez Ayestarán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we are grateful for the convening of this quarterly open debate, the briefing by Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the update provided by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, to whom we convey our respects.

My delegation also endorses the statement to be made by the representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We meet once again in this Chamber to address one of the most painful conflicts that has faced humankind for almost 75 years, during which time the suffering of an entire people has been prolonged and during which they have not tired, and will never tire, of demanding their rights, namely, their inalienable right to exist, their inalienable right to return to their homes and their inalienable right to live in a free, independent and sovereign State of Palestine. Those inalienable rights, however, are trampled upon day after day by the occupying Power, which in the face of the inaction of the international community, especially that of the Security Council, continues, *inter alia*, to pursue its policy of colonial occupation, apartheid and the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity. That reality has resulted from the framework of impunity that has been maintained over time by the most faithful protector of the Israeli regime, which is also a permanent member of this organ, whose mandate is precisely the maintenance of international peace and security.

In that context, it is worth recalling that only yesterday we commemorated the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, an initiative that my country took the lead on and submitted to the

General Assembly in 2018, when resolution 73/127, which established that important Day, could not be adopted by consensus owing to the unexpected call for a vote by the United States. However, the resolution was adopted by an overwhelming majority, with only two countries, Israel and the United States, voting against it. That is no surprise at all, since the resolution was totally incompatible with their positions, principles and actions. Both countries have historically been enemies of multilateralism and diplomacy, let alone peace.

In recent months, we had hoped that the recent meetings held in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh would lay the groundwork for immediately resuming the necessary political dialogue and credible, serious and direct negotiations between the parties. However, Israel chose once again to reject an opportunity to achieve peace, as illustrated by the images that the whole world recently saw, as the forces of the occupation tainted the month of April, while disregarding that it coincides with important dates for the Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths. The occupation forces have indiscriminately attacked worshippers and the civilian population in general at the entrances to the holy sites, in flagrant violation of their sanctity and the status quo.

It is clear that the situation on the ground has in no way improved since we last met (see S/PV.9246) and that it continues to deteriorate daily, as confirmed in the reports of the United Nations system, which have informed us that the occupying Power has no intention of ending the occupation; that its policies seek to take full control of the occupied Palestinian territory, including by attempting to alter its demographic character; that 2022 was one of the deadliest years for the Palestinian people since 2005; and that the first quarter of 2023 saw four times the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces than in 2022. The barbarity and brutality of Israel's forces of aggression continue unabated. The human rights of the Palestinian people continue to be systemically violated, with absolute impunity. The Palestinian people continue to be discriminated against in their own land. The arbitrary arrest and detention of innocent Palestinian civilians and journalists also continue, as do the criminalization and detention of human rights defenders and the persecution of Palestinian civil society organizations. The annexation of Palestinian land, the construction of settlements, the policy of eviction and the demolition of Palestinian homes persist unabated. Incendiary speeches inciting fanatical groups and encouraging the commission of,

inter alia, hate crimes and attacks against religious sites by Israeli settlers and security forces, as well as instances of collective punishment, such as that in the Gaza Strip, also persist.

The outlook is definitely not encouraging. And although there are those who choose not to condemn it publicly, the reality of the situation is based on putative facts, constituting a flagrant, systematic and grotesque violation of the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the most basic norms of international law. Perhaps that is the best reason for dismantling the order based on supposed rules that the United States and its allies seek to impose — an order based on alleged exceptionalism, unilateralism, supremacy, double standards and the convenient interpretation of their international obligations, all of which have no place in the framework of the founding Charter of the Organization, which is the sole set of rules accepted by the entire international community in governing its actions and relations.

From this Chamber, we call for ending the prevailing cycle of impunity that for years has only emboldened Israel to continue with its crimes; bringing to justice those who are responsible for so much pain and suffering; providing international protection for the Palestinian people; guaranteeing respect for the Charter and the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions; and ending all unilateral measures or actions that are likely to escalate tensions, remove the political horizon and further prolong the conflict.

For its part, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela will continue in its resolute commitment to all international efforts aimed at facilitating the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace with regard to the Palestinian question, based on a two-State solution, with both States living side by side in peace and security. It is time for the Palestinian people to live — not coexist or merely survive — on their own ancestral land, which is currently illegally and forcibly occupied. It is time for the promise of peace, justice and freedom that is enshrined in the Charter to be realized for those heroic people, who demand their inalienable right to self-determination and the realization of their legitimate national aspirations in their free, independent and sovereign State of Palestine, within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and as a full Member of the Organization.

Lastly, we would like to conclude our statement by acknowledging the most recent developments in Middle East dynamics, from the normalization of diplomatic relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to those between the Syrian Arab Republic and several countries of the region. We hope that those positive developments will have implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as we are certain that they will result in the realization of the aspirations for peace and justice of all the peoples of the Middle East, including those of the noble Palestinian people, as well as the withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territories that continue to be illegally occupied, including the Syrian Golan.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Muhith (Bangladesh): I would like to commend the presidency of the Russian Federation for its leadership in the work of the Council in April and for convening this very timely debate. We thank Foreign Minister Lavrov for presiding over this morning's meeting (see S/PV.9309) and we welcomed the presence of Palestinian Foreign Minister Al-Malki. I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing.

Once again, we note with deep regret that the Israeli occupation forces have continued their pattern of killing and destruction in the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel has consistently subverted international laws and international justice through its illegal policies and practices designed to establish its illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The world's most protracted denial of collective and individual rights is still under way in Palestine, including the longest isolation of an independent territory — the Gaza Strip, which has been under a blockade for nearly 16 years. Moreover, since the start of 2023 Israel has increased its military operations inside the occupied Palestinian territory. We strongly condemn the heinous attack in Nablus in February and the constant attacks, killings, ethnic cleansing and forcible transfers of Palestinians from their own land, most of them in broad daylight on the Council's watch. We deeply deplore the raid by Israeli occupying forces inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound on 4 April during the holy month of Ramadan, which resulted in hundreds of Palestinian worshippers being beaten, injured, humiliated or detained, while also damaging the building of the Qibli Mosque. We are

also very concerned about the continuing violations of the historic and legal status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem.

The international community has regularly condemned all of Israel's illegal activities and has urged Israel to respect international human rights and humanitarian law and the decisions of the United Nations. Unfortunately, those condemnations and the calls of the United Nations have gone unheeded. Israel has shown no respect for the decisions of the Security Council and is completely ignoring the international community's legitimate call for the implementation of a two-State solution. Against that backdrop, I would like to highlight a number of points.

First, I would like to point to the presidential statement of 20 February (S/PRST/2023/1), in which the Council expressed deep concern and dismay at Israel's 12 February announcement of its further construction and expansion of settlements and legalization of settlement outposts. We once again urge the Security Council to take immediate and concrete steps, as the price of continuing inaction will certainly be higher.

Secondly, we cannot overemphasize the need to ensure accountability and justice for Israel's atrocities and human rights violations to end the culture of entrenched impunity. In that regard, we welcomed the General Assembly's call in its resolution 77/247 for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legal status of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory and the consequences arising from it.

Thirdly, we are concerned about the fact that nearly 5,000 Palestinians, including 31 women and 170 children, are currently arbitrarily and illegally imprisoned in Israeli jails and detention centres and being subjected to the most inhumane treatment. We echo Palestine's call for the release of all Palestinians held captive by the Israeli occupying forces.

Fourthly, until we see the establishment of an independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, under a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders, we urge the international community to ensure protection for Palestinians on their own land and provide the necessary humanitarian assistance.

Finally, we urge the Security Council to implement all of its resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

I reiterate Bangladesh's unwavering and steadfast support for the legitimate aspirations of our Palestinian brothers and sisters.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Ms. Joyini (South Africa): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this quarterly debate, and we are also grateful to Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

South Africa is deeply concerned about the continuing levels of violence and grave attacks directed at Palestinians in recent months by Israeli settlers and Israeli occupation forces in the occupied Palestinian territory. The provocative rhetoric and brutality directed at Palestinians incites a vicious cycle of violence, resulting in intimidation and inflammatory actions. That endemic cycle of violence must be stopped and the drivers of the conflict addressed if peace is to prevail. We are therefore perturbed by the fact that those who are legally obligated to serve and protect are the initiators inciting harm and stoking the flames of provocation. As an occupying Power, Israel must abide by its obligations to ensure the protection, security and welfare of the Palestinian civilians living under its occupation in terms of international human rights and humanitarian law.

We are appalled by and have noted with grave concern the Israeli occupation forces' recent assault on Palestinian worshippers earlier this month at the Al-Aqsa Mosque during the holy month of Ramadan, as well as the illegal restrictions on worshippers praying at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during Easter. We condemn those violent and illegal acts by the Israeli Government and wish to state that such actions threaten the internationally agreed status quo in relation to Jerusalem and its sacred sites. The ubiquity of the attacks and the Israeli military's participation in the violence have deepened the atmosphere of fear and coercion. South Africa strongly condemns every act of violence and violation of religious freedom.

The actions we have witnessed in the occupied Palestinian territory since the beginning of the year do not make for an environment that is conducive to peace. Instead, they detract from the possibility of a

just settlement based on a two-State solution. Israel's decision to continue with its settlement agenda in the West Bank is of grave concern. Settlements are illegal under international law and the Security Council must address Israel's continued disregard for international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Council's own resolutions.

South Africa maintains that the selective application of international law undermines the effectiveness of collective responses to global security threats. As the organ entrusted with the maintenance of international peace, the Security Council must strengthen and uphold its responsibility to ensure accountability when international law has been violated. Israel must be held accountable for the structural violence and suffering that its occupation inflicts on Palestinians, and it continues to be of pivotal importance to ensure that the Council's decisions and resolutions are enforced. We are therefore encouraged by the decision of the General Assembly in its resolution 77/247 to request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

As the international community, we have a responsibility to work tirelessly to support Palestine and to call for an immediate and unconditional end to Israel's illegal occupation. South Africa remains committed to that just course and to promoting efforts that will result in the establishment of the two-State solution, whereby Palestinians and Israelis can live side by side in peace.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Ugarelli (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Increasing tensions, systematic violence and the deteriorating situation in East Jerusalem and several West Bank cities continue to be of serious concern to the international community. The all-too-frequent escalations of hostilities, demolitions, forced evictions and settlement expansions and the deteriorating plight of Palestinian refugees persist. As noted, acts of violence, unlawful restrictions and the widespread, indiscriminate and unnecessary use of force at the Esplanade of the Mosques in East Jerusalem have occurred in recent weeks — precisely during the holy month of Ramadan, during which a large number of Muslim worshippers congregate at the mosques for prayer — with Israeli

police violently removing Muslim worshippers. The firing of rockets into Israel in response must also be firmly denounced, as it only fuels violence.

Peru condemns all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terrorism, regardless of their origin. In such an unpredictable scenario in which there is no end to provocations, decisive efforts must be made to defuse the current situation and above all to revive the peace process through direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, with the participation of the Quartet and international mediators. We deplore all acts that violate Security Council resolutions and the historical and legal status quo of Jerusalem and its holy sites. The Government of Peru joins the call of the international community for full respect for the historical and legal status quo of the Christian and Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem. It is imperative that the powers and prerogatives of custodianship and access over the holy sites conferred by international law on the Kingdom of Jordan be fully respected. Jerusalem is the centre of spiritual convergence of the three monotheistic religions, and its status as a universal meeting point of religious freedom and for the followers of various faiths must be respected. Holy sites must not be the scene of violence or the indiscriminate and illegitimate use of force by either side.

In 1947, Peru was a member and Vice-Chair of the Special Committee on Palestine, which proposed the creation of two States — Palestine and Israel. Consistent with that historical position, Peru supports the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which calls for a halt to all settlement activity and the establishment of elements for a just and lasting solution so that the two States can live side by side, within secure and internationally recognized borders, on the basis of the 1967 boundaries and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. To that end, we reiterate that it is essential to support the mediation efforts of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, and to endorse a realistic and comprehensive approach to the Middle East peace process. The main objective of that process should be to persuade the parties to relax their positions and sit at the negotiating table, where they can address their differences in a transparent manner and begin to seek common ground in a spirit of peace, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Nasir (Indonesia): Indonesia thanks the Russian Federation for convening today's open debate. We also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his briefing.

Today we live with the fact that a large number of Palestinian people are living in catastrophic conditions. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 2.1 million Palestinians across the occupied Palestinian territory are in need of significant humanitarian assistance. More than 100 Palestinians have been killed by the occupying forces since January. Many of them are children. Sadly, the year 2023 might be an even bloodier one than 2022.

In the Chamber, we speak loudly of respecting the principles of human rights, equal rights, freedom of worship and international law. Yet we often stand idle while the occupying Power implements apartheid-like policies, brutally beats worshippers during Ramadan prayers or violates various norms of international law and Security Council resolutions. Every day, innocent Palestinians pay the price for the inaction of the international community. What message are we sending to innocent Palestinian women and children? The international community's inaction risks being seen by innocent women and children in Palestine as a double standard when it comes to their lives. Even worse, if we continue to fail to act, we may inadvertently create a perpetual cycle of violence. Innocent children exposed to continuous violence and injustice may grow up to become vindictive. We therefore need to strengthen our commitment to achieving peace in the occupied Palestinian territory. In that context, allow me to emphasize the following points.

First, we need to take concrete steps to push for a de-escalation of violence and ease the suffering of Palestinians. Unilateral and unlawful measures must be halted. The Security Council must act when Israel chooses to ignore its obligations under international law. We need to ensure that there is no impunity, including through appropriate accountability mechanisms.

Secondly, we must remain committed to the two-State solution and take concrete steps to that end. The Security Council cannot remain indifferent when there is overwhelming international support for the two-State solution. We therefore commend the efforts to establish a direct dialogue among the relevant parties

and encourage tangible outcomes. The international community also needs to push harder for a credible peace process, including a multilateral process.

Thirdly, we must not forget the plight of the nearly 6 million Palestinians refugees located in various camps. It is unacceptable that, 75 years after the Nakba, the number of people in refugee camps continues to increase, while Israel continues to expand settlements, undertake demolitions and confiscations and forcibly remove Palestinian civilians from their properties.

In the absence of a solution to return the Palestinians to their rightful home, we must continue to support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and secure its sustainable and predictable funding. For many refugees, UNRWA is the provider of last resort. While we have the ambition to work towards implementing a New Agenda for Peace, we do not yet have the same ambition to end one of the longest-standing conflicts in the world and in the Middle East. In our view, the New Agenda for Peace will be burdened by our continuing inability to address the Palestinian question. For its part, Indonesia remains committed to ensuring just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine, based on a two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Fatah (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Russian Federation on its presidency of the Security Council for this month. I welcome Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and wish the Russian delegation every success in its work for the rest of April. We value the briefing by Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and we welcome the participation in today's meeting of the Minister of State of the United Arab Emirates and the Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the Group of Arab States and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and would like to make this statement in its national capacity.

We are meeting here today once again after numerous meetings to discuss the cause of a people who legitimately have sought for decades to enjoy their basic rights, build their State and live in peace. However, they have been systematically subjected to flagrant violations of all relevant conventions, resolutions and

international law, let alone oppression, displacement, detentions, illegal confiscation of their land and most notably assassinations.

My country's delegation is participating in this meeting today based on the following points.

First, Iraq is committed to the Charter of the United Nations and all international organizations as we work together through various forums and mechanisms to support, promote and protect humankind, civilization and the environment throughout the world.

Secondly, we stress the importance of respecting the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem under the custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the need to respect freedom of worship and access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Thirdly, we believe in and are committed to the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to build their contiguous, independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The objective is not only to deliver a statement of condemnation and express our rejection of the Israeli violations and crimes against the unarmed Palestinians, but also to reiterate our calls to the Security Council to uphold its responsibilities and implement its resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which calls on the Israeli occupying Power to end all its settlement activities that undermine the two-State solution. The occupying Power also must immediately cease all unilateral, illegitimate, provocative and escalating measures, as well as the unabated violations of the occupying Power aimed at building and expanding its illegitimate settlements. Moreover, it murders innocent people; repeatedly invades Palestinian towns and villages; confiscates territories and property; demolishes Palestinian homes and installations; displaces inhabitants, including in East Jerusalem; and flagrantly violates, via the Israeli occupation army and extremist settlers, the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Those are the violations that the international community is failing to stop and are causing the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. All those who believe in the need to stop the bloodshed seek peaceful and lasting solutions as they uphold the right of people to live in dignity.

In conclusion, the Iraqi people and Government reject and strongly condemn the storming of the courtyard of the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Quds Al-Sharif,

the heart of occupied Palestine, by the Israeli occupation forces. That was accompanied by barbaric aggression committed against unarmed worshippers while they prayed during the month of Ramadan. We reiterate the need to uphold the legal and historical status quo of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and not manipulate current legal and historical realities while respecting the religious status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque as a place for worship.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Sabbagh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic entrusted me with delivering this statement on his behalf, as he was unable to attend this important meeting owing to the difficulty of travel resulting from the unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and his delegation for convening this important meeting on the situation in the Middle East. The Russian Federation has always stood in solidarity with peoples suffering from colonization and injustice.

The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

A few days ago, the holy month of Ramadan came to an end. That holy month witnesses every year a new criminal escalation on the part of Israel, as well as aggressive practices committed against the Palestinian people, which put all humankind to shame.

Unfortunately, the Security Council is a witness to those crimes against humanity and does not lift a finger to stop them. Perhaps it is not allowed to do so, given the umbrella of immunity and unlimited support for Israel provided by some permanent members of the Security Council, which are known by all.

The Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms the attacks of the Israeli occupation forces against worshippers in the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the desecration by Israel of the Noble Sanctuary. We deplore the continued international silence regarding the crimes of the Israeli occupation that aim to ignite the region and lead it to higher levels of tension and instability. Syria holds the Israeli occupying authorities and their supporting countries fully responsible for

the escalation and the repercussions thereof. We call upon the United Nations to condemn and put an end to those violations and ensure that they are not repeated. Moreover, we call for Israel, the occupying Power, to be compelled to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy related to the Palestinian question and to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their legitimate and inalienable national rights.

It has become clear that the recurrent political crises within Israel are compelling its failed leaders to export their internal crisis by launching attacks against the defenceless Palestinian people and by committing acts of aggression against Syria and its people, as well as the people of southern Lebanon. That attests to Israel's adoption of the law of force and the law of jungle, which have been the hallmark of its behaviour since 1948.

It is unfortunate that the question of Palestine and its people who have been suffering from the most heinous crimes on a daily basis for decades has become a routine matter without any tangible effort undertaken to compel the occupying Power to stop its multifaceted aggression and to hold it accountable for its actions. It is even more unfortunate that some treat the killer and the victim equally. They treat the occupying Power and the defenceless people who are subject to that occupation equally, the defenceless people who are deprived of their most basic rights, such as the right to live. Both sides are then required to exercise maximum restraint. Israel, the occupying Power, was and still is the only reason for the emergence and the continuation of the plight and tragedy of the Palestinian people, as it has expelled Palestinians from their homes through killings, massacres, intimidation, forced displacement, the confiscation of property and home demolitions and turned them into refugees for decades.

The responsibility for the Palestinian refugees is an international political, legal and moral responsibility before it is a mere humanitarian responsibility. The Syrian Arab Republic stresses that the continuation of the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its support to Palestinian refugees is indispensable, especially in the light of the continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. We stress the importance of UNRWA continuing to fulfil its mandate and adequately and sustainably securing the necessary funding for its budget from the United Nations and donor countries.

The crimes perpetrated by the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories are inseparable from the practices of that entity in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan since 1967, which is evident in the continuation by Israel, the occupying Power, of aggressive policies against the Syrian people of the Golan and the most heinous violations of international law and international humanitarian law, including the arrest, killing and displacement of Syrians, in the Syrian Golan for more than five decades. Moreover, that is reflected in Israel's systematic expansionist settlement policy in the occupied Golan, which is aimed at perpetuating the occupation and increasing the number of settlers, thereby imposing demographic change and stealing the natural resources, confiscating lands and establishing projects on those lands that have catastrophic effects on the lives of Syrians in the Golan.

In addition, the Israeli occupation forces use the occupied Syrian Golan as a platform to launch repeated attacks on the sovereignty of Syrian land by bombing and carrying out assassinations of innocent civilians and targeting Syrian infrastructure. The Israeli occupation forces launched consecutive attacks in March and April, targeting areas in and around Damascus and Homs and the surrounding countryside, which resulted in the martyrdom of innocent civilians, injuries and material damage.

On 22 March, Israel once again targeted Aleppo International Airport, which rendered it inoperable, thereby interrupting United Nations air transport services and the delivery of humanitarian aid to those affected by the earthquake that hit Syria on 6 February, as that airport was a gateway for the delivery of humanitarian aid. The fact that Israel launched that terrorist aggression in conjunction with the visits of United Nations officials to Syria to follow up efforts to alleviate the country's difficult humanitarian conditions after years of war and the devastating earthquake is not strange for a terrorist entity whose suspicious origin coincided with the assassinations of United Nations officials and peace mediators.

The Syrian Arab Republic once again warns Israel and its sponsors of the dangers of those aggressive policies, which push the region towards broad escalation and a new phase of insecurity and instability. We also call on the Security Council to abandon its silence and to urgently shoulder its responsibilities to end the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and to implement relevant United Nations resolutions, especially resolutions 242

(1967) and 338 (1973), as well as resolution 497 (1981), which considers Israel's decision to annex the Golan Heights null and void and with no legal effect.

Before concluding, I would like to point out that the European Union delegation usually uses the meeting on the situation in the Middle East to raise issues related to the situation in Syria that are totally unrelated to the topic of the meeting, in an open attempt to divert attention from discussing the crimes committed by Israel in the region. That also shows that delegation's adherence to unrealistic policies that have been overtaken by developments and events, at a time when Syria needs concerted international efforts to help it overcome the negative repercussions resulting from the erroneous policies pursued by the countries of the European Union for more than 10 years, especially by mercilessly imposing, along with the United States of America, unilateral, immoral and inhumane sanctions on the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to Mr. Niang.

Mr. Niang: The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People welcomes His Excellency Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Russian Federation Foreign Minister, and congratulates the Russian Federation on its able presidency of the Security Council this month. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing and tireless efforts.

As mandated by the General Assembly, on 15 May the Committee will commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Nakba, which will serve as a reminder of the historical injustice suffered by the Palestinian people and the outstanding debt of the international community towards them and the more than 5.8 million refugees who are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We are also reminded of the ongoing Israeli occupation, for nearly 56 years with no end in sight, as reflected in the worrisome debates in Israel about the possibility of further annexation and colonization of occupied Palestinian territory.

The Committee expresses its concern about Israel's approval, on 21 March, of an amendment to the 2005 disengagement law, which paves the way for Israel to re-establish the former settlement of Homesh in the West Bank. The Committee reiterates its calls for a complete and immediate halt to all settlement activities

and reminds Israel that all settlements are illegal, regardless of their status under Israeli law, and that those actions further violate resolution 2334 (2016) and severely undermine efforts to find a just solution to the conflict.

This year Ramadan coincided with Passover and Easter, which should have led to peaceful reflection and celebration. Unfortunately, tensions rose when Israeli forces entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque's Al-Qibli prayer hall, in East Jerusalem, in order to demonstrate their power during those holy days. Stun grenades, batons, rifles and rubber-coated metal bullets were used by Israeli security forces and armed civilians in order to dislodge Palestinian worshippers, leading to the injuring of 44 Palestinian and two Israeli police officers, in addition to material damage to the holy site.

About 440 Palestinians were arrested and later released, but banned from the Al-Aqsa for the rest of Ramadan. On 5 April, the Committee's Bureau issued a statement denouncing the raid, which was seen around the world and drew global condemnation. In addition, as is customary, Israel imposed restrictions on attendance on Orthodox Easter on 16 April and used excessive force against Christian worshippers, citing security concerns. The Committee condemns the violence inside the Al-Qibli prayer hall and reminds Israel that the historic status quo of the holy sites must be upheld, while respecting the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Waqf.

The Committee strongly condemns the Israeli Finance Minister's outrageous statements denying the existence of the Palestinian people and calling for wiping out Huwvara, a Palestinian village in the occupied West Bank, after extremist settlers went on a rampage — killing one Palestinian and causing widespread destruction to Palestinian property, including dozens of homes — in the wake of the killing of two Israelis. The Committee urges the Israeli authorities to respect international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and its obligations as the occupying Power with regard to the protection of the civilian population.

We call on political, religious and community leaders on all sides to reject inflammatory rhetoric and provocative actions and to refrain from steps that could escalate tensions. The indiscriminate firing of rockets towards the civilian population is also unacceptable and must cease. We welcome the United Nations

Special Coordinator's mediation efforts to de-escalate the situation and urge all parties to work towards reducing tensions.

While the international community is preparing to commemorate the Nakba of 1948, Israel continues to entrench its occupation of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, with its relentless establishment of illegal outposts, the advancement of settlements, seizures and the demolition of hundreds of structures, including donor-funded structures, and the displacement of 388 people, including 89 women and 197 children. In open defiance of the international community and appeals from its own friends, Israel advanced plans for over 7,200 settlement housing units, with approximately 4,000 settlements deep in the occupied West Bank. Israel's actions as the occupying Power in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, point to what many have described as an ongoing Nakba of dispossession and displacement and denial of the rights of the Palestinian people. We, the international community, must not wait any further. In that regard, the Committee welcomes the resolutions on the question of Palestine adopted on 4 April 2023 at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council — one on Israeli settlements and another on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination — and calls for their implementation.

The Committee praises the participants at the high-level meetings in Aqaba and hoped that those meetings would advance security, stability and peace, as outlined in the joint communiqué, and we expect tangible and verifiable actions to address the crisis. The Committee reiterates the need for Palestinian unity based on the Algiers declaration to advance national aspirations and facilitate engagement in resolving the question of Palestine.

On behalf of the Committee, I want to make a strong appeal to the Security Council to demonstrate leadership by taking action to protect the Palestinian people. I call on the Council to protect the Palestinian people with measures to ensure their human security in the face of constant acts of aggression and human rights violations by the occupying Power. In that context, the Committee also emphasizes its previous call to all States Members of the United Nations to support sustainable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which is crucial for the well-being and the livelihoods of Palestine refugees and overall regional stability.

The Committee believes that a just and lasting peace will be achieved only with the end of Israel's occupation, the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees, and the achievement of the two-State solution in accordance with international law and past agreements, resulting in the independence of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to Mr. Abdulaziz.

Mr. Abdulaziz (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a pleasure for me to begin my statement by congratulating the Russian Federation on its exceptional presidency of the Security Council. I would like to welcome Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, who is presiding over this meeting; Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine; and Mr. Khalifa Shaheen Al Marar, Minister of State at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates. I also would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing today.

We align ourselves with the statement made by the Chargée d'affaires of the Lebanese Republic on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

The Middle East has seen successive and dangerous developments recently, in particular ongoing violations by the new Israeli extremist Government of all the inalienable rights of the occupied Palestinian people in the State of Palestine. The Government also supports the dangerous violations by Israeli settlers in the context of its abhorrent policies that run counter to all its commitments under international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law, foremost of which is resolution 2334 (2016).

The most serious acts committed by Israel, the occupying Power, during the period under review were the repeated ferocious attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, capital of the Palestinian State. The most repugnant aspect of them were storming the Mosque and attacking worshippers, which prevented other worshipers from gaining access to the Mosque. Israel supported the settlers who desecrated the Mosque and its courtyards, and also Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories, in flagrant violation of the international responsibility mandated to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Custodian of the Holy Sites, to protect them in Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The most dangerous aspect of those violations is that they were led by prominent members of the Israeli Government during the holy month of Ramadan and concurrent with Christian celebrations, including Easter Sunday, Great and Holy Saturday, Good Friday and others. That was a dangerous provocation to the feelings of Muslims, Christians and other religions, Arabs and non-Arabs throughout the world. That demonstrates extremist directives of that Government based on challenging the entire international community and disrespect to any holy places, be it Muslim, Christian or even to Jewish values. That has led to massive demonstrations in Israel recently to protest laws that the Government wants to impose to ensure impunity for some leaders in the State that claims, as we heard in the statement made by its representative today, to respect democracy and human rights, which is a barefaced lie.

Undoubtedly, the Security Council does not oppose those escalating dangerous violations seriously undermining the credibility of the multilateral international system. That is particularly true because Israel is exploiting the world's preoccupation with addressing the crisis in Ukraine and the resulting sharp polarization in the Security Council. Certain major Powers are also preoccupied with that crisis and were considered by the Middle East countries fair negotiators in the peace process and peace seekers within the Middle East Quartet. That warns of a new phase of increasing violence and the risk of triggering a third Palestinian intifada, with significant political, security and humanitarian implications not only for the peoples of Palestine and Israel, but also for the peoples of the entire Middle East. That situation would demand a more decisive action from the Council.

Accordingly, the League of Arab States calls for the creation of an implementation mechanism to protect the Palestinian people from the occupation forces and settlers. The Security Council must not stand idle until the recurrence of Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi massacre of 1994, which led the Security Council to adopt resolution 904 (1994), which sought to set up a protection mechanism for the Palestinian people in the Al-Khalil area. It is clear that the Council is responsible for protecting the Palestinian people, regardless of Israeli Governments or different international stances.

The League of Arab States therefore associates itself with the Secretary-General in his call to expand current mechanisms to protect the Palestinian people from the oppression of the Israeli occupation. We see

that it is important for the Secretary-General to issue a new urgent report similar to the report he issued in 2018 (A/73/84). We urge him to issue specific proposals on the best ways to protect the Palestinian people living under occupation from the violations of their inalienable rights by the Government and settlers. Such an effort by the Council and the Secretary-General on that issue is particularly important because the extremist Israeli Government is now seeking to set up special militias that would fall exclusively under the purview of the Minister of the Interior, who stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque and has supported and participated in all the violations against the Palestinian people since the establishment of that Government. That could exacerbate the situation at any time and undermine the credibility of the Security Council.

Given the deteriorating situation since the beginning of the year, the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States, whose role it is to oppose illegitimate policies and measures taken in the occupied city of Jerusalem, on 5 January adopted a strong statement that addressed the impact of escalating violations perpetrated by the extremist Israeli Government since its formation. The League of Arab States and its Secretary-General continue to warn against the consequences of those violations, which are being carried out with impunity and no accountability.

We stress that we consider it insufficient that the Security Council has met seven times since the beginning of January to discuss those violations and has expressed its regret in press or presidential statements that include no effective measures. The League believes that the Security Council should ensure effective international protection for the Palestinian people by adopting a clear resolution and subjecting those responsible for the blatant violations to international justice.

At the same time, the international community has a greater responsibility to convince the international Powers that have lost interest in the Middle East and are preoccupied with issues in other eastern areas to refrain from obstructing the possibility of a peaceful settlement in our region. They should work seriously on a clear political process for achieving a settlement through the Quartet and at the ministerial level, with a view to convening the international conference that the Palestinian President has been asking for since 2018. The Palestinian and Israeli sides need to start direct negotiations on implementing a two-State solution and the land for peace initiative. We stress that more than

20 years later, the Arab Peace Initiative, introduced by Saudi Arabia and adopted at the Arab Summit is still a realistic and practical proposal, one that cannot be replaced by the Abraham Accords or any others, for establishing just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, resolving the Palestinian question and ensuring the creation of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, along the borders of 4 June 1967. The League of Arab States emphasizes the need to make every effort in collaboration with international actors to implement the Arab Peace Initiative as soon as possible.

In addition to the Palestinian question, which has been and will remain the Arabs' central issue, there have been positive recent developments in the Middle East that we believe the Security Council will support and welcome, including the Arab world's increased engagement in resolving the Syrian issue in coordination with the United Nations and Syria. Intense efforts are also being made, with Arab support, to ensure the formation of a new Lebanese Government. The first phase of prisoner exchanges in Yemen and the start of political discussions are under way to achieve the political consensus needed for the desired settlement to be reached. There is also increased Arab support for the holding of free, fair and comprehensive elections in Libya by the end of the year. Many other developments are taking place.

The bloody clashes in our brother nation of the Sudan are having an impact on the Sudanese people and on its neighbours on both the political and humanitarian fronts. However, the League of Arab States is upholding its regional responsibilities in the Sudan in cooperation with the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the United Nations, the European Union and other international Powers inside and outside the Security Council, with the aim of reaching an immediate settlement to the internal Sudanese conflict with the support of the Sudanese Government and the country's leaders. The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States has been at the forefront of those seeking to achieve an immediate ceasefire and has appealed twice to the two parties with a view to initiating a Sudanese dialogue to resolve the conflict. We hope to have support from the Council for all the efforts being made regionally and internationally to reach a political settlement.

At the same time, the League of Arab States will continue to support the Secretary-General's proposed *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982). We look forward to establishing it in order to restore credibility to the

international multilateral system and especially the Security Council. We are convinced that all the great Powers, along with all the States Members of the United Nations, will rise above the acute polarization that has divided them, and that has had a negative effect on the Security Council's performance in the maintenance of international peace and security, so that we can fulfil our joint interests. We hope that everybody will cooperate to achieve that goal.

In conclusion, the League of Arab States believes that the Arab summit to be convened in Saudi Arabia next month will adopt more decisions promoting regional Arab relations, with a view to addressing all the issues pertinent to the Arab region with the support of the Security Council and other international actors. The aim is to achieve peace, security and stability in our region.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mauritania.

Mr. Mohamed Laghdaf (Mauritania): Mauritania aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Lebanon, on behalf of the Group of Arab States (see S/PV.3909), and the statement to be delivered by the representative of Azerbaijan, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. I will be delivering this statement on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in my capacity as Chair of the OIC Group.

In recent weeks we have witnessed a dangerous escalation in the crimes and violations perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces and extremist settlers in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the cities of Jerusalem, Nablus, Jenin and Jericho, which have resulted in the deaths of 96 Palestinians, including children, in addition to hundreds of citizens who have been injured or arrested since the beginning of the year. Tensions are high and fear is widespread, as Israel's provocations and incitements against the Palestinian people and their heritage and presence in their homeland have also escalated, along with violence on the part of the army and settler militias. The OIC is particularly concerned about the Israeli occupation forces' repeated assaults and the incursions by extremist Jewish settlers into the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, including during the holy month of Ramadan, as well as the brutal attacks on worshippers and people in its courtyard, including women and children, while they were performing their prayers and rituals. The Israeli occupation forces

fired stun grenades and tear gas inside the Mosque, damaging windows and doors and wounding and arresting hundreds of worshippers.

In the same vein, Israel's illegal, oppressive and destructive policies aimed at further entrenching and perpetuating the longest belligerent occupation in modern history, including through violent military aggression, the construction of colonial settlements, ethnic cleansing, blockades, displacement and the confiscation of Palestinian land, have continued relentlessly, in flagrant violation of international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

In that regard, the OIC emphasizes that a lack of accountability has emboldened Israel to persist with those illegal policies, which are causing the Palestinian people enormous suffering and undermining the pillars on which a just and lasting peace can be realized. Israel's continued flagrant breaches are further deepening the current political impasse and making the achievement of a two-State solution, on which there has long been an international consensus, less probable by the day. We therefore reiterate that the Security Council and all other key actors in the international arena should fulfil their responsibility for ensuring accountability, upholding the rule of international law and ending those illegal acts. Urgent action is needed to preserve the possibility of a two-State solution and salvage the prospects for peace. A dereliction of duty will have serious consequences on the ground and for the viability of our international system.

The OIC would particularly like to warn the Council of the dire consequences of the Israeli occupation authority's continued infringement on the sanctity of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, including its constant provocations, abuses, daily brutal assaults, incursions and unprecedented tampering with the Mosque's existing historical, legal and religious status as an exclusive place of worship for Muslims. In that regard, the OIC stresses that Israel, the occupying Power, has no sovereignty over the entire Al-Aqsa compound at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, where Muslim worshippers have an absolute right to pray freely and safely at any time and without hindrance. We therefore reaffirm our strong rejection of Israel's measures and attempts to alter the historical and legal status quo of the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. We have cautioned time and again that Israel's provocative and irresponsible actions hurt the feelings of Muslims across the globe, violate their religious rights and eternal attachment to that holy site

and jeopardize stability in the region and beyond. We underscore that this organ must fulfil its responsibility and obligations to ensure Israel's compliance with, and respect for, international law and United Nations resolutions, including resolutions 2334 (2016), 476 (1980) and 478 (1980) with regard to East Jerusalem, the occupied capital of the State of Palestine, which has endured Israel's endless attempts to isolate, Judaize, colonize and subjugate it.

The OIC commends the continued efforts of King Mohammed VI, Chair of Al-Quds Committee, in protecting the Islamic holy sites in Al-Quds Al-Sharif — standing up against the Israeli occupation authorities' measures aimed at Judaizing the holy sites — and praises the concrete role played by the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency of the Al-Quds Committee in carrying out development and steadfastness-building projects and activities for the inhabitants of the Holy City. The OIC also reaffirms that, within its total area of 144 dunums, Al-Haram Al-Sharif is an exclusive place of worship for Muslims that is protected by international law and its historical and legal status, and that the Jordanian Administration Department of Awqaf and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs is the competent authority to manage the affairs of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Qudsi Al-Sharif. The OIC furthermore stresses the role of the historical Hashemite custodianship over the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Al-Quds in protecting their sanctity, identity and historical and legal status.

The OIC appreciates the contribution of the Algiers declaration, emanating from the Reunification Conference for Achieving Palestinian National Unity, to ending division and achieving reconciliation as a positive step towards national unity; expresses its heartfelt thanks to the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria for sponsoring that conference; and is grateful for the tireless efforts of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of Algeria to ensure the success of that historic endeavour.

The Israeli extremist Government has proven that it is more committed to colonialism, annexation, oppression and violence than to justice, human rights, peace and stability. The deliberate escalation of Israel's aggression against Palestinians and the expansion of its illegal colonial settlements on the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular in and around Jerusalem, constitute war crimes and flagrant violations of international law. There must be accountability for

all such abuses and violations, and protection must be ensured for the Palestinian people, who are defenceless against the relentless aggression of that more than 50-year-old foreign occupation, including the 2 million people trapped by the Israeli blockade in the Gaza Strip.

In conclusion, as we will soon solemnly mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Nakba, the OIC reiterates its call for justice for the Palestinian people, including the Palestinian refugees. The OIC affirms that the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East requires firm and prompt action by the Security Council to ensure an immediate end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. Similarly, the international community should uphold its responsibilities in enabling the Palestinian people to achieve their right of return and rights to self-determination, sovereignty and independence in their State and in their territory, which has been occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mrs. Ali (Maldives): I thank you, Sir, for convening today's debate, and Mr. Tor Wennesland for providing his insightful briefing.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

It is noteworthy that the Security Council has received, for the second time in one month, an update from Mr. Wennesland on the Palestinian question (see S/PV.9290), including with regard to the ongoing tensions at Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Israeli forces stormed the courtyard of the Al-Aqsa Mosque on 4 and 5 April, assaulting worshippers, making multiple arrests, injuring worshippers and damaging the Mosque during the holy month of Ramadan. Sadly, this is not the first year that such events have taken place. The Government of Maldives strongly condemns those highly provocative actions.

Our delegation is concerned that such reckless actions undermine efforts to achieve a lasting resolution to the conflict, as well as peace and stability in the region. We commend the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1, of 20 February — the first Council outcome on this agenda item in more than eight years and the first of its kind since the adoption of resolution 2334

(2016). However, mere calls for calm and de-escalation are insufficient to halt the killing of innocent people. Expressions of concern and outrage are not enough to stop settlement activity in the occupied territories or the seizure and demolition of Palestinian-owned structures and land.

In February alone, more than 7,000 housing units were approved in settlements across the West Bank. Israel's actions in occupied territories must not be exempt from international and humanitarian law or the authority of the Security Council. We firmly believe that the rule of law should apply equally to all countries. It is crucial that those responsible for flagrant violations of international law and international humanitarian law be held accountable for their actions.

The Security Council, which is mandated by the Charter of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security, must ensure that all countries respect and uphold its decisions. The Government of Maldives reiterates its call for the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which offers a viable path to peace based on the two-State solution, ensuring the fulfilment of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, including self-determination, and a just resolution for Palestine refugees. The Maldives reiterates its unwavering support for the two-State solution, with the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We urge the complete lifting of the illegal blockade, which has caused immense humanitarian, social and economic suffering for millions of Palestinians, including women and children, for more than 56 years. In the absence of a just solution, we must find ways to enhance relief assistance to the Palestinian people, including by providing essential support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other United Nations agencies and international organizations working on the ground to assist the Palestinian people.

In 2023, Syria's conflict has continued to rage after more than 13 years of ongoing civil war. Despite numerous ceasefire attempts, the conflict has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, the displacement of millions of people and the destruction of entire cities. The Maldives calls on the Council and the international community to act urgently to end the suffering and facilitate a resolution for the war-torn nation.

In conclusion, the Maldives reaffirms its commitment to collaborate with the Council and Member States to seek long-term solutions in ensuring peace and stability in the Middle East and achieving a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful resolution to the Palestinian question in all its aspects.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Alwasil (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Russian Federation on its presidency of the Security Council, and to thank Russia on behalf of my Government for holding this important meeting on a topic that demands the attention of the entire international community. We welcomed the participation of Russia's Foreign Minister, Mr. Sergey Lavrov, and the Palestinian Foreign Minister, Mr. Riad Al-Malki, in this meeting (see S/PV.9309). We would also like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing. We appreciate his pivotal role and constructive efforts in that regard.

We are meeting today while our brother people of Palestine and the entire region are living in critical conditions, a result of Israel's continuing practices against the defenceless Palestinian people, who have suffered for decades from the consequences of Israel's occupation of their territory and control over their daily lives. Unfortunately, the Israeli Government has continued its daily acts of aggression against the Palestinian people and their holy sites and property, most recently through the provocative actions that we witnessed at the beginning of this month. The occupation forces raided the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, attacked worshippers and arrested several Palestinian citizens, causing Muslims all over the world immense pain. Saudi Arabia condemns that blatant violation and categorically rejects such practices, which are undermining peace efforts and contravening international principles and norms with regard to respect for the holy sites.

We reiterate our firm position in support of every effort to end the occupation and arrive at a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question. Israel's measures will inevitably undermine the prospects for peace in the Middle East and for a two-State solution. We all know that a just and comprehensive peace will be impossible as long as those aggressive practices continue, especially the ongoing settlement

activities, the confiscations of Palestinian land and the evictions of Palestinians from their homes. Peace, security and justice can be achieved only through a two-State solution and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, including those of the Security Council, and the Arab Peace Initiative, launched by Saudi Arabia in 2002.

We therefore renew our call to the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and ensure that its resolutions are implemented in order to put an end to all of the illegal, unilateral, provocative and escalatory measures and violations that Israel continues to perpetrate relentlessly, including its construction and expansion of illegitimate settlements. We further demand that Israel cease targeting the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem and put a stop to the attempts to change the city's legal and demographic composition and to alter the status quo of the Islamic holy sites and impose Israeli sovereignty on them. We call urgently for international protection for the Palestinian people in accordance with the Secretary-General's proposals, which were also welcomed by the General Assembly. In the light of the General Assembly's resolution 77/247, requesting an advisory opinion on this issue from the International Court of Justice, we must put pressure on the Israeli Government to immediately rescind the punitive measures unilaterally imposed on the Palestinian people and their leadership and civil society.

In conclusion, we call on the new Israeli Government to respond to the calls for peace and to engage seriously in efforts to resolve its conflict with the Palestinians. Settling the conflict is unquestionably in the interests of the entire region, including Israel itself. We call on Israel to participate in serious negotiations in good faith in order to achieve peace on the basis of a two-State solution and in a manner that can ensure stability in the Middle East. We call for finding a just solution that will guarantee the Palestinian people's legitimate rights, and we underscore the need to mobilize the international community to resolve the longest-lasting conflict in the history of the United Nations in a manner that can assure all the legitimate rights of our brother people of Palestine in accordance with the pillars and principles on which the United Nations was founded.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. Vidal (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this open debate and to reaffirm the importance we attach to the issue. In the same vein, we are grateful to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his briefing and to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine for his statement (see S/PV.9309).

We reaffirm that the region needs and deserves peace. The solution lies in productive, direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel in order to achieve a two-State solution with two free, autonomous, sovereign and independent States within internationally secure, definitive and mutually recognized borders, based on the pre-1967 lines and the relevant decisions and agreements of the United Nations, including resolutions adopted by the Security Council itself. That is founded on support for international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and concerns the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and to constitute an independent, internationally recognized State. Likewise, Israel must be able to enjoy secure borders.

We are deeply concerned about the recent increase in tensions around the holy sites in Jerusalem and elsewhere, which has resulted in violence, injuries and deaths. Chile is not indifferent to the worsening security situation, which will inevitably result in growing numbers of civilian casualties. Likewise, the incidents in various settlements and their expansion by Israel do not contribute to the promotion of a just and lasting peace or one that is dignified and secure. We call for a halt to such activities. We reiterate that the legal, historical and religious status quo of Jerusalem's holy sites must be respected and that they must remain safe places of worship for Christians, Muslims and Jews alike. We call on the parties to exercise restraint and to refrain from any act that undermines the well-being of the entire population. We condemn all violent actions by Hamas or any armed group that uses violence to achieve any goal.

We welcomed the adoption of General Assembly resolution 77/247, requesting the International Court of Justice to render an advisory opinion on the legal consequences arising from Israeli policies and practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In the same vein, we acknowledge the efforts of the Security Council in its adoption on Monday, 20 February of a presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/1) — the first on the issue in more than

eight years and the first formal outcome produced by the Council on this issue since its adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). In a few months' time, we will mark three decades of the Oslo Accords. We hope that the commemoration of that milestone will encourage the parties to demonstrate the necessary political will to set aside radical elements and extremist discourse and reaffirm their respect for human rights. Needless to say, we applaud the efforts of the countries in the region towards reconciliation.

We call for an end to the humanitarian crisis, which is having a major impact on refugee women and children in particular. In that regard, we acknowledge the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. New generations can no longer be victims of destitution and recriminations. Jewish and Palestinian young people must be able to look to the future with confidence.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Maawda (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Russian Federation for holding today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East under the presidency of Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation. We would also like to congratulate Russia on its presidency of the Council this month. We welcome the participation of Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the sisterly State of Palestine, in today's meeting and thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered by the representative of Lebanon on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

At the last open debate on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem (see S/PV.9246), much concern was expressed about the unprecedented high levels of violence that occurred in 2022. Calls were made to reverse that dangerous trend in order to avoid further deterioration. However, since the beginning of the year, the Israeli Government has continued its escalatory policies, which compelled the Security Council to respond by adopting presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1 of 20 February. At the same meeting (see S/PV. 9263), the State of Qatar welcomed

the presidential statement on behalf of the Arab Group and expressed its deep concern about the extremist tendencies of the new Israeli Government. We also stressed the pivotal role of the Security Council in addressing those violations. Since then, the occupation authorities and extremist settlers have continued their dangerous violations. The most dangerous of those violations occurred at the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan, with no consideration for the sanctity of the place or the time. The current month coincided with several important religious occasions for Muslims, Christians and Jews. However, that did not stop the Israeli occupation forces and extremist settlers from perpetrating blatant attacks on religious sites and freedom of worship.

The State of Qatar strongly condemned the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the assaults on worshippers, the actions taken to prevent ambulances from reaching the injured and evacuating those who were trapped in the Al-Qibli Mosque, and the restrictions imposed on Palestinians entering the Mosque. An extremist group expressed support for the occupation police increasing the number of hours during which the Al-Aqsa Mosque could be stormed. Restricting the right of Muslims and Christians to freely visit places of worship, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and occupied churches in Jerusalem in order to perform religious rites is a violation by the occupying authority of its commitment in accordance with international humanitarian law, which ensures the right to worship, the right to protection of worshipers and the rights of holy sites. It is also a violation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Those recent measures are an extension of the policy to Judaize Jerusalem and provoke the 2 billion Muslims around the world. They could lead to escalation and undermine any hope of a two-State solution, which the international community has agreed is the only way to settle the situation in the Middle East and establish lasting peace. In that regard, the State of Qatar reiterates its strong condemnation of any attempts to Judaize the occupied city of Jerusalem and change its Arab, Islamic and Christian identity.

We stress the importance of respecting the legal and historical status quo throughout Jerusalem and the entire Al-Haram Al-Quds compound as an exclusive place of worship for Muslims, without any attempt to divide it temporally or spatially. We also stress the importance of the historic Jordanian guardianship of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

The policies of occupation, settlements and oppression against the Palestinian people are the main reason for the lack of stability and the prevalence of violence. In that context, the State of Qatar voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 77/247, which included a request to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on the legal effects of the Israeli occupation and settlement activity and measures to change the demographic composition of Jerusalem. The State of Qatar continues to uphold its duty to support the steadfast Palestinian people and meet their humanitarian needs, in cooperation with the United Nations, especially in the Gaza Strip, which has been subjected to an unjust siege for more than 15 years.

The State of Qatar will continue to support improving the humanitarian situation and efforts to achieve lasting peace. We reiterate that in order for peace to prevail, the Israeli occupation of the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territories, must end. Moreover, Israel must immediately and fully halt its settlement activities and attempts to annex land so that the Palestinian people can regain their legitimate rights, above all the right to establish an independent, contiguous and viable State, within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Mainero (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Argentina supports a peaceful, definitive and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question and reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the two-State solution, while respecting the legitimate aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace and security. In that regard, Argentina reaffirms its support for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish an independent and viable State, recognized by all nations, as well as the right of the State of Israel to live in peace alongside its neighbours, within secure and internationally recognized borders. On that basis, my country has spoken out on several occasions because of the worrisome escalation of violence this year and has repeatedly called on the parties to avoid further confrontation and clashes.

Argentina reiterates its concern about the persistent and continuous increase in the number of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories

and calls for a stop to their expansion. The gravity of the situation linked to the Israeli settlements has been recognized by the General Assembly and by the Security Council in resolution 2334 (2016), the terms of which we fully reaffirm. The resolution underscores that the settlements established by Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem have no legal validity, are contrary to international law, hinder peace and undermine the prospects for the achievement of the two-State solution. In that context, our country expressed its concern in February about the Israeli Government's decision to legalize nine outposts and build 10,000 homes in existing settlements in the West Bank. Furthermore, Argentina reiterates its firm condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and has reiterated its dismay in recent months about the attacks perpetrated against Israeli citizens and citizens of other nationalities in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. We again offer our condolences to the families of the victims.

Argentina considers the indiscriminate launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon towards Israel unacceptable. Argentina recognizes the right of Israel to exercise its legitimate self-defence, emphasizing that the measures taken must be respectful of international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction and proportionality.

With respect to the situation in East Jerusalem, Argentina considers that one of the issues whose final status should be defined by the parties through bilateral negotiations, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, and calls on all parties, in particular the Israeli authorities, to respect the legal, historical and religious status of the holy sites.

With regard to the recent events at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Argentina expressed its concern at the time and reiterated that holy sites should be a place of peaceful and safe prayer and religious reflection. Any attempt to deny or relativize the historical link of the holy sites in East Jerusalem with and their profound significance for any of the three monotheistic religions is completely unacceptable and does not serve the objective of finding a solution to the conflict.

Argentina once again urges the parties to return to the path of negotiations in order to reach a just and lasting peace, in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Muhamad (Malaysia): My delegation expresses its appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. We welcome the presence of Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine. We also extend our thanks to Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Malaysia aligns itself with the statement delivered by Mauritania on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the statement to be delivered by Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Indeed, what we have heard today is disturbing. Barely four months into the year, already almost 100 Palestinians, including innocent children, are reported to have died and hundreds more to have been wounded. The situation is showing no signs of abating. Malaysia strongly condemns the incursion of Israeli forces into the Al-Aqsa Mosque and their vicious attacks against worshippers, especially when Muslims were observing the holy month of Ramadan. Malaysia remains gravely concerned with the continued aggression and systematic oppression of the Palestinians through discriminatory policies, the denial of basic human rights, the imposition of harsh living conditions, as well as the confiscation of their lands and properties.

In line with resolution 2334 (2016), our delegation urges both parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from acts of provocation, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric to avoid further escalation of tensions. Resolution 2334 (2016) is also clear on the fact that all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law and must immediately and completely cease. Yet Israel remains defiant, which further deviates efforts towards achieving a peaceful and lasting two-State solution.

It is extremely frustrating that the apartheid practices of Israel, including the annexation and illegal occupation, are routinely ignored. The impunity that Israel continues to enjoy is partly the failure of the Security Council to hold Israel accountable for the violations and brutality it perpetrates. Malaysia, in that regard, calls on the international community not to condone such practice of double standards, which severely undermines the effectiveness and legitimacy of international law.

It is incumbent upon the United Nations and the global community to provide protection to the Palestinian people from the heinous crimes that Israel continues to commit. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 77/247 adopted in December last year, Malaysia urges all responsible Member States to support the request for an advisory opinion on the question of Palestine from the International Court of Justice. In addition, Malaysia calls upon Member States to contribute on a consistent and predictable basis to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to support the financial needs of the Palestinian refugees.

The people of Palestine can count on Malaysia's unwavering support in their efforts to create an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In that regard, we fully support the application of Palestine to become a full member of the United Nations and call upon the Security Council and the General Assembly to favourably consider that legitimate application.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Kim (Republic of Korea): I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his timely briefing. I also reaffirm my Government's full support for his ongoing efforts and dedication to bringing peace to the region.

The Republic of Korea is deeply concerned about the escalation and sustained violence in Palestine since early this year. It is particularly worrisome that acts of violence and clashes led to a number of civilian casualties in the region during Ramadan and Passover this month. That vicious cycle of violence will undermine the foundation for a political solution.

My Government reaffirms its position that the status quo of holy sites in Jerusalem must be respected and all relevant parties should undertake every effort to prevent a further deterioration of the situation in the area. In addition, violence against civilians cannot be justified under any circumstances. We take this opportunity to condemn all terrorist attacks in the strongest terms.

My Government strongly encourages all relevant parties to maintain crucial momentum for engagement. In that regard, my delegation commends the recent meetings among the five parties, including Palestine,

Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the United States, in attempts to de-escalate tensions on the ground. We express support for efforts by international parties, including the joint communiqués issued at Aqaba in Jordan and Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt in February and March, respectively, and hope that it can lead to more concrete steps in both establishing and maintaining much-needed stability in the region.

The Republic of Korea supports all diplomatic efforts by the international community to establish lasting peace in the region and reaffirms its driving commitment to continue its constructive role to that end. My delegation reiterates its firm belief that there is no alternative to a two-State solution wherein Israelis and Palestinians live side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders, as enshrined in the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Republic of Korea is deeply concerned with the Israeli Government's decisions to expand its settlements in the West Bank this year, which would significantly undermine the efforts to establish permanent peace between Israel and Palestine based on a two-State solution. We urge the Israeli Government to reverse its settlement activities, demolitions and evictions since they constitute clear violations of international laws and relevant Security Council resolutions.

We also remain concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as conflict intensifies. The Republic of Korea expresses its strong support for ongoing efforts by the international community to meet the humanitarian and development needs of the Palestinian people. In that regard, my Government decided to increase our support to the program budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We will continue to support UNRWA and its activities going forward.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to congratulate the Russian Federation for presiding over the Security Council for this month. In that regard, I would like to thank in particular Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia for convening this meeting at the ministerial level. I would also like to welcome the participation of Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Foreign Minister of Palestine in this

session. I appreciate the efforts of Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

The international community recently witnessed the flagrant escalation of aggressive practices and restrictive policies adopted by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people, especially during the sacred month of Ramadan, as the occupation authorities deliberately violated the sanctity of the holy sites and raided the courtyards of the Al-Aqsa Mosque through settlers and occupation forces. They attacked worshippers and detained hundreds who were inside the Mosque in blatant disregard for Muslim sentiment and a flagrant violation of international conventions and treaties.

Tunisia strongly condemns the policies of the occupation and its attempts to change the legal and historical status quo of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem, especially through plans for settlements, home demolitions, the displacement of Palestinians, as well as flagrant violations of human rights. We hold the occupation forces responsible for the actions taken in the occupied Palestinian territories that could impede peace efforts in the region. We stress the Hashemite Jordanian historical custodianship of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in the city of Jerusalem.

Addressing the Palestinian question at the international level should not consider only the repeated vicious circles of violence without truly focusing on the root causes of the situation, namely, the occupation. In that regard, we call on the international community to launch serious and effective negotiations within a specific timetable in order to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on the agreed terms of reference and international resolutions.

As we approach the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Nakba, we recall the major sacrifices of the Palestinian people and their prolonged suffering. We call upon the international community and the Security Council to protect the Palestinian people and to compel the occupying Power to put an end to its aggressive practices and collective punitive measures taken against the Palestinian people, as well as to comply with international law and all relevant United Nations resolutions. We also call for holding the occupying Power responsible for all its violations.

In conclusion, Tunisia renews its steadfast solidarity with the Palestinian people in efforts to restore their legitimate rights, especially the right

to self-determination, by ending the occupation and establishing their independent and sovereign State on their land along 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alajmi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening this high-level meeting in order to highlight the escalation of acts of violence and extremism carried out by the Israeli occupation and settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories. We would also like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing. We also welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, Mr. Riad Al-Malki, in this meeting.

A few days ago, the sacred month of Ramadan came to an end. During that month we witnessed the unprecedented escalation on the part of the occupying Power, with the support of extremist settlers, during which they desecrated the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and assaulted unarmed worshippers, including women and children, arresting hundreds of them. This is a renewed vicious circle of bloody violence and a provocation of millions of Muslims all over the world. These actions showed contempt for the appeals of the international community, especially the calls of the Security Council for de-escalation during the month of Ramadan.

It is incumbent on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities by condemning those serious violations by the occupying Power and compelling it to refrain from any attempt to change the legal and historical status quo of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, including by respecting the sanctity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. We also reiterate the right of the State of Palestine to enjoy sovereignty over the occupied city of East Jerusalem. Israel, the occupying Power, has no sovereignty over the occupied city of Jerusalem and its holy sites.

In a few days, the General Assembly will be commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Nakba, which attests to the languishing of successive generations under the yoke of continued injustice due to the inability of the international community to find an active mechanism to implement the resolutions of various United Nations organs since 1948. Notwithstanding the multiple international and

regional efforts and peace initiatives in that regard, as well as international resolutions, the unprecedented deterioration of the situation of the steadfast Palestinian people, especially refugees, continues, along with the increasing systematic violence and illegal restriction of their rights, illegal settlement activities, the demolition of homes, the confiscation of land and the continued blockade on the Gaza Strip.

All the forgoing only attests to the zero-sum mentality of the Government of the occupation, which is patently manifest in the current Administration, one of the most extreme in recent decades. This Government disregards international efforts and shirks its responsibility to comply with international obligations. Any attempt to communicate with it at the international level in an effort to de-escalate the situation is in vain. How can we speak about peace with a Government of occupation that adopts extremism, violence and racism as its guiding doctrine?

We therefore call again on the international community and the Security Council to condemn all acts of violence perpetrated by the occupying Power and the extremist settlers against Palestinian civilians and to hold them accountable in accordance with the rules of accountability and transparency. Also, we must urgently provide the Palestinian people with international protection, pursuant to the Secretary-General's proposals, which were approved by the General Assembly. We reiterate that just and comprehensive peace, security and stability in the Middle East can be realized only when the free Palestinian people can exercise their inalienable and legitimate rights, including the right to self-determination, thus ending the illegal Israeli colonial occupation and establishing the independence of the State of Palestine, with full sovereignty over occupied Palestinian territories since 1967 and with Jerusalem as its capital.

In that regard, we once again welcome resolution 247/77, which requests an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the Israeli colonial occupation of Palestinian territories and its implications, since such actions are in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We call on the Member States and all countries that adhere to the values of justice and the principles of international law to support the State of Palestine in that endeavour by providing written legal submissions to the International Court of Justice.

We also urge the International Criminal Court to finalize the criminal investigation and to hold responsible and accountable all perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the occupation Power against the unarmed Palestinian people. Those crimes include annexation, settlement activities, aggressions, a continuous blockade on the Gaza Strip, public and deliberate executions of civilians, journalists and first-aid medical crews, in addition to compulsory evictions, arbitrary detentions and the torture of prisoners.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Gertze (Namibia): Allow me to congratulate the Russian Federation on presiding over the Security Council this month and for having convened today's important meeting. I join speakers before me in welcoming Foreign Minister Al-Malki to this timely meeting, and I equally wish to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for briefing us earlier. I wish to align my statement with the statement delivered on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Today's open debate takes place against the backdrop of a year marked by a continuation of injustice, intensification of conflict and expansion of settlements. The United Nations has been seized with the question of Palestine since 1947, when, through General Assembly resolution 181 (II), the Assembly decided to partition Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish, with Jerusalem placed under a special international regime. In this way, for the past 76 years — I repeat, 76 years — the United Nations has recognized a two-State solution in accordance with 1967 borders as the path towards just and lasting peace.

In charting this path to peace, the General Assembly and the Security Council have adopted a broad range of resolutions that condemn Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, calling it illegal and calling for a just and lasting solution that takes into account the legitimate concerns of both Israelis and Palestinians. The primacy of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people is central to resolving the question of Palestine.

The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination is universally established and enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Our commitment to

the United Nations Charter compels us to hold Israel accountable for the 56-year Israeli foreign occupation, which is also universally established. This occupation can be viewed through several prisms, including that of entrenched and systematic racial discrimination and persecution.

As a country with a lived experience of colonial occupation, Namibia has a clear understanding of what constitutes apartheid, and the illegal colonial occupation that Israel is committing by all accounts constitutes apartheid. We are attuned to the realities faced by the Palestinian people and cannot ignore them. They cause us deep pain, and it is for this reason that we make yet another urgent appeal to the international community, foremost this Security Council, to act. The occupying Power must be held to account for continued actions that are in violation of international law, international human rights law and the resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The Palestinian people should not wait any longer for their freedom, justice and an opportunity to peacefully coexist in a contiguous State in accordance with the pre-1967 borders. As we approach the seventy-fifth year since the Nakba, and as a just peace seems ever more remote due to rising dangers, the Security Council has a duty to prevent another such catastrophe, put stop to genocide, protect vulnerable people and pursue justice before it is too late.

The responsibility of the United Nations towards the resolution of the question of Palestine is a permanent one. We therefore support and have full respect for all United Nations-mandated processes geared to bringing about a resolution to this complex question. The consistent flagrant violation of international law and humanitarian and international human rights law denies the Palestinian people their most basic rights. The practice of unabated continued annexation and expansion of settlements is untenable, and if we well value the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, we must show true and consistent commitment to their just cause by acting with a sense of urgency.

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

Ms. Novruz (Azerbaijan): I am honoured to speak on behalf of the 120 States members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

At the outset, I congratulate the Russian Federation on its successful presidency of the Security Council this month and express appreciation for the opportunity for the Movement to present its position on the question of Palestine.

During the NAM Ministerial meeting held on the sidelines of the high-level week of the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly, on 21 September 2022, the Ministers adopted a political declaration stressing, *inter alia*, that a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects must remain a priority on the Movement's agenda and that it remains a permanent responsibility of the United Nations until it is satisfactorily resolved in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions and the internationally endorsed parameters.

In this regard, the States members of the Movement once again reaffirm that this ongoing historic injustice, with decades of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory and other Arab territories at its core, continues to pose a serious threat to regional and international peace and security. As the Palestinian people continue to be deprived of their inalienable rights, including to self-determination and independence, their prolonged international paralysis on this issue is inexcusable.

The international consensus on a just solution is firm and clear, and there is a great abundance of multilateral political and diplomatic tools to promote the achievement of a just and peaceful resolution. We must use them responsibly, and we in the NAM are ready to do so and urge the Security Council to act forthwith and shoulder its responsibilities in this regard.

The Security Council must uphold its duty under the Charter to maintain international peace and security and must act to implement its own resolutions. The question of Palestine cannot be the exception in international law and to the authority of the Security Council. The members of the Movement call on the Security Council to overcome its paralysis on the Palestine question to justly resolve this protracted conflict and tragic injustice. This will not only open a new era for the people of the occupied territories and the region, but it will also restore credibility to this organ and our international system as a whole.

NAM believes that resolution 2334 (2016) provides a viable path to peace, setting forth the essential requirement and parameters for the realization of a just outcome on the basis of the two-State solution based on

the 4 June 1967 lines and ensuring the fulfilment by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, and the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). NAM therefore reiterates its call for the full respect of resolution 2334 (2016) and for the effective implementation of its provisions and obligations, particularly by the occupying Power, and including, in terms of States, obligations regarding distinction, which is central to ensuring accountability.

The Movement also underscores the need for the intensification of international and regional diplomatic efforts, including by the Security Council, aimed at bringing an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and at achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution. Similarly, the States members of the Movement continue to call for the full respect for and the implementation of all other relevant resolutions, including with regard to the complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activities and the status of occupied East Jerusalem. In that regard, NAM expresses its grave concern about the deteriorating situation on the ground, which has been marked by rising violence, provocation and incitement, particularly settler violence and terror, which has led to the tragic loss of life of more civilians, including children, as well as the detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians and countless other human rights abuses and violations of international law.

Action must be taken immediately to help to de-escalate that volatile situation. It must include a halt to all unilateral and unlawful measures by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Actions that violate the resolutions of the Security Council, including violations of the historic and legal status quo of Jerusalem and its holy sites, are provocative, dangerous and destroy the prospects for peace. We reiterate our call for full respect for the historic and legal status quo and for the historical Hashemite custodianship over the Christian and Muslim holy sites in the city and the protection of their sanctity and for all relevant provisions of international law and Council resolutions.

The Non-Aligned Movement commends the efforts of King Mohammed VI of Morocco as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation and welcomed the appeal regarding Al-Quds/Jerusalem signed in Rabat on 30 March 2019

by King Mohammed VI and Pope Francis, stressing the important role that Al Quds/Jerusalem plays as a city of tolerance and mutual respect among the people of the three monotheistic religions, as well as the need to preserve its specificities and its features as a city of peaceful coexistence.

In that regard, NAM reiterates its rejection of the purported annexation by Israel of occupied East Jerusalem and underscores that the continued threats of annexation by Israeli officials and the continued settlement activities and forced displacement of Palestinian families from their homes and lands must be unequivocally condemned. Any such measures must be forthwith rejected as null and void and without any legal effect and must be met with firm measures of accountability for such grave breaches, including through lawful countermeasures.

The situation in the Gaza Strip, in particular the grave humanitarian situation there, remains of great concern to the Movement. NAM reiterates its call for the complete lifting of the illegal Israeli blockade, which continues to inflict dire humanitarian, social and economic suffering on more than 2 million Palestinian children, women and men in Gaza. That crisis must be comprehensively addressed in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

In the absence of a just solution, the NAM member States also reiterate their call for the continued provision of the necessary humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance to the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees. The Movement reaffirms the continued indispensability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), along with other United Nations agencies and international organizations, in alleviating their plight, and we urge the international community to provide the Agency with sufficient and predictable funding. Ensuring the continuity of UNRWA and its significant contribution to regional stability must be of concern to the Council.

As Israel has clearly abdicated on its obligations as the occupying Power to protect the Palestinian civilian population, as prescribed by the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the Movement also reiterates its long-standing call for international protection for the Palestinian people in order to deter violations, promote the human security of the occupied population and prevent the loss of more innocent lives.

In that connection, the Movement reiterates its grave concern regarding the lack of accountability for all violations committed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, many of which may amount to war crimes. Israel must comply with international law and must be held to account for its blatant contempt of the Council and its international legal obligations. The absence of justice only leads to greater impunity and the recurrence of crimes and destabilizes the situation on the ground, diminishing the prospects for peace. The NAM member States therefore continue to call for international action to ensure a cessation of and accountability for the violations being systematically committed by Israel against the Palestinian people.

With regard to the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, such as its illegal decision of 14 December 1981 that purports to alter the legal, physical and demographic status and the institutional structure, as well as Israel's measures to apply its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. In that regard, and in line with NAM's principled position, the Movement once again demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and fully withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to its 4 June 1967 borders, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Moreover, the NAM member States emphasize that Israel must withdraw from all Lebanese territories, including Sheba'a Farms, the Kfar Shuba hills and the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006).

To conclude, the Movement seizes this opportunity to reiterate its call for collective international efforts to uphold international law in order to bring an end to this historic and grave injustice. The NAM member States reaffirm their commitment to promoting a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including for the plight of the Palestine refugees, and reaffirm their support for the Palestinian people in their struggle to achieve justice and fulfil their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, including to self-determination, freedom and independence in their sovereign and independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Turay (Sierra Leone): I thank you, Madam President, for convening today's important open debate. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his update.

The recent incidents in the Middle East as it relates to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are an indication that until a holistic and comprehensive approach to the dispute is sought, a recurrence remains inevitable, and it will continue to pose a serious threat to regional and international peace and security.

This protracted conflict in the Middle East continues to undermine every effort of the Security Council to uphold the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and fulfil its core mandate of maintaining international peace and security. At this point, we as a community of nations should meaningfully engage to stop the deaths, displacement and loss of property and curb the immense fear that has been instilled in the minds of both Palestinians and Israelis in the region. Decades after the General Assembly's adoption of the partition plan in its resolution 181 (II), the Palestinians and Israelis are still exposed to violence and conflict leading to untold deaths, trauma, displacement and anguish. In that regard, Sierra Leone calls on the Security Council to implement its own resolutions pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian question and explore all possible diplomatic and political avenues that can lead to a peace process geared to achieving a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace.

Sierra Leone urges both Israel and Palestine to refrain from unilateral actions that could exacerbate tensions and trigger violence. Our sympathy in that regard is with the victims of the prolonged violence. We condemn the rise in violence, incitement and all other actions that negate peace efforts and that run counter to international law and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. We acknowledge the plight of Palestinian refugees and reiterate the need for continued humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance to the most vulnerable, especially women, the elderly, children and young people, through the competent United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and other international humanitarian organizations that can ensure their right to life, freedom and prosperity.

In conclusion, Sierra Leone calls on Israel and Palestine to uphold their shared responsibility to build mutual trust and advance the potential for a two-State

solution based on the pre-1967 borders, in the spirit of international consensus and founded on a just and mutually acceptable solution. In that connection, any solution to the current crisis should be consistent with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the work of the Middle East Quartet, guided by the overarching principles of non-violence, the recognition of Israel and the acceptance of previous agreements arrived at in furthering the Middle East peace process.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

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

Norway remains deeply concerned about the security situation in the Middle East. The tensions we witnessed recently during Ramadan, Passover and Easter could have easily spiralled out of control, with far-reaching consequences for the whole region. We commend the parties for contributing to de-escalation. The relative calm that has prevailed at Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount since the end of Ramadan has demonstrated that even during periods of elevated tension it is possible to avoid serious escalation. We also recognize the efforts of the United Nations and actors in the region. That calming influence will still be needed in the weeks to come. We welcome the statements made at the Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh meetings and call on the parties to implement their commitments. We continue to urge Israel to observe the historical status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem, including Jordan's custodial role.

Seventy-five years have passed since the General Assembly adopted a partition plan for Palestine through its resolution 181 (II). Norway voted in favour of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1947 and recognized it in 1949. Furthermore, 75 years ago, Norway also voted in favour of the establishment of a Palestinian State and has remained committed to a two-State solution ever since. Although the prospects for a political settlement right now look bleak, Norway continues to believe that a two-State solution is the best way to ensure the security and human rights of both Israelis and Palestinians, as well as both peoples' right to self-determination.

As Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the coordination of international assistance to Palestinians, Norway continues to work actively with the parties and the international community to improve economic conditions and build Palestinian institutions for a

Palestinian State. We remain committed to that work even in these very difficult times. Next week, Norway will therefore reconvene the donor group at a meeting in Brussels, hosted by the European Union. Together the parties and the international community will review the Palestinian Authority's extremely serious financial situation and set goals to safeguard the viability of a two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Pieris (Sri Lanka): I welcome the presence of Mr. Al-Malki earlier in this meeting (see S/PV.9309).

It is an indictment on all of us that for more than seven decades we have struggled to find a just and peaceful solution to the situation in Palestine. Sri Lanka has long advocated continued support for a sovereign, independent State of Palestine and calls on the international community and all parties concerned to make renewed efforts to achieve a lasting solution, including by implementing the United Nations resolutions on a two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders, as soon as possible.

It is said that peace cannot be separated from freedom because none of us can be at peace unless we have our freedom. One might observe that that was the salutary wish expressed through recent statements by the Secretary-General and representatives of numerous Member States indicating that any attempt at unilateral annexation of one State's territory by another is a violation of international law. It is clear that the occupation of any territory by force entails international responsibilities and makes the occupying force accountable. Regrettably, we have learned of the unabated, forcible acquisition of Arab land and natural resources. We have heard about the 15-year blockade and closure of the Gaza Strip, which has been described as an open-air prison.

All that has had a serious impact on life for Palestinians and perhaps even for Israelis. We are saddened to hear of the damaging impact that the ongoing aggression has had on children. It was not long ago that the Security Council adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2023/1 expressing its deep concern about the ongoing situation in the occupied Arab lands. The Council reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to the vision of a two-State solution whereby two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, can live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders. That commitment stresses that both peoples are entitled to equal measures

of freedom, security, property and dignity, and further notes that continuing aggression, regardless of its source, is dangerous and imperils the viability of a two-State solution.

We can only discourage all unilateral measures that impede peace, and we condemn such actions, including acts of terrorism, and call on all the parties to unequivocally condemn such acts and refrain from incitements to violence. We urge all parties to observe calm and restraint and refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric. We must also discourage discrimination, intolerance and hate speech motivated by racism or directed against people belonging to religious communities. We must stand firm in our call for upholding the status quo at the holy sites of Jerusalem. Only recently the Council noted the important regional and international diplomatic efforts that have been made and called for an urgent halt to any activity that would be detrimental to the peace process. Regrettably, the month that is the holiest for both denominations has not passed peacefully. We therefore reiterate the calls for all parties to refrain from steps that could escalate tensions in and around the holy sites. We appreciate that there have been dramatic changes, not only in Israel and Palestine in recent years but also in the region as a whole. We believe there is a need to consider a new discourse about that unending problem, first and foremost with regard to the dramatic changes on the ground in recent years.

It would finally appear that the story of Palestine has been marked, from its beginning to the current date, with every shade of colonialism and a disposition that the international community treats as being multifaceted, difficult to understand and even more difficult to resolve. We appreciate that it is difficult to challenge established Powers and interests when they refuse to hear the moral voices of civil society and their objectives, but we must continue to encourage peace. There is always a requirement to think carefully about whether more can be done in a bid to resolve that long-standing issue. We have to find a way forward and a way out of the ongoing catastrophe. It would appear that such a vision must be clearly based on the desire to be of assistance to the people of Palestine and on real political considerations of the other. Many of those who support a two-State solution as the ideal settlement are perhaps saying so sincerely, but at the same time it has led us diplomats and politicians to remain ineffective. That language has been put in place as the best solution, although it may not be completely satisfactory. Our hopes and prayers

will be in vain if we fail to ignite our hearts for peace in that once blessed land. We cannot wait much longer; we cannot permit the issue to escalate any further. Sri Lanka wishes Palestine a genuine peace, which is long overdue.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, for presiding over the Security Council's meeting this morning. I also thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for convening this important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to welcome Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the sisterly State of Palestine, and to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing.

The long-standing conflicts that have ravaged the Middle East, including with their socioeconomic repercussions, require unified efforts to resolve them peacefully and the need for renouncing violence and intolerance in order to revive the prospects for a just peace and realize the security and stability of the region, while meeting the aspirations of the peoples of the region towards prosperity and comprehensive and sustainable development.

The Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirms the centrality of the Palestinian question and the importance of preserving the peace process and regional and international efforts aimed at establishing an independent Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the two-State solution and in accordance with the principles of international law and the Arab Peace Initiative. The Kingdom of Bahrain underscores the importance of continuing to provide protection for worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and

the other holy sites of Jerusalem and of preserving the legal and historical status quo there, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions. We reaffirm the need to respect the role of the sisterly Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as the custodian of the holy sites.

The Kingdom of Bahrain welcomes the joint trilateral statement by the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, brokered by the People's Republic of China, on the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Kingdom of Bahrain hopes that the agreement will constitute a positive step towards resolving differences and ending all regional disputes through dialogue and diplomacy, while establishing international relations on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, good-neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

The Kingdom of Bahrain expresses its deep regret over the armed confrontations taking place in the brotherly Sudan and its serious implications for the safety and security of Sudanese citizens and residents. We call on the Sudanese parties to prioritize wisdom and reason in order to end the armed clashes, cease escalation and stop the bloodshed, while resorting to dialogue to reach a political solution that preserves the security and stability of the Sudan and protects the interests of the brotherly Sudan.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Bahrain reiterates the need to continue cooperation and coordination to support all efforts aimed at reaching political solutions that consolidate peace and stability in that vital and strategic region, which will benefit all the countries and peoples of the world.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.