



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

Provisional

9498th meeting

Friday, 8 December 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mr. De la Gasca López Domínguez/Mr. Montalvo Sosa . . (Ecuador)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil	Mr. França Danese
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
Russian Federation.	Mr. Polyanskiy
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America.	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 6 December 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/962)

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 6 December 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/962)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Egypt, Indonesia, Israel and Qatar to participate in this meeting.

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite Her Excellency Mrs. Hedda Samson, Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/962, which contains the text of a letter dated 6 December 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting of the Security Council in response to my letter dated 6 December 2023 on the situation in Gaza and Israel (S/2023/962).

(*spoke in English*)

I wrote to the Security Council invoking Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations because we are at a breaking point. There is a high risk of the total collapse of the humanitarian support system in Gaza, which would have devastating consequences. We anticipate

that it would result in a complete breakdown of public order and increased pressure for mass displacement into Egypt. I fear the consequences could be devastating for the security of the entire region. We have already seen the spillover in the occupied West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. There is clearly, in my view, a serious risk of aggravating existing threats to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The risk of collapse of the humanitarian system is fundamentally linked with a complete lack of safety and security for our staff in Gaza and with the nature and intensity of military operations, which are severely limiting access to people in desperate need. The threat to the safety and security of United Nations staff in Gaza is unprecedented. More than 130 of my colleagues have already been killed, many with their families. This is the largest single loss of life in the history of our Organization. Some of our staff take their children to work so they know they will live or die together.

Colleagues have shared heartbreaking messages from staff members pleading for help. The Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Safety and Security has advised me that all possible means of mitigating the risk to staff within Gaza, short of evacuation, are closed off because of the way this conflict has evolved. I cannot emphasize strongly enough that the United Nations is totally committed to stay and deliver for the people of Gaza. I pay tribute to the heroic humanitarian aid workers who remain committed to their work despite the enormous dangers to their health and their lives. But the situation is simply becoming untenable.

The Council called, in resolution 2712 (2023), for "the scaling up of the provision of such supplies to meet the humanitarian needs of the civilian population, especially children" (*para. 4*). I deeply regret to inform the Council that, under the current conditions on the ground, the fulfilment of that mandate has become impossible. The conditions for the effective delivery of humanitarian aid no longer exist. The crossing point at Rafah was not designed for hundreds of trucks and is a major bottleneck. But even if sufficient supplies were permitted into Gaza, intense bombardment and hostilities, Israeli restrictions on movement, fuel shortages and interrupted communications make it impossible for United Nations agencies and their partners to reach most of the people in need. Between 3 and 5 December — the two days preceding my letter — the United Nations could distribute aid in only

one of Gaza's five governorates, Rafah. Elsewhere, access was impossible. People are desperate, fearful and angry. In some cases, they have expressed that anger towards our own staff.

All this takes place amid a spiralling humanitarian nightmare.

First, there is no effective protection of civilians. More than 17,000 Palestinians have reportedly been killed since the start of Israel's military operations. That includes more than 4,000 women and 7,000 children. Tens of thousands are reported to have been injured and many are missing, presumably under the rubble. All these numbers are increasing by the day.

Attacks from air, land and sea are intense, continuous and widespread. So far, they have reportedly hit 339 education facilities, 26 hospitals, 56 health-care facilities, 88 mosques and three churches. Over 60 per cent of Gaza's housing has reportedly been destroyed or damaged, some 300,000 houses and apartments. Some 85 per cent of the population has been forced from their homes. The people of Gaza are being told to move like human pinballs, ricocheting between ever-smaller slivers of the south, without any of the basics for survival.

But nowhere in Gaza is safe. At least 88 shelters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East have been hit, killing over 270 people and injuring more than 900. Conditions in shelters are overcrowded and unsanitary. People nurse open wounds. Hundreds of people stand in line for hours to use one shower or toilet. Families who have lost everything sleep on bare concrete floors, wearing clothes they have not changed for two months. Tens of thousands of Palestinians arrived in Rafah in recent days, overwhelming shelters there. Many displaced families, including children, older people, pregnant women and people with disabilities, are sleeping in streets and public spaces across the city.

Secondly, Gazans are running out of food. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), there is a serious risk of starvation and famine. In northern Gaza, 97 per cent of households are not eating enough. In the south, the figure among displaced people is 83 per cent. Half the people of the north and more than one third of displaced people in the south are simply starving. The World Food Programme's own food stocks are running out. In the north, 9 out of 10 people have spent at least one full day and night without food.

The last functioning flour mill in Gaza was destroyed on 15 November. WFP has provided food and cash assistance to hundreds of thousands of people across Gaza since the crisis began, and it is ready to scale up its operations. However, that would require effective access to all people in need and at least 40 trucks of food supplies every day, many times the current level.

Thirdly, Gaza's health system is collapsing, while needs are escalating. At least 286 health workers have been killed. Hospitals have suffered heavy bombardment — just 14 out of 36 are still functioning. Of those, three are providing basic first aid, while the others are delivering partial services. The European Gaza Hospital, one of two main hospitals in southern Gaza, has 370 beds. It is currently housing 1,000 patients and an estimated 70,000 people seeking shelter. There are critical shortages of drugs, blood products and medical supplies. Fuel to run the hospitals is severely rationed. Many patients are being treated on the floor and without anaesthetics. As patients with life-threatening injuries continue to arrive, wards are overflowing and staff are overwhelmed. At the same time, the unsanitary conditions in shelters and severe shortages of food and water are leading to increases in respiratory infections, scabies, jaundice and diarrhoea.

Everything I just described represents an unprecedented situation that led to my unprecedented decision to invoke Article 99, urging the members of the Security Council to press to avert a humanitarian catastrophe and appealing for a humanitarian ceasefire to be declared.

We are all aware that Israel began its military operation in response to the brutal terror attacks unleashed by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups on 7 October. I unreservedly condemn those attacks. I am appalled by the reports of sexual violence. There is no possible justification for deliberately killing some 1,200 people, including 33 children, injuring thousands more and taking hundreds of hostages. Some 130 hostages are still held captive. I call for their immediate and unconditional release, as well as their humane treatment and visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross until they are freed.

At the same time, the brutality perpetrated by Hamas can never justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people. And while indiscriminate rocket fire by Hamas into Israel and the use of civilians as human shields are in contravention of the laws of war, such

conduct does not absolve Israel of its own violations. International humanitarian law includes the duty to protect civilians and to comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. The laws of war also demand that civilians' essential needs must be met, including by facilitating the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian relief. International humanitarian law cannot be applied selectively. It is binding on all parties equally at all times, and the obligation to observe it does not depend on reciprocity.

The people of Gaza are looking into the abyss. The international community must do everything possible to end their ordeal. I urge the Council to spare no effort to push for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, for the protection of civilians and for the urgent delivery of life-saving aid.

While we deal with the current crisis, we cannot lose sight of the only viable possibility for a peaceful future: a two-State solution, on the basis of United Nations resolutions and international law, with Israel and Palestine living side-by side in peace and security. This is vital for Israelis, Palestinians and for international peace and security. The eyes of the world — and the eyes of history — are watching. It is time to act.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I would like to welcome you to New York, Sir, and to congratulate you and your country on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to express our appreciation for the presence of the Secretary-General and for his principled position reflected in the letter (S/2023/962) he transmitted to you recently, as well as for the crystal-clear and principled statement he just delivered to us. I thank him for being with us, for what he said and for the things that will hopefully be implemented from this moment on. You, Sir, are the third President of the Security Council to take office since Israel started its carpet bombing of the Gaza Strip. We hope that on this day, and under your presidency, the Council will finally be able to call for an immediate ceasefire.

Allow me to thank the Secretary-General for his relentless efforts, for the clarity of his voice and for having upheld his sacred mission to stand up for the

Charter of the United Nations and for the protection of civilians by calling — early on and ever since — for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. Through him, allow me to also thank the United Nations for its humanitarian efforts. The United Nations has been the subject of despicable attacks for honouring its mandate as formulated by Member States. It is the duty of Member States to reject and put an end to such attacks, especially at a time when United Nations personnel on the ground are also victims, with many killed, wounded or displaced.

In two months, Israel has killed 17,000 Palestinians, including 7,000 children. It wounded over 40,000 Palestinians. It displaced 1.9 million Palestinians. It destroyed two thirds of their homes. It attacked, besieged, destroyed and neutralized virtually all the hospitals. It bombed the bakeries. It attacked United Nations shelters. It attacked journalists. It cut off the electricity. It placed every possible impediment on humanitarian aid and access. We are all supposed to pretend that this aggression is not aimed at the destruction of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, when it has besieged and bombed our people and deprived them of all the requirements of life. I keep reading in the media that Israel has no clear war objectives. Are we supposed to pretend we do not know that the objective is the ethnic cleansing of the Gaza Strip and the dispossession and forcible displacement of the Palestinian people, when so many Israeli representatives could not refrain from admitting it?

Any who are against the destruction and displacement of the Palestinian people have to be in favour of an immediate ceasefire. When the Council refuses to call for a ceasefire, it is refusing to call for the only thing that can put an end to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. This is how Israel is conducting the war, through atrocities. The Council can keep calling on it to protect civilians, to uphold the laws of war and to allow humanitarian aid in. It will keep toying with members, fooling them, forcing them to discuss the number of trucks while people still cannot get food, water and medicine. It will keep telling the Council that if people only heeded its calls to head south then they would have been safe, while bombing them in the south itself. And now it is telling the Council it is creating imaginary safe zones, while it continues killing people everywhere. It will explain to the Council that all of Gaza is a military target, that everyone in Gaza can be killed, since they are either terrorists or human shields. Enough is enough. They are playing games with

the Council; they are taking Council members for a ride. The Council needs to wake up and see reality as it is. If two months of dehumanization and lies and massacres are not enough to make the Council understand Israel's plan, what will? Regardless of how good the intentions of members are or how genuine their efforts, this is the moment of truth, as the Secretary-General correctly stated a few minutes ago.

The shame is not on those calling for a ceasefire in the face of such atrocities; it haunts those refusing to do so. Israel's objective is clear: it is to force people out. And regardless of how many times some say that will not happen, everything confirms we were right from day one. We told the Council they would make Gaza unliveable for all; that they would displace the people; that they were pushing them south and killing them in the process; and that eventually they would launch a full-fledged attack on the south to push people out. When facts show we are right, no one should persist in saying they could somehow allow this war to continue but be against its true objectives. This war is part of the assault to end the Palestinian people as a nation and to destroy the question of Palestine. If members do not share that objective, then they must stand against the war.

The person leading this assault would sacrifice the Palestinian people and the Israeli people for his selfish political survival and is a sworn enemy of the two-State solution. His entire life has been dedicated to the annihilation of the Palestinian people and peace. He has been searching for an opportunity to put a definitive end to the national aspirations of the Palestinian people and to the aspirations for peace among Palestinians and Israelis. This is Netanyahu's war. This is the war of the extremist coalition in power in Israel. No one should get sucked into it any further. Its aim is not security; its aim is to prevent forever any prospect of Palestinian independence and of peace. Those intentions are clear in the Gaza Strip as well as in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. No one should pretend there is any question regarding the criminal nature of this assault. No one should pretend that those launching the bombs everywhere care at all about people held captive. No one should pretend that this war is targeting Hamas, when almost all its victims are civilians and when 70 per cent of those killed are women and children.

We have hostages being held by Israel as a means to terrorize and pressure our people — children, women and men of all ages, by the thousands. That includes those abducted in recent days in Gaza, humiliated

and paraded in the streets, almost naked. We have 2 million hostages in the Gaza Strip. Our civilians have been attacked repeatedly. Our security and our very existence are under threat. Are we allowed to do what Israel does?

The law should be upheld for everyone and against anyone. The same law protects all civilian life. There is no hierarchy of races or faith or nationalities. No one should take example from the horrors of the Second World War to justify horrors today against the Palestinian people. Everything we built as humankind after the Second World War was to prevent these horrors. Now they are taking place in Gaza against the Palestinian people, displayed on the screens of the entire world, and the war criminals conducting it have no shame. And instead of being blamed, they are blaming everyone else, attacking everyone. That includes the Secretary-General, who is upholding his sacred mission and standing by the Charter of the United Nations. They are attacking States that are refusing to be complicit with such crimes, including their allies. They are attacking United Nations officials, United Nations agencies and humanitarian and human rights organizations performing their duty in the most impossible of circumstances. They are bullying and intimidating all those who stand for the rule of international law, because they believe there is an international law specific to them, that allows them to commit atrocities. How can this be allowed to continue? It cannot. It should not. It has to stop. Israeli exceptionalism has to end, and it has to end now. Stop rewriting international law to fit Israeli crimes and stop calling for respect for international law while supporting an assault that has torn it to shreds.

The Palestinian people will not die in silence. The Palestinian people will not die in vain. The Palestinian people deserve respect — every people does, but we have earned it. We have paid the heaviest of prices to earn it, and we have survived every attempt to annihilate us over a century, with barely any means. Show us respect not in words but in deeds. Show respect to our lives and to our rights.

This is a moment in history, one for which everyone will be asked where they stood, and that will determine who they truly are and what they really stand for. The entirety of international law lies on one premise: nothing justifies atrocities. This is an atrocity assault. When faced with atrocities, it is not your right to call for them to end, it is your obligation to end them.

Save lives. Save our lives and their lives. Heed the call by billions around the world, by an overwhelming majority of States from across the globe. Let the most noble human instinct carry us — the instinct to preserve life. There is no role more important for the Council than to save civilian lives — 2.3 million Palestinians are fighting for their lives as we speak, every single day. Save them. Tell them and show them that help is on the way.

We call on the Council, in the name of humanity, in the name of justice, in the name of peace, to vote for a ceasefire by supporting the draft resolution presented by the United Arab Emirates, as the Arab representative on the Security Council. We thank all those co-sponsoring it from across the globe.

What is happening in Palestine now and what will happen next will determine the future of our region for generations to come and will impact relations and perceptions across the world for generations to come. This is the time for courage and decisiveness. This is the time for action. Time is up. The Council needs to act, and the Council needs to act now.

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

Mr. Erdan (Israel): Recently, the world has witnessed brutal wars and bloodshed. Nearly two years ago, peace was upended in Europe for the first time since the Second World War. Russia invaded Ukraine, and the entire globe has felt the impact. Food prices and energy prices surged, affecting countries everywhere. Supply chains suffered a hard hit, and the chance for a global war became a terrifying possible reality. Yet shockingly, Article 99 was not invoked. The same can be said regarding the thousands killed in Yemen, or how the murderous Al-Assad regime of Syria continued to massacre its own people, including through the use of chemical weapons. In each one of these conflicts — and I have other examples — tens, if not hundreds of thousands, were killed, and millions were displaced, yet not once — not even once — has Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations been invoked. Is the war in Ukraine not a threat to international peace and security? Do the millions of displaced Syrians and the children whose corpses were found foaming at the mouth in Douma not symbolize a threat to regional stability? Is watching thousands of Yemeni children die in war, while tens of thousands starve not worthy enough to invoke Article 99?

Despite the immense global impact of other conflicts and far more pressing threats to international peace and security, Israel's defensive war against Hamas, a designated terrorist organization, was the catalyst for activating Article 99. The irony is that regional stability and the security of both Israelis and Gazans can only be achieved once Hamas is eliminated, not one minute before. So the true path to ensure peace is only through supporting Israel's mission, absolutely not through calling for a ceasefire.

Secondly, for those of my colleagues calling for a ceasefire, it is crucial that they remember the facts. On 6 October, there was a ceasefire in place, but on 7 October, Hamas broke the ceasefire with an unprovoked invasion of thousands of Hamas Nazis into Israel. These Hamas terrorists carried out a massacre the likes of which we have not seen since the Holocaust. They raped women and girls, beheaded babies, burned families alive and took 250 hostages, ranging from infants to the elderly. Following the atrocities of 7 October, Israel committed itself to the elimination of Hamas's capabilities for the sole reason of ensuring that such horrors could never again be repeated. And if Hamas is not destroyed, such horrors will be repeated. Hamas officials have made it clear publicly time and again that 7 October was just a rehearsal, and they will continue to carry out atrocities again and again.

Hamas is responsible for inhumane terror against Israelis. Hamas is responsible for ruling Gaza with an iron fist, forcing Gazans to live in poverty, deprived of basic human rights. Hamas is responsible for exploiting international aid to fuel their war machine. And calling for a ceasefire is precisely what ensures that this will continue. A ceasefire means that the suffering of all will carry on. A ceasefire cements Hamas's control of Gaza, but even more than that, calling for a ceasefire sends a clear message that Hamas is forgiven for their deliberate atrocities and Hamas's oppression of Gazans is given a green light by the international community.

Hamas, like any terror entity, only responds when its existence is threatened. And without the military pressure applied on Hamas, no amount of diplomacy can secure the release of hostages. Is this what the Council desires — that Hamas continue its reign of terror forever, that the hostages, among them women and children, never leave Gaza? Hamas will not even permit the Red Cross to visit them. Hamas has a clear script. Calling for a ceasefire is following that script. Hamas knows that it cannot defeat Israel on the

conventional battlefield. This is why Hamas targets and murders civilians. They seek to terrorize Israelis and drive us out of our homeland in fear.

But Hamas's vicious strategy is also to advance the deaths of many Gazan civilians as well. This is why Hamas hides behind and under the civilian population. This is why they use hospitals for cover and schools as arms caches, including United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East schools. Hamas wants to maximize civilian casualties, to co-opt the United Nations to pressure Israel to cease its fire and allow Hamas to survive and continue its reign of terror. Hamas knows that the more civilian fatalities there are, the more pressure the international community will put on Israel. That is why Hamas also fabricates death tolls, which are taken at face value here, with no real efforts made by the United Nations to verify them. According to the Hamas Ministry of Health, almost no terrorists have been killed in this war — only women and children. This is the same body that falsely blamed Israel for 500 casualties at Al Ahli Hospital, when the truth is that the number of casualties was drastically lower, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad was the one responsible for the fatalities.

I will be very clear. The numbers on which Council members are basing their discussions on are libellous and distorted — drastically. Hamas has built terror bases inside and underneath medical facilities. That has been proven. They store rockets and assault rifles in children's bedrooms. And just yesterday, Hamas launched 12 rockets at Israel from within a designated humanitarian zone in southern Gaza. Rockets were fired mere metres from the tents of evacuated Gazans. Hamas exploits Gazans as human shields in hopes that civilian casualties will rise and the United Nations will call for a ceasefire. Do we want to be the actors in the show that Hamas has carefully crafted? It is always easier to pressure the law-abiding democracy as opposed to the terrorists who do not even recognize the existence of international law. But is that the right and just way to ensure security? Of course not. It is Hamas's script of death. Do not agree to be part of it, please. Hamas is the root cause of the situation in Gaza, yet there is zero accountability for their evil. Why is Hamas not held fully responsible by the United Nations and its bodies? Tell Gazans the truth. They have to hear it from the Council. That is the only way to bring about bottom-up change in Gaza.

Hamas not only violated the ceasefire on 7 October, it also fundamentally violated the recent humanitarian pause. Last week, there was a pause in place. The agreement was clear. For every 10 hostages released, the pause would be extended by 24 hours. Hundreds of aid trucks entered Gaza. Fuel tankers were and continue to be permitted in. Wounded children and their families were evacuated for treatment. Field hospitals were established and continue to be established. And Israel completely halted all military activities. Israel asked for the daily release of 10 women and children held hostage, who had been savagely taken from their homes and from a peace party. While we upheld our side of the agreement and even exceeded aid quotas, Hamas violated it — not once, but several times. Fifteen minutes after the pause began, Hamas fired a barrage of rockets into Israel. Throughout the following eight days, Hamas carried out shooting attacks, detonated improvised explosive devices and fired anti-tank missiles. Hamas violated the pause time and again, while Israel abided by the pause.

Hamas not only violated the agreement by attacking Israeli soldiers, but also violated the agreement regarding the release of hostages. They separated mothers from their children. They refused to release all women and children as agreed. Today there are still 138 hostages being held in Gaza, and Hamas has not even allowed the Red Cross to visit them to provide their families with the most basic sign of life. That is an abhorrent war crime. Hamas ended the pause by refusing to abide by the terms of the hostage-release agreement and then proceeded to fire a barrage of rockets at Israeli towns and cities, targeting Israeli civilians yet again.

How can it be that those who are now calling for a ceasefire are not demanding that Hamas immediately stop all terror activities? Why is it only now that they have woken up, and not when Hamas caused the previous pause to collapse? If the Council wants to see a ceasefire, it should start by demanding it from Hamas — the party that broke the past two. Why is the draft resolution (S/2023/970) not directed at Yahya Sinwar and Ismail Haniyeh? Why? Do Council members not know who was responsible for ending the previous ceasefire and reigniting hostilities?

Hamas is solely responsible for the humanitarian situation on the ground, and they must be held fully accountable by the Council. Hamas is committed to bringing death and destruction upon both Israelis and Gazans. Where is Israel? Israel is taking every possible

effort to improve the situation for Gazans. It is a fact that some members of the Council and the Secretary-General refuse to come to terms with. Here are some other facts and figures. As of 7 December, in total, since the start of the war, more than 3,500 aid trucks carrying humanitarian supplies have entered Gaza through the Rafah crossing. More than 70,000 tons of aid, including food, water, medical supplies, tents, beds, blankets, humanitarian equipment and more, have entered Gaza. Even now, in the midst of heavy fighting, Israel agreed to increase the amount of fuel entering Gaza, and yesterday the entry of 65 aid trucks was facilitated. But that number could have been much higher if the United Nations capacity to accept more trucks permitted that. There are currently hundreds of aid trucks in a logjam waiting to enter Gaza after security inspection, and the only reason that they have not entered is because of the logistical difficulties of international organizations.

Today Israel accepted to screen 334 aid trucks, which means that each of those trucks will be ready to enter Gaza, should international organizations be willing to accept them. Israel also facilitated the construction of two field hospitals, one run by the Kingdom of Jordan and the other by the United Arab Emirates, to treat the uninvolved sick and injured. France, in coordination with Israel, has supplied a floating hospital that is treating Gazans in El Arish, and Italy is following suit. Saudi Arabia donated 21 additional ambulances. Five other field hospitals are set to open soon, to be run by the Red Cross, Egypt, the International Medical Corps, Türkiye and Italy. A total of 553 sick and injured have exited Gaza for treatment abroad, accompanied by 378 family members and guardians. That was all allowed and facilitated by Israel. In fact, Israel welcomes any and all humanitarian assistance to Gaza from any and all countries willing to assist.

But sadly, not all of that aid reaches its destination. In the previous days and weeks, we have seen footage from inside Gaza of Hamas terrorists literally shooting at Palestinians trying to gain access to basic humanitarian supplies. Gazans have reported that aid is being taken by Hamas and distributed exclusively to its terrorists. Boxes of humanitarian aid have been found in Hamas terror tunnels. So if humanitarian supplies are not getting to where they should, the finger should be pointed at Hamas. Hamas is the genocidal terror organization that rules Gaza with an iron fist. Hamas violated the ceasefire on 7 October, and it was Hamas, not Israel, that violated the humanitarian

pause. To Hamas, international humanitarian law holds no importance. When sitting in these meetings, it feels as if Hamas does not exist at all. It is always only about Israel. That is a distortion of reality, and it is unacceptable. Hamas must be held accountable.

Today is the first day of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, the festival of light. It is one of the Jewish holidays that celebrates the Jewish people overcoming attempts in each generation to destroy us — how world Powers tried to deny our presence in our ancestral homeland in Jerusalem in second-century BCE, before Jesus and before Muhammad. It is a holiday that celebrates how light prevailed over darkness. Today, sadly, we find ourselves again surrounded by darkness, with forces that seek to destroy us and to demonize and delegitimize us. Jewish tradition teaches that even a little bit of light can dispel much darkness. Everyone here can use light to dispel the darkness and expose the truth. I pray that we see another Hanukkah miracle here at the United Nations, and that the Almighty will allow truth and light to prevail here in the Council. I pray that we will see Hamas defeated soon, so that both Israelis and Gazans can live freely, free of violence and of fear.

Israel will continue with its mission, which is the elimination of Hamas's terror capabilities and the return of all of the hostages. We will complete our mission while supporting every humanitarian initiative to improve the situation for Gazans. Whoever truly seeks peace and security in the region must understand that the only way to achieve it is by destroying Hamas, not by calling for a ceasefire that will only extend the war and everyone's suffering. There is no other option.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates): I thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing. We are profoundly grateful for his steadfast moral leadership. By taking the rare step to invoke Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations, he is compelling us to confront the enormity of the catastrophe unfolding in Gaza. It is our fervent hope that his demand is met.

For two harrowing months, we have borne witness to the onslaught in Gaza. Israel's military operation has killed more than 16,000 Palestinians, 7,000 of them children. It has displaced 80 per cent of the population and damaged or destroyed 60 per cent of housing units. For context, that is a scale of destruction surpassing

even the bombing of Dresden in 1945. For the many Gazans who have never left that narrow, besieged strip of land, their entire world is being systematically demolished before their eyes. The invocation of Article 99 must be a tipping point, a solemn reflection of the desperate plight in Gaza and the imperative need for the Security Council to act. The Council must act when too little aid is getting in and humanitarian workers are unable to deliver it for fear of being killed. The Council must act when the siege of Gaza is becoming a major source of death. The Council must act when unrelenting bombardment is killing more than 130 United Nations staff members. Despite the recent temporary pause, the violence and the danger to civilians have not abated. In fact, the conflict has now graduated to a new, more dangerous phase. The siege of Khan Yunis and other parts of southern Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of people have fled, has now begun. There is literally no safe haven for the millions trapped and under attack.

In his letter to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/962), the Secretary-General noted that Gaza's health-care system, or what is left of it, is on the verge of collapse. Israel is warning the World Health Organization that unless it removes its medical supplies in southern Gaza, the impending military operations will render them unusable. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the deliberate targeting of medical facilities, equipment and personnel. For its part, the United Arab Emirates established a field hospital inside Gaza on 2 December, with an operational capacity of 150 beds. We recognize that those efforts are not nearly enough. Even during the recent pause, we saw the need for an enhanced delivery mechanism to enable full, rapid, safe and unhindered access for aid. We need a streamlined monitoring system and an expanded capacity to deliver goods, including through the opening of further crossings and entry points. We note that Israel reportedly agreed to open the Kerem Shalom crossing for inspections only, and while that should reduce the time delays, it remains necessary that all crossings be opened and repaired, if repairs are needed.

We stress the importance of ensuring the full implementation of resolution 2712 (2023), which demands that all parties respect their obligations under international law and calls for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses. We underscore that Council members must ensure that implementation, but we all know that the only way to end this tragedy is to

impose an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. There is no defensible moral, political or military justification for the carnage to continue. After two months of war, ambulances are delivering more corpses than survivors to the few emergency rooms left functioning. In the past few days reports have revealed precisely what unfolded in northern Gaza. In the paediatric intensive-care unit of an abandoned hospital several babies lay dead, their bodies decomposing. Let that harrowing image haunt anyone persisting in the fantasy that the operation in the south will be any less horrific. It will not.

This war has brought our region to a breaking point, but its effects have rippled far beyond. There has been an appalling increase in incidents of antisemitism and Islamophobia worldwide. The international system is teetering on the brink, for the war signals that might makes right and that compliance with international humanitarian law is dependent on the identities of the victims and the perpetrators. The Secretary-General, every head of every United Nations agency, humanitarian organizations and an overwhelming majority of the world's population have repeatedly called on Council members to bring the unrestrained violence to a definitive and sustainable end. The United Arab Emirates has circulated a draft resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire to do just that. Today the Council will vote and have an opportunity to respond to the deafening calls across the world to bring this violence to an end.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his frank assessment of the disastrous situation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone. Given the current circumstances, we take note of his entirely appropriate decision to invoke Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations to draw the attention of the Security Council to this issue.

Together with our colleagues from China and the United Arab Emirates, and guided by the same considerations as the Secretary-General, we asked the Ecuadorian presidency of the Council to convene an urgent meeting in connection with the resumption of hostilities both in the Gaza Strip and the other occupied Palestinian territories, as well as in the areas bordering Lebanon and Syria. We consider it extremely important to note that both the United Nations Secretariat, headed by the Secretary-General, and an overwhelming number of United Nations Member States are united in their desire to take decisive measures in order to put

an end to the deaths and suffering of civilians in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone.

It is no exaggeration to say that this is a moment of truth. For almost two months, attempts have been made to persuade us that the most important, most urgent and most pressing thing that the Council could do was to call for humanitarian pauses. We were told that it was supposedly an attainable and realistic goal, unlike a ceasefire. In answer to every question as to how it was going to be implemented, we were told that the humanitarian agencies on the ground would figure it out.

It is time we took stock. There was indeed a humanitarian pause. However, it had nothing to do with resolution 2712 (2023). The pause, and the release of several dozen hostages and Palestinian prisoners, were the result of agreements that regional mediators made with Hamas and Israel, whose observance was of course monitored by no one. Nor did the humanitarian pause have any political significance — the parties took a break and achieved their tactical goals, after which Israel, with the active support of the United States, moved on to a new, even deadlier phase of its ground operation in Gaza.

Let me cite some passages from yesterday's letter from the Secretary-General:

“Civilians throughout Gaza face grave danger... There is no effective protection of civilians. The health-care system in Gaza is collapsing. Hospitals have turned into battlegrounds... Nowhere is safe in Gaza. Amid constant bombardments by the Israel Defense Forces ... I expect public order to completely break down soon ... rendering even limited humanitarian assistance impossible” (S/2023/962).

These are the real fruits of resolution 2712 (2023), of all the protracted discussions in the Council, which, unfortunately, seem more like empty talk. And today António Guterres has once again summed up the situation — United Nations humanitarian agencies, under the current circumstances, are simply unable to help the people of Gaza.

We deeply regret that the Security Council, with its uniquely powerful instrument, under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, in all of this time failed to adopt any clear binding decision to demand — not call — the parties to end the violence. Under pressure

from the United States, which has threatened to block any other product, the absolute imperative for a ceasefire was replaced with a call addressed to no one in particular for unenforceable pauses, which, essentially, dovetailed with the Israeli approach of continuing military operations in the enclave. This was a huge step backwards from General Assembly resolution ES-10/21, which the overwhelming majority of States Members of the United Nations adopted on 27 October.

Today the Council has a good opportunity to end this abnormal situation and do what the international community expects of it. That requires adopting draft resolution S/2023/970, submitted by the United Arab Emirates. I trust that all of our colleagues will summon the strength and courage to do so.

Two months of conflict in Gaza have brought tremendous suffering to the civilian population. During this time, more than 7,000 Palestinian children have died. Information is becoming public about the destruction of many hospitals, schools, refugee camps and United Nations facilities, together with humanitarian personnel. The magnitude of this devastation is itself evidence of the indiscriminate use of force. Moreover, there are indicators of deliberate destruction of objects protected under international humanitarian law.

War crimes are mounting. In recent days, shocking information has been disseminated about Israel's plans to flood underground facilities in the Gaza Strip with seawater. According to publicly accessible sources, the Israel Defense Forces has already established a system of pipes and pumps designed to inject seawater and is currently discussing with the United States the practical possibility of carrying out such a flooding — whether there is sufficient water, whether the topography of the tunnels will allow for such actions, and so on.

Such a step, if taken, would constitute a blatant war crime. Such a flooding could be akin to an order of “no mercy” for anyone, and there may be civilians present in those tunnels. The likelihood of that is very high, for where else could they escape the indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza and the deliberate targeting of hospitals, schools, refugee camps and United Nations facilities? As we heard from the Secretary-General today, nowhere is safe in the small, densely populated Gaza Strip. The southern part of the Strip, which had previously been subjected to regular strikes, has now been completely transformed into an active war zone.

The biased Western media extols the ingenious tactical decisions of the Israeli army. It is not even questioning the potential consequences of pumping thousands of cubic meters of seawater, in other words, salt water, into the ground. We see a clear plan to demolish the already tenuous agricultural capacity of the Strip, since seawater would inevitably contaminate Gaza's groundwater.

I note that from the beginning of the escalation, Israel has prevented the normal supply of drinking water into Gaza. Most of the water supply has been cut off. Deliveries of water are only being supplied to some areas of the southern Gaza Strip. All humanitarian agencies unanimously say that this is not enough to meet even the basic needs of the thousands of civilians besieged in Gaza. If, in addition to the artificially created problems of drinking water from the tap, the groundwater is also contaminated, the situation will become truly catastrophic. Let us recall that, pursuant to the norms of international humanitarian law, specifically articles 23 and 59 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the occupying Power bears a specific responsibility to ensure that the civilian population has access to basic necessities.

We would like to emphasize that the consequences of the contamination of groundwater — the only source of fresh water for the people of Gaza — will persist not for years, but for centuries. Together with the incessant indiscriminate bombardment and targeted attacks on civilians' objects, aimed at instilling terror and panic among civilians, a systematic strategy to forcibly displace Palestinians is emerging. Its cannibalistic logic is simple — to make life in Gaza unbearable, even impossible, leaving the civilian population with a single choice: to leave their homes or to be killed.

This inhumane strategy is abundant with war crimes, including egregious violations of nearly all provisions of articles 51 and 52 of the Protocol Additional I to the Geneva Conventions. In particular, they prohibit attacks against civilian population and objects, acts or threats of violence with the principal purpose of terrorizing the civilian population, as well as indiscriminate attacks.

The Council is therefore invited to sit tight and observe the mass crimes being committed, including with the use of weapons provided by Western countries — first and foremost the United States and the United Kingdom — and with their full political support.

I wish to stress that references by Israel and its allies to the actions of Hamas on 7 October, which we certainly condemn, do not justify — and, in principle, cannot justify — the large-scale and systematic war crimes and crimes against humanity that are being committed in the Gaza Strip. Failure to respect humanitarian law by one party to the conflict in no way exempts the other party to the conflict from complying with the obligations incumbent upon them. Moreover, article 51 of the Protocol Additional I to the Geneva Conventions expressly prohibits attacks against the civilian population or civilians by way of reprisals.

At the same time, one can hardly expect a proper assessment by Western countries or the corrupt institutions under their control, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC would never go against its patrons or allies, as it is designed to advance their political agendas. After all, neither the United States or the United Kingdom or other Western countries have been held accountable for their war crimes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. We all remember how the British Prosecutor of the ICC, Mr. Karim Khan, disgracefully deprioritized investigations into Western military crimes in those countries, essentially halting them. We have no doubt that he will behave in the same way with respect to Israel and its sponsors.

We certainly share the view that we must all not lose sight of the prospects for a Palestinian-Israeli settlement on the basis of a two-State solution, which we believe has no alternative. We stand ready to work to that end, but the priority today is to end armed hostilities and to save Palestinians from extermination.

In conclusion, I would like to address our Arab brothers and sisters in their language.

(spoke in Arabic)

Russia calls for an end to the cycle of violence following the Israeli-Palestinian escalation that we have been witnessing since 7 October. We also add our voice to the numerous calls for a sustainable ceasefire and a return to addressing the root causes of the current conflict, which would move the humanitarian catastrophe away from the Gaza Strip.

Russia categorically condemns any actions that could lead to civilian casualties, including women and children. We do not accept plans aimed at forcibly transferring Gaza people to the south of the Strip. That constitutes another Nakba for the Palestinian people.

Russia supports all constructive initiatives of the Security Council aimed at normalizing the situation and opening a path to a serious settlement process between Palestinians and Israelis against the backdrop of attempts by one member of the Council to slow down and thwart those joint efforts.

In the face of those dubious plans, Russia continues to stand in solidarity with the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to establish their own independent State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace and security with its Israeli neighbour. Russia stands ready to redouble its efforts, in coordination with its active partners, to achieve that desired objective on the basis of the well-known terms of reference, including the relevant Security Council resolutions and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

In that regard, Russia supports draft resolution S/2023/970 submitted by the United Arab Emirates and calls on all its colleagues in the Council to vote in favour of it today.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Secretary-General Guterres for his crucial briefing a moment ago. In his letter dated 6 December to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/962), the Secretary-General invoked Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations and brought the attention of the Security Council to the situation in Gaza, which may aggravate existing threats to international peace and security. The Secretary-General just once again issued a sobering warning and made an appeal, fully underscoring the gravity and urgency of the current situation and demonstrating once again his sense of responsibility.

The situation before the Council and the task required by it is very clear and definitive. It must act immediately, achieve a ceasefire, protect civilians and avoid a human catastrophe on a larger scale.

Draft resolution S/2023/970, submitted by the United Arab Emirates on behalf of the Group of Arab States, reflects the universal core of the international community and represents the right direction for the restoration of peace. China fully supports that and will join in co-sponsoring the draft resolution.

As it stands, only a ceasefire can save lives and avoid a greater human catastrophe. The war in Gaza has claimed the lives of more than 17,000 innocent civilians. More than 1 million people have fled from

the north to the south only to find there is nowhere to hide and nowhere to go. Words cannot describe the scale of this human catastrophe. Any waiting or delay means more death.

At this juncture, only a ceasefire can avoid the havoc of a regional conflagration. The negative effects of the conflict are increasingly spilling over. The West Bank, the Lebanese-Israeli border and the Syrian-Israeli border have frequently sounded the alarm. A crisis with a wider impact is imminent. Any tolerance and connivance will push regional peace and security towards a precipice.

At this juncture, only a ceasefire can create the necessary conditions for reviving the political prospects for the two-State solution. The two-State solution is the fundamental way to achieve the peaceful coexistence of two States, Palestine and Israel, and lasting peace in the Middle East. Any action that allows the current conflict to drag on will only sow the seeds of hatred between the two sides and lead to further deterioration of the situation and do more damage to the political prospects of the two-State solution. At this moment, only a ceasefire befits the appropriate role of the Council.

The international community is eagerly looking to the Council to assume its primary function in the maintenance of international peace and security. The Council has no other option but to act urgently, without procrastination, to bring about a ceasefire and protect civilians. Any hesitation or excuses would be irresponsible.

China strongly calls on all members to adopt a responsible approach and support the Council in making the right decision in the face of war and peace, life and death. Let us act for peace and act to save lives.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing.

For the past two months, the Security Council has been engaged in continuous meetings on the topics highlighted in his recent letter (S/2023/962). In parallel, and even as it has supported the right of another Member State to defend its people against heinous atrocities and acts of terrorism, the United States — at the highest levels — has undertaken intensive diplomacy to save lives and lay a foundation for a durable peace.

American diplomacy opened the way for the first trucks that flowed into Gaza with aid. In partnership with Qatar and Egypt, it helped reunite more than

100 hostages with their loved ones and dramatically expanded aid to civilians in Gaza, during a seven-day-long humanitarian pause.

Hamas, however, has a different set of goals. Its refusal to release young women hostages led to a breakdown in the pause and the resumption of the fighting.

The Council's failure to condemn Hamas's 7 October terrorist attacks, including its acts of sexual violence and other unthinkable evils, is a serious moral failure. And it underscores the fundamental disconnect between the discussions that we have been having in this Chamber and the realities on the ground.

An undeniable part of that reality is that, if Israel unilaterally laid down its weapons today, as some Member States have called for, Hamas would continue to hold hostages — women and children and elderly men — many of whom, according to survivor accounts, are being subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment.

And as of today, Hamas continues to pose a threat to Israel and remain in charge of Gaza. That is not a threat that any one of our Governments would allow to continue to remain on our own borders, not after the worst attack on our people in several decades.

For that reason, while the United States strongly supports a durable peace in which both Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace and security, we do not support calls for an immediate ceasefire. That would only plant the seeds for the next war because Hamas has no desire to see a durable peace, to see a two-State solution.

I am pained by the suffering that we have witnessed over the past two months. Even when we, as Governments, are compelled to take up arms and protect our people from the most heinous acts of terrorism and violence, war is tragic. It is tragic for the families of the hostages, who await word on the fate of their loved ones. We are doing everything possible to free the remaining hostages and reiterate our expectation that the International Committee of the Red Cross be permitted to access and provide medical treatment to the hostages held by Hamas and other extremist groups. The war is equally tragic for civilians in Gaza. The scale of civilian suffering is devastating and heartbreaking.

Hamas intentionally embeds itself within civilian areas. But that does not in any way change the fact that how Israel defends itself matters. We have

been unequivocal: Israel must respect international humanitarian law and conduct its operations in a way that minimizes civilian harm. To back up those words and help protect civilians, we have supported establishing a more effective humanitarian deconfliction mechanism with the United Nations, and we are monitoring its implementation. That is a moral imperative and strategic imperative. One can only win in urban warfare by protecting civilians.

In every conversation, we also have underscored that Israel must avoid further mass displacement of civilians in the south of Gaza, many of whom previously fled violence. Civilians must be provided adequate time and opportunity to move, including through corridors that allow people to move safely from defined areas of hostilities. Israel must further ensure sufficient humanitarian support exists for displaced individuals.

Finally, civilians displaced in Gaza must have an opportunity to return home as soon as conditions permit. There must be no enduring internal displacement or reduction in Gaza's territory. Under no circumstances will the United States support the forced relocation of Palestinians from Gaza or the West Bank. Although the extended humanitarian pause has ended — again, by Hamas's choice — we have been clear that humanitarian aid must not only continue, but must be expanded.

We welcome the Israeli Government's decision to open Kerem Shalom for inspections and screening of humanitarian goods. We will continue to be in touch with Israel to ensure this happens, and on the timeline committed. We also welcome the Israeli Government's decision to ensure the provision of fuel that meets requisite needs to sustain the humanitarian assistance operation, including vital civilian infrastructure. Both of these outcomes are the result of intensive United States engagement with all parties and are consistent with resolution 2712 (2023). They lay the foundation to expand sustained, desperately needed humanitarian aid.

Of course, humanitarian aid cannot be delivered if humanitarian workers are not protected, and all parties have an obligation to protect United Nations and humanitarian personnel. We offer our deepest condolences to all the families, friends and colleagues of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East staff who lost their lives since 7 October. Attacks against United Nations shelters and facilities are unacceptable. We have also continued to reaffirm that the work journalists do in

conflict settings is vital and they, too, must be protected. Israel must avoid damage to civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, power stations, water facilities and telecommunications infrastructure.

Regarding the regional dimensions of this conflict, we are concerned by the renewed violence along the Blue Line. Restoring calm there is of utmost importance, as is fully implementing resolution 1701 (2006). Moreover, we condemn the recent attacks by Houthis against three separate commercial vessels operating in international waters on the southern Red Sea. Consistent with Iran's long-term support and encouragement of the Houthis's destabilizing actions in the region, we know that Iran was engaged in planning Houthi operations. Iran has the choice to provide or withhold this support, without which the Houthis would struggle to effectively track and strike commercial vessels navigating shipping lanes through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. We welcome the Council's press statement (SC/15513) condemning those attacks and underlining the importance of navigational rights and freedoms of all vessels in the Red Sea. We are engaged in intensive consultations with partners and allies to determine the appropriate next steps.

The United States has also been clear about the dangers from the rise in extremist violence committed by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank. Violent extremist settlers must be held accountable for violent acts. The United States is therefore implementing a new visa restriction policy targeting individuals believed to have been involved in or meaningfully contributed to undermining peace, security or stability in the West Bank. President Biden has been clear: the Palestinian people deserve a State of their own and a future free from Hamas, and a two-State solution is the only way to guarantee the long-term security of both the Israeli and the Palestinian people.

Members of the Council advocating for draft resolutions have an obligation to explain how their proposals will break the cycle of unceasing violence and support the steps we all agree are necessary to lay the foundation for a more peaceful and secure future so that history does not keep repeating itself. Our goal should not simply be to stop the war for today, it should be to end the war forever, break the cycle of unceasing violence and build something stronger in Gaza and across the Middle East so that history does not keep repeating itself. As has been the case since day one of this crisis, the United States will continue to use all its influence to encourage the reunification of hostages

with their loved ones and the further expansion of aid to Palestinian civilians in Gaza, who have suffered tremendous losses. We will continue pressing for the protection of civilians as Israel pursues legitimate military objectives. And we will not give up on a future in which Hamas does not control Gaza, which is untenable for Israel's and the region's security and the well-being of the Palestinian people.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General for calling this meeting and for his remarks. Like others in this room, Albania shares the deep concerns about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. We commend the efforts of the United Nations, regional partners, the United States and all those who are working to guarantee the free flow of humanitarian aid in Gaza. We are also encouraged by the recent news on the possible use of the Kerem Shalom crossing for screening and inspections. It would increase and expedite the entry of more humanitarian assistance into Gaza, which is very much needed. Throughout this week, approximately 80 trucks per day made their way into Gaza, compared to more than 200 during November's week-long humanitarian pause. Civilians in Gaza need more much humanitarian aid than before the Hamas attack.

While all efforts are concentrated on the protection of civilians and the provision of humanitarian aid to all those in need, we must not lose sight of the entire picture in this terrible situation. We reiterate our condemnation of the terrorist attack of Hamas on Israel and its people on 7 October, including the indiscriminate rocket launches on the residential areas of Israel. The horrible events of 7 October, the abduction of innocent civilians and the consecutive violence, including sexual violence and psychological pressure exercised on them, are unacceptable. Nothing justifies the abduction of civilians, and nothing can excuse their use for political goals. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages, in compliance with international humanitarian law, and also condemn the use of Palestinian civilians as human shields by Hamas. The Security Council must stand against such injustice towards the Palestinians, Israelis and civilians of other nationalities and hold Hamas accountable. We regret that the Security Council has not been able to condemn Hamas's terror. By not condemning Hamas, the Security Council risks empowering them. This lack of condemnation does not contribute to empowering the Palestinian Authority. It does not help the Palestinian

people and does not contribute to the security of the entire region.

The huge impact of the conflict between Israel and Hamas on Palestinian civilians cannot be ignored. We call on Israel to fully comply with international humanitarian law and to exercise the principle of proportionality and distinction in its military operations. Protection of civilians at war is a must, and lives matter the same — Israelis and Palestinians alike. More should be done to protect them and civilian infrastructure. Furthermore, we call on Israel to address the issue of increased settler violence on Palestinian civilians in the West Bank. We deplore the extremist violence and call for those responsible to be held accountable.

In conclusion, while all efforts are invested towards restoring calm on the ground, the international community must also seek to restore the perspective of a political horizon based on securing Israel's right to exist and its security on one hand, and a viable pathway for Palestinians to have their own State and freedom on the other hand. It is time to think seriously and to start setting the foundation for a future in security, dignity and prosperity for all.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank the Secretary-General for his sobering briefing and emphasize Malta's full support for his decision to invoke Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations.

The catastrophic situation and hostilities in Gaza are fuelling unprecedented levels of human suffering and threaten regional peace with serious international repercussions. More than 15,000 people have been killed thus far, 67 per cent of whom are women and children. Apart from the implementation of all provisions of resolution 2712 (2023), which include the unconditional release of all remaining hostages, an immediate humanitarian ceasefire is now critical. We are disappointed that the temporary truce achieved a few weeks ago, allowing for the release of hostages and much-needed aid into Gaza, has broken down. The resumption of hostilities in the Gaza Strip is distressing. The renewed fighting has brought with it more death and devastation and has added to the extreme hardships of a population under siege.

In the past few weeks, a number of United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners have outlined the catastrophe that is unfolding, and the Council must heed their warnings. Inaction is not an option. Civilians in Gaza are lacking the basic means for survival, including

food, water and medicine. The health-care system is on its knees. Collapsing hospitals and a handful of facilities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are sheltering more than a million people, and 133 UNRWA workers have been killed. The Agency's ability to work is at stake. The conditions are compounding serious risks of widespread disease. Children are yet again bearing the brunt of the hostilities. They continue to be killed or maimed and denied access to health care and education. Thousands have been orphaned. This must stop. The future of an entire generation is being jeopardized. There is no scenario that justifies the denial of aid for 2.2 million people, 80 per cent of whom have been displaced. In conformity with international law, all parties are obliged to ensure that civilians and civilian infrastructure are protected. The scaling-up and distribution of humanitarian aid, together with the safety of United Nations and humanitarian workers, must be guaranteed. The only way to achieve those imperatives is through a humanitarian ceasefire.

Malta has repeatedly and unreservedly condemned Hamas's acts of terror, including the heinous attacks of 7 October, the attack in Jerusalem on 30 November and Hamas's indiscriminate rocket fire. Its strategy of embedding itself among civilians and civilian infrastructure in Gaza, and the incidents of sexual violence reported, are reprehensible. There can be no justification for terror, and the Council must be clear in rejecting it. Malta recognizes Israel's right to protect its people, but any action it takes must be in line with international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and necessity.

The situation in the West Bank has seen unprecedented escalations in the past eight weeks. We are deeply worried about the reports of increasingly heavy incursions, restrictions and mass detentions occurring throughout the West Bank, including in refugee camps. The resurgence of illegal encroachment and violence by settlers is also gravely concerning. Settlements are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. We condemn the forcible transfer of the Palestinian community in Zanut and the recent destruction of its European Union-funded school by Israeli settlers. Furthermore, we are alarmed at the skirmishes on the Israeli-Lebanese border. Malta condemns all violations on the Blue Line, including attacks on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. We call firmly on all parties, including non-State actors in the region, to

exercise restraint, de-escalate and respect the norms of international law. The potential for opening further conflict fronts must be avoided at all costs.

It is vital that a comprehensive resolution of the spiralling crisis include a serious recommitment to peace. That will be achievable only through dialogue and a political horizon that is aimed at holistically addressing both Israel's security concerns and the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians, including their right to self-determination.

Malta reaffirms its unwavering commitment to a two-State solution along the pre-1967 borders, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States living side by side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. We remain convinced that this is the only path to lasting and sustainable peace in the Middle East.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I welcome the Secretary-General to the Council today and reiterate France's full support for his efforts. It is his duty to warn us so that together we can fulfil our collective responsibility to maintain international peace and security. He has clearly stated that the humanitarian situation on the Gaza Strip is catastrophic. One week after the truce expired, the Strip has been subjected to bombing, risks of epidemic and famine, a lack of access to medical care and the consequences of displacement on an increasingly circumscribed piece of land. In the light of the seriousness of the crisis, the Council must continue to act.

France proposes a new, immediate and lasting humanitarian truce that should lead to a permanent ceasefire. That is crucial to ensuring the delivery of a greater quantity of humanitarian aid. The humanitarian actors are no longer capable of carrying out their operations. The safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid must be guaranteed, and international humanitarian law must be respected. The protection of civilians, civilian and health infrastructure and humanitarian workers must be fully guaranteed. Access to water, fuel, medicine, food and basic necessities must be ensured. It is essential to open new crossing points, including Kerem Shalom, as well to increase the volume of aid passing through Rafah. Inspection procedures should not delay its delivery.

Taking action also means continuing our mobilization. That was the goal of the follow-

up meeting on 6 December to the conference on 9 November presided over by our Foreign Minister, Catherine Colonna, which enabled us to raise more than €1 billion. We must do even more, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). France has already announced an additional €100 million for 2023, including €54 million for UNRWA, as well as 600 tons of humanitarian cargo in addition to the 200 tons already delivered. We are also treating civilians on our helicopter carrier *Dixmude*.

Taking action also means shutting down Hamas and the other terrorist groups that committed terrible atrocities, including sexual violence, on 7 October. It is unacceptable that the Council has not yet been able to condemn those acts. Israel can count on France's support in combating Hamas. We have taken measures against Hamas commanders, with a view to extending them at the European level. Hamas and other groups must release all hostages immediately and unconditionally.

The situation in the West Bank is concerning. France firmly condemns the recent decisions on settlement expansion and the violence carried out by groups of settlers. The Israeli authorities must stop those acts and prosecute their perpetrators. France intends to ban their entry into French territory and freeze their assets. We are working to avoid a conflagration in the region and urge all parties to show restraint. The continuing clashes along the border between Lebanon and Israel are very worrisome. I reiterate our commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) by all the parties concerned.

Ultimately, the most important thing is restoring a political horizon, based on the only viable solution — a two-State solution, with two States living side by side in peace and security. It is no longer enough to invoke that prospect. We must make it a concrete reality, without delay. Procrastinating yet again will ensure that the next crisis will be even worse than the current tragedy. France is ready to participate fully in those efforts. The President of France and our Minister for Foreign Affairs are fully prepared in that regard and are continuing their discussions with their colleagues in the region.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate in response to the call of the Secretary-General, whose presence in the Council today Switzerland welcomes.

The fact that Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations has been invoked for the first time under his mandate is a testament to the tragic situation in the Middle East today. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our sincere condolences with regard to the 130 United Nations personnel who have lost their lives. Switzerland shares the Secretary-General's concern. The situation could have irreversible consequences for peace and security in the entire region and even beyond. It is therefore imperative that the Security Council be seized of the situation and take action to prevent an even more serious deterioration.

On a number of occasions, Switzerland has firmly condemned the acts of terror, indiscriminate attacks and taking of hostages perpetrated by Hamas since 7 October. They have claimed more than 1,200 victims in Israel, including many women and young girls, who have been exposed in particular to sexual and gender-based violence. Never in the region has the price paid by the Palestinian civilian populations been so heavy in such a short time. In two months, more than 17,000 Palestinians — 70 per cent of them women and children — have been killed in bombings in Gaza, according to available sources. Switzerland deplores the deaths of thousands of civilians in Israel and throughout the occupied Palestinian territory and expresses its most sincere condolences to the families of all the victims.

Switzerland has made respect for international humanitarian law, and the protection of civilians in particular, a priority for its mandate on the Security Council. Alongside the Secretary-General, we make the bitter observation that there is “no effective protection of civilians” and that “nowhere is safe” today in Gaza (S/2023/962) — not even for aid workers, medical personnel and injured persons; not even for journalists, the number of victims among whom has risen to more than 63 since 7 October, according to the Media Freedom Coalition; and not even for the 138 hostages, whose immediate and unconditional release we call for. We recall that investigations must be carried out into all violations of international law committed in Israel and throughout the occupied Palestinian territory so that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

The destruction of and damage to civilian infrastructure, including more than 60 per cent of housing units, the collapse of the medical system, the saturation of schools and other structures of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East — which have become places of refuge for more than a million people — has plunged the Gaza Strip into total insecurity. We call for respect for international humanitarian law and human rights while recognizing Israel's right to ensure its security. We also remind the warring parties of their obligations in the conduct of hostilities, in particular that of respecting the principles of proportionality, distinction and precaution, under all circumstances. Respect for international humanitarian law and human rights is a necessity in order to prevent a regional escalation of the conflict, of which we are seeing worrisome signs both in the West Bank and in Lebanon.

The humanitarian tradition, to which my country has close ties, was born in the midst of a battlefield and ruins. That tradition advocates the obligation to come to the aid of civilians in need. It is for that reason that Switzerland favourably considers the draft resolution presented by the Emirati delegation and scheduled to be put to the vote this afternoon. Resolution 2712 (2023) conveys that same duty of humanity. It recalls the need to ensure full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to civilians. The observation that the implementation of that resolution is untenable in the current circumstances means that that minimum of humanity is not ensured in Gaza today. Humanitarian aid is an obligation, but it is not an end in itself. It will save lives and bring a little dignity into a conflict that absolutely needs a political solution, in the terms repeatedly emphasized by the Council, and in accordance with international law.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): We thank the Ecuadorian presidency for convening this emergency meeting. Our appreciation is extended to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, for calling the Security Council's attention to the escalating danger and the catastrophic implications that the Gaza situation poses to global peace and security in accordance with Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Since the resumption of hostilities on 1 December 2023 following a week's humanitarian pause, reports from Gaza, including the southern region, which is bearing the brunt of the Israeli military operations, are of an increasingly worse scenario. The situation is quickly getting out of control, with potential long-term effects on the security and stability of the region, as well as on the Palestinian people in general. There is a possibility of a collapse of the humanitarian system,

as highlighted by the Secretary-General, which underscores the need for collective action to avert that imminent humanitarian disaster.

It is in that vein that Mozambique echoes the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate ceasefire to prevent a humanitarian crisis. To alleviate the continued suffering of innocent civilians in Gaza, a permanent humanitarian ceasefire between the parties is required. The repeated warnings from United Nations agencies, humanitarian organizations and other players of an impending monumental humanitarian crisis in Gaza should prompt us to take immediate action.

Given the scale of the loss of life in Gaza, Mozambique calls upon the Council and the international community to fully leverage their influence for the cessation of hostilities in Gaza, ensuring humanitarian assistance and restoring dialogue between the parties. We urge the Israeli authorities to implement resolution 2712 (2023) of 15 November to enable the delivery of life-saving supplies and services that are vital to the survival and well-being of defenceless civilians, particularly children. Practical steps must be taken now to ensure the implementation of that resolution, including an effective mechanism.

We reiterate our call on the parties to comply with their obligations regarding the protection of civilians in accordance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We urgently call on the parties to demonstrate leadership and courage by engaging in dialogue to achieve a long-lasting solution, allowing both Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace and security as good neighbours, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Finally, to realize that noble goal, we appeal to the members of the Security Council to exert their influence on the parties concerned.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for his letter to the Security Council under Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations (S/2023/962).

These are dark days. The horror of Hamas's 7 October attacks hangs over us, including the shocking reports of sexual violence by Hamas against Israeli women and girls. The terrible and heart-wrenching suffering of innocent Palestinians, including many women and young children, is a humanitarian tragedy unfolding before our eyes. The Secretary-General, who

has our strong support, set out clearly the trajectory towards humanitarian catastrophe facing Palestinians in Gaza. We need to respond and to do so with urgency.

The sheer scale of civilians killed is shocking. The fact that 80 per cent of the population has been displaced in Gaza cannot continue. The United Kingdom continues to support Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas's terrorism as it seeks the return of more than 100 hostages who are still held in Gaza. But we are absolutely clear that Israel must be targeted and precise in achieving that goal. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom have delivered that message and will continue to do so. Civilians must be protected.

In parallel, we need a marked increase in the provision of sustainable and unhindered delivery of life-saving aid and essential services to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe from taking place. That includes increasing the types of aid allowed. The sanitation and shelter picture, together with the lack of medical provision in Gaza, is dire, and there is a desperate need for sanitation and shelter kits and vital medicines. We welcome the fact that Kerem Shalom will now be open for screening aid deliveries. We urge Israel to go further and to fully open Kerem Shalom to allow goods to cross so that the huge volumes of aid needed can reach the people of Gaza. That should include at a minimum the 200,000 litres of fuel per day that the United Nations has called for. It is imperative that we work to agree on further urgently needed humanitarian pauses, building on the pivotal work of Egypt, Qatar and the United States.

As we work to halt the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, we also need to work to avoid escalation in the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem. Israel's announcement approving further settlements in the Lower Aqueduct area of East Jerusalem is alarming and serves only to raise the tensions in the West Bank when the international effort is focused on preventing further conflict. I want to make it clear that settlements are illegal under international law. They are an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability and delivery of a two-State solution. That decision must be reversed with immediate effect.

Let us work together to deliver peace, dignity and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his work and his efforts

to uphold the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations in the war between Israel and Hamas, whose scale of murderous violence and destruction has reached inhumane proportions. We want to express our deep appreciation and support to the Secretary-General for taking the important and responsible step to invoke Article 99 of the Charter.

The Security Council must respond without further delay to the Secretary-General's unprecedented appeal, in view of the scope of the intolerable humanitarian catastrophe unfolding before our eyes in the siege on Gaza. It is crucial that we redouble our efforts to achieve an immediate ceasefire to stop the tragedy in Gaza. Given the gravity of the situation for regional and international security, in addition to the risk of a spillover, we must rekindle the hopes that were raised by the Council's adoption of resolution 2712 (2023) on 15 November.

We cannot resort to calculations when it comes to saving human lives. Gabon firmly condemns all attacks targeting civilian populations and calls on all the parties to show restraint and respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. It is more urgent than ever to establish a humanitarian ceasefire. The Council must work tirelessly for that if we are to save human lives, particularly of children, women and civilians, in Gaza and the region. We urge for the unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid, in sufficient quantities and with respect for human rights. We also reiterate the imperative need for all the hostages to be released. We repeat that the use of civilians as human shields is unacceptable, as is military action that collectively punishes the civilian population. And we repeat that Israel's right to self-defence must respect the principles of proportionality, distinction and precaution.

The Council must demonstrate a greater commitment to ensuring accountability for the serious violations of international law that have been committed since Hamas's barbaric attacks of 7 October — which my country firmly condemned. Gabon believes that achieving a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict depends on a resumption of dialogue and a peace process aimed at a two-State solution, with both States coexisting peacefully on the basis of internationally recognized borders. Such a solution must be implemented without further delay, and the indispensable channels for achieving it are dialogue and negotiations, with the United Nations playing a central role.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing.

It has been more than two months since Hamas's brutal terror attack on 7 October, in which more than 1,200 people were killed in Israel and around 250 taken hostage, more than half of whom are still held captive. We once again unequivocally condemn the terror attacks by Hamas and other militants and demand the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

Since that attack, Gaza has descended into one of the most devastating humanitarian crises in the world. More than 17,000 Palestinians have reportedly been killed, a majority of them women and children, and thousands more are under the rubble of destroyed buildings. That is an appalling loss of life. Now winter is approaching in Gaza, and the streets and the facilities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East are packed with the newly displaced, many of whom are fleeing for a second time. Most basic goods are unavailable. To echo the words of the Secretary-General, the nightmare in Gaza is a crisis of humanity.

Japan takes the Secretary-General's invocation of Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations seriously, urging the members of the Security Council to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and appealing for a humanitarian ceasefire to be declared given the grave human loss in such a short period of time. We deeply regret that no significant humanitarian aid has been delivered since the breakdown of the humanitarian pause last week. The delivery of essential supplies through the Rafah crossing alone is utterly insufficient. We of course welcome the fact that Israel agreed to open the Kerem Shalom crossing for screenings and inspection. Establishment of a monitoring mechanism under the authority of the United Nations is also critical.

Japan believes that the Council cannot simply watch the situation deteriorate. It is our responsibility to address this grave humanitarian situation immediately. What is more, there are increasingly serious concerns about the possibility of a spillover of the conflict into the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and the Red Sea. The situation could all too easily engulf an already volatile region.

Against that backdrop, Japan's position is clear. Humanitarian concerns should be given absolute priority. All parties must abide by resolution 2712 (2023). Furthermore, it is urgent that the Council

speak in a united voice — whatever the language we may agree on — to prevent a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation. The bottom line is that the hostilities must stop immediately for a period that enables meaningful humanitarian operations aimed at averting a humanitarian catastrophe.

Only a two-State solution will enable both Israelis and Palestinians to live in lasting and secure peace. Today that goal seems far off. Gaza has been devastated, the task of reconstruction will be enormous, and we must consider what political and security arrangements will be in place when the fighting stops. But even in the midst of the current desperate crisis, we must not forget that peace and coexistence are possible.

Ms. Oppong-Ntiri (Ghana): Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and his intervention and efforts in helping to find a solution to the ongoing war between the State of Israel and Hamas.

The resumption of hostilities, which followed the end of the temporary humanitarian pause that was brokered by the State of Qatar and the United States, has been of grave concern to Ghana. We are equally worried about the challenge of committing to the spirit of the humanitarian pauses and the obligation to preserve civilian lives and infrastructure, which makes a humanitarian ceasefire, as called for by the Secretary-General, more necessary now. It is in that regard that we welcome the decision by the Secretary-General to invoke Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations, which has only been invoked four times in the more than seven decades of history of the United Nations, the last time being in 1989.

We note that the ongoing Israeli-Hamas conflict has unfortunately taken a heavy toll on the civilian population on both sides and has consequently created a serious security and humanitarian crisis, not only in Gaza but also in Israel and the other occupied Palestinian territories. It is regrettable that civilians and non-combatants, especially those residing in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Israeli communities along the border with Gaza, are bearing the brunt of the violence. We are concerned that the already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza has rapidly worsened in the past few days. Unfortunately, the use of heavy weaponry and the bombardment of Gaza has made it extremely difficult for humanitarian actors to have

access to many of the internally displaced people, including the aged, pregnant women and children, who face significant challenges, including limited access to essential services such as health care, clean water and electricity.

As all other delegations, Ghana is worried about the Government of Israel's decision to expand its ground operations to cover all parts of the Gaza Strip. That decision puts the lives of the civilian population in the densely populated Gaza Strip at serious risk. We note that the destruction of critical infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, exacerbates the suffering of innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. We join the appeal of the Secretary-General and all Security Council members for Israeli security forces and Hamas to prioritize, and put in place adequate measures for, the protection of civilians on both sides, as per the principles of international humanitarian law governing the legal use of force in armed conflict. The ongoing war presents complex security and humanitarian concerns that require the Council's immediate attention. The security concerns of both Israel and the Palestinian people must be addressed.

International cooperation, direct diplomatic negotiations and a commitment by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to engage in frank dialogue are essential to addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and achieving lasting peace for both Israelis and Palestinians. The security of Israel and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to their homeland lies in a deepened commitment to a negotiated two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the shared capital. We call on Council members with a moderating influence on both Israel and Hamas to use all means possible to heed the calls of the international community for steps leading to peace and an eventual settlement of the conflict.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate our long-held belief that it is only through a comprehensive and inclusive approach that the Middle East question can be settled.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank the presidency for convening this briefing at the timely request of the United Arab Emirates and the Russian Federation. I also thank the Secretary-General for his important briefing.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is appalling and without precedent. For the first time since the beginning of his tenure, Secretary-General Guterres invoked

Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations to address the Security Council, and it is not that the world has been spared from serious conflicts elsewhere since then. We commend the Secretary-General's initiative, which conveys another express call for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. Appeals for a humanitarian ceasefire from the international community, the United Nations, humanitarian actors and all members of the Council have justifiably multiplied over the past few weeks, after more than two months of conflict. An urgent ceasefire is even more needed now, since the resumption of hostilities. The conflict has brought the humanitarian system in support of civilian lives in Gaza to the point of total and unprecedented collapse. More than 80 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza have been uprooted from their homes and are becoming increasingly deprived of the minimum necessary to survive. Those conditions are unacceptable.

We recall Brazil's efforts in the Council since the very beginning of the crisis, including during its presidency. Our draft resolution (S/2023/773) was supported by the vast majority of Council members, but was vetoed by a permanent member, as was the case with other draft resolutions. Our proposal called for immediate humanitarian pauses, among other provisions. If it had been adopted on that occasion, thousands of lives would have been saved.

Brazil also spared no efforts in joining international initiatives in support of a humanitarian ceasefire and to ensure the protection of civilians. We are being constantly reminded that there is no safe place in Gaza. The repetition of that extremely worrisome statement, compounded by the increasing and devastating human toll prompted by the conflict, constitutes another wake-up call for the Council. We must step up and act responsibly to respond to the unfolding tragedy. The dramatic humanitarian situation leaves us with no alternative: we need an immediate halt in hostilities, for as long as necessary, allowing for proper humanitarian action. The provisions of resolution 2712 (2023), recently adopted by the Council, must be fully implemented. In the absence of that, we, particularly those responsible for any failure, risk being complicit and being judged very negatively by history. It is difficult to express the frustration that many of us continue to feel. That frustration is not just with Council inaction. We urge all those with power to influence the key stakeholders to allow for the necessary conditions for meaningful action by the Council.

Once again, it is necessary to reiterate that obligations under international law and especially international humanitarian law must be respected in any conflict. We recall the need to act according to the principles of distinction, proportionality, necessity and humanity. The protection of the civilian population and civilian infrastructure is an obligation under international humanitarian law, as is the prohibition of forcibly displacing civilians or the taking of hostages. We reiterate the call to allow access to hostages to the International Committee of the Red Cross. That all unfortunately applies the current hostilities in Gaza.

There can be no politically and morally justifiable attitude towards the growing tragedy in Gaza other than working to protect civilian lives now and keeping up the pressure for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages still held captive. We, members of the Council, have more than a moral imperative now. We must do what is in our reach to stop this humanitarian catastrophe. Failing in that task would likely result in a scenario in which the authority and legitimacy of the Council would erode even further, proving its incapacity to discharge its duties according to the Charter of the United Nations, to the detriment of world peace and security, as we have seen in recent days.

As a consequence of all I have just said, we will vote in favour of the draft resolution to be presented by the United Arab Emirates for a vote this afternoon (S/2023/970), and we are co-sponsoring it.

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

At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement this morning and reiterate Ecuador's support for his work and that of the entire United Nations system at this difficult time.

On Wednesday, for the first time in more than 30 years, Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations was invoked, thus allowing the Secretary-General to draw the attention of the Council to any matter which, in his opinion, might jeopardize the maintenance of international peace and security. He did so in view of the magnitude of the loss of life in Gaza and Israel in the two months since the terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas on 7 October. He did so because the situation is rapidly deteriorating and in order to prevent a total collapse and a catastrophe with potentially irreversible consequences for peace and security in the region.

Ecuador has been clear in strongly and unequivocally condemning the unjustifiable and atrocious terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas, as well as in demanding that all hostages be released immediately and unconditionally. We have done so repeatedly, in this and other forums, and we do so again today. We have also been clear in recalling that the Palestinian people have an inalienable right to self-determination and to its legitimate aspirations to live in security, freedom, justice, opportunity and dignity.

We have expressed our solidarity with Israel and with Palestine, because all lives are precious, because we grieve for all death and because there is no justification for causing pain and death to innocent civilians. We have pointed out that Israel has the right to defend its population and also the inescapable obligation to respect the principles of international law and international humanitarian law in exercising that right. We have also rejected the use of civilians as human shields by Hamas. In short, our position has been clear and has been based on international law and on the defence of human life and dignity. Those are the principles that guide us on this and all issues, without double standards.

Consistent with those principles and in response to the Secretary-General's call, we believe that a humanitarian ceasefire is absolutely necessary in order to alleviate the terrible situation in Gaza and to reduce the risk of an expansion of violence in the region.

Unfortunately, no action by the Council can restore lives lost. But we can try to prevent more suffering, more pain and more death. Every day, every minute and every second counts because every life counts.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Mahmoud (Egypt) (*spoke in Spanish*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council.

Let me now speak in Arabic, my native tongue, as I speak on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I deliver this statement on behalf of the Arab Group today. I would like to recall history and to remind everyone that the United Nations, where I am speaking today, was born out of tremendous human suffering

during the Second World War to prevent the recurrence of such suffering. The founding Member States, in the Charter of the United Nations, focused their attention on the fact that the noblest purpose of this Organization and the utmost duty of the Security Council are the following, as stipulated in the preamble:

“We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person ... and for these ends ... to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security”.

The Arab and Muslim worlds, all peace-loving and justice-loving nations and every individual with a living conscience are looking with rage and accusation at the role played by this Organization and the Council, in particular during this unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe inflicted upon the unarmed Palestinian people. Yes, they are looking with accusation and criticism because of the lack of justice, equality and fairness after the Council has been unable for two months to fulfil its duty and reach a ceasefire. Regrettably, some of its members are obstructing a ceasefire in a serious precedent that will impact, if it has not already impacted, the credibility of the United Nations in addressing present and future crises.

Today is the beginning of the third month of the war on Gaza, which has thus far led to the killing of more than 17,000 Palestinians, who are innocent and unarmed people. Seventy per cent of the victims are women and children. That percentage lays bare the lie that the war is against an armed group. Unfortunately, it is a war of collective punishment and genocide against the Palestinian people. The war has led to the destruction of more than 60 per cent of the buildings and residential facilities in the Gaza Strip. It has also destroyed and damaged more than 339 educational facilities, 26 hospitals, 56 health facilities, 20 water and sanitation facilities, 121 Government offices, 56 ambulances and 100 mosques, in addition to targeting the United Nations itself, which was not spared, as more than 130 United Nations personnel have been killed.

On behalf of all Arabs, I would like to commend the integrity and bravery of many United Nations staff members, whether in the occupied Palestinian territory or at the Headquarters, led by Secretary-General António Guterres. I commend them for fulfilling their tasks, duties and making their honest efforts to assist

the Palestinian people. I also applaud their bravery and sincerity in defending the values of this well-established Organization — despite criminally targeting them and despite the difficulties imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, to obstruct their work and despite the defamation and terrorism campaign launched against them.

The Arab Group strongly supports the United Nations personnel and applauds their integrity, namely, António Guterres, Philippe Lazzarini, Lane Hastings, Sima Bahous, Martin Griffiths and Tor Wennesland. We will stand in solidarity with them so long as they continue to fulfil their duties and protect the values of the United Nations.

The Arab Group would like to place on record before everyone in the Council that the Israeli aggression has led to the displacement of more than 1.5 million Palestinians inside the Gaza Strip. Eighty-five per cent of Gaza inhabitants were forcibly displaced to live in very dire circumstances at facilities belonging to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, schools, hospitals and open places. Their circumstances represent the worst of war crimes and crimes against humanity that clearly seek, unfortunately, to eliminate the Palestinian people and destroy their cause.

In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, settler crimes are escalating, under the protection of the Israeli army. We are now witnessing a systemic killing of the Palestinian people. Since October, more than 250 people have been martyred in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in addition to many others displaced due to settlement expansion, the seizure of homes, the destruction of facilities and criminal attacks by settlers. The Arab Group places on record that the brutal aggression also includes repeated attacks on Syria and Lebanon, including the targeting of safe villages in southern Lebanon, the Lebanese army and journalists who report on facts. That is happening under false pretences in a manner that could drag the entire region into a broad confrontation.

The Arab Group calls on the Security Council to uphold its duties and responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security and, in that context, demands the Council adopt an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, as per draft resolution S/2023/970 submitted by the United Arab Emirates, in order to end the bloodshed. This is an opportunity for the Council to save what it can, after more than 60 days of the war.

We also call on the Council to urgently address the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The United Arab Emirates, the Arab member of the Council, has submitted a humanitarian draft resolution to increase humanitarian assistance to unarmed Palestinian civilians through all crossings.

The Arab Group stresses once again that demanding a ceasefire, opening the crossings and allowing the flow of humanitarian assistance is not an act of pity or sympathy, but a right of civilians enshrined in international instruments and the agreed principles of human rights. It is also a political, legal and moral obligation of the Security Council and the international community at large.

The Arabs were the ones who initiated efforts to achieve peace with Israel, and for decades they have expressed their commitment to a political solution, despite the rejection of Israel to engage with the calls for peace and despite the repeated crimes of Israel against civilians and despite the ideological extremism that is on the rise in Israel. The Arabs remain committed to peace because they understand well, as a civilized people, that violence will not lead to peace and genocide will not succeed in liquidating a people's cause. Dialogue and peaceful coexistence are the only way to achieve stability in the region. That leads us, once this destructive war has ended, to commit to resuming the political process as soon as possible to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East through the establishment of a Palestinian State on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

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

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am delivering this statement on behalf of the member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), namely, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar and the State of Kuwait.

At the outset, we thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting, and we thank the Secretary-General for his valuable participation.

In the light of the dangerous developments in the Gaza Strip, the GCC member States condemn the Israeli aggression. We consider Israel legally responsible for its continued aggression, in particular against innocent civilians, mostly women and children,

thousands of whom have perished in the Gaza Strip in flagrant violation of international law and international humanitarian law. The GCC member States reject any justifications and excuses for the Israeli aggression as an act of self-defence.

The GCC member States call upon the international community to take the necessary measures in the context of international law to respond to the illegal practices by the Israeli Government and the collective punishment policy against the inhabitants of Gaza. International protection must be provided to the brotherly Palestinian people. We also reject Israeli measures resulting in the forced displacement of the inhabitants of Gaza. The GCC member States condemn the occupation forces' targeting of civilian facilities and infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and refugee camps along with its killing of journalists and targeting of international facilities and the headquarters of the Qatari Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza. We stress that the Israeli blockade contravenes international humanitarian law and resolution 2417 (2018), which condemns the illegal obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare.

The GCC member States commend the success in the mediation undertaken by the State of Qatar in cooperation with the Arab Republic of Egypt and the United States, leading to a humanitarian truce, which was extended; the exchange of hostages and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We regret the end of the truce and the increase in the Israeli attacks towards southern Gaza which has threatened the lives of millions of displaced people. We express our deep concern about numerous humanitarian and United Nations organizations being prevented from carrying out activities owing to a lack of resources, a fuel shortage and insecurity.

We welcome resolution 2712 (2023), which calls for establishing urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip. We demand that the resolution be fully implemented. We look forward to expeditiously establishing a suitable mechanism to monitor its implementation.

We also commend the step taken by the Secretary-General in addressing a letter to the Security Council (S/2023/962) pursuant to Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations demanding the Council to declare an urgent humanitarian ceasefire. The Security

Council, pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations, must demand an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and demand that the parties uphold their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, especially with regard to the protection of civilians. We therefore call on the Council to adopt today draft resolution S/2023/970, submitted by the United Arab Emirates on behalf of the Group of Arab States. Furthermore, the GCC member States demand an immediate ceasefire and unobstructed delivery of humanitarian and relief assistance, along with the basic necessities, to those in need throughout the Gaza Strip. Measures must be taken to expedite direct delivery of aid and to provide electricity, water, fuel, food and medicines.

The GCC member States have provided emergency relief and humanitarian assistance to our brothers and sisters in Gaza, in addition to continued financial support to meet humanitarian needs and support United Nations activities, in particular to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in the light of its growing needs and its pivotal role especially given the Israeli attacks against UNRWA facilities and staff. In that regard, we call on the international community to immediately increase humanitarian assistance for UNRWA and the United Nations.

The GCC member States reiterate their unchanged position with regard to the centrality of the Palestinian question, the need to put an end to the Israeli occupation and their support to the sovereignty of the Palestinian people over all occupied Palestinian territories since June 1967 and the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also support the rights of refugees, in line with the Arab Peace Initiative and resolutions of international legitimacy. The international community must redouble its efforts to resolve the conflict in a way that ensures all legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people. In that context, the GCC member States support the initiative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the European Union and the League of Arab States to revive the peace process in the Middle East, in cooperation with the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. We also call on the Security Council to adopt a resolution that internationally recognizes an independent Palestinian State, which should become a fully-fledged member of the United Nations.

In conclusion, we take this opportunity to reiterate that the GCC States stand with the fraternal Palestinian people during their ongoing ordeal and that we support their resilience on their land. We also express our full solidarity with them in order to achieve all their legitimate rights.

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

Mr. Nasir (Indonesia): I speak on behalf of Bangladesh, Malaysia, the Maldives, Namibia, Timor-Leste, Türkiye and my own country, Indonesia.

In one autumn season, the world has stood by and watched as more than 16,000 people have been killed in Gaza. Whole families and generations have been wiped out, including more than 6,000 children. The latest words used to describe the situation facing innocent women and children in Gaza are “apocalyptic conditions”. Saying that this has taken a toll on our collective conscience is an understatement. If we fail to act, history will judge us as accomplices to crimes against humanity. When the world vowed “never again” more than 75 years ago, it was not meant only for certain races or a certain religious group; it was meant to protect everyone in the world. It was to save humankind.

We fully support the Secretary-General’s recent letter to the members of the Security Council (S/2023/962) calling for a humanitarian ceasefire. In the Council’s 24 October open debate (see S/PV.9451), we underlined that an immediate ceasefire is vital if we are to end the atrocities and the deteriorating humanitarian situation. That is the least that the Council should do if we truly want to uphold human rights and our humanity. And that is why we will be proud to co-sponsor the draft resolution on a humanitarian ceasefire. We call on the Council to adopt it today. In that regard, I would like to make three points.

First, I ask that the Council please show compassion to humankind. It must focus on the innocent civilians — women, children and the infirm. How many more lives, how many more children must we sacrifice? How many more must die before this relentless assault is halted — 20,000, 50,000, 100,000? Listen to the collective plea of the global community. Stop the attack on women and children in Gaza. Let adequate humanitarian assistance into all parts of Gaza.

Secondly, the threats of the spillover of the conflict may not just be regional but global. The situation in

Gaza is being broadcast 24/7, uncensored, through social media and electronic channels. The world is watching in horror as women and children become innocent casualties in a devastating conflict. We cannot afford to let radical elements take up arms in different parts of the world, or even to radicalize the moderates.

Lastly, let us reaffirm our commitment to upholding international law and international humanitarian law in their entirety. There can be no double standards in how we uphold international law and international humanitarian law and accountability. They should be applied equally to all countries, big or small. There can be no double standard on humanity. For those reasons, we appeal to members of the Council to do the right thing. They must stop the inhumane acts against the Palestinians and listen to their consciences. Let us choose peace over conflict, compassion over cruelty and unity over division. Let us work to bring peace to Palestine and Israel. Let us address the root cause and make a two-State solution a reality.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Mrs. Samson.

Mrs. Samson: The European Union (EU) supports the Secretary-General’s call for the Security Council to act to avert a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and a collapse of the humanitarian system there. Urgent action is needed to ensure the protection of all civilians. The EU deplores the high number of civilian casualties, the majority of whom are women and children. We commend the strong efforts of the United Nations and all humanitarian actors to deliver life-saving aid in extremely dire conditions. We deplore the deaths of a record number of United Nations staff members and other humanitarian workers, who have paid the ultimate price. Full respect for international law and international humanitarian law by all sides is of paramount importance. We urge all sides to respect those principles and note that there must be accountability for violations of international law.

The EU calls for the urgent implementation of resolution 2712 (2023) and supports its call for immediate and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip for a sufficient number of days to enable full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, consistent with international humanitarian law. The civilian population is in desperate need of more food, water, fuel, electricity and medical care, as well as safe shelter. We regret that

since the humanitarian pause ended, there has been a reduction in the humanitarian aid permitted to enter from levels that were already insufficient. It is urgent that access to those essentials be restored at a rate sufficient to address the very high level of need, and we call for establishing additional routes to bring in life-saving aid to Gaza. The EU stands ready to continue its support and has already increased its humanitarian aid to more than €100 million. The EU and its member States will continue to work closely with international partners, the United Nations and other agencies, as well as countries in the region.

There is no justification for terror. The European Union has condemned in the strongest possible terms Hamas's brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks across Israel. Israel has the right to defend itself in line with international law and international humanitarian law. All the hostages must be immediately released, and the International Committee of the Red Cross must be granted access to them and allowed to bring them the necessary medical support.

The EU continues efforts with its partners to prevent escalation in the region, and we have continued to engage to that end with Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as well as other regional and international partners. We call on actors in the region to refrain from any action that could further aggravate the situation.

The Palestinian Authority must be supported by all members of the international community, and it must be reinvigorated to ultimately return to govern Gaza as the legitimate Palestinian governance body in charge of the whole occupied Palestinian territory. Democratic Palestinian institutions based on respect for the rule of law and human rights are vital for the Palestinian people.

The EU deplores the increased extremist violence by settlers in the West Bank and would like to remind everyone that Israel has a duty to protect civilians in the West Bank, hold perpetrators accountable and ensure that the Israel Defense Forces intervene. Furthermore, in line with the EU's commitment to implement 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 the context. The EU underlines that the only sustainable solution that will bring security to the Middle East is peace. The European Union is ready to contribute to reviving a political process on the basis of a two-State solution, including through the Peace Day Effort. We welcome diplomatic peace and security initiatives and support the holding of an international peace conference soon.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.