



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9513**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Tuesday, 19 December 2023, 10.20 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

---

*President:* Mr. De La Gasca/Mr. Montalvo Sosa. . . . . (Ecuador)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. França Danese
China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon . . . . .	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
Ghana . . . . .	Ms. Opong-Ntiri
Japan . . . . .	Mrs. Shino
Malta . . . . .	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Fernandes
Russian Federation. . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America. . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

---

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room AB-0601 ([verbatimrecords@un.org](mailto:verbatimrecords@un.org)). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



*The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; and Major General Patrick Gauchat, Head of Mission and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

**Mr. Wennesland:** I am devoting my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to the twenty-eighth report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). The Secretary-General's written report covers the period from 19 September to 7 December 2023.

As the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza rages on, 2023 ends as one of the deadliest in the history of this conflict, with the situation deteriorating on nearly all fronts. Since the end of the written reporting period, hostilities have continued inside Gaza as Israeli forces advanced further into Khan Younis in the southern part of the Gaza Strip and intensified operations in reported Hamas strongholds in the north, in Jabaliya refugee camp and Shujaiya neighbourhood, as well as at the Kamal Adwan Hospital. Intensive Israeli airstrikes continued across the Strip.

More than 1,000 fatalities — overwhelmingly Palestinian — have taken place. The toll on civilians, including women and children, remains unbearable.

With more than 100 Israeli hostages still held by Hamas, the Israeli army announced it had retrieved the bodies of three hostages, two from a tunnel in the Jabaliya refugee camp and one woman. On 15 December, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said that Israeli soldiers had mistakenly shot and killed three hostages in Shujaiya.

Hamas and other militant factions have also continued to indiscriminately fire rockets at areas in

southern and central Israel, including a barrage aimed at Jerusalem on 15 December.

The delivery of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip continues to face nearly insurmountable challenges. Amid displacement of an unimaginable scale and active hostilities, the humanitarian response system is on the brink. Limited steps by Israel, including allowing entry of more fuel, food and cooking gas, and opening the Kerem Shalom/Karm Abu Salem crossing for the entry of humanitarian supplies are positive, but fall far short of what is needed to address the human catastrophe on the ground. The northern part of the Gaza Strip remains mostly inaccessible to humanitarian actors owing to insecurity, as well as access restrictions imposed by Israel.

In our focus on Gaza, let us not forget that our attention during the first nine months of the year was on a West Bank in crisis, with mounting pressures from settlement activity — which I note more than doubled, to a reach a new annual record since 2017 — settler violence, increased Palestinian armed attacks, Israeli security forces operations, a rapidly deteriorating fiscal and economic situation, and a Palestinian Authority struggling to face these challenges. Most of those trends have continued and intensified.

On 8 December, Israeli forces killed six Palestinians, including a 14-year-old child and a local commander in the Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, during an operation in Al Far'a refugee camp, which led to exchanges of fire with armed Palestinians.

Over 12 to 14 and 16 to 17 December, two large-scale Israeli operations took place in Jenin refugee camp and Tulkarem, respectively. The operations included exchanges of fire with armed Palestinians, Israeli drone strikes and search operations. In Tulkarem there was extensive infrastructure damage from IDF bulldozers. Seventeen Palestinians were killed, and dozens were arrested.

The Palestinian Authority's fiscal situation continued to be extremely precarious amid broader economic concerns across the West Bank. Some 150,000 Palestinian workers have been unable to reach their jobs since Israel imposed strict entry restrictions following the 7 October attacks.

I remain concerned about the wider impact of the war in Gaza and the risk of escalation in the region. Daily exchanges of fire across the Blue Line have continued,

with the risk of miscalculation and escalation posing a grave threat to regional stability. It is imperative that Lebanon not be dragged into a regional conflagration and that the parties return to the cessation of hostilities, under the framework of resolution 1701 (2006).

Meanwhile, in the Red Sea, the Houthis in Yemen have targeted numerous vessels by boarding parties, as well as by armed drones and missiles. Strikes have damaged a number of ships, with others interdicted by United States and other naval forces in the area, raising concerns about the safety of shipping through that vital trade artery. Four major shipping companies have reportedly directed their vessels not to transit through the Red Sea, while Israel's Eilat port has reported an 80 per cent drop in revenue since the attacks began.

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

The violence that has taken place since 7 October in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in and around Gaza, has shaken the region and, most tragically, the lives of millions of Palestinians and Israelis.

I strongly condemn the abhorrent armed attacks by Hamas and others in Israel. Nothing can justify the acts of terror that were committed and the deliberate killing, maiming and abduction of civilians and other protected persons. Accounts of the attacks reveal acts of brutality that are impossible to accept and comprehend. I am appalled by the report of sexual violence during the attacks. That must be vigorously investigated and prosecuted.

The indiscriminate firing of rockets towards the Israeli population centre, which continues to this day, is a violation of international humanitarian law and must cease completely.

I welcome the release of 110 Israeli and foreign hostages and reiterate that all remaining hostages must be immediately and unconditionally released, in line with resolution 2712 (2023).

The magnitude of hostilities between Israel and Hamas and the scope of death and destruction in Gaza have been unprecedented and unbearable to witness. I unequivocally condemn the killing of civilians in Gaza, including women and children. I mourn the loss of every civilian, including 131 United Nations

colleagues — the single-largest loss of life in the history of the Organization.

I remain gravely concerned about the impact of the ongoing hostilities on the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The current conditions are making it impossible for meaningful humanitarian operations to be conducted.

I am also deeply concerned about escalating tensions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Intensified armed exchanges between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, predominantly in the context of Israeli operations, have led to exceedingly high numbers of fatalities and arrests. I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable to protect life.

I am alarmed by the lethal attacks carried out by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and by Palestinians against Israelis in the occupied West Bank and Israel. All perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice. I am appalled by the numerous instances of officials glorifying violence, encouraging the killing of civilians. Such rhetoric is abhorrent and must be clearly rejected by leaders on all sides. Leaders have an obligation to clearly and explicitly condemn acts of terror and violence carried out directly against civilians.

I remain deeply troubled by the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which is impeding the access of Palestinians to their land and resources and threatening the viability of a future independent Palestinian State. I reiterate that Israeli settlements constitute a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and international law and call on the Government of Israel to cease the advancement of all settlement activity immediately.

This war has once again served as a devastating and tragic reminder that there is no substitute for a legitimate political process that will resolve the core issues driving the conflict. It is critical at this important junction to enable the parties to re-engage on the long-delayed political path to the two-State solution. I urge Israelis, Palestinians, the States of the region and the broader international community to work together towards that goal. United Nations efforts to support that objective have already begun through active consultations in the region. Our work must continue.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis in ending the occupation and resolving the conflict, in line with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements, in pursuit of the two-State solution — Israel and an independent, democratic, viable and sovereign Palestinian State, of which Gaza is an integral part, living side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Major General Gauchat.

**Major General Gauchat**: I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Security Council to share the perspective of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) on the situation in the Middle East.

The events of Saturday, 7 October surprised, shocked and appalled everyone, and the conflict they triggered continues to reverberate in the region. Since UNTSO does not have a presence in or around Gaza or southern Israel, UNTSO personnel were not in a position to directly observe the events on 7 October or the developments since. But those events have assuredly affected our operations and regional dynamics.

The history of UNTSO goes back 75 years. On 29 May 1948, the Council called for a cessation of hostilities in Palestine, under resolution 50 (1948). That truce was to be supervised by a United Nations mediator, assisted by a group of military observers, that would become known as the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, the first peacekeeping mission in the history of the United Nations.

In 1949, with the signing of the four armistice agreements — one between Israel and each of its Arab neighbours, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic — the Council declared the role of the mediator complete and transferred the role of supervising the implementation of the armistice agreements to the Chief of Staff of UNTSO. In addition, UNTSO was tasked with assisting the parties in their application and observance, until the peaceful adjustment of the future situation of Palestine. That two-part mandate remains the basis for UNTSO's presence to this day and is accomplished through, first, deploying expert military

observers to maintain unconditional ceasefires and, secondly, maintaining a strong regional liaison with host nations.

At the operational level, from 8 October, many ceasefire violations have occurred across the Blue Line, between Israel and Lebanon, and on the Golan between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. UNTSO's military observers, who constitute Observer Group Lebanon (OGL) and Observer Group Golan (OGG), under the operational control of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, respectively, took appropriate and adapted security measures. They continue to fulfil the critical role of ensuring accurate military reporting, observation, investigations of ceasefire violations and inspections on the Golan. They also report to enable liaison with the parties, including for the purpose of de-escalating tensions.

During the past few weeks, the adaptations mainly involved logistics, security and the rotation and deployment of personnel. Since 8 October, the military crossing points that UNTSO uses between Israel and Lebanon, as well as between the Israeli occupied Golan and the Syrian-controlled Golan, have been closed. Similarly, the access points to the closed observation posts, located just beyond the Israel Defense Forces technical fence on the Golan, were sealed, impeding rotations and logistical support. Through constructive dialogue with the parties, UNTSO was able to put in place the minimum required support and security for the deployed military observers.

In southern Lebanon, where a clear escalatory pattern has been observed, UNTSO military observers in OGL still conduct Blue Line patrols every day, taking calculated risks. As part of the wider work conducted by UNIFIL, that international presence encourages restraint by the parties in their kinetic activities. Our female military observers are key to connecting with local women and children across the area where UNTSO is deployed, given our exemplary percentage of female officers, which is 22 per cent in the mission. The everyday liaison functions of UNTSO's military observers include engaging with the local population, local leaders and military commanders. In that regard, I want to add that their presence during the current tensions in southern Lebanon is reassuring for the local population.

In parallel with the work of the military observers on the ceasefire lines, UNTSO maintains liaison offices in Cairo, Beirut and Damascus, as well as in Jerusalem for Jordan and Israel. UNTSO's regional liaison mandate allows the mission to analyse and address complex issues, especially those not covered by other missions operating in the region, whether they be peacekeeping or special political missions. It also allows us to be in direct contact with the five parties — which I want to stress is very good contact with all five parties — passing on messages and establishing tactical confidence-building measures. I have done that numerous times since 7 October. In each of the capitals of the five UNTSO host countries that I have visited, the authorities have shared their views on the regional situation, as well as on the ceasefires in which UNTSO is involved through OGL and OGG.

For instance, in the Blue Line area, officials of both Israel and Lebanon communicated to me their willingness to improve security and the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). With regard to the Golan, both Israel and Syria mentioned to me their strong desire to keep the armistice in place. They also shared their concerns and expectations of the peacekeeping system. On that basis, I of course shared those messages with the parties and my relevant United Nations colleagues, as that contributes to the overall effort of the United Nations for peace in the region. During the exchanges, I systematically tried to diffuse potentially dangerous situations, clarify positions and assure my interlocutors that I would pass on their messages. That has always been well received by the parties.

In conclusion, UNTSO continues to carry out its regional mandate. The Council can rest assured that UNTSO is a vibrant mission of women and men — national and international, military and civilian — who remain true to the concept of an unarmed military observer mission operating with the consent of the five parties. As the regional situation evolves, we will continue to contribute towards the comprehensive, just and peaceful resolution of the situation in the Middle East, consistent with the mandates conferred upon us by the Council.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Major General Gauchat for his briefing.

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

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and the Head of Mission and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, Major General Gauchat, for their briefings.

Over the past few days and weeks, we have shared many of our thoughts on the subject, and we will have more to say later in the day. But right now, a few things bear reiterating: that the atrocities Hamas committed on 7 October must be condemned; that we must pursue justice for the victims of horrific sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas on and after that day; that Israelis still face barrages of rocket fire to this day — rocket fire launched by Hamas from civilian infrastructure in Gaza at civilians in Israel; that civilians must be protected; that humanitarian aid must reach those who desperately need it; that Hamas must not be allowed to control Gaza, for the sake of Israeli and Palestinian safety alike; that Israel has the right to protect its people from terrorism; that regional actors, including the Houthis, must not exploit and widen the conflict; that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East must be supported — and the United States has provided more than \$422 million to its 2023 appeals to that end; and that, ultimately, we must all work towards a two-State solution, which serves as the only foundation for a truly sustainable peace.

Of course, as Special Coordinator Wennesland highlighted, the events that have unfolded in the West Bank over the past year have moved us farther away from that reality. That includes the ongoing construction of settlements in the West Bank, which undermines the possibility of a Palestinian State. And it includes a sharp and alarming uptick in settler violence, especially because, even before Hamas's attack on 7 October, the year 2023 has been the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since 2005.

The United States condemns those violent attacks. We believe that the perpetrators must be held accountable. As Secretary Blinken announced earlier this month, we will continue to issue visa bans to extremist individuals who have undermined peace, security and stability in the West Bank. Already, we have implemented that policy for dozens of individuals and their families. And we have repeatedly underscored to the Israeli Government that it too must do more to investigate the violence and hold extremist settlers who have committed it accountable. More than that,



Israeli officials must not fan the flames of the violence with incendiary, dehumanizing rhetoric — because we have seen the ways in which words have consequences, not only in the West Bank, but around the world. Over the past two months, we have witnessed a spike in antisemitism and Islamophobia, both online and in our communities, including in our own backyard here in New York City, where just a few blocks north a Halal food vendor faced vile, bigoted harassment and where, just over the river in Brooklyn, a Jewish man was brutally beaten in front of his family's home. Rhetoric matters, and we must do more to prevent this dangerous dehumanization.

There are two more subjects that I want to address today.

The first is what faces those reporting in the region, because today journalists are not just witnessing what is happening. They are experiencing it — all of it. Scores have lost family members, including *Al Jazeera's* Wael Al-Dahdouh, who was himself injured last week. Others have been displaced from their homes or have been gravely injured on the job. And far too many have been killed, making this the deadliest period in memory for journalists. There are few callings more noble than telling the truth. Journalists' words change hearts and minds and move people to action. And in this moment, more must be done to protect them.

The final note I want to end on is about the hostages. Earlier this week, our Mission met with young Israelis whose loved ones are still being held captive in Gaza. They came to us to share the stories of their loved ones, and we promised that we would tell those stories to the Council, to the world. We heard from Amit and Michael Levy, whose sister, Naama, was kidnapped by Hamas. Many of us have seen the video of her being forced into a Jeep at gunpoint, her hands tied and her pants bloodied. But what many of us do not know is Naama's story — the fact that she was a peace activist who built connections with Palestinians in an effort to chart a brighter future. She dreamed of being a diplomat, and maybe even sitting in this very Chamber. Her smile is missed every single day. We will continue to share Naama's story — and every hostage's story — until they are home, and until Amit and Michael can embrace their sister once again.

We must hold space for the heartbreak on all sides and for all whose lives have been disrupted and destroyed by a conflict that Hamas set in motion,

that Hamas restarted after a week-long humanitarian pause and that Hamas could once again end by simply releasing the hostages. For all those who have suffered in Israel, in Gaza, in the West Bank and around the globe, let us work in good faith to end this cycle of violence and sow the seeds for a lasting peace.

**Mrs. Shino** (Japan): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his updates and Major General Gauchat for sharing information with us on the valuable activities of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization.

Japan expresses its grave concern about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Following the resumption of fighting after the breakdown of the humanitarian pause, air strikes and ground operations, especially in the southern Gaza Strip, have led to a significant number of civilian casualties. The total death toll in Gaza is approaching 20,000, and two thirds of the victims are reportedly women and children. This must stop.

The facilities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are overcrowded with displaced Palestinians, hunger is alarmingly on the rise and communicable diseases are rapidly spreading. As UNRWA's Commissioner-General Lazzarini put it, everywhere you go, people are desperate, hungry and terrified.

It is critically important for Israel to abide by international law, including international humanitarian law, in order to prevent harm to innocent civilians and basic civilian infrastructure. Japan also calls for all parties to act faithfully based on resolution 2712 (2023).

The amount of assistance crossing through Rafah is nowhere near enough. We note that the border crossing at Kerem Shalom is finally open for the direct delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza. That will be a crucial lifeline for many but, as we heard from the Special Coordinator, it still falls short of what is needed.

Beyond Gaza, there remains a serious risk of a regional spillover. The continuing clashes on Israel's northern border could easily escalate with a single miscalculation. Missile launches and attacks on vessels by the Houthis are causing considerable interruption to global shipping and threaten maritime security in the region. Of particular concern is the situation of the *Galaxy Leader*, a ship operated by a Japanese company that was seized and has been held, along with its multinational crew, by the Houthis for nearly

a month. We strongly urge the Houthis to immediately and unconditionally release both the ship and its crew.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, we observe with concern spiking settler violence and attacks on Israelis by Palestinians, which are inflaming the situation. Japan once again calls on Israel to refrain from advancing settlement activities, which are a clear violation of international law and contravene the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In conclusion, the international community must exert every effort possible to urgently alleviate the suffering in Gaza and end this tragedy. We can no longer ignore the root causes of the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel and an independent Palestinian State must live side by side in peace and security. We must heed the calls from voices around the world who wish to see those aspirations realized fully and decisively. There is simply no alternative, and it is high time to act now.

**Mr. França Danese** (Brazil): I too thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Major General Gauchat for their briefings.

Brazil deeply regrets that resolution 2334 (2016) continues to be disregarded, a fact that only aggravates the negative trends imperilling the two-State solution. Regrettably, that is the case with almost every single resolution adopted by the Security Council regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — not to mention those that were simply vetoed.

As the world watches the appalling human toll of the ongoing war in Gaza with astonishment and powerlessness, settlement activities in contravention of international law have continued and expanded, relentlessly and undisturbed, throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, in flagrant violation of international law and in defiance of the authority of the Council. We are deeply concerned about the increase in the displacement of Palestinians from their homes as a result of settlement activities, which only worsened after the 7 October terrorist attacks against Israel, as well as the intensification of settler violence in the West Bank. State violence has been on the rise, and not just in Gaza. Demolitions, eviction orders and other types of attacks against Palestinians and their households have further expanded in Palestinian land, including East Jerusalem.

The Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) reminds us of the gravity of the situation, including the staggering numbers of victims and the amount of destruction caused by the war. Unprecedented levels of violence and destruction in a region already marked by serious instability have, in the latest reporting period, produced the deadliest record for both Israelis and Palestinians in the history of this 75-year-old conflict.

United Nations officials, including the Secretary-General, have also warned us about the imminent collapse of the humanitarian system in Gaza, prompted by military operations imperilling the safety of humanitarian workers, and by decisions to limit the inflow of humanitarian aid to those in need. Our failure to respond to their call for help through a ceasefire and the scaling up of humanitarian aid has contributed to the further loss of innocent lives.

With its slow action, the Council has been condoning this never-ending cycle of violence and lawlessness for far too long. Our inability — not just to pass meaningful resolutions, but also to enforce decisions already adopted — has created the impression that, in the Middle East, the only law that matters is the law of the strongest.

That state of affairs is not in the interest of anyone. On the contrary, it only breeds further violence and resentment. It also encourages contempt for the law and disbelief in the ability of the international community to deliver on its promise of, and commitment to, a two-State solution, with Israel and a viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security, within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders.

Our collective duty to advance durable peace in the Middle East requires from us, now, that we ensure respect for international law by all parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the protection of civilians, the immediate and unconditional release of hostages and the delivery of humanitarian aid to the occupied Palestinian territory as a whole, through justice, accountability and reconciliation, including by putting an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and the respect of all pertinent Security Council resolutions.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Major General Patrick Gauchat for their participation in this meeting. We thank them for

their great efforts to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and human rights and to liaise with all regional actors so as to avoid regional escalation.

As the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2023/458) recalls, resolution 2334 (2016) condemns "all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction", as well as incitement to violence. In that spirit, Switzerland condemned the acts of terror committed by Hamas on 7 October and has since called for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages. In his report, the Secretary-General also strongly condemns those acts of terror, including the taking of hostages and the sexual violence committed during the attacks by Hamas.

Since then, thousands of civilians have tragically lost their lives in Israel and many more throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. The risk of a regional expansion of the conflict remains real, as shown by the growing tensions on both sides of the Blue Line.

The situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem also demonstrates that. The number of deaths among civilians there was already reaching frightening records before 7 October. Since then, violence has increased and, according to the United Nations, more than 250 Palestinians, a quarter of them children, have been killed. More than two thirds of them died during Israeli operations, including air strikes and incursions, particularly in the Tulkarem, Jenin and Balata camps.

Switzerland calls on Israel to respect its obligations under international law during such operations. In particular, the use of force must meet the criteria of necessity and proportionality and protect every individual's right to life and security of person.

We also condemn the violent acts committed by settlers against Palestinian civilians, which reinforce the prevailing coercive environment in the West Bank, which has led to the deaths of several Palestinians, the forced displacement of more than a thousand civilians and the destruction of essential infrastructure since 7 October. This escalation of violence is unacceptable.

Switzerland recalls Israel's obligations under international law, including the obligation to protect the civilian population. In an environment of near complete impunity, independent investigations must be carried out into all violations of international law in order to bring the perpetrators to justice. In addition, Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory

are illegal under international humanitarian law, as mentioned in resolution 2334 (2016). As the occupying Power, Israel must refrain from taking any measures that would introduce permanent changes in the Palestinian territory.

In Gaza today, the protection of civilians is not being respected, and aid remains insufficient. Aid must be increased, its importance must be understood and, above all, the necessary conditions must be met for its effective distribution throughout the Gaza Strip. We welcome the opening of Kerem Shalom and expect it to allow the entry of humanitarian and commercial goods via a variety of access routes.

In view of the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, with a real risk of a collapse of the social order, we hope that the Council will be able to shoulder its responsibility and speak out in support of the Gazan civilian population in need.

While recognizing Israel's right to ensure its defence and security, we call on the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law, in particular to fulfil their obligations in the conduct of hostilities, notably to respect the principles of proportionality, distinction and precaution in all circumstances.

We must support any process that promotes peace and security. The full, equal and meaningful participation of Palestinian and Israeli women is essential. The two-State solution is the only foundation that can ensure peace and stability in the region. We must help to rebuild that foundation for two democratic States — Israel and Palestine, of which Gaza is an integral part — living side by side, in peace, within secure and recognized borders.

**Mr. Fernandes** (Mozambique): Mozambique commends Ecuador's presidency for convening this briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We extend our sincere gratitude to the briefers, Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Major General Patrick Gauchat, Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, for their insightful briefings on the Middle East peace process.

Along with other members of the Council, Mozambique has voiced grave concerns regarding the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. Specifically, we highlighted several critical issues, such as the expansion of settlements, violence



against civilians, inflammatory language and other provocations between the parties. All those activities are flagrant violations under international law, contribute to aggravating tensions and are an obstacle to peace in the region.

It is crucial for all parties involved to exercise maximum restraint, prioritize dialogue and work towards de-escalating tensions. The international community must continue to advocate for a just and peaceful resolution to this long-standing conflict.

We are deeply concerned about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The ongoing conflict between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups has exacerbated the situation, leaving thousands of people in desperate need. Acknowledging the situation on the ground, Mozambique appreciates the tireless efforts of all stakeholders and the international community to advance the peace process.

We therefore welcome several initiatives, including the high-level meetings hosted by Jordan, Egypt, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, Muslim and Arab leaders, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the League of Arab States to address the current crisis.

Equally important is a demonstration of goodwill by both parties. In that vein, the immediate release of hostages is of paramount importance. Let us collectively work towards a humanitarian pause and de-escalation of the conflict in order to safeguard lives and uphold human dignity.

Given the dire situation, we call for the immediate implementation of resolution 2712 (2023) to ensure the timely delivery of vital goods and services for the well-being and protection of civilians, especially women and children. There is an urgent need to scale up and improve humanitarian access into Gaza. Lives are at stake, and we have a duty to help the most vulnerable, including children and women.

We believe that only an immediate suspension of hostilities can allow for safe, unhindered humanitarian access and the delivery of life-saving assistance to the desperate civilian population. Mozambique therefore fully supports the proposal for the Secretary-General to establish a monitoring mechanism to confirm the humanitarian nature of aid consignments into Gaza. We believe that that will fast-track the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Mozambique's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is well known and emanates from its conviction that the two-State solution remains fundamental for achieving lasting peace and harmony in the region. Doing so necessitates a common effort from both conflicting parties, with the support of the international community, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 2334 (2016). We urge the parties to continue the constructive dialogue towards that goal while respecting the principle of the two-State solution.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): A humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding in Gaza, and the intense suffering of innocent Palestinian civilians shows no sign of abating. Israel is reckoning with the brutal horror of the 7 October attacks. More than 130 hostages continue to be held by Hamas, and just this morning, I met with the parents of one girl still held hostage; I will carry their words with me for a long time.

As my Prime Minister has said, we need a sustainable ceasefire that breaks the cycle of violence. Hamas must stop firing rockets into Israel. All hostages must be released. And aid must flow into Gaza. That is the only way to achieve a sustainable peace based on the two-State solution, in which Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace and security.

We are focused on three areas.

First, too many civilians have been killed. Israel must be targeted and precise in its efforts to address the threat posed by Hamas and should do more to discriminate sufficiently between terrorists and civilians. Civilian infrastructure must be protected, in line with international humanitarian law. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have repeatedly delivered that message to Israel, and we will continue to do so.

Secondly, we need to continue to work on increasing the amount of humanitarian support into Gaza through as many direct routes as possible. The agreement to open Kerem Shalom is welcome; we look forward to its urgent implementation. Israel should also immediately increase the range of humanitarian items allowed into Gaza.

Thirdly, as we heard today, in recent months the violence of extremist settlers in the West Bank has dramatically increased. Since 7 October, there have been eight Palestinians killed by Israeli settlers, including one child, and at least 1,257 displaced

amid settler violence and access restrictions. We strongly condemn those hateful acts, which undermine prospects for peace. We are banning those responsible for settler violence from entering the United Kingdom to make sure our country cannot be a home for people who commit those intimidating acts. Israel also must do more to hold perpetrators of settler violence to account and to end the demolition and confiscation of Palestinian property.

Moreover, we reiterate our call on Israel to immediately and completely stop all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and its Lower Aqueduct. We are clear — those settlements are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability and delivery of a two-State solution, which must become a reality in order to ensure justice and peace for Palestinians and Israelis.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Major General Gauchat for the briefings they just delivered.

Nearly 80 days into the new outbreak of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, more than 2 million innocent people in Gaza have been suffering an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. On 11 December, thanks to the arrangements made by the Governments of the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, I visited the Al-Arish and Rafah crossings, together with the Ambassadors of a number of Security Council members, and gained first-hand experience of the humanitarian disaster in Gaza.

Egypt and other countries have made tremendous efforts to alleviate the humanitarian situation on the ground, but they still face many difficulties. On the one hand, the people of Gaza have no access to water, electricity, food, fuel or medicine; they simply lack the minimum supplies for survival. On the other hand, a large number of trucks delivering supplies are waiting in line while the supplies piled up at the warehouses in Al-Arish cannot be delivered in time to the people in need. Even more worrisome is the fact that, owing to Israel's indiscriminate bombardment, the humanitarian relief network comprising a number of United Nations agencies that operate in Gaza is on the verge of paralysis, and the safety and security of their personnel cannot be guaranteed.

In that context, the United Arab Emirates, on behalf of the Arab States, has presented the text of a new Council draft resolution aimed at removing bottlenecks

to humanitarian access and alleviating the humanitarian disaster in Gaza. The United Arab Emirates has held extensive consultations with Council members on the draft text, has listened to the views and opinions of United Nations humanitarian agencies and has gained the support of the majority of Council members. China has joined in the co-sponsorship of the draft resolution. We believe that no country should have any reason to be hesitant regarding this draft resolution. We urge the relevant Council members to adopt a constructive approach and support the Council in taking immediate meaningful and life-saving actions.

It should be noted that the United Arab Emirates draft resolution is an emergency initiative to address the immediate urgent needs arising from the current humanitarian disaster in Gaza. Facing the prolonged Gaza conflict and the escalations in the West Bank, the Council must further play its due role and take action to realize a ceasefire and cessation of hostilities at an early date in order to restore regional peace and uphold fairness and justice.

First, the realization of a ceasefire remains the overriding prerequisite. Only a ceasefire can prevent greater civilian casualties, including among the hostages. Only a ceasefire can prevent the regional conflict from spiralling out of control. And only a ceasefire can prevent the prospects of a political solution from being completely snuffed out. The international community has repeatedly and overwhelmingly called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza; nevertheless, Israel continues its bombing and shelling. Schools, hospitals, mosques, Christian churches and refugee camps have been repeatedly targeted in military operations, and there can be no justification for such attacks.

It must be pointed out that causing more civilian casualties in Gaza will not offer a solution for rescuing the hostages, nor will it lead to greater security for any party. We urge Israel to immediately reverse its course of action and stop its indiscriminate military attacks and collective punishment against the people of Gaza.

Secondly, every effort must be made to prevent the situation in the West Bank from spiralling out of control. While the eyes of the international community are focused on Gaza, violence committed by the Israeli army and settlers in the West Bank has intensified. Searches, arrests and attacks against Palestinians happen on a daily basis with appalling frequency and intensity and have resulted in a large number of Palestinian

casualties. Settlement activities violate international law and resolution 2334 (2016) and continue to erode the foundation of the two-State solution. We urge Israel, the occupying Power, to comply with its obligations under international law, cease all settlement activities and effectively curb settler violence, so as to put an end to impunity.

Thirdly, the two-State solution must be revitalized with maximum political determination. The two-State solution is the only way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue. It is also the broad consensus of the international community. The main reason that the Israeli-Palestinian issue has long failed to be resolved is precisely because the two-State solution has not been implemented.

We are extremely concerned about the recent public rejection of the two-State solution by some political leaders. China calls for greater international and regional diplomatic efforts to reaffirm the commitment to the two-State solution, revitalize the political prospects for the two-State solution and restart direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel. Undoubtedly, any solution to the question of Palestine should respect the will of the Palestinian people and the legitimate concerns of the countries of the region and should not deviate from the basic direction of the two-State solution.

China calls for the convening of an international peace conference that is larger in scale, scope and effect and for the formulation of a timetable and a road map, so that the two-State solution can truly be realized.

**Mrs. Frazier** (Malta): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). I also thank Major General Patrick Gauchat for his briefing.

Since the Council's last meeting on this resolution in September (see S/PV.9425), the situation has deteriorated on all fronts. We have witnessed an unprecedented scale of death and destruction in the occupied Palestinian territory and in Israel, the consequences of which will no doubt reverberate for years to come. This year, the intensification of deadly violence against civilians in the region, including acts of terror, has skyrocketed. The unyielding cycle of violence has pushed us further away from a political horizon than at any point in recent history. It is painfully clear that the conflict in Gaza is taking an unimaginable toll on the population. A shocking number of civilians have been killed and

displaced. Countless others continue to face the denial of basic necessities.

Malta stresses that respect for international humanitarian law is paramount. All parties are obliged to ensure that civilians and civilian infrastructure are protected.

A significant scale-up of humanitarian aid to Gaza is desperately needed, including through the opening of further crossing points. That must happen in tandem with assurances for the safety of United Nations and humanitarian workers, including of their premises. The rising death toll of humanitarian and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East staff is completely unacceptable. And attacks on religious sites and persons seeking refuge within them are also unacceptable, as is the number of journalists who have been killed in the conflict.

Malta stresses that an immediate humanitarian ceasefire is now an imperative to ensure the necessary protection of civilians and de-escalate the conflict.

We continue to strongly condemn the unjustifiable Hamas terror attack of 7 October. Indiscriminate rocket fire and acts of sexual violence are equally condemnable. We reiterate our call on Hamas to release the remaining hostages immediately and unconditionally, in accordance with resolution 2712 (2023). We also underline the urgency for humanitarian actors to be allowed access to the remaining hostages as long as they are held captive.

Too many women and children, on both sides, continue to unjustly suffer the consequences of the conflict. Children have been abducted and are being killed and maimed at staggering rates. Children face heightened risks of malnutrition, severe illness, dehydration and psychological trauma. They deserve our undisputed protection. We commend UNICEF staff and their partners for providing lifesaving aid and psychosocial support to all children, in particular inside Gaza in extremely difficult circumstances.

We also underline that attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian residents and properties in the West Bank are inexcusable. Such acts must not be allowed to take place with impunity.

Settlements, the demolition of homes and the displacement of Palestinians violate international law and resolution 2334 (2016). They constitute an obstacle to peace, inflame tensions and threaten the viability

of an independent, contiguous Palestinian State. We reiterate our strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions advancing settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Urgent steps must be taken to prevent regional escalation and to relaunch credible negotiations and engagement between both parties. A meaningful political horizon cannot be achieved unless we ensure that the Palestinian Authority has the fiscal stability and support it needs.

Malta reaffirms its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict, based on 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.

It has never been more critical that the international community engage in meaningful peace-forward efforts, placing regional stakeholders at the forefront of any deliberations and addressing the core issues of the conflict. We cannot return to an unsustainable status quo. The violence and suffering must stop.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland and Head of Mission and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, Major General Gauchat, for their assessments of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, where for two and a half months an unprecedented massacre in terms of casualties has been taking place.

Since the most recent meeting of the Council on this issue (see S/PV.9499), on 8 December, 10 days have passed and, in that time, the number of victims has increased even further. Since the beginning of Israel's military operation in Gaza, approximately 19,000 people have been killed with 70 per cent of the victims being women and children, and 90 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip — approximately 2 million people — have become internally displaced. Even the Israeli hostages are among the victims of indiscriminate Israeli actions. Add to that the total blockade of Gaza, including the disruption of communications and severe restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian assistance. There are severe shortages of water, fuel and medicine in the Gaza Strip. Public order is on the brink of collapse.

Director-General of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus confirms that no one is safe in Gaza. Out of the 36 health facilities, until recently only eight were allegedly partially operational, but without water or electricity. The loss of personnel also speaks volumes about what is happening in Gaza — staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of the United Nations have been killed, along with entire families, including babies. Some 90 United Nations facilities have been attacked, some of them repeatedly, and 133 United Nations staff have been killed. According to United Nations data, it is the single-largest loss of life in the history of the United Nations. The Head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Martin Griffiths, admitted that the catastrophe occurring on the Strip was the worst he had ever seen, in particular given that people had nowhere to go and that the stated goal of destroying Hamas was not feasible.

According to media reports, Israel has dropped some 29,000 bombs on Gaza, which is comparable to the number of shells dropped by the United States and Great Britain throughout the entire military aggression in Iraq in 2003. We have received shocking reports from the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem that on 16 December at the the Holy Family Parish in Gaza, which has been a refuge for the majority of Christian families since the beginning of the war, a sniper of the Israel Defense Forces killed two Christian women who were headed for the monastery. Seven more people were wounded as they tried to protect their loved ones on church grounds. According to witness accounts, no warning or notification had been issued. On the same day, Israel carried out an air strike against the Convent of the Sisters of Mother Teresa, which is part of the church compound and which was designated as a place of worship since the beginning of the escalation. Such attacks continue as everyone is preparing for Christmas celebrations on 25 December.

Given the catastrophe in Gaza, which is caused by the actions of Israel, events in the West Bank fade into the background in the media, but violence is also raging there. Israeli armed forces continue their armed raids, and brutal attacks by Israeli settlers persist. Five Palestinians were killed in the Nur Shams refugee camp in the past 24 hours alone, as a result of an Israeli military raid. The day before, on 18 December, another 17-year-old Palestinian was killed in the Al Far'a camp. That brings the total number of victims of the so-called



Israeli operations in the West Bank since 7 October to at least 293.

In that context, we would like to underscore that Israel has been engaged in the cleansing of the West Bank for a long time, even prior to the events of 7 October, without there being any connection to the terrorist security threat, which is the slogan being used by West Jerusalem to conduct the unprecedented operation on the Gaza Strip.

At the same time, the demolition of Palestinian homes without Israeli building permits in the West Bank continues, which are almost impossible for local residents to obtain. The illegal settlement policy in West Jerusalem, including the financing of the expansion of Israeli settlements, continues unabated. Such plans are approved by the Israeli authorities in parallel with the systematic destruction of Gaza.

The scale of the human catastrophe in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone has compelled the Secretary-General to use his powers under Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations and call on the Security Council to take a decision to stop the bloodshed. However, despite the efforts of an absolute majority of the members of the Council, all draft resolutions submitted were blocked by Washington, which, instead of assisting civilians, is providing Israel with large quantities of weapons of all kinds that are used to kill Palestinian civilians.

By now it should be obvious to everyone that stalling the collective efforts of the United Nations is not the result of any objective institutional problem, but solely because of the stubborn and egotistical ambitions of American leadership. It is no exaggeration to say that there is a global consensus on the need for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. The only State, apart from Israel, that opposes it, pitting itself against the entire international community, is the United States.

Since the tragic events of 7 October, Washington's policy in the region has reached a strategic impasse. The Hamas attack, for which there is and cannot be any justification, cannot be considered as separate and distinct from Israel's actions to build and expand settlements on Palestinian territory, or the failed United States policy of ignoring the Palestinian question and the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians for a State of their own — such actions undermine the international legal basis of the Middle East settlement, including the two-State solution. With Washington's encouragement,

Security Council resolutions promising a State to the Palestinians have been sabotaged by Israel for more than a decade now, against the backdrop of illegal settlement expansion, the seizure of Palestinian land and property and the continuing long-standing blockade of Gaza, which has led to generations of Gazans growing up in complete isolation.

The position of the Russian Federation is consistent. We value our historically close relations with Palestinians and Israelis alike. We condemn terrorist acts of any kind and the indiscriminate use of force against civilians and civilian infrastructure. We advocate the cessation of hostilities in Gaza, the safety of civilians and the release of detainees.

At the same time, we have always maintained our position in favour of the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace and security with Israel. Our approach is based on the international legal framework for a Middle East settlement, including resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

In addition, we call for the implementation of the only Security Council product adopted to date on Gaza — resolution 2712 (2023), which, for all its weaknesses, at least contains a binding call on the parties to establish humanitarian pauses. We must ensure international monitoring of the implementation of that Council decision, under the auspices of the United Nations. We thank the Secretary-General for developing the relevant monitoring options, which we are carefully considering. We trust that the Council will be able to take a decision, in the near future, on the option to choose, through a relevant resolution.

**Ms. Oppong-Ntiri** (Ghana): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Major General Patrick Gauchat for their briefings.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which addresses some of the crucial issues surrounding the Middle East peace process. We regret that the prospects for our collective aspiration for the two-State solution continue to be obscured by the current highly degenerative environment in the Gaza Strip.

The briefings we just received paint a gloomy picture as far as the two-State solution is concerned. We note that actions on the ground by Israelis and



Palestinians alike are counterproductive to the search for lasting peace in the Middle East. We reiterate our position that violence has never been successful as a tool for the resolution of any conflict — and it will not be in the ongoing conflict.

We are equally distressed about the appalling humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and other parts of the occupied Palestinian territories, which seems to deteriorate on a daily basis as the war lingers on. We call for respect for international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the protection of all civilians and civilian infrastructure. We welcome the gesture by the Israeli Government to open its border crossing at Kerem Shalom for the direct delivery of humanitarian assistance and supplies to the ever-increasing number of internally displaced people in Gaza, including women, children and the elderly, who desperately need them.

As a Council, we must do everything within our means to bring the hostilities to an end and give peace a chance. We must also recognize and accept the importance of resuming the stalled peace process. It is our firm belief that the resumption of the peace process will promote confidence-building measures and provide for a peaceful and lasting resolution of the question of Palestine, based on the principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Ghana's commitment to continue supporting a meaningful peace process, which would eventually provide the potential pathways towards resolving the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and ensuring the fulfilment of the rights and aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians alike, for the prosperity of the peoples of the wider Middle East region.

**Mrs. Broadhurst-Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Tor Wennesland and Major General Gauchat for their briefings.

The catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza should not make us forget that Israeli settlement-building is continuing and even accelerating in the West Bank. France reiterates its firm condemnation of that policy, which is illegal under international law and contravenes several Council resolutions, notably resolution 2334 (2016). We remind Israel of its obligations under international law, in particular article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

France will never recognize the illegal annexation of territories or the legalization of outposts. We reiterate our condemnation of Israel's decision on 6 December authorizing the construction of 1,800 new housing units in the settlements in East Jerusalem. We also strongly condemn the expropriation measures announced on 10 December on certain families in the Old City of Jerusalem. Those decisions undermine the possibility of establishing a future viable and contiguous Palestinian State and endanger the prospect of a two-State solution with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

The priority today is therefore an immediate end to unilateral measures. France recalls that resolution 2334 (2016) also concerns the implementation of the differentiation by States between the territory of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. In accordance with its obligations, the European Union ensures its strict application.

We strongly condemn the violence committed by extremist settlers in the West Bank, who are terrorizing Palestinian communities. Such acts must cease immediately, and their perpetrators must be punished. Israel's failure to protect Palestinians and prosecute extremist settlers has led to an environment of near-total impunity in which settler violence has reached unprecedented levels. The situation undermines security in the West Bank and the region and threatens prospects for lasting peace.

On 15 December, France, alongside the United Kingdom, Switzerland and 11 other States, recalled Israel's obligation as the occupying Power to protect Palestinian civilians in the West Bank. We call on the Israeli authorities to bring the perpetrators of violence to justice. We cannot accept those abuses, which deprive Palestinians of their rights and their land, as was recalled by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, who visited Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories this weekend. She also announced that measures would be taken in that regard.

We must urgently restore a political horizon to implement the two-State solution. The French Minister for Foreign Affairs reaffirmed the solidarity of our people with the Israeli people and our commitment to their security. I reiterate our strongest condemnation of the sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October. We call for a new immediate and lasting humanitarian truce, which must lead to a lasting ceasefire, in order to obtain the release of all

the hostages still held by Hamas and to provide the population of Gaza with the aid they so urgently need.

We recall the imperative that all parties must fully respect international humanitarian law. France deplores the death of thousands of Palestinian civilians and condemns the bombing of a residential building, which led to the death of an agent of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and of numerous other civilians in Rafah. We demand that the Israeli authorities work to shed full light on the circumstances of that bombing.

A resumption of the political process is necessary. We must work to build a State for the Palestinian people. The Palestinian Authority has a central role to play in that process, in the West Bank as well as in Gaza, which is intended to be part of the Palestinian State. France is actively mobilized in that regard with the parties and with all of our regional and international partners. Standing idly by is not a solution. As we have seen, the conflict in Gaza is already having repercussions in the region.

It is essential to avoid a regional conflagration, as recalled by our Foreign Minister, who travelled to Lebanon yesterday. France calls on all parties to demonstrate responsibility. The stability of south Lebanon requires full compliance with resolution 1701 (2006) by all parties.

Finally, France strongly condemns the Houthi attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea and will continue to mobilize to contribute to maritime security in the region and safeguard the freedom of navigation. We welcome the unanimity of the Security Council on that matter.

**Mrs. Ngyema Ndong** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): We are grateful to Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Major General Patrick Gauchat for their insightful briefings on the situation prevailing in Gaza and the region.

Too many people have been killed or injured, too many lives have been wasted and too many destinies have been stolen in the name of a war that cannot be won through violence. The war that has been raging between Israel and Hamas since 7 October — a new phase in the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict — appears to be the deadliest ever for both sides. The bloodbath must end.

We call on the Israeli authorities to exercise the greatest restraint and responsibility in the conduct

of their military operations, in accordance with international humanitarian law. Likewise, Gabon demands the immediate and unconditional release of all the hostages.

As the situation deteriorates on an unprecedented scale on the ground, the divisions within the Council are incomprehensible on a human level. On 12 December, during its tenth emergency special session, the General Assembly adopted, by a vast majority, a resolution calling in particular for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza (General Assembly resolution ES-10/22). Gabon voted in favour of that resolution. The cessation of hostilities is in fact a prerequisite for secure access to humanitarian aid by civilian populations in need. Likewise, the parties are encouraged to engage in constructive dialogue to reactivate a peace process capable of achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Unity within the Security Council is crucial in order to save lives and reconcile with obligations under international humanitarian law. Gabon has supported — and will support — any initiative aimed at restoring the hope of saving human lives and contributing to improving the fate of civilian populations and to de-escalation. The draft resolution on increasing and monitoring aid to Gaza, which we hope to see adopted today, offers an opportunity in particular for the following.

First, the reaffirmation that the Gaza Strip is an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 and that it must be part of the Palestinian State.

Secondly, the call for an urgent and lasting cessation of hostilities to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access.

Thirdly, the demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as the guarantee of humanitarian access.

Fourthly, the demand for the supply of fuel to Gaza at levels that meet the required humanitarian needs.

Gabon supports the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a mechanism to monitor humanitarian aid in Gaza. We also note the temporary opening of a crossing point at Kerem Shalom.

The situation is grave. We cannot afford to remain in a state of impasse and inaction. Our term on the Security Council is coming to an end, but until then Gabon intends to spare no effort with regard to silencing the

guns in the war between Israel and Hamas and avoiding a conflagration throughout the region — because the risk of a conflagration of the entire region is very real. We are concerned about the attack by the Houthis from Yemen on a ship in the Red Sea, while the situation between Israel and Lebanon remains as volatile as ever. We call on all parties to exercise restraint and respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

We also call for the implementation of resolution 2712 (2023), which has fostered so much hope with a view to saving human lives, particularly those of children and women.

We will never stop reiterating that a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be political and diplomatic, through dialogue and negotiations in good faith, while ensuring respect for the legitimate concerns of each party. We must therefore intensify our efforts to find a just and lasting solution to the conflict based on the two-State solution.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): Let me thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Major General Gauchat for their remarks.

On 7 October, innocent people were savagely murdered. Thousands were wounded and babies, young people and Holocaust survivors were killed. Women and girls were raped. Innocent people were taken hostage. What followed is known by all and continues to this hour. This war and its appalling human toll constitute yet another tragedy on top of so many seen in the past, where civilians always end up paying the highest price, especially children — victims of wars they never choose and of conflicts they cannot understand.

We call for full respect for international humanitarian law, as we have done at every meeting. That is not an option, but an obligation. Terrorists must be killed, but innocent people — children, civilians and their families, humanitarian workers, United Nations staff and journalists — must be protected. We deplore every innocent life lost in this bloody war, be it Israeli or Palestinian. Innocent life has the same value, on any side of that or any border.

For an entire week, guns were silenced, reason prevailed, some 100 hostages were released, and a glimpse of hope came back. The world was holding its breath, hoping for the truce to be extended, but Hamas did not see it that way, leaving families of hostages in deep anguish, fully aware of what would happen — that

more innocent people would be killed and more innocent Palestinians would be sacrificed. We remain worried about the situation of the hostages who are still in the bloody hands of Hamas. Those returned to Israel were malnourished, ill, injured and in a poor psychological state. We reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of the remaining hostages, and in the meantime, the International Committee of the Red Cross must be allowed to visit and to check on their well-being.

Alongside the real war with guns, rockets and tanks, another frontal clash is happening at the same time, one using tweets, hashtags and shares — the so-called war with 140 characters — with unfiltered images, raw videos, hate speech, conspiracy theories and antisemitism, sowing more division and spreading more hatred. It would be a tragedy, or another one on top of the one before our eyes, if the immense suffering of the citizens of Gaza, the thousands of lives lost and the ocean of human pain on both sides were used by Hamas to strengthen their narrative. We are afraid that, in this black and white context, this may be happening. It must be resisted because it is only a recipe for tragedy.

We share the deep concern about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Despite the amount of aid going through and the deconflicting mechanisms in place, the fact is that the situation is very dire and a humanitarian system in pain is struggling to survive. We call for the full implementation of resolution 2712 (2023) and reiterate the need for urgent measures in order for the aid to reach the civilians as soon as possible and without any hindrance. We support efforts to scale up humanitarian aid and for a monitoring mechanism and all efforts to break up hostilities. We must be sure to put in place a mechanism that helps and that facilitates access and makes it easy to reach those suffering, not rush into something that, despite good intentions, may end up producing the opposite effect, especially for those on the ground. In that respect, we welcome the decision to open the Kerem Shalom crossing for humanitarian aid.

The situation in the West Bank is another area of concern. The settler's violence towards civilian Palestinians is unacceptable. It must end, and all cases should be properly investigated. We remain worried about the lack of implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We recall that settlements are in violation of international law. They constitute an obstacle to the two-State solution. They must be dismantled, not expanded.

Allow me to conclude with this: as with every other conflict, this one will also end and, we hope, as soon as possible. It will leave behind ruins, immense grief and deep scars. The political and physical reconstruction of Gaza will require new and true efforts. As this may be the last meeting on this issue for my country as a member of the Security Council, I would like to say, just as we have said and repeated in every other meeting, that we look forward to the moment when the two-State solution is advanced, not as an empty mantra, not as an easy substitute to failure and not as a placebo, but as a genuine process so that the Israelis and Palestinians find a way out of the horrible deadlock, the terrible impasse and the perpetual failures of the past few decades, and so that, together with the international community, they design, agree and implement ways to live side by side, each in their own State, in dignity, prosperity and security, free from terror and insecurity. If not, even if Hamas is dismantled, its ideology will remain, and if it is not abandoned or eradicated, plans will remain dreams, those dreams will be crushed, and the harsh and unforgiving reality will be perpetuated, and it will unfortunately only be a matter of time until the next tragedy unfolds.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates): At the outset, I would like to extend sincere condolences on behalf of the United Arab Emirates to the Government and the people of Kuwait on the passing of the late Emir, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He was a true leader and a tireless advocate for peace in the region who championed humanitarian causes around the world. His loss will be felt the world over.

I thank our briefers today, Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Major General Patrick Gauchat, for updating us on the situation on the ground.

We are now coming to the end of what was the deadliest year in the occupied Palestinian territory. This should be a wake-up call that the current status quo cannot be allowed to continue, and this starts with the current situation in Gaza. Last week, many Security Council members witnessed a humanitarian system at its breaking point at the Rafah crossing. They saw thousands of trucks and warehouses filled with aid from people and Governments around the world — the physical expression of their solidarity with the people of Gaza. Meanwhile, just over the border, 2.2 million people remain trapped, with 9 out of every 10 spending entire days without food. Gazans are experiencing

unprecedented levels of starvation and thirst, while doctors lack even the most basic of medical supplies to treat the wounded and the growing threat of infection.

What we need is access. The draft resolution that we will vote on later aims to meet that need by demanding the use of all land, sea and air routes to allow aid to enter. Israel must stop blocking the entry of aid and allow life-saving assistance into the Gaza Strip. The United Arab Emirates notes the opening of the border crossing at Karm Abu Salem. We call on authorities to ensure its full opening, including to commercial cargo, so that aid can enter at scale.

The entry of aid alone is not enough — aid workers must not have to pay the ultimate price to carry out their life-saving work, and those accessing the aid must be able to do so without fearing for their safety. That is why we need the urgent and extended pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip, as called for in resolution 2712 (2023). Monitoring and verification are key to implementation. We welcome the Secretary-General's letter to the Council yesterday providing options. We look forward to discussing those with fellow members of the Council and to their further elaboration by the Secretariat.

A humanitarian ceasefire remains a fundamental necessity to bring the suffering in Gaza to an end. It will stop the bloodshed, allow for safe and unhindered access for humanitarian aid and offer an opportunity for hostages to be brought to safety. Meanwhile, less than 100 km away from Gaza, people in the West Bank are living in a situation of violence and fear that has escalated over the past two months. Since 7 October, the number of people killed in the West Bank has increased — 278 Palestinians, including 70 children, have lost their lives. That is more than half of the total number since the beginning of the year, in a year that was already witnessing unprecedented levels of violence. The level of settler violence is disturbing and unrelenting, with 344 Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians in the past two months. That is unacceptable and must be stopped. Just because those with extremist voices shout the loudest does not mean that they should decide the fate of the region.

We are also deeply concerned about reports of Israel approving a new illegal settlement in East Jerusalem, including 1,700 units. We reject and condemn in the strongest possible terms any attempt to exploit the ongoing war on Gaza to expand settlements and displace



Palestinians from their land. That is also a grave violation of resolution 2334 (2016). Not just an indictment of settlements, resolution 2334 (2016) renewed the Council's commitment to the two-State solution and the parameters necessary for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The violence we are witnessing now across Gaza and the West Bank is a direct result of the lack of full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), and the absence of any meaningful political process. The past two months have made that crystal clear and have served to underline the urgency of resolving the Palestinian question — a matter of priority for all of us. That is why we need a comprehensive, just and lasting solution. The international community's commitment to the two-State solution is a responsibility we must all bear and a call to action we must all heed.

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

I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Major General Patrick Gauchat for their briefings today, and the Secretariat for the report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). I reiterate my country's support for the work of the United Nations, which is so valuable and selfless.

In his report, the Secretary-General describes the past quarter as the deadliest period for Israelis and Palestinians in the history of the conflict and provides an account of the outbreak of the violence that began on 7 October with the reprehensible terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas, which has continued up until now, with very serious catastrophic consequences for civilians and for the humanitarian situation. The report is a sombre document that we wish we had never received. In addition to the situation in Gaza, the report recounts the alarming increase in violence in the West Bank, at times perpetrated by settlers; the continuation of illegal settlement-building; the increase in incendiary rhetoric, acts of provocation and incitement, including the unacceptable glorification of the killing of civilians, and terrorist acts. Indeed, the report summarizes a tragic period of terror, hatred, violence and death. At the same time, it is a warning and a call to action.

A few days ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Rafah crossing on the border between Egypt and Gaza. Along with other representatives of current and

incoming members of the Council, through the initiative of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates and in coordination with Egypt, which I thank, I was able to see the gravity and urgent nature of the humanitarian situation. There is a pressing need to continue our efforts to alleviate the suffering of civilians in Gaza, which is why we believe that an immediate humanitarian ceasefire is essential, as it would allow for a greater influx and distribution of aid.

We are duty-bound to do everything in our power to prevent more cases such as that of Wala — a young Palestinian and mother of a son who died and another who was injured — who I met in a hospital in Egypt during my visit. In that regard, resolution 2712 (2023) and all other resolutions of the Council must be fully implemented immediately. We must also prevent the spread of violence to other areas, which is why it is essential to put a stop to acts of incitement, hate speech and the glorification of violence. We call on leaders to show responsibility and humanity.

As the Secretary-General rightly states in his report, leaders have the obligation to clearly and explicitly condemn acts of terrorism and violence against civilians — clearly and explicitly. In addition, we are concerned about the increase in hate speech, Islamophobia and antisemitism in various parts of the world. That is unacceptable. Once again, we appeal to reason and responsibility on everyone's part to prevent the spread of disinformation and hostility.

In conclusion, my country reiterates its commitment to peace, its call for a humanitarian ceasefire, its condemnation of Hamas's terrorist attacks and violence against civilians and its demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. We also reiterate our belief that the only way to end the conflict is through a peaceful, negotiated, lasting and fair solution for all parties, with two States, Palestine and Israel, on the basis of the 1967 borders and the relevant resolutions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to closed consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.*