



# Security Council

Eightieth year

**9846**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Thursday, 23 January 2025, 3 p.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Bendjama . . . . .	(Algeria)
<i>Members:</i>	China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Denmark . . . . .	Ms. Lassen
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivi�re
	Greece . . . . .	Mr. Sekeris
	Guyana . . . . .	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Pakistan . . . . .	Mr. Akram
	Panama . . . . .	Mr. Alfaro de Alba
	Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Sangjin Kim
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone . . . . .	Mr. Kanu
	Slovenia . . . . .	Mrs. Blokar Drobi�
	Somalia . . . . .	Mr. Yusuf
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Shea

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Egypt and Israel 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 invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Ms. Bisan Nateel, Tamer Institute for Community Education.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a statement.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We have just approved the list of briefers for this meeting. I would like to draw members' attention to the fact that Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF, is absent from that list, although her participation was requested by our delegation and supported by the Algerian presidency. We are grateful to you, Mr. President, for your efforts and those of your delegation, as far as we know, to persuade Ms. Russell to brief us. However, she refused to do so, and as far as we can tell, it was under some vain, thought-up pretexts without putting forward any meaningful arguments to explain her refusal. Similarly, other representatives of the UNICEF leadership have also mysteriously become unavailable. The refusal of the Executive Director of UNICEF to brief the Security Council about the horrific tragedy linked to the deaths of tens of thousands of children in Gaza is an egregious step that deserves our most serious censure. I would like to remind Council members that Ms. Russell, during the United States presidency of the Security Council, rushed to brief us at the drop of a hat at a disgraceful politicized briefing about the so-called issues related to children stemming from the situation in Ukraine on 4 December last year (see S/PV.9799).

It therefore appears that children in Gaza are less important to UNICEF than children in Ukraine. Otherwise, how can we explain the fact that UNICEF deems it unnecessary to brief the Security Council about the situation of children in Gaza, which, by the way, is part of the Fund's mandate. Clearly, the fate of those children is of no concern to Catherine Russell herself or to the United States of which she is a national. After all, the United States presidency, despite our repeated calls, never convened a Security Council briefing on children in Gaza in December last year. Our United States colleagues apparently are not comfortable commenting on the situation surrounding the deaths of tens of thousands of children in the Gaza Strip, which they themselves basically provoked by casting a veto on six occasions and by not allowing the Security Council to intervene and stop the Israeli massacre. The Executive Director of UNICEF simply played along with the United States on that issue. We see that as a blatant violation of Article 100 of the Charter of the United Nations. Ms. Russell behaved in this situation as a United States citizen, not as an impartial United Nations official.

We are grateful to Mr. Fletcher, who, despite his busy schedule found the time, unlike Ms. Russell, to attend this meeting despite receiving the invitation at the eleventh hour. We appreciate his availability, but the mandate of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — in contrast to that of UNICEF — is not focused on monitoring issues related to children. Therefore, unfortunately, his briefing cannot be considered as substitute for that of Ms. Russell. We will draft a letter to the Secretary-General posthaste urging him to take measures to prevent such outrageous situations in future.

**The President:** The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a statement.

**Ms. Shea** (United States of America): On behalf of the United States, I reject the accusations put forward by the representative of the Russian Federation. I will be speaking later on behalf of my Government with respect to the situation of children in armed conflict in Gaza. The idea that the United States is responsible for the terrible suffering there is unacceptable to us, and we reject it in its totality.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Fletcher.

**Mr. Fletcher:** Today marks one of the rare times we are able to highlight positive developments, albeit amid catastrophic humanitarian needs in Gaza.

The ceasefire has provided a vital reprieve from relentless hostilities for Palestinians. It has at last allowed Israeli hostages and imprisoned Palestinians to be reunited with their families. And it has enabled a massive surge in life-saving humanitarian aid into Gaza.

We can save more lives if all parties continue to honour the deal. I thank the mediators — Egypt, Qatar and the United States — for their tireless efforts to ensure the deal is upheld. I thank them for their help to mitigate operational obstacles as they arise.

Before I update the Council on what humanitarians have achieved during these first few days of ceasefire, I must testify to what Palestinian children in Gaza have endured in the past 15 months.

Children have been killed, starved and frozen to death. They have been maimed, orphaned or separated from their family. Conservative estimates indicate that more than 17,000 children are without their families in Gaza. Some died before their first breath — perishing with their mothers in childbirth. An estimated 150,000 pregnant women and new mothers are in desperate need of health services.

Children have lost their schools and their education. Those with chronic illnesses have struggled to access the care they need, many unable to do so.

Many have faced sexual violence. Girls, who have endured the additional indignity of no access to menstrual care, have been left exposed and vulnerable.

One million children are in need of mental health and psychosocial support for depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts, according to UNICEF. A generation has been traumatized.

Against the backdrop of that horror, the United Nations and its partners are seizing every opportunity presented by the ceasefire to step up our response across the Strip. Safe, unobstructed humanitarian access, alongside the absence of hostilities and the almost complete cessation of criminal looting over the past days, has significantly improved our ability to operate. We have been able to increase the flow of incoming supplies and deliveries, scale up storage capacity and repair work,

provide life-saving services and carry out needs and damage assessments. We are getting supplies to designated emergency shelters and distribution centres across the Gaza Strip. We are delivering food parcels and flour and working to reopen bakeries. We are distributing fuel to ensure that critical services, such as healthcare and water pumping, can run on back-up generators, in the absence of electricity.

Across the spectrum, humanitarian organizations and agencies have united to meet our humanitarian goals. At the centre of this, as always, is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). But we cannot do this alone. Surging high volumes of aid into Gaza requires a collective effort. All of Gaza — more than 2 million people — depends on our humanitarian support. Therefore, it is critical that the pipelines of stocks are regularly replenished, including by Member States. Aid efforts must urgently be complemented by the private sector.

While we spare no effort to scale up in Gaza, we must also keep attention on the West Bank. As we briefed the Council, since October 2023, the West Bank has witnessed record-high levels of casualties, displacement and access restrictions. Those trends have intensified since the announcement of the ceasefire. Israeli settlers have attacked Palestinian villages, setting homes and properties on fire. Increased movement restrictions are impeding Palestinians' ability to access basic services and livelihoods. Mass detentions are taking place across the West Bank.

Of particular concern is the situation in Jenin, where an Israeli military operation, helicopter gunfire and air strikes, alongside ground forces, have claimed lives and caused further destruction of basic infrastructure and displacement. That follows the weeks-long operation by the Palestinian Authority, during which access restrictions and confrontations with armed Palestinians triggered the displacement of some 2,000 families from the camp and claimed numerous lives.

After months without hope, we must seize the present moment. I therefore leave the Security Council with three requests.

First, I urge the Security Council to ensure the ceasefire is maintained.

Secondly, I urge the Council to ensure that international law is respected across the occupied Palestinian territory of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Civilians must be protected and their essential needs must be met. All hostages must be released. Arbitrarily detained Palestinians must be freed. Detainees must be treated humanely and allowed visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Civilians must be allowed to return safely to their homes. They must be able to access life-saving aid. That includes medical evacuations for the wounded and sick who need it. I urge Member States to take in those patients. We need rapid, unimpeded and safe access for the humanitarian community to be sustained. We can deliver when we are given the chance to do so. UNRWA's role is fundamental and must remain the backbone of those efforts. Restrictions on critical humanitarian items must be lifted, including those considered to be dual-use. There must be accountability for atrocities, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Thirdly and finally, Member States must ensure that our humanitarian operations are well funded. Our 2025 flash appeal requires \$4.07 billion to meet the needs of 3 million people in Gaza and the West Bank, with nearly 90 per cent of the funds for Gaza. Funding that appeal is essential to meet the massive needs and sustain the ceasefire.

The children of Gaza are not collateral damage. They are as deserving as children everywhere of security, education and hope. They tell us that the world was not there for them throughout this war. We must be there for them now.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Fletcher for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Nateel.

**Ms. Nateel** (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to participate in this meeting in order to say more about the images that Council members have already seen in the media — images of children who have lost their limbs and their families; of our displacement and non-return to our homes; of us losing our homes and of violations of all the human rights of all the civilians in the Gaza Strip. What I can say is that we did not realize that the war would change our lives. Suddenly we started to lose our homes. We were told to go to the safe area in southern Gaza. We moved because of the messages sent out to civilians. We went south, but once we arrived and put down our luggage, the homes near us were attacked. That was the place that was supposed to be a safe place.

Allow me to introduce myself. I work with the Tamer Institute for Community Education. We give children a chance to express themselves through artistic activities and provide them with a safe environment, free of charge. But we lost that environment and that safety. We no longer have schools or a playground. Everything has been turned into shelters and tents. We have tried to get the children to tell us their dreams. They dream of going back to their schools and not hearing the sounds of shelling. They dream of finding food and drink. They are very simple dreams — just the basic necessities of life, to eat and drink and go to school and to go back to play with their friends.

Our children have experienced serious threats to their lives. They could not grasp the nature of those threats — the loss of homes and families, and displacement through the so-called safe corridor. Their lives were under threat in that safe corridor. They were forced to open their eyes and see the bodies alongside the road. They were forced to walk while snipers were targeting them. We saw how they arrived, unable to say a word about the horrific images they had seen on the journey of displacement, and when they reached the safe area, they were targeted.

Through our work in the Tamer Institute and our activities to help children express their dreams, we have a video stream called the Dream of Return. It is by Ghazi, one of the children from Al-Mawasi, one of the areas claimed to be safe. When he was around, he drew his home, his school, his toys. I will share his artwork with the Council — I hope members can see it. Ghazi used to draw his father, and he drew himself feeling well fed. But Ghazi could not transfer that image to canvas because he was attacked in his tent and he and his father both lost their lives. The same thing happened to many other children who have been killed. Some experienced violence. They lost their families, homes and schools. Layan, one of the little girls in northern Gaza — I will never forget her — was in a shelter along with her mother and family. The school-turned-shelter was surrounded by tanks and soldiers. The family was expelled from it and the place was attacked. One of Layan's relatives was killed in the shelter and blown to pieces. They were forced to collect the body parts to bury them. The army forced her to open her eyes and see things like that until she and her family reached Salah Al-Din, and later the central area of Gaza.

Can the Council imagine a 12-year-old girl walking a long distance after those horrific scenes of violence, killing and displacement, while going through all that psychological suffering? Can members imagine the things that happened to her? All our children have lost the true meaning of life, safety and security, what it means to eat, to live, to be human.

I will never forget the radio, throughout all this, because we had lost all means of communication. As Council members can see, I do not have even an electricity supply, and I am trying my best to stay in touch with the world. We had a radio at the beginning of the war that we used to listen to Al Jazeera, the Hebrew station and Al Arabiya. We used to wait for the Security Council to meet to see what would be

said there. Would there be a ceasefire? Would the massacres and death come to an end? While my friend and colleague Mohammed Sami Qariqa, an artist, was at the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital, he was just drawing and singing with the children. He was at the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital — one of the hospitals in the ancient Gaza Strip and somewhere we saw as the safest place for us. He was there to play and sing with the frightened displaced children in the hospital. He and the children were all killed in the massacre there. Members can look it up, although they are no doubt already aware of it and all of the other instances at Al-Shifa Hospital, other hospitals and civilian centres.

Every day, we were losing our friends, loved ones, homes and lives. Every day, we walked down the street not knowing if we would live or die. Every day, we slept to the sound of planes and tanks, not knowing if we were dead, alive or dreaming or if it was real life. Yet we were always waiting for the moment when the Security Council would declare a ceasefire and stop all the massacres and violations of the rights of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip.

Today I hope to see a ceasefire, that our children will go back to school and that we will all return to our normal lives, to when we used to go to school and work, when we used to sing, cultivate and work — the natural acts of life, simply living. I would always think about human rights that we had learned about. We studied human rights at school, and the first thing they taught us about was the right to life. The first thing that was violated in Gaza was our right to life. Any moment now, it is possible that we can all be survivors, after 470 days — more than a year — of war. We have lost count of the days, having lost our sense of time because of the war. We never knew, from one moment to the next, if we were going to wake up the next day to continue our lives, breathe, eat, drink, or if we were going to die.

I hope that, after 470 days of continuous attacks against the Gaza Strip and against us, the aggression will all now come to an end and we can go back to our normal lives. I hope that our right to life will be returned and that we will have at least the basic necessities of safety and security. I hope that our children will return to school, to their lives, to drawing, playing, writing and singing — in short, to a normal childhood, in a normal environment, not one of fear, anxiety and death, passing by soldiers at gunpoint and hearing planes and helicopters above with new weapons, seeing and hearing them for the very first time. In Gaza, we cannot cross the border, we cannot know what life is like on the outside. I know that we have lost a lot in this war, but I hope that we will not lose more.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Nateel for her sobering briefing.

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

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's Security Council meeting — supported by Algeria in its national capacity, as well as Pakistan and Somalia — to discuss the disastrous situation of children in Gaza. We are grateful to Mr. Fletcher for responding to our calls and participating in today's briefing. We are also grateful to Ms. Bisan Nateel, who shared a very emotionally charged account of the tragedy facing Palestinian children.

The vile war in Gaza, with the most intensive bombardment of civilians since the Second World War and effectively no humanitarian access, has steamrolled the lives of children in the enclave. As early as November 2023, Secretary-General António Guterres called Gaza “a graveyard for children” (SM/SM/22021). Some members of the Security Council also saw for themselves the horrifying consequences of the massive attacks against civilians during their unofficial visit to Rafah in December 2023. Already back then, we saw maimed children in a hospital in Egypt on the

border with Gaza. The efforts of Egyptian and Qatari mediators, who at a late stage were joined by representatives of the new United States Administration, have finally made it possible to reach an agreement that provides for not only a cessation of hostilities but also an increase in the supply of food, fuel and medicine for the people of Gaza.

However, there are few reasons for celebration so far. The humanitarian catastrophe that has been raging in the enclave for more than 15 months has not gone away. The agreement does not stipulate the establishment of safe and unimpeded supply of the necessary quantities of aid using all available routes. Israel's military presence in the enclave continues. The Israeli military retains control of, for instance, the Rafah border crossing. As far as we understand, European observers will monitor how that border crossing is being used, thereby assuming part of responsibility for the humanitarian situation in Gaza. It is noteworthy that the Europeans, who tend to paint themselves as human rights champions, are not demanding that those who are killing children in Gaza be brought to justice. Moreover, several European States have not even stopped supplying arms to Israel. The war in Gaza has truly become a litmus test exposing how the West actually treats the protection of human rights.

We do not yet have definitive data on the number of boys and girls who have perished, because organizations working in the field cannot accumulate quickly enough data on deaths that are not related to injuries but are the result of hunger, dehydration, poor sanitation or disrupted health services. The rubble of buildings has not been cleared, under which there could potentially be thousands of bodies. However, a recent study by *The Lancet* informs us that, out of the 28,257 deaths documented between 7 October 2023 and 30 June 2024, for which age and gender data are available, 16,699, or approximately 59 per cent, were women, children and elderly persons. According to UNICEF, the total number of Palestinian children killed since the beginning of the conflict is at least 14,500, approximately 17,000 fall into the category of unaccompanied minors or have been separated from their parents and about 1 million have been compelled to leave their homes. In the first seven days of 2025 alone, 74 children were killed in Gaza. Eight newborns in tent camps died of hypothermia between the end of December and early January.

Many children are being maimed. In 2024, explosive weapons used in the Gaza Strip left an average of 475 children a month, that is, 15 children a day, disabled for life, with serious trauma to their limbs and hearing damage. According to the United Nations Mine Action Service, if the war were to end today, the risk of boys and girls being killed and maimed in Gaza would persist for at least another 14 years — the time that it would take to clear the Strip of unexploded ordnance. Need we point out that children have always been and will remain the primary victims of mine contamination, owing in part to their natural curiosity?

Tomorrow we will mark the International Day of Education. People the world over will talk about education as a key factor in sustainable development and about the fact that everyone has a right to education. But in the Gaza Strip in the first week of 2025 alone there were five attacks on schools, which the population is now using as shelters. Dozens of children were hurt and at least three died. Gaza's education system has long been paralysed. Estimates of the number of school buildings damaged or destroyed vary, going as high as 96 per cent in the entire Gaza Strip as of September 2024 and 100 per cent in northern Gaza as of December. And we are not talking about minor damage. School ceilings have collapsed and walls have gaping holes, while 625,000 students have already missed an entire school year and will now be forced to miss a second. If they are ever able to return it will be a miracle.

The health system has also been devastated, with catastrophic consequences for children's access to health services. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released a thematic report on 31 December

confirming that the attacks on health facilities in Gaza were systematic and structured. By June 2024, 22 of 38 hospitals had stopped functioning. According to the World Health Organization, only 38 per cent of primary healthcare centres remain operational.

In the circumstances, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) — whose activities in the occupied Palestinian territory could soon be banned under laws enacted by the Knesset — has once again been shown to be unique and irreplaceable. The Knesset's decisions violate not only international humanitarian law but also the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, whose implementation is guaranteed by the Secretary-General. They also contradict the relevant General Assembly resolutions and the basis of Israel's 1949 admission to membership in the United Nations, which was conditional on the implementation of two cornerstone General Assembly resolutions — resolution 181 (II), on the plan to partition Palestine, and resolution 194 (III), on Palestinian refugees.

For more than 70 years the Agency's staff have at times worked in inhumane conditions and at the risk of their lives, to implement UNRWA's mandate of providing educational, medical, social, microfinancing and emergency assistance services to Palestinians in need and of improving the infrastructure and living conditions in refugee camps. In the 15 months of the conflict, 265 UNRWA personnel have been killed, representing a loss of staff that is sadly a record in the history of our Organization. Shutting down UNRWA would have catastrophic consequences for the most vulnerable groups of the population, above all for children. We cannot allow that to happen. In the circumstances, the ceasefire must be used to urgently scale up the humanitarian assistance in the region, with an emphasis on the special needs of children. Besides the efforts to rebuild infrastructure and bring in food and medical supplies, it is essential to ensure that children in need of specialized assistance, together with their parents or guardians, can be evacuated without problems from the Strip and allowed to return home unhindered.

Another aspect of the agreement concluded between the warring parties is the exchange of detainees, who include children. And that is just the tip of the iceberg. The issue of the arbitrary detention of Palestinian children by the Israeli authorities existed long before the events of 7 October 2023. Like adults, children were subjected to so-called administrative detention and incarcerated indefinitely without being charged. Nor should we forget the repeat detentions of minors who were released after a similar deal in November 2023.

The war in Gaza has not only ruined the individual lives of many children and adults, but it has also torn apart the very fabric of society, delaying indefinitely the start of a truly peaceful coexistence between the two peoples. Even the children in Gaza who have been fortunate enough to survive without being disabled will need years to restore their mental health and learn to live like their peers in regions not blighted by conflict. Another acute issue is the problem of Palestinian orphans, who now number more than 20,000. What does fate have in store for them? What can the United Nations do to ensure that their lives are not shattered? When it comes to securing a future for Palestinian children — and that means the Palestinian people as a whole — there is no alternative to the sustainable stabilization of the situation in Gaza. It is also our view that the Council is simply duty-bound to maintain a focus on children's issues in the context of the situation in Gaza.

**Ms. Shea** (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Tom Fletcher for his briefing and Ms. Bisan Nateel for her moving remarks.

A ceasefire and hostage release deal were long overdue. The mediation led by the United States, Qatar and Egypt has finally resulted in an agreement to end



the conflict that Hamas set in motion on 7 October 2023. The deal has halted the fighting in Gaza. It will reunite all of the remaining hostages with their families and surge much-needed humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians. We remind the Council that Hamas is still holding two children hostage — Kfir and Ariel Bibas — who were violently taken from their home on 7 October 2023. Two-year-old Kfir has marked both of his birthdays in captivity by Hamas. Since Hamas' barbaric attack started the conflict over 15 months ago, the suffering of Palestinian civilians, the deaths, injuries and displacement have been immense. The suffering extends to Gaza's youngest victims, the Palestinian children who were caught in the crossfire, lost family and missed school. No one benefits from the crisis. Now is the time to ensure that critical aid reaches those in need throughout Gaza in accordance with the ceasefire deal that the United States, Qatar and Egypt secured. We urge countries to support that effort by supplying additional funding and resources to help to quickly scale up much-needed humanitarian aid.

We must ensure that Hamas is not permitted to seize, divert or profit from that assistance and that if it does so, it is reported immediately. Hamas cannot be allowed to reconstitute. It should have no role in the governance of Gaza and should not be rewarded for launching the brutal attack that started the conflict or for its deplorable behaviour in the interim. We must instead seize this opportunity to reshape the region in a way that affords its people a path forward. Gaza must be demilitarized for the sake of Israel's security and to provide a brighter future for the Palestinian people. Hamas, along with its benefactors in Tehran, should not have a say in the region's future.

We have already seen Hamas weaponize the suffering of Palestinians by using civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, to store caches of weapons, house fighters and coordinate attacks against Israel. We are concerned about reports that Hamas held returned Israeli hostages in United Nations shelters in Gaza during their prolonged captivity. It is vital for a full investigation to assess those very serious allegations. At the same time, Hamas plays the victim and makes false appeals to the international community on behalf of Palestinians, all the while employing tactics that put them in danger.

Israelis need to feel secure within their own borders, and Palestinians deserve a future to look forward to, with freedom, dignity and security. We must work together to counter the nefarious influence of Tehran and its terrorist proxies, whose actions have destabilized the Middle East for decades. We can instead work with like-minded partners to create a Middle East that is more integrated, prosperous and peaceful. The United States is strongly committed to implementing the ceasefire agreement so that hostages can return home and the people of Gaza can look forward to a brighter future under new leadership. That is the only path forward.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher and Ms. Nateel for their briefings.

Children are the greatest victims of armed conflict. During the 15-month-long Gaza conflict, at least 17,000 Palestinian children were killed, with more than 600,000 plunged into an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. Those children, who should have been sitting in classrooms learning, with books in their hands, have instead found themselves facing forced displacement again and again and huddling under the rubble to seek shelter from the bombardment. Scenes of children dying in front of their families and images of children reduced to skin and bones by malnutrition have broken our hearts. All that should never have happened and must not be allowed to continue.

The international community must act to put an end to the suffering of the children of Gaza.

First, there is a need for a durable ceasefire in Gaza. Once the ceasefire that began on 19 January has been fulfilled, there must be no resumption of fighting, and children must not once again be targeted at gunpoint or subjected to gunfire. The current ceasefire should form the basis for a permanent ceasefire rather than a pause before a new round of offensives ensues. We are gravely concerned about reports that children were shot and killed by Israeli forces in Rafah the day after the ceasefire came into effect. We strongly call for the continuous and full implementation of the three-phase ceasefire agreement.

Secondly, humanitarian assistance in Gaza must be expanded. Children in Gaza have long been deprived of the basic necessities for survival, such as food and medicine, and there are even cases of newborn babies freezing to death. We call on Israel to fulfil its obligation under international humanitarian law as the occupying Power by opening all border crossings, lifting restrictions on the entry of goods and guaranteeing large-scale access of humanitarian supplies into Gaza and the safe and orderly distribution thereof. We call on the international community to scale up its assistance to Gaza.

Thirdly, guaranteeing education for children in Gaza is imperative. Education is indispensable to the healthy development of children. Fifteen months of indiscriminate bombing have obliterated living conditions in Gaza, with education being completely disrupted. The international community should support the expeditious commencement of reconstruction in Gaza to restore people's livelihoods and provide children with a healthy environment in which to grow up. For years, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has been providing basic public services in Gaza, such as education, and as such has the capacity to, and should play a major role in, the post-war reconstruction of Gaza. We once again call on Israel to cease its suppression of the Agency and to repeal the relevant bill as soon as possible.

Fourthly, there must be accountability for violations against children. The protection of civilians in armed conflict is an obligation under international law — and refraining from targeting children even more so. Security Council resolutions have clearly identified six grave violations against children as prohibited actions. However, a large amount of reporting has shown that children in Gaza have suffered grave violations during the conflict, and the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/384) has also listed relevant perpetrators. We call for investigations of and accountability for all violations against children in all conflicts, and we support the continued focus of the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict on the children of Gaza.

The fundamental approach to allow Palestinian children to grow up in a safe and healthy environment is the implementation of the two-State solution and the realization of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. The international community must act with the utmost sense of urgency to promote the restart of the political process for the two-State solution. China is ready to continue making unremitting efforts with all parties to promote an early realization of peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel and lasting peace and security in the Middle East so that the children of both Palestine and Israel can be free from the horrors of war and grow up freely under the sunshine of peace.

**Mr. Alfaro de Alba** (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): Panama welcomes the convening of this meeting in response to the request by the Russian Federation, Algeria, Pakistan and Somalia to address the situation of children in the Gaza Strip, within the framework of children and armed conflict.

We thank the briefers — Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher and Ms. Bisan Nateel of the Tamer

Institute for Community Education — for their valuable presentations. We also welcome the presence of the delegations of Egypt, Israel and the Observer State of Palestine.

We acknowledge the efforts of humanitarian agencies, which are facing extreme conditions and working tirelessly to protect and ensure the well-being of the communities most affected by the conflict.

The recent ceasefire between Hamas and Israel provides an admirable opportunity to address the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. However, United Nations reports are clear: more than 14,500 Palestinian children have lost their lives, another 25,000 are injured and nearly 1 million have been displaced. We deeply regret the loss of those innocent lives.

According to UNICEF, approximately 88 per cent of schools in Gaza are in need of total reconstruction or significant repairs, affecting more than 625,000 students. In addition, only 25 per cent of drinking water production is operational, leading to an exponential increase in waterborne diseases. The health infrastructure has also suffered severe damage, with numerous hospitals out of service, exacerbating the public health crisis.

Panama reiterates its condemnation of the abduction of Israeli children by Hamas, an inhumane act that constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law. Those children have been used as bargaining chips in a cruel and unacceptable strategy. With deep regret, in this conflict as in so many other armed conflicts, we deplore the tragic loss of every child's life and reaffirm that the protection of children must be comprehensive and without distinction. We urge the Security Council to continue to always promote efforts to ensure that all children receive the care and protection they deserve.

In that context, Panama welcomes the adoption of resolution 2764 (2024), adopted last December, which reaffirms the obligation of all parties to uphold international humanitarian law, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We also recall the importance of complying with resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 2225 (2015) and 2601 (2021), adopted by the Security Council, which have established a solid framework for the protection of children in armed conflict.

Given the alarming situation that children in Gaza are facing, which can in no way be justified, Panama proposes the following priority actions to address the most pressing needs.

First, unrestricted humanitarian access must be guaranteed through the sustained and efficient opening of crossing points, allowing the safe and agile delivery of essential supplies such as water, food, medicines and fuel. It is also crucial to ensure the safety of humanitarian staff on the ground. The process, which is fortunately already under way, to ensure the daily arrival of at least 500 trucks is indispensable to respond to the urgent needs of the affected population.

Secondly, children must be protected effectively through the implementation mechanisms that safeguard their lives and well-being and ensure their access to medical care, safe shelter and psychosocial assistance. Rehabilitation programmes must be initiated as a matter of urgency and must adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses both the physical and mental health of affected children. It is estimated that some 17,000 children have been separated from their families in Gaza and require immediate specialized assistance.

Thirdly, essential infrastructure must be built, with a more urgent focus on restoring schools, hospitals and water systems, to ensure safe and enabling environments for children's development. Investment in education is key to avoid losing a generation, considering that more than 496 schools have been damaged

or destroyed. Effective coordination of those efforts will allow children to resume their education and access to basic services, enabling them to move towards a future of hope.

Fourthly, we must strongly support United Nations agencies, in particular UNICEF and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), whose role has been instrumental in providing humanitarian assistance in Gaza and must continue as such. The current situation of UNRWA, with the Agency facing operational constraints and critical underfunding, puts at risk the delivery of essential services to millions of Palestinian refugees. Panama underscores the need to guarantee the security of UNRWA staff, respect its international mandate and provide the necessary financing for it to continue its crucial work in the region.

The crisis in Gaza is an urgent reminder of our collective responsibility towards the most vulnerable. We cannot allow indifference or political differences to hinder efforts to protect the children caught up in that conflict. War-stricken children cannot continue to pay the price of inaction. With each day that passes without a solution, children's suffering increases and their dreams of a safe future fade. Let us act with courage, humanity and determination so that the world does not forget the faces of those children or the duty we all have to them. We cannot change the past, but we can and must decide the future we want to build for them.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General and Ms. Nateel for their briefings. And I welcome the participation of the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine and the Permanent Representatives of Israel and Egypt in this meeting.

I would like to make three points.

First, following the terror attacks of 7 October 2023 and 15 months of appalling conflict, we stand with Palestinians and Israelis in relief and hope that the ceasefire and hostage release deal can bring lasting peace. The children of Gaza did not choose this war, yet they have paid the ultimate price. A third of identified bodies are children. At least 21,500 children are thought to have sustained injuries. And in the past four months of 2024, nearly 19,000 children were hospitalized with acute malnutrition. Gaza has become the deadliest place in the world to be a child. The psychological scars of fear, pain and deprivation are clear. Nearly half the Palestinian children surveyed by one non-governmental organization in late 2024 expressed a desire to die. That is a truly shocking statistic. We must ensure that the needs of children are front and centre of efforts to rebuild in Gaza. As the Security Council heard in September 2024 from Dr. Bron-Harlev of Schneider Children's Medical Centre (see S/PV.9717), the events of 7 October 2023 also exacted a dreadful toll on Israeli children, who were killed, gravely injured and abducted, some of whom have still not returned to their loved ones. It is unimaginably cruel of Hamas to take children hostage and still to be holding them a full 15 months later. They must be released.

Secondly, we welcome news that aid is now flowing in at scale, and as Under-Secretary-General Fletcher said, that must continue. Humanitarian actors must be allowed safe and unfettered access throughout Gaza, including the north, and alongside that, we need to see a massive increase in commercial delivery. The roll-out of the polio vaccine to children in Gaza last year was an example of what can be achieved when there is political will. We urge the parties to enter this new phase in that same spirit and to prioritize those in desperate need. The ceasefire deal should be an opportunity to get more — not less — aid in. And for that reason, my Foreign Secretary has urged Israel to ensure the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) can continue its life-saving operations and give the fragile ceasefire the best chance of success.

Finally, the conflict has meant that the 1.1 million children of Gaza have been out of school for over 15 months. We cannot allow a generation of Palestinians to be deprived of education and their right to a better future. To do so, risks further suffering and a continued cycle of violence. That is in neither Palestinian nor Israeli interests. Once again, UNRWA plays a crucial role in that regard. We must ensure its delivery of essential services, such as education and healthcare, can continue until such time as a Palestinian State can take over those functions.

In conclusion, the Security Council has a clear children and armed conflict mandate to ensure that it protects children from the scourge of war and violence, wherever that may be. And yet grave violations against children are at an all-time high. We must do much more to reverse that appalling trajectory. We call on all parties to adopt and implement concrete and time-bound action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children.

The United Kingdom will do all it can to turn the current ceasefire in Gaza into a lasting peace based on a two-State solution, in which Palestinian and Israeli children alike can enjoy a safe and prosperous future.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett** (Guyana): I thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for his briefing and Ms. Nateel for her sobering testimony.

The subject of today's meeting reminds us of the worst consequences of war — its devastating impact on children. It reminds us of why peace must always be the only choice. Over the past 15 months we, the members of the Council, and indeed the entire world, have watched the children of Gaza bear the brunt of a war that no child should ever experience. More than 14,500 children have been killed and thousands more injured and maimed for life. Gaza is now the place with the highest number of child amputees in modern history. Children have lost limbs, suffered severe burns and had their fragile bones broken and crushed as Israeli air strikes and bombs destroyed their homes and the places where they played, ravaging all the spaces where they sought shelter, in gross violation of international law. Many have lost their parents, siblings and other beloved family members. They have been displaced multiple times, travelling from place to place, often in harsh weather conditions, but finding nowhere truly safe. In December alone, eight infants and newborns reportedly died from hypothermia. It is reported that more than 30,000 children have been orphaned and nearly 1 million displaced from their homes.

In this unrelenting war, children in Gaza have been denied access to water and food and have suffered malnutrition, with famine a real risk for many of them. In the absence of basic sanitation, thousands have fallen sick, suffering from preventable diseases with no recourse to healthcare as hospital after hospital was bombed and medical personnel were attacked and terrorized. Previously eradicated diseases such as polio have re-emerged as vaccination programmes fell behind. Schools in Gaza have not been spared by Israel's weapons. They have been reduced to rubble, erasing their students' hopes, dreams and educational aspirations. UNICEF reports that 95 per cent of Gaza's school buildings have been damaged or destroyed. With an acquired ability to identify the various types of weaponry used through the ominous sounds of war, children in Gaza have witnessed the worst atrocities and endured tremendous suffering. The trauma and scars of the past months on their bodies and minds will endure for the rest of their lives.

Guyana welcomes the current ceasefire, which offers a much-needed reprieve for the people of Gaza, particularly children. We urge all parties to work assiduously to ensure that it holds and becomes permanent. The protection of children in Gaza must be a priority during the implementation of the ceasefire. They must have shelter and the necessary humanitarian aid and healthcare, including psychosocial support.

Access to education must be restored as soon as possible, with attention paid to clearing explosive ordnance and risk education in order to ensure their safety.

The ordeal of Gaza's children is far from over. Families are returning to new horrors in their communities, discovering flattened or gutted homes and pulling decayed bodies from the rubble. The reconstruction and rehabilitation process will be long, expensive and arduous, requiring the collective support and resources of the international community. The continued functioning of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is crucial to those efforts. It has been emphasized in numerous briefings to the Council that UNRWA is the only agency in Gaza with the capacity and reach to provide the wide range of support needed by civilians in Gaza. Guyana reiterates its call for Israel to refrain from implementing its law on UNRWA and to respect the mandate given to UNRWA by the General Assembly. We thank all United Nations agencies, including UNRWA, as well as the numerous non-governmental organizations, for their indefatigable efforts to provide life-saving support to children in Gaza, never giving up in even the most difficult circumstances. They must be given the requisite support by the Council and the international community to continue their critical work.

It is necessary to touch on another issue as we discuss today's subject — that of accountability, which was also mentioned by Under-Secretary-General Fletcher. As the war on Gaza dragged on, the undertakings and assurances given to the world's children in legally binding international instruments and under the umbrella of international law were eroded in Gaza one by one. In resolution 1261 (1999) and subsequent resolutions concerning children in armed conflict, the Council has been united in identifying six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, calling on the parties to ensure the protection of children and for accountability for violations. Children in Gaza have been subject to those grave violations. We have seen a blatant disregard for international humanitarian law and widespread human rights abuses. Guyana is of the firm view that impunity and the failure to hold perpetrators of grave violations against children accountable are contributing to the increase in such violations worldwide. Those responsible must be held accountable. The Council must be consistent and united in demanding that all parties to conflicts adhere to their obligations under international law to protect children. The children in Gaza deserve no less.

In conclusion, I reiterate that the peaceful resolution of conflicts remains the best and only real protection for children. We must therefore spare no effort to end this conflict.

**Mr. Kanu** (Sierra Leone): I thank you, Mr. President for convening this briefing at the request of the Russian Federation, supported by Algeria in its national capacity, as well as Pakistan and Somalia, in order to focus on the deeply alarming situation of children in the occupied Palestinian territory. I thank Under-Secretary-General Tom Fletcher for his briefing and Ms. Bisan Nateel for her compelling contribution.

Sierra Leone commends the United Nations agencies and other partners on the ground in the Gaza Strip for their tireless efforts to protect and support children affected by the conflict in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Sierra Leone stands in solidarity with every child affected by this conflict, those who have been tragically killed, those buried under rubble, those maimed and injured, those held hostage in prison or captive for months without proper care, and those who have been orphaned. Let us remember those children not only with sorrow but also with a renewed determination to resolve the conflict that has caused them such immense suffering.

At the heart of the conflict in Gaza are the civilians who have borne the brunt of this violence. Today's briefings have underscored the profound impact that the conflict is having on children, many of whom have known only a life of violence

and insecurity. The current ceasefire, while bringing some relief, cannot mask the dire conditions that they continue to face. For more than a year, children in Gaza have endured unimaginable hardship, deprivation, bombardment and displacement. Since 7 October 2023, it is reported that at least 14,500 children have lost their lives and an estimated 25,000 have been injured. More than 17,000 children have been separated from their parents, and nearly 1 million have been displaced from their homes. Many are still unaccounted for. Disturbing reports indicate that newborns have died from harsh winter conditions, inadequate shelter and the unavailability of life-saving baby formula. Those numbers add to the 1,434 Palestinian children killed and 32,175 injured between 2008 and 6 October 2023, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The relentless attacks on densely populated areas and the constant displacements and disruptions of essential services have subjected countless children to grave violations of their rights, including killing, maiming and the destruction of schools, hospitals and water and energy infrastructure. The targeting of schools now used as shelters has left children with no safe spaces for learning or recovery. That has contributed to the erosion of the social fabric of a once resilient society. The effects of the war on children will endure long after the fighting stops, leaving lasting physical and psychological scars. As the ongoing situation in Gaza continues to highlight the vulnerability of children in conflict zones, it is essential that we take urgent and effective action to safeguard this generation from further calamity. In that regard, Sierra Leone would like to emphasize the following points.

First, we urge all parties to fully adhere to the ceasefire agreement and to take all necessary steps to protect children's rights. We deeply regret attacks on schools and hospitals and that the Safe Schools Declaration was not upheld. As noted by Under-Secretary-General Fletcher, with the ceasefire in place, humanitarian agencies and partners are scaling up efforts to address the health and psychosocial needs of children, including specialized protection services for unaccompanied children. That vital work must be supported and expanded as part of Gaza's rebuilding process and the broader reconstruction of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Secondly, in accordance with resolution 2712 (2023), we call on all parties to comply with their obligations under international law for the protection of children in armed conflict, including the Geneva Conventions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and all relevant legal frameworks. The adoption of resolution 2712 (2023) by the Council acknowledges the disproportionate impact on children and demands that all parties ensure that children receive the special protection they are entitled to under international law.

Thirdly, in line with resolution 2720 (2023) and other relevant resolutions, Sierra Leone reiterates the call for Israel, as the occupying Power, to ensure the safe, sustained and unimpeded supply of humanitarian aid into Gaza. We welcome the entry of approximately 2,400 aid trucks since the beginning of the ceasefire and encourage further support for those efforts. We also call on all parties to support humanitarian organizations in facilitating the emergency medical evacuation of critically injured civilians, including thousands of children. The risk posed by explosive remnants of war remains high, and we urge all stakeholders to ensure the safe disposal of that ordnance to prevent further harm to civilians, especially children.

Last but not least, we reaffirm the critical role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees in meeting the humanitarian needs of the civilian population in Gaza, particularly in providing education, health services and psychosocial support for children. Rebuilding educational infrastructure must be a top priority to ensure that children can resume learning in a safe environment that fosters both academic development and emotional healing.

In conclusion, it is imperative that we strengthen accountability mechanisms for violations of children's rights, including holding perpetrators accountable for attacks on schools and hospitals, the denial of humanitarian access and the use of sexual violence against children in conflict. We call for the release of all those children being held in detention camps and for full and impartial investigations into their detention. As we welcome the ceasefire as a crucial step towards rebuilding Gaza and addressing the immediate needs of its children, we also urge swift action to end the ongoing military operations in the West Bank, which have resulted in fatalities and injuries. Reports of violence between settlers and Palestinian communities must be addressed to ensure that the ceasefire leads to lasting peace and stability.

**Mr. Akram** (Pakistan): I would like to thank the Algerian presidency and you, Mr. President, for convening this briefing on the plight of children in Gaza, at the request of the Russian Federation, Somalia, Sierra Leone and my own delegation. We thank Mr. Tom Fletcher for his briefing, and I would like to thank Ms. Bisan Nateel in particular for her testimony on the suffering that the children of Gaza have endured for the past 15 months.

Israel's unrelenting and indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population in Gaza for 15 sustained months, with one pause, cannot be justified by any argument regarding the provocation that instigated those attacks. International humanitarian law is crystal clear that, no matter the provocation, the forces of a State are prohibited from attacking civilian structures, or even structures where there may be civilians who could suffer as a result of such attacks. That principle must be upheld if we are, today and in future, to be able to contain the consequences of wars and conflicts on innocent people. That was the purpose of the Geneva Conventions, and that purpose was set out after the wars that devastated Europe and the world. Today that purpose must be reinstated, as we see the suffering that has been caused by Israel's brutal and indiscriminate war in Gaza. In total, 46,000 people have been killed, most of whom were women and children. How can that be justified?

Among the tragedies of the Palestinian people, the suffering of the children in Gaza stands out as a black mark on humankind at large, not only on those who caused the suffering with their bombs and artillery, not only on those who allowed it to be happen over 15 months — with the Security Council remaining frozen because of the position of certain States — or those who continue to supply weapons and ammunition to the attacking forces that were killing children every day, but even all of us. And I am glad that I was not on the Security Council last year and that I joined the Council at the time when a ceasefire — however fragile — has been achieved.

However, that deliberate policy of targeting civilians, irrespective of the fact that the majority of those who have been killed were children and women, attacks on hospitals and schools, children targeted by snipers — what moral degradation allows something like that to happen? There are complaints about 7 October 2023, but compare that with the devastation that has been visited on the people of Gaza. Does the 7 October attack justify what has been done to the children of Gaza? Can it ever be justified?

Of course, we have welcomed the ceasefire and are grateful to Egypt, Qatar and the United States for brokering it. It could have been achieved much earlier, and we understand the new dynamics that seem to have obliged the Prime Minister of Israel to finally accept the ceasefire. Now we must ensure that the ceasefire holds and that the Israeli threats to resume the conflict are held back. We are also concerned about what is happening in the West Bank. The ceasefire in Gaza has been simultaneous with an escalation of violence in the West Bank. The Security Council must also take cognizance of what is happening there.



Humanitarian aid must of course be accelerated. We fully concur with Mr. Fletcher regarding how much aid should go through. There are risks of disease, water scarcity and a lack of food. All of those requirements must be addressed. All the border crossings must be opened and the international community and the Security Council must ensure the continued operation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. A reconstruction plan must be implemented immediately, because the Palestinian people are being asked to return to their homes. But look at those homes — there are no homes. Everything has been devastated. Where will they go for shelter?

Lastly, we must talk about accountability. Last year, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were finally listed in the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384). The Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict must serve as a vital tool for scrutinizing the IDF's actions and ensuring justice and accountability for Palestinian children. It should continue to report objectively and comprehensively on the plight of children affected by Israel's war in Gaza.

Heinous crimes have been committed in this brutal war, particularly against children, in violation of international humanitarian law, the Geneva Conventions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. There must be accountability for those crimes. That is essential to restoring international legitimacy. We must try to ensure that such brutal slaughter of children never happens again.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Ms. Nateel for their briefings.

They remind us of how lethal the conflict in Gaza has been for children. According to UNICEF, more than 14,500 children have been killed in Gaza since the start of the war — more than the total number of children killed worldwide in four years of war. Approximately 25,000 children have been injured. Gaza has the highest per capita number of child amputees in the world. The conflict has separated 17,000 children from their parents or left them on their own after their parents' death. More than 1 million children have been displaced. The numbers are devastating.

The war has destroyed almost all essential infrastructure. The grave violations of children's rights fly in the face of international humanitarian law and human rights. The ceasefire's entry into force must bring the plight of Palestinian children and civilians to an end. France will continue to take action to come to their aid and has taken part in a number of medical evacuation operations, most recently in coordination with the European Union and the World Health Organization to bring Palestinian patients to France. We should also remember that Hamas took Israeli children hostage during the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023. France will continue to condemn those attacks and abductions. It goes without saying that we will not forget the plight of Israeli children. The entry into force of the agreement must bring the release of all hostages, including our two compatriots Ofer Kalderon and Ohad Yahalomi, and the delivery at scale of aid to the people, particularly Palestinian children.

The Gaza Strip's future belongs within a future Palestinian State. Hamas must be prevented from regaining a foothold there. The Palestinian Authority must be able to return there without delay, and Israel must facilitate that and allow the Palestinian Authority to exercise power in the West Bank. France urges for the ceasefire to become the opportunity to set in train an irreversible process that culminates in a two-State solution, which we are committed to both within the Council and in every other forum.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that the protection of children in armed conflicts is an overriding priority for France, which will remain fully engaged, including from the perspective of the forthcoming twentieth anniversary in 2027 of the Paris Principles, which are a reference point for child protection. We reaffirm our support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and for UNICEF. We must give the children of Gaza and all Israeli and Palestinian children a future so that they can live, study and grow up freely in peace and security.

**Mr. Sangjin Kim** (Republic of Korea): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for his briefing and Ms. Nateel for her testimony.

Regrettably, during the horrendous terrorist attacks by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing Israeli military response in Gaza, children have been disproportionately affected by this brutal conflict. We still remember the shocking moments of Hamas' unjustifiable attack on Israel's citizens on 7 October, in which dozens of children were brutally killed and 251 Israelis, including 30 children, were abducted. Their terror on that dark and unforgivable day is unimaginable.

While we unequivocally condemn the terrorist attacks by Hamas, we remain seriously alarmed by the extensive killing of Palestinian children in Gaza over the past 15 months. It is deeply disturbing that at least 14,500 Gazan children — and that is possibly an underestimate — have reportedly been killed in Israel's attacks since 7 October, with Save the Children reporting that at least another 20,000 Palestinian children in Gaza are either missing or have disappeared or been buried under the rubble. The Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict for last year (S/2024/384) stated, staggeringly, that more than a third of the total verified cases of killing and maiming worldwide occurred in Israel and Palestine, mostly between 7 October and December 2023. And the figure for 2025 is expected to be even higher, given the escalated hostilities that continued throughout the entirety of 2024.

The Republic of Korea wholeheartedly welcomes the ceasefire agreement and hopes that it will serve as a true stepping stone to finally giving Gaza's 1 million children a respite from this perpetual nightmare. We also note that there are women and minors, some of them reportedly as young as 12 years old, among the 90 Palestinian prisoners released from Israeli prisons on 19 January in exchange for three Israeli hostages. We hope that the rights of Palestinian children can also be respected under due process and that the release of those and other Palestinian minors can help build trust between Israel and Palestine.

The current ceasefire in Gaza must urgently ease the catastrophic suffering of Palestinian children in Gaza. Children should have priority access to the supply of adequate food and water and enjoy full access to the healthcare that they need, despite only half of Gaza's 36 hospitals being partially functional. Sufficient care for babies and lactating mothers must also be ensured.

The resumption of education throughout Gaza is also of great importance. The significance of education cannot be overemphasized in long-term reconstruction efforts or in building trust among peoples and nations. Therefore, it is deeply concerning that children in Gaza have already lost two years of education, as nearly 88 per cent of schools in Gaza need either full reconstruction or major rehabilitation. We recognize the vital role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in providing essential services to Palestinian children, including healthcare and education.

The future of Israel and Palestine belongs to the children in the region. We, the adults of the current generation, have the responsibility of providing a better future for all children in the Middle East to inherit. The terror of 7 October 2023 and the

horror in Gaza over the past 15 months once again remind us that the status quo is neither acceptable nor sustainable. The realization of the two-State solution, in which both Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace, security and dignity, is not an option, but an imperative. Let us begin a sincere discussion to revive the stalled Middle East peace process. While appreciating relevant initiatives, including the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution by Saudi Arabia, Norway and the European Union, the Republic of Korea will faithfully engage in every effort to that end.

**Mr. Yusuf** (Somalia): I thank the presidency for convening this important meeting in response to the call by the Russian Federation, Algeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone and my own country, Somalia. I also extend our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for his comprehensive update and thank Ms. Bisan Nateel for her courage and her sobering briefing about the situation of children in Gaza.

We have all heard with heavy hearts the devastating situation of children in Gaza. While we acknowledge the recent pause agreement, we must confront an uncomfortable truth: temporary respite, although welcome, falls devastatingly short of what Gaza's children desperately need. Palestinian children have witnessed and experienced horrors that no human being, let alone a child, should ever endure. They have lost homes, family members and their fundamental right to a safe childhood.

The recent developments, including the ceasefire agreement and the related hostage exchange, offer a glimmer of hope for the protection and well-being of children who have borne the brunt of this prolonged conflict. While a crucial first step, the ceasefire must be transformed into a permanent ceasefire. That is not merely a diplomatic preference — it is an absolute necessity for the survival and the recovery of Gaza's children. The damage inflicted over the past months not only threatens individual futures, but risks scarring Palestinian society for generations to come.

In that regard, Somalia would like to emphasize the following points.

First, with regard to the protection of children, the children of Gaza must be shielded from violence and the devastating impacts of conflict. Somalia reiterates the necessity of upholding international humanitarian and human rights law, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The protection of the lives, safety and dignity of children must remain a top priority. We urgently call for compliance with, and the implementation of, obligations under the ceasefire agreement and for accountability for any violations to be ensured.

Secondly, with regard to humanitarian access and aid, we welcome the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those desperately in need, as mentioned by Under-Secretary-General Fletcher. Children across Gaza face acute shortages of food, clean water and medical care. The spectre of famine looms, while countless injured children require medical attention that Gaza's devastated healthcare system cannot provide. We join others in calling for the immediate opening of all crossing points into Gaza and for the removal of arbitrary restrictions on all aid delivery. The needs of children — not political considerations — must determine the scale of humanitarian assistance. Adequate funding for organizations like UNICEF and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is essential to sustain life-saving efforts and rebuild Gaza's infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. We reiterate that UNRWA's continued operations can complement the ceasefire agreement, as it is crucial for delivering services on the required scale.

Thirdly, with regard to psychological and educational support, as mentioned by Under-Secretary-General Fletcher and by Ms. Nateel in her vivid stories of horror, the trauma inflicted on children during the conflict is immense, with much suffering

and irreversible harm. We must ensure that children requiring specialized medical care can be evacuated safely, accompanied by their caregivers. The denial of such care violates both international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Fourthly, Priority should be given to facilities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, followed by appropriate international facilities, based on medical necessity. Somalia calls for urgent investment in health services and infrastructure, including mental health and psychological support services, alongside the rehabilitation of schools and education systems. That includes addressing the needs of children with disabilities resulting from violence, ensuring inclusiveness in recovery efforts.

Fifthly, with regard to sustainable peace and long-term recovery, we emphasize that lasting peace requires addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, including the occupation and blockade of Gaza. Children in Gaza must be granted the right to grow up in a safe and dignified environment. The reconstruction of Gaza's critical infrastructure must be Palestinian-led, inclusive and centred on the needs of children. International actors must work collectively to rebuild healthcare systems, support economic recovery and ensure the territorial integrity of Gaza within the broader context of a unified Palestinian state.

Sixthly and my last point, with regard to mine clearance and post-conflict safety, the vast amounts of unexploded ordnance in Gaza pose a severe risk to children. We call for immediate international support for mine risk education and clearance efforts to safeguard lives and facilitate reconstruction.

In conclusion, the plight of Gaza's children is a stark reminder of the human cost of conflict and the urgent need for a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution. Somalia remains committed to advocating for their rights and ensuring their voices are heard in the pursuit of peace and stability. The children of Palestine have the right to life, have the right to education, have the right to food to eat and have the right to sleep in a safe environment.

Somalia calls on the international community to act with urgency and compassion to restore hope for Gaza's children and ensure a brighter future for all.

**Ms. Lassen** (Denmark): I also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher and Ms. Nateel for their sobering briefings.

Last week, a long-awaited ceasefire and hostage agreement was reached, an agreement which we hope will ensure the release of all remaining hostages and adequate humanitarian aid and which we hope can lead to a permanent ceasefire to allow for reconstruction and a path towards a two-State solution. We also hope that the ceasefire will provide a first step towards a safer future for children in Gaza — a chance for children to attend school without interruption, to play without fear and to once again hope for the future. On this fifth day of its implementation, we call on all parties to uphold their commitments and ensure that the agreement is fully implemented.

As we have seen in far too many conflicts around the world, children bear the brunt of war. Last year, the occupied Palestinian territory was ranked as the deadliest place in the world for children, as children make up close to half of those killed in Gaza. Those surviving face a grim reality and a lifetime of trauma: more than 34,000 children have been injured, and Gaza is home to the largest number of amputee children in modern history. Gaza also has the highest rate of child malnutrition globally. And approximately 1 million children are estimated to be in need of mental health and psychosocial support. The war has left close to 17,000 children orphaned. More than 95 per cent of schools in Gaza have been partially or completely destroyed. And the 625,000 school-aged children of Gaza have lost more

than one year of learning. Those figures and the immense suffering they convey are more than shocking.

We remind all parties of their obligations to take all necessary precautions to protect civilians, not least children, who count for almost half of the population in Gaza. We recall that schools must be protected, and their civilian status respected. We once again call on all parties to the conflict to immediately end and prevent all six grave violations against children and ensure that there is accountability for those committed.

Denmark remains deeply concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. With the ceasefire agreement in place, we must now see a surge in humanitarian assistance into and across Gaza, as well as guaranteed safety for humanitarian workers. A key priority will be to get sufficient food, water and medical supplies, as well as winter supplies, to children and their families. Restoring schools and the physical and mental safety needed for children to be able to resume learning will be a Herculean task, but a task we need to undertake.

At this critical moment, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains the backbone of the wider humanitarian response in Gaza. It must be allowed to implement its full mandate, including on the delivery of essential services, such as healthcare and education.

We are waiting impatiently to finally see the release of the remaining child hostages brutally taken and held by Hamas in a blatant violation of international humanitarian law. One as young as two years old knows no other world outside those dire conditions. We recall the need to ensure the immediate release of all remaining hostages without conditions. And we call for humanitarian visits to all remaining hostages held by Hamas, as well as Palestinians held in Israeli detention. They are protected under the Fourth Geneva Convention, and International Committee of the Red Cross representatives must be allowed access to them wherever they may be.

Palestinian and Israeli children alike deserve a brighter future, where they can live in peace, without fear of losing their family or their lives.

Building on the ceasefire agreement, we need to see tangible steps towards realizing a two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition. That is the only viable path to durable peace — a durable peace in which children can dream beyond mere survival, envisioning lives full of possibility, without the weight of war. That is the future the children of Israel and Palestine need — the future they deserve.

**Mrs. Blokar Drobič** (Slovenia): I thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher and Ms. Nateel for their powerful briefings.

Children in Gaza have experienced unspeakable horrors. Many lost their families, their homes and their schools. Too many are missing — either lost, disappeared, detained or buried. Far too many have been maimed or killed. Basically, all children in Gaza are traumatized for life.

As they are everywhere else, in Gaza children are the future — the future of Palestine. To rebuild Gaza into a place of life, hope and lasting peace, we must ensure that its people's trauma is not perpetuated.

We once again welcome the ceasefire agreement and urge all parties to fully uphold their commitments. We must make sure that the ceasefire translates into lasting peace. The children of Gaza deserve that.

First, children in Gaza must be freed from deprivation. Safe, sustained and unimpeded access to large-scale humanitarian aid must be guaranteed to ease their

pain and treat the widespread malnutrition. Access constraints need to be lifted, and security and stability must be guaranteed. A full range of supplies, including water, food, shelter, medical supplies, fuel and winter essentials, must be allowed into Gaza. Those must be accompanied by materials for the restoration of critical civilian infrastructure — water supplies, hospitals, schools, housing and markets. Additionally, children must have the means and the opportunities to be reunited with their family members.

Secondly, children in Gaza need access to health services. Healthcare in Gaza has been under attack, rendering the majority of hospitals and health centres out of service and the rest only partially functioning. That situation is leaving newborns and pregnant women without access to vital services of prenatal and postnatal care, so urgently needed in the beginning of a child's life. In the face of the disproportionate impact of war on children, access to basic healthcare is crucial for their survival and development. That is not optional; it is an obligation of Israel, as the occupying Power, under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to protect every child's right to life, survival and development, health and physical and psychological recovery. It must be guaranteed, including through medical evacuations.

Whether facing hunger and acute malnutrition, amputations and war wounds or lifelong trauma, children in Gaza need access to long-term specialist care, including prosthetics and assistive technologies and mental health services. As the World Health Organization underscored, life-changing injuries in Gaza require rehabilitation services now and for years to come. For years, Slovenia has been engaged in providing medical rehabilitation and psychosocial support to more than 200 children from Gaza. Most recently, a group of 10 children was evacuated from Egypt in October.

According to Save the Children, in 2024, an average of 15 children a day were left with potentially life-long disabilities owing to explosive weapons. We underline the urgent need to prevent any further injuries or deaths, including by clearing explosive remnants of war.

Thirdly, we need to give those children an opportunity to build a better life for themselves. This generation of children is missing out on their second school year, with almost all of their schools having been either damaged or destroyed. The education system must be rebuilt. It is essential to ensure that children have access to safe spaces for learning, development and play. No society could ever be successful without access to education. A rebuilt Gaza must stand on pillars of better opportunities. We therefore repeat the essential role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in human development. Now is the time to strengthen the Agency, which offers basic services, not undermine it.

Children are the biggest victims of any war. We therefore encourage parties listed in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) to initiate a dialogue with the United Nations for the development, adoption and implementation of action plans to end and prevent grave violations committed against children.

We were touched by the carefully crafted words in Ms. Nateel's writing. In Slovenia's book of life, we have always acknowledged Palestinians, and in fact every human being, as more than just numbers and names. Images of children in Gaza during this war have been our constant reminder not to give up on peace.

Now that the ceasefire agreement is in place, many children have nowhere to go and no one to turn to. Their stories and struggles remind us that, despite the recent breakthrough, our work has not yet finished. The Council must continue working on a pathway to lasting peace and the two-State solution. Only then will there also be a peaceful future for children in Palestine, Israel and the region.

**Mr. Sekeris** (Greece): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher and Ms. Nateel for their detailed briefings.

Early on in this war, the Security Council recognized its disproportionate impact on children, when it adopted resolution 2712 (2023), demanding that

“the parties comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, notably with regard to the protection of civilians, especially children” (*resolution 2712 (2023), para. 1*).

Evidently, this war has taken a shocking toll on children in Gaza, reportedly leaving at least 14,500 dead and thousands more injured or separated from their families, and nearly 1 million internally displaced. They all have names, and they all deserved a better future.

A few days ago in this Chamber, we welcomed a long-overdue ceasefire deal struck between the parties (see S/PV.9841), in the hope that it will last and lead to a situation in which recovery from 15 enormously difficult months for the people of Gaza can be achieved.

We understand the shock among Israeli society and the international community caused by the horrendous attacks of 7 October 2023 by Hamas, which also led to the killing and abduction of many children. At the same time, international law and international humanitarian law must remain the compass for our behaviour.

In that vein, we join our colleagues in asking the parties to adhere to the ceasefire deal and respect the provisions of international humanitarian law. We cannot but stress the importance of ensuring the protection of all civilians, at all times, including humanitarian workers, in line with international humanitarian law.

We also encourage the parties listed in the Secretary-General’s report (S/2024/384) to engage with the United Nations on preventing violations committed against children.

The suffering of civilians must come to an end. All crossings should be open for aid delivery, which should come quickly and at scale, to meet the urgent needs of a starving population. The operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remain vital for the thousands of children in Gaza who have been stripped of their basic rights, including to safety, to healthcare and to education. There can be no day-after scenario for the Gaza Strip without child-centred services. The valuable work of UNRWA and other international organizations, such as UNICEF, cannot be overstated, and we proudly continue to support them.

The protection of children is central to our conscience as human beings. Greece has decided to actively take steps to alleviate the suffering of children in Gaza. This week the first injured child from Gaza arrived in Greece, through Romania, for treatment, and my country will further offer treatment to several more injured children in Greek hospitals.

The only long-term solution for the region is to revitalize the political process to pave the way for a political horizon for a two-State solution, according to relevant Security Council resolutions, while recognizing the right of Israel to exist in peace and security. In the meantime, we call on all parties to refrain from actions that put children in danger. Attacks on children, coupled with obstacles to access to humanitarian aid, constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

In a world stuck in a cycle of violence, children are the world’s hope and should be given hope. They should be allowed to reinvent a better world for all of us.

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

We extend our sincere thanks to Under-Secretary-General Tom Fletcher and the civil society representative, Ms. Bisan Nateel, for their sobering briefings. Bisan's moving presentation was further testimony of the level of suffering that Gazans, in particular children, faced during more than 470 days of Israeli aggression. She should be assured that the Algerian people will always support her and the Palestinian people. As President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said, "Algeria will never leave the Palestinian people's side until they enjoy their rights".

A ceasefire has just been reached in Gaza, offering a glimmer of hope after a devastating 15 months of war, thanks to the mediation efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States. At this moment, it is crucial to feel the distress of the population in Gaza, among whom stand innocent children who witnessed atrocities to which no child should ever be subjected. Children are not responsible for the decisions made by adults, yet they are often the first victims of conflicts. That tragic reality is true across the globe, but in Gaza the situation has reached unprecedented levels. The events that unfolded before our eyes were not merely a conflict — this was a war against children, a war against innocence.

It is crucial to give voice to the suffering of Palestinian children, who still endure the consequences of the deadly attacks on the civilian population carried out by the Israeli occupying Power for more than 15 months — 470 days — attacks leading to astonishing figures. Thousands of children were injured, including the highest number of child amputees in modern history. An estimated 17,000 children are now unaccompanied or separated from their parents. Nearly 1 million children have been displaced from their homes, and we should not forget those who have died as a consequence of armed attacks, bombing, hunger, a lack of access to healthcare and even freezing to death, to mention only a few of the violations of international humanitarian law. According to various non-governmental organizations, more than 18,000 children have been killed in Gaza, making up 44 per cent of the total number of victims, and the real figures are surely much higher. While the rubble in Gaza has not yet been fully cleared, an estimated 20,000 children are currently reported missing. Those children, whose lives have been brutally ended by Israeli attacks before they could bloom, will never have a chance to grow old. Their passing will leave an emptiness that cannot be filled in the lives and hearts of their families and loved ones.

While calm is being restored in Gaza, which we hope will lead to a permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of the Israeli army, the situation there remains dire. The scale of destruction is immense. The long-term consequences for the lives of people in Gaza, particularly children, are also profound, as they have suffered significant losses and severe trauma and injuries and been subject to displacement. Those children are out of school and have no access to healthcare. That is the dark reality that children in Gaza are experiencing. The perpetrators of these heinous killings and crimes against children must be held accountable. There should be no room for impunity or immunity.

It is time for recovery, and we must act urgently to save lives and help the children heal. The damage caused by the conflict is so extensive that everything must be rebuilt in Gaza, even the people's hopes for life. To achieve that, we must focus on children by granting them access to education and healthcare. With more than 660,000 students currently out of school, the challenges are immense, especially considering that at least 88 per cent of school buildings require either full reconstruction or major repairs. Moreover, malnutrition is rampant. The nutritional needs of more than 96 per cent of children under 2 years old are not being met owing to a lack of dietary diversity, and an estimated 60,000 children will need treatment for acute



malnutrition this year. In addition, 1 million are in urgent need of mental-health and psychosocial support. Those challenges are exacerbated by the fact that 84 per cent of health facilities have been damaged or destroyed by Israeli bombing.

Let me be clear. Overcoming those challenges will require the humanitarian community to mobilize. In that regard, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) — the backbone of humanitarian action in Gaza — is vital, especially in the areas of healthcare and education. The Agency is indispensable and irreplaceable. Attacking UNRWA at this critical time would ruin the reconstruction efforts and threaten the very presence of Palestinians on their lands. The conflict in Gaza has exacted a heavy toll on children, inflicting potentially irreversible harm, and the consequences are a threat not only to their individual futures but to the very fabric of Palestinian society for generations to come. We must protect the needs and interests of present and future generations, as reflected in the commitment that our leaders expressed in the very first paragraph of the Pact for the Future (General Assembly resolution 79/1).

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. And regardless of where they are born, children have an inalienable right to a dignified life, education and a joyful, safe and secure childhood. The children of Gaza should not be an exception to that. Let us unite our efforts for a better future for children in Gaza.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

**Mr. Mansour** (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Russian delegation, with the support of Algeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone and Somalia, for convening this important meeting to discuss the situation of Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip and to highlight their plight and the urgent need to provide them with protection and care.

Now that there is a ceasefire, which must become permanent, it is perhaps time that Council members visited the stricken Gaza Strip to witness first-hand what has befallen our people and children after 15 months of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide at the hands of Israel, on top of the 17 years of an unjust blockade, and to see for themselves the results of the culture of impunity, double standards, immunity and lack of accountability that Israel has unjustly enjoyed as an occupying Power.

I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Tom Fletcher, for his comprehensive briefing, and to express our gratitude to all the United Nations teams on the ground for providing relief to our people. I want to tell Ms. Bisan Nateel, our daughter from Gaza, how proud we are of her and of all the young women and men of Palestine. Nothing makes us prouder than when our children in Gaza can speak about Gaza before the Security Council and the world, especially after the long silence that the occupation has imposed on them. Brimming with humanity and hope, Ms. Nateel conveyed the suffering and the horror of what happened to her. On behalf of all the children of Palestine, I want to thank her for her testimony.

Our hearts have ached for them all throughout this heinous genocide. We could hear their pulse coming from Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahiya, Jabalia, Gaza, Al-Wusta, Deir Al-Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah. We know that they and their children have been suffering and enduring what no human being can bear — injustice and aggression that are no fault of theirs. They have been confronting the Israeli machine of killing, destruction, displacement and ethnic cleansing, which wants to thwart their attempts to escape the shelling, the killing, the burial under rubble, the arrests, the disease, the fear, the starvation, the thirst, the summer heat and the winter cold.

We know about the pain and oppression that has afflicted them, the magnitude of the catastrophe that has struck them and the scars that we as a people bear and that cannot be healed. But we also know the firmness of their resolve and their determination to begin living again and resist the death that awaits them at every turn. We will build on that determination and hope, which we know may be in short supply in these difficult times, especially with the funeral homes still open and the search for the remains of martyrs and for the missing continuing.

I wish all of our people in Gaza a safe return to their lives and homes — or what is left of them — and a safe return to their families, loved ones and friends, or whoever is left of them. We will be with them. We will be the hand that builds and that heals wounds. We will heed their legitimate aspirations and dreams and continue to convey their voices until Israel's criminal occupation of our land and people ends.

In that connection, we reaffirm the readiness of the Palestinian Government to assume its governing responsibilities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and to provide relief and development services to our people in the Strip, which is an integral part of the territory of the State of Palestine. It is ready to do that in line with the Government plan for relief, early recovery and emergency response for the Gaza Strip that Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa presented to President Mahmoud Abbas. The plan provides for the safe return of the internally displaced to their homes, treatment for the sick and wounded and rehabilitation for the disabled. It also envisages a comprehensive reconstruction phase, including resumed education and health services, the rebuilding of infrastructure and the reinstatement of controls at crossings and borders, as well as economic and social recovery. To that end, we will draw on the skills and experience of our daughters and sons of the Palestinian people, who have the ability to build a better future. In that regard, the Israeli occupation must be made to immediately release the thousands of Palestinian medical personnel, journalists and academics who were abducted from the Gaza Strip and have been subjected to terrible treatment in Israeli torture centres. Gaza cannot recover without the return of its sons such as Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, Dr. Ahmed Muhanna and other professionals and technical staff whom Israel abducted from the Gaza Strip.

We also look forward to cooperating and coordinating our efforts with brotherly and friendly countries on every front to provide aid and assistance to our people. We want to emphasize in that regard the key role of the United Nations, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which is irreplaceable, especially at this critical juncture. The Israeli occupation must therefore be compelled to refrain from obstructing UNRWA's operations in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We call on the international community to ensure that UNRWA can reopen its schools in the Gaza Strip and to equip those schools to receive thousands of children and resume the provision of formal education for every child, equally and safely. We all know that school helps protect children from the consequences of war through the psychological support and recreational opportunities it affords. We cannot wait any longer. We must start resuming education at all levels in the Gaza Strip with immediate effect.

Israel has been carrying out indiscriminate air raids on civilian homes in Gaza and engaging in carpet-bombing, using hundreds of tons of bombs. Those bombardments killed more than 17,000 children, with approximately 20,000 missing under the rubble of their homes or their shelters or in mass graves. Tens of thousands of children are suffering severe burns and permanent injuries, including the amputation of their limbs. Israel orphaned thousands of children. It also besieged the Gaza Strip and imposed a policy of starvation, using starvation as a weapon of war, and prevented the delivery and distribution of relief and medical assistance to civilians in Gaza, in violation of all the moral, legal, and political norms, including the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In the West Bank, Israel drives its military armoured vehicles into our children, into their homes, schools, streets and neighbourhoods. It kills and arrests them. This occupation and settler terrorism is expanding to engulf every city and every street — in Jenin and its camp, in Tulkarem, Nablus, Ramallah, Qalqilya, Bethlehem and Hebron. The occupation demolishes, displaces and bombs; it arrests, burns and destroys; it plunders and builds settlements, in flagrant violation of international law and agreements, undeterred and unpunished.

We demand that the Israeli occupation army forces remain on the United Nations list of violators of the rights of children in armed conflicts until this occupation stops committing its crimes against our children. We also call upon countries to prohibit the delivery of weapons to the Israeli occupation army, to compel it to respect international law and to ensure protection for our children. We cannot accept this as our fate, and we cannot accept that the fate of our children will be either a grave in the Gaza Strip or a detention centre in the West Bank, or displacement in East Jerusalem. It is inconceivable that today our children should live the same harsh life that we lived as children, owing to the Israeli occupation that has spanned decades without any prospects for ending it.

This cycle of violence must end immediately. This occupation, which is robbing us of our children, robbing us of our youth and robbing us of life, must end immediately. The time has come for us and our children to live a life free from the Israeli occupation and its aggression. The time has come for a Palestinian generation that does not know life under occupation. The time has come to put an irreversible end to the war and to the blockade.

The time has come to release all our Palestinian children who are being held by Israel in the Israeli detention and torture centres and to guarantee that Israel will not detain them again. The time has come for our wounded and sick children to receive treatment and the necessary medical care, especially those who lost their limbs and who are in need of artificial limbs and rehabilitation to adapt to this new life that was imposed on them.

I call upon all Council members to join us in our efforts to achieve justice, peace and security in our region. That can be achieved only by ending the unlawful Israeli occupation of our land, pursuant to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the *Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem* (see A/78/968); achieving justice and holding those responsible for those crimes accountable before international tribunals; and achieving the independence and sovereignty of the State of Palestine and its full membership in the United Nations. In that way, our people will be able to exercise their right to self-determination and our children can be born and grow up in peace and security, able to realize their aspirations, build their future and live in freedom and dignity.

**The President:** The President of the Security Council gives the floor to the representative of Israel.

**Mr. Danon** (Israel): Before I begin, Mr. Bendjama, I have noticed that when you give the floor to any Member State, you just say that you give them the floor. But when it comes to Israel, you say, “the presidency” or “the President” gives the floor. I do not understand what the reasoning for that is, and maybe you can let me know why you make that distinction between Israel and any other Member State that appears in front of the Council.

**The President:** Did you finish your statement?

**Mr. Danon** (Israel): No, I have not started. I just wanted to know why you have made the distinction when you have given me the floor during this month, since you

are the President of the Security Council. And I have thought it was a mistake, but now I see that it is not a mistake and there is something behind it. Maybe you have something against my country. But as President of the Council, you should put your personal thoughts or feelings aside when you preside over the Council.

**The President:** We are presiding over the Council, and the presidency of the Security Council gives the floor to the representative of Israel. You have the floor, Sir.

**Mr. Danon (Israel):** I must first ask whether the Council has ever paused to consider the plight of Israeli children. Too many Israeli children were mutilated, tortured and murdered on 7 October 2023, innocent lives stolen by the brutality of Hamas terrorists. Thirty children were kidnapped from their homes, ripped from their families and taken into the depths of Hamas' terror tunnels. Tens of thousands of Israeli children have been displaced, their homes destroyed, their schools closed and their lives shattered. No one at the United Nations or at any of its agencies has said enough about them, let alone lifted a finger to help them. And what about the children who have spent their formative years under the constant stream of Hamas' rocket fire? Imagine growing up with the sound of sirens, given mere seconds to find shelter, with the knowledge that every moment of peace could be destroyed in an instant. Tens of thousands of children have grown up knowing that at any moment a Hamas rocket could kill them.

That is the reality of Israeli children. The trauma that they have endured is beyond imagining. Yet where is the Council's compassion? Where are the urgent meetings? Where is the outrage? Instead, we meet here today to discuss only the children of Gaza. While their suffering is real, this discussion is dripping with fake outrage and a political agenda. Every member of the Council, including those who called for this discussion, knows who bears responsibility for their situation. It is Hamas, not Israel, that has turned Gaza into a war zone. It is Hamas, not Israel, that uses children as human shields. It is Hamas, not Israel, that places its terror infrastructure in schools, hospitals and civilian neighbourhoods. But time and time again, the Council chooses to ignore those facts, choosing to vilify the democratic country that goes to every possible length to protect innocent lives.

On 7 October, Hamas made a deliberate choice to massacre our people. They knew, as did everyone in the Chamber, that their actions would provoke the response they have provoked. They knew that they were putting their own people in harm's way — and still they carried out their atrocities, hiding behind civilians and daring Israel to act.

Today's discussion is an affront to common sense. Those who truly care about the children of Gaza must condemn Hamas unequivocally. Anything less is hypocrisy. Hamas has stolen countless childhoods and poisoned those children's minds. They have turned schools into training grounds for terror, where children are taught to glorify violence and hate. We have all seen the images, including in the past week, of young Gazan children wearing the Hamas headbands, waving guns in the air. That is the future Hamas wants for Gaza's children. Imagine the level of hatred they have ingrained in those countless young boys. These are not isolated examples; it is systematic indoctrination. Hamas has robbed generations of their innocence and their future.

If the Council truly cared about the children of Gaza, it would have condemned that indoctrination long ago. But instead we hear only silence. Let us be honest — what future will the children of Gaza have with Hamas in power? The answer is none. They will remain tools for Hamas' terror, cannon fodder for their murderous aims. They will grow up in a society where hatred is celebrated, where violence is glorified and where life is cheap. Is that the future that the Council wants for them? That is the future that the Council is enabling when it refuses to hold Hamas accountable.

Let us contrast that with what could have been. I want to remind the Council that, in 2005, Israel made a painful and unprecedented decision to withdraw from Gaza. We removed every single Israeli citizen and soldier — so-called settlements, settlers, the occupation, the blockade, however people want to call them — uploading entire communities in the hope of giving the Palestinians a chance at peace and prosperity. We left everything there, entire communities.

What did Hamas do with that opportunity? They turned Gaza into the world's largest terror base, diverting resources meant for the people and their needs in order to build rockets and tunnels. They could have created a thriving future — everyone speaks about the future for the children. They had the opportunity to do so — a Singapore on the Mediterranean. Instead they chose destruction. The children of Gaza could have had a future filled with opportunity. Instead, they are trapped in a cycle of violence and despair, all because of Hamas, not because of Israel.

Israel's commitment to minimizing harm to civilians is unmatched. We take extraordinary measures to protect innocent lives, even when Hamas makes it nearly impossible. We put our own soldiers at greater risk to spare lives on the other side. Yet Hamas exploits this humanity, embedding itself deeper among civilians, using their homes as bunkers, their schools as weapon stores and their hospitals as command centres. That is not a moral equivalence; it is a moral abomination.

I therefore ask the Council today — if it truly cares about the children of Gaza, why does it remain silent in the face of such evil? Why does it not demand an end to Hamas' indoctrination and exploitation of children. Why does it not support efforts to dismantle the terror network and free Gaza from Hamas' grip.

Algeria speaks so highly of Hamas and wants Hamas to stay. If it does, there will be no future for the kids of Gaza. If it genuinely cared about the children of Gaza, it would join Israel in working to create a future of hope, not hate. That future is possible, but only if Hamas is removed from power. Imagine a Gaza where children go to school to learn — not to be indoctrinated, not with guns. Imagine a Gaza where resources are used to build playgrounds, not tunnels; where hospitals heal, rather than hide weapons; where families can live without fear. That is not a pipe dream. It is a reality that could be achieved if Hamas' reign of terror ends.

The international community must make a choice — stand with the children of Gaza or stand with those who use them as shields. It is not possible to support the children of Gaza and support Hamas at the same time. By refusing to confront the truth about Hamas, the Council is not just failing Israel or the children of Gaza; it is failing humankind. The Council was created to uphold peace and justice, but if this inaction continues, terror will continue to flourish. Israel will continue to do everything in its power to protect its people and to seek a better future for all children in the region. But make no mistake — that future cannot and will not include Hamas.

Perhaps my colleagues have forgotten about little Kfir Bibas, but I promise that we have not. Kfir Bibas was nine months old when he was ripped from his bed, along with his four-year old brother, Ariel, and his parents, Shiri and Yarden. He has remained in the darkness of Hamas' terror dungeons. Since then, we have received no word — nothing — about his condition, no visits from the Red Cross, no offers of assistance and no outrage from the United Nations. Just a few days ago, Kfir Bibas should have celebrated his second birthday, but for this little boy there have been no celebrations. Kfir has not had the opportunity to celebrate a single birthday. He has known only captivity and suffering. Does the Council not hear the cries of Israeli children? Does it not feel the pain of Israeli children? Does it not see their tears? If it did, if it cared for anything other than political agendas, then it would devote this meeting to discussing Kfir Bibas and all Israeli children still suffering.

Our children — every single one — deserve more than the Council's silence; they deserve more than the Council's indifference; they deserve their lives back.

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

**Mr. Mahmoud** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank those who called for the holding of this important meeting. I thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher and our dear sister, Ms. Bisan Nateel, for her informative and detailed briefing.

I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

I thank you once again, Mr. President, for holding this meeting today to discuss the situation of children in the Gaza Strip, in the light of Israel's aggression. Extensive mediation efforts by Egypt, Qatar and the United States have succeeded, with difficulty, in reaching a ceasefire agreement to stop the aggression and save civilians. We hope it will be implemented in full to end the suffering of our Palestinian brothers.

We are speaking today with a heavy heart about the most heart-wrenching cause — that of our children in the Gaza Strip, who have gone through the most horrific experience that a child can go through. We are speaking today in pain, unable to fathom why we even need to explain that the cause of our Palestinian children is a just and a humanitarian cause, even as it is there before the Council's eyes for all to see.

United Nations reports and reports of international organizations referred to a multitude of horrors. It is not possible to mention them all today. Those reports tell us that Gaza has turned into a graveyard for children, that — at the very least — more than 7,000 children have been martyred. Women and children, together, comprise 70 per cent of the martyrs in Gaza. That is the highest number of women and children killed in any conflict in a similar time frame over the past two decades. The reports are telling us that thousands of children are missing, displaced or orphaned. Some of them are completely alone, without any remaining family members. The number of child amputees in Gaza, relative to the size of the population, is the highest in the world. The reports refer to death from starvation, shortages in medication and harsh cold, as a result of Israeli restrictions imposed on humanitarian aid. They refer to children losing more than a whole school year and being completely deprived of healthcare. They refer to displacement, siege and the destruction of health and educational facilities.

The children of Gaza have been subjected to unparalleled horrors for a simple reason — because they are Palestinians who have been languishing under the yoke of the unjust Israeli occupation. They have been subjected to atrocities that cannot be erased from their memories. It might even be impossible to treat the physical and psychological impact of such atrocities. Israel is always motivated by the liberation of the hostages. We wonder — how can killing children in this way and at this rate be both a means and an end?

The position of the Arab Group is based on the following factors.

First, the crimes perpetrated against the children of Palestine are a grave violation of treaty and customary rules of international humanitarian law and a violation of the provisions of international criminal law and international human rights law, all of which stipulate that it is illegal to target civilians, including children, in armed conflicts. They are also violations of international commitments contained in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1949 Geneva Conventions and its 1977 Protocol I Additional. Those commitments were also endorsed by the Security Council to protect civilians in armed conflicts through its resolutions — starting with resolution 1261 (1999) to its latest resolution, resolution 2764 (2024).

Secondly, Palestinian children in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem are being subjected to violations and crimes. That has prompted the Secretary-General to add Israel to the list of parties that commit grave violations against children in armed conflict. The number of children killed by Israel during this war exceeds that of any war over the past decades. The Arab Group therefore stresses the need to ensure accountability and to cooperate with international courts in that regard. These crimes must not be condoned or justified in any way.

Thirdly, the Arab Group calls for intensifying efforts and mobilizing international resources for early-recovery projects. We call for focusing on rebuilding and restoring health and educational facilities. Children urgently need those services. It is necessary to quickly mitigate the consequences of the children of Gaza being out of school and being deprived of the necessary healthcare and psychological care.

Fourthly, the Arab Group stresses the vital and irreplaceable role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in providing services to Palestinian children, especially health services, educational services and humanitarian support. In order to protect the future of our children, we must preserve their only lifeline, namely, UNRWA.

Finally, the only way to ensure a better future for these children, who will be the men and women of a future Palestine, is to ensure that they are equal to the other peoples of the world, to end the heinous occupation imposed upon them, to put an end to them having been targeted over decades so that they can live in their independent State along the lines of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In conclusion, we can only apologize to the Palestinian children and to Ms. Bisan Nateel. We have done our utmost to stop this unjust war. We hope that the future of this generation of Palestinian children will be better than its past and its present. They might be the generation born from the womb of suffering to then become the first generation to live in an independent State. For that noble goal, we will continue to give our all.

*The meeting rose at 6 p.m.*