



Security Council

Seventy-third year

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Tuesday, 18 December 2018, 10 a.m.

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Provisional

President: Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
France	Mr. Delattre
Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
Sweden	Mr. Skoog
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: On behalf of the Secretary-General, today I will present the eighth report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), covering the period from 13 September to 14 December. I will focus on developments on the ground, in accordance with the provisions of the resolution, including on regional and international efforts to advance peace. Let me underscore that these developments cannot be divorced from the broader context — Israel's continued military occupation of Palestinian territory; uncertainties about the future of the peace process and the two-State solution; Hamas's continuing hold over Gaza and its militant activity; the persistent threat of war; unilateral actions that undermine peace efforts; reduced donor support for Palestine; and turmoil in the wider region.

Before I begin my report, I would like to warn of the dangerous escalation of terrorist attacks, clashes and violence in the West Bank. Over the past days and weeks, there has been an alarming rise in incidents that have led to the tragic deaths of Israeli and Palestinian civilians and Israeli soldiers. My thoughts and prayers go out to the bereaved families. The security measures put in place in the aftermath of those incidents, search operations in Ramallah, as well as clashes and protests that turn violent, are adding to an already tense atmosphere. I join the Secretary-General in his call on Israeli and Palestinian security services to work together to restore calm and avoid escalation.

Allow me to return to my reporting on resolution 2334 (2016). No steps were taken by Israel during the reporting period, according to paragraph 2, to

“immediately and completely cease all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem”

and to fully respect all of its legal obligations in that regard, as required by the resolution. I reiterate that all settlement activities are a violation under international law and a major obstacle to peace. During the reporting period, plans for some 2,200 housing units in settlements in the West Bank were advanced or approved by the Israeli authorities. The vast majority, nearly 2,000, were advanced in East Jerusalem, further consolidating the ring of settlements to the city's north. Two hundred are in Area C and have reached the final stage of approval. That is the lowest number of quarterly advancements and approvals recorded since the resolution was adopted. This period, like the last quarter, saw no tenders issued.

In October, the Government approved the allocation of \$6 million for advancing the construction of 31 housing units in Hebron, which would be the first new construction there in 16 years. On 15 November, the High Court of Justice rejected an appeal by two Palestinian families living in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and allowed the eviction of some 40 family members to advance construction. The decision was based on an ownership claim by an Israeli company. On 19 November, the Knesset passed legislation enabling, under certain conditions, the planning for residential purposes in national parks located within municipal boundaries. That amendment could facilitate the construction of additional housing units in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan. On 21 November, Israel's High Court of Justice rejected a petition filed by over 100 Palestinian residents of Silwan to stop the efforts of an Israeli organization to evict them from their homes. The organization had gained control of the properties by invoking an Israeli law by which Israelis, but not Palestinians, may claim lands they owned prior to 1948.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures by Israeli authorities continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain in Area C and East Jerusalem, 152 structures were demolished or seized by the authorities. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, that has resulted in the displacement of 103 people. On 21 October, the Israeli authorities announced the delay

of the demolition of the Bedouin community of Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu in order to allow for negotiation with the community to relocate residents with their consent. Nevertheless, the threat of mass demolition and displacement remains, despite broad international opposition to the move.

Let me turn now to the issue of violence. The resolution calls for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians. However, violence and the threat of war continue. Overall, 75 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces, including during demonstrations, clashes, air strikes, security operations and other incidents. Seven Israelis, including three soldiers and four civilians, were killed by Palestinians in attacks in the West Bank and a military operation in Gaza. The reporting period once again saw a major escalation in Gaza that almost brought Israel and Hamas to war.

On 11 November, in an exchange of fire following the discovery of an undercover Israeli unit in Gaza, seven members of the military wing of Hamas and an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) officer were killed. Militants in Gaza immediately launched 18 rockets and mortars. In the following 24 hours, some 450 projectiles were indiscriminately fired towards Israeli cities and towns — more than in the entire period since the 2014 conflict. One Palestinian civilian was killed by a Hamas rocket in the Israeli city of Ashkelon. An IDF soldier was also seriously wounded by a missile strike that hit a military bus. The IDF responded by striking 160 targets identified as militant sites. Seven Palestinians were killed and at least four are reported to have been members of armed groups.

On 11 October, the IDF announced that it had destroyed a tunnel extending 200 metres from Gaza into Israel. On 17 October, two medium-range rockets were launched towards Israel, one directly hitting a residential building in Be'er Sheva, some 40 kilometres away. The IDF responded by firing 10 missiles at target sites across the Gaza Strip. On 28 October, three Palestinian children aged 13 to 15 were killed in an IDF strike near the fence in the southern Gaza Strip, in disputed circumstances. Protests at the Gaza perimeter fence and near the beach continued, although their size significantly decreased, and they have remained fairly peaceful since the beginning of November.

Since early November, there have been no reports of incendiary devices, balloons or kites from Gaza

causing damage in Israel. Since 13 September, some 43 Palestinians, including nine children, have been killed during the protests and other incidents near the fence and at sea. The youngest and most recent victim was a four-year-old who died on 11 December after he was injured by Israeli live fire during protests at the fence.

Meanwhile in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the situation has also deteriorated over the past weeks. During the reporting period, six Israelis, including four civilians, and 12 Palestinians were killed in various incidents, including terror attacks, clashes and military operations. On 7 October, an Israeli man and woman were shot dead in the Barkan industrial zone by a former Palestinian co-worker, who was killed in an IDF operation near Nablus on 13 December.

On 12 October, a Palestinian woman was killed south of Nablus by stones allegedly thrown by Israeli assailants. On 4 December, in Tulkarm refugee camp, a 22-year old Palestinian with a psychological disability was shot and killed by the Israeli security forces in circumstances that would seem to indicate that he posed no threat to security personnel or others. Investigations have been launched into both incidents.

On 9 December, in a drive-by shooting near the West Bank settlement of Ofra, seven Israelis were injured, including four children and a pregnant woman whose baby was delivered prematurely and subsequently passed away. Hamas praised the attack and identified one of the perpetrators, who was later killed in an Israeli security forces operation north of Ramallah, as one of their own. The Israeli Defence Forces have indicated that there are additional individuals involved in the incident still at large and that a manhunt is ongoing. I want to strongly condemn that attack and reiterate that there is no justification for terrorism.

On 13 December, in another drive-by shooting near the Giv'at Asaf settlement, two Israeli soldiers were killed and another was severely wounded alongside an Israeli woman. The perpetrators, who fled towards Ramallah, reportedly remain at large. In the operations to apprehend the perpetrators of the Ofra attack, on 10 and 11 December dozens of IDF troops entered Ramallah, where, inter alia, they raided the offices of the official Palestinian news agency, WAFA, and seized surveillance video. Two Palestinians were reportedly injured by live fire during ensuing clashes and over 150 in related incidents around the West Bank in subsequent days.

In a statement issued on 13 December, the Israeli Prime Minister announced a series of measures in response to the wave of attacks, including revoking the permits of family members and demolishing houses of the perpetrators of attacks, increasing checkpoints and administrative detentions, and intensifying efforts to capture assailants still at large. The Prime Minister also announced that some 2,000 houses built on private Palestinian land in settlements would be retroactively legalized, and that steps had been taken to advance the construction of 82 new housing units in Ofra and in two industrial zones in the settlements of Avnei Hefetz and Beitar Illit.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has recorded 49 incidents of settler-related violence resulting in the injury of Palestinians or damage to their property. During the reporting period there were also recurring clashes between settlers from Yitzhar and residents of the neighbouring Palestinian village of Urif.

Following the shooting attacks of the past few days, settler leaders blamed the Government for failing to protect them. Hundreds protested, some violently, blocking traffic and throwing stones at Palestinian vehicles. Police arrested some 40 people. Incidents of stone throwing and vandalism, as well as shots fired at villages have been reported in several locations in the West Bank.

Resolution 2334 (2016), in its paragraph 7, calls upon the parties “to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric”. Unfortunately, such actions and statements continued during the reporting period. Hamas continued to use inciteful and inflammatory rhetoric. Its officials praised the stabbing and shooting attacks that killed Israeli civilians as heroic and mourned the killers. Fatah, including on its official social media accounts, also commemorated and celebrated the perpetrators of recent attacks, as well as past terror attacks in which Israeli civilians have been killed. In a radio interview, a senior member of the party glorified the perpetrators of stabbing attacks in Jerusalem. In addition, senior Palestinian religious leaders made a series of inflammatory speeches alleging Israeli intentions to destroy the Al-Aqsa mosque or change the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem. President Abbas has spoken against the recent surge of violence in the West Bank.

Meanwhile, Israeli officials have also made provocative and highly problematic statements encouraging violence and undermining a two-State solution. In the wake of the recent violence in the West Bank, politicians have called for the deportation of families of attackers. Separately, there have been calls for a shoot-to-kill policy in Gaza, and one politician has gone as far as to call for President Abbas to be assassinated. Others have continued to reject Palestinians’ right to statehood, to support openly widespread settlement expansion, and to support the annexation of all or parts of the West Bank.

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterates calls by the Middle East Quartet for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution. There have been some positive developments, but the negative trends dominate. Among positive developments, I can point to the mobilization of international support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). On 19 November, UNRWA announced that the financial shortfall for 2018 — which stood at some \$446 million in January — had been reduced to \$21 million thanks to substantial new funding by Member States.

In Gaza, the international community has taken a number of steps to improve the lives of 2 million people who live under Hamas control, struggle with Israeli closures and have little prospect of seeing national unity.

First, thanks to generous funding from the State of Qatar, the United Nations has been able to import life-saving fuel to operate the Gaza power plant. Daily electricity supply has increased to more than 11 hours — the highest in over two years. Private homes, hospitals, schools, water facilities and businesses are all benefitting. Seventy-five per cent of the sewage can now be treated again. That has significantly reduced the contamination levels caused by discharge into the sea. Piped water supply has increased by 40 per cent, almost fully meeting water demand for domestic household purposes. Drinking water supplied through desalination plants has also increased by 20 per cent, while private businesses have benefited from the reduced fuel costs. Those are substantial improvements. Finding sustainable solutions to Gaza’s electricity crisis, however, remains critical. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the World Bank have convened

the international community to discuss how to stabilize electricity supply in the long run.

Secondly, on 4 December, the United Nations concluded a comprehensive review of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, together with the Palestinian Authority and Israel. It has resulted in several important changes that will be implemented as of 1 January 2019. They will allow the Mechanism to better respond to Gaza's changed needs and increase its functionality, transparency and predictability.

Thirdly, the reconstruction and rehabilitation of 360 totally destroyed houses and the repair of 30 homes that were partially damaged in the 2014 conflict in Gaza have also been completed.

Finally, in Gaza, the United Nations has enhanced its project implementation capacity by establishing a project management unit to work with all relevant stakeholders to support implementation, including of the package of urgent interventions from the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians.

Beyond Gaza, in another encouraging sign, civil society groups continue to mobilize in support of peace. This past month, I participated in a remarkable conference organized by Women Wage Peace, a non-governmental organization that brings together Jewish and Arab women advocating a negotiated solution to the conflict. The conference, attended by close to 1,000 young women and men, is precisely the kind of grass-roots effort called for in the 2016 Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex). It encourages a culture of tolerance and laying a crucial foundation for peace.

Regrettably, however, the negative trends continue to overshadow any positive developments. The humanitarian, economic and political crisis in Gaza continues and, despite Egypt's sustained efforts, there has been no progress in implementing the October 2017 intra-Palestinian agreement. The goal remains that Gaza and the West Bank are reunited under the control of a single, legitimate national Government, with a unified legal framework that would be responsible for all aspects of governance, including security.

In December Hamas made public the decision of a military court to sentence six people to death, including a woman. Another death sentence was also handed down in Gaza to a man convicted of murder by a criminal court. These decisions are contrary to both

international human rights law and national Palestinian legislation.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls upon all States "to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967". On 28 November the Chilean parliament approved a resolution that called on the Government to examine all of its agreements with Israel to ascertain that they apply solely to the territory of the State of Israel, and not to the territories occupied since 1967. The Republic of Ireland advanced in the upper house of parliament, the "Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill 2018", which, if passed into law, would prohibit trade with and economic support for settlements.

The resolution also called upon "all parties to continue ... to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations". No progress was achieved in this respect as well.

At the beginning of my statement, I addressed the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements. On 28 and 29 October, the Central Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization reaffirmed the decisions taken to suspend the recognition of the State of Israel until the latter recognizes the State of Palestine within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, end security coordination in all its forms, and disengage economically from Israel. These decisions have not been implemented. President Abbas is reported to have signed, on 15 November, 11 instruments of accession to international agreements.

In closing, I would like to share some broad observations concerning the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) over the past year.

The continued expansion of the Israeli settlement enterprise, in all its aspects, is illegal under international law, and undermines hope among the population, trust between the parties, and the two-State solution itself. Settlement planning and tendering continued during 2018 but at lower rates compared to 2017. For Area C settlements, plans were advanced or approved for some 4,800 housing units, compared to nearly 7,000 during 2017. Tenders were announced for some 2,900 units, slightly less than the 3,200 tendered the previous year. For East Jerusalem settlements, plans were advanced or approved for 2,100 units in 2018, compared to about 3,100 in 2017, and a tender was announced for the first time in two years. About one quarter of the units

advanced, approved or tendered in 2018 are planned for settlements in outlying locations deep in the West Bank.

In this context, this year saw some worrying moves, including the continued construction of a new settlement, Amichai, located in a strategic location that further consolidates the cluster of settlements to the east of Shilo, at the very heart of the West Bank. Israeli authorities also approved new construction in Hebron after a lull of some 16 years. In addition, several judicial and administrative decisions taken during 2018 have removed long-standing obstacles to the use of private Palestinian land for the benefit of settlements.

The United Nations continues to closely monitor the threat of demolitions and displacement to Palestinians in Area C and East Jerusalem. Between January and November 2018, there were 422 Palestinian-owned structures demolished or seized by Israel on the grounds of a lack of building permits — 245 in Area C and 167 in East Jerusalem. Some 411 people have been displaced, which represents a slight increase in the number of structures demolished compared with the equivalent period of 2017.

Particularly worrisome is the situation in the community of Khan al-Ahmar-Abu al Helu. Moving forward on the demolition of the community would amount to a serious violation of Israel's obligations under international law and undermine the prospects for a two-State solution. I call on all concerned parties to work towards resolving the issue in a manner that is consistent with the community's will and genuine needs, and in line with Israel's international legal obligations.

In terms of violence over the past year, although Gaza has been the most volatile, the risk of an explosion in the West Bank has also grown. I am concerned by the recent incidents and rising tensions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. During the past three months, we have witnessed stabbing, ramming and three lethal shooting attacks against Israelis, one of which led to the heartbreaking death of a baby. We have also seen the death of a Palestinian woman, killed by a stone. There can be no justification for any brutal acts of terror, and I call on all to join the United Nations in condemning them unequivocally. They feed mistrust and hatred among people.

Israeli responses to recent events in the West Bank have been harsh, as some of the perpetrators of recent

attacks have been killed. Unfortunately, incidents like the shooting of a Palestinian man with psychosocial disabilities as he was walking away from the security forces fuel a climate of fear and anger. These actions continue to worsen a climate of hatred and fear and drive Israelis and Palestinians further away from resolution of the conflict.

Settler-related violence has also been on the rise during 2018, with the highest number of incidents recorded since 2014. Thousands of Palestinian-owned trees and more than hundreds of vehicles have been damaged. Settlers have continued to enter Palestinian locations, triggering clashes, some of which involve Israeli soldiers. Such incidents have resulted in the death of two Palestinians. While I acknowledge efforts by the authorities to prevent and investigate settler-related violence, I call for further measures to ensure that Israel fulfils its obligation to protect civilians and to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for attacks.

And while Gaza has been quiet since the last escalation in November, it is critical that events in the West Bank not lead to reigniting the Gaza fuse. The people in Gaza have suffered enough and must not be made to pay the price for violence elsewhere.

Each time, as the parties came frighteningly close to the brink of war, tireless efforts by Egypt and the United Nations prevented a full-fledged conflict. Ultimately, what will ensure long-term peace is reuniting Gaza and the West Bank under a single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian Authority and putting an end to the occupation. Meanwhile, however, it is imperative that the current calm be preserved at all costs. No one can afford another war in Gaza.

Since March, tens of thousands of people in Gaza took part in demonstrations along the perimeter fence, many of which turned violent. Throughout this period, hundreds of fires were started in Israel by incendiary devices, balloons and kites coming from Gaza. From May through November, we witnessed the most serious escalations since the 2014 conflict, with over 500 rockets and 700 mortars fired towards Israel by Hamas and other militant groups. Some 175 Palestinians were killed by Israeli live fire, including 32 children, two women and three medical workers. One Israeli soldier was killed by sniper fire during the demonstrations. The indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars against Israeli towns and villages violates international

law, placing hundreds of thousands of civilians under imminent threat, and causing great fear and mental trauma, particularly for children.

Serious concerns remain over the loss of life, especially of children, in the context of these hostilities and protests. The death of four-year-old child is a tragedy that must not be repeated; I mourn his short life. The killing of children is absolutely unacceptable. Israeli security forces have a responsibility to exercise restraint and should use firearms only when strictly necessary in order to protect life or prevent serious injury from an imminent threat. Hamas also has an obligation to protect children, ensuring that they never be put in harm's way.

Ongoing instances of incitement, provocative steps and inflammatory rhetoric plague the public discourse of the conflict. They are highly dangerous and threaten to push an already volatile situation past the boiling point. I have repeatedly stated in my briefings to the Council that leaders have a responsibility to reduce, rather than escalate, tensions; yet over the past year, statements that encourage violence continued. Such rhetoric, particularly if it denies the right of existence of one of the sides, or their right to Statehood or glorifies terror, is dangerous and plays into the hands of extremists beyond Israel and Palestine. I also reiterate to political, community and religious leaders the resolution's call to clearly condemn all acts of terrorism.

Regrettably, this year has seen no affirmative steps by the parties to reverse negative trends nor serious progress on implementing important agreements signed in 2017, including agreements on water, energy and telecommunications. On the contrary, significant Israeli administrative and legal decisions are facilitating the legalization, under Israeli law, of settlements on private Palestinian land and threaten to undermine the financial stability of the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile, restrictive measures by the Palestinian Authority against Gaza compound the long-standing Israeli closures of the Gaza Strip, further widening the political and administrative gap between Ramallah and Gaza. Such measures must end.

However, the completion of the review of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism and, more specifically, the commitment by the Palestinian Authority and Israel to the Mechanism's continuation and enhancement were important developments. That rare example of direct

Israeli and Palestinian engagement with United Nations facilitation shows that there is room for cooperation.

Humanitarian partners have also struggled to fulfil their mandates in the face of rising humanitarian needs amid record-high cuts in funding, increased restrictions on humanitarian operating space and attempts to delegitimize the work of reputable organizations that provide essential support to vulnerable Palestinians. I encourage Member States to support the humanitarian response plan for 2019.

The important financial support of the State of Qatar has enabled the United Nations delivery of fuel to the Gaza power plant and the resulting substantial increase in the electricity supply for Palestinians in Gaza. I urge other donors to support additional elements of the package of urgent economic and humanitarian interventions for Gaza that was endorsed by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in New York in September. I also welcome the generous support of donors, which has almost fully met the shortfall facing UNRWA this past year. Looking ahead to 2019, I also urge donor countries to maintain the funding levels achieved this year and to increase the number of multi-year agreements.

The fate of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of the IDF soldiers missing in Gaza also remains an important humanitarian concern for us all.

While there has been no progress on intra-Palestinian reconciliation, it is critical that the important Egyptian-led process continue. The United Nations stands firmly in support of Egypt's efforts in that regard and urges the parties to make serious efforts to ensure the return of the legitimate Palestinian Government to Gaza. The Gaza Strip is, and must remain, an integral part of the future Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that I remain concerned about the weakening of the international consensus and the absence of collective efforts to achieve an end to the occupation and the realization of a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and prior agreements.

I believe that I speak on behalf of us all today when I say that we all share the concern that, at the end of 2018, we are no closer to reviving efforts for a negotiated solution. Without a political horizon, all our collective and individual efforts contribute only to managing the conflict rather than to resolving it.

It is only by realizing the vision of two States living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition, with Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and Palestine and all final-status issues permanently resolved through negotiations, that the legitimate aspirations of both peoples can be achieved.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

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

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): When I first came to the United Nations two years ago, I was a little taken aback by this monthly meeting. The fact that the United Nations would consider the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not striking. After all, it is a matter of international peace and security. What was striking was the frequency and the one-sidedness of the discussion.

Members of the Security Council have heard me say this many times — the problems of the Middle East are numerous, and yet we spend a vastly disproportionate amount of time on just one of them. The United Nations has shown itself to be hopelessly biased, as we witnessed again only two weeks ago when the General Assembly failed to condemn Hamas's terrorist activity against Israel.

Over the past two years, I have attempted to provide more value to this monthly meeting by using my time to speak about other pressing problems in the Middle East. I have spoken about Iran's illegal weapons transfers and destabilizing support for terrorism throughout the region. I have spoken about the barbarism of the Al-Assad regime in Syria. I have spoken about Hamas's illegal and diabolical use of human shields. I have spoken about Hezbollah jeopardizing the safety of the Lebanese people and its violations of Israeli sovereignty, which have come to light even more clearly in the past month. I have spoken about Iraq, Yemen, refugees and humanitarian crises.

I have done that for two reasons. I have done it to illustrate that most of the region's problems have absolutely nothing to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I have also done it to encourage the United Nations to move away from its obsession with Israel. That obsession of the United Nations with the issue has been entirely unproductive. In fact, worse than that, it has been counterproductive. It has sent a loud and

false message to the Palestinians that they may perhaps be able to achieve their goals by relying on the United Nations rather than through direct negotiations. It has sent a loud and accurate message to the Israelis that they can never trust the United Nations. That biased obsession is not the path to peace. It is the path to an endless stalemate.

Today is the last time that I address this monthly meeting as the United States Ambassador. For that reason, I will deviate from my practice of the past two years. Today, I will directly address the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Given my record, some may mistakenly conclude that I am unsympathetic towards the Palestinian people. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is how I see it.

Israel is a thriving, strong, prosperous country. It has always wanted peace with its neighbours. It has clearly demonstrated its willingness to make great sacrifices for peace, including by giving up large areas of land. But Israel will not make a peace agreement at any price, and it should not do so. No United Nations resolutions, anti-Semitic boycotts or terrorist threats will ever change that. Throughout its existence, and even today, Israel has been surrounded by threats to its security. It would be foolish for it to make a deal that weakened its security. Yet, even in the face of constant threats, Israel has become one of the leading nations in the world. Israel wants a peace agreement but it does not need such an agreement.

Then there are the Palestinian people. Like the Israelis, they are a deservedly proud people. They, too, do not need to accept a peace agreement at any price. But the condition of the Palestinian people is very different. Economic opportunity, health care and even electricity are all scarce in the Palestinian territories. Terrorists rule much of the territory, undermining the safety of all civilians. The Palestinian people suffer terribly, while their leadership clings to 50-year-old demands that have become only less and less realistic. What awaits the Palestinian people with a peace agreement are the prospects of a huge improvement in the quality of their lives and far greater control over their political future.

It is time that we faced a difficult truth: both sides would benefit greatly from a peace agreement, but the Palestinians would benefit more and the Israelis would risk more. With that backdrop in mind, the Trump Administration has crafted its plan for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. I do not expect anyone to

comment on a peace proposal that they have not read. But I have read it, and I will share some thoughts on it now.

Unlike previous attempts to address this conflict, this plan is not just a few pages, containing unspecific and unimaginative guidelines. It is much longer and contains much more thoughtful detail. It brings new elements to the discussion, taking advantage of the new world of technology in which we live. It recognizes that the realities on the ground in the Middle East have changed in very powerful and important ways. It embraces the reality that today, things that were previously unthinkable can be done. This plan will be different from all previous ones. The critical question is whether the response will be any different. There are things in the plan that every party will like, and there are things in the plan that not all of them will like. That is certainly true for the Israelis and the Palestinians, but it is also true for every country in the world that has taken an interest in this subject. Every country or party will therefore have an important choice to make. Council members can focus on the parts of the plan that they dislike. For irresponsible parties, that would be the easiest thing to do — simply reject the plan because it does not satisfy all of their demands. Then we would return to the failed status quo of the past 50 years, with no prospects for change. Israel would continue to grow and prosper. The Palestinian people would continue to suffer, and innocent people on both sides would continue to be killed.

Their other choice is to focus on the parts of the plan that they do like and encourage negotiations to move forward. And I can assure the Council that there is a lot for both sides to like. Ultimately, as always, the final decisions can be made only by the parties themselves. Israelis and Palestinians will decide their own futures. They will decide what sacrifices they are willing to make, and they will need leaders with real vision to do that. But my friends at the United Nations, particularly my Arab and European brothers and sisters, will also play a very important part. And they will face the same choice. The choice between a hopeful future that sheds the tired, old, and unrealistic demands of the past, or a darker future that sticks with the proven failed talking points of the past. The world will be watching. More importantly, the Palestinians and Israelis will be watching. Their response will be affected by our response.

I have heard privately from many of my Arab friends. They have said that they know that a solution is urgently needed, but their Governments have not been willing to talk to their constituencies about what is realistic or to the Palestinian leaders about the harm they are doing to their own people. By taking the easy route, they are really saying that the Palestinian people are not a priority for them, because if they were, they would all be in a room helping to bring both sides to the table.

As for the American people, we have demonstrated time and again our commitment to peace in the Middle East. We will continue to offer our hand in friendship to the Palestinian people, whom we have supported financially far more than any other country has done. The Palestinians have everything to gain by engaging in peace negotiations, but whatever others may decide, the world must know that America will remain steadfast in its support to Israel and its people and security. That is an unshakeable bond between our two peoples, and it is that bond, more than anything else, that makes peace possible. My hope is that once I become an outside observer — one who has invested much time on this issue — we will no longer be having this same conversation and hearing the same old speeches in years to come.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his valuable briefing and reaffirm the full support of the State of Kuwait to his role in finding a solution to the protracted Palestinian question, which has had such a severe impact on the daily lives of the Palestinians who have been living under the yoke of occupation for more than five decades. We also thank our colleague Ambassador Nikki Haley. I am pleased that her very important final statement to the Security Council was on today's topic of the Palestinian question, and that she has revealed some of the points of the peace plan that the United States will soon unveil.

We once again commend the efforts of Mr. Mladenov and the parties concerned to improve the daily lives of the citizens of the Gaza Strip, which have led to the completion of the joint review of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism in order to promote and improve its effectiveness and performance. We look forward to the implementation of its recommendations by 1 January 2019. In that regard, we were awaiting a written report for this month by the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016),

similar to his first written report submitted in June (see S/PV.8289) following his response, for which we are grateful, to a request by 10 Security Council members. This month, however, we regret to say that was not the case. We therefore call for an increase in the number of written reports on the status of the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) over the course of 2019. We do not want to settle for just one written report per year. That accords with the provisions of the resolution, presidential note S/2010/507 and the practices used in addressing other items on the Security Council's agenda.

As always, we listened carefully to Mr. Mladenov's briefing, especially with regard to the recent developments in the West Bank, which show once again how dangerous the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has become, thanks to the crimes perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people and their land and holy sites, as well as their inalienable rights. The most recent of those crimes was the Israeli act of aggression against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory on 11 November, which targeted the lives of Palestinian civilians and their homes, media facilities and civilian infrastructure. Its victims included dozens of martyrs and unarmed civilians who were killed or injured as a result of the Israeli occupying forces' war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The most recent child fatality was that of a boy aged four years and eight months, a victim of the occupying Israeli forces' relentless crimes against Palestinian civilians. On 12 December we saw the images of hundreds of civilians in the town of Absan in Khan Younis burying the small body of Ahmed Abu Abed. His killing was the forty-second murder of a Palestinian child since the Great March of Return began in March. Since then, more than 230 Palestinian martyrs have perished and more than 24,000 have been injured. Reports from Doctors without Borders estimate that more than 1,000 of those who have been injured in the Gaza Strip now suffer from permanent disabilities as a result of the live ammunition used by the Israeli occupying forces.

The Security Council must not stand idly by in the face of Israel's systematic crimes against unarmed Palestinians. They are war crimes and crimes against humanity under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. As members of the

Security Council, we must assume our responsibility and stop Israel, the occupying Power, from perpetrating such illegitimate and provocative actions in deliberate and dangerous violation of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We call on the United Nations and the Secretary-General to implement General Assembly resolution ES-10/20, on the protection of Palestinian civilians, pursuant to the Secretary-General's latest report (A/ES-10/794). We must urge the States and institutions of the international community to engage in the protection of Palestinian civilians and establish a practical and effective mechanism for implementing both the resolution and the report.

We also call on the international community, especially the Security Council, to implement resolution 2334 (2016), which emphasizes that Israel's settlement activities are a blatant violation of international law and an obstacle to peace. It calls on Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately and fully cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and reaffirms the importance of the implementation of other relevant international resolutions on the illegal and illegitimate nature of Israeli settlement activities, including resolutions 465 (1980) and 497 (1981).

We reaffirm our condemnation of Israel's repeated acts of aggression against the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the form of daily violations and dangerous incursions, which provoke Muslim and Arab feelings of resentment. Those unprecedented attacks have recently increased and demonstrate that Israel, the occupying Power, plans to change the Mosque's current historic and legal status, which will have grave consequences. We welcome Jordan's announcement that it will be organizing an international conference on 20 December on an appeal for the Al-Aqsa Mosque, with wide Arab and international participation. The aim is to hold consultations in support of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem and its Islamic holy sites. We reiterate our rejection and condemnation of all violations by Israel, the occupying Power, of Islamic and Christian holy sites, especially its attempts to change the existing historical and legal status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by dividing it in space and time, undermining the freedom of Muslim prayer.

In conclusion, we welcomed the General Assembly's adoption few days ago of resolution 73/89, submitted by Ireland on behalf of the European Union

and entitled “Comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East”. We reiterate our support for putting an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions, international law and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, with all its provisions. The Initiative states that a comprehensive peace and the normalization of relations with Israel are conditional on ending Israel’s occupation since 1967 of Palestinian and Arab territories, including East Jerusalem; on Israel’s recognition of the State of Palestine and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and the right of return and reparation for Palestinian refugees; on a just resolution of the Palestinian question pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III); and on a rejection of any deal or initiative for a resolution of the conflict that is not in line with the internationally agreed terms of reference pertaining to the peace process in the Middle East.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing on developments in the Middle East. The situation in this region plagued by crises old and new remains problematic and demands considerable collective efforts, including by the Security Council. The only way we can make progress on stabilizing and normalizing the situation in the region is by acting together, regardless of the differences in our approaches. By presenting the broadest possible united front, which Russia’s President Vladimir Putin has called for, we can achieve substantive breakthroughs in combating terrorism. Together we can end the bloodshed in Yemen, stabilize Libya, help Syrian refugees return home, tackle the global migration crisis, support normalization in Iraq and end the stalemate in other crises. And, of course, through our joint efforts we can sort out the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. We can say that based on our experience of friendly relations with the Arab States, Palestine and Israel. The foundations for our cooperation exist. They are based on international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and many Security Council resolutions. Our main tools should be dialogue and mediation, and we should refrain from unilateral steps. We cannot achieve lasting solutions to these crises any other way.

The need for urgent collective action is greatest with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli issue, which is at the epicentre of the turmoil in the Middle East. Resolving it is key to improving the situation in the

entire region. We have regretfully had to conclude that against a backdrop of increasingly frequent attempts to aggressively revise previously settled agreements aimed at achieving sustainable Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli settlements on an internationally recognized basis, the prospects for a resumption of the negotiation process are still faint. The misunderstanding and mistrust between Palestinians and Israelis is growing constantly. Aggressive attitudes are intensifying and violence, unilateral measures and provocative rhetoric are coming to the fore. But there is an alternative to the current developments, which entails implementing the steps outlined in the 2016 report of the Middle East Quartet. Implementing its recommendations would enable us to stop the violence, whose victims are Palestinians and Israelis alike, and to tackle the familiar destabilizing factors hindering progress on the political process, including the settlement activities and the rupture between the West Bank and Gaza. Bringing that sector back under the control of the legitimate authorities in Ramallah under the leadership of President Abbas would strengthen the international community’s humanitarian efforts there. We should emphasize in particular that every step taken should be geared to ensuring and restoring Palestinian unity.

It is urgent that we intensify our collective diplomacy in order to prevent a collapse of the efforts that the international community — all of us — have jointly undertaken, including in the Security Council, for the sake of ensuring the conditions for implementing the only viable solution, which is the establishment of two States through direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. It is direct dialogue that can find answers to all final status issues regarding Jerusalem, refugees, borders and security. Dismissing those problems will not work. Any future deal must take account of these issues, which are so sensitive and significant for both parties.

Russia will continue to maintain its principled and consistent position that a comprehensive and lasting settlement between Palestinians and Israelis and Arabs and Israelis can be achieved on the basis of internationally recognized principles, including the Security Council’s resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid principles — including the principle of land for peace — and the two-State formula, which provides for the creation, through negotiations, of an independent State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security with Israel. Policies that seek

to change the facts on the ground are unacceptable, and we reject violence in any form. We consider the expansion of Israeli settlements, the demolition of Palestinian property and the expulsion of Palestinian families to be illegal.

Russia will continue to play an active role in restoring peace in Israel, Palestine and the entire Middle East in its capacity as a permanent member of the Security Council and a participant in the Middle East Quartet, which remains the only mediation format approved in Security Council resolutions. Our offer to convene a summit in Russia between the leaders of Palestine and Israel is still on the table. We will continue to assist the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose critical humanitarian activities have an important stabilizing effect in the Palestinian territories and the countries of the Middle East.

In conclusion, we want to once again call for genuine collective efforts in the Middle East. Despite the evolving realities, we must help to create conditions there that are conducive to strengthening a general atmosphere of trust, which is hugely important to the relations between the Arab States, Israel and Iran. We would like to remind members that in its resolution 598 (1987), the Security Council directed the Secretary-General to work with regional stakeholders on measures to strengthen security and stability in the region. It is time to implement that resolution. In that context, we believe that the Russian blueprint for security in the Persian Gulf could be very helpful. Russia stands ready to work on all of those aspects, and others, with interested partners on a basis of openness and impartiality.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing today and for his tireless efforts, which we very much appreciate. The United Nations and its agencies deserve to be commended for the work that he is doing on the ground in what we understand to be a challenging and sometimes explosive environment.

This is the last time that Sweden will speak on this issue in the Chamber, as we come to the end of our two years as a member of the Security Council. I would therefore like to begin with some broader reflections, in the same vein as Ambassador Haley, whom I want to thank for providing us with insights into the current thinking in the United States on how to pursue peace in

the Middle East, and to say that for us the United States remains a key partner in that pursuit.

When Sweden joined the Council, there was a moment of hope for Middle East peace. The Council had just adopted resolution 2334 (2016), France was organizing its international conference on the two-State solution, and the new United States Administration had announced its commitment to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Today it is with heavy hearts that we conclude that hopes are evaporating, with no peace process in sight. The two-State solution is rapidly moving beyond our reach as realities on the ground trend towards an expansion of Israeli settlements. The desperate situation for the people in Gaza has further deteriorated into a humanitarian crisis, making Gaza increasingly unliveable and on the verge of social and economic collapse. The spread of violence on the ground is leading to a tragic loss of life on both sides, instilling fear among Israelis and Palestinians and destroying hopes for peace for young people, the so-called post-Oslo generation.

The idea behind resolution 2334 (2016) was for the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility and reverse this negative trend. Two years on, the resolution remains as relevant as ever. Its core components — demands for ceasing all settlement activities and an end to the violence — reflect the gravity of the situation on the ground.

We are deeply concerned over the deteriorating security situation and escalation of violence in the West Bank and Jerusalem. We strongly condemn the acts of violence against civilians that have led to a tragic loss of life in recent days. Terrorism can never be tolerated. We call on all actors to de-escalate and stop attacks against civilians. Security forces on both sides must exercise restraint so as to avoid escalation and further loss of life.

We reiterate our grave concern over the continued Israeli settlement expansion. Israel's settlement policy is illegal under international law. We condemn the Israeli decisions to advance additional settlement units, including in Hebron and East Jerusalem. The illegal settlement expansion seriously undermines the two-State solution and clouds all hope for peace.

We are also concerned about the demolition of Palestinian homes and at the fact that the Palestinian

population is at risk of forcible transfers in Area C. We urge the Israeli authorities not to proceed with the demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar, as that would have serious consequences for its residents, including children. The village is located in Area E1, a location of strategic interest for preserving the contiguity of the Palestinian State.

Against this dismal backdrop, the international community must act, otherwise we risk ending up with perpetual occupation and a one-State reality. Resolution 2334 (2016) was a milestone, and its implementation is key to the return to a path of peace.

We are therefore disappointed that no written report on the implementation of the resolution was circulated prior to this meeting, as is standard practice for any other issue. This is a question of the credibility of the Council on how we conduct our work, and neglecting its reporting serves only to distance the Council from its responsibilities. Resolution 2334 (2016) was adopted by the Council and cannot be disregarded. The oral report we just heard is a long list of events and incidents, each leading to personal calamity and despair. Along with many others, we wish to see regular written reports from the Secretary-General in future, so that these meetings can be properly prepared and focus on the direst realities on the ground and how to improve them.

Individually, we as Member States also need to step up our implementation of the resolution, which calls on all of us to distinguish, in our relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. The European Union has clear policies with regard to such differentiation. Settlement products cannot be promoted as Israeli products, and all agreements between the State of Israel and the European Union must explicitly indicate inapplicability to the occupied territories. This does not constitute a boycott and is fully in line with resolution 2334 (2016). We encourage other Member States to adopt similar policies.

We are as committed as anyone to peace in the Middle East. During our two years as a member of the Council, we have witnessed challenges to the international consensus on peace as well as attempts to take final-status issues off the table. We therefore wish to reiterate once more our support for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and previous agreements. Our position and that of the

whole European Union reflect the continued broad international consensus on a two-State solution, as expressed in the recently adopted General Assembly resolution 73/89, submitted by Ireland.

Any peace plan that fails to recognize these internationally agreed parameters would have little chance of succeeding and would run counter to the fundamental positions of the European Union. There cannot be any clean slate. Final-status issues can be taken off the table only when resolved through negotiations between the parties.

Implementing resolution 2334 (2016) is not a matter of taking sides. Sweden has a long-standing friendship with the peoples of Israel and with the peoples of Palestine. This is about the responsibility of the international community to save yet another generation of young Israelis and Palestinians from growing up in a reality of constant tension, mistrust and conflict.

This is about making sure that the objective of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States and home of three world religions, is kept within reach. And this is about keeping hope of peace in the Middle East alive.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Before I start, could I, through the American delegation, pass on a tribute to Ambassador Haley in connection with her time on the Council. Her ambition for the Council and her commitment to delivery and effectiveness have really helped moved issues and ourselves forward. So I would ask the United States delegation to please thank her very much indeed for that, and I will come to what she said about the peace process a little bit later. I also thank the Special Coordinator. I completely echo the Swedish Ambassador in paying tribute to him and his team in such difficult circumstances.

As others have noted, it is two years since the Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), and no steps have been taken by Israel to cease settlement activity during this period. In fact, settlement activity has continued. The Government of Israel has also moved forward with retroactive legislation of the outpost Havat Gilad. We are deeply concerned about the Government's announcement last week to retrospectively legalize thousands more homes in the West Bank, construct 82 new residential units in the Ofra settlement and advance the construction of two new industrial zones in the West Bank.

The United Kingdom's position on settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law. Settlements present an obstacle to peace, and they threaten the physical viability of a two-State solution. That is why we supported resolution 2334 (2016), and we urge the Government of Israel to reverse its policy of settlement expansion.

At the same time, we see continued demolitions taking place, including in East Jerusalem. We are concerned by the demolition of 16 small businesses in the Shuafat refugee camp on 21 November. There are no valid town plans for the camp, and this forces Palestinians to resort to building without permits. We are also closely monitoring developments in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, where many hundreds of Palestinians are at risk of eviction. This risk is exacerbated by recent Israeli legislative developments and court rulings. We will continue to support the Palestinian presence in East Jerusalem, including through legal aid programmes for those facing demolition or eviction.

We welcome the temporary postponement of plans to demolish the Bedouin community of Khan Al-Ahmar, but we remain gravely concerned about the fate of that community. The United Nations has said that this demolition could amount to forcible transfer, in violation of international humanitarian law. As I have said before in this Chamber, Israel is in no way obligated to demolish Khan Al-Ahmar. It has the power to change its mind, and we urge it to do so.

We look to the Israeli Government to provide a clear, transparent route for Palestinian construction to end the cycle of illegal building and demolitions.

Turning to some of the other issues that the Special Coordinator raised, I have no hesitation in joining him in unreserved condemnation of all terrorist attacks, no matter against whom they are perpetrated. We share his concern about the intensity of these attacks, and we convey our condolences to the families of the victims on both sides.

In the context of the Hamas resolution in the General Assembly recently (A/73/L.42), I note that it would have been adopted by a majority of 30 had there not been a required two-thirds majority. However, I think that majority of 30 is very significant and shows the direction in which the tide is going.

Turning to the humanitarian situation in Gaza, yesterday the United Kingdom announced an additional

\$7 million of emergency funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to provide food to refugees in Gaza. The immediate priority must be to ease restrictions on movement and access, reduce tensions and avoid another conflict. We expect Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and Israel to do their utmost to prevent escalation. We continue to support tangible steps towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation and uniting the Gaza Strip and the West Bank under the effective functioning of the Palestinian Authority. I welcome the efforts of the Special Coordinator in this respect.

I would like to address what Ambassador Haley said about the peace process. We very much welcome the confirmation that a United States plan is ready and we look forward to receiving it and studying it in due course. We agree that both sides will clearly be asked to make difficult decisions to achieve peace and we agree that European and Arab States will have an important role to play in supporting any peace plan. We look now to the parties to take steps to build confidence and to build the right environment so that any peace process can succeed.

For the United Kingdom, it is very clear that the well-known parameters are the most viable framework for a just and lasting peace. First, there must be an agreement on the borders of the two States, based on the 4 June 1967 lines, with equivalent land swaps as may be agreed between the parties. Secondly, security arrangements for the Palestinians must respect their sovereignty and show the occupation is over; for the Israelis, they must protect their security. Thirdly, a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the refugee question must be put in place. Fourthly, the aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem need to be fulfilled and a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States.

It follows from this that we continue to believe that a two-State solution remains the best outcome of a peace process. The United Kingdom remains committed to working with both parties, as well as regional and international partners, in support of this goal.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to thank Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing, which was, as usual, most enlightening, as well as for his commitment day in and day out. I join other members of the Council, on principle, to express our regret that the quarterly report presented

to us today pursuant to resolution 2334 (2015) is not a written report. In the absence of any clarification to the contrary in the text of the resolution, the procedure that must be followed by default is that of a written report. Ten members of the Council made this request more than six months ago and it is important that it be taken into account.

Developments over the past few days confirm once again the assessment that we highlight before the Council on a regular basis, namely, that the illusion of the status quo conceals a daily deterioration of the situation that is liable to degenerate at any time and further undermines the foundations of peace every day. I said this last month about Gaza (see S/PV.8405), which, from 11 to 13 November, was on the verge of being plunged into a new conflict. The return to relative calm does not detract from the tragic humanitarian situation of the people of that territory. The situation requires urgent political, humanitarian and development measures to be adopted. Today, however, I would like to focus on the West Bank, where last week's escalation reminds us of just how volatile the situation is.

First of all, I wish to recall the violence of recent days, which intensified after the 9 December firearms attack on Israeli civilians on the outskirts of the Ofra settlement in the West Bank and — as we are aware — took a tragic death toll. I wish to reiterate with the utmost clarity that France emphatically condemns this attack and the apologia that Hamas has made in its regard. Violence against civilians is unacceptable and unjustifiable. In the wake of the attack, Israeli forces deployed massively in the West Bank, including Zone A, particularly in Ramallah. A new cycle of violence followed, marked by numerous clashes with Palestinian protesters and attacks by Israeli settlers. It peaked during the day of 13 December, with several attacks in the West Bank and Jerusalem that killed two Israeli soldiers. While a precarious calm seems to have been restored on the ground, we call on all parties to exercise restraint. We regret that the Israeli authorities have chosen to respond to these events with new decisions in favour of settlement activities.

My second point concerns the fact that these developments have unfolded in an environment marked by the absence of any political horizon and an acceleration of settlement activity policies. In this context, I reiterate that France's position on settlement activity will not change. Settlement activities are illegal under international law; they contravene the

Fourth Geneva Convention and paragraphs 1 and 2 of resolution 2334 (2016). They are dangerous, aggravate tensions between populations and exacerbate spiralling violence. Settlement activity is counterproductive; it is progressively destroying prospects both on the ground and at the political level for the two-State solution, which must remain our ultimate goal.

While resolution 2334 (2016) calls for an immediate halt to settlement activity, exactly the opposite has occurred since its adoption almost two years ago. This systematic policy has continued over the course of the year, with a number of announcements of new housing units in Jerusalem, almost reaching the woeful record set in 2012, and a succession of announcements of new housing units in settlements in the West Bank, especially in particularly sensitive areas such as Hebron. I would like to recall here the unique situation of that divided city, where the presence of 800 settlers has become a symbol of settlement activity and its consequences, including the expulsion of the Palestinian population, recurrent tensions between armed settlers and Palestinians, and restrictions on public freedoms, including movement and access to places of worship.

Demolitions and forced displacements have also continued at a steady pace. Almost 200 Palestinian structures were demolished in the first half of 2018, and more than 40 schools in Zone C and East Jerusalem have been subject to an order of demolition. We call on the Israeli authorities to abandon these demolitions and forced displacements. We have taken note of the suspension of the demolition orders in Khan Al-Ahmar and call on the Israeli Government to definitively abandon the demolition of the village and the displacement of its population. I join my British colleague in underscoring the need to support the maintenance of the Palestinian presence in East Jerusalem.

Finally, legislative initiatives aimed at regularizing the so-called outposts — which are illegal not only under international law but also under Israeli law — are continuing, with the adoption of a so-called regularization law, covering settlements built on private Palestinian land, that is the subject of an appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court. A second law, under review, concerns the regularization of more than 60 settlements. We call on the Israeli authorities to reverse these decisions, which seek to normalize or even intensify a policy that is illegal under international law.

In light of this risk — to introduce my last point — we are obligated under both international humanitarian law and resolution 2334 (2016) to refuse to recognize the 1967 border violations effected by the Israeli settlement policy under paragraph 3 of the resolution; to acknowledge the distinction between Israel and the occupied territories, under paragraph 5; and to address the need to identify practical means to ensure the implementation of relevant Council resolutions by the parties, under paragraph 11.

We hope that the decisions taken by the international community that meet these obligations, in particular those under paragraph 5 of resolution 2334 (2016), will be systematically reflected in the reports submitted to the Council pursuant to the resolution, as was the case today. The European Union has adopted, through the 2013 guidelines on European financing and the 2015 Interpretative Notice on products of the settlements, several instruments that must be included among the good practices in this regard.

The reality is that we are close to the point of no return. The fragmented territorial aggregation that is taking shape before our eyes is creating an unequal coexistence of two populations on the same territory. The culmination of this process will spell, for the Palestinians, the abandonment of their national aspirations, which involve the establishment of a State; and for the Israelis, the renunciation of the democratic nature of the State of Israel.

As we all know, the destinies of Israelis and Palestinians are intertwined; neither of the two peoples will realize their aspirations in the long term at the expense of the other. As a friend of the Israelis and the Palestinians, France has only one objective — the implementation through negotiation of a two-State solution, which is the only way to bring about a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. It is against that yardstick and in the light of respect for internationally agreed parameters that France will closely scrutinize, with the resolve to make progress, the forthcoming proposal of the United States that has just been mentioned by my colleague and friend, Ambassador Nikki Haley.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to express my deep gratitude to my colleagues who will be leaving the Council and thank them for their outstanding contribution to the work in the Council.

I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

At present, hotspot issues in the Middle East are complicated and intertwined. Conflicts and confrontations are ongoing and the evolution of the situation is worrying. The issue of Palestine is the root cause of the Middle East problem and touches on the long-term peace, stability and development of the region. The current security and humanitarian situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is grim, which is not conducive to regional stability and the peace process. China expresses its concern in that regard.

Fighting violence with violence will solve no problem. China urges all parties to bear in mind the safety and security of the people of the region and the imperative of peace and stability by exercising restraint to avoid an escalation of the situation. The Security Council should adopt a long-term perspective and make every effort to create the conditions necessary for stabilizing the situation and resuming dialogue. Relevant parties should cease all settlement activities in the occupied territories, lift the blockade of Gaza as soon as possible, and take measures to prevent violence against civilians.

The international community should create increase its support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, including support for countries hosting refugees. There is a need to comprehensively implement relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, adopt a long-term perspective and jointly promote the resumption of talks. In that regard, I would like to make the following observations.

First, there is a need to remain united and consistent and renew our efforts to promote peace talks. All parties should meet each other halfway, avoid any action or rhetoric that would aggravate the situation and refrain from any unilateral action that would undermine trust in order to create the conditions necessary for the resumption of dialogue. Parties that can bring influence to bear on the question of the Middle East should play a constructive role and explore new mediation mechanisms to break the deadlock in Palestinian-Israeli talks as soon as possible.

Secondly, there is a need to uphold the two-State solution and address the root cause of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The international community should adhere to the relevant United Nations resolutions,

the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, and persevere in resolving the issue of Palestine in a comprehensive, just and lasting manner through negotiations. Resolution 2334 (2016) should be implemented in earnest. China hopes that the Secretary-General will submit a written report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

Thirdly, there is a need to properly address the final status of Jerusalem. This issue is complex and sensitive and concerns the situation the future of the two-State solution and the peace and security of the region. All parties should proceed with caution and refrain from imposing a solution that could lead to new confrontations. Relevant United Nations resolutions and international consensus should serve as the basis for finding a solution through negotiations that accommodate the interest of all parties.

China firmly supports and promotes the Middle East peace process, the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights, and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine with full sovereignty based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. We support the greater integration of Palestine into the international community.

China will follow the four-point proposal of President Xi Jinping to promote the political settlement of the Palestinian issue and continue to work with the rest of the international community to explore innovative mechanisms to facilitate of peace in the Middle East, to promote an early resumption of peace talks between the two sides and make tireless efforts to realize comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): My delegation thanks Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive and objective briefing and his unflinching commitment to the region.

First of all, we welcome the decision taken by Israel and Hamas in Gaza to hold a ceasefire that would follow the agreement the two sides reached in 2014. We appreciate the political will of both sides, which has resulted in concluding a viable truce. We hope that this will lead to a full-fledged peace treaty between the two sides and thus prevent a relapse, for which no efforts should be spared. It is clear to all that in a state of fierce war or exchange of fire between the parties, which we should avoid at all costs, all the rest of the issues simply

fade away, including a critical problem like the illegal settlements in the Palestinian territories.

We sincerely welcome the contribution of Egypt and the United Nations since the beginning of the crisis to pull Israel and Gaza back from the brink of war and bring some calm. Astana also appreciates the measures of the international community and different entities to obtain a ceasefire. I need hardly recall that confidence-building measures and political and diplomatic measures are at the core of our foreign policy. We therefore always urge our partners to utilize them.

Astana expresses its concern over the intention of the Israeli leaders to legalize thousands of Jewish settlement homes in the occupied West Bank. Kazakhstan calls on both sides to honour their respective commitments, in accordance with all Security Council resolutions that have been adopted over the 50 years since 1967. The Council must ensure that resolution 2334 (2016) is complied with, and we urge a complete freeze on the construction of settlements.

Astana encourages Member States with influence — in particular the Arab countries, the United States and Russia — and the European Union to urge Israel and Palestine to return to the negotiating table. This should be aimed at reaching an agreement upon mutually acceptable principles of the coexistence of two States based on international law and Security Council resolutions.

We also need to address the blockade of the Gaza Strip, where an acute food shortage persists. We share the concerns of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, who said that further conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza is likely, due to the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian coastal enclave. It is therefore obvious that stakeholders should increase the amount of electricity supplied to Gaza.

Kazakhstan hopes that the work of the unique Middle East Quartet will be revived and intensified. We believe that with the assistance of the participants of the Quartet, the parties will be able to find common ground for the continuation of a peaceful dialogue.

Astana is deeply concerned about the recent violent incidents in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. A very serious security situation still prevails in the occupied West Bank. We have learned

that four Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces in separate operations over the past week in the occupied West Bank, with the Israeli army announcing the city of Ramallah to be a closed military zone. We express our sorrow over a shooting attack that took place near the illegal settlement of Ofra, east of Ramallah, where two Israeli soldiers were killed by an unknown Palestinian. The Israeli and Palestinian security services must work together to restore calm and avoid escalation. We condemn all acts of violence and terrorism, in particular against innocent civilians, and we call on political, religious and community leaders to speak out clearly against such brutal acts and those who glorify them.

My country's position remains unchanged and is very clear. Kazakhstan is a strong advocate of a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We still believe that peace is possible between Israelis and Palestinians. We believe that Israelis and Palestinians can live together in peace and security with the rest of the region.

Kazakhstan ends its term on the Security Council on 31 December, and this is our last consultation on the subject. We have invested much effort towards the rapprochement between the two sides over the past two years of our term. Even as we step down, our interest will remain steady and ongoing in the future, and we will always work towards peace in the Middle East through the General Assembly and other forums — and even the Security Council, externally — as a passionate State Member of the United Nations that is deeply committed to peace and security. We wish Mr. Mladenov and his team every success, and hope that Palestine and Israel can fulfil their aspirations.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his very comprehensive and insightful briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). I would also like to thank Ambassador Nikki Haley for sharing her plan for the peace process with us.

Exactly two years ago this month, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), reaffirming its previous resolutions regarding the applicable international law and the parameters of a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This year also marks 25 years since the first Oslo Accord. Despite its many shortcomings, the agreement represented a historic compromise. Unfortunately, since then the

conflict has not seen significant progress towards achieving peace. On the contrary, we have seen that the recent security situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory has become more tense. Many times over the past months, we have expressed our great concern about the tragic loss of civilian lives on both sides.

Recent developments on the ground clearly point to a constant need to continue the de-escalation process. Despite the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas on 14 November, the security situation in Gaza remains fragile, and miscalculations could result in the outbreak of violence. In that context, let me underline that all sides must fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.

Recent reports on the violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are a source of great concern. We deeply deplore the loss of lives on both sides. We call upon all parties to exercise restraint and spare no effort to avoid further escalation.

Our priority is to restore a political horizon for the resumption of a meaningful peace process. We believe that a negotiated two-State solution and the resolution of all final status issues, including Jerusalem, settlements, the future of Palestinian refugees, borders and security arrangements remain a realistic way to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of both parties and achieve long-term peace. We appeal to both sides to refrain from taking unilateral steps that prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations, and expect them to demonstrate, through their actions and policies, their commitment to peace.

In more general terms, let me underline that Poland supports a two-State solution, under which the national aspirations of both parties to the conflict would be met, including the Palestinian right to self-determination and independence, the Israeli right to ensure its security and the normalization of relations with Arab States. Unfortunately, we have so far not seen significant progress towards achieving that goal.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is extremely worrying. There is a lack of progress on the political, security and humanitarian fronts. The prevailing lack of decisive steps towards a return of the legitimate Palestinian Government to Gaza, despite Egypt's best efforts to revive the process, is detrimental to Palestinian aspirations to statehood, contributes to the worsening of the humanitarian crisis and risks

escalation. Undoubtedly, progress in the Palestinian reconciliation process would contribute to improving the situation on the ground. The humanitarian situation on the ground has continued to deteriorate. In the Gaza Strip, humanitarian conditions are especially dire. Basic needs continue to be unmet and many people lack access to basic services, including health care.

The critical financial shortfalls of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have also raised the alarm, particularly as 80 per cent of Gaza's population is dependent on the Agency's humanitarian services. In that regard, I commend the mobilization of the donors that helped secure additional funding for its budget, as well as the imposition of austerity measures by the Agency, under the leadership of Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl. It is vital to continue those efforts in the coming year so as to ensure sustained support to UNRWA, as well as the transparency and accountability of its programmes.

Unfortunately, provocation, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric continue on both sides. In our opinion, such acts constitute a significant obstacle to the reactivation of the peace process. It must also be stated that we have observed an increasing number of dangerous incidents as a result of that incitement and inflammatory rhetoric. Some of those incidents involve children, who need special protection.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the long-standing position of the European Union that all settlement activity is illegal under international law. Settlements continue to undermine the practical prospects and hopes for peace. In that context, I also wish to reiterate our call for the plans to demolish Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu to be cancelled. Not only is the community at imminent risk of demolition and displacement, but it would also set a significant precedent for other Bedouin communities in Area C.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): First of all, let me thank Nickolay Mladenov for his frank and sobering briefing on the developments of the past months, including on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). In that regard, let me refer to the letter (S/2018/454) that was sent to the Secretary-General in May, signed by 10 Security Council members, in which we requested written reports on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We welcomed the written report (S/2018/614) that we received in June and would

have appreciated a continuation of that practice in September and this month. Written reports provide the factual basis that is needed to fruitfully discuss the implementation of the resolution in the Council.

Today marks two years since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). And today, we sadly have to conclude, as others have done, that most parts of the resolution have not been implemented. Unfortunately, the situation on the ground is worse than it was two years ago. Positive steps are urgently needed. The Kingdom of the Netherlands recalls that each side can and must take positive steps to bring peace closer, as the Middle East Quartet recommended in 2016 (see S/2016/595, annex).

In that context, I will focus on three issues: first, the undermining of the prospects of peace; secondly, settlement activities; and thirdly, Gaza.

On my first point, prospects for peace continue to be undermined through terror attacks, violent incidents and incitement. We condemn the recent terrorist attacks by Palestinians against Israelis in the West Bank that has led to the loss of lives. There is no excuse for terrorism. Those recent attacks have further increased tensions in the West Bank. We condemn the statements by Hamas and other terrorist groups welcoming those cowardly attacks. Those statements serve only to increase tensions. We regret that General Assembly draft resolution A/73/L.42, condemning Hamas, was not adopted, as we need to speak out as one United Nations against terrorism in all cases.

At the same time, the attacks in the West Bank are no justification for the ensuing violent response of some settlers against Palestinian civilians. We call upon the Palestinian and Israeli leadership to observe calm and restraint and to refrain from provocative actions and rhetoric that could further increase tensions. We call upon the parties to make every effort to find the perpetrators of those acts and bring them to justice.

That brings me to my second point, on settlements. Calls for the annexation, expansion or legalization of settlements and all actions in that regard serve only the purposes of the extremists and will create only more tensions between both sides. The Kingdom of the Netherlands strongly opposes Israel's settlement policy, which we consider to be illegal under international law. It is a policy that includes actions such as forced transfers, evictions and demolitions. Settlement activities have increased since the adoption of the

resolution. If we look at the past two years, we see that in 2017 construction was started on almost 1,700 units and that in the first six months of this year, construction was started on more than 1,000 units. In addition, the number of planned and tendered units are a multiple of that. That shows a substantial increase as compared to the numbers of 2015 and 2016.

It is not only about the numbers. A new expansion of settlements has been announced for sensitive areas, such as Hebron and East Jerusalem. Those are areas that are of crucial importance to the viability of a future Palestinian State. In addition, over the past two years, Israel has continued with the demolition of Palestinian houses and structures and with the eviction of Palestinian families from their homes. We are deeply concerned by the developments in East Jerusalem, where an unprecedented number of families face eviction. Although we welcome the fact that the planned demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar has not taken place, we reiterate our call upon Israel to withdraw those plans all together.

Thirdly, the situation in Gaza remains extremely fragile. We have seen the tragic results of resorting to the use of violence in Gaza over the past year all too often. We condemn the indiscriminate firing of rockets. We express grave concern about the use of force by Israel that has led to the loss of life of over 200 Palestinian civilians. We have called for a thorough investigation into all cases where lives have been lost and we have concluded several times that a sustainable solution for the situation in Gaza is needed. That solution would include the urgent improvement of the humanitarian and economic situation.

Thanks to regional and international efforts, the situation in Gaza has marginally improved. We thank Nikolay Mladenov and his team for their unabated efforts in finding solutions to alleviate the humanitarian and economic crisis, including through the projects of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians.

Another positive development that I want to highlight is that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was able, with the combined efforts of the Agency itself and many donors, to continue to provide basic services and to close the financing gap. Continued support to UNRWA, including next year, is needed. We will continue to work together with the United Nations

and the international community, as well as Israel and the Palestinian Authority, to find solutions that bring tangible relief. Those solutions must also include the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza as the legitimate Government. Moreover, they must include the full opening of the crossings, taking into account Israel's security needs.

My last point is on the need to restart a genuine peace process. We thank Nikki Haley for the first glimpse of the United States plan for peace in the Middle East. We look forward to further information and consultations in that regard. As was just said in a press statement of the former, current and incoming members of the European Union to the Council, "We see an urgent need for a political horizon to be restored".

It is unfortunate to have to sum up the many developments since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) that have undermined the prospects for peace and of a two-State solution. In addition to the developments mentioned so far, I also want to express our concern about the shrinking space for civil society in both Israel and the Palestinian territories. We are, for example, concerned by the threats and hostile reaction to the Israeli non-governmental organization B'Tselem, which is an organization that rightly won international praise for its work. The findings by Human Rights Watch about suppression of dissenting opinions by both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, including by the use torture, are deeply concerning. A vibrant civil society is essential to long-term sustainable peace and stability.

In conclusion, two years after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), we have to recognize that we continue to reaffirm our collective commitment to a two-State solution, while the situation on the ground is developing towards a one-State reality. That development must be reversed. Positive steps are urgently needed to restart a genuine peace process, leading to a two-State solution based on internationally agreed parameters. We should all remain united in our efforts towards that goal.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his clear and detailed briefing. I would also like to express to him and his team our appreciation and recognition of the continued work carried out and efforts made this year.

We encourage them to keep up the same spirit and dynamism in their work next year.

Unless there are further insurgencies, I believe that this will be the last meeting on the Palestinian question of this working year. The delegation of Equatorial Guinea is extremely concerned that, despite all the support and effort, we have been unable to achieve any political progress in both the disputes between Israelis and Palestinians and the intra-Palestinian relationship.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is convinced of the important role that the United Nations has always played with regard to the Palestinian question, but also believes that the Security Council and the international community must conduct a deeper moral and political examination of what and how much we are doing and in what way and if we are taking the right approach. Seventy years is too long to wait for the resolution of a conflict that is unrelenting in taking human lives on all sides, keeping millions of Palestinians displaced and hindering the development of Palestinian society, while unravelling the basic livelihoods of some localities, as has been the case in the Gaza Strip. The amount of time that this sad reality has lingered on is completely unjust and could create scepticism in international public opinion about the will and spirit that drives our work of managing peace and security in the Middle East, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Every year, we advocate new draft resolutions to alleviate the conflict, which is all well and good, but what about the many resolutions that have already been adopted? The history of the conflict has proven that it is extremely difficult to adopt draft resolutions on this matter in the Council, which demonstrates how rational and fair the existing resolutions are. We must therefore all support strict compliance with those resolutions, which, in our opinion, provide a balanced solution to the problem.

We regret and strongly condemn the heavy exchanges of gunfire between Israeli forces and Hamas militias in November, the magnitude of which caused severe alarm among the population and led to several deaths and infrastructure damage. In that regard, we call on Hamas and other Palestinian organizations in the area to refrain from any provocation against Israel. Likewise, we urge the Israeli security forces to respect international humanitarian law by evaluating their responses to those threats. We therefore call on

the parties to respect the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016).

We welcome the efforts of the United Nations that, together with its partners and donors, has continued to improve the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza. We hope that such inroads can garner further international support. However, in order to achieve a secure and sustained settlement in Gaza, it is important to guarantee a stable security environment, for which we have always demanded the return of the Palestinian Authority. That compels us to join Egypt's actions to promote reconciliation among the Palestinian parties, while bearing in mind that security in the Gaza Strip would help to alleviate the tension with neighbouring Israel.

History has starkly taught us that the conflict has no military solution. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea therefore reiterates that the political solution to the Palestinian question must comprise a two-State solution that is negotiated by the parties, within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. The interests of both parties must always be taken into account. Likewise, we urge the Security Council not to remain indifferent in the face of the stalemate in negotiations between the parties and to work to implement measures that allow for compliance with its own resolutions. We ask that written reports on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) be published, as was requested by 10 members of the Council.

Finally, the United States peace plan that has been initiated by Ambassador Nikki Haley deserves our due attention, as it currently lacks detail. We welcome the plan and hope that it will be fair and convincing in the eyes of the international community. We wish to take this opportunity to pay well-deserved tribute to Ambassador Haley for her leadership during her time here at the Security Council.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I would like to express our appreciation to Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Ethiopia is closely following the situation and is very concerned about the recent incidents that have taken place following the renewed escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory since last month, particularly in the Gaza Strip. We expressed the same concern at both emergency consultations that were convened under the agenda item "Any other business" on

the escalation of violence in Gaza and Southern Israel, when the Council was briefed by Under-Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča, and at the monthly briefing (see S/PV.8405) and consultations, when Special Coordinator Mladenov briefed the Council, stressing the situation's fragility and underscoring the urgent need to change the dynamics on the ground and address underlying political issues. We continue to appreciate the efforts of the United Nations, in close consultations with countries such as Egypt and other relevant parties, to help restore calm and on the need to promote political dialogue between the parties based on a two-State solution, to which Ethiopia fully subscribes.

Today's briefing and recent discussion further show how the latest developments are bound to cause damage and undermine the long-sought hope for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. The deteriorating political, humanitarian and security situation in Gaza remains extremely worrisome. Although Special Coordinator Mladenov pointed to progress in terms of reconstruction efforts and the provision of water services, among other things, we believe that the humanitarian situation cannot be alleviated without fixing all essential services, as well as easing the movement of people, goods and services.

We would also like to note the importance of promoting intra-Palestinian reconciliation, supporting the efforts of Egypt and bringing the Gaza Strip under the control of the Palestinian Authority, as per the Cairo agreement, which have not yet fully materialized. Therefore, it is vitally urgent that all sides exercise maximum restraint and that every effort be made to de-escalate tensions, in order to avoid endangering the lives of innocent civilians and exacerbating the humanitarian situation.

All of that makes it self-evident that, unless the peace process is advanced and the underlying problems are peacefully solved, the tragedy at hand will only happen again and again, eventually getting to the point of no return. That is why it is so critical that ways and means be found to continue the peace process and save the two-State formula, which is the long-held position of the United Nations and the international community.

We all know that those same underlying problems and known obstacles to peace persist, with no movement forward to speak of — a situation that is hardly conducive to sustainable peace and security for either party. Without genuine efforts to remove those

obstacles, there cannot be any meaningful progress towards realizing the two-State solution. That is why direct negotiations between the parties should resume without any preconditions and without any delay. As we leave the Council next month, we can only hope that the international community, and particularly the Council, will be able to take steps in support of realizing that objective.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the briefing made by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov on the latest quarterly report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and the illegality of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

I will begin by reiterating what was mentioned in letter contained in document S/2018/454, of 14 May, regarding the timely distribution of a written report on resolution 2334 (2016). We thank the Secretary-General for having heeded our request last June and we reiterate that that must become common practice, in accordance with the usual practice stated in the provisions of paragraphs 62 and 64 of presidential note S/2017/507.

As a pacifist country, Bolivia has persistently echoed the innumerable calls of the international community for Israel — the occupying Power for more than 70 years — once and for all to stop its expansionist and annexationist policies, which violate international law and Council resolutions. Yet once again today we must express our outright rejection of the manifest intention demonstrated by the Government of Israel to impose its illegal policies in the occupied Palestinian territories through violent actions, in clear violation of resolution 2334 (2016) and in accordance with the report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of 30 November.

Sixty-three structures been demolished in the West Bank in just the past month, which has resulted in the displacement of at least 35 people. We reiterate that the demolition of civilian buildings forms part of the coercion affecting many Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which also means restrictions on accessing natural resources. The denial of basic services and safe housing for Palestinians is a product of Israeli plans to relocate communities to urban municipalities, such as the case of Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu.

During the two years that we have occupied a seat on the Security Council, we have categorically rejected the criminal actions of the Israel Defence Forces, which used lethal weapons to end the lives of more than 228 Palestinian civilians, including 43 children, in various circumstances during what was called the Great March of Return. We have seen a marked deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip as an explicit result of the violent incursions of the Israeli army.

The 11-year-long land, air and sea blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza has paralysed its economy, resulting in high levels of unemployment, food insecurity and dependence on international aid. Gaza's economy is in free fall, according to the World Bank. Unemployment reached 54 per cent in the second quarter of this year, with more than 70 per cent of young people and 78 per cent of women unemployed, while poverty has skyrocketed to 53 per cent and food insecurity to 68 per cent.

There were power cuts in Gaza for between 18 and 20 hours per day during most of this year, which have prevented the provision of basic services. Productive activity has also seriously deteriorated, especially in hospitals, water treatment facilities and sewage and solid waste collection services, which rely almost entirely on the emergency fuel provided by the United Nations.

In the multilateral forums to which it belongs, Bolivia will question how a Member State can be allowed to infringe upon the human rights of the Palestinian population in such a way before the international community. Accordingly, we demand that Israel fully comply with its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. In that regard, we cannot fail to mention the great spirit of solidarity of the Government of Qatar, which provided a significant amount of fuel in October that led to a significant improvement in the supply of electricity to the population of the Gaza Strip.

We again express our firm commitment to all international efforts that lead to a peaceful solution and end to the Palestinian occupation. In that regard, we endorse initiatives such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and others that constitute guarantees for a just and lasting peace, so that both peoples can safely live within recognized borders.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our conviction that the only long-term solution to the occupation suffered by the Palestinian people is that of the two-State solution, whereby a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State can finally become a full Member of the Organization, within the pre-1967 international borders and East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting, and Mr. Mladenov for his important briefing and dedicated efforts.

We must express our deep concern about the situation described regarding the continued deterioration of the political and humanitarian conditions underpinning the question of Palestine and the acute risks that that represents for a particularly unstable region and the maintenance of international peace and security. We note with dismay the complex humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which has been exacerbated by recurrent episodes of violence and cuts in funding to assistance programmes. It is evident that the situation favours those actors interested in promoting violence and extremism.

We must continue to condemn the recurrence of indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population and terrorist attacks by Hamas and other radical Palestinian actors, the imbalanced Israeli responses and the confrontational rhetoric of its respective authorities, which fuel ongoing hostile dynamics. We reiterate that settlement practices, the demolition of buildings and evictions in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 undermine the possibility of reaching a two-State solution and openly violate international law and resolution 2334 (2016). We underline the need for the Israeli authorities to stop and reverse those practices, and we note with particular alarm the political and social impact that would be caused by the demolition of a set of structures in the town of Khan Al-Ahmar.

There is a clear need for political gestures to build a climate favourable to détente, dialogue and negotiation between the parties, with the support of the international community and the Council. In that regard, we have taken note of the information provided by the United States Ambassador on the peace plan that her country is preparing. We look forward to further details on that.

We believe that all possibilities of resuming negotiations aimed at reaching a two-State solution with secure and internationally recognized borders must be explored. In line with that objective, we underline the urgency of alleviating the humanitarian situation in Gaza and moving forward the process of intra-Palestinian reconciliation. With regard to the latter, we would like to highlight the efforts made by Egypt and the importance that the Council closely follow them, while providing the necessary support.

I would like to conclude by noting, as other delegations have done, that we continue to expect a written report on compliance with resolution 2334 (2016) by the Secretary-General, which was requested by 10 members of the Council, as that would provide greater transparency and allow for a deeper discussion on this sensitive topic. We hope that that practice will be resumed in the coming quarters.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

My delegation thanks Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the recent developments regarding the situation in Palestine, which once again reminds the Security Council of the urgent need to mobilize further around issues of peace and security in the region.

Côte d'Ivoire is concerned about the situation in the Palestinian territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, where tension remains high despite the many efforts of the international community to restore peace and stability. My country wishes to reaffirm its steadfast position in favour of a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict through dialogue between the parties. That is why we believe, in accordance with international consensus, that the status of the city of Jerusalem must be determined following peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Côte d'Ivoire can, under no circumstances, approve the policies of settlement expansion and intensive reconstruction that have thrown entire Palestinian families into complete disarray, which threatens the urgent need to restore dialogue in the quest for lasting peace in the region. We therefore call for stringent compliance with the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) and call on the various parties to exercise restraint and urge them to refrain from unilateral

actions that could irrevocably compromise the chances of a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis carries with great risk of deterioration to the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation in the region. Many reports from United Nations agencies indicate that unemployment has reached 27 per cent, the highest in the world. According to those reports, the state of health of Palestinians is deteriorating and a significant proportion of the population does not have access to drinking water or electricity, despite the substantial assistance provided by some States in the region, in particular Qatar. Given the seriousness of the situation, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its urgent call for a general mobilization and collective responsibility on the part of the members of the Council so that significant humanitarian and financial assistance is provided to the populations in distress. In that connection, my delegation urges the United Nations and international partners to continue providing financial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. That support will allow it to efficiently carry out its mission of providing assistance to more than 5 million refugees whose needs are constantly increasing.

The end of the humanitarian crisis is highly dependent upon a settlement of the political and military crisis that has pitted Palestinians against Israelis for several decades. Hence the need to put an end to the cycle of deadly violence and repression. In that regard, my delegation calls on the Israeli and Palestinian parties to enter into new peace talks without preconditions, as part of the good offices of the United Nations. To that end, the Council should support all mediation initiatives in favour of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, thereby allowing the Palestinian Authority to recover all of its prerogatives over Palestinian territory.

My country welcomes and encourages the mediation conducted by the Egyptian authorities under the supervision of the United Nations. We also express our continued support for the two-State solution, Israel and Palestine, living in harmony, side by side, in peace and security, in accordance with resolution 242 (1967). In that connection, I welcome the United States initiative to develop a peace plan focused on improving the quality of life for people in the Middle East. I am pleased to note that the plan will be available in the near future, and I hope it will have the desired impact on the region.

In conclusion, my delegation encourages Mr. Mladenov to continue his constant efforts to find a negotiated solution.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.