



# Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

**8532**<sup>nd</sup> meeting  
 Wednesday, 22 May 2019, 10 a.m.  
 New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mrs. Marsudi . . . . .	(Indonesia)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium . . . . .	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China . . . . .	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire . . . . .	Mr. Ipo
	Dominican Republic . . . . .	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Equatorial Guinea . . . . .	Mr. Ndong Mangué
	France . . . . .	Mr. Delattre
	Germany . . . . .	Mr. Heusgen
	Kuwait . . . . .	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru . . . . .	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland . . . . .	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	South Africa . . . . .	Ms. Mogashoa
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Mr. Allen
	United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Greenblatt

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Mr. Mladenov and Mr. Krähenbühl are joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem and Gaza City, respectively.

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

**Mr. Mladenov:** Just a few short weeks ago we teetered on the precipice of another devastating conflict, as we witnessed the most intense fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants from Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza since 2014. The United Nations worked intensively with Egypt and all sides to calm the situation, but Israeli and Palestinian lives were tragically lost. My sincere condolences go out to the families and friends of all those who were killed, and I wish a speedy recovery to the injured. While the situation has now stabilized, it remains very tense. One thing is clear: these dangerous cycles of escalation and de-escalation are not sustainable in future.

Thousands of Palestinians participated on 3 May in the weekly demonstrations at the Gaza perimeter fence. Incendiary balloons were launched, and stones and pipe bombs were thrown at Israeli soldiers, who responded with live fire, rubber bullets and tear gas, killing two Palestinians and injuring 49. Later that day, a sniper, reportedly from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, fired across the fence, injuring two Israeli soldiers. In response to the sniper attack, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched several tank shells, while the air force targeted military sites in Gaza, killing two Palestinian militants and injuring two civilians. That was the beginning of the most serious escalation since 2014.

Over the course of the following 48 hours, 650 rockets were fired from Gaza. While approximately 240 projectiles were intercepted by the Iron Dome system; several houses, two kindergartens, a school and a hospital in Israel were directly hit. Four Israeli civilians were killed and over 200 were injured, according to the IDF. During the same period, the Israel Defense Forces reported that it had hit over 300 Palestinian militant targets in Gaza, including a senior Hamas official, who was targeted and killed by an air strike. According to sources in Gaza, 25 Palestinians were killed and over 150 were injured.

After intense efforts by the United Nations and Egypt, a cessation of hostilities was established as of early morning on 6 May, ending the escalation. I take this opportunity to once again urge all sides to use this period to reduce tensions, solidify the fragile calm and commit to implementing the understandings established in the past few months.

Sniper fire from Gaza has been a constant threat that, on at least four occasions over the past year, has pushed both sides closer to confrontation. This latest incident followed a pattern that has been well established — the closer we get to consolidating an understanding that would relieve the pressure on people in Gaza and reduce the risk of rocket fire towards Israel, an incident like the last one occurs and undermines our careful and painstaking efforts.

Despite that, the United Nations and Egyptian teams will continue to work intensely with all sides to use this window of opportunity to provide assistance to the people of Gaza and further reduce the risk of conflict. Sustained calm is also critical to supporting Egyptian-led efforts to advance intra-Palestinian reconciliation,

which should enable the return of a unified, legitimate Palestinian Government to the Gaza Strip.

I take this opportunity to welcome Israel's decision to lift the ban on accessing the Gazan fishing zone and expand it to 15 negotiationsautical miles in some places, reopen the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings as normal on 12 May and other steps taken in the past few days. I also welcome the renewed commitment by the Palestinian Government in Ramallah to engage constructively on addressing the situation in Gaza.

I also want to reiterate the call by the Secretary-General, who condemned in the strongest terms the launching of rockets from Gaza into Israel, particularly the targeting of civilian population centres, and also call on Israel to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from using lethal force against protesters, except as a last resort.

Turning briefly to the humanitarian situation, Deputy Special Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick has warned that health providers in Gaza are struggling to treat the high numbers of injuries sustained during the weekly demonstrations. Many of the wounded require complex surgeries not currently available there. Yet access to treatment outside of Gaza continues to be challenging, as the lack of consistency in the approval process is having very serious and negative implications on people.

Meanwhile, the international community has continued its efforts to address the dreadful situation in Gaza. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians met in Brussels on 30 April and reiterated its support for the implementation of a package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions in Gaza through the United Nations. Between October 2018 and April 2019, approximately \$112 million was mobilized, enabling a significant increase in electricity supply through the Gaza power plant, the creation of thousands of temporary jobs in Gaza and the delivery of essential medical supplies and other support for the struggling health sector. Fuel deliveries for the power plant have been extended. As I speak, we are moving forward on other more sustainable efforts for the energy sector, with a focus on renewable energy. On 13 May, I visited the second-largest hospital in Gaza, where a landmark World Health Organization-developed solar power plant project will cover a substantial part of the energy needs of the hospital.

I appreciate the financial support provided by Japan and many others for those critical projects. I urge other donors to further increase their support for our joint efforts to improve the situation on the ground. The most significant contribution to date remains that of the State of Qatar. On behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the assistance provided by Qatar, without which the situation in Gaza would have been untenable. On 6 May, His Highness the Emir of Qatar announced an assistance package for the Palestinian people of approximately \$480 million — \$180 million for Gaza, \$250 million as loans for the Palestinian Government and \$50 million as grants for projects in the West Bank. In relation to Gaza, some of that funding will allow the United Nations to provide fuel for electricity until the end of the year, expand temporary employment programmes and focus on permanent job creation.

While Gaza continues to command significant attention, the situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is of growing concern to all of us. The prolonged absence of a political horizon to resolve the broader conflict has coincided with a steady deterioration of the living conditions of Palestinians. That, coupled with violence, settlement expansion, demolitions of Palestinian property and the persistent threat of further economic decline, is creating an explosive mix that could have serious security implications.

Two hundred and forty Palestinians were injured by Israeli forces during the reporting period, including nine children, during demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other incidents in the West Bank. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), four Palestinians were injured or had their property damaged by settlers, while one Palestinian attack against Israeli civilians in the West Bank was recorded, resulting in one injury and damage to a vehicle. I unequivocally condemn all attacks on Palestinian and Israeli civilians and call on all sides to refrain from violence. All perpetrators must be accountable for their crimes.

Allow me to reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace. In that context, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 40 structures during the reporting period, displacing 31 people, overwhelmingly on the grounds of a lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

On 29 April, 31 structures were demolished in East Jerusalem, the highest single-day total monitored by OCHA since 2009. On 3 May, a joint statement by the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) called for

“an immediate halt to the Israeli authorities’ destruction of Palestinian-owned property in East Jerusalem”.

On the following day four structures were demolished in Silwan, displacing 11 Palestinians. According to OCHA, five people were seriously injured when Israeli forces reportedly beat and used stun grenades and sponge-covered bullets to push residents away as they tried to retrieve belongings prior to the demolitions. Moreover, in a worrisome move, Israel’s High Court of Justice upheld a new Israeli military order that accelerates the demolition process for new structures built without permits in Area C of the West Bank.

Regrettably, the reporting period saw no resolution to the Palestinian Authority (PA) financial crisis. For the third consecutive month, the Palestinian Government has refused to receive Israel’s transfer of any tax revenues less than the full amount owed to it. I am concerned that, despite the PA’s announced austerity measures and the support package committed by Qatar, the latter’s survival remains at risk.

I briefed the Council in March (see S/PV.8489) and said that the crisis would have a substantial impact on the Palestinian economy, with reduced purchasing power and weakened growth. The first signs of that negative trend are already beginning to show. A long-term resolution of the financial crisis is urgently needed. Its continuation threatens to further destabilize an already volatile situation. Both parties should implement their bilateral agreements and avoid taking unilateral actions that undermine the stability of the Palestinian Authority. Against that backdrop, a team from the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process recently visited the Al-Fawwar Palestinian refugee camp, where the residents endure harsh living conditions and UNRWA’s ability to deliver essential services is hampered by its own financial crisis. Commissioner-General Krähenbühl, who will also be briefing the Council

today, will speak more on the severity of the current challenges facing Palestine refugees.

On a positive note, with the advent of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, hundreds of thousands of Muslims from the occupied West Bank were able to pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque during the holy month. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the relative calm at the holy site and urge continued respect for the status quo and relevant agreements.

Turning very briefly to the region, the situation on the Golan is calm. However, the potential for heightened tension between the parties to the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement persists. On 1 May, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) saw that some Israel soldiers, who had been laying razor concertina wire in the area between the Israeli technical fence and an UNDOF position, had crossed the ceasefire line. During that activity, Syrian Arab Armed Forces soldiers deployed close to that location to monitor their activity. UNDOF liaised with both sides and was able to de-escalate the situation.

In Lebanon, the Cabinet started reviewing the draft 2019 State budget on 30 April, as protests over reported austerity measures continued. At stake in the ongoing budget discussions is meeting commitments from the 2018 CEDRE conference on economic development and reform, which include the need to reduce Lebanon’s deficit.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The recent escalation in Gaza has once again demonstrated the urgency of solidifying and expanding the existing understandings on the ground. We must ask ourselves, how many more years will Palestinians in Gaza be forced to live on a pittance from the international community, under the control of Hamas, and suffer from Israeli closures? How many more years will Israelis be forced to run for shelters as rockets launched by Palestinian militants in Gaza rain down indiscriminately from above?

The United Nations and its partners have, yet again, tried to mitigate the impact of the crisis in Gaza, but those efforts will ultimately fail unless there is progress on resolving the Palestinian divide, lifting the closures and charting a course towards the two-State solution, based on long-standing international parameters, including the relevant United Nations resolutions and previous agreements. There are no short-cuts to sustainable peace.

I also take note of the invitation by the United States and the Kingdom of Bahrain to convene Government, civil society and business leaders to discuss the potential for economic investments and initiatives that would be made possible by a future Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement and a solution to the final-status issues. Humanitarian and economic support is very important for people, but it is also critical for creating an environment conducive to viable negotiations. However, the solution to the conflict remains fundamentally political.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Krähenbühl.

**Mr. Krähenbühl:** First of all, allow me to thank you, Madam President, for the invitation to address the Security Council. It is a particular honour to do so from Gaza.

I wish to emphasize and express heartfelt appreciation to the States Members of the United Nations — both countries hosting Palestine refugees and donors — for their extraordinary trust in and support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) since its operations began, in 1950. Together, we have significantly advanced several key Sustainable Development Goals for Palestine refugees, notably in education, health and beyond, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight.

Never was the support of Member States more remarkable than in 2018, when our Agency was confronted with its most severe funding crisis ever — a truly existential crisis. Forty-two different countries and institutions from all corners of the world, including Indonesia, Madam President, increased their contributions to UNRWA last year. On our side, we took a number of difficult internal measures and reduced expenditures by \$92 million. Through those combined efforts, last year we successfully overcame an unprecedented deficit of \$446 million. We are particularly indebted to the leadership of Secretary-General António Guterres and the wider United Nations family, who resolutely stood with UNRWA every step of the way during those most challenging times.

The European Union became the Agency's single-largest contributor in 2018. I also wish to pay special tribute to Germany, the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia, the United Kingdom, Sweden, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Japan, Norway and many others, including permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council, for their very generous contributions last year. Those actions were vital to keeping open the 715 schools that UNRWA runs for more than half a million female and male students in the West Bank, as well as in East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

More than 2 million students have graduated from UNRWA schools since 1950, where gender parity has long been achieved and we have included a human rights, conflict resolution and tolerance programme that is unique in the region. The generous support of donors also preserved primary health-care services for 3 million patients through our network of 140 health centres and, despite severe pressures, also preserved our emergency services for 1.5 million refugees, mainly in Gaza, the West Bank and Syria. At a time when Palestine refugees face a near complete absence of a political horizon, I am strongly convinced that preserving UNRWA's services is a crucial contribution in terms of human dignity and regional stability.

Speaking from Gaza, I must draw the urgent and renewed attention of the Council to the increasingly desperate situation faced by the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, of whom at least 1.3 million are Palestine refugees. My current visit has once again exposed me to the extreme hardship created by successive armed confrontations, blockade and violence. UNRWA is working alongside our United Nations and civil society partners to address that humanitarian crisis.

I think here of issues such as the lack of freedom of movement or employment opportunities, as well as the deep trauma created by the many casualties and persons injured from repeated wars and from what became known as the Great March of Return. Thousands of young people have been wounded, and hundreds killed, since March 2018, including 14 boys and girls, ages 11 to 16, who were students in UNRWA schools. As I have done in the past, I reiterate here my call for respect for international humanitarian law and my condemnation of the targeting of civilians. That includes rocket firing from Gaza that has led to civilian loss of life and injuries in Israel.

Every family in Gaza has been impacted, and people speak of a level of despair that surpasses anything previously known to them, in particular

in terms of what our health teams call an epidemic deterioration of mental-health conditions. After hearing many concrete examples during my visit today, it seems particularly important that UNRWA and other relevant actors be enabled to strengthen critically needed mental-health capacities.

Poverty levels among Palestine refugees continue to rise, and they rely on UNRWA in particular to meet essential food needs. For their sake and the stability of Gaza, we must ensure that our food distributions for 1 million people here in the Gaza Strip do not face any interruption. As we speak, UNRWA has only enough money to run its operations until mid-June; then we will hit negative figures and a funding gap. It is absolutely crucial to avoid a breakdown of our food pipeline, and I call on all our partners to actively mobilize in support of our efforts to secure the needed funding.

It is similarly essential that UNRWA be able to open the next school year on time in August and September. We are currently rehabilitating a large number of schools, but we need the funding to ensure that the education itself can be provided. Nothing sustains hope and opportunities more effectively than the education provided in our classrooms. I am deeply impressed by the courage shown by our students in overcoming the adversity they face and pursuing their studies. We need to match that courage with our ability to mobilize the necessary financial support. In Gaza alone, 280,000 girls and boys study in our schools. In the light of all the discussions on leaving no one behind, on safeguarding refugee education and preserving regional stability, we need to work together to keep UNRWA schools open and safe.

UNRWA faces important needs in the West Bank as well, including in East Jerusalem. Palestine refugees in the West Bank are confronted with multiple consequences of the ongoing occupation, such as home demolitions and evictions, with numbers significantly on the rise since early 2019, as well as movement restrictions and settler violence. There are also frequent military incursions in which live ammunition is fired, resulting at times in fatalities, but often in injuries and property damage in densely populated areas like Palestine refugee camps, where entire communities can be impacted by the live fire and the use of tear gas. I must in particular draw the attention of the Council to the growing pressure UNRWA itself has faced in East Jerusalem, with threats to interfere with our operations. The current developments in the West Bank, including

East Jerusalem, will further unsettle not only Palestine refugees, but also their hope and aspirations with regard to a two-State solution and their rights under international law.

In addition to strong political backing, in 2019 we require \$1.2 billion for all of our operations throughout the Near East. That is the exact amount we mobilized last year. In other words, if every donor should manage to maintain its level of funding in 2019, we should be able to cover our budget. I therefore humbly call on all of our partners to repeat their generous support and preserve the successful dynamic created in 2018. The upcoming pledging conference, to be held in New York on 25 June, will be an important opportunity to that effect. For its part, UNRWA will continue to manage its operations with strong financial discipline and a determination to achieve further efficiencies.

Wars, armed conflicts and violence persist in the absence of effective political action to resolve them. It is political inaction — not the action of humanitarian organizations — that perpetuates conflicts. Nothing today would be more important than a renewed, genuine and inclusive effort to resolve the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. I say that not because UNRWA was mandated to deal with the politics of the region — we were not — but rather because every single day, we deal with the increasingly severe humanitarian and human consequences of this enduring conflict. We do not believe that the future of Palestine refugees should be framed by another 10, 20, 30 or 40 years of UNRWA. They need and deserve a just and lasting political solution. Until then, however, we are determined to live up to the mandate that the General Assembly bestowed upon us.

When meeting with young students here in Gaza, I was again reminded that our efforts — with the Council's support — are worth it every single day. In another remarkable example of talent and dedication, 15-year-old UNRWA student Jameela Abu Jom'a was declared the winner of the 2019 Inspirational Messages of Peace Contest by the United States National Park Service and International World Peace Rose Gardens. The competition celebrates messages of peace written by young people throughout the world. Yesterday I congratulated Jameela and told her that we are very proud that her message of peace will be on display in the gardens of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park in Atlanta, Georgia, for one year. That is what members of the Council and of the General

Assembly have allowed us to achieve and preserve. For that, members deserve the highest recognition. From here in Gaza, I call on them to protect this vital effort and sustain their collective mobilization, in support of dignity, stability and robust multilateralism.

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

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

**Mr. Greenblatt** (United States of America): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing and for his redoubled efforts to restore safety and security both to the people of Israel, who came under sustained attack from Gaza, and to the Palestinian civilians, among whom Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad members hid as they launched wave after wave of rockets.

All of those innocent victims deserve better. The families of the four Israelis who died and the 200 Israelis injured, and the Palestinian civilians killed and injured by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad attacks all deserve better. It is simply unacceptable that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad continue to target Israeli communities, including hospitals and schools, in a cynical attempt to extract concessions from Israel. It is simply unacceptable that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad continue to use civilians in Gaza, including children, as human shields. It is simply unacceptable that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad continue to siphon the scarce resources of the people of Gaza to build their terror arsenal while preventing donor aid from reaching the people.

There will be no end to the suffering until all of us together say in public what I believe many here are thinking — Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad are to blame for the suffering of the people of Gaza. Nothing can be meaningfully fixed until they renounce terror and cease their acts of violence and their vow to destroy Israel. When will the Security Council say this out loud? When will we clearly reject this terrorism? As President Trump has said, the United States will always stand with Israel and we will always support its right to self-defence. But we should not stand alone. We must all speak loudly and clearly and say that these attacks upon Israel, which are perpetrated by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad — whether by rockets, incendiary balloons or otherwise — must end. I was just informed moments ago that Israeli firefighters are working to extinguish six blazes caused by incendiary

balloons. Also, the terrible suffering that those attacks cause Israelis and Palestinians must end.

Every Government has a responsibility to ensure the safety and security of its citizens. Since its birth, the State of Israel has faced threats from enemies that call for its destruction and the death of the Israeli people. The State of Israel has no margin for error. The Palestinians are also entitled to safety and security. A first step towards that goal is for us sitting here today to admit that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad are the primary barrier to the dreams of the residents of Gaza who want to live in peace, raise their families and find meaningful work.

Mr. Mladenov's efforts on behalf of the United Nations, together with Egypt, have created a fragile peace in recent days. Qatar has sent funds, which has eased some suffering. Keeping that fragile peace intact will require intense international pressure on Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. If that calm holds, I look forward to working closely with all gathered here, Mr. Mladenov and others to determine how we can best help the people of Gaza move past 12 years of suffering and deprivation into a world in which they can imagine a real future.

On a separate but closely related topic, nothing stops us now from undertaking the hard work of ensuring that the Palestinians who receive services from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have access to more reliable and sustainable health and education services. I thank UNRWA Commissioner-General Krähenbühl for his briefing today and for his work over the years. But I am afraid that it is time for him and everyone here today to face the reality that the UNRWA model has failed the Palestinian people.

UNRWA's business model, which is inherently tied to an endlessly and exponentially community of beneficiaries, is in permanent crisis mode. That is why the United States decided that it will no longer commit to funding this irredeemably flawed operation. The UNRWA model cannot provide to Palestinians what they deserve — a life where they can plan for their future and the future of their children, and one where they know whether schools and health clinics will remain open.

We did not come to that conclusion lightly. Since UNRWA's founding, the United States has donated \$6 billion to it, vastly more than any other country.

And yet, year after year, UNRWA funding fell short. Year after year, budget shortfalls threatened essential services to Palestinian mothers and children. Year after year, UNRWA and other donors turned to the United States to make up the shortfall. And year after year, Palestinian in refugee camps were not given the opportunity to build any future. They were misled and used as political pawns and commodities, instead of treated as human beings.

UNRWA is currently running on fumes, surviving on a surge in foreign donations in 2018 that is unlikely to be sustained this year, or in future. What happens when the Agency's bank account is empty again? We need to be honest about the situation. UNRWA is a band-aid, and the Palestinians who use its services deserve better, much better. We do not have to wait until a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in place to address that fact.

For too long, we have dismissed the dismal situation of Palestinians in refugee camps as an unavoidable by-product of the lack of a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinians. But nothing stops the international community from choosing to reach out its hand to Palestinians living in refugee camps today to address their very real, everyday needs in a sustainable way while we all continue to work towards a lasting comprehensive peace.

We need to engage with host Governments to start a conversation about planning the transition of UNRWA services to host Governments or to other international or local non-governmental organizations, as appropriate. The United States is ready to participate in that conversation. We tried to begin that conversation before we cut our aid to UNRWA. No one wanted to engage in that conversation back then. We remain ready to begin that conversation now. It is time to start.

We do not advance a comprehensive and enduring peace by ignoring the reality that UNRWA is unable to fulfil the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. We advance a comprehensive and enduring peace by making it clear that the international community is fully committed to providing a brighter future for today's Palestinians and their children.

Palestinians have been held hostage for too long to United Nations resolutions, regional politics, donor fatigue and weak leadership. It has been 70 years — three generations of Palestinians who have suffered tremendously. A similar number of Jewish

refugees expelled from Arab lands shortly after the creation of the State of Israel also suffered tremendously. But there is a difference. Those Jewish refugees' needs for basic services and their desire to build a brighter future for their children were not held hostage to politics. It is time for the needs of Palestinians for basic services and their desire to build a brighter future for their children to stop being held hostage to politics. Do we not have an obligation to the Palestinians to make that transition?

Next month, in Bahrain, we and many others will participate in an economic workshop on an alternative path, with the potential to unlock a prosperous future for Palestinians. That is the first stage of a process that we want to begin to showcase what could be — how, if we can achieve a political solution to the conflict, we can also transform the lives of the Palestinians. It would be a mistake for the Palestinians not to join us. They have nothing to lose and much to gain if they join us, but it is, of course, their choice.

I cannot help but point out the irony that at the time of our conference in Bahrain, which can pave the way to prosperity for Palestinians, UNRWA is hosting a pledging conference for a broken system. The United States is committed to talking with others about how best to address the fearful uncertainty of UNRWA's service recipients, who are not sure whether schools or clinics will be open, and how we might help them actually build new lives — with or without a peace agreement. But we are also committed to resolutely standing by Israel as it address the urgent challenges presented by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad — attacks from Gaza or elsewhere.

I approach this issue with humility. I acknowledge that I have not brought with me today a solution — either to the acute crisis of the violent and illegitimate rule of Hamas over Gaza, or to the prolonged crisis caused by UNRWA's inability to fulfil its original mandate, or to any of the other challenges posed by this extraordinary conflict. What we do know is that what we have today is not the answer. We do know that Palestinians and Israelis both deserve better. We do know that it is time to move past band-aid solutions and political assertions into the adult world of hard choices.

The hopes and dreams of Palestinians living in refugee camps have been suspended for too long. So have the hopes and dreams of Palestinians living under the punishing rule of Hamas in Gaza. And so



too have the hopes of Israelis, who have lived under constant threats for decades and who yearn for peace. This conflict is sad and tragic and complex, on so many levels. But we must stop pretending that UNRWA and United Nations resolutions will somehow solve the conflict. They simply will not. Let us work together to find a real cure.

**Mr. Alotaibi** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we congratulate you, Madam President, on the holy month of Ramadan. We welcome the fact that you are presiding over this important meeting in which we are discussing the Palestinian question. This question is an important, central and sensitive one for both the Arab and Muslim nations. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his informative briefing. We reiterate the full support of the State of Kuwait for his efforts to ease the tensions in the situation, protect civilians and push for the resumption of the peace process.

We welcome as well the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), who recalled the serious financial pressure the Agency is experiencing this year in its efforts to continue providing schools, health centres and many other services to Palestinian refugees.

We are meeting today a year after the crime committed by the Israeli occupation forces against civilian protesters in Gaza on 14 May 2018, which led to the deaths of 60 Palestinian martyrs, including children, as well as more than 2,000 injured. It is also important to note that Palestinian civilians are still being attacked. We want to reiterate what was said in the open meeting on this issue last month (see S/PV.8517). It is important to seriously follow up on the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (A/HRC/40/74) established to investigate violations committed during protests in the occupied Palestinian territories in Gaza Strip, with a view to ensuring that the criminals are brought to justice. Israel, the occupying Power, is requested to end all acts of aggression against the Palestinian people and commit to the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, as well as to lifting the unjust blockade against Gaza.

It is no secret that if we are to establish a fair, lasting and comprehensive peace through a

negotiating process culminating in the signing of an agreement between the two key stakeholders, there are fundamental terms of reference that must be respected, including the implementation of confidence-building measures between the parties that not only show a genuine political commitment to peace but ensure that they are committed to implementing the provisions of the agreement.

The Arab countries have reiterated their principled position of upholding peace as a strategic choice. That was announced at the Arab summit in Tunisia on 31 March, at which the participants expressed their determination to see a resumption of serious negotiations on a two-State solution as a requirement for reaching a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. Today I will therefore highlight some obstacles that stand in the way of any agreement or peace initiative.

First, we cannot speak of peace if the Israeli occupation continues to spread through the confiscation of land by force. We should point out that the settlements are still the major obstacle to the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace. For that reason, on 9 May Indonesia, South Africa and my country convened an Arria Formula meeting on the settlements and Israeli settlers. Such settlement activities, accompanied by violence perpetrated by the settlers, are on the rise, and are undermining the possibility of establishing a viable and contiguous Palestinian State within the 1967 borders. In that regard, we once again condemn all Israeli settlement activities without legal legitimacy. We call on the international community to take responsibility and provide the necessary protection to the Palestinian people while ending Israel's acts of aggression, including the recurring assaults made at the Al-Aqsa compound under the watchful eye of Israeli forces. These are all flagrant violations of international law and the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Secondly, we cannot speak of peace when one party continues to take decisions on a unilateral basis, especially since the Secretary-General has warned on many occasions that unilateral steps and measures can only undermine the possibility of achieving peace. In that regard, we reiterate our condemnation of Israel's decisions not to renew the Temporary International Presence in Hebron and to withhold part of the Palestinian tax revenues. That does not just threaten

the financial stability of the Palestinian Authority and endanger the security of Israelis and Palestinians alike, as Mr. Mladenov said earlier, it is in defiance of the Oslo Accords and negates any possibility of ensuring Israel's respect for future initiatives in favour of peace.

Thirdly, we cannot speak of peace if it is imposed on Palestinians by force. At its summit, the Arab League ensured that it would pledge its full solidarity with the State of Palestine and would not accept any political or financial pressure with a view to imposing unjust solutions to the Palestinian question that are not in line with the main international terms of reference.

Here we also want to recall UNRWA's financial difficulties just mentioned by Mr. Krähenbühl, whom we commend for his efforts and those of UNRWA in delivering services to the Palestinian refugees. Without them, the quality of life and future of millions of refugee children would worsen immediately and bring more instability to the region. We therefore reject attempts by Israeli campaigns to end or minimize the role and mandate of UNRWA and stress the importance of providing the necessary financial support for the Agency's programmes and activities. We are pleased to be able to say that the State of Kuwait is one of UNRWA's major partners, and that our voluntary contributions over the past four years have totalled \$113 million. We reiterate our commitment to supporting UNRWA to ensure that it can continue to provide its services in the five areas where it operates — the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

Fourthly, we cannot speak of peace if that peace is not based on international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, because it would imply acceptance of the legality of Israel's actions violating law, international agreements and customary law. The current situation and the realities on the ground are the result of illegal policies and decisions of Israel, the occupying power, and they are null and void under international law. In that regard, we note that any attempts to protect those violations and crimes rather than holding the State committing them accountable would undermine the rules and values on which the United Nations was established and which the Security Council has also been defending and demanding their implementation for decades.

Finally, we cannot speak of peace that is not based on international law. In that regard, we want to point to the first Arab-European summit, held recently in

Sharm El-Sheikh, at which Arab and European leaders insisted on their common positions with respect to the Middle East peace process, including the status of Jerusalem, the illegality of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories and a two-State solution, in line with United Nations resolutions. They agreed that this is the only realistic way to bring an end to an occupation that began in 1967 and includes East Jerusalem, as well as to arrive at a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between the Israelis and Palestinians through direct negotiations among the parties that deal with all final-status issues.

**Mr. Delattre** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by welcoming your presence here, Madam President, and the fact that the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia is presiding over our meeting, which reflects the importance of the subject we are discussing today. I thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing, which was very precise and informative, as always. I also thank the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, whose presence in the Chamber today is very welcome. I would like to pay tribute to Mr. Krähenbühl's commitment and to UNRWA's work with Palestinian refugees and its contribution to the stability of the region. I also want to welcome the participation in our work of the Special Representative of the President of the United States, Jason Greenblatt.

I would first like to mention the situation in Gaza, where the humanitarian, political and security equation is particularly alarming. Earlier this month, the Gaza Strip once again experienced an outbreak of violence that runs the risk of tipping into a new conflict, like the other three it has experienced over the past decade. France, which will never compromise Israel's security, has condemned in the strongest terms the firing of rockets into populated areas of Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip on 4 and 5 May. Those shootings and the ensuing clashes have once again claimed civilian casualties on both sides. The developments since 2014 are of an unprecedented gravity. Israelis and Palestinians alike have the right to live in peace, dignity and security.

The efforts of Egypt and the United Nations Special Coordinator have made it possible to achieve a ceasefire, which must be consolidated and sustained. We call on the parties to exercise the utmost restraint in that regard. Beyond that, however, there will be lasting

stability in Gaza only in the context of a negotiated settlement, including the full return of the Palestinian Authority and the lifting of the blockade accompanied by credible security guarantees for Israel.

We also recall that the stabilization of the Gaza Strip requires an immediate improvement in the humanitarian situation in the territory, to which all stakeholders must contribute. In that respect, Israel's announcement of the expansion of the fishing zone is a step in the right direction. In the Gaza Strip, where two-thirds of the population is composed of Palestinian refugees, the main humanitarian actor is UNRWA. In Palestinian refugee camps in Gaza and the region, access to education, health and, for some people, food aid depends entirely on UNRWA.

Beyond the humanitarian dimension, the dignity of Palestinian refugees and their ability to build a future are at stake. It is also a question of the stability and security of a region that has been shaken by crises, to which we cannot allow the addition of yet another factor of fragility. We must therefore respond to Pierre Krähenbühl's call for us to maintain our level of collective financial engagement this year. UNRWA's ability to maintain services is not guaranteed beyond summer, and the issue of the reopening of UNRWA schools will arise in August. The mobilization of us all will be crucial in the preparation for the donors conference, scheduled for late June in New York. France, for its part, has doubled its contribution to UNRWA in 2019.

Our support for UNRWA will also require political mobilization for the renewal, in the fall, of the three-year mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly. Until a just, equitable, realistic and lasting solution to the Palestinian refugee problem is found in the context of a peace agreement, the UNRWA mandate will remain necessary, not only for the refugees themselves and their future and the stability of the region, but also for the international community. We cannot collectively afford to leave the refugee camps to themselves, at the risk of making them the ideal recruitment pools for terrorist groups that are active in the region.

The situation in Gaza, with which I began my statement, cannot be dissociated from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole or from the two-State prospect. There will be no viable Palestinian State without Gaza and no lasting and just peace without a Palestinian State. On the ground and in people's

minds, however, the acceleration of settlement activity undermines the foundations of the two-State solution. Today, we are inching ever closer to the point of no return.

In addition to the facts, legal developments have led to the progressive application of Israeli law to the inhabitants of West Bank settlements. That situation does not correspond to the aspirations of either the Palestinians or the Israelis, and it is emerging in violation of international law, including the resolutions of the Council.

As we can see, the issue we are facing collectively is urgent and fundamentally political. We take note of the scheduled holding of an economic workshop in Manama on 25 and 26 June, at the initiative of the United States and Bahrain. France stands ready to support all efforts, including of an economic nature, as long as they are in line with the prospect that we have defined together: the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State, real conditions for the economic resurgence of Palestine and, beyond that, the construction of a stronger and more integrated regional economy.

We must not hold back from engaging in serious negotiations to implement the two-State solution, with both States living in peace and security within recognized borders, with Jerusalem as the capital. That is what the law says. That is the objective that France is pursuing, as a friend of Israel and the Palestinians, and it is on that basis that we will evaluate the initiatives that can be undertaken.

**Mr. Heusgen** (Germany): I thank you for joining us in the Security Council, Madam President. I think that your presence here again underlines your country's commitment to the issue that is at stake today.

Germany remains steadfast in its commitment to Israel's security as a Jewish and democratic State. The German Government recently underlined its support to Israel in a declaration on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of Israel becoming a Member of the United Nations. We condemn all attacks on Israel in the strongest possible terms, including the recent firing of rockets from Gaza, which put Israel's security and the lives of civilians at risk. Germany will not be silent when Israel's right to exist is questioned or compromised.

Let me underline that, from our perspective, only a two-State solution can meet the aspirations

of both parties and deliver peace and security in a sustainable way. European Union member States are united in stating that any future plan should consider the parameters, as laid out in resolution 2334 (2016), in order to be successful. We believe that this is essential for Israel's security. It is indispensable that a solution be negotiated and guarantee the right to self-determination of the Palestinians as well. Any peace plan should not preclude solutions negotiated between the two parties.

We are deeply concerned about developments that increasingly undermine the prospects for a two-State solution and contribute to entrenching a one-State reality, which cannot be in anybody's interest. I can only repeat what my French colleague just said that, with regards to the developments on the ground, we are moving closer to the point of no return.

The latest unilateral actions and decisions—the Israeli decision to partly withhold Palestinian tax revenue, the rejection of any tax revenue transfers by the Palestinian Authority, the move of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem and the United States recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights—have all added to growing tensions and are not helpful in an already fragile situation.

We reiterate our position that settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law and undermine the prospect of a two-State solution. The continuous expansion of settlement activity by Israel in the Palestinian territories is a matter of great concern to us. That includes the recent approvals of construction for thousands of new housing units in settlements in the West Bank.

We call upon Israel to end the expansion of settlements, the legalization of outposts and the demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures. Those actions jeopardize the prospects for a peace agreement on the basis of a two-State solution by creating enclaves, obstructing Palestinian development and leading to frustration and despair. We are also extremely concerned about statements of a possible annexation of parts of the West Bank. Should such statements be translated into Government policy or law, Germany would see that as a clear violation of international law.

We also remain deeply concerned by the dire economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza. Protests in Gaza have to be peaceful, and the rights of demonstrators to express their opinion freely and

peacefully have to be respected. At the same time, the right to peaceful protest must not be used as a pretext for incitement or exploited in order to commit violent acts. In that context, we call on all sides to refrain from the use of excessive force.

Let me turn to the very impressive briefing by Commissioner-General Krähenbühl. For we are deeply concerned about what he had to report to the Council with regard to the current challenges facing the mission of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We believe that UNRWA remains indispensable for providing humanitarian assistance and essential services, not only in the Palestinian territory but also in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. What he mentioned concerning East Jerusalem is worrisome. We would like to commend UNRWA's efforts to overcome the recent financial crisis as well as its tremendous work in the light of that crisis.

In continuing to provide services that encompass education, health care, relief, social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance, UNRWA remains key to maintaining stability in the region. We continue to firmly support the mandate of UNRWA and encourage others to similarly continue to show their political and financial support for the Agency's work. In that regard, let me express once again, as I did earlier, that we very much regret that the United States, which had been a consistent donor to UNRWA, is no longer contributing.

The question that I have asked the United States delegation is, who does it believe will teach the more than 200,000 students in the Gaza Strip, who would no longer receive UNRWA schooling were funding unavailable? The question of who would provide such teaching has not been answered. I am afraid that, as my French colleague just said, Hamas and others would teach the children. We are therefore very grateful that, in very difficult circumstances, UNRWA does what it does. As the representatives of Kuwait and France said earlier, Germany is proud to be among the top donors in sponsoring that important work. In that context, I have a question for Mr. Krähenbühl. Mr. Greenblatt mentioned that the Commissioner-General scheduled the donor conference for the same date as the Bahrain conference. I would ask Mr. Krähenbühl if he might clarify that.

With regard to the situation of the Palestinian Authority, we look forward to working with the new Palestinian Government. Although the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process remains in deadlock, progress is urgently needed in order to build strong and inclusive Palestinian institutions. That includes the renewal of democratic legitimacy through well-prepared elections, which are overdue. It is also important that the Palestinian Authority remain financially stable and functioning. That is important for the delivery of health care, education and security to millions of Palestinians, which, we believe, is in the interests of both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Resolution 2334 (2016), to which I alluded earlier, needs to be fully implemented, not only with regard to settlement activities but also violence against civilians, including acts of terror, incitement, provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric. We welcome that the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/251) also focuses on those obstacles to achieving peace. We strongly urge all parties to de-escalate tensions, exercise restraint and refrain from provocative rhetoric and actions.

In conclusion, let me share the Secretary-General's concern in his report about the weakening of the international consensus to achieve the realization of a negotiated two-State solution, based on internationally agreed principles. Joint efforts to restore a political perspective for the resumption of the peace process are urgently needed. We support any attempt to restart meaningful direct talks and negotiations between the parties, with the objective of creating a lasting peace, based on the internationally agreed parameters. At the same time, we have to counter collectively the negative developments on the ground that are undermining the viability of a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the internationally agreed parameters.

**Mr. Allen** (United Kingdom): I welcome you back to the Security Council, Madam President. I also thank Special Coordinator Mladenov and Commissioner-General Krähenbühl for their respective briefings.

Since the Council's previous monthly meeting on this issue (see S/PV.8517), we have witnessed the worst violence in Gaza since 2014. The United Kingdom was gravely concerned about that escalation, during which both Israeli and Palestinian civilians were killed. We utterly condemn all rocket fire from Gaza towards

Israel, and we are clear that it must stop. It is ultimately the ongoing decision by Hamas to embrace violence and reject the Quartet principles that lies at the heart of the Gazan tragedy. The United Kingdom's support for Israel's right to self-defence is unequivocal, but we are equally clear that Israel's action must be proportionate and guard against civilian casualties.

We welcome to ceasefire brokered by the United Nations and Egypt and support their efforts to maintain calm. We urge all parties to demonstrate restraint and make progress towards reaching a long-term agreement. As well as creating fear among the Israeli and Palestinian populations and damaging the prospects for peace, this hopeless cycle of violence further undermines the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Against that backdrop, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a necessary humanitarian and stabilizing force in the region, providing vital services to millions of Palestinian refugees.

The United Kingdom remains a firmly committed supporter of UNRWA and Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. We will do everything we can to maintain the continuity of essential services at this time. The United Kingdom almost doubled its original core support for UNRWA last year and, over the next two years, the United Kingdom will provide the Agency with up to \$100 million. We also recognize the need for UNRWA to reform in order to ensure its sustainability. UNRWA has undertaken significant cost-cutting measures to respond to budget cuts and growing need. We welcome UNRWA's efforts to broaden its donor base. We encourage others to step up with more funding and predictable disbursements.

The United Kingdom remains worried about the impact of Israel's decision to withhold tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Israeli decision will have significant consequences for stability and security. It is impacting ordinary Palestinians and risks exacerbating the already dire humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza. The United Kingdom continues to have concerns about aspects of the Palestinian system of payments to detainees. We encourage the reform of the system to be needs-based, transparent and more affordable. But that is not justification for withholding agreed tax revenues.

A stable Palestinian Authority is in the interests of both Palestinians and Israelis. This is the PA's money.

We encourage Israel to reconsider this decision, or find other ways to counteract the risks, while abiding by all signed agreements. Given that the risk of fiscal collapse is very real, we also urge the PA to accept the remaining tax revenues. We welcome the calls made at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians for enhanced dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian Governments to address the current fiscal crisis, as well as the offers made to assist the parties in addressing the outstanding fiscal issues adequately and urgently.

The United Kingdom continues to believe that substantive peace talks between the parties leading to a negotiated two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders, with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as a shared capital and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees, is the way to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, provide security and justice to both Israelis and Palestinians and preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic identity.

I want to thank the representative of the United States for his comments, including on the proposed meeting in Bahrain. We look forward to studying the United States Administration's proposals for a viable Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that addresses the legitimate concerns of both parties.

In order to have the best chances of success, the peace process must be conducted in an atmosphere free from violence. We call on all parties to work together to maintain calm.

**Ms. Wronecka** (Poland): Allow me at the outset to welcome you very warmly, Madam President, to the Council. I also thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his very comprehensive, although again alarming, briefing. I would also like to thank Commissioner-General Krähenbühl for his valuable insight into the situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

We now live in a time when the very fundamentals at the heart of the Oslo process appear to be challenged. The foundation of the two-State solution, which remains the core of internationally agreed parameters, is being impacted by facts on the ground. We have to restore a political horizon for the resumption of a meaningful peace process. We believe that it is only through the negotiated two-State solution that a resolution of all final-status issues, including Jerusalem, can be found.

We also have to be frank with ourselves — on the political track, we have to acknowledge that the process is currently almost entirely blocked, even taking into consideration all of the commendable Egyptian mediation efforts.

In terms of the security track, unfortunately, two weeks ago we witnessed the consequences of one of the biggest escalations in Gaza since 2014. Poland strongly condemns rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip targeting Israel and remains committed to supporting its legitimate security interests. Hamas and Palestinian Jihad's incitement to violence, as well as the exploitation of protests for their own political objectives, have to stop. At the same time, Israel should calibrate its use of force and protect its borders using only proportionate means. We call on both sides to exercise restraint and engage constructively in efforts aimed at breaking the vicious cycle of violence in and around Gaza.

The recent increase of violence is paving the way for growing frustration among the citizens, allowing extremism to grow. It is also combined with the extremely difficult humanitarian situation on the ground, mainly in Gaza, where basic needs continue to be unmet and many people lack access to basic services, including health care. This could easily lead to an escalation of social tensions that may destabilize the situation in the region even further. In our opinion, the current situation depriving the inhabitants of Gaza of hope and real prospects creates an environment conducive to inflammatory rhetoric that could again result in violence and extremism, particularly among the youth.

While addressing the question of future generations, let me underline the critical financial shortfalls being endured by UNRWA. UNRWA has worked for nearly 70 years to ensure access to quality education, which is a human right fundamental to helping each child achieve his or her full potential. In this context, the unprecedented financial crisis of 2018 forced the Agency to take some very difficult measures, sometimes with tragic personal consequences for its staff members.

As already mentioned by many in this Chamber, the educational and humanitarian services, including medical care, provided by UNRWA are key for young Palestinians and their teachers, as well as the staff of the Agency. UNRWA runs one of the largest school systems in the Middle East, teaching nearly half a million children in over 700 schools. Education remains

key to sustainable human development, and we should do our utmost to support the agency in its endeavours in this matter, especially in the light of the fact that UNRWA is too often the only entity that offers people any positive perspective.

In this regard, I commend the extraordinary mobilization of donors, hosts and other partners, as well as the support of the Secretary-General and many other leaders, ministers and senior officials around the world, that have allowed additional funding to be secured for the UNRWA budget in 2018. It is vital to continue these efforts also this year, as UNRWA remains a key factor for stability and security in the region.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): It is a pleasure to see you in the Council, Madam President. We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, and the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, for their informative reports.

Exactly two weeks from now, on 4 June, it will be 52 years since Israel occupied the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This date is an important milestone in the Middle East conflict and has a sensitive symbolic meaning for Israelis and Palestinians and for Arabs in general. For example, for the Syrians, it marks the loss of the Golan, which, despite everything, remains occupied Syrian territory. Unfortunately, that day was not the last tragic date in the calendar of the Middle East. Others have followed.

As a result of various internal causes and brazen external intervention in the region, several other hotbeds of crisis have emerged, in particular in Yemen, Libya, Syria and Iraq. While the situation in the Republic of Iraq is steadily returning to normal, and most of the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic has been stabilized, resolving the Yemen and Libya conflicts will still require a great deal of effort on the part of the international community.

Recently, new tensions have appeared around Iran. This artificial escalation of tensions could have the most negative consequences for the entire Middle and Near East and beyond. There must be urgent de-escalation and a search for negotiated solutions to existing disagreements. Confrontation must give way to dialogue. We recall the relevant mandate of the

Secretary-General in accordance with resolution 598 (1987).

It is necessary to recognize the interconnectedness of everything taking place in the region. This is not surprising, since the region has a common history of development and a common civilizational space. Encouraging and strengthening close, friendly and mutually beneficial relations among the States of the region would help to improve the overall situation there. Based on that logic, the settlement of one conflict would have a positive impact on the reconciliation processes in other hotbeds of crisis.

In this regard, we believe it necessary to redouble efforts on the Palestinian-Israeli track of the Middle East peace process. A just solution to the Palestinian problem would be key to improving the situation throughout the region. Should the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians persist, by contrast, it would continue to constantly poison the overall international atmosphere, adversely affect efforts to resolve other regional crises and fuel terrorism.

At the same time, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. There are agreed, internationally recognized parameters, including the Security Council's resolutions, the Madrid principles — including the principle of land for peace — and the Arab Peace Initiative. Some may say that this basis has not resolved the Palestinian question and is therefore irrelevant. However, the problem is not with the basis, because its final details must in any case be discussed by Palestinians and Israelis in direct negotiations. The problem is in factors preventing the resumption of the negotiation process. Those factors can be eliminated through the implementation of the recommendations indicated in the 2016 report of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators.

First of all, Israeli settlement activity on the West Bank of the Jordan river and the policy of demolishing Palestinian property must be ended. Palestinians and Israelis should refrain from aggressive and provocative rhetoric and eschew violence. We need to jointly put an end to terrorist attacks. It remains necessary to restore unity within the Palestinian ranks. Palestinians and Israelis should be helped to take the first steps to implement these recommendations. That would open up the prospects for reaching a comprehensive, just and lasting Palestinian-Israeli settlement. That should lead to an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands that began in 1967 and the creation of an independent,

viable, contiguous Palestinian State existing side by side and in peace with Israel within secure and recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and of course West Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel.

We see no alternative to a two-State formula. We believe that it is the only realistic way to put an end to the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation and resolve their mutual claims. Other concepts are only misleading and make it difficult to resume the political process. We do not believe that the Palestinians will renounce their legitimate aspirations to statehood, whatever they are promised in exchange. Imposing a ready-made solution on the parties will not work. We believe that now more than ever it has become essential to take practical measures to help the peace process emerge from its dangerous impasse. Russia will continue its efforts bilaterally and in other formats to bring about a resumption of direct dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. Our proposal for holding a meeting between Mahmoud Abbas and Benjamin Netanyahu in Moscow is still on the table.

As long as the Palestinian question remains unresolved, we believe it is important to continue to provide support, including financial assistance, to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Agency's activities have a political as well as a humanitarian dimension, providing an important stabilizing effect in the Palestinian territories and the countries of the Middle East. We made our latest financial contribution to UNRWA's budget for 2019 only the other day.

Israel and Palestine have major religious significance for hundreds of thousands of followers of the monotheistic religions. The establishment of a lasting peace in those lands as soon as possible is in the interests of all Christians, Muslims and Jews. However, the destabilization of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa has hit Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities in the region extremely hard. Extremists exploit ethnic and religious factors to foment discord and enlarge their ranks. It is important to take immediate measures to spread a culture of peace among religious and ethnic groups, which will help to prevent new upheavals based on ethnicity or religion. Russia's experience with coexisting ethnicities and religions is unique. On that basis, we support the Inter-Parliamentary Union's proposal for organizing a world conference on interreligious and inter-ethnic dialogue together with the United Nations, in which

Heads of State and Government, parliamentarians and representatives of world religions would take part. We are willing to host that conference in Russia in 2022.

We call for intensifying the joint work on the Middle East as a whole, including in the Security Council. We believe that sending missions to areas of conflict can strengthen the Council's unity. Russia is ready to work on all of those and other aspects together with interested partners on an open and impartial basis, without threats or negative pressure.

**Mr. Singer Weisinger** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a pleasure to have you back with us presiding over the Council, Madam. We thank Mr. Mladenov and Mr. Krähenbühl for their updates today and are grateful for their commitment and vital work. We also welcome Mr. Greenblatt.

Once again, this issue brings only accusations and counteraccusations, without solutions. We reiterate our firm condemnation of the attacks at the beginning of this month in which rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel, and of the resulting reprisals, which resulted in tragic losses of both Israeli and Palestinian lives, leading once again to a dangerous escalation of tensions and distancing us from the understandings recently reached between the parties. We commend the mediation and cooperation efforts that countries such as Egypt are making to ease tensions as quickly as possible and prevent any further loss of life, as well as of United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, through human development initiatives and humanitarian assistance, help to relieve the suffering of the inhabitants of Gaza, who continue to endure a severe humanitarian and security crisis. We therefore urge friendly countries to continue to support those efforts and initiatives.

We remain optimistic about the recent formation of the Palestinian Government and the start of a new stage for the Government in Israel and hope that they can bring renewed impetus to the quest for a definitive solution to the conflict that can deliver the longed-for peace, considering that we are seeing a continued increase in tensions between the parties thanks to widespread violence in which civilians, including women and children, are the most affected; various kinds of provocations and inflammatory rhetoric; a lack of internal reconciliation; and actions that contradict and violate international law and order.



We had an important discussion at our previous meeting, at the end of April (see S/PV.8517), on the environmental dimension of the peace process and the precarious situation in Gaza and the West Bank created by the severe water shortage and its impact on the economic and social development of the region, including by increasing its vulnerability to food insecurity. We must therefore recognize the transboundary nature of water as a relevant element in peace negotiations. We are also concerned about the Palestinian Government's difficult financial situation, which has worsened with the involuntary withholding of tax revenues and the decrease in international assistance, which have led to a substantial loss of income and forced it to take austerity measures, with negative effects on the economy and society.

We continue to be dismayed at the continued expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, with thousands of units being advanced, approved or bid on and action taken to legalize a number of enclaves and homes, all under the shadow of possible annexation. We also strongly condemn the excessive use of force and any acts of violence and intimidation against civilians, including women and children, and reiterate our condemnation of the indiscriminate firing of rockets, mortars and incendiary devices.

Finally, we urge for international consensus on this conflict to be strengthened, based on the peaceful settlement of conflicts, international law and multilateralism, while recognizing the important mediation role of the United Nations, and on agreements previously arrived at, based on a solution whereby two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

**Ms. Mogashoa** (South Africa): I would like to welcome you to the Council, Madam President. We are delighted that you are presiding over our deliberations today. I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Mladenov for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, particularly the question of Palestine, and Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl for his briefing on the status of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The security and humanitarian situation in all of the occupied Palestinian territory continues to be of great concern to my delegation. The escalation of violence in Gaza has only worsened the already

dismal humanitarian situation, which has persisted for years. It cannot be denied that the grave situation in Gaza is a direct result of the illegal Israeli blockade and occupation of the area. That has shattered any prospects for normal economic and social development for the 2 million Palestinian people trapped in what has been called an open-air prison. In that regard, South Africa reiterates its call for the complete lifting of the illegal Israeli blockade, which continues to cause untold humanitarian, social and economic suffering for the Palestinian people.

We would like to acknowledge the efforts of all parties, particularly Egypt and the United Nations, through the Office of the Special Coordinator, in brokering a ceasefire agreement in Gaza earlier this month. My delegation reiterates that violence in all its forms and from all quarters is unacceptable, and calls on all parties to adhere to their commitments under the ceasefire agreement in order to prevent a further escalation of violence in Gaza.

The cumulative impact of unilateral actions has had a destructive impact on the lives of all who live in the occupied Palestinian territory and has further hindered the prospect of the long-standing aspiration for peace in the Middle East, based on the established parameters.

Key among those actions is the continuation of illegal settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, in direct contravention of a resolution of the Council. Resolution 2334 (2016) is clear in stating that any settlements built on occupied land have no legal validity and are a flagrant violation of international law. The blatant paralysis in addressing systematic violations damages the credibility of the Council. My delegation once again reiterates its call for the full implementation of all General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

As we have just heard from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, which is tasked by the United Nations to assist Palestinian refugees in the region, the Agency is having immense difficulty in carrying out its mandate due to a lack of funding. That, in turn, also has a negative impact on the quality of life of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In conclusion, it must be unequivocally stated that any proposed peace plan should not allow Palestinian statehood to devolve into an entity devoid of sovereignty, territorial contiguity and economic viability. Doing so would severely undermine previous peacemaking

efforts, accelerate the demise of the two-State solution and fatally damage the cause of a durable peace for both Palestinians and Israelis alike.

As many in the Council have stated today and on many other occasions, the only credible solution to the situation in the Middle East is that of a two-State solution, within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent Palestinian State. Every effort must be made to bring all sides to the negotiating table to allow them to find a long-term peaceful solution. The Council must do its part to support the parties in that endeavour and not condone any violations of its resolutions.

**Mr. Ipo** (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): For my part, on behalf of my delegation, I would like to welcome you, Madam President, and express our gratitude for your participation in this meeting. My delegation congratulates Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), on their detailed briefings on the latest developments in the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Côte d'Ivoire expresses its concern over the deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the consequences of which are reflected in sporadic outbreaks of violence and a disastrous humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank. My country notes with regret the recent violence in the Gaza Strip and border towns, which killed 27 people and injured a number of others, including many civilians. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our call to stakeholders to exercise restraint and resume dialogue. We call on the parties to refrain from any unilateral action that could compromise the mediation activities of the international community.

Côte d'Ivoire wishes to reiterate its commitment both to the security of the State of Israel and to the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. We also reaffirm our strong support for the two-State solution, coexisting peacefully within the pre-1967 borders.

The current security and humanitarian situations remain closely linked to a political settlement of the crisis. Côte d'Ivoire therefore encourages the warring parties to continue the peace talks and calls on the Council to support all mediation initiatives towards

reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas in order to enable the Palestinian Authority to regain all its prerogatives on the Palestinian territory.

The Council is concerned about the structural weaknesses affecting the Palestinian territories, in particular an estimated unemployment rate of 53 per cent and a drastic reduction in the supply of decent housing and school and hospital facilities, as well as the continuing shortages of basic social services, such as drinking water and electricity.

With regard to the current humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its call for the convergence of the Council's views and encourages it to work to mobilize the necessary assistance in order to meet the essential needs of the affected populations. My delegation also urges humanitarian donors to continue their support to UNRWA, whose role is crucial in assisting those in need.

My country would like to recall that the peace process remains the appropriate framework for seeking mutually acceptable solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. In that regard, it urges the parties concerned to fulfil their commitments with a view to facilitating the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and creating the conditions for the implementation of the peace agreements, in particular the Oslo Accords.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its support for the tireless efforts of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov and wishes him every success in the execution of his mandate.

We remain convinced that there can be no military solution to the various crises in the Middle East, in particular in Palestine. My country therefore reaffirms that only inclusive talks will make it possible to achieve peace and stability in a region whose peoples have a legitimate aspiration to prosperity and happiness.

**Mr. Meza-Cuadra** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and your presence this morning, Madam Minister, presiding over the work of the Council. We would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov and Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl for their detailed briefings.

Peru notes with deep concern the deterioration in the political and humanitarian conditions underpinning the question of Palestine. Putting an end to that serious

situation is a major undertaking, which requires a sense of urgency. The risk of escalation in the Middle East must be viewed by the Council as a serious threat to the maintenance of international peace and security.

It is from that perspective that we encourage the authorities of both parties to refrain from hate speech, anti-Semitism and discrimination in all its forms. In any society, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity must be seen as an asset and never as a threat.

In that regard, we recall the obligation to implement the resolutions of the Security Council. In particular, we believe that it is urgent to put an end to the increased settlement activities, house demolitions and evictions in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. We recall that such practices represent an open challenge to international law and to specific Council resolutions, such as resolution 2334 (2016), and that they undermine the possibilities of achieving a two-State solution.

Peru strongly condemns the firing of rockets and incendiary devices, which endanger the lives of innocent people and cause material damage, as well as all terrorist acts by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. At the same time, we emphasize Israel's obligation to observe in its responses to such threats the basic principles of international humanitarian law, such as proportionality in the use of force and precaution in relation to its effects.

We also emphasize the urgent necessity to address the basic needs of Gaza's population, as poverty and marginalization are fertile ground for those who promote violence and terrorism. We therefore believe that it is essential to continue mobilizing the international community's support to deal with the still complex financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East so that its crucial assistance work will not be interrupted given the new arguments of those who promote radicalization.

We also believe that it is indispensable to redouble efforts to advance the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process because of the relief that its realization would bring to the humanitarian situation and the impetus that it would provide for a resumption of dialogue with Israel.

We would like to conclude by expressing our full support for Mr. Mladenov in his intense efforts to prevent further escalation and foster a climate of understanding between the parties, with a view to reaching the only

viable solution, that of two States living side by side with secure and mutually recognized borders.

**Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov and Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl for their insightful briefings.

The recent escalation of violence in Gaza has been the most intense of any in recent years, bringing both sides to the brink of a new conflict. This kind of escalation comes with considerable human cost and jeopardizes any prospects for peace. We firmly condemn the firing of rockets into Israeli territory and reaffirm our support for the mediation efforts undertaken by the United Nations and Egypt to reduce tensions. We call on all the parties to exercise restraint and remind them of the vital importance of protecting civilians and respecting international humanitarian law, including its principles of proportionality and distinction.

The humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in Gaza is a continuing concern for us. Free access to humanitarian actors and unconditional access to medical care are essential. In that regard, we would like to commend the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), whose mandate and action we fully support. Despite a precarious financial situation and a difficult working environment, UNRWA is doing a remarkable job, thanks in part to the tireless efforts and professionalism of its staff. Its efforts in the areas of education, health and protection, to mention just a few, enable Palestinian refugees to exercise their human rights and see their dignity respected. And frankly, I do not believe that closing schools in Gaza is the best way to combat radicalization and violent extremism.

Resolving the crisis in Gaza demands fundamental change, including lifting the blockade and fully opening the crossing points, while taking Israel's legitimate security concerns into account. A political solution to the crisis also requires returning full control of the territory to the Palestinian Authority. We therefore call on all the parties to engage constructively in intra-Palestinian talks on reconciliation. Unity is in the interest of the Palestinian people and of peace in the region.

In the month of April alone, 63 houses and other structures were demolished in East Jerusalem, reflecting the ever-increasing pressure on the Palestinian population of the city. The demolitions and subsequent

displacement of people are an integral part of a policy of colonization that is illegal under international law and constitutes a serious obstacle to just and lasting peace. Belgium firmly condemns the colonization policy and its related measures and demands respect for resolution 2334 (2016). The settlement policy undermines the viability of a two-State solution, with two States living side by side in peace and within secure and internationally recognized borders. That is why any credible initiative to revive a peace process must be accompanied by measures to halt colonization, reverse the current trend and allow Palestinians full and free access to their resources and rights.

Bridging the gap between the parties is a matter of urgency. It can be achieved only by respecting international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. There is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution, based on the coexistence of two States, with the city of Jerusalem as their future capital, in accordance with internationally agreed parameters. Those parameters must be the basis for any comprehensive, just and lasting peace plan that addresses both Israel's concerns for its security and the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians for a sovereign, democratic and viable State. The Council has a key role to play in helping to create an atmosphere that is conducive to dialogue, while ensuring compliance with its previous resolutions and international law. It is in that spirit that we will continue to oppose any unilateral initiative that is at variance with those values and principles.

**Mr. Ndong Mangué** (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): This month violence escalated between Hamas militias and the Israeli army, claiming many lives and resulting in injuries and extensive material damage. Such events once again confirm that Gaza is the hot spot in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Equatorial Guinea strongly condemns those events and expresses its condolences to the bereaved families.

We welcome Her Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia back to the Council today. We congratulate your delegation, Madam President, on its successful conduct of our work since your country's presidency began.

We thank the team led by Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his detailed briefing. We also thank Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl for his valuable contribution.

To get back to our monthly meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea would like to express its concern about the continuing aggressive exchanges that have dominated the long-running Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We believe that the escalation of violence has merely exacerbated the hostility between the parties, which has had a very negative effect on the socioeconomic development of the Palestinian people. It has created a sense of insecurity for both peoples and led to the abandonment of arrangements regarding issues that had been agreed on for decades.

The current plight of women, children and all who live in Gaza as it has evolved over the past decade is a clear example of how the tension between the parties affects the Palestinian population. Reliable and recent reports indicate that more than half its people of working age are unemployed and that their prospects of finding work remain poor. A regular supply of electricity and drinking water has still not been restored, while hospital care is inadequate and schools are damaged.

The ongoing situation in Gaza affects the development capacity of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is currently experiencing funding difficulties. We are grateful to UNRWA, which, despite its situation, continues to meet the needs of all those benefiting from its humanitarian aid. In that regard, we reiterate our call to the international community to continue providing voluntary funding to the Agency, which plays a very important role in assisting Palestinian refugees from Gaza and other parts of the Middle East.

We must bear in mind that violence is the cause of the suffering of the people of Gaza. Our delegation therefore urges Hamas and its militias to refrain from any provocative actions against Israel. We also call on the Israeli army to be measured in its responses and do everything it can to prevent the suffering of innocent civilians. However, a political settlement is essential if the blockade of Gaza is to be lifted, and it requires reconciliation between the Palestinian factions.

Now that we have lost the valuable contribution, lasting more than two decades, of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, which worked to prevent conflict and protect the Palestinians there, we are concerned about the future coexistence of Israelis and Palestinians there. In that regard, we hope that the

Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority will take care to avoid provoking the parties unnecessarily. On the subject of the situation in Hebron, we would like to point out that the issues of coexistence that arise in the various occupied Palestinian territories where Israeli settlers and Palestinians cohabit must be addressed while taking into account the fact that errors can be made on both sides, since they are both human, obviously. In that regard, the Israeli occupation forces should act fairly and without bias regarding the origins of those involved.

Finally, Equatorial Guinea's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has always been unequivocal and is based on the international instruments in force. In the same way that we defend Israel's right to exist in peace and security, we therefore also support the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right of Palestine to exist as a free and independent State. That is also the position of the African Union, whose decision we have a responsibility to respect. In short, Equatorial Guinea fully supports a two-State solution, with two States coexisting in conditions of peace and security and in harmony with the other States of the region.

**Mr. Ma Zhaoxu** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would first like to welcome Your Excellency, Madam Foreign Minister, to New York and to thank you for presiding over this meeting. I also thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for their briefings.

China has been closely following the recent tensions in the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem. We express our deep concern and sorrow over the casualties resulting from the clashes. We welcomed the recent ceasefire agreement reached and commend the United Nations, Egypt and others for their good offices. Safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the Palestinian people is a joint responsibility of the international community, and in that context I want to emphasize the following.

First, we must adhere to the principle of a two-State solution in seeking a just and durable solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The international community should base its efforts on the Arab Peace Initiative, the principle of land for peace and the relevant Council resolutions with a view to facilitating

a settlement of the question of Palestine and eventually establishing a State of Palestine with full sovereignty, based on the 1967 borders, and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Any new initiative must comply with those basic international norms. That is the only way to ensure a fair and durable solution that is broadly acceptable to the international community.

Secondly, it is necessary to implement resolution 2334 (2016) effectively. The party concerned must immediately cease all settlement activities in the occupied territories, the demolition of Palestinian houses and the destruction of Palestinian property, and take measures to prevent violence against civilians. It is crucial to ensure that all legal actions or unilateral measures aimed at legitimizing settlements cease immediately and take practical measures to reverse their impact.

Thirdly, there must be unity in promoting a resumption of Palestinian-Israeli peace talks as soon as possible. It is vital to refrain from actions that could worsen the situation or jeopardize trust, and to create the conditions necessary for the resumption of dialogue. Parties that have strong influence in the Middle East must play a constructive role and refrain from unilateral actions that could escalate tensions in the region. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation must be actively facilitated.

In recent years the hotspot issues in the Middle East have triggered numerous humanitarian crises. In extremely harsh and difficult conditions, UNRWA has continued its humanitarian relief efforts with positive results. We have noted that it has been working hard to improve the humanitarian situation of Palestinian refugees, safeguard their rights, alleviate the burden on their host countries, actively promote regional peace and stability and prevent the spread of terrorist and extremist ideologies in the refugee camps. China applauds such efforts. We call on the international community to lend greater support to UNRWA. We hope that the pledging conference to be held in June will be a success. Last year, China greatly increased its annual contribution to UNRWA, and we will continue to contribute to it financially.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia.

I would first like to convey my appreciation and thanks to Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Krähenbühl,

Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for their briefings.

In January, I made a statement in this Chamber to the Council on this very agenda item (see S/PV.8449). Among other things, I underlined that the Palestinian question defined the credibility of the Council. Unfortunately, nothing has improved since then. If anything, the situation has deteriorated. Earlier this month we saw yet another wave of violence in Gaza that resulted in at least 29 casualties on both sides. I appreciate the roles that the Secretary-General and Egypt have played in working to de-escalate the situation. However, we are concerned about the fact that the construction of illegal settlements in West Bank persists and has become a de facto annexation. That is why Indonesia and Kuwait, together with South Africa, organized an Arria Formula meeting on this issue two weeks ago. We have seen the closure of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron and the increasingly limited resources and capacity for humanitarian assistance. We urgently need to revive the political will of all the parties to work towards a credible peace plan and improve the humanitarian situation on the ground. In that regard, there are a number of bottom-line points that I want to raise.

The first is the protection of Palestinian civilians. I would like to recall the report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry issued in February (A/HRC/40/74). The report details the use of extreme violence by the occupying Power, including towards journalists, medical personnel and persons with disabilities. That is clearly against the basic principles of human rights. It justifies our belief that we have no option but to provide international protection for Palestinian civilians.

Secondly, we need to address the humanitarian conditions. Improving the economic and social situation is crucial. Not only is this a matter of fundamental rights, but it would also prevent needless violence.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is facing another year of crisis. We commend the work of its staff, who have been instrumental despite the Agency's difficult security and financial situation. We also thank those who have stepped up their contributions to support the Agency's programmes. Rest assured that Indonesia is fully committed to doing so.

Thirdly, the peace process must be resumed. The cycle of violence must end. All sides must show maximum restraint and be willing to engage in meaningful dialogue. There is an urgent need for a credible process that allows all the relevant parties to engage on an equal footing to work towards an acceptable peace plan. A fresh perspective should not mean abandoning internationally agreed parameters on the issue. For Indonesia, there is no alternative to a two-State solution.

Finally, the world has seen enough evidence of how protracted conflicts in the Middle East have serious repercussions on peace and stability in many other parts of the world. This is indeed an issue that has global consequences. Therefore, the Security Council must make real progress on this issue, particularly on the Palestinian question — the oldest item on the Security Council's agenda.

All parties must exercise maximum restraint and continue working in good faith to advance the peace process by upholding the principles of multilateralism through dialogue and negotiation so that we can arrive at our common goal — a genuine and lasting peace.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

**Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Palestine): I thank the Indonesian presidency for convening this important meeting of the Security Council. I especially thank you, Minister Marsudi, for presiding. I also thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov and Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for their comprehensive briefings and sober assessments of the current situation in all its dimensions.

We reiterate our thanks to the Special Coordinator for his efforts, in cooperation with Egypt, to de-escalate the recent cycle of violence, which brought about more loss of civilian life, destruction and displacement. We stress once again the urgency of providing protection to the Palestinian people and lifting the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, which continues to subject an already traumatized population to dire humanitarian conditions and increasing needs.

We also renew our gratitude to the Commissioner-General and the entire staff of UNRWA for their fortitude in implementing the Agency's mandate, in spite of the very challenging circumstances on the ground and recurrent financial crises. With the generous support of the international community, the Agency continues to provide vital, life-saving assistance to the Palestine refugees in all fields of operation — ensuring education, sustenance, stability and hope where there would otherwise be none. We are grateful to all the United Nations agencies that extend support to the Palestinian people, in recognition that UNRWA remains at the fore of upholding that responsibility pending a just solution to the plight of the refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

We completely reject attacks against UNRWA and its programmes, which are recognized globally as providing exemplary humanitarian and development assistance. Attempts to characterize the Agency as part of the problem, when it has done extraordinary work to alleviate the plight of millions and to contribute to regional stability, are cynical, unfair and rejected — not only by us but also by the vast majority of States that continue to strongly support UNRWA's mandate, as we have heard today. We urge continued support for the Agency and solidarity with the refugees.

The Palestinian people have just solemnly marked 71 years since the 1948 Nakba, lamenting not only the tragedy of the violent uprooting, dispossession and ethnic cleansing of our people from their homeland seven decades ago but also lamenting the Nakba that continues to be suffered as their rights continue to be grossly and systematically violated.

In the absence of justice, Palestinians continue to be denied their rights to return and to self-determination, continue to be dispossessed of their homes and forced off their lands, and continue to be marginalized and subject to all forms of humiliation and deprivation by an illegal Israeli occupation that knows no bounds and stands in absolute contempt of the international community, including the Security Council.

This protracted injustice has kept 5.4 million Palestine refugees away from their ancestral homes and lands, forced to live in limbo, suffering one misery and one crisis after another — their vulnerability and despair interminably deepening. It is a primary factor in the degradation of international law and has bred

a dangerous culture of impunity. And the protraction and gravity of this injustice have kept this issue on the United Nations agenda for decades and have brought us to the Chamber time and time again to plead for the Council to uphold its duties and implement its resolutions, certain that this constitutes the key to the establishment of peace and security.

That conviction is shared by the overwhelming majority of the international community, which continues to reaffirm, at every juncture, the pillars and parameters of a just solution to the Palestine question. The global consensus remains strong on the two-State solution, with the pre-1967 borders, as the foundation of a peaceful solution on the basis of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. The Council has reaffirmed that unequivocally, most recently in resolution 2334 (2016), and it remains the core of the international community's position.

Israel's actions stand in sharp contrast to that global consensus and, regrettably, its intransigence and violence have only been further emboldened by recent decisions by the United States disregarding, contradicting or completely undermining the pillars of that consensus and foundations of a peaceful solution.

Ignoring the Council, Israel has persisted with its crimes and entrenched its belligerent military occupation and settler colonization of our land, especially in and around Jerusalem. Israel's appetite for expansion and annexation has only grown in tandem with its belief that it can get away with it.

After 52 years of calling and appealing, cajoling and appeasing, it should be self-evident to the international community that only accountability can break this toxic cycle to finally end this illegal occupation, assert the rights of the Palestinian people and establish lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace.

No one can deny that we are in need of new efforts and new energy to overcome the suffocating political deadlock, least of all us. But new cannot mean trampling the law or mocking and discarding the long-standing international consensus. As we have heard repeatedly in the Chamber, a solution can be founded only on respect for the law and human rights, the implementation of United Nations resolutions and good-faith negotiations to resolve all final-status issues, including Jerusalem, refugees and borders. For a genuine lasting peace, such

core issues must be justly resolved and cannot simply be relegated as non-issues.

That is the path for ensuring justice and creating the peaceful and secure Middle East we have long sought, where all States can live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders, including an independent, sovereign State of Palestine.

The saying that peace requires painful compromises is borne out starkly by the Palestinian experience. The Palestinian people and leadership made the most monumental and painful compromise over 30 years ago in accepting the two-State solution on the 1967 borders and declaring the independence of their State on only 22 per cent of their historic homeland.

Contrary to the myths and rhetoric, that is actually the most generous offer for peace ever made. But Israel has rejected it over and over, never missing an opportunity to obstruct and undermine it. The one-State apartheid reality we face today is its doing. Claims otherwise are false. We are committed to a peaceful solution and to political, legal, popular and non-violent means for achieving it. Our pledge to respect international law and United Nations resolutions is unwavering. For the sake of peace and coexistence, we have for decades engaged with courage and in good faith in negotiations and cooperated with every single credible peace effort, believing firmly in multilateralism and dialogue as essential for realizing peace.

But assumptions that further, unfair compromise can be forced upon us by financial or political pressures are faulty at best and cynical and destructive at worst. Only in the context of a just solution is compromise possible, logical and defensible. Occupation, annexation and human rights violations will never be acceptable and will never become the new normal, no matter the spin, rhetoric or pretext. Likewise, we cannot accept dangerous attempts to convert this conflict into a religious battle.

In truth, no one can accuse us of not wanting peace or not seeking the best interests of our people. There is only one legitimate basis for peace — international legality — and that cannot be characterized as a condition. It is a minimal ask, not only for Palestine but the wider international community.

As stressed recently by the Palestinian Government, a solution to the conflict can be achieved only through a political solution that guarantees an end to the

occupation and the realization of the national rights of the Palestinian people, embodied in their independent, sovereign and viable State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and realization of the Palestine refugees' right to return, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law.

The Palestinian leadership cannot accept merely improving the lives of the Palestinian people while this illegal occupation continues apace. Nor have the Palestinian people endured decades of suffering and waited nearly a century for freedom to resign themselves to limited autonomy. Those who believe that ignore history, international law and the resolve of a people to attain justice and human equality and dignity.

The vision that will offer Palestinians new opportunities to realize their full potential is one in which independence is the centrepiece. Despite all the setbacks and challenges, the Palestinian people have long demonstrated their resilience, ability and ingenuity. What they need and are entitled to is self-determination and control over their land, borders and resources — not endless international aid. They will not accept half-solutions or *faits accomplis* as their fate, and they will not surrender to despair. They will persist on their journey to fulfil their legitimate national aspirations and inalienable rights, including to be a free people and live in security and peace in their homeland.

We appeal to the international community, particularly the Security Council, to rise to its responsibilities and act now to salvage the prospects for peace and spare future generations of Palestinian and Israeli children the conflict, strife and suffering their ancestors have so tragically borne.

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

**Mr. Danon (Israel):** This is unfortunately not the first time I have had to speak on the troubling reality that is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA has been political since its inception. It continues to amaze me how the States Members of the United Nations do not see the hypocrisy that lies within the Agency's very existence.

Let us start with organization itself. No other refugee population in the world currently has an UNRWA — not the Syrian refugees, not the Yemeni



refugees, not the refugees from any other conflict in the world. Every other refugee in the world is under the jurisdiction of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The United Nations created UNRWA and its unique criteria specifically for the Palestinians. UNRWA defines its beneficiaries as refugees, but an UNRWA refugee is different from an UNHCR refugee. An UNRWA refugee has a special refugee status that is automatically passed down to future generations. Palestinian refugees can obtain citizenship from other countries while maintaining their refugee status. The vast majority of UNRWA beneficiaries do not meet the recognized criteria for what constitutes a refugee under international law. No other refugee population in the world enjoys these same criteria. Why, then, does UNRWA grant its beneficiaries all of this special treatment? Let us take a look at history.

In 1947, the United Nations partition plan proposed the formation of two States — a Jewish State and an Arab State — in the land of the former British Mandate. The Jews accepted the proposal immediately, but the Arabs did not. Following their rejection, five Arab armies launched a war on the young and tiny State of Israel, attacking our borders from all sides. We won. UNRWA was established following that war — 68 years ago.

In 1952, Lieutenant General Alexander Galloway, director of UNRWA in Jordan, spoke candidly about UNRWA's purpose. I was not born back then. He said,

“It is perfectly clear that the Arab nations do not want to solve the Arab refugee problem. They want to keep it as an open sore, as an affront against the United Nations, another weapon against Israel.”

The Palestinians have never let go of that agenda. The unique status of automatic inheritance continues and worsens the Palestinian refugee problem. What began as 750,000 Palestinian refugees has now turned into over 5 million, simply because of UNRWA. By manipulating the scale of the Palestinian refugee problem, UNRWA plays a direct and biased role in the politics of the conflict. In addition, 2.1 million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, who have never crossed an international border, are still considered by the United Nations to be refugees. In every other case on Earth but the case of the Palestinians, a person must be forced to leave one country and cross an international border

into another to be considered a refugee by the United Nations.

Let me ask the Council members, why is it that a Palestinian who was born in Ramallah and lived there his entire life considered a refugee? How come? But that is indeed the case.

Had the original 750,000 refugees been resettled in 1949, the Palestinian refugee crisis — and therefore the illegitimate claim of return — would not exist. But today approximately 5.4 million so-called refugees still hold on to the hope of returning to houses in which they have never lived. That hope, if realized, would erase the State of Israel simply by sheer numbers. Under the guise of the claim of return, the Palestinians, through UNRWA, are refusing to accept the Jewish right to self-determination in any part of the land of Israel and within any borders. Those sentiments run rampant in Ramallah today.

In September, we all heard Mahmoud Abbas say in the General Assembly that he believes in a two-State solution (see A/73/PV.10). But he also said that he would fight for the return of over 5 million so-called refugees. Those views are contradictory. If the millions of so-called Palestinian refugees return, Israel, as the one and only Jewish State, will cease to exist.

Numerous reports reveal close ties between UNRWA employees and the Hamas leadership. In April 2017, Suhail Al-Hindi, an UNRWA teacher and the Chairman of the UNRWA employees' union in Gaza, was accused of being elected to the Hamas leadership. He resigned amid those allegations.

For years, UNRWA has been empowering the refugee problem instead of trying to solve it, while adopting a unilateral political position. The organization's schools have been transformed into terror and incitement infrastructures, with textbooks that deny Israel's existence distributed on the ground and underground tunnels dug by Hamas. UNRWA employees assist terrorist groups by using official UNRWA vehicles to transport weapons and terrorists to carry out attacks against Israel. As if that were not enough, every UNRWA school has a Hamas-appointed representative on campus who is responsible for recruiting students to participate in the Hamas student group.

In the light of recent events, Israel simply cannot take lightly the alliance that appears to have been formed between members of UNRWA and Hamas.

Just two weeks ago, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other terrorist groups in Gaza fired more than 700 rockets and mortars into civilian population centres in Israel. Those rockets hit Israeli homes, hospitals, factories and even kindergartens. Four Israeli civilians, Jews and Arabs alike, were killed. Moshe Agadi, Ziad Alhamada, Pinchas Pshuzman and Moshe Feder were killed in those acts of terror, and more than 100 others were injured. Two Palestinians in Gaza, Falastin Abu Arar and Saba Mahmoud, were also killed by a Hamas rocket that was fired towards Israel, but landed in Gaza. As protectors of international peace and security, the United Nations should wonder why its Agency, which is meant to help the Palestinians, is working so closely with the Hamas terrorists, who do nothing but hurt the Palestinians.

It is therefore in the best interest of UNRWA, Israel, the Middle East and the Palestinian people for the United Nations to take the following two actions. First, the Security Council must finally designate Hamas as a terrorist organization. Secondly, the time has come for a reassessment of UNRWA, its objectives, its success in implementing those objectives and whether or not those objectives match the reality on the ground. It is time to stop pumping money into an organization that has perpetuated the plight of the Palestinian people in Gaza. UNRWA has failed to rehabilitate the Gaza Strip. It has succeeded only in inciting violence against the State of Israel. UNRWA's mandate must come to an end.

I have a question for the representative of UNRWA. Like any other organization, it must have clear goals. Can the UNRWA representative present those goals? How long will it take to reach those goals? Will we still be sitting here in 10 or 15 years? How much money will it cost to achieve those goals? The Security Council should receive answers within three or six months, but we need to hear those answers.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Mr. Krähenbühl to respond to the question raised.

**Mr. Krähenbühl:** I thank you for this opportunity, Madam President. I am especially grateful for the outstanding and repeated expressions of support and trust offered by numerous members of the Security Council present at today's meeting. It is extremely important both for Palestinian refugees and the staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to have such very strong expressions of trust and confidence in

the work, results and contributions of the organization to regional stability and human dignity.

I will first address the question that was raised by the Permanent Representative of Germany regarding the pledging conference. The meeting, otherwise known as the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to UNRWA, is an annual feature in the calendar. The particular week of 24 June was identified in December 2018, and any suggestion of ulterior motives in the decision about the date would be mistaken. The pledging conference fulfils a very important role in seeking — at a very critical juncture in the year, in particular just before the summer — to mobilize additional resources that are needed to keep our different activities running, installations open and community served. We therefore appeal, as several of the participants highlighted, for renewed engagement and strong additional commitments to be announced at that moment. We would be very grateful for that.

I would like to briefly react to some of the remarks that were made by the representative of the United States in relation to UNRWA. When the original decision of the United States to cut funding to UNRWA was announced in early 2018, as those present can imagine, it was a matter of deep regret and disappointment at my level and the level of the Agency because it affected one of the most robust and rewarding partnerships in the history of humanitarian and development work.

At the same time, of course, we are extremely conscious that the decision of a Member State to contribute or not, and if so at what level, to funding humanitarian organizations is a voluntary and entirely sovereign decision, of which we need to take note. At the same time, I want to say here, repeating something that I said in the course of last year, that while recognizing that fact — in other words, that it is a voluntary and purely sovereign decision whether Member States support or not humanitarian organizations such as UNRWA — I unreservedly reject the accompanying narrative and the suggestions that the UNRWA model is “irredeemably flawed”.

I think that it is very clear that the responsibility for the protracted nature of Palestinian refugeehood, the increasing number of refugees and the growth in needs lies squarely and clearly with the parties themselves and the international community, in particular because of the lack of will sometimes or, at other times, the utter

inability of the political actors to once and for all bring about a solution in political terms to that long-standing crisis, which everybody in the region — Israelis, Palestinians and others — deserve and have deserved for very long. The suggestion that one could simply deflect attention from the political responsibilities and somehow make a humanitarian organization responsible for the unresolved crisis is therefore something that I believe to be misguided and certainly unhelpful.

The Permanent Representative of Israel addressed a question to me specifically, so I will just take a few minutes to address some of the points he made. The question that was specifically addressed was: For how long? Indeed, I return the question — for how long? — because it was never the intention of any member of the General Assembly, and most certainly never the intention of anyone in UNRWA, to see the organization in existence and operation for as long as it has been.

Once again, our ongoing activities are the illustration of two things, one of which is positive in terms of what can be done with regard to investing in the capabilities, the aspirations and the hopes of a long-term refugee community and, the other of which, as I said, is the abysmal failure in political terms to bring about a solution. The way in which UNRWA was mandated has to be recalled here.

The question addressed to me as to how long it should continue was not addressed to the right entity. It is the responsibility of the General Assembly to answer that question because, when we were tasked, we were not a self-created organization that one day decided that this would be an important issue to address. We are an organization mandated by the General Assembly and, until a decision is made that that should change, we will continue with resolve, determination, pride and humility to implement the mandate that we were given. Given the attempt to delegitimize our actions with general statements about the nature and definition of refugeehood in ways that I have really never come across in terms of the misrepresentations of actual situations, let me talk and address the question of the definition of “descendants”.

It is well known to the members of the Council and General Assembly — and, therefore, I repeat it here with great clarity — that under international law and the principle of family unity, the children of refugees

and their descendants are also considered refugees until a durable solution is found. Both UNRWA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognize descendants as refugees on that basis — a practice that has been widely accepted in the international community, including both donors and refugee-hosting countries.

Palestine refugees are not distinct from those of any other protracted refugee situation, such as those from Afghanistan or Somalia, for example, where there are multiple generations of refugees considered by UNHCR to be refugees and supported as such. As I have said, protracted refugee situations are the result of the failure to find political solutions to the underlying political crisis.

Let me now just briefly address the comments that were made by the Permanent Representative of Israel concerning UNRWA’s neutrality. I can simply not accept that the efforts that UNRWA undertakes every single day, in one of the most — if not the most — polarized contexts on the planet, to preserve the integrity, dignity and neutrality of its operations be questioned in that manner. I reject it robustly, and the Permanent Representative knows it because we have had such conversations before. During the war in 2014, UNRWA discovered weapons components in some of its schools during the conflict. We found that out. We informed the parties — Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We informed the world and condemned the fact that those weapons components had been found.

When two of our staff members were elected to positions two years ago and allegations emerged that they had been elected to positions in Hamas, we not only immediately investigated the matter, but as soon as we found the truth we dismissed them. They did not leave of their own accord. When, the same year, during repair work carried out by UNRWA under our schools, we discovered that tunnels had been dug by Hamas, we not only condemned Hamas publicly for that, but we also sealed the tunnels by injecting cement into them, which is fairly extraordinary in terms of the measures of the robustness of what humanitarian organizations are prepared to do in a conflict environment where its staff is at risk every single day, not because we invented the mandate, but because we were tasked by the General Assembly.

Therefore, it is with great determination that we will uphold the integrity of this organization, use and work with the immense generosity and support of States Members that trust our work, and seek and continue to engage in dialogue both with the United States, Israel and other parties on aspects of critical review that we are always and have always been prepared to look into. The integrity with which we approach such situations is a matter of public record, and we have received widespread recognition for it.

I apologize that I took a little bit longer than intended. I remain available for any further elements that members might require during the informal consultations.

**The President:** 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 12.45 p.m.*