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Seventy-fourth year

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Provisional

President: Mr. Szczerski..... (Poland)

<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Côte d'Ivoire	Ms. Niamke
	Dominican Republic	Ms. Morrison González
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Germany	Mr. Schulz
	Indonesia	Mr. Djani
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Duclos
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	South Africa	Mr. Matjila
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ..	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

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 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: I am afraid that I must begin this month's briefing to the Council by focusing on the rising spectre of violence in the West Bank and Gaza and the threat for a regional escalation. Both are happening against the backdrop of the complete political deadlock of the Middle East peace process and the lack of any prospective to revive it.

On numerous occasions, the Secretary-General and I have warned that the lack of a political horizon towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the two-State solution, unilateral moves on the ground, including settlement construction and expansion, terror attacks and a multitude of other factors create an explosive mix that can be resolved only by a leadership that is willing to return and capable of returning to the table for meaningful negotiations towards a sustainable and just peace and that can stand up to extremists and radicals and uphold what we in the international community, the Security Council and the region have said so many times, namely, that lasting peace can be based only on the idea that Israelis and Palestinians live side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition, as both peoples have a legitimate and historic right to their own statehood.

That can be achieved on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and mutual agreements. If we stray from that framework, we will see the inevitable radicalization. We cannot give up on the goal of a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The alternative

is too horrible to fathom. In the past month, we have seen an increase of violent incidents, including settler-related violence in the West Bank, and continuing tensions in and around Gaza.

On 8 August, a 19-year-old Israeli was murdered in the West Bank, stabbed close to the settlement of Migdal Oz. Two Palestinian suspects were later arrested by the Israeli security forces. On 15 August, two Palestinian teenagers stabbed and injured an Israeli police officer in Jerusalem's Old City. One of the assailants was shot and killed. The following day, two Israeli teenagers were injured in a car-ramming attack near the settlement of Elazar, south of Bethlehem. The 26-year-old driver was shot and killed by an off-duty Israeli policeman. On 23 August, an improvised explosive device was detonated near the settlement of Dolev, north-west of Ramallah, killing a 17-year-old Israeli girl and severely injuring her father and brother.

I unequivocally condemn all attacks on Palestinian and Israeli civilians. Such dangerous attacks serve only those who want an escalation. Violence and terrorism must be condemned by all. Their glorification by Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian factions is indeed deplorable.

In East Jerusalem, two months after the killing of a 21-year-old Palestinian in the Al-Issawiya district, tensions remain high as the Israeli security forces continue to carry out raids and arrests. Overall in the past month, two Palestinians and Israelis have been killed and at least 102 Palestinians and seven Israelis have been injured in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

In response to the terrorist attack on 23 August near the settlement of Dolev, the Israeli Government decided to submit to the High Planning Committee a plan for the establishment of the new neighbourhood in Dolev with approximately 300 new housing units. That decision is part of the practice to expand settlements in the wake of attacks in the West Bank.

In addition, settlement expansion, demolitions and seizures of Palestinian property continued during the reporting period. Citing the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain, the Israeli authorities demolished or seized 22 structures in Area C, including 14 donor-funded aid structures and 11 structures in East Jerusalem. Among the demolished structures were four water cisterns, serving two herding communities in

southern Hebron, which are already facing severe water shortages. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the demolitions have resulted in the displacement of 19 people, including six children, and affected the livelihoods of some 2,000 others.

I reiterate the statement made by the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory that Israel's policy of destroying Palestinian property is not compatible with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

On 5 and 6 August, Israel's High Planning Committee advanced plans for some 2,400 housing units in Area C settlements, with 800 units reaching the final stage of approval. Some 200 units in East Jerusalem were also advanced during the reporting period. Further, the Security Cabinet of Israel discussed on 30 July the advancement of another 6,000 housing units and, in a rare step, unanimously approved granting construction permits for 715 housing units for Palestinians living in Area C.

The expansion of settlements has no legal effect and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law. By advancing the effective annexation of the West Bank, it undermines the chances for establishing a Palestinian State based on relevant United Nations resolutions as part of a negotiated two-State solution.

Despite the relative calm over the past two months, the situation in Gaza remains very fragile as violent incidents continue. During the reporting period, some 11 rockets and mortars were launched from Gaza towards Israel. Most were intercepted. Two landed in the Israeli town of Sderot on 17 and 25 August, causing material damage. In response, just yesterday, Israel decided to temporarily reduce the fuel transfer to Gaza by a half. That unfortunate decision has already resulted in a reduction of energy supply to the Gaza Strip.

On several occasions during the reporting period, some 15 militants from Gaza breached, or attempted to breach, the perimeter fence, triggering retaliatory fire or air strikes by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in which nine militants were killed. The weekly protests at the perimeter fence also continued. Some individuals engaged in violent activity. The IDF responded mostly with riot dispersals means. However, live ammunition was also used. One Palestinian was killed and 545 were injured, including more than 150 children.

Although there were fewer incidents involving incendiary kites, balloons and other devices being launched from Gaza as compared to the previous period, at least 11 fires were reported. Israel must calibrate its use of force and use lethal force only as a last resort and in response to imminent threat of death or serious injury. Hamas must prevent the indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards Israel. It must ensure that protests at the fence remain peaceful and prevent provocation. I would also like to reiterate that the fate of two Israelis civilians and the bodies of two soldiers missing in Gaza remain an important humanitarian concern for all.

I am afraid that I also have to raise the alarm on the deteriorating situation in the health-care sector in Gaza, particularly the lack of resources, including medical supplies. According to the World Health Organization, in July, 254 items, or 49 per cent, of essential medications, and 225 items, or 26 per cent, of medical disposables were reported to be at less than one month's supply at Gaza's central drugstore.

On 20 August, Deputy Special Coordinator McGoldrick visited a hospital in Gaza and met with a group of women beneficiaries of projects supported by the United Nations Occupied Palestinian Territory Humanitarian Fund. He heard about the large number of health issues that Palestinian women are facing as a result of the humanitarian crisis. Doctors highlighted the scarcity of cancer drugs in Gaza and the unpredictable referral system for treatment outside Gaza as serious challenges. The United Nations is committed to working with all parties, including donors, to prevent a health crisis in the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, access to drinking water has improved with the completion of a new desalination plant, which will serve up to 200,000 people. I would like to express my appreciation to the State of Kuwait for generously funding that project through the Islamic Development Bank. The past month also saw an increase in the number of permits given to Palestinian businessmen and labourers from Gaza.

While those efforts are not enough to fundamentally change the harsh realities of life in the Gaza Strip, they serve to lessen the impact of the ongoing humanitarian and economic crises. The past month also saw serious movement and access constraints continue on national staff from United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations in Gaza. Those

restrictions affect nearly all our national staff, who are unable to leave Gaza for practically any purpose. Israel must significantly improve the movement and access of goods and people to and from Gaza as a step towards lifting the closures in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

The Muslim holiday of Eid Al-Adha and the Jewish commemoration of Tisha B'Av coincided this year on 10 August, which led to tensions at Jerusalem's holy sites. Israeli authorities allowed Jewish visitors to access Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount on that day under police protection. In the days before the holiday, Muslim religious leaders urged worshippers to come en masse to the Al-Aqsa Mosque for Eid prayers.

In clashes between police forces and worshippers that took place before and during the entry of Jewish visitors into the compound, 29 Palestinians were injured, including the Chairman and members of the Islamic Waqf Council. According to media reports, Israeli security forces also sustained four injuries. I reiterate the call for the status quo at the holy sites to be upheld in line with the special and historic role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as Custodian of the Muslim and Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem.

Following the demolitions of Palestinian homes in Areas A, B and C of the West Bank on the East Jerusalem side of the barrier, which Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo briefed the Council on last month (see S/PV.8583), President Abbas stated on 25 July that the Palestinian leadership would suspend compliance with agreements signed with Israel and start putting in place mechanisms to implement that decision. For the sixth consecutive month, the Palestinian Government refused to receive Israel's transfer of tax revenues less than the full amount owed to it.

On 22 August, however, following months of consultations, Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) agreed for the PA to receive approximately \$568 million in reimbursed taxes levied by Israel on fuel. That is an important measure that will temporarily relieve the PA's financial situation. Disagreement on the bulk of the tax revenue transfers, however, remains. In that context, I reiterate my call on both sides to continue their engagement in a constructive manner and comply with the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations.

Turning briefly to other developments in the region, on 25 August media reported that two unmanned aerial vehicles had crashed in the southern suburbs of Beirut. On 26 August, also according to media reports, a

military base of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command in the Bekaa Valley, along the Lebanese-Syrian border was targeted in an air raid. President Aoun and constitutional leaders in Lebanon have referred to the drone incident as an assault on Lebanon's sovereignty and a blatant violation of resolution 1701 (2006). The United Nations takes note of those statements as well as of the ongoing investigation into the incident by the Lebanese authorities. The United Nations reiterates its appeal to all concerned to cease violations of resolution 1701 (2006) and fully implement its provisions. The United Nations calls on the parties to exercise maximum restraint both in action and rhetoric.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat, as I said at the beginning of this briefing, that tangible steps can, and must, be taken to reverse the negative trajectory of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict — urgently — in order to counter the rising spectre of violence and the threat of regional escalation. The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and prior agreements, and to realizing the vision of two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security.

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

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Chief of Cabinet of the President of Poland.

At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his informative briefing. I also want to take this opportunity to commend Mr. Mladenov for his relentless efforts to restore peace and stability in the Middle East. I can assure him that Poland highly values his role in the process of the stabilization of one of the most crucial regions to the world's security.

Regrettably, for yet another month, we have witnessed the fading of the prospect for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, deepening the atmosphere of mutual distrust. Only a couple of days ago, rockets were fired once again from Gaza towards southern Israel. Fragments of one of them struck a home in the town of Sderot earlier this month. Light was shed on worrisome reports of several incidents of infiltration into Israeli territory by armed Palestinians

from the Gaza Strip, which were followed by exchanges of fire.

I want to reiterate that Poland strongly condemns such acts, as well as all instances of terrorism and incitement. Five years have passed since the previous full-Scale conflict in the Gaza Strip. It is imperative that all parties take the necessary actions to stop another wave of hideous violence and engage in good faith in efforts aimed at achieving lasting de-escalation.

Poland is also concerned about any unilateral actions taken by Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We deem the settlement policy in the occupied territories illegal under international law and a formidable obstacle to peace that undermines the chances for establishing a viable Palestinian State. Reaching a breakthrough on intra-Palestinian reconciliation remains a prerequisite to peace. Poland calls on the Palestinian factions to engage in the reconciliation process and commends Egypt on its role in facilitating it. There is a pressing need to restore a consensual political atmosphere for a meaningful peace process to be delivered. A failure to do so could result in reaching a point of no return.

All parties must demonstrate their commitment to peace through actions and policies. Poland remains a proponent of a negotiated two-State solution, based on the internationally agreed-upon parameters, which should lead to Israel living side-by-side, in peace and security, with a sovereign, neighbouring and democratic Palestine. We support all international efforts aimed at breaking the current impasse in the peace process. We commend the United States for its commitment to that end. Nevertheless, without the far-sighted vision of the leadership of both sides and their readiness to compromise, as was the case at Camp David in 1978, reaching lasting peace will be impossible.

We furthermore believe that, without respect for the basic rules of international law, including those pertaining to the protection of civilians, there can be no lasting peace in the Middle East. Poland continues to actively advocate for compliance with international humanitarian law, which constitutes the fundamental means of protecting civilian populations.

As we heard during the Special Coordinator's briefing, last weekend we witnessed air strikes in Lebanon near the Syrian border. Those followed the crash of two drones in the southern suburbs of Beirut during the weekend. We have underlined many times that increased instability in one country may quickly

further destabilize an already violent region. We therefore call on all sides to exercise maximum restraint, as the situation in the region remains very tense.

In that context, I also want to underline that Poland remains firmly committed to supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We consider it to be a major contributor of vital services to those in need. Supporting the Agency's work is an act of humanity that makes a tangible difference in the lives of those directly affected by conflict.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): Welcome you to New York, Mr. President. It is good to have you with us in the Security Council this morning. I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and his tireless efforts.

I want to start by expressing our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Rina Shnerb, who was brutally murdered in an improvised explosive devise attack while hiking in the West Bank with her family. Our thoughts and prayers are also with her father and brother, who were seriously wounded in the attack. That attack occurred just weeks after the murder of Israel Defense Forces Corporal Dvir Sorek. Attacks such as those undermine attempts to find a solution to the conflict and build trust between the parties. The perpetrators of those brutal murders must be brought to justice.

I also want to highlight Hamas' praise for those attacks, which is deeply disturbing. Speaking about the death of Rina Shnerb, a Hamas leader said, "I bless this operation and greet the hands of those who executed it". How can that be tolerated? And how can so many here at the United Nations refuse to condemn an organization, Hamas, whose leaders make such statements?

This month we also continued to see rocket attacks launched from Gaza into Israel by Hamas and other terrorist factions, as well as armed infiltration attempts. That represents an alarming escalation, and we condemn those attacks. It is beyond time for Hamas to put the interests of the people of Gaza first by rejecting violence, instead of seeking to extract concessions through attacks and threats.

In that vein, I recently met with the family of Hadar Goldin, whose body is being held by Hamas as a bargaining chip, along with the body of Oron Shaul. As we tragically recall, Hadar was killed during a ceasefire at the end of the 2014 Gaza conflict, and it has been almost five years exactly since his family began their struggle to have Hadar's remains returned. As the Special Coordinator noted, the return of those remains is an issue of serious humanitarian concern, and we urgently call for their return, which is long overdue, to take place now. We also cannot forget Avraham Mengistu and Hisham Al-Sayed, who continue to be imprisoned by Hamas. Their families must recover their loved ones. Those are the acts of a brutal terrorist organization, whose actions should and must be condemned.

To conclude, I note that for years this body has come together to discuss this contentious topic; but we have seen little success in making progress towards a solution that creates a lasting, secure and prosperous future for both Israelis and Palestinians. The United States remains committed to pursuing a comprehensive peace through direct negotiations. We encourage all those present to keep an open mind regarding the United States efforts and to remain constructively engaged with our team as we move forward.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to welcome you, Mr. President, to preside over this meeting. We also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his comprehensive briefing. We look forward to the submission of at least two written reports per year on the state of the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), in accordance with the agreements reached on different issues in the Security Council, the provisions of that resolution and the note by the President contained in document S/2017/507.

“The Security Council is the highest world body. After the Council, we leave our issue in the hands of the Almighty, until Judgment Day. If justice for all people cannot be attained here, where should we go? Please help us. We call upon the Council to help us so that we do not commit acts that are at variance with our beliefs, those of the Council and the world.” (S/PV.8183, p.10)

Those are the words that His Excellency the President of the State of Palestine, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, the highest Palestinian official, used in addressing the international community from this Chamber in

February 2018, when he called for the liberty, dignity and independence of his people, just like other peoples. Almost one and a half years have passed since he launched that call and, regrettably, we have not lifted a finger in response.

The Oslo Accords are nearly 25 years old, and we have had great hopes for leading to a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, the Israeli acts of aggression continue to entrench the occupation and undermine any real chance for peace that would ensure the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The occupying Power continues its arbitrary detentions and the demolition and seizure of Palestinian homes.

Moreover, the occupying Power continues the construction of settlements in an unprecedented manner, especially after the most recent announcement made by the Israeli occupation authority to build over 2,300 settlement units in the West Bank. It also continues to expand the already existing settlements and forcibly displace Palestinian civilians, in another blatant violation of resolution 2334 (2016). It continues, as well, to tighten the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and its aggression on Islamic and Christian sanctuaries. The Israeli occupation authority takes illegal unilateral decisions, such as freezing part of Palestinian tax revenues and refusing to renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, not to mention its measures that aim to change the historic and democratic nature of the city of Jerusalem. It tries to impose a fait accompli and exercises sovereignty over the territories that it occupies.

There are those who believe that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories cannot get any worse than they are at present. However, the daily violations against the Palestinian people are unprecedented, given the dangerous precedents that the Palestinian question has recently witnessed, the most notable of which was the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the relocation of embassies there, while ignoring the fact that East Jerusalem is Palestinian land that has been occupied since 1967.

All those measures, and many others, have compelled the Palestinian Authority to halt its implementation of the agreements that were reached with the Israeli occupying Power. We all have responsibilities to help meet the legitimate aspirations of

the Palestinian people and to uphold the responsibilities that we have been tasked as Security Council members to protect civilians, given the escalating violence. We call upon Israel, the occupying Power, to cease all acts of aggression against the Palestinian people, commit to the protection of civilians and guarantee the implementation of international law and the relevant resolutions. Palestine cannot remain the exception to the rule. In addition, the international community must be committed to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and provide its budget with the necessary resources and financial contributions so that it continues to offer its educational, health and social services to the community of Palestinian refugees.

In conclusion, despite what President Abbas said before the Council, we are committed to peace as a strategic choice. Arab States concluded the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002. It is based on international law, resolutions of international legitimacy and the principle of land for peace. We cannot accept a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict that is not in line with those international terms of reference, to be preceded by an end to the occupation by Israel of the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem; its recognition of the State of Palestine and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination and right of return; compensation to Palestinian refugees; and resolving their cause in a just manner, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Moreover, we call on Israel to stop its repeated violations of the sovereignty of Lebanon and to respect its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1701 (2006).

Ms. Niamke (Cote d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Welcome to New York, Mr. President.

My delegation commends Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his detailed briefing on the latest developments in the situation in the region, including the Palestinian question.

Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the ongoing stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The hope created by the Oslo Accords has been eroded, giving way to radical rhetoric and its

corollary of episodic violence that contributes only to the deterioration of the situation in Gaza and the West Bank. The lack of a viable framework for dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian sides within which they could resolve their differences leads to further mistrust, which fuels outbreaks of violence. In the light of that impasse, my country encourages the parties concerned to listen carefully to the calls for dialogue launched by the international community.

Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that just and lasting peace is not possible without a negotiated political solution and compromises on the most complex issues. To that end, it is important that both sides refrain from any actions that could lead to a resurgence of deadly clashes, which would ruin hopes for peace and undoubtedly plunge the region into a spiral of conflicts with disastrous consequences.

Côte d'Ivoire has faith in the virtues of dialogue and urges the international community to intensify its mediation efforts in order to bring both parties back to the negotiating table for further peace talks without preconditions and under the auspices of the United Nations. This is the opportunity for my country to reaffirm its commitment to the security of the State of Israel and the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and, consequently, our support for a solution involving two States, coexisting peacefully within the framework of the 1967 borders.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, while the ongoing opposition between Fatah and Hamas further complicates the development of appropriate responses to the many difficulties faced by the Palestinian people. The estimated unemployment rate of 53 per cent, the drastic decline in the supply of decent housing, school and hospital infrastructure and the continued decrease in basic social services, such as drinking water and electricity, are all vulnerabilities that deserve the attention of development partners and humanitarian agencies.

Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its call for a convergence of views among Council members and encourages them to work to mobilize the necessary assistance to meet the essential needs of those affected. My delegation also urges international partners, as providers of humanitarian assistance, to continue their support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose crucial role

in alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people is well established.

My delegation commends Mr. Mladenov on his resolute commitment, which clearly illustrates the mediation efforts of the United Nations in the quest for a negotiated political solution to the current crisis between Israelis and Palestinians. Côte d'Ivoire would like to reiterate its support and encourage him to continue his good offices with the parties to the conflict. The Council also has an urgent duty to overcome differences and work towards peace, security and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation welcomes you, Mr. President, to the Security Council to preside over today's meeting. I would also like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and for his efforts.

Recently, the conflict in the Gaza Strip has escalated. The situation in Jerusalem remains grim. Settlement construction has continued. Inflammatory rhetoric is frequent. The Middle East peace process has stalled. At the same time, the situation in the Middle East has become increasingly tense. Local conflicts continue to emerge. China is very concerned about the situation. I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize the following points.

First, the Palestinian question is at the core of the Middle East issue and at the root of the region's issues. Safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the Palestinian people is a shared responsibility of the international community. Foreign occupation and historical grievances are at the source of the complexity and insolubility of the Palestinian question. The international community should uphold multilateralism, promote dialogue and negotiations and find a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli issue through political consultations. Violence or threat of force will not help solve the problem. All the relevant parties should move towards each other, actively promote internal reconciliation in Palestine, put an immediate end to inflammatory words, actions and mutual accusations and avoid unilateral measures that undermine trust, so as to create favourable conditions for resuming dialogue.

Secondly, efforts should be made to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue, based on existing international consensus. The two-State solution is the only right

way to solve the Palestinian-Israeli issue. The relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative constitute the fundamental parameters to be followed in that regard. The international community should proceed on that basis to promote an early resumption of peace talks between the two sides, with a view to establishing a fully sovereign Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Any new initiative should be in line with those international parameters.

Thirdly, resolution 2334 (2016) should be effectively implemented. Settlement-building continues, and the prospect of the two-State solution has been severely undermined. The parties concerned should immediately stop all settlement activities in the occupied territories, stop demolishing Palestinian houses and destroying the property of the Palestinian people and should take measures to prevent violence against civilians. All legal and unilateral actions aimed at legitimizing settlement-building should be stopped immediately, and practical measures should be taken to redress their impact. China hopes that the Secretary-General will submit to the Council another report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

Fourthly, we should pay close attention to, as well as improve, the economic and humanitarian conditions in Palestine. The party concerned should fully lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip as soon as possible, effectively fulfil its obligations under relevant international treaties, such as the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations, and fully implement the relevant United Nations resolutions. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has made vigorous efforts to improve humanitarian conditions for Palestinian refugees, including by safeguarding their rights, easing the pressure on host countries, actively promoting regional peace and stability and preventing the spread of terrorism and extremist ideology in refugee camps. China appreciates those efforts. The international community should continue to lend firm support to UNRWA and contribute to improving humanitarian conditions for Palestinian refugees.

China has always been committed to promoting the Middle East peace process and will continue to follow the four-point proposal put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping to promote a political settlement of the Palestinian issue. China will continue to strengthen communication and cooperation with the major parties

and countries of the region and will play a positive and constructive role in achieving peace in the Middle East.

China is also assisting Palestine to the best of its ability in the area of development. On 30 July, China and Palestine signed a document on the implementation of a Ramallah schools project, which will provide hundreds of secondary school students in Ramallah with access to nearby schools. China has also actively promoted local exchanges in cooperation with Palestine, supported local social development and provided support to UNRWA. We will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestine through bilateral channels.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his enlightening briefing, which provided us with a clear and precise outline of the situation and the issues at hand.

First of all, I would like to draw our collective attention to the further deterioration of the situation in Gaza and the need to address it. The recent increase in tensions we are witnessing today must compel us to closely follow developments in Gaza in the coming weeks. We must do everything we can to avoid any new escalation of the conflict, as we have been observing since early May. In that context, we call on the parties concerned to exercise full restraint. Further civilian casualties must be avoided at all costs. I would also reiterate France's strong condemnation of shooting from Gaza towards inhabited areas in Israel.

These tensions are a reflection of the broader crisis throughout Gaza, which is simultaneously humanitarian, economic and political in nature. As we know, lasting stability will be possible in Gaza only in the context of a negotiated settlement. That requires the full return of the Palestinian Authority, on the one hand, and the lifting of the blockade, on the other hand, accompanied by credible security guarantees for Israel.

Secondly, I would like to refer to the dangers that today weigh heavily on the two-State solution and risk irreversible damage to it. The ongoing settlement policy in East Jerusalem and the West Bank continues to take us further away from a two-State solution. France condemned the recent decisions taken by the Israeli authorities on 5 and 6 August to allow the construction of 2,500 housing units in the West Bank, in addition to the 4,500 new housing units that have been approved since the beginning of the year. These decisions are all the more disturbing given that this policy has been

accompanied by worrisome statements regarding the annexation of all or part of the occupied territories.

The demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are also continuing unabated. France, along with its European partners, has condemned the demolition of several buildings by the Israeli army in the area of Wadi Al-Hummus, East Jerusalem. Those demolitions in zones A and B are unprecedented, illegal under international law and serve to further undermine the Oslo Accords. As reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016), settlement is illegal under international law. This policy aggravates tensions on the ground and undermines the conditions for a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians and must be brought to an end.

Finally, France followed with concern the clashes on the Esplanade of the Mosques that took place on 11 August in the context of Muslim and Jewish holidays. We call on all parties to refrain from any act or statement that could exacerbate tensions and to demonstrate a sense of responsibility with a view to mitigating the situation. France recalls its commitment to preserving the status quo of 1967 at the holy sites of Jerusalem. To call the status quo into question would be fraught with the risk of regional destabilization.

As the backdrop continues to worsen, France calls for safeguarding the two-State solution. A solution to the conflict must be, as we know, fundamentally political and based on the long-standing parameters, defined in particular by the relevant Council resolutions, and in response to the legitimate aspirations of both parties, namely, the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders, with Jerusalem as its capital. France, in conjunction with its European partners, stands ready to support all efforts, including economic initiatives, as long as they fall within the framework that we have collectively defined.

With such a solution pending, we must urgently focus on the immediate improvement of the humanitarian situation, especially in Gaza, where basic essentials — such as medicine in particular, but also fuel — must be able to be delivered. We must also pay special attention to what Mr. Mladenov has just told us about the risk of a health crisis in Gaza.

Moreover, while the Palestinian Authority is experiencing a worrisome fiscal situation, France notes with satisfaction the agreement reached on tax

exemptions on oil imports by the Palestinian Authority. This represents a first step towards a resolution of the ongoing crisis over Israeli budgetary payments to the Palestinian Authority. In that connection, France encourages both parties to continue their discussions in that direction.

Allow me to reiterate that, in the absence of a political solution for a just and lasting peace, the programmes of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East are essential to provide vital assistance to more than 5 million Palestinian refugees, thereby contributing to the stability of the entire region.

In conclusion, turning to recent developments in Lebanon, as the Permanent Representative of Kuwait mentioned, I would like to take the opportunity of this briefing to express France's deep concern regarding the situation. In the context of current regional tensions, it is imperative that all parties avoid an escalation and comply with the relevant Council resolutions, while also refraining from any violation of the Blue Line.

Mr. Pesteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

Once again, we note that the situation is deteriorating, and tensions are mounting. The settlement-building policy and related measures of eviction and demolition are continuing unabated in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This policy undermines respect for the basic rights of Palestinians, as well as fundamentally — and soon, irremediably — undermining the two-State solution, which we support.

Belgium strongly condemns the policy of settlement building, as well as any initiative aimed at consolidating it. We will not recognize any unilateral annexation of the occupied territories. We recall that Israel, as the occupying Power, is obliged to ensure the protection of the rights of the Palestinian population. Moreover, we condemn the attacks against the Israeli population. We are also concerned about the recent clashes at Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount. It is imperative to preserve the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem.

For 12 years, life in Gaza has been dominated by the blockade, which is seriously affecting the health and education sectors, among others. Women and young people are especially impacted. We welcome the

efforts of humanitarian actors. In particular, I would like to stress the importance of the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Beyond humanitarian support, there will be lasting stability in Gaza only through a negotiated settlement, which involves lifting the blockade and opening up crossing points, while taking into account Israel's legitimate concerns about its security. In the meantime, we call on the Israeli authorities to ensure unhindered access to humanitarian and development actors and goods.

A political solution to the crisis also requires the full return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. We reiterate our call to the parties to relaunch the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process.

Children continue to be severely affected by this conflict, as also shown in the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict of 20 June 2019 (S/2019/509). We call on all parties to refrain from the excessive use of force. We urge Israel, as the occupying Power, to put in place preventive and protective measures. We call on Palestinian movements to refrain from encouraging children to participate in violence.

We are also concerned about the detention of children and the circumstances in which it takes place. We call on the Israeli authorities to respect international norms governing juvenile justice, to stop submitting children to administrative detention, to end all forms of ill-treatment in detention and to refrain from enlisting child detainees as informants.

Belgium remains convinced that there is no other option than a negotiated solution, based on the coexistence of two States, with the city of Jerusalem as the future capital of the two States, in accordance with the internationally agreed parameters. Those parameters were defined and endorsed by the Council. It is therefore necessary for the Council to guarantee their implementation. Belgium will continue to work to that end in order to meet the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis.

Mr. Duclos (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and your presence here this morning, Sir, to lead the work of the Security Council. We thank Mr. Mladenov for his detailed briefing.

Peru notes with deep concern the continuing deterioration of the political and humanitarian conditions underlying the question of Palestine. We must continue condemning the recurrence of indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population by Hamas and other radical Palestinian actors, the disproportionate nature of Israeli responses and the confrontational rhetoric of their respective authorities. This dynamic, coupled with the inaction of the Security Council and the inertia on the part of certain key actors, has a negative impact on an already highly volatile environment. Bringing this grave situation to an end is a challenging but urgent undertaking.

Under the prevailing circumstances, we reaffirm our commitment to the only solution we deem viable and consistent with international law, namely, that of two States with internationally recognized and secure borders, to be negotiated directly between Israel and Palestine, on the basis of the borders in place in 1967, which must also lead to the determination of the final status of Jerusalem.

We recognize the right of Israel to safeguard its own security and existence through self-defence measures exercised legitimately in accordance with the principles of legality, proportionality and precaution. In that regard, we must remember Israel's obligation to comply with the resolutions adopted by the Security Council. In particular, we view it as urgent to put an end, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), to the intensified settlement activities, property demolitions and evictions in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. Such practices contravene international law, seriously jeopardize the territorial integrity of the Palestinian State and undermine the prospects for reaching a solution based on the existence of two States.

We furthermore emphasize the urgent need to continue efforts to address the serious humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, which has deteriorated following cuts in the financing of aid programmes. In that regard, it is imperative to provide continuity to United Nations infrastructure and development projects in Gaza, make gains in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process and continue mobilizing the support of the international community to address the financial difficulties facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We also wish to recognize the willingness of the Israeli Government to agree

on a solution allowing for the release to Palestinian authorities of previously withheld fiscal revenues.

Following the recent episodes of violence in Lebanon, Peru underscores the need to respect the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty, in line with the provisions of international law and, specifically, resolution 1701 (2006). We urge all the parties involved to act as called for by the prevailing circumstances, refrain from unilateral actions that could escalate tensions and prioritize diplomatic channels.

In conclusion, I would like to note that Peru looks forward to receiving the written report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) next month, which will contribute to greater transparency and deeper discussion within the Council.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I should like to join others in welcoming you, Sir, to the Security Council today, as well as to thank Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing and, through him, his team for all they are doing.

I want to start by stating clearly that the brutal murder of an Israeli soldier on 8 August and the improvised explosive device terror attack, which killed a 17-year-old Israeli on 23 August, are both an outrage. This perpetual cycle of violence does not serve anyone's interests and must end.

The United Kingdom is also concerned by the increase in tension in Gaza, including the four attempts this month by Gazan militants to infiltrate Israel, which contribute to an environment of terror. We utterly condemn the abhorrent rocket attacks by militants in Gaza. Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and all militant groups must cease all actions that are violent or provocative or put civilian lives at risk. We encourage the Palestinian Authority, Israel and regional and international actors to put forward sustainable, long-term proposals for resolving the threat posed to Israel's security by Hamas and for returning the Palestinian Authority to Government functions in Gaza.

It is also important that we continue to address the underlying causes of the economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza, in particular, by improving movement and access for people and goods. On this point regarding the humanitarian situation in Gaza, let me say that the United Kingdom is of course firmly committed to supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

(UNRWA) and Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. UNRWA is a vital humanitarian and stabilizing force in the region. The United Kingdom has increased its funding to £65.5 million this year, to match our support from 2018, but does remain concerned about the funding crisis.

Turning to settlements, the United Kingdom is seriously concerned about the plans announced earlier this month by Israel to advance over 2,300 housing units in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. We urge Israel to halt its settlement expansion, which is contrary to international law and promotes the effective annexation of the West Bank. As we put on record before in the Security Council, the United Kingdom would be strongly opposed to any move to annex all or part of the West Bank. Such a move would be deeply damaging to prospects for lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians and could not pass unchallenged.

During last month's open debate (see S/PV.8583), many Member States expressed alarm regarding the demolition of Palestinian properties in Wadi Al-Hummus in Sur Bahir. I reiterate that the United Kingdom remains seriously concerned by the continued demolition of Palestinian property and evictions of Palestinians by Israeli authorities. This practice causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and is harmful to the peace process.

I also want to touch on the clashes that took place on the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif on 11 August, during the religious holidays of Eid Al-Adha and Tisha B'Av. The United Kingdom urges all parties to maintain calm, avoid provocation and uphold the status quo to ensure the safety and security of the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif and all who worship there, particularly during religious observances.

I noted what Mr. Mladenov had to say about the recent escalation between Israel and Hizbullah. That is a cause for concern for the United Kingdom. Of course, we support Israel's right to security, but we also condemn violations of Lebanon's sovereignty. We urge both sides to show restraint and to de-escalate. A conflict would be in no one's interests.

Turning to the more positive developments, the United Kingdom welcomes the agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to transfer outstanding fuel taxes. But we remain worried about the impact of Israel's wider decision to withhold tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority. We encourage

the Israeli Government to reverse its decision, which undermines the Oslo Accords. We encourage the Palestinian Authority to accept the remainder of the revenues on a provisional basis, as refusing all revenues only harms Palestinians.

Every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. The ongoing violence serves to underline that a just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace to both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue. The United Kingdom therefore continues to encourage the United States Administration to bring forward detailed proposals for a viable Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that address the legitimate concerns of both parties. And, as we have said before, the best way to achieve that is through substantive peace talks between the parties, leading to a two-State solution, based on 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as a shared capital, and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we welcome you, Mr. President, to New York. We also thank Poland for having included the Israeli-Palestinian issue on this month's agenda.

I would also like to thank the team of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for the detailed and informative briefing he just gave us. His ongoing dedication and commitment to his sensitive mission in the Middle East are commendable.

On Friday, 23 August, the response of Israeli forces to the protests in the Gaza Strip resulted in hundreds of injuries. Rockets launched at Israel from Palestinian territories by radical groups and Israeli air strikes on Gaza cause significant damage on both sides. That is compounded by improper exchanges between Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories and local Palestinians. Israel must respond with proportionate force and the terrorist attacks must stop. The environment is quite hostile, which is worrisome for Equatorial Guinea.

That is the sad state of coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. The conflict between the two peoples has gone through different scenarios in the almost 70 years of its existence, sometimes reaching the highest alert levels. And that, which is no small thing, has happened in the full view of all the members

of the Council, the United Nations and the entire international community.

The lack of a sustainable and definitive political solution to this conflict, over such a long period — in addition to being an unending source of destabilization for the entire region — could raise questions about the prestige and leadership of this Organization in general, and of the Council in particular. That is what we all absolutely must avoid. Instead, we should surprise those who doubt the effectiveness and ability to achieve results of the United Nations. We have sufficient tools to do so, but we sometimes lack consensus and unity among all Council members.

We held a debate recently on international peace and security that focused on the Middle East (see S/PV.8600), in which, among other things, we underlined the importance of a political process based on inclusive dialogue between the parties to the conflict. Almost all of us agreed that a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians would be possible only through a two-State solution. To that end, we stressed the essential role of the United Nations in all the conflicts in the region — a critical responsibility that falls to the Security Council as the principal organ for the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security.

With regard to the Gaza Strip, we welcome the efforts of the United Nations, which is working closely with Egypt to mediate and reduce tensions in that enclave. According to Ms. DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, last month those efforts led to an Israeli-authorized extension of the Gaza fishing zone from 10 to 15 nautical miles, the return to the Gaza Strip of 44 confiscated fishing boats and certain flexibility in some of the conditions for the travel of businessmen based in Gaza.

We also welcome the United Nations efforts to generate employment through the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which recently created about 9,000 employment opportunities, including 3,000 for women. In any case, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains troubling, and the Council must continue to be seized of this issue.

Our delegation hopes that all efforts continue in this positive direction so that we can resolve all the political, economic and humanitarian concerns that threaten the stability of this population enclave, which has always

created a volatile atmosphere that does not favour either of the parties. In that regard, we urge Israelis and Palestinians to refrain from unilateral actions that could exacerbate an already complex environment. We must alleviate the suffering of the people of Gaza.

Finally, on the Palestinian question in general, the delegation of Equatorial Guinea reaffirms its commitment to supporting all initiatives that take into consideration existing instruments of international law, such as the resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly, as well as those of other internationally recognized entities. For Equatorial Guinea, it is paramount to find a solution resulting from negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians that is applauded by the international community. That solution must be a two-State solution, with independent States living in peace, with security guarantees for both and for the other States of the region.

Ms. Morrison González (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the presence of the Secretary of State of the Chancellery of the President Poland. It is an honour to have you among us. We also thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

The Dominican Republic reiterates its grave concerns about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The demolition and seizure of Palestinian property by the Israeli authorities continue. Sixty-six buildings were recently demolished or seized owing to a lack of construction permits, which are difficult for Palestinians to obtain as they are issued by the Israeli authorities. This practice must stop. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the recent incidents caused the displacement of 90 Palestinians, including 58 children.

Although there has been a reduction in violence in Gaza in recent months, protests continue in peripheral areas. Last Friday, 2 August, during what was the sixty-ninth week of the Great March of Return protests, the Israeli forces again used firearms and other violent means of controlling the protests. There are reports of 64 injured, including 27 children. The Dominican Republic calls on the international community to condemn all violations of international law and to ensure that civilians taking part in the protests are protected.

The Dominican Republic continues to defend the current international consensus whereby the only way forward for Palestinians and Israelis is the negotiation

of a two-State solution with borders based on the 1967 lines. We reiterate the importance of creating an enabling environment for peace in order to pave the way for talks on all final-status issues, including the issue of Jerusalem.

With regard to Palestinian attacks against Israel, the Dominican Republic maintains its position, namely, that we emphatically condemn any act of violence. The launching of rockets and mortars towards civilian populations is inhumane and prohibited under international law. Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad must stop this practice immediately.

The humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories continues to be a source of concern and could be further undermined if the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which provides assistance to over 3 million Palestinians, does not return to a level of funding that enables it to meet the needs of at-risk populations. A recent report by the UNRWA ethics office revealed evidence that UNRWA senior management has engaged in "sexual misconduct, nepotism, retaliation, discrimination and other abuses of authority". As a consequence, two donors, Switzerland and the Netherlands, immediately suspended their contributions. Belgium followed suit shortly after.

In conclusion, we urge all the parties concerned to work together to open the door to talks and to avoid provocations and soaring rhetoric. We trust that the work of the international organizations is vital in providing relief, reducing the risk of violence and finding a solution to this regrettable situation.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Let me begin by welcoming you, Mr. President, to the Chamber and thanking you for presiding over a meeting on this very important issue. I also wish to thank Mr. Mladenov for his important update on the situation on the ground. Indonesia shares his concern about the rising spectre of violence in the West Bank and Gaza. This is an issue that really must be addressed.

At a debate on this issue last week, we discussed at length peace and security in the Middle East (see S/PV.8600). It is important to point out that, during the debate, there was a general consensus that the long-standing Israel-Palestine problem is the core issue of conflict in the region, and that arriving at a durable solution on this issue requires our commitment to

multilateralism and the rule of law. With that in mind, I wish to highlight some pertinent points.

First, violence and provocations must stop. We are appalled at the continuing provocative actions by the occupying Power, in breach of international law and various United Nations resolutions. In Gaza, violence against Palestinian civilians persists, with no accountability. In East Jerusalem, the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound by Israeli occupation forces on the morning of Eid Al-Adha two weeks ago is a serious act of provocation that gave rise to religious and political tension. We need to make sure that such reckless action against the holy site never happens again in order to avoid creating further instability in a region already experiencing unprecedented turmoil. These cycles of violence and provocation must stop. The Government of Israel must adhere to international law, particularly international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

Secondly, the root cause of the conflict must be addressed. We must never forget the elephant in the room, which is the illegal occupation of Palestinian land by Israel. Israel's persistent illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories is a clear sign of its effective ongoing occupation of Palestine. This illegal action is designed to alter the demography, characteristics and geographic realities of the occupied Palestinian territories, thereby making a solution to the protracted conflict more difficult to attain. This is the root cause of the problem that requires the Council's utmost attention. It is quite unfortunate that this organ has failed to respond to such illegal actions, regardless of the various attempts that have been made. In other words, multilateralism is under constant threat.

Thirdly, humanitarian assistance must be sustained. Since 2018, there has been a sharp deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, the coercive environment, which is intensified by the ongoing demolitions, forced evictions, discriminatory planning, access restrictions, settlement expansion and settler violence, is increasing the vulnerability of the Palestinian population. In addition, Palestinian refugees are experiencing increased suffering due to the lack of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Indonesia shares the view that improving UNRWA management is crucial but, at the same time, UNRWA should not be defunded or shut down. The role of UNRWA is vital

not only as a lifeline, but also as a safeguard of the Palestinian right of return against all the Powers that want to do away with it.

Regarding the reference by the Special Coordinator to the Israeli drone crash in Lebanon, Indonesia strongly condemns that attack as well as the daily violation of Lebanese sovereignty by Israel, which constitutes a clear violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Indonesia believes that the Council needs to take these daily violations seriously as a potential trigger of renewed conflict.

To conclude, Indonesia wishes to reiterate the need for the members of the Council to unite in greater commitment to the ever-increasing challenge of the peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, guided by multilateralism and international law. As stated during my intervention last week, overcoming the violence and atrocious humanitarian conditions in Palestine and achieving a durable solution to the conflict will come down to the ability and willingness of the Council to act courageously to realize a two-State solution.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): First of all, let me begin by extending a very warm welcome to you, Mr. President; it is great to have you here in New York. Let me also thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive and unfortunately, once again, very sobering report.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is first and foremost a political conflict that requires a political solution. Germany therefore remains fully and firmly committed to a negotiated two-State solution based on the internationally agreed parameters as the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As already stated last month (see S/PV.8583), we are extremely concerned about repeated statements from various sides in Israel calling for an annexation of all or parts of the West Bank. Should such statements become Government policy or law, it would constitute a clear violation of international law, which prohibits the acquisition of territory by force.

It is a truism that there is no fast track to peace. However, bypassing the most controversial questions in the process by taking them off the table or creating facts on the ground will not lead to sustainable peace. Germany will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations.

Nonetheless, I would like to underscore once more that Germany remains steadfast in its commitment to the security of Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State. We will not be silent when Israel's security or right to exist is questioned or compromised.

Joint efforts to restore a political perspective for the resumption of the peace process are urgently needed. We support any attempts to restart meaningful direct talks and negotiations between the parties, with the objective of achieving lasting peace. We therefore call on all parties to refrain from taking unilateral measures and counter collectively the negative developments on the ground, which are undermining the viability of a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the internationally agreed parameters.

With regard to the recent developments that the Special Coordinator referred to, we are appalled by the repeated deadly attacks on Israeli civilians in the West Bank in the past weeks and strongly condemn the repeated rocket attacks by Hamas or other groups from Gaza into Israeli territory, which put Israeli security and the lives of civilians at risk. That increase in violence is deeply worrying. It makes the resumption of much needed dialogue even more difficult and will only create further suffering. It cannot be justified and must stop immediately.

Concerning the recent incidents on the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount, we recall the paramount importance of the agreed status quo for keeping the peace at that unique site. One of the main obstacles to a political settlement is the ongoing Israeli occupation and the continued settlement activities in the territories occupied in 1967. The continued expansion of settlement activity by Israel is a matter of great concern. We firmly reiterate our position that settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law and undermine the prospect for a negotiated two-State solution.

The recent decision of the Government of Israel to build more than 2,000 housing units in settlements in the occupied West Bank and this week's announcement of an additional 300 housing units in one of the Israeli settlements only fuel the already heightened palpable tensions between Israel and the Palestinian sides, especially in the run-up to the September elections in Israel. Therefore, we call on all sides to refrain from further escalation.

Before I conclude, I will make two brief remarks.

First, with regard to the importance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in our view UNRWA remains indispensable to meeting the basic needs of Palestinian refugees. As the largest bilateral donor, Germany remains committed to UNRWA and continues to significantly contribute to the Agency's budget.

Lastly, concerning Lebanon, in view of the recent incidents with regard to Lebanon, as we heard from the Special Coordinator, we call on all sides to cease violations of resolution 1701 (2006) and exercise maximum restraint in order to avoid any escalation.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): We welcome you to New York, Mr. President, and thank you for presiding over this meeting of the Security Council today. My delegation would also like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing and tireless efforts in taking forward the Israeli-Palestinian question.

At the outset, South Africa would like to remind the Council of the United Nations and the Council's own decisions taken in resolution 242 (1967) calling for Israel to withdraw its armed forces from the territories occupied in the conflict. I would like to express South Africa's unwavering support for the two-State solution and the agreed peace processes aimed at ensuring two viable States of Israel and Palestine with the possibility of them coexisting side by side to the mutual benefit of all the people in the region.

We also express our grave concern about the continued disregard for the prevailing and long-standing Middle East peace process, such as the systematic foreclosing of the final-status issues, particularly with regard to the borders and the status of Jerusalem.

South Africa believes that the continued expansion of settlements violates international law, undermines the prospects for achieving peace and contravenes the decisions of the Security Council, effectively damaging its credibility. If the Council cannot uphold its own decisions, it will lose its effectiveness and purpose. We continue to call for the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and note that the overt violation of Security Council resolutions usually evokes stricter measures on the party responsible for such infringements. The Council should be consistent and fair vis-à-vis all United Nations Member States.

South Africa believes that the Council ought to work towards restoring the trust in the legitimacy of the peace process that has been pursued for decades and prevent the further development of antagonism between the parties. The rockets fired into Israel from Gaza in recent days and the deadly Israeli responses are clear indications that, as long as the impasse continues, the instability will be perpetuated and more lives will be lost.

We further call for the written response by the Secretary-General on this matter in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), and we look forward to the circulation of the written report ahead of the next reporting cycle in September. Furthermore, we also express our concern about the continued human rights violations in the occupied territories and emphasize that those violations only contribute to the festering hatred between Palestinians and Israelis.

We believe that, instead of antagonistic acts, such as building additional barriers and walls, closing schools and killing civilians, the Council should encourage gestures of hope and the building of trust between the parties, namely, the Palestinians and the Israelis, which has long since been lacking. The Council should urge the current generation of Israeli and Palestinian leaders to resolve this core issue in the Middle East. Passing the problem onto the fourth generation of Palestinians and Israelis since 1948 would be disastrous, and the Council would regret it for many years to come.

South Africa therefore proposes that the Council also reconsider its long-delayed visit to the region. In that regard, should some members of the Council be unwilling to participate in the visit, the Council should consider a mini-mission, which could include those members interested in taking part in such a visit.

We believe a visit to the region will be a clear indication that the international community has not washed its hands of the core and long-standing conflict in the Middle East. Similarly to the Council's other field visits, it will also provide Council members the opportunity to meet relevant actors on the ground, including the Governments of Israel and Palestine, convey our good wishes to them and help them resolve this question.

In conclusion, South Africa remains firmly convinced that dialogue is the only viable option that can effectively address the issue of self-determination for the Palestinian people and calls on the Council to

implement its resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). South Africa remains hopeful, and we continue to urge both the Israeli and Palestinian sides to resume the peace process to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution to the Palestinian question.

As we approach the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, and concurrently the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Security Council, we should recall and implement the relevant Security Council resolutions establishing the State of Israel, which we did, and the State of Palestine, which we are failing to establish.

We look forward to any initiative, including on the part of the United States of America or any other party or parties, that can inject positive momentum into the Israeli-Palestinian question. This crisis must be resolved in our lifetime.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his report on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. We welcome you, Mr. President, as Secretary of State of the Chancellery and Chief of the Cabinet of the President.

The Middle East is at the heart of global politics. The region is beset by many crises, old and new. Russia is closely following the development of the situation, given that we have long-standing relations with the States of the region, based on mutual respect, mutually beneficial cooperation and common interests.

We note with concern the ongoing tension in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. It is further compounded by Israel's ongoing settlement activities and the situation in and around the Gaza Strip.

Against that backdrop, it is clear that unilateral actions do not bring us closer to resolving the old and new problems in the region. The situation of some United Nations Member States trying to put Governments of other States beyond the reach of the law is particularly harmful. We, like many of our partners, see clearly that the only way out of all of that is by pooling international and regional efforts, with a central role played by the United Nations and its Security Council. That premise must be the basis for all relevant efforts and initiatives.

Our memory is still fresh of the statement made in this Chamber a month ago by the Special Representative for International Negotiations of the United States on the Middle East peace process, Mr. Jason Greenblatt

(see S/PV.8583). Frankly, statements on the uselessness of seeking consensus on the Middle East peace process within the United Nations and the futility of the relevant Council resolutions are of great concern to us. Choosing to destroy all that has been achieved on creating an independent Palestinian State, living in peace alongside Israel, is fraught with the most terrible consequences for the entire region. It would allow only for the further radicalization of the Arab street.

In the light of the statement of our American colleagues on the need to review and revise old decisions of the United Nations on the Middle East peace process, I would like to recall that it was thanks to General Assembly resolution 181 (II) that Israel was established. The declaration on the establishment of the State of Israel also mentions it. We would like to know how far the United States is willing to go in revising old and unnecessary decisions.

For our part, we are convinced that unilateral actions that ignore international law will not produce results. They are detrimental to the prospects for a just and lasting solution to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian problem. We support the involvement of the Quartet of international mediators as the only mechanism to support the Middle East peace process endorsed by the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Russia is doing everything in its power to promote all of the activities in the Middle East peace process, including by offering a potential platform for meetings between Israel and Palestine, without preconditions. We are also undertaking efforts to restore intra-Palestinian unity, and we welcome the steps taken by our Egyptian colleagues in that direction.

In that context, the Security Council's mission to the region is long overdue, which many of our colleagues have already mentioned. It should bolster trust, facilitate the resumption of negotiations between the parties and prevent the failure of the international community's efforts to ensure conditions for the implementation of the only viable settlement on the international legal basis. That framework was developed by the Security Council, and its revision should be done within the Security Council, too. No unilateral steps can replace the key tenets of the two-State solution, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the status of the occupied territories, including the Syrian Golan.

We will continue to provide assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East. Its activities are not only humanitarian but also political and provide an important stabilizing effect in the Palestinian territories and the Middle East region. All final-status issues, including Jerusalem, basic security issues and refugees, should be the result of direct negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Seeking consensus on those sensitive issues during direct negotiations is essential to their future sustainability.

We consistently call on all interested parties to take steps to de-escalate and settle the problems in the Persian Gulf through political and diplomatic means. Enhancing the military presence, including of States outside the region, creates the risk of armed clashes. That crisis endangers peace and security in the Middle East as a whole, as well as international efforts to resolve regional conflicts. It is increasingly relevant to look at the need to develop a lasting mechanism for collective security in the region, based on equitable dialogue and cooperation. The relevant Russian initiative focuses on addressing the deadlock in conflict situations and developing confidence-building and security measures.

We should also continue our efforts to eradicate the terrorist presence in the countries of the region. We call on all forces of good to engage in collective efforts in that regard, while ensuring respect for the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant decisions of the Security Council, as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, and rejecting double standards. We urge that those principles be respected in all countries facing such a threat: Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen.

I must also note that we are extremely concerned about the information regarding the incident on

25 August involving two unmanned aerial vehicles over the Lebanese capital. According to some reports, they were Israeli reconnaissance drones. The situation is exacerbated by Israel's simultaneous arbitrary missile strikes on targets in neighbouring Syria, the most recent of which was on a military facility near Damascus last weekend.

For our part, we have repeatedly pointed out the danger of such activities in a tense regional atmosphere, and we warned that they could lead to a large-scale armed conflict with unpredictable consequences. We again call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and strictly comply with international law, including the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In that context, we reiterate our commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and stability of Lebanon. At the same time, we reaffirm the importance of the role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, whose mandate we are soon to extend. The activities of peacekeepers have a stabilizing impact not only on the Blue Line but also within Lebanon and the Middle East as a whole.

Russia will actively contribute to stabilizing the situation in the Middle East. We are ready to cooperate with all interested players, and we call on all to work together.

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 11.40 a.m.