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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Ms. Pierce	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Germany	Mr. Schulz
	Indonesia	Mr. Djani
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Ugarelli
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	South Africa	Mr. Matjila
	United States of America	Ms. Norman-Chalet

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 Ms. Tania Hary, Executive Director of Gisha, Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent 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 that regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: We meet today in the aftermath of the most serious recent escalation between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza. Although the immediate crisis was defused, the situation remains highly volatile.

Following Israel's targeted killing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) Commander Baha Abu al-Ata in Gaza, Palestinian militants launched more than 500 rockets towards Israel. This latest escalation was preceded on 1 November by some 10 rockets that were launched from Gaza towards Israel, one of them hitting a house in Sderot city. While, according to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), 90 per cent of the rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome, those that landed caused damage to residential and commercial property. Seventy-eight Israelis were treated for injuries or shock. The indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars at civilian population centres is unacceptable and must stop immediately.

In response to the rocket attacks, the IDF conducted a number of strikes against PIJ and militant targets in Gaza. Thirty-four Palestinians were killed, more than 20 of whom were identified by the IDF as militants and including three women and eight children. One of the fatalities was reportedly caused by a Palestinian rocket falling short inside Gaza. In total, 109 people were also injured.

Among the people killed in Gaza were eight members of a family, who were killed in a single Israeli strike. The IDF has reportedly admitted that their home was mistakenly targeted. That is a tragic and heinous incident and must be thoroughly and impartially investigated. There is no justification for the killing of civilians anywhere.

I want to recognize today the extraordinary effort by Egypt, working closely with the United Nations, to ensure that calm in Gaza was restored after 48 hours of hostilities. Had our efforts failed, we would certainly be in the midst of another war that would be far worse than the terrible conflict in 2014. However, the dangers have not passed. Although for now the arrangements that came into effect in the early hours of 14 November are holding, sporadic rocket launches have continued, prompting Israeli retaliation.

But there are also other risks. Israeli closures and intra-Palestinian division feed a desperate reality. Militant activity, rocket fire and retaliatory air strikes constantly risk more violence. Over the past year and a half, the United Nations has worked hard to prevent escalation and to implement the United Nations package for Gaza as endorsed by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC). As a result of that work, the electricity supply was restored to an average of 13 hours per day; more than 16,000 temporary jobs were created; and work is progressing on reviving an industrial zone to create long-term economic opportunities. All those measures have admittedly eased tensions but they fall far short of what is required in terms of both financial resources as well as political commitment by Palestinian leaders and measures by Israel.

Gaza ultimately requires a political solution. Militant activity cannot continue to undermine the chances for peace and development. Israel cannot continue with its policy of closures that stifle development. Palestinian leaders cannot continue to

avoid the devastating consequences of their internal political division.

I take this opportunity to thank those in the international community who have contributed to the implementation of the AHLC plan and call on all to increase their support to United Nations programmes on the ground. Most urgent is the need to address the collapse of the health system in Gaza.

Nevertheless, our important humanitarian engagement must not divert us from the political goal of helping Palestinians to develop freely, without relentless occupation, and Israelis to live in security, free from the fear of terror and rockets. The only way to ensure this goal is to work towards and achieve a two-State solution — one that is based on relevant United Nations resolutions and in which Gaza is an integral part of the future State of Palestine.

Protests in Gaza at the Gaza perimeter fence have also continued, with a small number of participants engaging in violent activities. The IDF responded with riot dispersal means and live fire, injuring over 300 people, including women and children. The Israeli security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly necessary, as a last resort, and in response to an imminent threat of death or serious injury, in accordance with international law. Hamas must ensure that protests at the fence remain peaceful and prevent provocations.

If we want a way out of this crisis that leads to something more than just another ceasefire, the road is clear. There must be no more firing of rockets, retaliatory strikes or provocations; the understandings that sustain calm in Gaza must be upheld; efforts must be redoubled to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and lift the closures; and the focus must be towards a long-term, sustainable political solution that includes allowing the Palestinian people throughout the occupied territory to vote and elect their leaders for the first time since 2006.

In recent weeks, I have engaged with senior Palestinian officials and different factions and am encouraged that all sides have moved from their entrenched positions and made important concessions towards making elections a more realistic prospect. Renewing the legitimacy of all national institutions is important for the future of the Palestinian people. In my discussions, I have emphasized all the critical elements required for elections to be credible. First, they must be organized across the occupied Palestinian

territory — in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza — in line with the Palestinian Basic Law, electoral legislation and international best practices. Secondly, both legislative and presidential elections are necessary and should be held within a clearly identified and reasonable timeframe. Thirdly, broad intra-Palestinian agreement must be reached on the modalities of holding elections.

As Palestinians hopefully accelerate their efforts to hold elections, the Israeli-Palestinian political deadlock continues to manifest itself in the continuation of negative trends on the ground. On 1 November, some 2,600 housing units were advanced by the Civil Administration High Planning Committee, including 182 units in Mevo'ot Yeriho, an outpost in the Jordan Valley that the Israeli Government decided in September to retroactively legalize as a new settlement. Other notable plans include 382 units in the Dolev settlement, west of Ramallah, and 609 units in the large urban settlement of Beitar Illit, west of Bethlehem.

I take the opportunity to reiterate that we regret the announcement made on 18 November by the United States that it no longer views settlements as inconsistent with international law. The United Nations position remains unchanged. As per resolution 2334 (2016), Israeli settlement activities are a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures have also continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain in Area C and East Jerusalem, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 48 structures, resulting in the displacement of 101 Palestinians, including 46 children. This practice must immediately cease.

Violence also continues across the occupied Palestinian territory. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 46 Palestinians, including nine children, and three Israelis were injured in various incidents, including during clashes, search-and-arrest operations and settler-related violence. On 11 November, a 22-year-old Palestinian man was killed in circumstances that indicate that he did not pose a threat. Such acts must be thoroughly and impartially investigated and the perpetrators held accountable. The IDF has reportedly

launched an investigation into that incident. Four days later on 15 November, a Palestinian journalist lost an eye after being reportedly shot by the Israeli security forces while covering a demonstration in the village of Surif, north of Hebron.

I remain concerned by the continuing and sometimes escalating settler-related violence. Attacks on Palestinians and their property in the context of the annual olive harvest have continued despite preventive measures adopted by the Israeli authorities. These attacks, along with the restrictions on Palestinian farmers' access to their land in areas adjacent to Israeli settlements and behind the West Bank barrier, have undermined agricultural livelihoods.

Despite the agreement reached last month between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which resulted in the transfer of some \$425 million of clearance revenues to the Authority, the underlying disagreements between the two parties remain, including over Israel's deductions. It remains critical that both sides engage in a constructive manner with the goal of restoring the revenue transfers in full, in line with the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations. The United Nations stands ready to assist that process.

In a positive development, on 11 November UN-Women, with support from the Government of Norway, launched a \$1.2-million programme to support the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda in Palestine, including the development of the Palestinian national action plan for the next four years on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

We have regularly updated the Council and its members on the financial challenges that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to face. Cash flow is reaching a record low. I welcome the extension of the UNRWA mandate until 2023, as adopted by the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly on 15 November, but given the stakes, I urge the swift mobilization of support to enable the Agency to sustain its operations.

Turning now briefly to other developments in the region, the situation in the Golan remains calm. However, the continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement remain of concern, particularly in this volatile time for the region. On 19 November, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) observed two unidentified objects being fired from a location on the Alpha side

and heard three explosions. The IDF informed UNDOF that it had intercepted rockets fired from Syria. The Syrian authorities informed UNDOF that they had no knowledge of any firing of rockets. On 20 November, the IDF carried out air strikes against what it described as Iranian Quds Force and Syrian armed forces targets in Syria. Further details of the developments in the occupied Golan will be reported in the Secretary-General's report on UNDOF, to be submitted to the Security Council on 3 December.

In Lebanon, peaceful nationwide and non-sectarian demonstrations, triggered by frustration against Government policies, led to the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri on 29 October. Security forces have largely responded with restraint, allowing peaceful demonstrations to continue despite heightened tensions at roadblocks. After one month of unabated protests, a political deadlock hinders the nomination of a Prime Minister-designate and the formation of a new Government, amidst a rapidly deteriorating economic situation. The United Nations has called for a swift formation of Government that is responsive to the protestors' aspirations and has the Parliament's backing. The United Nations also encourages the Lebanese security forces to continue to protect peaceful demonstrators.

In the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), following decreased joint operations with the Lebanese Armed Forces prompted by the popular protests, UNIFIL's operations, in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, returned to normal levels in early November. The Council will be briefed on resolution 1701 (2006) on 25 November.

In closing, I would like to return to the issue of the long-overdue Palestinian elections. The Palestinian people have a right to vote and elect their leaders. For too long, they have been denied that right and division has set in. A whole generation's voice for the future has yet to be heard. Intra-Palestinian division is like a cancer eating away at the aspiration for statehood, peace and the commitment to democracy, rule of law and human rights.

Elections are not a gift; they are a right. If elections are to build unity, they must take place in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. How can we heal the devastating division if people in Gaza are not able to vote for their future as well? The United Nations will do

all that is necessary to support a successful Palestinian election process, but we must be cognizant of broader risks as well. The continuing risk of war threatens to upend all our efforts to prevent escalation and revive a political process. The United Nations will continue our efforts to prevent another devastating conflict despite all odds.

Upholding the international consensus on resolving the conflict and all final status issues on the basis of the two-State solution, as per relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and mutual agreements, is just as important. Unilateral moves fuel anger and disillusionment and significantly undermine the prospects for establishing a contiguous and viable Palestinian State with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Hary.

Ms. Hary: I thank the Council for the invitation to be here today.

I was born in Haifa, in northern Israel, and became a United States citizen at the age of five. My parents had moved to Los Angeles in pursuit of a better life. Their parents before them had fled to Israel to escape conflict and poverty and, like most of us in this Chamber, I believe, I took it for granted that the ability to travel shaped every aspect of my life. I moved back to Israel in June 2007, just days before Hamas took power in Gaza and Israel's subsequent imposition of a near total lockdown on the Strip. Over the past 12 years, I have seen the devastating impact of Israel's closure policy on Gaza but also on Israel. Three major military operations and several smaller operations — like the one that we saw last week — have taken the lives of thousands of people. I do not believe that we are better off or safer for it in Israel.

Gisha means “access” or “approach” in Hebrew. We are the only Israeli human rights organization focusing on the situation in Gaza and on how reality there is shaped by our Government's actions. The permanent discourse about Gaza, especially in Israel but also at the United Nations, revolves around terror or crisis. We are lucky at *Gisha* to see nuance, entrepreneurship, resilience and potential through our broad caseload and our range of contacts. In my comments here today, I hope to share a sober analysis with the Council of

where we are, but I also hope to convey my optimism about what the future could hold. There is much that can be done to meaningfully alter course, given a broader understanding of what is at stake and also political will.

Today, Israel continues to exercise control over many aspects of daily life in Gaza. The Rafah crossing, which connects Gaza to Egypt, is vital. However, Israel controls all access to the West Bank, the movement of commercial and humanitarian goods and Gaza's sea space, airspace, access to farmland, civilian infrastructure and the Palestinian population registry. In 2007, Israel further reduced access to a point of closure. Entry of civilian goods was restricted, all exit of goods was blocked and travel of people was allowed only in what Israel called “exceptional humanitarian cases”. Far beyond just protecting legitimate security concerns, Israel defined its approach as economic warfare and also the separation policy. It was an effort to apply pressure and simultaneously reinforce Gaza's isolation from the West Bank, primarily to achieve political goals.

Certain practices have changed, but overall the picture remains the same. Israel believes that it can manage the humanitarian situation in Gaza and it has an interest in maintaining the physical and political fragmentation of Palestinians, which allows it to pursue annexation in the West Bank. The changes that have been made to the closure, while important, have not been significant enough to alleviate humanitarian concerns, let alone address wider needs. Unemployment in the Strip remains among the highest in the world. Electricity is available just half of the day and families struggle to secure clean water. Hopelessness and despair have increased, particularly among young people, who account for 70 per cent of the population — that is, 1.4 million of the 2 million residents of the Strip. They see no future and feel abandoned by regional leaders and by the international community.

Access is repeatedly cited by the World Bank and by Israeli security officials as a catalyst for well-being and stability, and yet as the situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, counterintuitively, obstacles are placed on people trying to improve their conditions and live their lives peacefully. To give a few examples, last year *Gisha* invited 24 people from Gaza to a meeting of Israeli, Palestinian and foreign stakeholders about the situation in the Strip. Only four — all men — received permits, while the State claimed that “women played too minor of a role in the economy” to be relevant to

discussions about improving economic activity. If you are a woman in Gaza, you are less likely to meet Israel's criteria for work-related travel. Our own field coordinator was also blocked — he and other human rights defenders do not meet the criteria for travel. We recently represented a company in Gaza wishing to sell its cookies in the West Bank, but an ongoing ban on the exit of food products continues to undermine the once thriving food sector in the Strip.

I am honoured to be here today to share the stories of these courageous women and men who joined us in challenging movement restrictions. It actually gives me no joy to expose the senselessness and even the cruelty of decisions made daily, ostensibly in my name. In 2018, Gisha was contacted by a man in Gaza whose father in the West Bank had suffered a debilitating stroke. His urgent application for a permit went unanswered for two months until the army responded that the father was “not sick enough to justify a visit”. Two petitions to the District Court and an appeal to the High Court were unsuccessful. Security had nothing to do with it. These stories are not just the unfortunate by-product of conflict; they are an expression of Israel's intent to maintain control of the West Bank while locking out Palestinians in Gaza.

I am certain that many Council members will want to make statements today reaffirming the illegality of the settlements and citing that they are a primary obstacle to peace. I encourage them to note that the isolation of Gaza is also a primary obstacle, aggravated certainly by Palestinian division but also driven by deliberate choices on the part of Israel. In March this year, in defending his decision to allow funds from Qatar to enter the Strip, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was cited as saying that whoever is against a Palestinian State should be for transferring the funds to Gaza, because maintaining a separation between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas helps prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State. In the absence of self-determination, millions of Palestinians cannot vote for the Government with so much power over their lives and different legal standards are applied to people literally living side by side. The situation cannot be anything other than cause for further instability not only in the region, but also in some of the capitals of Council member States. The erosion of norms entailed in maintaining the occupation undermines the universal values of security and human rights on which this very institution was founded.

So, what can be done? First, access — rather than allowing the minimum access necessary to prevent further crises, we believe that the international community should insist that Israel allow the maximum access possible, subject only to necessary and reasonable security procedures. Since 2014, we have seen the rate of exit of goods from Gaza increase, but it remains a fraction of what it could be. Restrictions could be lifted on the types of goods that can exit and to which destinations. Also vital for industry, construction and civilian infrastructure is the entry of building and other raw materials, which remain heavily restricted by Israel's broad definition of what constitutes dual-use items.

When it comes to the movement of people, Israel must remove obstacles on people travelling to reunite with family and to reach jobs and other professional opportunities, especially women, who, as I noted, are disproportionately denied access. Israel must improve access to medical care and also access for companions of patients, including parents, who are routinely denied permits to accompany their children to treatment. Israel must allow safe and reliable access to Gaza's sea and farmland. Egypt has operated the Rafah crossing consistently since May 2018, allowing many to travel abroad. It should be encouraged to continue and expand operations.

The Palestinian authorities should refrain from leveraging the critical services needed by the civilian population in their factional dispute, including electricity supply and health care. I also believe that the two Israeli civilians allegedly held in Gaza should be released immediately as a humanitarian imperative.

The humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza is not an act of nature. It is the result of deliberate choices made by policymakers — Israeli but also Palestinian and regional actors, as well as the international community, which has helped keep the people's heads above water with the critical aid that it provides but must leverage its influence for more sustainable change.

Given recent statements by Israeli officials and their supporters and the current American Administration, I do not think that we can delude ourselves that a peace process is just around the corner. In the absence of peace and also to catalyse it, the international community must confront the de facto annexation of the West Bank together with the isolation of Gaza, taking action

to reverse these trends by abiding by its obligation to protect civilians.

It should also provide support to civil society. A vibrant community of civil-society organizations operates in both Israel and Palestine, but we and our allies are targeted for our work. We are outraged at the expected deportation of our Human Rights Watch colleague Omar Shakir, but as much as these actions are cause for concern, I believe that they are also an indication of our growing influence.

Many people in Israel may see my appearance here today as an act of disloyalty, because we have been taught that it is a zero-sum game, that it is us or them. In fact, it is just the opposite: the well-being of Israelis and Palestinians is interlinked, and we should address Palestinian security just as much as we do Israeli security.

To conclude, the international community has a claim, a moral responsibility and a vested interest to pursue peace and, with it, accountability for rights violations. If nothing else, the desire of some to undermine the foundations on which this institution, the United Nations, rests should be a loud wake-up call and should unite the international community in action. Young people in Israel and in Palestine will be grateful for it.

The President: I thank Ms. Hary for her briefing.

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

Ms. Norman-Chalet (United States of America): I wish to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing. As always, we appreciate his team's hard work to fairly address these complicated issues. I also want to thank Ms. Hary for her briefing.

I am sure that there will be further discussions today of our Monday announcement regarding Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Ambassador Craft has already addressed this issue in writing, and I want to briefly take it up again today on her behalf.

It is the position of the United States that the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law. We believe that this complex political problem can be resolved only through direct negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. I would like to be clear on our decision. The United States Government

is expressing no view on the particular legal status of any individual settlement, nor are we addressing or prejudging the ultimate status of the West Bank. That is for Israelis and Palestinians to decide.

The relevant question today then is, what real obstacles are preventing the Palestinians and the Israelis from sitting down to work towards peace? On that matter, we must note that the recent barrage of rocket fire from Gaza into Israel represents a far greater barrier to peace. Just for a moment, I want each person in this Chamber to imagine what it would be like to live each day knowing that a siren could go off at any time, alerting them and their family that they have 15 seconds to reach a bomb shelter. Would anyone on the Council tolerate such an existence? Would they accept blame and criticism for the violence directed against them? Would they feel confident that there was a clear path to peace while these attacks persist? Of course not. And yet this is often what Israel is expected to endure.

In just the past week, reports indicate that 450 rockets were fired into Israel by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. What is especially notable is that these attacks threaten the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike. This Iranian-funded terrorist organization has repeatedly attempted to undermine progress towards peace. It has intentionally attempted to disrupt periods of calm and ceasefire between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Both sides are affected by these terrorist actions. Schools in Israel and the Gaza Strip are closed, businesses have shut down and families are seeking shelter. There could hardly be a more significant or more self-evident barrier to peace.

The United States remains committed to the cause of peace, and Monday's announcement does not alter this fact. We continue to believe that discussion between the parties is the path to finding a solution that works for both sides and promotes and protects the welfare of Palestinians and Israelis alike.

But just as we are committed to the cause of peace, we are committed to Israel and its fair treatment at the United Nations. As Ambassador Craft has made abundantly clear and asked me to convey again today, the United States has always supported Israel in the past; we support Israel today; and we will support Israel moving forward. We will not stand idly by when the international community unfairly criticizes Israel, especially when it fails to also condemn those who seek

Israel's physical destruction and even deny its right to exist.

If the Council is truly committed to peace, we must be clear-eyed in evaluating what the real obstacles are to its attainment. Rocket fire that threatens the safety of Israelis and Palestinians on a daily basis is such an obstacle.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): Let me first of all thank Special Coordinator Mladenov and his team for the presentation and their dedicated work. Let me also express my thanks to Ms. Hary for her insightful presentation.

Let me start with the recent developments in Gaza. Germany condemns all attacks on Israel in the strongest possible terms, including the recent firing of more than 400 rockets from Gaza into Israel. Such attacks are directed against Israel's security and cause casualties among Israeli civilians. Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad must stop firing rockets from Gaza into Israel. There is no excuse for the firing of rockets into Israel.

Germany remains steadfast in its commitment to Israel's security. We will not be silent whenever Israel's security or right to exist is questioned or compromised. While we stress Israel's right to self-defence and its right to react adequately to attacks against its territory, we are also concerned by reports about the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza. We have taken note of the announcement of investigations into incidents with civilian victims by the Israel Defense Forces.

Last week's escalation in and around Gaza is deeply concerning. It reminds us once again of the urgent need for a sustainable long-term solution to the humanitarian, economic and political crisis in Gaza. As Ms. Hary illustrated in her briefing, freedom of movement of persons and goods is an essential aspect of any resolution of the dire humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza. We call on both Israel and the Palestinian authorities to do their respective parts in order to improve the situation in Gaza.

A political solution is required not only for Gaza but for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole. Germany remains firmly committed to a negotiated two-State solution based on the internationally agreed parameters. We believe that the two-State solution is the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs, fulfils

Palestinian aspirations to statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967, resolves all permanent-status issues and guarantees equal rights for all inhabitants.

We welcome and support any initiative aimed at reviving the peace process as long as it is based on a commitment to a viable two-State solution as internationally agreed and as long as it is acceptable to both parties, Israelis and Palestinians.

We also support any attempt to restart meaningful direct talks in negotiations between the parties with the objective of reaching a just and lasting solution. Forgoing the most controversial questions of the peace process by taking them off the table or creating facts on the ground will not, however, lead to sustainable peace. We therefore call on the parties to the conflict, as well as other international stakeholders, to refrain from taking unilateral measures that risk undermining the viability of a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the internationally agreed parameters.

We believe that international law provides the basis and framework for all political negotiations and finding an agreement that is acceptable to both parties. One of the main obstacles to a political settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the ongoing Israeli occupation and the continued settlement activities in the territories occupied since 1967. We reiterate our position that Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law and undermine the prospects for a negotiated two-State-solution.

The continuing expansion of settlement activity, including the recent approval of 2,300 new housing units in October by the Higher Planning Council of the civil administration, and the legalization of settlement outposts by Israel are a matter of serious concern to us. We also remain deeply concerned about increased demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures across the West Bank and evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem.

We call on Israel to end the expansion of settlements, the legalization of settlement outposts, the confiscation of Palestinian land and evictions from, and the demolition and seizure of, Palestinian-owned structures. We remain extremely concerned about repeated statements alluding to, or even announcing, an intended annexation of areas of the occupied West Bank.

Should such statements turn into actual Government policy or law that would, in our view, constitute a clear violation of international law.

We strongly advise our Israeli friends and the Israeli Government against taking any steps in that direction that could have serious negative repercussions on the viability of the two-State solution and the entire peace process. We reiterate that Germany will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties.

With regard to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), it needs to be fully implemented, not only with regard to settlement activities but also with regard to acts of terror, violence against civilians, incitement, provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric. The increase in violence, as well as in provocative rhetoric and actions on both sides, is deeply worrisome. We strongly urge all sides to de-escalate, exercise restraint and refrain from provocative rhetoric and actions.

With regard to the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount, we recall the paramount importance of maintaining the agreed status quo for keeping the peace at those holy sites.

Before I conclude, let me also say a final word concerning the very important issue of support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Special Coordinator alluded to that and reminded us of the emergency situation that we are in. UNRWA remains indispensable to meet the basic needs of Palestinian refugees. By providing humanitarian assistance, health services and education, UNRWA contributes to the stability in the region.

Germany therefore strongly supports the renewal of UNRWA's mandate for three years. As the largest bilateral donor, Germany remains firmly committed to UNRWA and continues to significantly contribute to UNRWA's budget. We encourage others to similarly continue their financial support to the Agency's crucial work, in particular by disbursing the funds they have pledged.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov and Ms. Tania Hary for their briefings.

The Gaza Strip continues to be the scene of persistent cycles of violence that is undermining the

right of both Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace and security. We condemn in the strongest terms the firing of rockets into Israeli territory to target populated areas as a response to an Israeli operation. We welcome the ceasefire established thanks to the efforts of the United Nations and Egypt and call on all parties to exercise maximal restraint in order to ensure that the ceasefire holds.

The obligations to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law, including its principles of distinction and proportionality, must be respected. We call on the Israeli authorities to conduct a thorough investigation on the air strike that resulted in the deaths of eight members of the Al-Sawarkah family. The cycle of violence facing the Gaza Strip recalls the need to take concrete steps to improve the economic and humanitarian situation, including lifting the blockade and fully opening the crossing points, while taking into account the legitimate security concerns of Israel.

A political solution to the crisis also demands the return of that territory to the control of the Palestinian Authority. In that regard, we also reiterate our call on Palestinian factions to engage in good faith in the reconciliation process. We encourage Palestinian leaders to work towards ensuring strong, inclusive, accountable and democratic institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights. A credible electoral process throughout the Palestinian territory — in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as in the Gaza Strip — should contribute to meeting that goal.

Concerning developments on the ground in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the ceaseless pursuit of settlements, including related measures, is fundamentally undermining, and will soon irrevocably compromise, the two-State solution, which we support. Settlements are illegal under international law, which is unambiguous and not subject to interpretation. Settlements constitute a flagrant violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), and international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention. Settlement policy also leads to increased tensions and violence on the ground and undercuts the trust needed to achieve a just, stable and lasting peace. We call on the Israeli authorities to end it immediately.

In that context, we also reiterate that we will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including in Jerusalem, other than those agreed by

both sides. In anticipation of the December briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), we reiterate our request for a written report on the issue, in accordance with the usual practices of the Security Council, including presidential not S/2017/507.

Today we are celebrating World Children's Day. We are deeply concerned about the impact this conflict is having on children. The excessive use of force resulted in the deaths of 16 Palestinian children in the first half of 2019 alone, while violent attacks led to the deaths of three Israeli children during the same period. Attacks on schools are on the increase, as are arrests of children on their way to school and their administrative detention. We are also very concerned about the extremely elevated and increasing number of refusals of, and delays in obtaining, permits from the Israeli authorities for children in need of medical care outside Gaza. We expect all parties to act in full compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the thirtieth anniversary of which we are currently commemorating in the General Assembly Hall.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Mladenov and Ms. Hary for their briefings.

At the outset, the Dominican Republic emphatically condemns the recent escalation of violence in the region. The firing of rockets into civilian areas is absolutely unacceptable. We insist that there is no justification whatsoever for carrying out such indiscriminate attacks and that it is imperative to make every possible effort to achieve an expeditious, complete and definitive de-escalation.

Safeguarding the lives and ensuring the safety of Palestinian and Israeli civilians must be at the heart of all international efforts, bearing in mind that such acts of violence increase the humanitarian needs of the population and serve only to hinder any possibility for understanding and progress towards a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict.

According to the World Health Organization, during the period from 12 to 14 November, Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip killed at least 34 Palestinians and injured 111. According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, eight of the dead and 46 of the wounded were children, who are paying a high price for a conflict over which they have no control. Similarly, injuries were reported in Israel from the firing of rockets from Gaza.

Guided by respect for human rights and international law, we are deeply concerned about continued Israeli settlement activities throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including in and around East Jerusalem. We continue to see how the hopes of the Palestinian people to consolidate their State are dashed by the systematic expansion of the settlements, accompanied by a policy that seeks to legitimize them. Women and children continue to be victims of an environment of ongoing violence, which removes all possibility of well-being. The situation limits the lives and movement of the affected population.

We agree with international consensus that the only way forward for Palestinians and Israelis is through the negotiation of a two-State solution. We urge concrete action to broaden consensus rooted in the peaceful resolution of conflicts, international law, multilateralism — recognizing the important mediation role of the United Nations — and previous agreements, based on a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within secure borders.

The Dominican Republic would like to express its gratitude to Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl for his commitment and dedication in the leadership of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and to Palestinian refugees. The extraordinary circumstances in which the Agency continues to operate, with significant financial and political challenges, continues to be a source of concern. Looking ahead to the Agency's prospects for the immediate future, we reiterate our call to support its human development and humanitarian assistance initiatives, which provide relief for the suffering of Gaza's inhabitants and Palestinian refugees throughout the region.

Finally, the Dominican Republic believes that it is critical to embark upon an intra-Palestinian reconciliation process that will enable the national consolidation necessary to advance its legitimate aspirations as a nation and will lead to a process of political renewal based on free and inclusive elections.

Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation commends Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, on his detailed briefing on peace and security issues in the region, in particular on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. We also thank Ms. Tania Hary, Executive Director of

Gisha, Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement, for her briefing.

Côte d'Ivoire notes with deep concern the resumption of violence on 12 November between Israelis and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and south-eastern Israel, after a relative calm. We unreservedly condemn that violence, which has indiscriminately targeted both Palestinian and Israeli civilians.

Given the current situation, my country would like to remind the Israeli and Palestinian parties that just and lasting peace will require a negotiated solution, with bold compromises that can lead to a solution of two States coexisting peacefully. Côte d'Ivoire believes that the deep aspiration of the Palestinian people — a viable State based on pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital — is an inalienable right. We are also committed to the security of the State of Israel.

Côte d'Ivoire also urges the parties to the conflict to respect the ceasefire reached on 14 November, mediated by the United Nations and Egypt, and to refrain from any unilateral actions that could further undermine efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis.

Persistent tension and recurrent clashes between the warring parties must spur the international community and, especially the Security Council, to create, without further delay, a framework conducive for the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, which, regretfully has not made any significant progress since the Oslo Accords. And the recent actions and statements of certain stakeholders' also do not bode well for imminent peace.

The Council must therefore unite once again in order to send a strong message of peace to all the parties and to encourage them to resume peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations. In that connection, we welcome the key role of international and regional actors, including Egypt for its mediation, which has once again proven decisive in reaching the current ceasefire.

The consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are also disastrous for the people living in the Gaza Strip, with a worsening humanitarian crisis due to the cumulative effects of a constant lack of water and electricity, crumbling social infrastructure and a foundering economy. We must therefore urgently remedy the situation, which fuels resentment and radicalization, through Israeli-Palestinian negotiations

with a view to lifting the blockade on Gaza. Côte d'Ivoire also encourages the Palestinian parties to pursue dialogue, based on strengthened cooperation, for the effective return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, which would enable better handling of humanitarian issues.

My country is also concerned about the continuing budget deficit facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We therefore urgently call for a lasting solution to the situation, which undermines the effectiveness of the Agency, which provides assistance to more than 3 million Palestinian refugees.

The much sought-after peace requires, first and foremost, the willingness of Israelis and Palestinians to engage in constructive dialogue, which will undoubtedly have a stabilizing effect on the entire region. Côte d'Ivoire remains firmly convinced that it is only through such a dialogue that a peaceful solution can be found to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire renews its support for Mr. Mladenov and all the stakeholders who are working day after day to establish a productive dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, in order to achieve lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. We also listened carefully to the statement delivered by Ms. Hary.

China is deeply concerned about the recent protracted turbulence in the Palestinian-Israeli situation. Military actions have been escalating, causing heavy civilian casualties. Settlement activities continue unabated, and there has even been evidence of rhetoric attempting to justify those settlement activities. The prospects for the two-State solution are being severely undermined. I would like to emphasize the following points today.

First, it is imperative to cease all rhetoric and actions that contradict the relevant United Nations resolutions and international consensus and to adhere to the overarching goal of the two-State solution. The two-State solution and the principle of land for peace constitute the bottom line of international justice. There should be no retreat from those objectives, not even by half a step. Independent statehood is an

inalienable national right of the Palestinian people — it is not something that can be traded. Resolution 2334 (2016) clearly indicates that settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, run contrary to international law. Given the severity of the Palestinian-Israeli situation, all parties must be committed to playing a constructive role, refraining from irresponsible rhetoric, preventing the exacerbation of tensions and confrontation and refraining from adding new complexities to the Palestinian question. The parties concerned must immediately cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the demolition of Palestinian houses and confiscation of their property.

Secondly, it is important to seek solutions through political and diplomatic means and refrain from any actions that might escalate tensions. Following the recent turmoil in southern Israel and the Gaza Strip, the international community has been closely monitoring the situation and is deeply concerned. China commends Special Coordinator Mladenov, Egypt and others for deploying their good offices with a view to reaching a ceasefire agreement. China has also been making efforts to alleviate tensions. The Chinese Government's Special Envoy on the Middle East Issue, Mr. Zhai Jun, has been in close contact with the parties concerned. China calls on all parties to remain calm, exercise restraint and remain committed to rebuilding and building up mutual trust so as to create sound conditions for the relaunching of peace talks. The international community should continue to work on the basis of the two-State solution, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, *inter alia*. We continue to urge the parties to re-engage in peace talks as soon as possible with a view to establishing an independent State of Palestine with full sovereignty and with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the 1967 borders.

Thirdly, it is necessary to closely monitor and improve the economic and humanitarian situation in Palestine, adopt comprehensive measures and promote peace through development. The economic and humanitarian situation remains grave in the occupied Palestinian territories. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has done much work to improve the humanitarian situation of Palestinian refugees. The Agency is a success story of multilateralism and the

role of the United Nations. On 15 November, the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session adopted with an overwhelming majority a draft resolution renewing the mandate of UNRWA, thereby demonstrating the international support for, and recognition of, UNRWA's work. China supports the continuing important role of UNRWA.

Fostering development is an important step towards resolving the question of Palestine. China calls on the parties concerned to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions in full and to lift the blockade of Gaza as soon as possible. China stands ready to continue its cooperation with Palestine in economic, financial, cultural, educational and health-care sectors, among others, and to take concrete actions in order to promote national stability and development in Palestine.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): Let me join others in thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Ms. Tania Hary, Executive Director of Gisha, Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement, for their briefings. I also welcome the observer of the Observer State of Palestine and the representative of Israel to the Chamber for our deliberations today.

I would like to address the following three issues in my statement today: the systematic annexation of Palestinian lands, the situation in Gaza and the power of the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

On the first issue, regarding the systematic annexation of Palestinian lands, South Africa would like to reiterate its steadfast stance with regard to the peace process and resolving the constant stalemate in negotiations. In that context, we affirm that the only way to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East is by reaching lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis themselves and by restoring all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, in accordance with the two-State solution and the relevant United Nations resolutions and international terms of reference, including the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, among others.

The continuing disregard for those prevailing and long-standing international concepts cannot be allowed, particularly with regard to the circumvention of final status issues, such as borders, the status of Jerusalem and the right to return of refugees. Israel's continuing pronouncements on the annexation of large parts of the West Bank and the building of

additional settlements further undermine the prospects for peace and are glaring examples of violations of international law. Since 1967 — that is, for over half a century — Israel has systematically constructed more than 160 settlements and outposts on land seized from the Palestinian people. More than 600,000 Israelis are now living in settlements built from the ruins of demolished and destroyed Palestinian properties. Since the adoption of the first resolution on the situation in Palestine — resolution 42 (1948), of March 1948, over 70 years ago, and all subsequent resolutions — the Council has failed to ensure that those resolutions are implemented or to take any concrete action to address the blatant violations of those resolutions. I now ask my fellow Council members, what will force the Council to act?

I would like to remind the Council of its unanimous adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), on 23 December 2016. It clearly states, in paragraph 1, that the Council

“[r]eaffirms that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace”.

There is no ambiguity, legal or otherwise, in those words or in that resolution.

Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations clearly states that

“[t]he Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter.”

It must be clear to all that no State Member of the United Nations is exempt from its obligations under the United Nations Charter. If we were to abandon the principles enshrined in the Charter, it would render the Council and its decisions obsolete. In that regard, South Africa has and will continue to insist on the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and all other Council resolutions on this matter, including by calling for written reports by the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We cannot ignore one Security Council resolution while calling for the full implementation of others.

On my second point, South Africa is deeply concerned about the recent activities in Gaza, which

have led to increased tensions, the killing of more than 30 Palestinians and injuries to hundreds of innocent Palestinians and Israelis. Those actions perpetuate the dire security and humanitarian situation in the area, and we welcome last week’s announcement of a ceasefire brokered by the United Nations and Egypt. In that regard, we call for a halt to the violent attacks on both sides and for all parties to begin negotiations. Additionally, South Africa is concerned about the continued human rights violations in the occupied territory and reiterates that such violations only foster hatred between the peoples of Palestine and Israel.

With regard to my third issue, on the power of peaceful conflict resolution, the security of Israel and its future generations does not lie in the annexation of Palestinian territories, the imprisonment of Palestinians, the erection of high concrete walls and checkpoints or the continued blockade of Gaza but rather in a peaceful, stable and happy neighbour and a sovereign and independent Palestinian State, whose children, like Israeli children, can go to school, play, attend places of worship and compete in sporting activities with their Israeli friends in peace and security. That can be achieved through sustained dialogue, negotiation and mediation, through both sides respecting one another and through compromise and understanding. As our late President Mandela said at a banquet in Cape Town during the visit of President Yasser Arafat in 1998,

“Our own humble experience has shown that negotiated solutions can be found even to conflict that the world has come to regard as insoluble. It has taught us that such solutions emerge when former opponents reach out to find common ground.”

In conclusion, I would like to say that South Africa is fully committed to ensuring that a two-State solution, and the agreed peace processes aimed at ensuring two viable States coexisting side by side for the mutual benefit of all peoples in the region, especially Israelis and Palestinians, becomes a reality. We are ready to play our part to assist the parties in finding durable peace for the sake of their children and future generations.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing and Ms. Tania Hary for her input.

Regrettably, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. Last week we saw another escalation. Israel conducted an operation in Gaza targeting a senior leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. In

response, rockets were fired from Gaza on southern and central Israel. Thankfully, owing to the United Nations and Egypt's hard work, we were able to prevent one of the most dangerous escalations in and around Gaza from degenerating into full-fledged war. Luckily, the situation was stabilized to safeguard the lives and security of Palestinian and Israeli civilians. But it was yet another example of how volatile the situation on the ground is.

The cornerstone of our policy on the Middle East peace process is the idea of a negotiated two-State solution. Unfortunately, it continues to be dismantled piece by piece, particularly through the expansion of Israeli settlements. Poland's position on the Israeli settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territory is clear and remains unchanged. It is also the European Union's position. The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) was a strong reaffirmation of the international consensus on the matter.

I will now turn to the situation in Gaza, which remains dire and continues to fuel extremism and radicalization and foster instability. We call on all to take urgent steps to achieve fundamental change in the humanitarian, political, security and economic situation in Gaza, as well as to end the closure policy and ensure the sustained opening of the crossing points that are important for Gazans' daily lives, while at the same time addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. On the political track, the intra-Palestinian division only aggravates the situation of the people of Gaza and weakens the national aspirations of Palestinians. We urgently need to relaunch the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process. Everyone must commit to Egypt's efforts in that connection. We have taken note of President Abbas's announcement that elections will be held, and a date should be set very soon for a vote in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip. We call on all the Palestinian factions to commit to that process.

The only way forward for Palestinians and Israelis is the negotiation of a two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security. Our main aim today should be to restore the political horizon for the resumption of a meaningful peace process.

I want to conclude with a few words about the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East, which remains a key contributor to the stability and security of the region. In that context, Poland supports a technical rollover of the Agency's current mandate.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his report on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. We would also like to thank Tania Hary for her briefing.

We are regrettably compelled to note that over and over again when we discuss the situation in the Middle East in this Chamber, we have to talk about the deteriorating overall situation in the region. But instead of heeding the calls to consolidate international efforts to resolve long-standing and new crises, we see unilateral actions that are completely out of step with a logic of compromise and collective action. First and foremost, I mean the problem that is central to the whole region, the issue of the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Two days ago, the United States took yet another step undermining the entire complex of agreements on the issue. It was announced that the United States authorities no longer consider Israel's construction of settlements in the West Bank a violation of international law. Furthermore, it was underscored that this was a recognition of the so-called realities on the ground. As far as we are concerned, such realities are unacceptable and unlawful. It is clear that this move will worsen an already tense situation in the efforts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Of a piece with that statement are the decisions of the United States Administration on Jerusalem and the illegitimate recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan, which are gross violations of international law and resolution 497 (1981) in particular. In that context, we want to once again affirm that the Golan is unquestionably Syrian territory, occupied and then illegally annexed by Israel. Israel's rocket fire on Syria has intensified in the past few days and runs directly counter to the efforts to normalize the situation in the region. This kind of action is seriously worrying and abhorrent. We affirm the principled position reflected in resolution 2334 (2016), according to which Israel's establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal force and is a violation of international law, as well as one of the main obstacles

to achieving a two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

As far as we are concerned, the internationally recognized foundations for a settlement in the Middle East, including the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid principles, remain unshakeable. Besides that, like our colleagues, we are concerned about the escalation around the Gaza Strip that has been accompanied by the launch of rockets into Israel and retaliatory shelling. We also need active efforts at the international level to improve the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

We are more than ever convinced that today it has become absolutely vital to take practical steps to extract the peace process from its dangerous impasse. First and foremost, the policies promoting Israeli settlement activity and the demolition of Palestinian property must cease. Russia will continue its efforts in bilateral and other formats aimed at reviving direct dialogue between the Palestinians and Israelis. As with most of our colleagues, it is clear to us that the only way out of all of this spiralling collection of problems is through concerted international and regional efforts, with the United Nations and its Security Council playing a central role. We believe that the Quartet, whose functions have been endorsed by numerous Security Council resolutions, is still relevant and needed more than ever.

Last week's vote on the Middle East bloc draft resolutions in the Fourth Committee clearly demonstrated the international community's growing support for the principles that constitute the basis for a settlement. We also believe that the support that has been shown to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is extremely important. UNRWA's activity has a political dimension as well as a humanitarian one, and an important stabilizing effect in the Palestinian territories and the countries of the Middle East. Israel and Palestine have major religious significance for hundreds of thousands of adherents of the monotheistic religions, and the swift establishment of a lasting peace in those lands is in the interests of every Christian, Muslim and Jew.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the unresolved problem of Palestine, together with the years of instability in the region as a whole, is building up the potential there for protests and radicalism in general.

The situation demands concerted efforts on the part of responsible members of the international community. The Secretary-General was instructed to work on that issue under resolution 598 (1987). The need to develop a sustainable mechanism for collective security in the region through dialogue on an equal footing is becoming ever more urgent. Russia's initiative in that regard is aimed both at unblocking conflict situations and developing measures for confidence and control.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his important updates on what is happening on the ground, as well as Ms. Tania Hary for providing a different perspective. Like others who have come to the Chamber, she has brought us sad and real stories of suffering that pose the question of how much more we in this Chamber can tolerate, and how much more can the people of Palestine and Israel tolerate on this issue. We welcome the ceasefire that has been in place since last Thursday and urge all parties to exercise maximum restraint. With that in mind, I want to highlight some pertinent points.

First, the violence and provocations must stop. We condemn violence of every kind, particularly when it targets innocent civilians, including women and children. The bombing of eight civilians in Gaza by Israel, as Special Coordinator Mladenov mentioned, should be taken seriously and impartially investigated. My delegation is also appalled at the continuing provocative actions and violence by the occupying Power towards Palestinian civilians. That vicious circle of retaliation must stop. In the Gaza Strip, more than 30 people, including eight members of one family, were killed last week alone. We managed to avoid another catastrophe; but how long can we count on such luck?

Indonesia recognizes that some within the international community may have concerns about some similar Palestinian actions towards Israel. But to do justice, we must put the issue in the proper context. The sequence and gravity of violations of international humanitarian and international human rights law perpetrated by the occupying Power are not comparable to the actions of Palestinians, which often come in response to insurmountable frustration. One does not have to be a genius to comprehend the situation. We need only honesty. The cycles of violence and provocation must stop. We urge Israel to adhere to international law, particularly international humanitarian law, and related Security Council resolutions.

Secondly, the root cause of the conflict must therefore be comprehensively addressed. We must never forget that Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land is at the root of this protracted problem. It is compounded by Israel's illegal settlement policy in the occupied territories, which blatantly disregards international law and opinion. I also want to mention the new statement made this week by the United States. It does not help and could lead to further deterioration of an already fragile situation. The settlements are illegal and in flagrant violation of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Indonesia strongly rejects any attempt to cast doubt on a policy that incontrovertibly constitutes a *de facto* annexation and is a barrier to peace efforts based on a two-State solution. The United States' irresponsible and provocative statement can only have the effect of making a resolution of the conflict more difficult and a two-State vision unattainable. We sincerely hope that this was not the intention of the statement in the first place, which we should also note was made by a member of the Quartet. We urge the international community to reaffirm the illegality of the settlements and its continued support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, statehood and independence, within the pre-1967 borders, and with East Jerusalem as the capital of a State of Palestine.

My third point is the need to address the deteriorating humanitarian situation. There has been a sharp deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The ensuing despair and frustration among Palestinians are capable of provoking anger and worse violations. The unjustifiable blockade of Gaza must therefore be lifted now and not later. In the West Bank, the coercive environment intensified by Israel's demolitions, forced evictions, discriminatory planning, access restrictions, settlement expansion and settler violence are also leaving Palestinians increasingly vulnerable. In addition, there is growing suffering among Palestinian refugees as the funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) suffers. As we welcome the renewal of the Agency's mandate, Indonesia once again appeals to the international community to extend its full support to UNRWA's vital work.

In conclusion, I was told this morning to close my eyes and try to imagine peace in Gaza. Like Martin Luther King, I too have a dream. I dream that one day the children of Palestine and the children of Israel can play

together on a playground. But that dream seems hard to achieve, simply because we are still letting the vicious circle of retaliation continue, because settlers continue to colonize and because countries make statements and take actions that are contrary to international law and Security Council resolutions. I have a dream that one day we will reach a two-State solution.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Mr. Mladenov and Ms. Hary for their briefings.

Israel's settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territories is illegal under international law, particularly international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and contravenes Security Council resolutions. Colonization also helps to heighten tensions on the ground and undermine the possibility of a two-State solution. It erodes the prospects for lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, as was recalled in resolution 2334 (2016). With almost 650,000 settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, we are near the point of no return.

For that reason, France has condemned the decision to build 2,342 housing units in the West Bank and the infrastructure works near Bethlehem, which undermine the territorial continuity of a future Palestinian State. Such decisions are in addition to the ongoing construction of 3,000 housing units in settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem from mid-June to mid-September and the expansion with another 6,000 units in the previous quarter. In total, the number of decisions on settlement housing construction since the beginning of this year is already higher than in 2018. France therefore calls on the Israeli authorities to halt such initiatives as well as all those that would jeopardize the two-State solution. In that regard, we will pay particular attention to the information contained in the Secretary-General's next report of 2019 on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

We regret any decision that may encourage further settlements. Respect for international law is not negotiable. It is binding on everyone. Undermining that principle weakens the entire international system. It is not up to one country to decide what is legal. The issue of the legality of settlements cannot be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

I would also like to return to the latest developments on the ground, in particular the dangerous escalation in Gaza last week. France strongly condemns the firing

of more than 450 rockets into populated areas of Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip. I would recall in that regard that France believes that Israel's security is not, and never will be, negotiable. Any attack deliberately targeting civilian populations and infrastructure is also contrary to international humanitarian law. In addition, we have taken note of the Israeli army's announcement of an internal investigation into the deaths of eight Palestinian civilians, including five children, in an air strike on Deir el-Balah on 14 November. We call for that investigation, like those announced by Israel in April 2018, to be completed in a transparent manner and followed by measures that are commensurate with the gravity of the situation.

We call on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and to respect the ceasefire agreed under the auspices of the Special Coordinator. In addition to the immediate need for a cessation of hostilities, there will be no lasting stability in Gaza without the lifting of the blockade, along with credible security guarantees for Israel, and without the return of the Palestinian Authority.

The Palestinian Authority will be able to fully exercise its authority in Gaza only if there is a resumption of the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process, which must involve credible elections held throughout the Palestinian territories, including Gaza and East Jerusalem. We noted with interest the commitment of President Abbas to holding elections in the near future as well as the preparatory work undertaken to that end. We encourage the Palestinian leadership to ensure that the elections take place, and we stand ready to support it on that path.

In a context where the situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem remains worrying, I reiterate France's commitment to respect for freedom of expression and the protection of journalists. We also call on the Israeli authorities to reconsider their decision to revoke the residence permit of the Director of Human Rights Watch for Israel and Palestine following the confirmation by the Israeli Supreme Court of that decision.

In conclusion, I would like to recall France's unwavering support for the two-State solution. At a time when the prospect of such a solution is being questioned, it is more necessary than ever to recall that only a solution based on the internationally agreed parameters will make it possible to meet the aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians and to bring lasting peace to the region. It must allow the establishment of a

Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel, within secure and internationally recognized borders drawn on the basis of the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of the two States. Any peace plan that deviates from the internationally agreed parameters would be doomed to failure. As France is a friend of both Israel and the Palestinians, it stands ready to encourage them to resume dialogue on that basis.

Pending a lasting peace that provides a just, realistic and sustainable solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees, the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East will remain crucial. At the General Assembly, a very large majority of Member States called for the renewal of its mandate for three years, which France welcomes. We will remain vigilant as to the Agency's ability to implement its mandate and to continue its operations, in particular in East Jerusalem.

Together with our European partners, we will continue to monitor the situation closely and to advocate for an order based on international law. It is also the responsibility of the Council to ensure compliance with international law and the parameters agreed by the international community. France will ensure that.

Mr. Ugarelli (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting. We thank Mr. Mladenov and Ms. Hary for their detailed briefings.

Peru is following with deep concern the developments in the situation in Palestine. We regret the ongoing hostile dynamics and the unacceptable and unsustainable stalemate in the peace process. We are particularly alarmed by the new escalation in Gaza and its impact in terms of fatalities and injuries. Peru condemns the indiscriminate attacks by Hamas and other extremist groups against Israeli territory as well as Israel's disproportionate responses against the Palestinian people.

In such circumstances, we urge the parties directly involved to cease, investigate and punish all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, all terrorist acts and all attacks against civilians. We must move towards specific steps in that direction.

We also regret the relentless expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the development of legislation that seeks to give them a legal status. That settlement policy is closely linked to the increase in demolitions

and evictions as well as to the rise in violent incidents against Israeli settlers, who are seen as perpetrators in some cases and victims in others.

We note with concern that unilateral statements on such illegal practices may further undermine the territorial integrity of the Palestinian State and the increasingly remote prospects of achieving a two-State solution. Such practices must stop in line with the relevant Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which are binding.

To that end, we emphasize the urgent need to end the blockade of the Gaza Strip. That involves the prior restoration of control over the area by the Palestinian Authority and providing Israel with the necessary guarantees for its security. We also believe it important to align humanitarian assistance with development plans that offer hope and opportunities to young people.

We must also reiterate the need to provide the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East with steady and predictable funding and to mobilize to that end the support of the international community, particularly that of countries with the greatest resources and those committed to peace and stability in the region.

In the current fragile situation, we believe that the Council must speak clearly by demanding that the parties act with moderation, prevent further escalation and support the resumption of meaningful dialogue in order to achieve the only viable solution — that of two States living side by side, with secure and mutually recognized borders.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): First and foremost, we would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing on recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory. We also thank Ms. Hary for her briefing. We reiterate our full support to Mr. Mladenov for his efforts to calm the situation and prevent clashes, particularly in the light of the Israel's recent provocations, shelling and strikes against the Gaza Strip. We firmly condemn those strikes, which have killed and wounded dozens of innocent Palestinians. We commend Egypt's efforts to facilitate a ceasefire and to stop Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilians and infrastructure.

In the Fourth Committee last Friday, 170 Member States voted to extend the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the

Near East (UNRWA) for an additional three years. The international community thereby sent a clear and firm message that underscores the importance of UNRWA's role and the essential services it provides to about 5.5 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory, and this despite concerted efforts to change the firm position that UNRWA has maintained since it was established in 1949 under General Assembly resolution 302 (IV). My country is proud to be one of UNRWA's main partners. In the past five years alone we have voluntarily contributed \$118 million to its support.

Accordingly, we believe that the Palestinian refugee issue is the essence of the Palestinian question. That is why we in the Security Council have a special responsibility to uphold the inalienable right of generations of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to return to the homes from which they were displaced, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948 in particular. As the occupying Power, Israel is legally, politically and morally responsible for creating the problem of the Palestinian refugees and perpetuating it. We reject any attempts by any party to nullify Palestinian refugees' right of return or to distort the refugee issue by attempting to resettle them, dismantle UNRWA, stop its funding or deprive their future generations of their right of return through a so-called redefinition of their legal status.

We also call for granting Palestinians a dignified standard of living and freedom of movement, while maintaining their refugee status until they can exercise their right to return and compensation. While we thank former UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl for his efforts during his tenure, we commend the steadfast Palestinian people, who have demonstrated resilience on their land. We reiterate our full support to their legitimate right to resist the Israeli occupation by defending their holy places and land and their inalienable rights in the face of Israel's attacks aimed at strengthening their occupation and undermining any opportunity for true peace, as well as its arbitrary arrest campaigns, its demolition and confiscation of buildings, its continuing blockade of the Gaza Strip, its attacks on Muslim and Christian holy sites, the attempts aimed at changing Jerusalem's historic status and its demographic composition, the excessive construction of new settlements and expansion of existing ones

and the forced displacement of Palestinian refugees, all of which are gross violations of international law and international humanitarian law. In that regard, we reiterate our rejection of any attempts to legitimize Israel's illegitimate expansionist settlement policy in all of its manifestations throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. As we said, it is a flagrant violation of international law and of the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016). It is an obstacle to peace. We want to reiterate that Israeli settlements are an activity that is null and void and cannot in any way constitute an acceptable *fait accompli*.

In conclusion, as I said at the beginning of my statement, the strong message sent by most Member States and their unwavering position in support of the Palestinian people and their right to exercise their inalienable rights reflects the special importance that the Palestinian question has for millions all over the world. And as we saw and heard from most of the Heads of State and Government in the Assembly's recent general debate, the world has echoed the key importance of the question of Palestine and of ensuring that a lasting, just and comprehensive resolution of it is based on a two-State solution. The Arab-Israeli conflict should be resolved according to the resolutions of international legitimacy and international law and the Arab Peace Initiative, with all its elements, which calls for Israel to fully end its occupation of all the Arab territories it has occupied since June 1967, including East Jerusalem, before a comprehensive peace with Israel and the normalization of relations can be achieved.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to express our delegation's appreciation and gratitude to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his informative briefing and for his and his team's laudable and tireless efforts in the Middle East. We also commend the valuable and constructive contributions of Ms. Tania Hary, Executive Director of Gisha, Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement.

Today's meeting revisiting the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, is very timely. In the past week, the Israel Defense Forces and Palestinian militias in Gaza once again exchanged intense attacks, resulting in several deaths and injuries and extensive material damage. These ongoing clashes are endangering children, whose rights, as the representative of Belgium noted, are currently being commemorated in the General Assembly Hall in the

context of the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And the groups that have always been the most vulnerable in this conflict, women and the civilian population of both sides, are also in danger. We believe that as long as Gaza remains at the centre of the ongoing tensions between Israel and Palestine, none of the efforts to improve the deteriorating economic and social situation of Gaza's 2 million inhabitants will improve their long-standing terrible standards of living.

We therefore urge all the armed groups in Gaza to cease their provocations and attacks. Similarly, Israel should respect international law and measure its responses in order not to harm the civilian population generally. Lethal weapons of war should not be directed at areas inhabited by civilians who are not involved in the fighting in the conflict. The Israeli forces present in the occupied Palestinian territories should respect and ensure the security of citizens of both sides in the event of protests or demonstrations, keeping in mind that the right to protest is a historical democratic right as long as it is the civilian population that is demonstrating, as is the case in Gaza.

We cannot leave the Israelis and Palestinians to their fate. That is why our delegation urges the Security Council and the international community to stay united and to approach its work with more humanity in order to achieve a definitive political solution to the conflict that is in the interests of both the Palestinians and the Israelis, a solution that all the other peoples of the Middle East and the world in general so fervently wish for. We deplore the fact that the historic moments that gave hope to the whole world on this issue have been consigned to oblivion. However, we believe that it is still necessary and urgent to continue to coordinate efforts aimed at finding a formula for talks that would encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table and deal with all outstanding issues. We deem it urgent and imperative that support continue for the Egyptian and United Nations mediation efforts aimed at achieving intra-Palestinian reconciliation. It is time for Palestinian leaders to make concessions and seek to reach truly definitive agreements that guarantee their political unity, thereby enabling them to work together for the well-being of their own citizens. Such an accord would also involve the return of the Palestinian National Authority to the Gaza Strip.

Before concluding, I wish to express my Government's satisfaction with the tireless efforts

of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and encourage the international community to continue providing the funding it needs to maintain and enhance its work. In accordance with our commitment to the Charter of the United Nations, Equatorial Guinea wishes to reaffirm its position that, in recognition of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 242 (1967), the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid principles, the Middle East Quartet road map and other instruments, we consider the historic claims of the Palestinians and the peaceful existence of Israel to be just. We therefore, reiterate our support for the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, with the capital city of Jerusalem to be negotiated between the two parties, guaranteeing a safe and peaceful coexistence for both States and in harmony with the other countries of the region.

The President: I will now make a statement in my national capacity.

I would like to thank Mr. Mladenov once again for his briefing and for the work of his team on the ground in what we have heard are obviously very difficult circumstances. I took careful note of his characterization of the current situation and, given the number of crises and difficulties we have seen over Gaza in recent months, I know he did not make that characterization lightly. I will come back to that topic in due course.

As others have done, I wanted to start by stressing that the United Kingdom's position on settlements has not changed. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of a two-State solution. The British position was reflected in our support for resolution 2334 (2016) but also for previous resolutions that confirmed the lack of legal validity of the settlements, such as resolution 465 (1980). We also condemned the advancement of plans for over 2,000 housing units across the West Bank on 10 October and call on such counter-productive action to end.

Turning specifically to Gaza, I wanted to thank Ms. Hary for her briefing and her insights on access. We take this issue very seriously. I believe that the most important aspect of the situation is the escalation of hostilities in Gaza that began on 12 November, about which we are very concerned. We welcome the ceasefire reached between Israel and the Palestinian Islamic

Jihad, and we are grateful, as are others, to Egypt and the United Nations for their mediation efforts.

I wish to stress the complete unacceptability of the indiscriminate attacks against civilians by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. We regret the loss of life and urge all parties to adhere to the ceasefire arrangement. In the longer term, we encourage actors to put forward sustainable proposals to resolve the threat posed to Israel's security by Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militants in Gaza. Hamas' misrule is leading to dreadful consequences for the people of Gaza and also of Israel.

I wanted to pick up on Ms. Hary's briefing on movement and access restrictions and show how they have constrained exports and affected the Palestinian economy in terms of low growth and rising levels of unemployment. We look to Israel to apply the same conditions to Palestinian traders as they do to Israeli traders.

I also wanted to join other speakers in reiterating our concern about demolitions and incidents of violence in both directions. I would also like to take the opportunity to join others in saying that Israel's security is absolutely a top priority for us and to condemn the missiles that are fired at Israel. However, as long as the destabilizing situation and the violence continue, it will be very difficult to find a way through.

We remain concerned by the increase in settler violence. We welcome work towards genuine and democratic national elections for all Palestinians, and I agree with those speakers who said that such elections would be crucial in view of the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. To this end, we call on all Palestinian factions to seek common ground and work together to pursue a positive path towards democracy for the full benefit of the Palestinian people.

I also wanted to put down a marker about a call for greater media freedoms in the occupied Palestinian territories, including revising relevant legislation. We are concerned by the 17 October decision by the Magistrate's Court in Ramallah, which ordered the blocking of 50 Palestinian Arabic websites, which we think is an important part of what is happening on the ground.

Finally, I would like to join others in noting the importance of the two-State solution, as well as the importance of Palestine and Israel living in peace and

mutual respect, side by side as equal and sovereign States. Security is, of course, an absolutely crucial component of that.

I resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate you, Madam President, and your delegation on assuming the presidency of the Council this month. We are confident that, with your wisdom, you will lead the Council's work to a successful end.

I also wish to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, and the Executive Director of Gisha, Ms. Tania Hary, for their comprehensive briefings and their assessments of the current difficult situation in all its dimensions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

This meeting is being held today in the wake of continued attacks by the United States Administration on the inherent rights of the Palestinian people to their territory. It continues to deny their right to self-determination, to freedom and to independence. The United States Administration has made yet another unlawful declaration on illegitimate Israeli settlements in order to kill any chance of achieving peace, security and stability in our region and for its peoples. We strongly reject and condemn such an unlawful and irresponsible Declaration, which we consider to be legally, politically, historically and morally null and void, without any value whatsoever. It is to be added to the series of provocative and irresponsible measures taken by the United States Administration, beginning with the claim that Jerusalem is "the capital of Israel", ongoing attacks against Palestinian refugees and their right to return to their homes, and attempts to put an end to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as well as recognizing so-called Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan.

The international community has confronted and rejected all of these policies, which have also been rejected here at the Council, including by some Council members who spoke to the press before this very meeting. We are confident that the position of the international community, especially the Council,

is strong and firm in rejecting this latest declaration by the United States, as it has done with regards to previous ones. All such declarations run counter to international law and the Charter of the United Nations and its relevant resolutions. They will not affect the legal and political situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, or accord any legality to Israel's colonization policies on our territory, including its annexation policy and its illegitimate settlements. That will affect only the position, image and credibility of the United States, or what is left of them in the eyes of the international community. This Administration continues to deepen its ineligibility as a peace mediator, its use of double standards and its bias regarding the Israeli occupation at the expense of our right to self-determination.

Today it is impossible to believe that the voice of the United States is a voice in support of peace. It has become clear that it is a voice that incites others against the Palestinian people and encourages Israel to continue with its illegal annexation of our territory and systematic violations of our rights. Our land is not a gift that the United States can offer to satisfy the ambitions of Netanyahu, and the blood of our people is not a currency to be used as a bargaining chip in Israeli elections.

In its resolutions on this subject, from 242 (1967) to 2334 (2016), the Security Council has reaffirmed the inadmissibility of the seizure of other people's land by force. That has been a basic principle of international law, implemented since the end of the Second World War. The Council has also affirmed the illegitimacy of Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories, including the Palestinian territory, and has stated that it was illegal to annex Jerusalem. In its adoption of those resolutions, it was working to achieve international peace and security, in line with its mandate. We reaffirm that settlements, as a form of colonialism, are illegitimate according to United Nations resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* (see A/ES-10/273). They constitute a violation of the Charter of the United Nations, a blatant breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a war crime under the Rome Statute. Any attempt to change that reality is therefore doomed to failure, and no one, no matter how strong, can change international law according to whims or illusions.

In that regard, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the States, Governments, organizations and members of the Council that have expressed their support for upholding international legitimacy and committing to the international consensus on the basis of the terms of reference for a just and peaceful solution. They have reaffirmed that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are a blatant violation of international law and a key impediment to ending the Israeli occupation and achieving peace in line with a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders.

Every country here at the United Nations can contribute to achieving peace by supporting our inalienable rights and by refusing to acknowledge Israel's illegal practices and policies, including those aimed at changing the status and character of Jerusalem or at changing the pre-1967 borders. They can support us by refraining from providing assistance and support to illegal settlement activities, by differentiating between Israel and the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 where relevant transactions are concerned, and by ensuring accountability and ending impunity, which is one of the major obstacles to the achievement of justice, peace and security.

We warn against the logic of the United States Administration, which holds that international law is an obstacle to peace, seeks to justify Israeli crimes and believes that it can impose its will on the international community as a fact to be accepted. There cannot be one international law that applies to all of us and another that is invented and tailored by the United States Administration to suit Israel's colonial greed and forgive its crimes. The international law that we all know does not permit double standards or bullying. It should apply to everyone without exception, including Israel and the United States.

The international law that we know does not forgive the Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. It does not prevent its civilians from having even a little bit of life and hope. It does not forgive the Israeli air strike on the home of the Sawarkas, which killed five little children in that family. International law does not forgive when a little girl goes to sleep hoping to celebrate her tenth birthday the next morning, only to wake up and have to attend her parents' funeral. International law does not forgive the killing of a man in Hebron who went out to buy food for his waiting family and never came back. It does not forgive Israel's holding on

to the bodies of martyrs and the pain that causes their parents. It does not forgive a sniper shooting a press photographer in the left eye while he was documenting violations committed by the Israeli occupiers. The soldiers believed that killing the witness would conceal their crime, but it only revealed and condemned them.

International law does not forgive ambushes and arbitrary arrests of girls and boys. Nor does it forgive their torture in Israeli prisons and detention centres. It does not forgive the military invasions of cities, towns and camps or the sowing of terror in the hearts of mothers who fear for the fate of their children. International law does not forgive forced displacement or the demolition of houses and property and the displacement of their owners. International law does not forgive the rioting and acts of terrorism by Israeli settlers, their looting of Palestinian natural resources or their burning of fields and olive trees. International law does not forgive the fact that people are made to wait for long hours at army checkpoints. It does not forgive the expansion of settlements in the West Bank or the racist annexation of Jerusalem, the provocative acts carried out in Haram Al-Sharif or the imposition of illegal taxes on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

International law does not forgive silence on these things. Neither the Palestinian people nor its leaders will give in to political blackmail. We will continue to take every measure possible to legally and politically counter the racist policies and inhumane practices that we are witnessing, in order to honour our commitment to the Palestinian people in our homeland and abroad, to their historical sacrifices and to the defence of our rights and national positions, including our right to freedom, security and dignity in our own beloved homeland of Palestine. As one of our famous poets once said,

“If one day a people desires to live, then fate will answer their call. And their night will then begin to fade, and their chains will break and fall.”

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

Mr. Danon (Israel): Two days ago, the United States adopted an important policy that rights a historical wrong. We thank the United States Administration for clearly rejecting the false claim and historical lie that the Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria are inherently illegal under international law. Earlier today, I had the pleasure of speaking with United

States Ambassador Craft who, as she is travelling in Latin America, called to express her continued support for Israel.

We look forward to combating the hypocrisy we see when it comes to identifying the true obstacles to peace in the region. We hope that the rest of the international community will find the courage to review the United States policy with an unbiased eye. Judea and Samaria are inseparable parts of the Jewish people's homeland. This is not a recent development or claim, but a historical truth that will never again be denied. The United States announcement reaffirms that resolution 2334 (2016) was based on political motives and has resulted in prolonging the conflict.

Many times, members of the Security Council have claimed, as they did today, that the Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria are an obstacle to finding a solution to the conflict. The Pavlovian response of some European countries to Secretary of State Pompeo's announcement only further delays the chances of ending the conflict. History teaches us that such claims have no merit. Let me be clear — Jewish communities are not an obstacle to peace. Israel has made this clear many times, not only with words, but with actions. In our peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, we have proven that when there is a partner, we are willing to negotiate and go to great lengths to achieve peace.

In 2005, Israel unilaterally decided to leave the Gaza Strip. Despite its rights to the land, Israel made this difficult decision because we thought that it would bring us closer to ending the conflict. Instead, it was met with terror and violence. Last week, we witnessed yet again rockets being fired at civilians — some 400 rockets. In 2009, President Obama asked Prime Minister Netanyahu to freeze building in Judea and Samaria. Prime Minister Netanyahu showed pragmatism and froze building for 10 months. Israel once again showed its willingness to make compromises in order to achieve peace. Needless to say, the response to this gesture was once again the rejectionism of the other side.

History clearly demonstrates that not only is Israel working to attain peace, but it has proven time and again that the Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria are not obstacles to achieving it. Why then would some members of the Council obsessively repeat the mantra that Jewish communities — which they refer to as settlements — are an obstacle to peace? Perhaps, it has to do with the political agenda and desire to

force a solution on the sides. Otherwise, why would the international community refuse to acknowledge the true obstacles to peace?

As opposed to the baseless claim that the Jewish communities stand in the way of peace, there are two true main obstacles to peace that must be overcome, if we are to be able to reach an agreement. We did not hear them mentioned here today.

The first is the Palestinian Authority's incitement against Israel and the Jewish people. When an entire generation is taught in school that the State of Israel has no right to exist, when children are taught to idolize martyrs whose so-called heroic acts are killing innocent people, and when teachers demonize Jews, we are faced with a real obstacle to peace. Incitement is an obstacle to peace, but we do not hear all Council members saying so because it places blame on the Palestinian Authority instead of on Israel.

The second real obstacle to peace is the Council's attempt to determine the outcome of the negotiations before they have even started. Too many members of the international community have a habit of trying to alter the starting point of future negotiations. Perhaps, that is done out of frustration over the fact that a solution to the conflict has not yet been reached.

The international community uses questionable legal tools to try to solve a political conflict. There are many examples of such behaviour. In internationally endorsed agreements, Israel and the Palestinian Authority agreed — we signed that agreement — that the future border will be negotiated directly and bilaterally. Although I heard certain remarks contrary to this fact in the Chamber today, we nevertheless have those agreements. Some in the international community have decided to go beyond the explicit agreement between the parties and add a few preconditions.

Several minutes ago, we heard some Council members say that future borders will be negotiated based on the so-called 1967 lines. The General Armistice Agreement of April 1949 between Israel and Jordan explicitly states that the demarcation line was established for military purposes only and, as stated in Article VI of the Agreement, "without prejudice to future territorial settlements or boundary lines". That was signed in 1949 between us and the Jordanians. Adding such a precondition is an attempt to decide the outcome of the negotiations before they have begun. Similarly — and this explains why some

in the international community insist on claiming that Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria are obstacles to peace despite knowing very well what I just mentioned — the claim is meant to try and decide the fate of these communities in a future agreement before the sides have — or really one side has — even agreed to negotiate.

Just last week, the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was renewed. UNRWA maintains the status of refugees and preaches in schools about a non-existent right of return. Why would the international community choose to keep people in refugee status? Why should someone who is a citizen of another country — for example, of the United Kingdom or the United States — still be considered a refugee according to UNRWA? The only possible explanation is that it is an attempt to shape the solution to the conflict.

Furthermore, inviting to the Council Israeli organizations that, under the umbrella of Israeli democracy and freedom of speech, paint a distorted picture of reality — and this is not the first time — is an attempt to solidify a one-sided narrative. It does not advance the prospect of negotiations. It all but guarantees that they will not happen in the near future.

The United States announcement this week says the exact opposite of what others in the international community are saying. It says that we cannot decide for the parties what the solution will look like and that only they can make that determination. There is a crucial difference between saying that we will not declare all Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria illegitimate and that we will allow the parties to decide on what happens with them in future, on the one hand, and that we will declare that these communities are illegitimate and that there can be only one outcome in future, on the other. Why should we negotiate if the Security Council knows better? The United States is not trying to misuse international law in order to force an outcome to the conflict, but rather understands that one can only come from negotiations. This idea was echoed by an American official who said that the announcement will create an appropriate level playing field for future talks.

When the international community tries to force a solution, it achieves the exact opposite effect. When Palestinians see that their battles are being fought for them, why would they agree to come to the negotiating table where they would have to compromise to speak with us? I would ask my colleagues, the Ambassadors of Belgium and France, how many times they have met Mr. Mansour over the past year or over the past four years. How many times has Mr. Mansour met with the Israeli delegation over the past four years? How many times has President Abbas met with Prime Minister Netanyahu over the past four years?

Maybe the international community thinks it is helping the Palestinians, but it is not. It is simply delaying the day that we will actually have to sit down and negotiate directly. The international community's actions are delaying the negotiations, which is clearly counterproductive.

The automatic support of some European countries for the Palestinians has resulted in a propaganda campaign that starts here in New York and ends in Ramallah. If they truly want to help, they must change their approach because their criticism is preventing direct negotiations. If the international community wants to bring the conflict to an end, it must shift its focus from trying to determine the outcome of a negotiation to encouraging the occurrence of one. The United States has played an important role to that effect, and we believe that the Arab countries in our region, through their influence, can also play a vital role in bringing both sides to the negotiating table.

Israel is more than willing to negotiate, as we have shown many times in the past. But, in order to get the Palestinians to the table, the international community must stop trying to force an outcome. Instead, they must force the Palestinians to show up — simply show up — without preconditions. The political conflict will never have a legal solution. The only solution is a negotiated one.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on the list, but a number of colleagues have asked for consultations, so I invite Council members to consultations to continue our discussions on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.