



Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

8826th meeting
 Wednesday, 28 July 2021, 10 a.m.
 New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. De Rivière	(France)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Estonia	Mr. Lipand
	India	Mr. Kakanur
	Ireland	Mr. Flynn
	Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Niger	Mr. Abarry
	Norway	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield
	Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter by the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of Security Council members dated 7 May 2020 (S/2020/372), which was agreed in light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this official record of the Security Council will be supplemented by a compilation of annexes (S/2021/685) containing the statements submitted by interested non-members of the Council.



The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Ms. Lynn Hastings, Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory; and Ms. Yudith Oppenheimer, Executive Director of Ir Amim.

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

I give the floor to Ms. Hastings.

Ms. Hastings: I brief the Security Council today as the United Nations and its partners are providing urgent assistance to Gaza in the wake of the recent round of hostilities. Beyond the human tragedy for both Palestinians and Israelis and the physical damage of 11 days of fighting, the economic impact of the escalation in May has further exacerbated the existing humanitarian crisis and severely weakened Gaza's economy.

On 6 July, the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union released the rapid damage and needs assessment. According to the assessment, damages in Gaza are estimated to be from \$290 to \$380 million, while economic losses may reach nearly \$200 million. The social sector was hit the hardest, significantly weakening the safety net for the most vulnerable. The immediate and short-term recovery and reconstruction needs are estimated at \$345 to \$485 million. The same day, a technical meeting of the

Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians was held to align donors' efforts to help address both the aftermath of the May escalation and the significant fiscal crisis facing the Palestinian Authority (PA).

International efforts coordinated by the United Nations to implement the humanitarian response and stabilize the situation on the ground in Gaza are well under way. Thus far, some \$45 million of the requested \$95 million dollars has been raised for the consolidated humanitarian flash appeal published by the United Nations in May. I thank donors for their generous support and urge additional contributions so that the numerous pressing needs can be addressed. The United Nations and its partners stand ready to implement urgently needed recovery and reconstruction initiatives in coordination with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, Egypt, Qatar and other regional and international partners.

On 28 June, fuel deliveries for the Gaza power plant resumed through the Kerem Shalom crossing under the existing United Nations framework through the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), with support from Qatar. Electricity supply is now roughly 14 hours per day, critical for Gaza and its residents. On 24 June, the Israeli authorities expanded the Gaza fishing zone from six to nine nautical miles, and then once again on 12 July to 12 nautical miles. Additional restrictions on the import and export of certain goods were also lifted. However, on 25 July the fishing zone was restricted again to six nautical miles, following the launch of incendiary balloons from the Gaza Strip.

In that context, further steps are needed. It is essential that Israel implement additional measures to allow unhindered entry of all humanitarian assistance, including materials to implement the 2021 humanitarian response plan and the flash appeal. Beyond the immediate humanitarian needs, without regular and predictable entry of goods into Gaza, the capacity of the United Nations and our partners to deliver critical interventions is at risk, as are the provision of basic services, the livelihoods of people and the wider Gaza economy.

In that context, the trilateral Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism — with the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations — established in 2014 and operated by UNOPS, remains best-placed to enable the entry and

accountable delivery of a wide range of essential imports from Israel. Furthermore, for any durable stability, movement and access in and out of Gaza must be improved. Taking into consideration its legitimate security concerns, Israel should ease restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from Gaza, in line with resolution 1860 (2009), with the goal of ultimately lifting them. Hamas and other armed groups must stop the launching of incendiary devices, rockets and mortars and end the militant build up.

In terms of looking ahead, with additional donor support, existing United Nations humanitarian cash assistance or other programmes could quickly be scaled up to reach tens or hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza. While urgent humanitarian interventions can provide critical relief in the short term, any sustainable future in Gaza requires political solutions. I once again reiterate the need for the return of a legitimate Palestinian Government to the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian Authority's fiscal situation continues to be a source of significant concern. The budget gap is expected to be well over \$1 billion for the current budget year, and the Palestinian financial sector is exposed to serious liquidity risks. Compounding the PA's financial situation, on 11 July, the Israeli Security Cabinet approved the freezing of some 600 million Israeli shekels from the clearance revenues Israel collects on behalf of the PA.

The funds will be deducted in monthly instalments, in line with Israeli Knesset legislation from 2018, which authorizes the withholding of funds equal to the amount that Israeli authorities determine have been paid by the PA over the preceding year to security prisoners and detainees and the families of Palestinians killed while carrying out attacks. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayeh called the measures contrary to signed agreements and unjust. In order to address those challenges, the PA must implement much-needed reforms, including the so-called prisoner-payment system, and strengthen the rule of law and accountability. Enhanced cooperation between Israel and the PA to address outstanding financial challenges on key fiscal and economic files will also be critical.

Violence continued across the occupied Palestinian territory throughout the reporting period.

In Gaza, while the cessation of hostilities reached between Israel and Hamas in May largely held, militants launched 13 incendiary balloons towards Israel, with

several causing fires. In retaliation, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) fired 18 missiles against what it said were Hamas targets in the Strip, resulting in damage but no injuries.

On 22 July, a Palestinian was killed and some 14 others were injured in an explosion in the Az-Zawiya marketplace, in Gaza City. The Israeli Security Forces (ISF) said the incident was an "internal matter" and that Israel had not been involved. Hamas has reportedly opened an investigation.

In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, clashes, attacks, search-and-arrest operations and other incidents resulted in the death of four Palestinians, including a child, and injuries to 638 Palestinians, including 46 children and seven women. Five Israeli security personnel were injured during these events.

On 25 June, Israeli forces shot, injured and detained a Palestinian who they said was planning to carry out a stabbing attack near the settlement of Yitzhar, in the northern West Bank.

On 3 July, a Palestinian man was shot and killed by the ISF in the village of Qusra, near Nablus, following clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. According to the ISF, the man was shot after throwing an object that exploded near Israeli soldiers.

On 14 July, a Palestinian man was shot and injured by the ISF after reportedly trying to enter the settlement of Yitzhar with a knife.

On 18 July, clashes broke out between Palestinians and the ISF in and around the holy sites, ahead of visits by hundreds of Jewish visitors observing the commemoration of Tisha B'Av. I reiterate that the status quo at Jerusalem's holy sites must be upheld and fully respected, and call upon community, religious and political leaders on all sides to refrain from provocative action and rhetoric in the interest of peace and stability.

On 23 July, the ISF shot and critically injured a 17-year-old Palestinian boy during clashes in the village of Nabi Saleh, in the West Bank. The boy later died of his wounds. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the boy was shot in the stomach by an ISF foot patrol. The ISF said a soldier had opened fire after stones had been thrown towards him, threatening his life, and that it would investigate the incident.

Also on 23 July, a Palestinian man was reportedly shot and killed by Hamas security forces while driving through a checkpoint in Gaza City.

Meanwhile, settlers and other Israeli civilians in the occupied West Bank perpetrated some 36 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in 13 injuries and damage to property. Palestinians perpetrated 47 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians, resulting in eight injuries and damage to property.

On 26 June, settlers attacked Palestinians in the village of Al-Mughayyir, near Ramallah. Israeli forces intervened, resulting in the injury of 18 Palestinians.

I underscore that all perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice.

I also call on Israeli security forces to ensure the protection of Palestinians, in line with Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law.

Following the death of political activist Nizar Banat on 24 June, Palestinians held demonstrations across the occupied West Bank. In Ramallah, on 26 June and 5 July, the Palestinian Security Forces beat protestors and indiscriminately fired tear gas and stun grenades. On 26 June, the Palestinian Security Forces also failed to stop violent acts by groups of non-uniformed persons, reported to be associated with security personnel, resulting in violence targeting journalists and human-rights monitors, including a United Nations staff member. Women present at the demonstrations reported sexual harassment and gender-based threats on social media afterwards.

I call on the Palestinian Authority to ensure that the death of Nizar Banat and all allegations of the use of disproportionate force against protestors by the Palestinian Security Forces are investigated in a thorough, transparent and independent manner and those responsible held to account. The Palestinian people must be able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, opinion and peaceful assembly. Arbitrary and politically motivated arrests must cease.

On 2 July, Israeli settlers, comprising some 50 families, left the illegal outpost of Evyatar following an agreement reached with the Israeli Government that IDF troops would re-establish a presence at the site. According to the agreement, the Israeli Civil Administration will conduct an accelerated land survey to determine land status. Areas found not to be privately owned by Palestinians will be declared "State land" and

subsequently made available for building a religious school and staff residence. Any existing structures found to be outside "State land" will be demolished.

Following the evacuation, near-daily clashes continued during the reporting period between Palestinian residents of the nearby village of Beita and Israeli settlers and security forces, resulting in the death of a Palestinian, injury to some 460 others and damage to structures.

I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law. Settlement-related activities must cease, as they undermine the prospect of achieving a viable two-State solution in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and prior agreements.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes and other structures continued throughout the reporting period.

Overall, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 113 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C of the occupied West Bank and 16 in East Jerusalem, displacing 177 Palestinians, including 38 women and 102 children, and affecting 1,934 others. The demolitions were carried out due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished 31 structures in the Bedouin community of Humsa Al-Baqai'a, in Area C of the occupied West Bank. Some 18 of the structures demolished or confiscated were provided by donors following previous demolitions in February. As a result, seven Palestinian families, comprising 54 people, including 30 children, were again displaced. Despite repeated calls by the international community, Israeli authorities have continued to instruct the residents to move to a different location, citing the community's presence in an Israeli-declared firing zone.

During the reporting period, Israeli forces confiscated at least 49 structures in another West Bank herding community, Ras Al-Tin, resulting in the displacement of 84 Palestinians, including 53 children and 14 women.

I urge Israel to cease the demolition and seizure of Palestinian property throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law, and to allow Palestinians to develop their communities.

Turning to the region, in the occupied Golan the ceasefire between Israel and Syria has been generally maintained despite the continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement by the parties. On 1 June, the IDF said that it had carried out a retaliatory attack on a military outpost of the Syrian armed forces west of the ceasefire line. Early on 17 June, United Nations personnel observed an IDF tank on the Alpha side fire 10 rounds towards Al-Qahtaniya in the area of separation. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force continues to liaise with the parties to remind them of their obligations to respect the terms of the disengagement agreement and prevent escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line.

In Lebanon, and ahead of the first anniversary of the Beirut port explosion on 4 August, the United Nations reiterates the need for an impartial and transparent investigation into the explosion to ensure accountability. The United Nations looks forward to the swift formation of a new Government able to address the country's crises, following the appointment of Mr. Najib Mikati as Prime Minister-designate on 26 July. Meanwhile, the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remains tense, as demonstrated by the rocket fire from Lebanon towards Israel and the artillery response by Israel on 20 July. UNIFIL continues to liaise with the parties to de-escalate tensions.

I remain concerned about the financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). As of today, the projected shortfall under its programme budget amounts to \$100 million. The Agency also faces an imminent cash-flow crisis, which risks impacting the smooth opening of the school year for half a million girls and boys in Gaza. The absence of a fully funded programme budget also undermines UNRWA's capacity to conduct much needed humanitarian and early recovery activities in Gaza. I appeal once again to all donors, including those from the Arab region, to sustain the funding levels of past years and advance disbursements of funds as much as possible to avoid a disruption of essential services and humanitarian aid.

Following the explosive violence across the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel in May, on 30 June some 200 Israeli and Palestinian women's organizations and activists released a joint statement calling for immediate action, based on the principles of resolution 1325 (2000), to achieve long-term solutions

to the conflict. Noting the particular importance of protecting women from all forms of violence and ensuring women's representation in decision-making positions, they urged broader efforts towards a negotiated long-term solution, and not just a temporary calm.

We in the international community should heed those important words. Urgent efforts to improve the situation in Gaza must move forward swiftly, but let us not lose sight of the broader goal — resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ending the occupation and realizing the two-State solution on the basis of United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

The United Nations remains committed to continuing to support Palestinian and Israeli moves towards that political horizon. The United Nations will work with the parties and through the Middle East Quartet to pave the way forward to meaningful negotiations on all outstanding issues.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Hastings for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Oppenheimer.

Ms. Oppenheimer: I thank you, Mr. President, and the members of the Security Council for the opportunity to address the Council today.

I grew up in Jerusalem and, likewise, raised my children here. My Orthodox Jewish upbringing deepened my understanding of the profound role of religion and tradition in shaping attachment to the city. Jerusalem is, in every meaning of the word, my home, yet it is also home for the many Palestinians who live alongside Israelis like me. When I think of Jerusalem, I cannot imagine it without the multiplicity of peoples, religions and historical narratives it contains. It is precisely that diversity that makes Jerusalem so extraordinary, but also what transforms it into an arena of acute conflict.

For that reason, I joined Ir Amim — an Israeli organization that envisions an equitable and sustainable Jerusalem, with an agreed political future. Ir Amim means “City of Peoples,” which reflects our vision of Jerusalem as a shared city — the current home and future capital of two peoples with equal measures of attachments and claims to Jerusalem. Yet, the rights and liberties I enjoy as an Israeli citizen are not afforded to the city's 350,000 Palestinian residents, who today make up nearly 40 per cent of its population.

Since the 1967 occupation and unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem, in contravention of international law, Israeli authorities have employed a system of discriminatory policies to weaken the Palestinian hold on the city. Those policies have included land confiscation and settlement-building, the denial of citizenship and political rights, permanent residency revocations, insufficient service provision and severe restrictions on planning and building in East Jerusalem. That not only violates the individual and collective rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem, but also contravenes Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), and destabilizes conditions for an agreed resolution based on a two-State framework, with two capitals in Jerusalem.

The recent escalation of violence and tensions in our region further underscored the centrality of Jerusalem to the conflict and its wider implications on regional stability. The main trigger behind the clashes was the ongoing pressure to undermine Palestinian rights to Jerusalem, exemplified by the continued erosion of the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif, the arbitrary closure of the Damascus Gate plaza during Ramadan and the pending evictions of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah. Indeed, in recent years, the number of evictions of Palestinian families and home demolitions has significantly grown, serving as an acute mechanism of Palestinian displacement from Jerusalem.

I am speaking before the Council today because these measures of Palestinian displacement have recently increased in scope and scale in an unprecedented manner. A total of four Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem: Sheikh Jarrah, Batan Al-Hawa, Al-Bustan and Al-Walajeh, numbering approximately 3,000 Palestinians, are simultaneously under impending threat of mass expulsion. Many of those families have exhausted their limited legal remedies, which could lead to a devastating wave of evictions and demolitions in the coming months.

Beyond the geopolitical implications, these measures severely violate Palestinian rights to housing and the right to family and community life, as an occupied minority group protected under international law. The Israeli Government presents its actions as legitimate within the framework of its democratic and legal institutions. However, those institutions are largely inaccessible to East Jerusalem Palestinians, who are devoid of political rights and the power to participate

in the legislative and policymaking processes, which govern their lives.

The two communities facing mass eviction are Sheikh Jarrah and Batan Al-Hawa. Nearly 150 Palestinian families, numbering more than 1,000 people, are at risk of displacement, based on discriminatory laws. Those laws afford Jews the reclamation of assets in East Jerusalem, lost in 1948, now inhabited by Palestinians, while denying Palestinians the same right for lost properties on the Israeli side of the Green Line. Many of the families facing eviction are Palestinian refugees, who lost homes in Israel in 1948 and now stand to be displaced for a second time.

Although successive Israeli Governments have framed those cases as standard property disputes, they are rather part of a systematic campaign aimed at uprooting Palestinian families and supplanting them with settlers to create Israeli enclaves in the heart of Palestinian neighbourhoods. These settler compounds are accompanied by the daily presence of security forces, which together generate constant friction and severely disrupt life in the community.

Currently, several eviction cases in both neighbourhoods are pending at the Supreme Court, with a major hearing scheduled for 2 August, pertaining to four families in Sheikh Jarrah. Concurrently, the Attorney-General has been asked by the Supreme Court to submit a legal opinion by 29 August in one of the cases in Batan Al-Hawa, which will likely impact the additional cases, involving 80 more families in that neighbourhood.

The Court's request indicates a possible understanding that those cases carry far-reaching political and moral ramifications and, therefore, require Government involvement. Through the Attorney-General's opinion, the Israeli Government is now being compelled to take an explicit position on these eviction proceedings. It is therefore essential to hold the Israeli Government accountable and to urge it to prevent the large-scale displacement of those communities.

In parallel, threats of mass demolition loom over 140 homes in Al-Bustan, Silwan and Al-Walajeh, placing some 1,800 more Palestinians at risk of displacement. Upcoming court decisions in August, concerning both of those communities, could immediately accelerate demolitions.

In Al-Bustan, demolitions are being advanced to make way for a nationalistic archaeological park, while in Al-Walajah they are being carried out due to its strategic location between Jerusalem and the southern West Bank settlements — an area targeted for further de facto or formal annexation.

Demolition orders are served under the pretext of lacking building permits, which are nearly impossible to procure due to the absence of proper zoning plans that the Israeli authorities have consistently neglected to advance. Israeli planning authorities have continually blocked efforts by residents in both those areas to authorize their homes and promote plans to enable the residential development of their communities.

A total of four communities of nearly 3,000 Palestinians are currently at risk of losing their homes in East Jerusalem. These are not private property disputes, but rather a manifestation of a national policy aimed at changing the demographic composition of East Jerusalem, which simultaneously deprives Palestinians of their basic right to housing and the right to family and community life.

In his recent remarks to his European counterparts, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid stated:

“What we need to do now is to make sure that no steps are taken that will prevent the possibility of peace in the future. We need to improve the lives of Palestinians. Whatever is humanitarian, I will be for it.”

To fulfil that statement, the Israeli Government must therefore be urged to, first, immediately cease all demolitions and evictions of Palestinian families; secondly, advance proper urban planning and equitable housing policies in East Jerusalem; thirdly, ensure the provision of fair and adequate services to all the city’s residents; fourthly, safeguard both peoples’ rights to their homes and the city and recognize their historic, religious and political attachments to Jerusalem; and, fifthly, engage with the Palestinian national leadership and together, with the support of the international community, foster the conditions for a sustainable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in line with resolution 2334 (2016).

In the absence of a political agreement in the foreseeable future, the two peoples in Jerusalem will continue to share a complex urban reality, predicated on symbiotic relations and interdependence. Dialogue

and cooperation must therefore be cultivated and measures that exacerbate tensions should be avoided. Those elements must constitute a basis for negotiations towards a viable solution out of the understanding that, in every possible political constellation, the two peoples will continue to live alongside each other in Jerusalem.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Oppenheimer for her briefing.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, I thank France for its presidency, which has shed light on issues of importance for Palestine and humankind, including the critical matter of the protection for civilians. I take this opportunity to declare that the State of Palestine is proud to have joined the call for action to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law. I also wish to thank the two briefers for their clear and sober portrayals of the situation on the ground and the dire reminder of the need for urgent international action to uphold international law and the Security Council’s resolutions in our collective search for justice and peace.

We are often told that we should not air past grievances and that we need to focus on the future. While I understand the sentiment, when we speak of dispossession, displacement and denial of rights, we are actually speaking of the present reality of our people, not of an old chapter in our history, an ongoing dismal reality and injustice. We fear that the future being drawn on the ground aims at making that our perpetual reality.

Some people try to explain to us how not to place our children in harm’s way, overlooking the central and hard fact that the occupation, violent and belligerent in every manifestation, is the harm placed in our children’s way every day. Every job becomes more challenging in Palestine. A teacher, a doctor, a nurse, a journalist and a representative of the people can be arrested or killed for doing their duty. But there is no task more difficult than being a parent deprived of any means to afford their children any sense of stability or security. There is no safe haven in Palestine. Children are killed in their homes, in their schools and in the streets. They can experience an arrest when they are as young as five or six years. They fear forcible displacement from their homes from the day they are born. In Jerusalem, in Gaza and in every corner of our country that is the reality with which parents and children are confronted.

Let us therefore talk about the future by addressing how to change the reality of our children today. The battle for peace will be won or lost on the ground by ending the galloping annexation and occupation and by upholding Palestinian rights.

The Security Council has called on the parties to demonstrate in word and practice their commitment to peace. Occupation and peace cannot coexist; they are mutually exclusive. Advancing peace requires ending the occupation. As we speak, peace is at stake in Sheikh Jarrah, as we heard, and Silwan as the occupation continues to creep into our homes. It is at stake in Beita, where the battle against illegal settlements has reached new heights. It is at stake in Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, where annexation plans are being advanced daily. It is at stake in the Gaza Strip, where the inhumane Israeli blockade continues. It is at stake at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, where events demonstrate that our warnings about attempts to divide the holy site are well founded.

There are many reasons to despair, but there is a good reason to continue fighting for just and lasting peace, which is the alternative. We have to name the alternative that is becoming more and more obvious every day: apartheid on both sides of the green line. That is the alternative. I repeat: it is apartheid on both sides of the green line.

The past couple of months unequivocally refuted the claims that the situation was under control while annexation is under way; that peace is possible while ignoring or sidelining the Palestinian people; or that East Jerusalem could remain occupied forever or that efforts for peace could be delayed indefinitely.

We need to maintain a sense of urgency and generate the momentum to move forward. There are reasons to be hopeful: the resilience of the Palestinian people; the ability of so many to see that only peace provides a sustainable and safe future for all; a United States Administration that adheres to the international consensus; an international community that shares clarity on the objective of two democratic States, with an independent and sovereign State of Palestine on the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital; as well as more and more actors, States, companies, funds and organizations upholding their obligations under international law and the Council's resolutions to distinguish between the territory of the occupying Power and the occupied territory, not to render aid

or assistance to illegal actions and not to recognize the situation created by those illegal actions. When companies implement Council resolutions, they should not be criticized; they should be saluted. We need to see more of this kind of action, and we need to see respect for resolutions of the Security Council — not falsely accuse them of things that they are not doing.

We are moved by the signs of international solidarity with the Palestinian people all around the globe this year — the solidarity of those who marched, spoke out and took action. Many of them had marched in earlier decades, against apartheid, colonialism, segregation and injustice. Many of them were born after all those struggles allowed freedom to prevail, and they refuse to see the Palestinian people denied the freedom that all human beings are entitled to. Some of us around this table were part of those historic movements.

Within these halls and around this table, there are representatives of nations that know only too well that freedom is the only path to peace. Their positions are informed by their own history and by the universal principles and international rules that the Organization was built to uphold. There is no reason for those rules and principles not to apply in Palestine or for those who violate them to continue enjoying impunity.

The Council has, unfortunately, demonstrated its limitations in times of aggression and war. That means that it has an even greater duty to actively pursue peace. It knows the road that leads to that destination; it is inscribed in its own resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). It has the tools to help implement those resolutions. It has a mechanism, the Quartet, established for that sole purpose, and we support in that regard the Russian proposal to convene the Quartet at the ministerial level. The Council must be the catalyst for determined international action to steer us away from the path we are on and drive us towards safety.

A lot has been written about this new Palestinian generation — that it was desperate, seeking individual salvation rather than national liberation, that it had lost interest in politics, that it could coexist with occupation so long as its needs were provided for. This generation responded with a resounding message: there is no alternative to our freedom. It has displayed courage, unity, determination and pride in being Palestinian. It has already vanquished the occupation by defeating fear and despair. This generation deserves the Council's

support even when it might no longer be expecting it after years of disappointment.

Many noted the participation of a team representing Palestine in the Olympic Games, a strong symbol, but my duty is to remind the Council of the challenges that those athletes had to face to make it all the way there to Japan, and also to speak of the athlete that lost his life or was paralysed or is detained, of all those whose dreams could not be fulfilled because of the occupation and injustice that continue to mar every aspect of Palestinian life.

When we speak of untapped potential in Palestine, there is no greater resource than our people, who have displayed their spectacular abilities and talents in the worst possible conditions. It is time for them to find their natural place in history and geography, among the nations of the world, to enjoy freedom and dignity, return and independence, and to fulfil their right to self-determination, a right that stands among the main principles and purposes of the United Nations and a right that the Palestinian people will not forgo.

I thank you, Mr. President, and Council members for their attention to this urgent matter.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Erdan (Israel): Two weeks ago, the United Arab Emirates officially opened its embassy in Tel Aviv. This week we saw the first direct flight between Israel and Morocco and Israel's return to the African Union. We will soon celebrate the one-year anniversary of the announcement of the Abraham Accords, which have so far led to peace and normalization between Israel and four Arab States, in addition to our long-standing peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan.

To quote a great Jewish thinker, "The times they are a'changin'". And they are changing, even without the involvement of the Security Council. In fact, perhaps they are changing because the Security Council was not involved. Israel and more and more moderate Arab States are working to move beyond the past of hate, instability and fundamentalism towards a future of dialogue, tolerance and peace, a future in which cooperation replaces conflict and respectful dialogue replaces violent disputes.

Unfortunately, terrorist groups such as Hamas and radical regimes such as Iran oppose that vision of a brighter future. They are fighting to keep the

Middle East stuck in a dark age of conflict, a past in which the narratives of the extremists dominate the international discourse and in which Israel is singled out for demonization.

In May, Hamas launched thousands of rockets against millions of Israeli civilians. Those who truly understand the Middle East know that that was a reaction to the Palestinian Authority's decision once again to cancel the planned elections. Hamas was seeking to increase its political power and popularity on the Palestinian street at the expense of the Palestinian Authority and so looked for an excuse to attack Israel. It found an excuse, a very, very weak one, or at least one that would be considered very weak in the context of any other country.

Let me ask you: would you ever accept the narrative of a designated terrorist organization as a valid excuse for firing thousands of rockets at your citizens, at your capital? Of course not. Bringing Hamas's lies about Jerusalem to the Security Council strengthens terrorist organizations and weakens the Palestinian Authority. You all know why President Abbas cancelled the elections.

Still, the Council acts as if the most important and pressing security issue in the Middle East were the false Palestinian claims regarding Jerusalem. Why else would the Council need to be briefed by a one-sided speaker from a political Israeli no-governmental organization (NGO) affiliated with the far left, an NGO with a long history of spreading distorted claims regarding Israel's legitimacy and presence in Jerusalem while ignoring inconvenient facts — such as the fact that more than half of Jerusalem's Arab residents would prefer Israeli citizenship to Palestinian citizenship, or the fact that Jerusalem's Arab population has increased by more than 400 per cent since Jerusalem was reunited in 1967, or the fact that just last week during Eid al-Adha, 100,000 Muslims prayed peacefully at the Al-Aqsa mosque while Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount are never allowed to pray — never.

As this Israeli non-governmental organization's participation in this debate reflects, Israel is a vibrant democracy committed to freedom of expression. However, bringing a political non-governmental organization to brief the Security Council on Jerusalem is as absurd as bringing a leader of the yellow vest protests to give an objective briefing on the French Government's economic policy.

But making Jerusalem the focus of the Security Council's Middle East debate is not just absurd; it is dangerous. It could be understood as an acceptance of Hamas' narrative that Israeli actions in Jerusalem justified its latest terror attacks on Israel. Today's discussion might serve to increase Hamas' influence in Jerusalem and the Palestinian arena. Is this really what the Security Council wants?

Listening to the Palestinian Ambassador, it is painfully clear that the Palestinian Authority is stuck in the past and that it wants to keep the Council stuck in the past as well — a past where, rather than dealing with its problems at home or investing in its people, the Palestinian Authority focuses on attacking Israel in the international arena and inciting terrorism, a past where the Palestinian Authority leads the efforts aimed at having the United Nations waste its resources on yet another commission biased against Israel.

The latest Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry against Israel is not just a waste of resources, it is a travesty of justice. While the Palestinian Authority continues to spread hate against Israel at the United Nations, the Palestinian people are in the streets calling for the downfall of the Palestinian Authority regime. Palestinian Authority security forces are savagely beating and murdering protesters and journalists.

But rather than addressing any of these issues, the Palestinian Authority is going through the same old tired act of blaming Israel for its problems. This approach, which prioritizes demonizing Israel over helping Palestinians, led to the Palestinian Authority's shameful decision to refuse Israel's offer to transfer over a million coronavirus disease vaccines that could have saved many, many lives. Once again, the Palestinian Authority prioritized its hate for Israel over the lives and well-being of its people.

The Palestinian Authority claimed that its refusal was due to the vaccine's expiry date, but this claim was baseless, and the proof of that is that Israel then signed a similar agreement with South Korea. I guess South Korea's health standards are too low for the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. President, do you think you could find the Palestinian non-governmental organization that would come before the Security Council to condemn the Palestinian Authority's incitement to terror and pay-for-slay policy? Of course not: if they dared to speak

out, they would be arrested and beaten into silence by the Palestinian Authority.

Make no mistake: the costs of adopting the narratives of the extremists in the Middle East and enabling those who oppose peace to keep the region stuck in the past are enormous, and not just for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Lebanon is in a state of crisis. According to UNICEF, Lebanon's water system is on the verge of collapse. Parts of Iran are facing a water crisis so severe that protesters are out in the streets and the Ayatollah regime is reacting the way it always does — with violence and murder.

Israel is a world leader in water management and technology. We would be glad to help the people of Lebanon and Iran improve their water security, just as we have helped many other nations in this field, and just like we accepted to do this month in our agreement to provide Jordan with an additional 50 million cubic meters of water. Leading the way to a future of cooperation would hold great benefits for all. Unfortunately, some countries are not interested in building a better future.

The regime working hard to keep the region mirrored in a dark past of conflict is Iran. The Iranian regime is continuing its quest to become a nuclear-threshold State while spreading terror, destruction and instability throughout the Middle East and around the world. The International Atomic Energy Agency reported this month that Iran is taking steps towards the production of uranium metal enriched to 20 per cent. As the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany and the United Kingdom stated, Iran has no credible civilian need for research and development in uranium-metal production, but that is a key step in the development of a nuclear weapon. Of course, Iran has no credible civilian need, but it has a clear military need to obtain nuclear-weapon capabilities.

It is not only Israel that Iran threatens. Iran is developing ballistic missiles that can reach the heart of Europe. Iran is destabilizing Yemen and taking over Lebanon, with its proxy Hizbullah. Iran is behind attacks on American troops in Iraq and on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia. Just this week, Jordan's King Hussein revealed that Jordan had been attacked by drones with Iran's signature on them.

The latest example of Iran's outrageous behaviour was the plot to kidnap an American citizen on American soil. Iran had Masih Alinejad, a brave journalist and

activist for freedom and women's rights, followed and photographed, and tried to lure her out of the country. Fortunately, the American authorities foiled the efforts to kidnap her. However, other regime critics, such as Ruhollah Zam, who was kidnapped and murdered by the Iranian Government, were sadly not so fortunate. If this is what Iran is doing today, imagine what Iran will do to anyone who tries to oppose its regime once it has nuclear weapons.

Yet Ms. Alinejad was not invited to brief the Council today, and Iran is not the focus of today's discussion. Instead, we are once again discussing Israel and Jerusalem, in line with the script of Hamas and Ayatollah Khamenei. While Iran plots to kidnap its critics in the West, it has, together with its proxy Hizbullah, kidnapped the Lebanese people while making a mockery of resolution 1701 (2006) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

When resolution 1701 (2006) was adopted, Hizbullah had approximately 10,000 rockets pointed at Israel. Today it has 150,000 rockets hidden among the schools, mosques and homes of Lebanon. Iran is working day and night to help Hizbullah to obtain precision-guided missiles and other advanced weapons.

How can it be that institutions such as the Security Council and the European Union have not designated Hizbullah in its entirety as a terrorist organization? Why allow Hizbullah to undermine Lebanese sovereignty rather than acting forcefully to undermine Hizbullah's terror activity?

Last week two rockets were fired at Israel from within UNIFIL's area of operation. This is completely unacceptable. The Security Council must take the opportunity of the renewal of the UNIFIL mandate next month to constrain Hizbullah terror activity in southern Lebanon by ensuring that UNIFIL has the tools, authority and resolve to fulfil its mandate. If not, Hizbullah may drag the entire region into a war that would only bring great destruction on Lebanon.

Should not the crisis in Lebanon and Hizbullah's use of Lebanese civilians as human shields be the topic of today's debate? But no, once again, the Security Council is focusing on criticizing Israel and encouraging Palestinian extremism and rejectionism.

When the Council fails to take strong action against the world's worst human rights violators, such as Iran and Syria, and instead singles out the world's

only Jewish State, it is no wonder that companies like Ben and Jerry's and Unilever allow themselves to single out Israel for boycott. Those companies have no moral reservations about operating in countries that are truly among the world's worst violators of human rights, while imposing an anti-Semitic boycott on the Jewish State. In the light of those double standards, the claims of United Nations bodies and companies like Ben & Jerry's to be motivated by high ideals and objective standards melt into nothing like ice cream in the summer sun.

One or another non-governmental agency, or even the Security Council, cannot undermine the millenniums-old connection between the Jewish people and their eternal capital of Jerusalem. Under every Jewish wedding canopy throughout the world, a promise is made to remember Jerusalem. We will always keep that promise. While Israel will always remain committed to coexistence and religious freedom for all peoples and faiths in the Holy City, and we continue to maintain the status quo despite false claims to the contrary, we will never accept the delegitimization of our legal, historical and national rights in Jerusalem — by the Security Council or any other international body.

Rather than singling out Israel for attack once again, there are many things that the Council can and should do for the stability, security and future of the region. It should reject Hamas' narrative on Jerusalem and hold it accountable for using the people of Gaza as human shields. It should insist that the Palestinian Authority end its rejectionism and financing of terror and finally agree to a dialogue with Israel with no preconditions. Palestinian pressure at the United Nations can never lead to a viable solution. Only good faith, bilateral talks and people-to-people ties can move us forward on the path to peace.

Lastly, the Security Council should support the efforts of Israel and moderate States to shape a new regional reality of tolerance and cooperation. Israel will always have its hands outstretched in friendship to all who wish to join hands in peace. We hope that the Council and its members will be our partners in building a better future for the entire Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Ms. Hastings for her briefing. Once

again, I would like to express my deep appreciation for the work of the United Nations, particularly her team and Special Coordinator Wennesland. I also thank Ms. Oppenheimer for her participation today. I welcome and acknowledge the participation of the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

The United States remains committed to a two-State solution. And we will continue to oppose efforts to single out Israel unfairly in United Nations forums. Israelis and Palestinians deserve equal measures of freedom, dignity, security and prosperity. Violence threatens those goals directly. We are therefore encouraged that the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Gaza-based militants, for the most part, continues to hold. We continue to encourage both Israelis and Palestinians to exercise restraint and refrain from provocative actions and rhetoric, including settlement activity, the annexation of territory, evictions, demolitions, incitement to violence and compensating individuals in prison for acts of terrorism.

We hope to partner with Israel and the Palestinian Authority in maintaining calm and keeping flash points like the situation in Jerusalem — whether in the Old City, on the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif or in Sheikh Jarrah — from reigniting the situation. As the immediacy of the most recent escalation recedes, we must make good on our commitments to provide humanitarian assistance and support recovery efforts in Gaza. To that end, the United States continues to provide critical humanitarian aid to vulnerable Palestinian refugees.

Two weeks ago, the United States signed a framework for cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA and its staff are tirelessly committed to serving the needs of Palestinian refugees, but the Agency needs operational and managerial improvements. I want to be clear: the United States has zero-tolerance for manifestations of anti-Semitism, racism or other forms of hatred in United Nations agencies, and that includes UNRWA.

That is why our framework of cooperation — the most robust to date — outlines expectations and includes benchmarks to increase UNRWA's transparency and accountability, consistent with United Nations principles, including neutrality. Shortly after signing the framework, we announced the contribution

of nearly \$136 million in additional humanitarian assistance to UNRWA. The new funding brings the total of United States humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Palestinians served by UNRWA this year to \$318 million. But even with our robust support, the Agency's needs are vast.

We call on other Member States, especially our partners in the Gulf, to step up their financial commitments too. In addition to ensuring that the Agency is on a stable financial track, it is critical that UNRWA be able to implement its operations in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. We look forward to working with donors to intensify those efforts.

As we work to provide aid to Palestinians in need, we are concerned about recent reports of the Palestinian Authority acting to restrict Palestinian freedom of expression and harassing civil society activists and organizations. That is unacceptable. In particular, we are deeply disturbed by the death of Palestinian activist Nizar Banat. The circumstances of his death must be fully investigated, and those responsible held accountable. It should be in all of our interests to promote a sustainable solution for Gaza and take steps towards ending the suffering on both sides.

In late June, I had the honour to meet Leah Goldin. Her son Hadar was killed by Hamas militants, and his body remains in Gaza. For the past seven years, the Goldins have advocated endlessly for his return. When I met with her, I promised her that I would do everything possible to support her efforts to have her son returned. No parent — no one — should have to endure such a wretched experience. The United States will continue to fiercely advocate for the return of Israeli soldiers killed in action in Gaza, as well as the return of Israeli civilians held captive there. And we will continue to push for decency, humanity, equality and peace for all.

Mr. Kakanur (India): I thank Deputy Special Coordinator Lynn Hastings for her briefing today. I also thank Executive Director Judith Oppenheimer for her participation. I welcome the participation of the observer of the Observer State of Palestine and the representative of Israel at today's meeting.

The 21 May ceasefire was brought about by the concerted efforts and assurances of the international community, which continues its intense diplomatic efforts in negotiating a long-term ceasefire. We call on all parties to show restraint and to desist from all

unilateral actions that could exacerbate tensions. The regular and predictable entry of goods through verified channels into Gaza remains vital for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. Israel's easing of restrictions on the entry of essential supplies into Gaza and on the movement of patients needing critical medical care in Gaza are steps in the right direction and need to be furthered.

India welcomes all measures to de-escalate the situation and encourages further steps from both parties to ensure the smooth delivery of humanitarian aid and other critical commodities to Gaza. Such confidence-building measures, followed by substantial actions, would help in stabilizing the ceasefire.

India strongly supports Gaza's early recovery and reconstruction. The World Bank Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment report has estimated a requirement of \$485 million for immediate and short-term recovery. It is important that the international donor community support the reconstruction of Gaza through the Palestinian Authority. We encourage all Palestinian parties to work with the Palestinian Authority to ensure the well-being of the people of Gaza.

India and other international donors continue to provide development assistance to the Palestinian Authority for strengthening its governance institutions and creating opportunities for the socioeconomic growth of Palestinians. However, negative trends on the ground in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are taking us further away from the two-State solution and threaten to derail the cumulative gains made by those efforts.

In that context, we reiterate our concern about the possible legal eviction of some Palestinian residents in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem. The houses were built as part of arrangements facilitated by the United Nations. We remain deeply concerned about the continued clashes and heightened tensions surrounding the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We reiterate the need to respect the historic status quo in East Jerusalem and its neighbourhood. All parties must refrain from provocative and inflammatory rhetoric in the interest of peace and stability.

Last week's clashes in Jerusalem are a reminder that violent confrontations remain a real possibility. We urge the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to go beyond the restoration of calm and start a serious dialogue to

address the issues that undercut the viability of the two-State solution.

India has always attached great importance to ensuring a better livelihood for the Palestinian people and has provided timely assistance to improve the economic and humanitarian situation in Palestine. India has also helped build schools, hospitals and technology parks and is supporting quick-impact community projects in Palestine. We have also contributed to the reconstruction of Gaza.

I conclude by reaffirming India's firm commitment to achieving a just, peaceful and lasting solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. That goal can be achieved only through two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. There is no other road to achieving that goal except through direct negotiations. We stand ready to support all efforts by our regional and international partners to restart negotiations and the peace process, which can ensure a future of hope for all Palestinians and Israelis.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Hastings and Ms. Oppenheimer for their detailed briefings. I welcome the participation of the delegations of Israel and the observer State of Palestine at today's meeting.

As we have heard, in spite of the ceasefire in May, stability in the area remains fragile. There are reports of frequent violent incidents, with the attendant risk of triggering greater conflict. We therefore condemn the recent mosque raids. We are concerned about the continued expansion of Israeli settlements, including the transfer of settlers, the confiscation of lands, the demolition of housing units and the consequent displacement of the Palestinian population. The most recent demolitions took place in Khirbet Humsa and Ras Al-Tin. The demolition of Palestinian-owned structures led to the displacement of 108 people, including 62 minors. Such actions are at variance with Security Council resolutions. We therefore urge Israel to be respectful of the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and to adopt measures to reverse the negative trends on the ground, in line with resolution 2334 (2016).

We note the ongoing cooperation in the civilian and security spheres between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. However, budgetary restrictions remain in place on the Palestine Authority. We hope that the dispute regarding the transfer of tax revenue collected

on behalf of the Palestinian Authority is swiftly resolved. At the same time, we urge the Palestinian Authority to respect freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to protest and to move forward expeditiously in shedding light on the circumstances surrounding the death of activist Nizar Banat. Those responsible for his death must be brought to justice.

We also call for a new date to be set for the holding of free, inclusive and transparent elections. The protection of human rights and the periodic holding of elections are the cornerstones of institution-building in any democratic State.

With regard to Gaza, we commend the efforts of the international community to provide financial and material resources for its reconstruction, including fuel donated by Qatar. We urge Israel to lift the blockade at the earliest and to facilitate imports of basic goods. We also urge Hamas to cooperate with United Nations agencies to accelerate reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip.

Mexico condemns the attacks on Israel, perpetrated by launching rockets and incendiary devices from Gaza and missiles from southern Lebanon. We call on the parties to exercise maximum restraint, avoid the disproportionate use of force and cease provocations.

Recent contacts between the new Israeli Administration and the Governments of Jordan, Egypt and Turkey are encouraging. We hope that that openness is also reflected in relations with the Palestinian Authority, with a view to resuming peace negotiations. It is essential to break the cycle of violence. That is why we reiterate the need to address the root causes of the conflict and underscore our support for the efforts of the international community in line with that goal.

After years of conflict, there are many Palestinians and Israelis who aspire to live in peace and security. It is a legitimate desire. We therefore believe that we in the international community have a responsibility to promote that goal.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I thank Deputy Special Coordinator Lynn Hastings for her briefing. I also thank Yudith Oppenheimer for her insightful remarks.

Let me begin today by reiterating Norway's strong support for the efforts of the United Nations and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process to secure a long-term ceasefire. Despite those efforts, the situation in Palestine remains unresolved and tense.

As Ms. Hastings' briefing again illustrated, needed most at this time are stability and sustainable solutions.

As Chair of the donor group for Palestine — the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) — Norway convened a working-level meeting earlier this month. That meeting discussed the critical financial situation of the Palestinian Authority and humanitarian and development needs in Palestine, particularly in Gaza. It is positive that, following the meeting, there has been direct contact between the Israeli Government and President Abbas for the first time in several years.

We also welcome the intention to resume meetings of the Joint Economic Committee under the Paris Protocol. The AHLC remains the only forum where the parties and the donors come together to assist in building the foundations for a Palestinian State in preparation for the two-State solution to the conflict. Encouraged by the progress and dialogue at the most recent AHLC meeting, we look forward to the ministerial-level meeting in New York this September.

Today's situation in Palestine, economically, financially and considering the sharpened political tensions, is more severe and challenging than perhaps ever before. The international community must work with the parties to strengthen the Palestinian economy and improve socioeconomic conditions.

A strong Palestinian Authority is crucial to the delivery of services to the Palestinian people and to development, both in the West Bank and in Gaza. A strong Palestinian Authority is one that is well-financed, well-functioning and accountable and enjoys democratic legitimacy and popular support and where violence against political opponents and journalists is unacceptable.

We remain concerned about the continued settlement expansions, house demolitions, evictions and violence. We take note of reports that indicate a significant increase this year in demolitions and evictions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Of particular concern are the repeated demolitions of the Palestinian Bedouin community of Humsa Al-Baqai'a and the planned construction in Givat Hamatos, which will isolate Bethlehem and the southern West Bank from East Jerusalem.

All Israeli measures altering the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory are illegal under international humanitarian law, and they severely undermine the prospects for a two-State solution.

All parties must respect human rights, including the right to assembly and peaceful protest. We reiterate the need to preserve the status quo of the holy sites in East Jerusalem.

I will conclude my statement today by reiterating that the current situation is unsustainable. The financial situation of the Palestinian Authority is critical. A solid ceasefire in Gaza is still not in place, and, as long as there is no political process and no end to the occupation, civilians will continue to suffer. The need for restarting meaningful negotiations is more urgent now than ever.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I thank Deputy Special Coordinator Lynn Hastings for her comprehensive briefing, and I thank Ms. Yudith Oppenheimer for sharing her perspective. I warmly welcome the participation of the representatives of Palestine and Israel at our meeting today.

Two months after the ceasefire was announced, we remain very concerned about the continued violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the West Bank. The situation on the ground remains precarious. The latest incident in the West Bank village of Beita last Friday, 23 July, and previously similar flashpoints were very troubling. We urge the Israeli authorities to refrain from the use of excessive force, especially the use of live ammunition against civilians. The rhetoric and provocative actions that have contributed to the dangerous dynamics on the ground must stop. Those actions and incidents have only deepened divisions between Israelis and Palestinians and complicated all efforts towards peace. To stop such acts of violence, we must tackle the root causes of the situation.

First, the decades-long occupation, settlement activities, demolitions, the threat of forced eviction and the violations of the status quo of the holy sites in East Jerusalem are the major sources of resentment that lead to the protests. The incident in the illegal outpost of Evyatar last week was a typical example of how settlement activities can spark violence. Those activities constitute one of the triggers of the conflict. We once again call on Israel to end such activities immediately and to uphold and respect the historic significance and

the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. We believe that it is in the security interest of Israelis themselves to do so.

Secondly, the lack of progress in the peace process has undermined the remaining hopes for peace. During times of intensified fighting, as in May, we witnessed strong efforts to reach a ceasefire, and we are grateful for them. However, it is equally imperative to maintain a similar level of focus on long-term measures and steps. In that connection, we welcome the recent positive signals paving the way for dialogue and urge the leaders of all relevant parties to act with urgency to revitalize the peace process. In the same vein, we welcome all initiatives aimed at bringing the relevant parties towards a just, comprehensive and sustainable settlement. Viet Nam continues to support the two-State solution, including the establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, peacefully coexisting alongside the State of Israel, with secure and internationally recognized borders on the basis the pre-1967 lines and a negotiated settlement and in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Throughout the decades of endless violence in this conflict, children have suffered the most. They were killed or injured in indiscriminate attacks. They were exposed to all kinds of violence and provocative incitement. They were denied access to humanitarian aid, education and medical care. Their homes were demolished. Their families were displaced, and many of them became homeless. Sadly enough, they have lost faith in the ability of the international community, the authorities and even their parents to help and to protect them. That is a tragedy with consequences not only for today but also for generations to come.

With that in mind, the relevant authorities and the international community should redouble their efforts to stop the violence, advance peace and relieve the suffering of those affected by the conflict. Humanitarian assistance is now more critical than ever for the Palestinian civilian population, particularly in Gaza. We call for all relevant parties to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We commend the role played by United Nations agencies in providing assistance to those in need, particularly that of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We call on international donors to continue their commitment to supporting the

humanitarian and reconstruction efforts to relieve the plight of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Abarry (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. Lynn Hastings and Ms. Yudith Oppenheimer for the quality of their briefings on the situation in the Middle East. I welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of Israel and Palestine, whose perspectives have helped to focus our discussions. As a famous author said, repetition gives the word lasting existence.

Two months ago, after intense diplomatic efforts, a ceasefire was reached to end one of the deadliest escalations in the cycle of violence between Israel and Palestine. Aware of the fragility of that truce, we also recalled the need to strengthen, on both sides, the measures that could contribute to not only the consolidation of the ceasefire but also to the return of calm and trust between Israelis and Palestinians in order to promote the conditions for a resumption of the peace process.

In view of the situation that we have been seeing in the region for some time, that prospect of peaceful coexistence between those two peoples and the return of peace seem to be moving further away, leaving the spectre of instability and violence still looming.

The launching of incendiary balloons towards Israel from Gaza is an act that must stop. The same is true of Israel's unbridled settlement policy, which has been in place for several decades on the Palestinian territories, with all the resultant immeasurable suffering and despair. The recent demolitions of 29 June in Silwan, in the occupied neighbourhood of Al-Bustan in East Jerusalem, and that of 7 July in the Bedouin village of Humsa Al-Baqai'a, in the Jordan Valley, are illustrative of that policy. During the latter operation, several residential and agricultural structures, including ones financed by the international community, were demolished, leaving almost 65 people, including 35 children, without water or food and deprived of shelter from the blazing heat of the Jordan Valley during this season.

Often implemented on the basis of military orders, those Israeli operations take place without any legal remedy being offered to the Palestinian people, who can but yield to the dictates of the occupying Power, which, in the best-case scenario, conducts forcible transfers or, in the worst-case scenario, abandons them totally.

The Niger would recall once again that the destruction and seizure of private property, as well as the confiscation of land and the building of settlements on the occupied territories, are forbidden under international law. Such actions violate United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016); they undermine the efforts made by the international community to positively resolve the conflict; and they ceaselessly increase the threat of confrontation between the two peoples.

Moreover, it is the settlement policy, injustice and discrimination against the Palestinian people that cause discontent, revolt and violence. The tragic events of last May, as well as the upsurge in protests in the occupied territories, are a clear demonstration of that reality and must prompt the Security Council, in accordance with its obligations, to do everything in its power to put an end thereto.

Here I wish to talk about two other aspects that are equally distressing, which are linked to the settlement policy undertaken by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories: the trauma caused to Palestinian children as a result of the demolition of their homes and the apartheid system arising from the multiple violations of Palestinian human rights. According to a recent report by the non-governmental organization Save the Children, the demolition of Palestinian structures has displaced at least 6,000 children in the past 12 years. Four out of five Palestinian children whose houses were destroyed by Israel state that they feel abandoned by the world. The majority of the children interviewed displayed high levels of psychological distress, namely, feelings of sadness, fear, depression and anxiety. All of those restrictions and arbitrary and discriminatory arrests create for the Palestinian people a climate of humiliation, fear and daily oppression. The grave violations of the rights of the Palestinian people, including thousands of women and children, as a result of the illegal occupation of Israel, must call us to action and encourage us to show greater commitment and resolve to end the suffering and the tragedy of that the Palestinian people have been experiencing for several decades already.

Moreover, it is only by doing the aforementioned that we can hope to see the return of peace and trust to relations between Israel and Palestine as well as an environment propitious to the resumption of peace talks in order to realize the only viable solution: the two-State solution. To ensure that we have every chance

of achieving that goal, we call upon the international community, the Quartet, the members of the Council and regional actors to continue to bring the necessary pressure to bear to ultimately halt all of the actions and practices that jeopardize peace and peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians.

Given that repetition gives staying power to speech, and to conclude, my delegation wishes to say that it remains concerned by the situation in the Gaza Strip. After the shelling last May of that enclave, the Israeli authorities have stepped up their restrictions on the regular movement of goods through the crossings into Gaza. If those restrictions remain in place, they will have grave repercussions on the provision of humanitarian assistance, which is crucial to the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza as well as its economy. That is why we urge Israel to show greater compassion towards the people of Gaza, who have already suffered so much, by easing its measures in order to avert the tragedy that is looming on the horizon.

The occupying Power must shoulder its responsibilities under international humanitarian law to protect the rights of the peoples under its control. The Niger affirms that only a return to international parameters and the resumption of a peace process leading to the realization of a two-State solution in which both States are viable, sovereign and independent, living side by side in peace and security, could lead to an acceptable solution. No solution can be reached without taking into account the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Ms. Hastings, and Ms. Oppenheimer for their briefings, both of which could help the Security Council understand the situation more comprehensively and give it fuller consideration. I would also like to welcome the participation of representatives from Palestine and Israel in today's meeting.

It has been two months since the last conflict in the Gaza Strip ended, yet the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory remains unstable. Unilateral actions by Israel are increasing, which is a matter of concern. In July alone, Israel demolished or confiscated dozens of Palestinian structures in communities in Humsa Al-Baqai'a and Ras Al-Tin, displacing more than 100 Palestinians, including children. Right

before Eid al-Adha, the Israeli police clashed with the Muslim community near the Al-Aqsa mosque, which exacerbated tensions in East Jerusalem.

China urges all parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from any action that might heighten tensions. Israel must earnestly comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions; stop demolishing Palestinian homes and evicting Palestinian inhabitants; discontinue its expansion of settlements; put an end to the violence, threats and provocations towards the Muslim community; and effectively maintain respect for the historical status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

The current humanitarian situation in Palestine is worrisome. The international community should scale up its assistance to the Palestinian people and support the Gaza Strip in resuming construction. We urge Israel to earnestly fulfil its obligations under international law, ensure the safety and rights of civilians in the occupied territories, facilitate access for humanitarian assistance and promptly and fully lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip.

China has always been committed to the interests of the Palestinian people and has on multiple occasions provided emergency cash transfers, supplies to combat the coronavirus disease, vaccines and other humanitarian assistance. Earlier this month we transferred a donation of \$1 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to support its food aid programme in the Gaza Strip.

China will continue to provide Palestine with much-needed assistance and donate 1 million additional doses of vaccines. China will also partner with Egypt and use the vaccine-bottling factory in Egypt jointly established by the two countries to donate half a million doses of vaccines to the Palestinian people in Gaza.

The Palestinian question is the root cause of the turbulence in the Middle East. The resolution of that question cannot be delayed indefinitely. China remains firmly committed to the just cause of the Palestinian people to gain national rights. We support the establishment of an independent State of Palestine that enjoys full sovereignty on the basis of the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Recently, the State Councilor and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, had in-depth exchanges of views on the Palestinian question with the relevant

countries during his visit to the Middle East. He emphasized that the two-State solution enjoys international consensus and demonstrates equity and justice. It is also the only practical solution to the Palestinian question.

China has put forward three ideas on bringing forth the two-State solution. First, the authority of the Palestinian Authority should be enhanced and it should be authorized to exercise sovereign functions in security, finance and other areas, so as to gain effective control over the autonomous and occupied territories. Secondly, the Palestinian factions should be supported in striving for greater unity, whereby they achieve internal reconciliation through consultation and dialogue and come to a unified position on talks for the settlement of the Palestinian question. Thirdly, Palestine and Israel should be encouraged to resume peace talks based on the two-State solution.

Palestinian and Israeli negotiators are welcome to conduct direct talks in China. In the meantime, China calls for the holding of an international peace conference led by the United Nations with the participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and all stakeholders in the Middle East peace process with a view to seeking a comprehensive, lasting and just settlement of the Palestinian question and to enabling both countries to coexist in peace.

These ideas from China have received positive responses from countries in the region, and they were welcomed in a declaration made by the Foreign Minister of Palestine, Mr. Al-Maliki. We stand ready to work with relevant parties and the international community to put true multilateralism into practice, enhance international cooperation, defend equity and justice, turn the vision of the two-State solution into reality, translate consensus into action and continue to undertake unstinting efforts aimed at realizing lasting peace and stability in the Middle East at an early date.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): At the outset, I would like to thank Deputy Special Coordinator Lynn Hastings and Ms. Yudith Oppenheimer for their detailed briefings. We also recognize and welcome the participation of the representatives of the observer State of Palestine and Israel in today's meeting.

Kenya notes that, despite the fragile ceasefire, efforts aimed at advancing the Middle East peace process and re-engagement in the political process continue at various levels, including through the Office

of the United Nations Special Coordinator and the Special Envoys of the Middle East Quartet, and with regional mediation efforts spearheaded by neighbouring countries. We recognize that all constructive and inclusive engagement undertaken on all tracks, from the communal track to diplomacy at the track-one — or State — level, have a critical role to play in the quest for sustainability of the peace efforts.

As we have done before, we urge all parties to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and acts of provocation and incitement that further contribute to the fragility of the peace of Jerusalem and of the region. I also reaffirm Kenya's condemnation of all acts of violence and other violations of Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), by all parties.

We strongly condemn all terrorist attacks and acts conducive to terrorism by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militant groups, and we reiterate that no cause can justify the deliberate targeting of civilians. We continue to urge the new Israeli Government to resolve the possible forced evictions of Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem.

Kenya once again underscores that the practicality and full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) requires that the issues relating to settlements, territorial contiguity and the viability of the two-State solution be addressed. Indeed, the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian occupied territory, including East Jerusalem, in violation of international law, remains a major impediment to the actualization of the vision of a two-State solution, where the two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace, and within secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines. We further reiterate that continued economic isolation of parts of the region from the wider regional and global economy has implications for the peace and security and stability of the broader Middle East region.

Kenya urges that as the rebuilding of the Gaza Strip is undertaken, steps must also be put in place to prevent the misuse and diversion of aid by Hamas and other armed groups. We note that the recent June 2021 joint Gaza Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA) undertaken by the World Bank Group, the European Union and the United Nations following the May 2021 conflict recognizes that appropriate safeguards should be instituted to prevent any diversions as an

immediate recovery initiative. In this regard, and as the RDNA consultations continue through the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, we emphasize that timely operationalization and unhindered humanitarian access to the affected areas should be a factor in all existing agreements, instruments and mechanisms with a view not only to preventing any diversion, but also to submitting recommendations that would comprehensively address Gaza's economic rigidity and closed economy, in coordination with the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The low vaccination rate in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem continues to be a concern, particularly with the increasing number of delta-variant cases being reported. We welcome and encourage efforts aimed at ensuring equity in the access to vaccines and medical care.

I conclude by reaffirming that the urgency of pursuing a new approach following the 11 days of hostilities in the month of May will be critical to achieving meaningful stabilization of the situation, a reversal of negative trends on the ground and the creation of the conditions necessary for successful direct final status negotiations.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Deputy Special Coordinator Lynn Hastings for her briefing, and we carefully listened to Yudith Oppenheimer's briefing.

We believe that the main tasks for the upcoming period are to strengthen the agreements on the ceasefire and to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to all the victims, in particular those in the Gaza Strip who need it. Of key importance in that respect is that both sides show restraint and refrain from unilateral steps and provocative actions.

This applies first and foremost to the forced evictions of Palestinians, the expropriation of houses and plots of land, the building of settlements, arbitrary arrests and any violence. It is important to guarantee respect for the special status and inviolability of the holy sites in Jerusalem. It is also very important to step up efforts aimed at offering assistance to the Palestinian authorities in overcoming socioeconomic difficulties.

A particular influence on this aspect of life continues to be played by the coronavirus disease pandemic, with which the Palestinians cannot cope by themselves.

In this regard, we are in favour of comprehensive humanitarian assistance for the Palestinians in the occupied territories and in neighbouring countries through United Nations specialized agencies, in particular through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, without politicization and without preconditions. The Palestinian-Israeli cooperation is of prime importance in this area.

The challenges I have mentioned are urgent pressing tasks. Tackling them will no doubt contribute to stabilizing the situation. However, it is important to recognize that this kind of stabilization will not and should not mean that the international community should become complacent. Quite to the contrary, the events of last May confirm that, without movement towards a just solution to the Palestinian question, peace and stability will not be achieved either in Palestine or in the region as a whole.

We believe that we should not lose sight of, or postpone until a more favourable moment, the task of reviving the political peace process, including relaunching direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on all final status issues, based on the widely recognized international legal framework. We believe that it is important to pursue efforts to build an international consensus that favours resolving the Palestinian issue based on the two-State solution. We place special emphasis on the role played by the Middle East Quartet, which remains the only internationally recognized mechanism to support the Palestinian-Israeli process. We also highly value Egypt's efforts to overcome the intra-Palestinian division, which is key to restarting the peace process.

In that regard, we intend to continue efforts to bolster the activities of the Quartet. We call on our Quartet colleagues to take into account our well-known initiatives, including the convening of a ministerial meeting and consultations in an expanded format, with the participation of the States of the region. At the same time, we count on the international community's support for those initiatives.

Mr. Lipand (Estonia): I thank Deputy Special Coordinator Hastings and Ms. Oppenheimer for their briefing. Estonia aligns itself with the statement submitted on behalf of the European Union and its States members.

I would first like to touch upon the ongoing fragile situation between Israel and Gaza. It is essential that the parties continue to respect the ceasefire and do their utmost to avoid further violence. The launching of incendiary balloons towards Israel is unacceptable. Israel has the right to defend itself, while ensuring the safety and protection of the civilian population. We fully support the international and regional efforts towards securing long-term peace, enabling the reconstruction in Gaza and ensuring unimpeded humanitarian access throughout the Strip. All parties should take steps to improve the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in Gaza, while taking into consideration Israel's security concerns.

Efforts must be continued to create the necessary conditions for the resumption of direct negotiations on a two-State solution, based on international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. Until such conditions are met, we urge the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to take practical steps to rebuild confidence. Further coordinated efforts to combat the coronavirus disease pandemic, as well as enhance economic cooperation, are vital and would benefit the citizens of both sides. We also call on all parties to calm the volatile situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The status quo of the holy sites must be upheld and respected.

Estonia is concerned about Israel's continued settlement expansion, evictions and demolitions of Palestinian property in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. They run contrary to international law and are escalating tensions in an already-tense environment. We are also deeply concerned about the death of activist Nizar Banat during his arrest by the Palestinian Authority's security forces in Hebron and the clashes between protesters and security forces in Ramallah that followed. We call for a full and independent investigation of the incident. The exercise of freedom of expression must be ensured for all.

Lastly, regarding the postponement of the elections in Palestine, we encourage all relevant stakeholders to support efforts in establishing a new election date and ensuring that the elections are free, fair, inclusive and take place throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Lynn Hastings for her briefing and, through her, the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for

the Middle East Peace Process. I also thank everyone working on behalf of the United Nations in the occupied Palestinian territory for their commendable efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people and promote peace. I also thank Ms. Yudith Oppenheimer for her briefing.

The international community has succeeded in containing the recent crisis, which was the result of Israel's aggression against the Gaza Strip and continued grave violations in the West Bank, especially East Jerusalem, against Palestinian residents and worshippers at Al-Haram Al-Sharif. However, Israeli settlers, supported by occupation forces, continue violating the Al-Aqsa Mosque and committing acts of aggression against Palestinian residents of the Old City. In addition, the occupation authorities are pursuing their settlement activities and home demolitions, raising serious concern of renewed escalation and grave repercussions for security and stability in the region.

Given this dangerous situation, Tunisia once again calls on the international community, especially the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities and compel the occupying Power to respect its commitments under international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law; cease its violations, expansionist plans and settlement projects; and stop all unilateral actions that could lead to further violence and escalation, thereby undermining the prospect of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. We also call for ensuring accountability for the grave violations of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions in the occupied Palestinian territory and call for putting an end to impunity.

Given the tension on the ground and the absence of any meaningful prospect of settling the conflict, we members of the Council must now step up our efforts to find the ways and means needed to de-escalate tension and end the stalemate in the peace process in order to resume negotiations under international law, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the agreed terms of reference.

We call once again on the Middle East Quartet to redouble its efforts and engagement with the relevant parties in order to help create the conditions necessary to bring about peace, end the occupation, enable the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East

Jerusalem as its capital, and strengthen regional security and stability.

The question remains: How long will the unjust occupation continue, in flagrant violation of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions? The Council already made its position clear on this matter more than 54 years ago, in resolution 242 (1967), in which it called for the withdrawal of the occupation forces from Palestinian territories to the 4 June 1967 borders. It is incumbent upon us to ensure compliance with international resolutions. The only way to do so is through hard and effective joint action to resume serious and credible negotiations according to the agreed terms of reference and a specific timeline.

Given the decades-long aggression against Palestine and the unjust blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, which is targeted continuously, we must increase the level of humanitarian assistance and response in the occupied Palestinian territory while enhancing building and reconstruction efforts. In the light of the growing humanitarian needs of the Palestinian refugees, especially owing to the pandemic threat, it is imperative to meet the financial needs of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East so that it can continue to provide its vital services.

In conclusion, we reiterate that peace and security in the Middle East will not be possible without a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in line with international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. Any attempt to impose a *fait accompli* will not change that fact. It will lead only to further escalation and threaten regional and international peace and security.

As a staunch supporter of just causes, Tunisia remains steadfast in its principled support to the brotherly Palestinian people in order to end the occupation and restore their legitimate and inalienable rights.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I thank all our briefers for their briefings. I also welcome our colleagues the representatives of Israel and the State of Palestine to today's meeting.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to stand in solidarity with the State of Palestine in its quest to live within safe and secure borders. As the occupying Power, Israel has an obligation to restore normal civilian life for all Palestinians and to realize the human rights of residents of the occupied territory.

It is unfortunate that in recent months, tensions within the State of Palestine have been stoked from outside, thereby undermining the country and the aspirations of its people. Our goal should be to forge a secure and durable peace between Israelis and Palestinians and consolidate efforts to preserve a sustainable two-State solution, without departing from relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. In that vein, we call for the activation of the Middle East Quartet to restart peace talks and negotiations as an urgent priority.

On the issue of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, the fundamental point about settlements is that they are illegal. International law is clear on that point. Let us be reminded that in 2004, the International Court of Justice unanimously found that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory breached article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. We must also act as responsible members of the international community and condemn such breaches of international law.

The impact of the illegal Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continues to highlight the daily Palestinian struggle. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains concerned about Israel's policy of demolishing Palestinian homes and property in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Equally, we unequivocally condemn the most recent demolition by Israeli occupation forces in the Palestinian Bedouin community of Humsa Al-Baqai'a, in the northern Jordan Valley of the occupied West Bank. There is absolutely no justification for those actions. The international community must take effective and timely diplomatic action to end this policy.

Turning to the situation on the besieged Gaza Strip, we are concerned about the worsening humanitarian crisis, which has been compounded by the 11-day war in Gaza, with further attacks kept at bay by a fragile ceasefire. The rebuilding of Gaza must begin in earnest. We welcome the small steps taken in that regard, but much more must be done. The United Nations estimates that millions of Palestinian people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. We once again call on the international community to provide additional funding to support the programme budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We were again reminded earlier today of the \$100 million shortfall and imminent cash-flow crisis.

Additionally, it is evident that Israel's illegal 15-year blockade has devastated the economy in Gaza. In that connection, we reiterate our call on Israel to fully lift the blockade on Gaza and facilitate a greater supply of humanitarian assistance to the area.

In conclusion, we echo the plea of Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, to the international community to adopt a plan of action, which includes calling upon Israel to fully dismantle its illegal settlements and ensuring full accountability of Israeli leaders, who are responsible for grave breaches of international law in the occupied Palestinian territory. Furthermore, we welcome the decision of the Human Rights Council to form an independent international commission to investigate Israeli violations of Palestinian rights. For such a time as this, let us redouble efforts and focus on increasing the protection of the rights of the population in the occupied territory. Minister Riyad Mansour underscored earlier today that this generation of Palestinians believes that there is no alternative to their freedom. This is a legitimate aspiration and we are duty-bound to ensure that it is realized.

Mr. Flynn (Ireland): I would like to welcome the participation of Deputy Special Coordinator Hastings and Ms. Oppenheimer, Executive Director of Ir Amim, and thank them for their comprehensive briefings earlier today.

I would also like to welcome the participation of Ambassador Erdan and Ambassador Mansour.

While the ceasefire agreed in May broadly continues to hold, it remains fragile. Ireland reiterates that all unilateral actions, which threaten the ceasefire and undermine prospects for a two-State solution, must be avoided. The root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be addressed.

We emphasize that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by the conflict, not least during the recent escalation in May, and must be an intrinsic part of efforts to secure sustainable peace.

We continue to be concerned about worrisome trends on the ground. Ireland condemns the demolitions and seizures in the communities of Humsa Al-Baqai'a and Ras Al-Tin in Area C of the occupied West Bank earlier this month. The increased rate of demolitions, including of donor-funded structures, across the West

Bank so far in 2021, is deeply concerning. We have seen an increase in the total number of structures targeted and people displaced in the first six months of 2021 when compared with the same period in 2020.

The most recent mass demolition in Humsa Al-Baqai'a constitutes the sixth incident of demolitions or confiscations the community has faced this year. This disturbing cycle has serious implications for affected communities. There is the particular risk of long-term effects on children, whose sense of safety is fundamental to their development. Ireland calls on the Israeli authorities to end further unnecessary demolitions of Palestinian homes and property, and to ensure humanitarian access is granted to communities in need and in compliance with the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Ireland is also deeply concerned about the possible evictions of families from their homes in East Jerusalem, including in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, a source of tensions, which seriously undermines the prospects for peace. It is imperative that those evictions do not go ahead; that families are allowed to remain in their homes, living in dignity and in safety. Recent events once again underscore the importance of maintaining the status quo at the holy sites.

I repeat Ireland's call on Israel to halt all settlement activity in the occupied territory, including in East Jerusalem. Such actions are illegal under international law and continue at an alarming rate, despite repeated calls from the Council for their immediate and complete end. Furthermore, Ireland underscores that individuals exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression, must be protected and those rights upheld.

We note the appointment of a commission of inquiry by the President of the Human Rights Council, to be chaired by Navi Pillay, and express support for the commission in undertaking its mandate.

In the Gaza Strip, our immediate priority must be on the recovery from the latest cycle of conflict. The World Bank, the United Nations and the EU Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment identified a need for almost half a billion dollars for immediate and short-term recovery. An integrated, robust support package is essential for sustainable reconstruction and recovery that supports the Palestinian people and strengthens their institutions. Ultimately, however, only a political solution will address the challenges in Gaza and

throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, and we must redouble efforts to that end.

As the largest international organization operating in Gaza, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has a critical role to play. In the face of an increasingly complex operating environment, we urge international donors to support UNRWA's emergency appeals and increase support. Ireland renews its call on Israel to end the blockade of Gaza.

I would like to briefly touch on the situation in Syria. Ireland supports the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen and underlines that a negotiated political solution, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and the inclusion of young people, is the only solution to the Syrian conflict. We urge the Syrian Government to engage constructively with the Special Envoy so that a meaningful sixth session of the Constitutional Committee can commence.

Finally, turning to Lebanon, we are following the political and socioeconomic crisis with growing concern. We welcome the nomination of Najib Mikati as Prime Minister-designate, and we call on all Lebanese political leaders to put the people of Lebanon first and form an inclusive Government so that reform and recovery, so badly needed, can begin.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Deputy Special Coordinator Hastings and Ms. Oppenheimer for their briefings.

I share concerns already expressed regarding the current situation on the ground. In view of that, it remains crucial that all parties take steps to avoid exacerbating tensions in order to prevent a further escalation.

The United Kingdom once again condemns unequivocally Hamas's inflammatory action and indiscriminate attacks against Israel, including the use of incendiary devices. We continue to call on Hamas and other terrorist groups to permanently end their rocket fire against Israel.

The United Kingdom has made clear that Israel's settlement activity presents a barrier to peace. Rates of demolitions are rising, and this month we have seen particularly concerning mass demolitions and confiscations in the communities of Humsa Al-Baqai'a and Ras Al-Tin. Demolitions are illegal under international law in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

We also remain concerned about the high number of Palestinian households in East Jerusalem with eviction and demolition cases pending, including in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan. The United Kingdom remains strongly opposed to Israel's proposed demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar, and we again call on Israel to reconsider its plans.

We remain concerned too by the high number of Palestinians killed in confrontation with the Israeli security forces in the West Bank. In the past week alone, two Palestinian children died as a result of live fire by the Israeli security forces. Israeli investigations, where there are accusations of the excessive use of force, should be comprehensive and hold those responsible to account. Settler violence also remains a concern.

In Jerusalem, we urge steps to end the ongoing tensions on Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The Waqf Administration and the Jordanian and Israeli authorities must work together to restore and sustain the historic status quo, including ensuring that any policing is sensitive to the sanctity of the site.

Turning to Gaza, we must continue to address immediate humanitarian needs and work towards a long-term humanitarian solution. We welcome Israel's commitment to allowing access for goods identified in the United Nations humanitarian response plan. We urge regularized and predictable access into and out of Gaza, in accordance with international humanitarian law, for humanitarian actors and supplies and reconstruction materials and for medical purposes.

Lastly, we commend the positive engagement at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians on 6 July, and we welcome positive signals from both parties towards the re-establishment of the Joint Economic Committee. An effective Joint Economic Committee is essential in supporting the recovery of the Palestinian economy and ensuring the sustainability of the Palestinian Authority. We urge the parties to make progress at pace, and we stand ready to provide support.

In conclusion, it is not too late to reverse the negative trends, rebuild trust and work towards a sustainable ceasefire and comprehensive peace. We welcome the early engagement between the new Israeli Government and the Palestinian leadership, as well as Israeli engagement with regional partners. We urge all parties to seize the opportunity to take action, tackle

immediate and long-term threats to peace and stability and work towards a two-State solution on the 1967 lines. The United Kingdom remains fully committed to playing its part in those efforts.

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

I thank the Deputy Special Coordinator and Ms. Oppenheimer for their briefings.

It is now more necessary than ever for the Security Council to mobilize in order to preserve the prospect of the two-State solution, both States having Jerusalem as the capital. Only that solution can meet the aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and ensure the security of all and the stability of the region.

The time has come to open a new page on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The latest exchanges between Israelis and Palestinians show a desire to resume dialogue. That desire must be reflected in reciprocal small steps aimed at restoring trust. That is what France is encouraging, alongside its German, Egyptian and Jordanian partners. We wish to deepen our relationship with the new Israeli Government. We welcome the continued normalization between Israel and several Arab States, as well as the re-engagement of the United States with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

It is vital that the parties refrain from any unilateral measure so as to allow this new beginning and prevent a new conflagration. France is concerned by this year's record level of demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian structures in Area C, some of which are

financed by France and its European partners. We have condemned the new demolitions in Khirbet Humsa, which are in breach of international humanitarian law and the Council's resolutions. We also call on Israel to halt eviction procedures in Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah. The status quo of holy sites must also be respected. Easing tensions also requires a consolidation the cessation of hostilities in Gaza through lasting arrangements that allow for reconstruction and greater freedom of movement of goods and persons. That also requires unhindered humanitarian access to all the Palestinian territories and increased cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis, in the common interests of both peoples.

Finally, there must be an improvement in Palestinian governance. France deplores the decision of President Abbas to postpone the elections, which would have made it possible to renew the democratic legitimacy of Palestinian institutions. It calls on the Palestinian Authority to propose a new electoral calendar as soon as possible. It also reiterates its commitment to freedom of expression and to respect for human rights across the Palestinian territories. Strong, democratic institutions based on respect for the rule of law remain crucial if we are to build a viable Palestinian State.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more speakers on my list. Before adjourning the meeting, I wish to inform delegations that written statements received by the end of today will be included in the compilation of statements from this meeting.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.