



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. França Danese	(Brazil)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Hoxha
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon	Mr. Biang
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan	Mr. Ishikane
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 11.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Libya, Oman, Pakistan, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia 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 this meeting: Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Olaf Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: The Secretary-General and I have briefed the Security Council extensively in private over the past days on the details of the horrific and unprecedented events that have been unfolding, relaying our utter condemnation, shock and regret. I will not repeat my briefings here today, noting that I will report on the situation next week during my regular monthly briefing. My colleague, Mr. Martin Griffiths, will brief the Council on the humanitarian situation.

Today I want to update Council members on where we are and on my efforts over the past several days to find a way to bring to an end the hostilities and spare

the lives of civilians. I have to be very honest here now and say that this is one of the most difficult moments facing the Israeli and Palestinian people in the past 75 years. The massacre and despicable acts of violence and terror perpetrated by Hamas against Israelis on 7 October are seared into our collective memory. Entire families were killed. Women and children were abducted to the Gaza Strip, where they are being held to this day. There is no justification or excuse for such acts of terror, and I condemn them unequivocally. We are facing a devastating and clearly difficult challenge for the region and for the international community. It comes at a moment when the global institutions we need to respond to such an active crisis are already overstretched.

We are in a war, and wars are filled with horrific scenes of violence and tragedy. Last night, I watched in horror and in real time, as I am sure we all did, as reports of mass casualties emerged from what should be a protected site, shielded from danger — a place of healing. Hundreds of Palestinians were killed — patients and those seeking shelter — when the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza City was struck by lethal fire. The circumstances of that catastrophe and the responsibility for it still need to be clarified, and we will need a fact-based, full and broad investigation. But the result of all of this is very clear: it is a terrible tragedy for those who were involved.

I fear that we are at the brink of a deep and dangerous abyss that could change the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, if not the trajectory of the Middle East as a whole. After more than a century of conflict and more than half a century of occupation, we, the international community, have failed, collectively, to bring the parties to a just, sustained political resolution. The long-standing fissures run deep and extend well beyond the confines of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. The events of the past 11 days have served to reignite grievances and reanimate alliances across the region. Based on my meetings and the dynamics I am observing on the ground, I would say the following: the risk of an expansion of this conflict is real — very real — and extremely dangerous.

Since the outbreak of the current hostilities, it has been my absolute priority to work to diminish these existential threats. Together with the Secretary-General, I have been in constant communication with a broad range of interlocutors, with the parties and with regional and international actors who have agency and influence. I will continue to do so. Today I speak to the Council from Doha, where the authorities have assured me of

their continued commitment to the Palestinian people and their humanitarian needs and the urgency to prevent any further loss of civilian lives.

Meetings and ongoing discussions with leaders in Egypt have focused not only on the question of facilitating access of humanitarian assistance through the Rafah crossing, but also our shared concerns and efforts to rein in further regional hostilities. I will return to Cairo tomorrow to join the Secretary-General to continue those political discussions. In that regard, I welcome President Al Sisi's swift call for a summit of world leaders to continue those discussions.

I also had similar discussions with leaders in Lebanon and Jordan, as well as repeated phone calls with the five permanent members of the Council and other key regional and international partners who are seized of and actively engaged in addressing this conflict. We are all seeking a common understanding and approach at this critical time.

I welcome the visits of world leaders, including Chancellor Scholz of Germany and Foreign Secretary Cleverly of the United Kingdom, as well as today's visit by President Joe Biden.

To the parties on the ground in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ramallah, my message has remained steadfast: we must not let the dynamic of the current conflict take our eyes off of what I would call "the day after". We need to start working immediately on the day after. We know the way forward. I can say that these days, diplomacy is very hard. But here is what we need to do.

We need the time and space to achieve two urgent objectives: first, Hamas' immediate, unconditional release of all the hostages; and secondly — and quickly — unrestricted access of humanitarian aid for Palestinians in Gaza. Thirdly, we need collective efforts to end the hostilities and prevent any further expansion of the conflict into the region.

Regarding the West Bank and Lebanon, there should be no miscalculation, no provocation and no step that closes the door on our current efforts.

The next step must be down the path towards a political solution. Ultimately, the only way to bring an end to the bloodletting, prevent any recurrence and pave a way forward is a long-term political solution, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

As I have stated many times in the Council, a patchwork of ad hoc and temporary fixes and the perpetual management of the conflict without addressing the underlying issues is not sustainable. That has been proven over the past 11 days. What we are seeing on the ground now all too tragically proves that to be true. What we must do now is to work together as one to achieve those objectives.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: I would like to say what an honour it is for me to be on the same rostrum as Tor Wennesland, and I associate myself profoundly with every single word that he said, born from years of relevant experience, including not just looking at the horrors of the past 11 days but anxiously looking ahead to the horrors to come. I give all credit to Special Coordinator Wennesland.

I also join him and all members of the Security Council in expressing my horror and despair at the explosion, which he described watching, as so many of us did, at the Al Ahli Anglican Episcopal Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday evening. My heartfelt condolences go out to the grieving families affected by that heart-wrenching tragedy. I also extend my sincerest wishes for a swift and complete recovery to all those who have been injured.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the hospital in question was one of 20 in northern Gaza subject to the announcement by the Israeli authorities that civilians should leave for their safety. It is terrible to think about that the morning after. However, evacuation for many had simply not been possible due to insecurity, as we have been discussing in the Chamber today, the critical condition of many of the patients, and indeed the lack of ambulances, staff and capacity in the rest of the health system, which as members know is on its knees in Gaza.

When the hospital was hit, it was fully operational and had breached its maximum capacity. It was therefore overflowing with patients, including women and children. Dozens of health-care providers and caregivers — demonstrating their frankly extraordinary courage and commitment to remaining on site to do their duties and remain steadfast by their patients' sides — were also in the building. The hospital was also hosting numerous internally displaced people, who

either had nowhere else to go or were sheltering there in the expectation — or at least perhaps the hope — that it would provide safety. They were wrong.

Reports to date indicate hundreds of fatalities — including hundreds of civilians and health-care workers. I associate myself with Mr. Wennesland's call for a fact-based inquiry to find out how this happened. I want to say one thing of the highest importance to all of us in the humanitarian community and all of us who are governed by the rules of war and international humanitarian law. What happened on 7 October, the invasion into Israel and the taking of hostages, still missing and hidden away in Gaza, is simply wrong, against the law, unconscionable and unacceptable. Their unconditional release is an essential component of any return to the kind of normalcy that Mrs. Nusseibeh described to us before the meeting started.

Since 7 October, 28 health workers in Gaza have reportedly been killed and 23 have been injured. There is no lack of courage. There is no lack of commitment in that population. There have been many reports of health facilities sustaining extensive damage — indeed the hospital had itself already been struck, as members know, on 14 October. Gaza's health services, as I have been hearing here in Cairo over the past day or two, are being overwhelmed by the extreme challenge of meeting the health-care needs of the rising number of wounded patients, all while facing significant shortages of medical supplies, water and fuel.

The destruction of that hospital yesterday heaped further pressure on the crumbling, failing and sad health-care system. Not only were the victims rushed to the Al-Shifa hospital, one of the many other hospitals in Gaza on the verge of collapse, but Gaza has now been deprived of a facility that cared for more than 45,000 patients per year before the current hostilities. I am compelled to reiterate, and it will not be a surprise to anyone, as everyone else has done on many occasions in the Council, that under international humanitarian law, there are simple requirements. There are simple rules of war that apply to all of us, whatever the provocation and — God knows that there has been provocation.

Parties to armed conflict must protect civilians and civilian objects and take constant care to spare them from any attack. We have discussed that in the Chamber in relation to almost every other conflict around the world. This one is no different. International law affords

specific protection to medical personnel and facilities to ensure that the wounded and the sick receive the medical care they need. It was no coincidence that one of the first humanitarian leaders on the scene after those events on 7 October was our dear friend and leader Mr. Tedros Ghebreyesus of WHO. It is imperative that the wounded and the sick receive the medical care they need. It is imperative that the parties respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. And it is our collective responsibility — we are all involved in this, we are not observers, we are all involved — to use all our influence to ensure that that is the case.

This tragedy is characteristic of the crushing impact the conflict has had on civilians and, as Mr. Wennesland and Mrs. Nusseibeh have pointed out, the catastrophic consequences it will have if it continues to escalate, as we fear. In just 11 days since the storming of Israel by Palestinian armed groups on 7 October, the death toll, as already mentioned, has already exceeded that of the 2014 hostilities, which lasted more than seven weeks. The pace of death, suffering, destruction and breaches of international law has not been exaggerated.

In Gaza, more than 3,000 people have been killed, more than 12,500 injured and hundreds are unaccounted for under the rubble. Quite frankly, we do not know how many have moved from the north to the south to get out of harm's way. We all know that the death toll includes humanitarians. I want to pay tribute to the 15 staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Red Cross and Red Crescent personnel who were killed, and I have been meeting in recent days and the families of those who have fallen.

We estimate that perhaps up to 1 million people have fled their homes to other parts of Gaza, but we do not really know. Many have done so in response to Israel's announcement that civilians should leave northern Gaza for safety. But there is simply nowhere to go for civilians to escape the destruction and privation, both of which grow by the hour as missiles continue to fly and essential supplies, including fuel, food, medical items and water, run low.

Because of the scarcity of water, in some locations, UNRWA — and I want to pay a special tribute to UNRWA for the way in which it has provided a buffer against suffering in such terrible times — is being forced to ration its provisions to one litre of water per person per day, bearing in mind that the minimum by

international standards is 15 litres. Those people are getting one litre, and they are the lucky ones. As reported by UNRWA and other agencies, people are increasingly being forced to consume water from unsafe sources, putting the population at risk of waterborne diseases. Whether civilians move or stay, or whether they move again or stay where they first moved to — and that must be their decision — they must be protected. They must not be attacked inside civilian infrastructure. They must be protected in places of de-confliction, and they must have access to the essentials of humanitarian assistance for survival, which are available and regarding which we have all spent many hours in detailed negotiations with the parties. I am grateful to all the parties for the commitment they have shown to those negotiations.

It means that the United Nations and humanitarian partners — I refer specifically to the great leadership of the Egyptian Red Crescent and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, whose leaders I met today — must be able to deliver relief to civilians in need throughout Gaza without impediment in places of their choice where they consider themselves to be safe and where we can seek to ensure that safety. We have humanitarian supplies; we have medical teams. UNRWA has a staff of 14,000 in Gaza still bravely working under such conditions, as do other agencies. The Red Crescents have many volunteers and are all ready to assist the people most in need. I am very grateful to many Member States for very quickly making emergency funding available for the immediate relief in Gaza, including from the Central Emergency Response Fund run by my Office and the Occupied Palestinian Territory Humanitarian Fund. I thank all who stepped up so quickly.

However, although we have a lot, what we do not have — and this is the killer and what we desperately need — is immediate and safe humanitarian access across Gaza, and that is the burden of our discussions with key parties. We urgently need a mechanism agreed by all relevant parties to enable the regular provision of emergency needs throughout Gaza and to bring the level of distribution of assistance up to what it was before these terrible weeks, to 100 trucks a day providing assistance throughout Gaza to people in need. We must get back to that level of ambition. For that we need additional funding for agencies such as UNRWA, the World Food Programme and the Red Crescents in their leadership role. Without additional funding, UNRWA, which is already woefully lacking in funds, will not be able to continue to deliver core services.

However, as Mr. Wennesland said when he made two very important points, Gaza is not the only location of concern in this deeply troubling conflict. Since the start of the latest hostilities, the situation in the West Bank has also been deteriorating, as Mr. Wennesland said, and he would know. Last week was the deadliest for Palestinians in the West Bank since the United Nations started recording fatalities in 2005, while the incidence of settler violence has also increased from an average of three incidents a day to eight. Suffering knows no borders. Widespread closures throughout the West Bank are having an impact on communities' ability to access essential services, and there is a real risk of the situation spiralling out of control.

What the people of Israel, Palestine and the region need, what we all need and what the Council's mandate exists to secure, is for sanity and humanity to prevail, drawing on the provisions of international humanitarian law, and for urgent efforts to arrest any further descent into this brutal calamity. As Mrs. Nusseibeh said so eloquently (see S/PV.9442), the worry that many of us have is where this will leave us when the fighting has taken place. Of course, we implore the parties to respect international humanitarian law, and I want to be very clear that a humanitarian ceasefire would go a long way to easing the epic human suffering.

Lastly, I want to conclude by expressing my deepest admiration, gratitude and comity for the extraordinary people who are delivering life-saving and humanitarian services in Gaza and the West Bank, as they do in so many other parts of the world. Many of them are displaced or have lost loved ones. Many staff members in all our agencies have experienced that kind of suffering. The dedication and bravery of ambulance crews, health-care professionals and people working in hospitals and clinics are in fact a reminder of the fundamentals of humanity that drive our efforts to resolve differences through diplomacy, dialogue, kindness, generosity and accountability. I also want to express my profound personal gratitude. I have said it already in regard to Mr. Wennesland but I would also like to thank our colleague, our Deputy Special Coordinator, President and Humanitarian Coordinator, Lynn Hastings, and the other humanitarians who are demonstrating unwavering commitment to providing essential assistance and relief. Their collective efforts and unstinting focus on key priorities based on operational needs exemplify not only the enduring commitment of the United Nations to extending hope and support but also the commitment

of the humanitarian community and its supporters to doing the job that they have resolved to choose for their lives.

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

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

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Together with the delegations of the United Arab Emirates and China, we initiated today's emergency Security Council meeting in view of the tragic events in the Gaza Strip. Yesterday the Al Ahli Hospital in central Gaza City was destroyed as a result of air strikes. We are deeply shocked by what happened. The Anglican hospital was one of the 20 in northern Gaza that had received evacuation notices from the Israeli military. However, it was impossible to comply with that requirement, as Mr. Griffiths already stated, given the prevailing unstable situation, the critical condition of many patients and the shortage of ambulances, staff, hospital beds and alternative shelters for the displaced persons. The air strike on the hospital, according to the most recent reports, resulted in more than 800 dead and wounded. We are calling for an objective investigation of this crime to be undertaken and for the perpetrators to be prosecuted.

This is the price of the inertia of Council members, many of whom have procrastinated for the past 11 days since the escalation surrounding Gaza began. We warned the Council about this on Monday, when a number of Council members, guided by supposedly purely humanitarian considerations but in reality purely political considerations, did not support draft resolution S/2023/772 on a ceasefire submitted by the Russian Federation. Our document outlined a number of specific urgent measures designed to stop the violence and civilian suffering, release the hostages, prevent the impending humanitarian disaster in that part of Palestine and avert the spreading of the conflict to other countries in the region. Given the extremely tense situation, it was necessary to act without delay. That is why the draft resolution we submitted did not contain any political elements or views or references to any party to the conflict, which could have complicated the process of reaching an agreement on it.

Despite that, in full view of the international community, the Security Council, the primary body for the maintenance of international peace and security, was not in a position to take a decision that could

have prevented the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza. The Council failed to send a clear, strong and collective signal calling for an immediate, lasting and observable humanitarian ceasefire. Today we are reaping the bitter fruit of that failure.

Once again, it has become clear that the position of Washington and some other Western capitals did not make it possible for a natural and logical decision to be taken. Given the current circumstances, that was an absolute humanitarian imperative and a moral duty of all conscientious members of the international community. Furthermore, humanitarian considerations, the norms of international law and the root causes of the failure to settle Palestinian question, which we have repeatedly and insistently pointed out for years, clearly do not matter for them.

In Israel, the number of deaths stands at 1,400 people, and 3,900 people have been injured. In Palestine, the number of deaths is more than 3,500, and 10,000 people have been injured. Today those figures are even higher. According to United Nations reports, approximately 450 children have died in Gaza, 750 more remain under the rubble of the buildings destroyed during the air raids.

More than 2 million people in Gaza still have no access to water, food, medical care, fuel or electricity. The only crossing on the border with Egypt — the Rafah crossing — is again coming under missile fire and has not been opened to let in humanitarian goods or to allow civilian evacuations. Some 1,000 Russian citizens and members of their families have become de facto hostages of the Gaza military blockade.

Against that worrisome backdrop, United Nations agencies, such as the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund, unanimously condemned the attack on the Al Ahli Hospital and called for immediate effective protection of civilians and medical infrastructure. At a briefing on the situation in Gaza yesterday, the deputy head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Joyce Msuya, noted that the number of victims in the current escalation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which has gone on for 11 days, has already exceeded the number of victims killed during the hostilities in 2014, which lasted more than seven weeks before a ceasefire was reached. That is truly horrifying. Humanitarian workers are dying as well. Approximately 1 million people have been forced to leave their homes in Gaza.

The humanitarian blockade of the Gaza Strip is pushing the entire population — a population that is being sacrificed before our eyes — to the brink of survival.

We call on the Israeli side to prioritize international humanitarian law, which has at its core the lives of Palestinian citizens and already fragile critical and medical infrastructure. Humanitarian access must be provided without delay. We call for an immediate ceasefire, an opening of corridors for the delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance to the affected areas of Gaza and to evacuate civilians, and for an immediate cessation of violence against civilians regardless of where they live.

In a number of Arab and European States there have been outbreaks of large-scale unrest against the backdrop of Israel's ongoing missile attacks. In that connection, we condemn attacks on diplomatic missions of foreign States.

This is all happening while the Security Council sits idle. The Council is paralysed by the self-serving interests of some countries whose unilateral actions have not only failed but also triggered a widespread escalation of violence in the Middle East region.

We are extremely concerned about the unprecedented scale of the humanitarian disaster in Gaza and the high risks of conflict spillover. Assuming that the Security Council has not been able to come up with an appropriate response to these challenges, we will initiate the resumption of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population in order to have a comprehensive discussion of the situation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone and ways to settle it. A letter to the President of the General Assembly on this matter has already been written and will be dispatched forthwith.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths for their briefings.

Yesterday's air strike on the Anglican hospital in Gaza, which left hundreds of Palestinian civilians dead and many wounded, illustrates the extreme brutality and gravity of the war between Israel and Hamas. Gabon strongly condemns that odious attack. Responsibility for it must be established. We recall also

that medical units and their personnel must be respected and protected in all circumstances, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Since the barbaric, unjustifiable and unacceptable attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7 October, the indiscriminate deadly violence against civilians has reached an unsustainable level.

My country recognizes Israel's right to self-defence, which must be exercised in accordance with the principles of proportionality and distinction between combatants and civilians.

Eleven days after the outbreak of this conflict, the scenes of war, marked by indiscriminate shelling, exude horror on both sides, with tragic consequences for civilians. The number of dead and wounded is in the thousands, and the atrocities committed against women and children and the destruction are immeasurable. In addition to the cynicism of using human shields and the barbarity of taking women and children hostage, millions of people are now under siege in Gaza, without water, food, gas or electricity, with death as their only prospect. It is time to put an end to the deadly cycle of violence and unbearable distress. We call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the opening of humanitarian corridors to help the civilian population in Gaza.

All parties must abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and allow unhindered humanitarian access to those in need in Gaza. I would like to take this opportunity to pay a heartfelt tribute to the humanitarian workers who are courageously carrying out their activities in difficult conditions, risking their lives in the process.

The flare-up of violence between Israel and Hamas threatens peace, security and stability beyond its epicentre. The international community must show greater commitment to preventing other fronts or centres of violence in the region, which would make the situation even more intractable. The exchanges of fire between Israel and Hizbullah, in southern Lebanon, are extremely worrisome in that respect.

There is an urgent need for the Council to act to prevent the situation from becoming bogged down. We must move beyond the strategic interests of each member and the range of emotions in order to achieve de-escalation and a cessation of hostilities, without delay. We must silence the weapons.

Diplomacy, dialogue and negotiation, with a central role for the United Nations, are the essential channels for reaching a solution that guarantees the rights and interests of the parties. For Gabon, the two-State solution remains the only credible alternative.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Special Coordinator Wennesland for their briefings. I wish to commend in particular Special Coordinator Wennesland for his tireless efforts to actively engage with all parties for the de-escalation of the conflict so as to prevent a humanitarian crisis.

Together with United Arab Emirates and the Russian Federation, China requested this emergency meeting. The Al Ahli Hospital, in Gaza, was attacked, claiming the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians. China is shocked by this heinous attack and strongly condemns it. The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a red line under international humanitarian law. Civilians and civilian facilities such as hospitals and schools should not and must not be targeted in military operations. The indiscriminate use of force is not acceptable, and the safety of humanitarian medical workers must be guaranteed. We urge Israel to effectively fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law.

If we look around in Gaza right now, tragedies like the one at Al Ahli Hospital are constantly unfolding as a result of the total blockade imposed by Israel. The supply of water, electricity and fuel in the Gaza Strip has been cut off. Basic and urgently needed supplies such as food and medicine are dwindling. Tens of thousands of Gazans have been forced to move south because of the emergency evacuation order issued by Israel, but have suffered from air strikes in the south, as well. From the north to the south, Gaza is full of frightened children and desperate mothers.

Given the current circumstances, there is no time to lose in protecting the safety of civilians, carrying out humanitarian relief and preventing a humanitarian crisis. We call on Israel to lift the full blockade of Gaza, rescind the emergency evacuation order and stop the air strikes around the Rafah crossing. We welcome the international community's efforts to open the humanitarian corridor and look forward to substantive progress in the relevant communications and arrangements as soon as possible. We appreciate the important role played by Egypt and other countries of the region in that regard.

Developments over the past few days have amply demonstrated that an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire must be the overriding priority. For as long as the war continues, more violations of international humanitarian law are inevitable. Without a comprehensive ceasefire, any amount of humanitarian assistance will be a drop in the bucket. If the current fight in Gaza is allowed to drag on, the end result will not be a complete military victory for any side. Instead, it will most likely be a catastrophe that will engulf the entire region and completely end the prospect for a two-State solution, plunging the Palestinian and Israeli peoples into a vicious cycle of hatred and confrontation. Arab countries have issued a strong call for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire. The international community should heed the just call of Arab countries and the Palestinian people. We should unite all current diplomatic efforts towards that goal.

China welcomes any initiative that is conducive to mitigating the humanitarian crisis and reducing the suffering of civilians and supports all efforts aimed at de-escalating the conflict and restoring peace. We hope that all parties concerned will maintain impartiality, actively leveraging their influence to promote calm and restraint and work for the cessation of hostilities as soon as possible. Given the current circumstances, all diplomatic efforts should work to send a unified signal.

First, there are no winners in war. Violence in response to violence can lead only to more serious crises. There must be an immediate ceasefire, an abandonment of military means and a return to the track of dialogue and negotiation.

Secondly, all violence and attacks against civilians should be rejected. Both the Palestinians and the Israelis have the right to be free from fear, and the security of both should be equally protected.

Thirdly, international humanitarian law must be followed. The basic needs of the people of Gaza must be ensured, the humanitarian corridor must be opened immediately, and the hostages must be released.

Fourthly, the fundamental solution to the Palestinian-Israeli question lies in the implementation of a two-State solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and other international consensus to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement, so that Palestine and Israel can live side by side in peace.

The Security Council bears the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. In the face of the continuing spread of conflicts and the increasingly imminent humanitarian disaster, the Security Council has no reason to remain silent and no excuse to delay further. China does not agree with the claim that Council actions would interfere with ongoing diplomatic efforts. Although the draft resolutions proposed by Russia (S/2023/773) and Brazil (S/2023/772) have not been adopted, the Security Council cannot stop now. China expects all members of the Security Council to shoulder their responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations, meet the expectations of the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples and of the international community, move forward in unity and build consensus and make binding decisions on the current crisis situation that will stand the test of history and human conscience.

China has been making continuous efforts in that regard. We will continue to work with the international community to play a constructive role in the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, the protection of civilians and the prevention of a furtherance of the humanitarian crisis in order to realize a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): We listened carefully to the sobering briefings by Special Coordinator Wennesland and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths.

We remain deeply concerned about the unfolding developments in the Gaza Strip and Israel. At the outset, while reiterating our strong condemnation of the current hostilities, initiated by the Hamas militia on 7 October, we are profoundly distressed by the attack on the Al Ahli Hospital, in Gaza, which was also sheltering civilians at the time it was hit. We condemn the attack, which adds to the growing frustration and human tragedy of this conflict, and we call for a full and transparent investigation of the incident and the establishment of accountability.

Since 7 October, the world has witnessed unimaginable horror in southern Israel and in the Gaza Strip. Many lives have been lost, and many more will be lost if the fighting does not stop. We deeply regret the high civilian cost of the current hostilities and express our solidarity and sympathy to all the families who have lost loved ones to the violence in both Israel and Palestine.

Ghana believes that, as the Council, and at this time, our foremost responsibility, together with the wider international community, should be saving lives — all lives. In that regard, we call on Hamas to immediately and unconditionally release all hostages and concurrently urge both sides to halt the firing of rockets and missiles. We further urge Israel to restore essential services, such as electricity and water supply, to Gaza and permit humanitarian access of food and medicines to the vulnerable populations in Gaza. We note the efforts of the United Nations and other humanitarian partners committed to operating in the unfolding difficult circumstances and call for funding for the emerging humanitarian needs and the flash appeal. In making these calls, however, we are not ignoring the dictates of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, including the relevant resolutions that affirm the right of guaranteed territorial inviolability of the States in the region, including Israel, as well as their right to self-defence, nor denying the need for accountability for those most responsible for the egregious, horrific and heinous acts committed since Hamas initiated its attacks against Israel on 7 October.

As one of the many Member States reborn into modern statehood in the past century, we cannot cease to underscore the importance of respect for and adherence to the established principles of international law and international humanitarian law. Civilians and civilian objects must be protected at all times. International law, which has been instrumental in the achievement of our respective statuses, must be upheld by all, even in conflicts, to protect innocent lives, to safeguard security and to facilitate aspirations for statehood. The deterioration of the security situation and the upward spiral of violence poses the risk of a further spread and a danger to international peace and security. We therefore strongly urge for an end to the fighting, accompanied by the exercise of maximum restraint in good faith by all sides, to enable mediation to play its role in releasing the hostages and addressing all immediate concerns, including the growing humanitarian needs of the civilian population in Gaza. We all must make every effort to reverse the downward spiral and provide a horizon of hope for the people of the two nations.

I will conclude by reiterating Ghana's enduring commitment of support for achieving durable peace between Israel and Palestine. We believe that reinvigorating the Middle East peace process presents

the most viable path for the international community to end the cycle of violence. The vision of a region where Israel and Palestine live side by side, within secure and recognized borders, should not be diminished, even in this darkest of hours.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for convening this emergency meeting. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for their extremely frank descriptions of a profoundly sombre situation. I would also like to thank them, and especially their teams, for all their work and courage in the most difficult of circumstances. I would like to offer our condolences to the families of the humanitarian workers who lost their lives.

Since 7 October, Switzerland has strongly condemned the acts of terror against and indiscriminate firing of rockets at the Israeli population by Hamas. We call for all hostages held in Gaza be treated humanely and immediately released, and our thoughts are with them. Switzerland has also joined the Secretary-General in unequivocally condemning yesterday's strikes, in particular the strike, which, according to the United Nations account, left hundreds dead and dozens injured at the Al Ahli Anglican Episcopal Hospital. We express our deepest condolences to the families of those who died and were injured. That incident must be thoroughly investigated so that light can be shed on the facts.

We will repeat it again and again: the civilian population and civilian property must be respected and protected. International humanitarian law also demands that hospitals, clinics and their patients and medical personnel be protected. The same applies to the schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which are United Nations civilian infrastructure.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate rapidly. Water and power cuts are causing a serious health crisis. Almost 1 million Gazans have had to flee their homes and seek refuge in the south. The Gaza Strip is under complete siege. UNRWA schools serve as vital shelter for 400,000 displaced persons, many of them children. The capacity of those schools and hospitals has been exceeded. All parties must allow for the safe, rapid and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid. We urge them to immediately observe a pause in hostilities, in line with the Secretary-General's demand for a humanitarian ceasefire.

As we reiterated following the voting this morning (see S/PV.9442), all parties must show the utmost restraint in the conduct of hostilities. They must respect international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction, proportionality, precaution and human rights. Every measure possible must be taken to avoid the impact of hostilities on the civilian population and civilian objects. As international humanitarian law provides for legitimate security concerns and military necessity, all its rules must be adhered to, without exception. We stress the need to investigate all violations of international law so that the perpetrators can be brought to justice. Respect for international humanitarian law, as others have said, can and must halt a spiral of violence that could inflame the entire region.

Switzerland stresses the importance of the good offices of the United Nations in this crisis, for which we are grateful. We welcome the Secretary-General's visit to Egypt and the region. As Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said yesterday in a joint statement, "humanity must prevail in Gaza". Humanity must prevail everywhere. De-escalation must remain our priority. As members of the Security Council, we owe it to ourselves to redouble our efforts to contribute to that end and exert our individual and collective influence on the parties to do the same.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefings we heard this morning and for the convening of this emergency meeting following the tragic news that is fuelling the escalation of violence that began on 7 October.

I would like to express our profound sadness and condemnation in the strongest terms regarding the killing of hundreds of civilians at the Al Ahli Hospital, in Gaza. Hospitals can never be the target of attacks, under any circumstances or any pretext. There is absolutely no justification for what happened yesterday. Likewise, we condemn the killing of personnel of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) — teachers, doctors, engineers, psychologists and support staff. Humanitarian assistance personnel must always be protected.

As this is the first time that I will be discussing this matter publicly, aside from the explanation of vote that we provided this morning (see S/PV.9442), I would like to reiterate in the strongest terms our firmest and

most unequivocal condemnation of the unjustifiable terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas. We also express our condolences to the families of the victims of those heinous acts and our solidarity with the people of Israel and other countries whose citizens were affected, including Latin American countries. We demand the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages taken by Hamas. There is absolutely no justification for attacking innocent civilians or, worse yet, using them as human shields. Hamas's terrorist attacks do not represent the Palestinian people. They do not represent the Palestinian people, their inalienable right to self-determination or their legitimate aspirations to live in security, liberty and justice, with opportunities and dignity. As we speak, the tragic and unacceptable deaths of innocent Palestinian civilians, including women and children, continue to occur. We reiterate our solidarity with their families and the people of Palestine. We recognize Israel's right to defend its population, and we recall that, in exercising legitimate defence, the principles of international humanitarian law — necessity, proportionality, distinction and humanity — must be upheld at all times. There is no justification for causing pain and death to innocent civilians. Therefore, all efforts must be deployed to avoid affecting civilians in that way.

For that reason, we support the Secretary-General's call to allow rapid, unimpeded humanitarian access of vital supplies to Gaza, such as water, food and fuel. We recognize those who are making efforts to ensure that is possible. Failing to achieve that would lead to an even greater tragedy. In that regard, we call upon all actors to exercise restraint, avoid exacerbating tensions and prevent an expansion of violence to other zones. As my delegation has said on numerous occasions, the only way to end this conflict is through a negotiated, definitive and just solution for the parties, with the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, based on the 1967 borders and the relevant resolutions.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Wennesland and Mr. Griffiths for their briefings.

The situation in Gaza and the region has continued to deteriorate since the terrorist attack committed against Israel by Hamas on 7 October. It is regrettable that the Security Council was unable to respond and to act today, 11 days after that attack. It is high time for the Council to spare civilian lives. France strongly condemns the strike against the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza, which led to a substantial number of Palestinian

civilian victims. Nothing can justify a strike against a hospital. Everything must be done to shed light on that event. It is also high time for the Council to unambiguously condemn the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel. France, through the voice of the President of the Republic, did so on that day, assuring Israel of its solidarity.

Those are the reasons that France voted in favour of the draft resolution (S/2023/773) put to the vote today by Brazil (see S/PV.9442). That draft resolution unambiguously condemned acts of violence and terrorism against civilian populations and called for the urgent opening of humanitarian access to Gaza. Civilians who want to be able to leave must be able to do so, and Hamas must not stop them. France thanks Brazil for its initiative and coordinating role.

Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in peace and security. I would like to recall France's unwavering solidarity with Israel in this ordeal and to express our most sincere condolences to all the families who have lost loved ones, including a significant number of French people. France reiterates its unwavering commitment to Israel's security and recalls its right to defend itself, in accordance with international humanitarian law, while safeguarding civilian populations in the face of the cowardly terrorist attacks targeting it. France also recalls that international humanitarian law is binding on everyone. The protection of civilian populations must be ensured. Humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip must be opened without delay, which requires the safeguarding of civilian security through humanitarian truces.

Today, through the draft resolution proposed, the Security Council could have recalled the urgent obligation to enable the provision of vital goods to the population of Gaza, including water, food, electricity, fuel and medicine. It could have demanded safe and unhindered access to Gaza for United Nations and International Committee of the Red Cross humanitarian workers. France, alongside its partners, is taking all measures to support United Nations humanitarian operations in Gaza. We call on Council members to do the same. Faced with the humanitarian emergency, France has mobilized €10 million in additional humanitarian aid for the population of Gaza, which will in particular finance the action of such United Nations agencies as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme, as well as humanitarian non-governmental organizations.

Only resuming dialogue will make it possible to put an end to the cycle of violence. The emergency is humanitarian in nature, but it is also diplomatic. We must do everything to avoid a regional conflagration. Actors who could take advantage of the situation must refrain from entering the conflict. The events of recent days confirm, if indeed we needed confirmation, the urgency of a political settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conditions for lasting peace are known: they are essential guarantees for the security of Israel and a State for the Palestinians. The legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians and the security of Israel form an inseparable whole. That is the line that France has always advocated and will continue to uphold. We must mobilize collectively to achieve that.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their updates.

The past two weeks have been painful, tumultuous and devastating. The situation in the Middle East is at a dangerous point, at which the risk of escalation is extremely high. We unequivocally condemn the terror attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian militants in Israel on 7 October, in which more than 1,300 people were killed, 3,600 wounded and nearly 200 taken hostage, overwhelmingly civilians. Japan demands the immediate release of the hostages without conditions. We are particularly appalled by the destruction of Al Ahli Hospital yesterday, in which hundreds died. We feel strong indignation at the tremendous damage and harm done to innocent civilians. Attacks against hospitals or civilians cannot be justified on any grounds. Japan expresses its heartfelt sympathy to the victims and injured and offers its condolences to the bereaved families. It is vital that humanitarian aid reach the people of Gaza. Humanitarian corridors must be established so that humanitarian actors can safely deliver food, water, fuel and medicine to the population. We echo the Secretary-General's call on Israel to ensure rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian aid to reach those relying on this assistance for their survival.

The risk of spillover, both regionally and globally, is real. We must choose a path that will bring us closer to peace, security and stability. In that vein, Japan welcomes President Biden's visit to Israel, as well as engagements by other players, including the Secretary-General and United Nations agencies, which could urgently address the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. We also encourage regional and other players to continue their efforts to negotiate the release of the hostages. For its part, Japan is engaging with other Security Council members to find common ground and take actions towards alleviating the plight of people in

Gaza and preventing further escalation. Whatever the position of the respective Member States towards the peace process in the Middle East, one thing remains clear: no one wants to witness the further loss of innocent lives. We must act without further delay.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Special Coordinator Wennesland for their sobering briefings. Through them, I would also like to thank their teams, who are working tirelessly in the region, including in the face of considerable personal risk. Again, we express our condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives.

The United Kingdom is shocked and deeply saddened by the destruction and the hundreds of lives lost at Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza yesterday evening. It is a devastating loss of life, and our thoughts and prayers are with those who are directly impacted. The United Kingdom is working intensively to establish the facts. Fundamentally, however, hospitals are protected under international law and should not be targeted.

As I have said, Israel has the right under the Charter of the United Nations to defend itself against Hamas's appalling terror attacks. We have also emphasized that every feasible precaution must be taken to minimize harm to civilians, and we continue to call for immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access to enable essential aid, water, food and medicines to reach civilians. Israel has itself acknowledged that it must act in accordance with international humanitarian law.

The United Kingdom is clear that Hamas does not speak for the Palestinian people. Humanitarian support and access in Gaza must be maintained. To support that effort, the United Kingdom has announced a further £10 million in humanitarian support. We call for the opening of the Rafah crossing and guarantees of security for any foreign nationals wishing to cross, as well as for the entry of vital humanitarian aid. We are also clear that we must avoid the further escalation of any conflict in the region. That is why my Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have been working urgently to engage Israeli, Palestinian and other leaders in the region. The United Kingdom will continue to work with partners in the international community to break the cycle of violence across Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and for peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their sobering briefings.

The Middle East is in danger to an extent that we have not witnessed for decades. The dire humanitarian situation, as we have heard, needs no explanation. The world is still in shock from the heinous and indefensible terrorist attack by Hamas and its consequences, including the taking of some 200 hostages. Given the brutality of the attacks, which everyone has witnessed, there is reason to believe that the innocent people abducted, if they are still alive, are being kept somewhere in Gaza under conditions that are hard to imagine. We strongly condemn such acts and reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of those being held hostage.

Albania strongly condemns the terrorist attacks by Hamas and reiterates the call for a global condemnation of terror perpetrated anywhere, by anyone and at any time. Terror cannot be justified or excused. It should not be condoned, applauded or glorified. It must only be condemned, and by all. It must be fought, and it must be eradicated. We have said many, many times that violence breeds violence. But let us not forget that Hamas is harming not only Israelis but innocent Palestinians, in the very same way. It is responsible for what is happening in Gaza. It wants to destroy Israel and is working to do that, but by doing so it is also destroying the future of Palestine. It is shattering the dreams of Palestinians for self-determination and obstructing the hopes of statehood that the Palestinian people deserve and that the international community rightly supports.

Albania has always stood by the right of any State to defend itself. In this case, we support the right of Israel to self-defence and its legitimate right to provide security for its people in a proportionate manner, in line with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, by taking every precaution not to harm innocent civilians.

The war against terror should not harm civilians. The innocent people of Gaza are fully entitled to care and protection. Human lives have the same value, be they Israeli or Palestinian. Both peoples deserve to live in peace and security. The explosion at the hospital in Gaza is a tragedy. We express our condolences to all those affected, and we mourn the patients, medical staff and other innocent people killed or wounded in that tragedy. Nothing can justify bombing a hospital or targeting civilians. Everything must be done to allow humanitarian assistance to reach everyone in need. We call for the opening of humanitarian routes and for assistance to flow unhindered to anyone in need.

As in every conflict, in the absence of independently verified facts, guilt shifts sides in a way that today is amplified as never before by social media. We must stick to facts, not judge by emotions. We must therefore work to shed all possible light on the hospital attack. The facts have to be established and the perpetrators held to account.

In the space of less than two weeks, thousands of Israelis and Palestinians have been killed. Innocent people have been taken hostage. Thousands of rockets have been launched indiscriminately in Israel, and Gaza is being destroyed. Peace and security throughout the entire Middle East are under threat, and the risk of a larger conflagration is real. Words of peace and calls for calm and reason may not be heard because of the noise of the war, but we should never, ever give up on efforts to bring the peace process back on track whenever possible. Regional and international actors must continue their efforts in order to respond quickly and wisely to the new reality and to prevent the crisis spilling over into the wider region and beyond.

For us there is no alternative. There can be no possible solution other than the one we have always supported and embraced, in which two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, for two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, live side by side in peace, security and dignity.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this emergency meeting. I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their sobering briefings.

All words fall short when it comes to describing the horror that befell the Al Ahli Hospital and the people of Gaza yesterday. One missile strike ended the lives of hundreds of people, all of whom were already acutely vulnerable, and Malta condemns that action in the harshest terms. It is a tragic illustration of the fact that there are no safe zones in Gaza. The population has nowhere to go. Many women and children, believing hospitals to be sanctuaries, have sought refuge within their confines, trusting in their status as protected spaces. While we recall the terror perpetrated by Hamas, as we speak, countless civilians in Gaza have been deprived of basic amenities such as running water and electricity. Given the collapse of water and sanitation services, the possibility of dehydration and water-borne diseases is a growing concern. People are turning to the schools and hospitals run by the United Nations

Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East throughout the area, seeking safety. It is imperative for safety to be assured. Safe zones must be immediately established and respected by all parties.

The scale of the tragedy unfolding is a direct result of the chaos and devastation that permeates a conflict when international rules and norms are trampled on. It is the international community's responsibility to make sure that those rules, which are enshrined in international law, guide our way forward. We stress that those with influence over the parties must underline the importance of respecting international humanitarian law. In that regard, Malta urgently calls for an immediate humanitarian pause to take place. There is also a desperate need for humanitarian corridors to be established to ensure that millions of civilians in Gaza have their core necessities, including water, food and medicine, met. It is an obligation of all parties to conflict to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The parties must ensure that United Nations, International Committee of the Red Cross and humanitarian personnel are afforded full protection in their priceless work. We are distressed to learn that, since 7 October, several aid workers have lost their lives to this war. We call for the establishment of an effective humanitarian notification system in Gaza to protect civilians and aid workers alike.

We cannot fail to underline the heroic work being undertaken by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Agency operates in highly dangerous situations, going over and above their operational capacity. Malta condemns the deadly attack on an UNRWA school in Al-Maghazi, which also took place yesterday. Malta will be doubling its contribution to UNRWA, and we call for donors to step up their contributions, as many have done already.

Malta is gravely alarmed at the growing risks of regional escalation due to this unprecedented war. It is critical that we prevent a regional spillover, which would destabilize the entire region. We are concerned about the upsurge of violence in the West Bank, where over 60 Palestinians, including 16 children, have also been killed since 7 October. Dangerous skirmishes along the Blue Line between Lebanon and Israel are also deeply worrisome and must cease immediately. We call for all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and commit to a full de-escalation to avoid further human suffering and devastation.

In the midst of this dark period, it is our responsibility to remain determined in ensuring that a just and comprehensive resolution to the Middle East conflict encapsulates all our efforts moving forward. We remain firm in our belief that that can only be achieved through a just and comprehensive resolution, based on a two-State solution, along the pre-1967 borders, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future capital of the two States, living side by side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters. That is crucial for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and for our shared humanity.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their sobering briefings.

President Biden just spoke to these issues in Israel, and he has made clear that the United States is outraged and saddened by the explosion at the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza. We mourn this terrible loss of life. We mourn all the innocent civilians killed or wounded in this tragedy. Today all of our hearts are heavy. My heart is heavy, and it is with the victims and their loved ones. I cannot imagine the pain, the grief and the anguish they are going through.

Last night, President Biden directed his national security team to continue gathering information about what exactly happened. While we continue to collect information, our current assessment, based on analysis of overhead imagery, intercepts and open-source information, is that Israel is not responsible for the explosion at the hospital in Gaza yesterday. The President of the United States has made clear, as have I in the Council, that we stand unequivocally for the protection of civilian life during conflict — unequivocally, in this conflict and in any conflict.

We have communicated at the highest levels that every step must be taken to protect civilian lives — every step. In the face of this horrific tragedy, we stand with Palestinians in Gaza, who are suffering through no fault of their own. Let us not lose sight of the fact that Hamas bears responsibility for this war. By slaughtering Israeli civilians and continuing to attack Israel, Hamas has wrought misery and destruction on Palestinians and the region, and it has done so for decades.

As the Council knows, Secretary-General Guterres is on his way to the region, and President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken are on the ground and are deeply engaged on this issue. Just today, President Biden announced that the United States is providing \$100 million in humanitarian assistance for Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank. That money will support over 1 million displaced and conflict-affected Palestinians.

The United States will continue to work closely with the Israeli Government, other countries in the region, the United Nations and other partners to minimize the risk of civilian casualties. The loss of any innocent life is heartbreaking and unacceptable, and we must all do everything possible to protect civilians.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): Mozambique thanks Russia and the United Arab Emirates for convening this meeting. We also appreciate the President's readiness to schedule it.

We thank both Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings on the latest developments in the region, particularly in the Gaza Strip. We convey our profound appreciation for and solidarity with their dedication in these difficult moments.

In just 11 days, the conflict between Israel and Hamas has caused significant damage to public infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, and has resulted in the displacement of thousands of people. We could not be more horrified by the Tuesday night airstrike on the hospital in Gaza City, in which hundreds of people were reportedly killed, while thousands of civilians were reportedly sheltering there. Furthermore, attacks on those who have the responsibility to take care of others, such as medical personnel, is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and could be perceived as a war crime. Needless to say, the situation has been further exacerbated by Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, leading to a shortage of such basic necessities as food, water and medical supplies, to mention but a few.

We strongly condemn the attacks on the civilian population — mainly children, women and the elderly, who suffer the most from the atrocities and grave effects of this war. In that regard, we reiterate our call, loudly and clearly, to the parties to de-escalate the tension, stop the bloodshed, halt the attacks and stop the human suffering

in the occupied territories in the Gaza Strip, which should ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches desperate citizens immediately and unconditionally.

As described, the humanitarian situation is indeed dire, and it is causing unprecedented levels of alarm. We fear that a humanitarian catastrophe will continue to unfold in Gaza. We therefore call on the international community to ensure respect for the fundamentals of international law and the protection of civilians.

We all know that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been ongoing for decades and that it is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach to resolve. In fact, there have been many grass-roots peacebuilding efforts between Israelis and Palestinians that have shown promise for fostering peaceful coexistence. It is therefore our firm belief that it is only through peace and dialogue that Israel and Palestine can resolve their differences. We hold the view that peace is always possible if the conflicting parties are genuinely willing to follow the path of justice and tolerance.

Concurrently, we resolutely reiterate our appeal to the members of Security Council to redouble their efforts in exercising their role of influence to achieve a sustainable solution to the Palestinian situation, in full compliance with the relevant resolutions, decisions and other instruments of the United Nations.

In conclusion, we urge the parties to pursue the path of dialogue and work constructively together towards a lasting peace, while respecting the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and the two-State solution, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 2334 (2016).

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I would like to thank our briefers, Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Tor Wennesland, for their invaluable remarks and insights today and for the fantastic work they are doing in very difficult circumstances.

The United Arab Emirates explanation of vote this morning on draft resolution S/2023/773 outlined its overall position on the matter before us (see S/PV.9442), but in this briefing, which we called for together with China and the Russian Federation, we really just wanted to focus concretely on the humanitarian situation, which is getting worse by the day.

For nearly two weeks, we have borne witness to the relentless and indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza following the heinous attack on Israel on 7 October. As

a result, 1 million people in Gaza are now displaced and more than 500,000 people are sheltering in United Nations facilities. The United Nations system is not equipped for such a response. There are reports of bombs being dropped on the United Nations schools and buildings to which people have been running in search of safety.

As Under-Secretary-General Griffiths made clear in his statement, the humanitarian situation on the ground is now catastrophic. The evacuation order for more than 1 million people to try to move to safety is, in those circumstances, an impossible demand that fails to comply with international law. Yesterday the situation got worse. The world watched the unthinkable happen: an attack targeted against the Al Ahli Hospital that resulted in the deaths of more than 500 people. There is no ambiguity under international law with regard to providing care to the wounded and sick. Hospitals and medical personnel must at all times be protected, and they must never, ever, be the target of an attack. Nothing can justify yesterday's attack. We condemn it and call for an impartial, independent and transparent investigation into that tragedy and for those responsible to be held accountable.

Gaza has been under siege for 10 days, during which a stranglehold has been placed around the necks of the civilians there. The descriptions of the humanitarian situation on the ground from both Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Wennesland give us a sense of what hell on Earth might look like. The steps that need to be taken are clear and practical. This morning, the President of the United Arab Emirates, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, discussed some of those steps with the Secretary-General. We need an immediate cessation of hostilities, as called for in the draft resolution that failed to be adopted today. We need the unconditional release of all the hostages — I repeat, all of them — being held and their humane treatment. That must happen now. We need safe and unhindered access for all humanitarian aid workers and for medical aid, food, water and fuel. I am sure many Security Council members are disturbed by the images of civilians in Gaza boiling toilet water to give to their families. The reconnection of electricity, water and telecommunications must happen, and the protection of all civilians must be our priority.

At Egypt's border with Gaza, life-saving humanitarian aid is piling up. The United Arab Emirates has opened an air bridge to transport the much-needed supplies, but without firm guarantees

from all the parties that the trucks and civilians gathering to receive aid will not be targeted, they remain out of the hands of those who so desperately need them. The Government of the United Arab Emirates has announced an additional \$70 million in aid for Gaza. Those protections must be put into place.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is deteriorating by the hour, and we must be under no illusions — we are staring into the abyss of what is now not only a conflict in Gaza but a widening regional conflagration. We therefore call today for a regional and international focus from the Council and the international community, as well as renewed efforts to secure the de-escalation and cessation of hostilities on the ground. We really appreciate the diplomatic efforts of Egypt and the United States in that regard. In particular, we commend Egypt's efforts to ensure safe humanitarian access in Gaza through the Rafah crossing and to convene a summit of world leaders to address the deteriorating situation. We hope that today's announcement by the United States and President Biden that Israel has agreed to allow humanitarian access via Rafah will result in the rapid and safe delivery of aid.

There is no time to waste. Leaders across the region and the international community should focus all possible efforts to secure a cessation of hostilities. As Mr. Wennesland said, the only way we can end these cycles of conflict is to rededicate all efforts towards a long-term political solution. The past 10 days cannot be undone, but our future remains before us to determine. How we act now to preserve our shared humanity, ensure respect for international humanitarian law and alleviate the dire suffering of the people of Gaza will determine that course.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Brazil.

I thank the briefers for their comments and commend them for their extraordinary work in a very difficult situation. I also ask them to please convey our thanks to their people on the ground.

Brazil is appalled by the catastrophic strike on the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza City that killed hundreds of civilians. It is simply abominable. Hospitals and medical personnel are — and must be — effectively protected under international humanitarian law. Yesterday's attack shows again that the civilians are the ones paying the ultimate price for this conflict. We stand in solidarity with the grieving families of the victims and offer our deepest condolences.

Brazil unequivocally condemns the terrorist attacks and hostage-taking by Hamas in Israel on 7 October. Acts of terrorism are unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever and by whomever they are committed. We all call in the strongest terms for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and demand their safety, well-being and humane treatment in accordance with international law.

Any military response to terrorist acts or acts of aggression must be conducted strictly in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The presence among the civilian population of individuals who may not qualify as civilians under international humanitarian law does not deprive the broader population of its civilian status. In addition to hitting hospitals, air strikes and the reckless use of heavy weapons such as missiles and shelling have also hit schools such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) facility in Al-Maghazi refugee camp, resulting in a tragic loss of life. The targeted UNWRA school had sheltered at least 4,000 people since 7 October. That is unacceptable. Brazil urges the protection of civilians, humanitarian workers, including United Nations staff, assets and health facilities. We also condemn the actions and decisions that have deprived the civilian population of Gaza of essential means of survival in violation of international humanitarian law. We urge for an end to actions that result in the forcible transfer of civilians and actions that are inconsistent with international law. The imposition of such measures, particularly in conflict zones, only exacerbates the humanitarian crisis and further endangers lives, and it will fuel the conflict even more.

The immediate objective is clear and urgent. To prevent further bloodshed and loss of life and to try to ensure immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access to the affected areas, a humanitarian pause is urgent. Efforts should be aimed at achieving a cessation of hostilities that would help to ensure the protection of civilians, both in Israel and Palestine.

“To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” are among the very first words of the Charter of the United Nations and were the primary motive for the creation of the United Nations. How the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, deals with the current humanitarian catastrophe will say a great deal about the future of the United Nations and of multilateralism as a whole.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): There is no right under international law to commit massacres. Israel is perpetrating massacres in Gaza every single day. For more than 10 days now, we have seen it kill entire families, bombing shelters, schools, hospitals, residential buildings and convoys. We have heard it tell people to head to southern Gaza and then seen it bomb the south. Members have heard and seen Israel telling people that they had a choice between forced displacement and death and then subjecting them to both.

It is beyond belief that some still speak of the right to self-defence of an occupying Power that has made it clear that it is seeking blind vengeance and the forced transfer and annihilation of our people. Everyone here says that civilian lives should be protected, and yet so far some Council members are still unable to call for a stop to the assault and for an immediate ceasefire. Those who cannot or will not call for a ceasefire will lose any credibility or authority, and they will share some of the responsibility for the devastation that is occurring now and what will occur next. No one should want to be seen as complicit in these mass killings or their continuation. Had the Council called for a ceasefire two days ago and acted accordingly, it would have saved hundreds of lives. Maybe saving hundreds of Palestinian lives is not such an important objective to pursue for some. But is anyone sure that Palestinian lives are the only ones they would be saving if the Council were to act? We told the Council months ago to take action to save lives — all lives. It did not hear us then. It should not make the same mistake now.

People are being killed as we speak. A humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented proportions is unfolding in Gaza on live television. We heard what Mr. Griffiths said. A political disaster is under way and yet the Security Council is unable to say the only thing that truly matters — stop the bloodshed. I repeat, stop the bloodshed. Those who think they can avert a humanitarian catastrophe and a regional spillover while Israel continues bombing and killing Palestinians must think again. The region is united in telling the Council that it is not possible. Listen to those countries. The only way to prevent both disasters is to stop the criminal aggression against our people.

There is no speech, legal contortion or political cover that can clear Israel of its responsibility for the Palestinian civilians it is killing. For 75 years now, Israel has explained and brazenly justified how it had to dispossess us, occupy our land and kill our people — all with full impunity. Killing more Palestinians will never make Israel more secure. Seventy-five years of experience should have been proof enough for those who want to learn. There is no logic, moral or law in the world that can justify the killing of a people — innocent children, women and men — as a pretext for making another people secure.

The whole world is watching. It is watching us. The events of the past 10 days may shape the next 10 years in our region and beyond. What happens next will be decisive. Anyone who thinks that this is a situation under control, for which a plan can be designed and implemented, is making false and irresponsible assumptions. This is the kind of war where we know how it starts but have no clue how it ends. Even now, it can be stopped, and it should be stopped immediately. Any further delay is a risk that no one should take.

The Council should have met today to heed the call of the Secretary-General, of religious leaders around the world, including the Pope, of Arab States, of the Muslim countries, of the global South, of an overwhelming number of States around the world and of billions of people, including the millions who have been marching in the streets everywhere. Stop the bloodshed. Stop it now. Listen to them. But the Council has not heeded those calls. It has not upheld international law unequivocally, equally or responsibly. And in the next few hours, more Palestinians will be killed, tensions in the region will rise to newly dangerous levels and anger and resentment will explode. Every one of us will be asked what we did when all of that was happening. We will all be asked what we did to prevent what will happen next.

The Council's failure to shoulder its responsibilities after 10 days of Israel's massacres of the Palestinian people, and after the killing of hundreds of people gathered in a hospital to find shelter and care, will mark public opinion in our region and the world for a very long time and affect people's belief in the law's ability to protect all people, as well as their perceptions and reactions. This was not a moment to foster more despair and more impunity. This was not a moment to make the same mistakes that got us here in the first place.

Lastly, Israel does not deny that it killed entire families — infants, children and their parents, uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents — with sometimes up to 45 members of the same family being slaughtered. It has done so repeatedly through the years and is doing so again, this time in the Gaza Strip. It has now killed 3,500 Palestinians, almost all civilians, including more than 1,000 children. It admitted to killing all of them but insisted it could not do otherwise. Their deaths were not its fault, even though it killed them. But the hospital massacre had such an impact on global public opinion that it had to change tactics and change its original story to a new one. So Israel will deny responsibility for the massacre at the Al Ahli Baptist Hospital, just as it made every effort to deny its responsibility for the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh and Muhammad Al-Durrah and for the many massacres it has perpetrated over the decades, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It will blame the Palestinians for their own deaths, as it has always done, and it will attempt to present evidence to that effect to the Council. Do members recall the last time somebody presented evidence in this Chamber to justify war? Somebody came with technological devices and pictures to convince the Council. Remember the last time somebody presented evidence in this Chamber to justify war. I am sure the Council, the media and the world will not be fooled by such theatre again.

These are serious times. They require serious and responsible leadership, which the Council has failed to provide. Some members are missing an opportunity to change our region for the better. Whatever their calculations may be, they are wrong. May they change course before it is too late. Reality on the ground will overtake any plans they may have — shaping it or enduring it is a decision that must be made now.

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

Mr. Erdan (Israel): What is going on here? I am truly shocked and horrified. I truly do not understand what is going on. The most barbaric and wide-scale terror attack in decades — bigger than the 11 September attacks — was perpetrated 11 days ago, and it seems that the Council has already forgotten. The pictures and footage from the pogrom on 7 October are forever seared into my brain and that of every Israeli, but it seems that I must remind some members what happened.

Thousands of barbaric Hamas Nazis invaded Israel and brutally murdered 1,400 innocent Israelis as they slept, celebrated or hugged their families in fear and cried

for mercy. Some were raped, others beheaded, and some were burned alive while bound and gagged. Many were children, and hundreds were young people at a music festival. There were many paramedics — speaking of medical teams — who were murdered on their way to treat the wounded. Mothers watched as their babies were slaughtered, and there were elderly Holocaust survivors who endured the Nazis only to be executed in their own living room. The approach was planned and carried out deliberately by the terrorists that rule Gaza today, as we speak. It was not done by accident or by mistake but deliberately. Two hundred innocents were violently taken hostage, many of whom are nationals of members' own countries.

I read the Hamas charter aloud to the Council just two days ago. Hamas' words were not empty threats. Hamas' charter is their action plan. Their goal is the annihilation of Israel, and if Hamas has the opportunity to commit such atrocities again, they will, and the Council knows it. Although there are some here who choose not to designate Hamas as a terror organization for political reasons, it still does not change the facts: Hamas deliberately targets civilians and massacres children when given the chance, which makes Hamas a terror organization, no different from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). They do not believe in dialogue and do not want a dialogue or believe in political solutions. They only believe in exterminating Jews and annihilating the Jewish State. Nothing can change their genocidal ideology. They do not even recognize the existence of international law — this is to all those who are talking about a two-State solution and international law.

There is only one way to cure a cancer, and that is the evisceration of every cancerous cell, just as was done with ISIS and Al-Qaida. Complete obliteration is the only way to ensure such atrocities will never be repeated. Nevertheless, look at what is going on here, 11 days after ISIS-like Hamas terrorists attempted to carry out another Jewish genocide. The Council is not even focused on their heinous crimes. Up until today, members have not even done the most basic thing — they have not condemned, as a Council, Hamas' brutal terror attack. It really is unfathomable that members cannot unite even on that basic thing. The Council is not focused on what needs to be done to free Gaza from Hamas and ensure that the oppression of the Gazan people by their tyrants ends. Instead, the Council is fixated solely on humanitarian corridors and aid. Those are important and noble causes, but they are certainly not a solution to prevent Hamas's

next atrocious massacre. How is it possible that the Council is only dealing with draft resolutions such as the one voted upon today? It is tragic to say, but the Council is playing the exact role that Hamas had written for it in their script of death and terror, and I will explain.

Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza 18 years ago. Hamas was then elected by the people of Gaza — I hear frequently that Hamas does not represent the people, but it was elected. After murdering the Palestinian Authority officials by throwing them off rooftops, Hamas proceeded to convert every inch of the Gaza Strip into a war machine. Where was the Council then? Where was the Council when Hamas exploited the billions of dollars of international aid to embed terror infrastructure within and below densely populated residential areas? Where was the United Nations? The United Nations knew all of this, but it remained silent. Hamas then spent the following 17 years terrorizing Israel by firing tens of thousands of rockets indiscriminately at Israeli towns and cities while hiding behind their own civilians. Where has the Council been? As we speak, right now, sirens are wailing, and millions of people in Israel are running to find shelter. Hamas does this so that once Israel strikes back, they can parade the bodies of the civilians in Gaza that they hid behind. Their strategy is to exploit their civilian casualties as propaganda, to leverage the international community to tie Israel's hands. Its goal is to increase civilian casualties in Gaza. That is part of its script. It knows that it cannot beat Israel on the battlefield. Of course, it knows it. So, it wants to terrorize its citizens — deliberately, only citizens — and then weaponize the United Nations to prevent Israel from obliterating it so it can rebuild, rearm and continue terrorizing Israelis. It has a lot of patience while working towards annihilating Israel. That is Hamas's script. That is its playbook, and shockingly, even after the recent slaughter, it is still working for Hamas.

Do Council members not understand that just by holding this meeting with its focus the Council is showing Hamas that it can fool everyone again and again and again? I reiterate that, so far, the Council has not even condemned Hamas for the atrocity perpetrated, let alone held Hamas fully responsible for the situation in Gaza, but here we are discussing humanitarian corridors. Does nobody else see how ludicrous this is?

Calling for calm, restraint and ceasefires is like putting a Band-Aid on a bullet wound. Such steps will not eradicate the cancer that is Hamas. Humanitarian corridors will not prevent the next atrocity. The only

thing that will be the utter obliteration of that satanic entity. What are Council members doing to prevent that evil?

Perhaps if, for once, the Council condemned Hamas, the people of Gaza would begin to comprehend the absolute destruction its leaders have brought upon them, perhaps they would stand up to those barbaric savages. Yet every time the international community pressures Israel and attempts to tie its hands, it serves only to embolden those genocidal terrorists, increases their popularity and ensure that this evil lives to see another day.

Perhaps the most fundamental part of this issue is that some have still not internalized what Hamas truly is. This emergency meeting and draft resolution S/2023/773, which the Council voted on, were triggered — we all know it — by the propaganda of savage jihadists. Let that sink in. Claims made by baby-killing terrorists were accepted in this Chamber and repeated today, by the way, at face value without a second thought, and that is what triggered this meeting. Any piece of information that comes out of Gaza cannot be trusted. Hamas runs Gaza; Hamas runs all Gazan institutions. Therefore, whatever comes out of the Gaza Strip is not the truth. It is what Hamas wants Council members to hear. Sadly, transparency and the truth are not central values for genocidal terrorists.

In August 2022, Sarah Muscroft, the former Head of Office for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Gaza, tweeted a condemnation of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad for their indiscriminate rocket fire at Israeli civilians. It was in August 2022 — Council members can check. Almost immediately, Ms. Muscroft, the Head of OCHA, was removed from her post and deleted her tweet. That made Israel very upset, obviously. Therefore, I asked her boss — I hope he is still with us — Under-Secretary-General Griffiths, why the United Nations would remove an official from her post for condemning acts of terror that deserve United Nations condemnation. Do Council members know what he told me? He said that Ms. Muscroft was transferred because, according to United Nations information and assessments, there was danger to her life. If a United Nations official received death threats for telling the truth about the terrorists, try to imagine how any Gazan feels about telling the truth. Not only are official Gazan sources absolutely unreliable, as they are terrorists, but they would also be immediately murdered if they say something that

Hamas does not like. Therefore, I have to ask Council members a question. What does that say about whoever decides to believe the claims of a terror organization without any fact-checking?

The Al Ahli Hospital was hit by — and only by — a Palestinian Islamic Jihad rocket. What happened yesterday, including the tragic loss of life of civilians, was the sole fault of Hamas. Israel has lots of footage and even audio recording from Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists to prove that beyond a shadow of a doubt. Nevertheless, the Secretary-General and numerous United Nations officials immediately accepted the claims of baby-killing terrorists. What a disgrace. And today some Council members repeated those lies. How can the Secretary-General forget that he has the obligation to verify the facts before issuing a condemnation? I guess it is easy when it comes to Israel.

Mere months ago, the Secretary-General himself signed off on a report detailing how the misfired rockets of Gaza's terrorists killed and maimed dozens of Gazan children and medical personnel. We demand an apology. The United Nations and some on the Council rushed to adopt the lies of ISIS-like terrorists and refused to accept the hard evidence of a law-abiding democracy. They should apologize. They should apologize for never convening the Council when Hamas rockets are fired deliberately at Israeli hospitals. Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon was directly hit by Hamas rockets just last week. Where was the Council? Council members should apologize for years of burying their heads in the sand while Hamas ceaselessly built up its war machine in Gaza.

Council members should stop following Hamas's script and stop playing by Hamas's rules. The time has come for the Council to hold Hamas fully and solely accountable for the war crimes committed. The Council should be purely focused on condemning the Hamas terrorists, supporting Israel's right to defend itself and demanding that Hamas immediately and unconditionally return its hostages. Israel's rescue mission can end very quickly if Hamas terrorists turn themselves in and release all the hostages. But the rescue mission will not end until Israel ensures that Hamas's atrocities can never be repeated again, and there is no way to ensure that other than the obliteration of Hamas's capabilities.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I would like to say the following. To ensure

that all speakers enjoy the same sizable audience, I strongly recommend that statements do not exceed five minutes, if possible.

I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Hmoud (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am delivering this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States against the backdrop of the tragic events in the Gaza Strip, in which the impartial voice of the international community and any active and effective international action to protect the Palestinian people in Gaza are lacking.

The Arab Group condemns in the strongest terms the heinous massacre undertaken yesterday by the criminal Israeli occupation army against innocent civilians and injured people who were receiving care at Al Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza.

The Arab Group holds Israel, the occupying Power, fully responsible for this heinous war, about which we cannot remain silent. We call upon the Security Council to take immediate action to ensure a ceasefire and end the brutal Israeli aggression against the people of Gaza. Humanitarian and medical assistance must be allowed to enter the Gaza Strip, and protection for medical and humanitarian workers, as well as medical, educational and United Nations facilities, must be ensured. We also call for preventing the forcible displacement of the people of Gaza.

The heinous crimes of the occupation run counter to the human and ethical values and clearly violate the international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, as well as the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. In that regard, we recall resolution 2286 (2016), which stipulates that medical and health-care personnel should not be targeted, condemning all attacks against medical staff and calling for the provision of adequate protection.

The Arab Group calls for holding Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for the massacres and crimes it continues to commit against the defenceless Palestinian people. Israel's targeting of the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital is not occurring in a vacuum. As we mentioned before, pronouncements from Israeli high officials were clear — Israel will not respect humanitarian and moral values or laws. It considers hospitals as military targets that should be immediately evacuated. That triggered a response from the World Health Organization and various

relevant United Nations agencies, which confirmed that the forced eviction and targeting of medical facilities and staff constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law.

Just now, Martin Griffiths stated that an eviction warning was issued by Israeli authorities to 20 medical institutions, including the Baptist Hospital shortly before it was attacked. In that connection, we stress that the heinous crimes against the people of Gaza are crimes against our collective humanity. Condemning that attack and aggression is a purely humanitarian call. It is incumbent upon us to coordinate international efforts in order to immediately put an end to this war against Gaza and to urgently provide the necessary international protection to the Palestinian people.

The Arab Group warns that this brutal war against innocent civilians has entered a serious phase that will lead the region to a disaster. The international community and, in particular, the Security Council must assume their responsibility to maintain international peace and security by putting an end to the bloodshed and the killing of innocent women, children and the elderly.

We stress that we will be the first to defend the rights of our Palestinian brothers and their just cause. We underscore that the main reason behind the conflict is the endless occupation. If we want peace and security, the Palestinian question should be resolved through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State along the borders of June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital and in accordance with international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, the Arab Group expresses its heartfelt condolences to the families of the martyrs. May God have mercy on them and quickly heal the wounded.

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

Mr. Mahmoud (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for their briefings.

I would also like to thank the United Arab Emirates, the Russian Federation and China, which asked to convene this emergency meeting of the Council in the light of the Israeli bombing of the Al Ahli Baptist Hospital, in the Gaza Strip. That bombing was part and parcel of a systematic plan to kill and uproot the Palestinian people

and to try to force them to leave their territory. The crime committed on 17 October is a new chapter in a long series of violations that did not begin on 8 October, but much earlier, when the Israeli occupation began.

This situation requires the international community to put an end to its current policy of indifference and to begin to hold accountable — politically and legally — everyone who commissioned, participated, called for or ordered yesterday's heinous crime. The events under way in Palestine call on the Council to shoulder its responsibility. We are confident that our friend, Brazil, along with the other Council members, will be able to shoulder that responsibility and fulfil their obligations.

The events of the past few days pose unprecedented risks to the region and to international peace and security. Those risks cannot be ignored. That is why, on numerous occasions, we warned against such risks and took action on our side to mitigate them. The occupation cannot go on any longer, and those crimes cannot be overlooked.

The continued Israeli occupation and the unilateral measures being taken, specifically, the construction and extension of illegitimate and illegal settlements; the provocation and crimes being committed by settlers and their supporters; the desecration of holy sites; the political deadlock owing to Israel's intransigence; and contempt for international legitimacy — all of which have fanned the flames.

We must ensure that no one uses what we have just said as a pretext to accuse us of justifying terrorism. In speaking now before the Council and the world, we reiterate our categorical rejection and explicit condemnation of all acts that involve the taking of civilian hostages. We expressed that position very clearly on 11 October, as did all Arab States, at the ministerial meeting of the League of Arab States.

We condemn the targeting of civilians and have condemned the double standards we have seen. We condemn civilians being targeted by our brothers in occupied Palestine. We would like to reiterate our condemnation and staunch rejection of all crimes being committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, the latest of which was targeting Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital yesterday.

We reiterate our rejection of Israel's attempts to evade responsibility, as well as the attempts of certain international parties to cover for Israel by providing false excuses. They have led to an impossible situation

in the Palestinian territories and the Gaza Strip. We see civilians being bombarded in their homes and in hospitals because of the ongoing rejection of all initiatives aimed at ensuring calm and resuming the political process. That leads to prolonging the occupation and undermining the Palestinian question. The international community and the Council must shoulder their full responsibility with regard to this explosive situation. In that regard, Egypt has a clear vision of what the Council should do.

First, we need an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. That is the standard procedure to be applied in all armed conflicts. Nevertheless, we do not see the same level of commitment to achieving a ceasefire in Gaza, despite the risk of the conflict spilling over. The States that have not done their utmost to achieve a ceasefire will not necessarily be spared the risks, as this might fuel the flames of conflict.

Secondly, we need to guarantee the protection of civilians. We need to provide them with humanitarian assistance. We were taken aback to see that we are debating this principle, one of the most fundamental principles of humanity. We are taken aback that it is controversial, as the protection of civilians in armed conflicts is one of the pillars of international humanitarian law. The targeting of medical facilities must also cease immediately, pursuant to the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2286 (2016), which unequivocally condemns all acts of violence, attacks and threats against hospitals and other medical facilities. Israel's evacuation order, which constitutes one of the most abominable cases of the forcible transfer of a population in our time, must be immediately rescinded. The murder of thousands of innocent civilians has demonstrated Israel's fallacious justification of that order as a means to protect civilians.

Thirdly, hate speech, including demonization and incitement, and the justification of crimes committed against the Palestinian people, must end. The use of the term "animals" by an official of a country that claims to be democratic has gone unnoticed by other States that continuously talk about the principles of humanity. Such speech is linked to genocide because it poisons minds and fuels blind hate.

Fourthly, every effort must be made to free all prisoners, hostages and detainees and ensure that they are treated according to international humanitarian law and the principles of humanity.

Since the beginning of the recent conflict, Egypt has worked in its traditional role in support of the Palestinian people to restore peace, achieve a ceasefire, guarantee

humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip and mobilize the necessary emergency aid. Egypt has also called for the convening of an urgent international summit in Cairo on 21 October, with the participation of international and regional influential parties involved in the crisis at this critical juncture of the escalation, in order to overcome the current crisis and move forward towards a fair, lasting and comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian question. That is based on our conviction that simply managing the Palestinian issue or deferring the aspirations of the Palestinian people through sedative policies has been made obsolete by recent events.

The people of Egypt and all Arab and peace-loving peoples look to the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and end the brutal war that Israel has launched against the Palestinian territories and against an unarmed people, whose only aspiration is to enjoy their most basic rights to freedom and to live in dignity in an independent State like all other peoples of the world.

The President: In order to ensure that all speakers enjoy the same sizable audience, we strongly recommend that statements do not exceed five minutes, and that for the sake of good communication, representatives speak at a pace that will allow our interpreters to interpret effectively.

I now give the floor to the representative of Oman.

Mr. Al Hassan (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): I deliver this statement on behalf of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), namely, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Qatar, the State of Kuwait and my own country, the Sultanate of Oman.

At the outset, I align myself with the statement made by the representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

I would also like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your friendly country, Brazil, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I wish you every success in leading the work of the Council for the maintenance of international peace and security and for strengthening the status of international law and the Council's credibility.

In keeping with the noble purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Council held a meeting two days ago (see S/PV.9439) to follow up the developments concerning the situation in the Middle East, above all in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Gaza

Strip, and to take action and practical and concrete measures to maintain peace and security and stop the blood-bath. Unfortunately, the Council was unable to adopt any position. The result has been more killing of innocent people, destruction and collective punishment. It is not a new situation, in particular with regard to Israel. For 75 years, the Council, upon which the international community has conferred its mandate, has been unable to find a lasting, comprehensive and fair solution to this issue, based on resolutions of international legitimacy and international law, including the resolutions adopted by the Council itself, above all resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

What we see happening in the Palestinian occupied territories today is nothing new — an outcome that involves victims on both sides, a situation of instability and the complete absence of security. Moreover, the cause of all of that is the double standards that have enabled Israel to repeatedly disregard the Council and its resolutions and have encouraged it to commit massacres against the Palestinian people, who had placed their trust in the international community and the Council to provide them with vital protection. The massacre at the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza, which has to date resulted in more than 500 martyrs, most of whom were women, children, elderly people and medical personnel — not to mention the hundreds of injured — represents a dangerous escalation. Is that not a violation of international law and international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions of 1949? Is Israel not the occupying State of the Palestinian territories, which has the responsibility to protect civilians in the time of war? Is not killing and mutilating such an unimaginable number of human beings before the eyes of the world a criminal terrorist act in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law?

Let me refer to the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, which stated that the amount of ordnance launched on the Gaza Strip by the Israeli army over the past few days is the equivalent to a quarter of a nuclear bomb, while Israel is killing an average of 14 Palestinians every hour. It states that the cycle of violence has destroyed more than 17,000 residential buildings and nearly 87,000 residential units, in addition to the destruction of 73 schools, 61 media outlets, 18 mosques and 165 other facilities, the number of which continues to mount. If that is not a violation and a massacre perpetrated against the Palestinian people, let me then ask Council members: What constitutes a violation? When will the international community take action to protect Palestinian civilians? We will hold the perpetrators accountable. Collective punishment and starvation policies are criminal acts of a kind that were practiced by

Nazis during the Second World War. They have no place in today's world, and we reject them. The international community has put its trust in the Council to guarantee that what happened would not happen again and to protect future generations from the scourge of war. The international community and the Palestinian people are asking the Council to shoulder its responsibility. It must act responsibly to maintain international peace and security and protect civilians. We must put an immediate end to any acts of violence or random illegal bombings of residential neighbourhoods in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The GCC countries categorically reject any plans for the forced transfer of civilian Palestinians, and we hold Israel, the occupying Power, fully responsible for any such plans. We call on the Council to consider that as well as the potential repercussions for international peace and security.

The GCC countries stress the need for an immediate ceasefire and for enabling relief and humanitarian teams to have safe, unconditional access to the Gaza Strip. We need to take a decisive position against creating famine and cutting off water and power supplies so as to use them as weapons of war. We call on the Council to stand up for international law and international humanitarian law, lift the siege on Gaza, open its crossing points and protect humanitarian and United Nations workers, particularly those of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

As an international community, what are we waiting for to act without any kind of double standards and selectivity? Are we just waiting for more massacres, killing and torture? The measures we need to take will go down forever in this Chamber and in history. We would like to draw the Council's attention to the fact that if it ignores reason and justice it will not give it credibility or enable us to ensure stability in the Middle East, quite the contrary. We call on the Council to apply international law. It must prove to us that no State is above the law, even if that State is Israel. We ask the Council to send a loud, clear and direct message that emphasizes the peace that can inevitably result for all parties.

In conclusion, the GCC held an emergency ministerial meeting yesterday in Muscat to discuss the developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, issuing a communiqué that calls for Israel to immediately cease its war on the Gaza Strip, de-escalate, respect international law and protect civilians. The communiqué also reaffirms the importance of ending the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and establishing an in-

dependent Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and calls on the international community to take immediate and effective steps to ensure that in accordance with international law. It urges the international community to support the resilience of the Palestinian people on their land while preventing attempts to displace them from their territory and exacerbate the problem of refugees, whose rights must be heeded in the context of a comprehensive solution that addresses the final-status issues on a basis of international law, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. It also calls for collective opposition to any attempt to extend the worsening crisis to neighbouring countries as a result of the continued occupation.

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

Mr. Elsonni (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Libya aligns itself with the statement made by the Ambassador of Jordan on behalf of the Group of Arab States, as well as the statement just made by the Ambassador of Oman on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

I would like to express Libya and the Libyan people's strongest possible condemnation of the atrocious, brutal aggression committed by the occupation forces against Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza City yesterday, an act perpetrated by a murderous and abhorrent machine that boasts about its power and the unlimited support it receives. It has killed hundreds of innocent martyrs, including women, children, the sick and medical personnel. The people of Gaza have been subjected to a horrible crime of genocide. The question today is whether this collective punishment constitutes genocide or not. It seems that the Council is waiting for another Rwanda, in contravention of all human and ethical values as well as international humanitarian law. Unfortunately, human rights have ceased to be respected.

(spoke in English)

Let me say this in English. The members of the Security Council, especially Western countries, have been preaching to us and lecturing us for decades about human rights and international law. What is the message they are sending to the world today? The people of the world are not stupid. The Council must stop its double standards and its hypocrisy.

(spoke in Arabic)

The Council is tasked with maintaining international peace and security. However, it is now engaged in a political contest at the expense of the people of the world.

We regret that the Council has been unable to adopt any resolutions aimed at putting an end to this dangerous situation. Some States have been deaf to the cries of women, children and the other innocent civilians in the Gaza Strip being murdered, bombed and besieged. They are facing electricity and water cuts. They are not getting humanitarian assistance and now they are also being forcibly displaced. Those are war crimes and crimes against humanity. Attempts are being made to punish an entire people. Where is international law in all this?

We want to comment on the draft resolutions proposed by Russia (S/2023/772) and Brazil (S/2023/773). If the Council had taken serious steps and adopted Russia's draft resolution two days ago (see S/PV.9439), perhaps the lives of the children and innocent civilians who were put to death yesterday in Al Ahli Hospital could have been saved. The unfortunate events unfolding before us are a logical result of the policy of racial discrimination waged by the occupying Power on the Palestinian people, who are denied their legitimate rights enshrined in international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions. The same goes for Israel's repeated attacks on holy sites in Palestinian territory.

The bloodbath has gone on for decades. Thousands of innocents have perished. That must end. All laws and religions reject and condemn the killing of civilians and innocent, unarmed people. The peoples of the world are seeing the double standards that many countries, especially those of the West, have adopted. We must not confuse the attacker with the attacked. We must not confuse self-defence with resistance to occupation. The treatment of the Palestinian question cannot be limited to what happened on 7 October. We have to look at the roots of the conflict, the continued injustice and violations, the settlement policies and the death of a dream of peace that has lasted for 75 years. The settlements have been planted in occupied territory recognized by international law. The unjust siege of the Gaza Strip has made it the largest open-air prison that humankind has ever seen, and the people there have become desperate. Anyone born there is already dead.

A just and comprehensive peace settlement of the Palestinian question is the only guarantee of the security and stability of the entire region and its peoples. We would like to reiterate that we firmly stand in support of the struggle and resilience of the Palestinian people. We warn against any attempt to transfer the Palestinian people outside of their territory — especially those in the Gaza Strip, given the pressure on Egypt in that regard. The Palestinian and Arab peoples will not allow another Nakba.

Libya expresses its unwavering and unified position vis-à-vis the Palestinian question, which all the Libyan people consider as their cause. We see no solution for the crisis unless justice is served and the rights of the Palestinian people are restored through the establishment of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

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

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Jordan on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

I would like to thank Mr. Wennesland and Mr. Griffiths for their briefings.

We also express our heartfelt condolences to the brotherly Palestinian people for their victims, in the aftermath of the brutal aggression perpetrated by the occupying forces in violation of all international and humanitarian instruments. It is but a new round of the atrocities and massacres that are perpetrated every single day against the Palestinian people. Amid deafening silence from the international community, the occupation forces perpetrated a heinous war crime by bombarding the Al Ahli Hospital, in grave violation of international law and international humanitarian law. That carnage has claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians, including sick and injured people, women, children and medical and paramedical personnel. That carnage underscores once again that the occupying Power disregards all international and humanitarian instruments and all calls to stop its aggression against the Gaza Strip and all the Palestinian territories.

Tunisia expresses its condemnation in the strongest terms of the cowardly aggression against Palestinian civilians. We call for an end to impunity for the war crimes and genocide perpetrated by the occupying Power against the Palestinian people for more than seven decades. My country calls on the international community to shoulder its moral and legal responsibilities and to put an end to the policy of aggression and to hold the occupying forces accountable for the displacement and killing of civilians and civilian facilities along with collective punishment against the Palestinian people for decades.

The failure by the Security Council to adopt a resolution regarding the humanitarian situation in Gaza proves yet again that the international community has failed to take a stance with practical and binding measures to put pressure on the occupying Power so

as to respect international humanitarian law. We call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security and to put an end to the current Israeli violations and practices; to endorse a ceasefire; and to put an end to the brutal aggression against the people of Gaza, prevent their forced displacement and guarantee their access to humanitarian and medical aid.

We wish to recall that Council delays in shouldering those responsibilities mean new innocent victims and further humanitarian suffering as well as threats to security and stability.

Tunisia is steadfast in its position in favour of the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State throughout the entire territory of Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital. We stress that the reason for all the tragedies is the continued occupation. We also stress that security, peace and stability in the region should be based on a just and comprehensive peace, as called for by the resolutions of international legitimacy. Meanwhile, the rights of the Palestinian people are not subject to a statute of limitations, nor do they lapse by way of their killing and displacement on the part of the occupying Power, which is cutting off the most basic services, including water, medicine, food and electricity, and targeting innocent women and children, homes and hospitals, and relief and first aid personnel. We reiterate that long-overdue justice should be served with respect to the Palestinian people by putting an end to the occupation and restoring the rights of the Palestinian people, who should have a sovereign, independent State, and by ceasing the humanitarian injustice that has befallen Palestinians for generations.

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

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): I want to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

In recent months and years, we have consistently warned against the potential deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The ongoing cycle of violence results from the absence of a political solution to the Palestinian question and the dire conditions in which generation after generation of Palestinians are forced to live. We must put an end to that ongoing tragedy in Gaza.

During the past 10 days, the civilian population in the Gaza Strip has been subjected to air strikes, with no area

safe for shelter. It is not a war against Hamas, but a war against Palestinian civilians, including children, women and the elderly. More than 60 per cent of the casualties are among children and women.

First, Algeria strongly condemns the deliberate attack on civilians in the Gaza Strip by the occupying forces, resulting in thousands of casualties. We also condemn in the strongest terms the air strike against the Al-Ahli Anglican Hospital, which resulted in the deaths of nearly 500 civilians. There can be no justification for targeting hospitals, clinics, medical personnel or United Nations facilities. International law protects that critical infrastructure. We should strongly condemn any violation of those rules. No one is above the law. Attempts to absolve the occupying Power of responsibility for such acts are unacceptable.

Secondly, it is imperative to adequately address the humanitarian needs of the affected population. We must ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip. The occupying Power should lift its siege and collaborate with United Nations humanitarian agencies. It must also rescind its order to evacuate the northern area of Gaza.

Thirdly, any attempt whatsoever to equate the Palestinian people and the occupying Power is unacceptable. What we are witnessing today is an assault on the defenceless Palestinian population and a crime against humanity.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate the Algerian people's solidarity with and support of the Palestinian people. Faced with the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation on the ground, the Council should not remain silent. We regret that the Security Council — once again, for the seventh consecutive year — has failed to shoulder its responsibilities and to adopt a substantive resolution on the Palestinian question. Therefore, we will call upon the international community to take swift action to halt those heinous acts, which violate international law and human dignity. Also, let me be unequivocal: there can be no lasting peace in the Middle East without a just resolution of the Palestinian question. The time has come to unite our efforts aimed at establishing a sovereign Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

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

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): I would like to first congratulate Brazil for its very successful and active presidency, and I also thank China, Russia and the United

Arab Emirates for convening this meeting, as well as the Special Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings.

Today is the eleventh day of relentless and catastrophic Israeli attacks on Gaza. All of Gaza is under military siege, and electricity, water and all humanitarian aid channels have been cut off. The entire population of Gaza — women, children and the elderly — are being collectively punished by the indiscriminate Israeli attacks. Pakistan strongly condemns Israeli airstrikes and military incursions into Gaza, the killing of civilians and the large-scale displacement of an already occupied and battered people.

The laws of war and international humanitarian law, especially the Geneva Conventions, must be strictly observed. Pakistan strongly and unequivocally condemns Israel's cowardly and criminal attack on the Al Ahli Hospital yesterday, which killed hundreds, most of them sick and wounded Palestinian children, women and men. That wilful atrocity, an attack on a hospital, which enjoys explicit protection under international law, is clearly a war crime and a crime against humanity. Those responsible for that crime must be held accountable through a full international inquiry and accountability process — with regard to both that incident and the other crimes that have been committed in this conflict.

Pakistan supports an immediate ceasefire. We regret that the Security Council was unable to issue a call for a ceasefire, owing to the opposition and insufficient support for the draft resolution (S/2023/772) proposed by Russia the day before yesterday (see S/PV.9439) and the Russian draft amendments (S/2023/775 and S/2023/776) for a ceasefire proposed this morning. Although the Brazilian draft resolution needed considerable improvement, in our view, we were surprised at the Council's inability to adopt it due to a veto cast by a permanent member. A heavy responsibility rests on those who have contributed to the prolongation of the consistent bombing of Gazan citizens that is taking place as we speak.

Consistent with the decisions taken last year with regard to the use of the veto, we expect that the General Assembly will address this conflict. Despite the paralysis in the Security Council today, we hope that the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and United Nations agencies will be able to halt the conflict, secure the opening of humanitarian corridors to ensure the delivery of food, water, medicines, fuel and other essential supplies to the Palestinians in Gaza, and prevent the

displacement of the Palestinian population of Gaza. The Executive Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation met today at the level of Foreign Ministers and proposed, among other things, the dispatch of an international protection force to protect innocent lives from the ongoing attacks by the occupation forces and extremist colonialist settlers. The United Nations should give urgent consideration to that proposal.

Let us not forget that the root cause of this latest violence is the prolonged and illegal occupation of Palestine and the usurpation of the lands and properties of Palestinians and the accompanying oppression and massive violations of human rights committed with impunity by Israel. The illegality of Israel's occupation has been reaffirmed by the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273). Any attempt to create a false equivalence between Israel, the aggressor, and the Palestinians, the victims, is legally, morally and politically untenable.

Let us also recall that the struggle of peoples under foreign and alien occupation for self-determination and national liberation is legitimate under international law, and they have the right to use all possible means in that struggle to achieve freedom. It is the suppression of that struggle for freedom that is illegal. Under the Charter of the United Nations, States have the right of self-defence against attacks on their sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, a State that is in forcible occupation of a foreign territory cannot invoke the right of self-defence against those whose territory it has illegally occupied.

The final solution to the protracted conflict that has claimed so many lives and that continues to jeopardize the stability of the entire region lies in the creation of a secure, viable, contiguous and sovereign State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

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

Ms. Joyini (South Africa): I thank you, Mr. President, for enabling South Africa and other non-members of the Security Council to contribute to the debate on this alarming and abhorrent development in an already tragic conflict that is getting worse by the day. We thank the briefers for the information shared with us.

South Africa condemns in the strongest possible terms the killing of civilians in Palestine and Israel. The targeting of civilians in armed conflicts is a violation of international humanitarian law and the Geneva

Conventions. Just as the attack by Hamas on civilians in Israel was abhorrent, there are no words to fully express South Africa's condemnation of Israel's bombing of the Al Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital on 17 October, killing well over 500 people and injuring over 1,000. The targeting of a hospital — considered a safe haven under international humanitarian law — is a war crime. Similarly, the killing of the people of Gaza by Israel in 12 days of aerial bombardment of hospitals, schools, apartment buildings and essential infrastructure is also a war crime. The continual bombardment of civilian targets and the denial of water, food, fuel and electricity to the civilian population of Gaza are prohibited under international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions.

The bombing of the Al Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital in Gaza is the most blatant violation of international humanitarian law. Doctors are operating without anaesthetics and do not have the medical equipment or supplies to treat the victims. The suffering of children and their parents is unspeakable and insufferable in this day and age, and there must be consequences for those actions. Otherwise, the international structures established to maintain international peace and security have utterly failed. The Al Ahli Hospital, which was bombed on Tuesday night, is one of the 22 hospitals in northern Gaza that had been ordered by the Israeli military to evacuate their patients and staff within 24 hours or be responsible for the consequences. Hundreds of civilians were sheltering in the hospital when it was bombed, as it was supposed to be a safe place to shelter. Israel is committing war crimes in violation of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions and must be held responsible for its actions by the International Criminal Court and the international community as a whole.

South Africa calls on the international community to end its indifference to the gross violations against the Palestinian people in Gaza and for the Security Council to take action to force a halt to the unfolding genocide. We regret that the Council was once again unable to adopt a basic resolution on the humanitarian situation in Palestine. South Africa calls for an immediate ceasefire and the opening of a humanitarian corridor to allow the entry of medicine, food and supplies. South Africa calls on Israel to cease its genocidal campaign against the Palestinians. We call on the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Karim Ahmad Khan, to immediately signal his intent to investigate the Al Ahli bombing, other war crimes and the crime of genocide in this conflict, and to include in his investigation the liability of those aiding and abetting those crimes.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Dandy (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegations of the Russian Federation, the United Arab Emirates and China for requesting that this emergency meeting be convened.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Jordan on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

Yesterday we witnessed one of the most heinous and bloody crimes against humanity in the modern era, perpetrated in the context of Israel's ongoing aggression against the Palestinian people. The Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms the heinous massacre by the Zionist criminal forces of hundreds of innocent people in the Al Ahli Hospital in the Gaza Strip. It is a brutal act that demonstrates the level of hatred of the Israeli authorities, whose crimes have attained the highest level of aggression. It is reminiscent of the crimes that resulted in Israel's founding and reflects a stark picture of the continuing approach of the gangs that established that criminal entity.

This tragic massacre would not have happened had some Western countries not obstructed the adoption of the humanitarian draft resolution S/2023/772 presented by the Russian Federation the day before yesterday and thereby provided a protective umbrella for Israel's continued crimes. It has become clear that the international community's continued silence, and its failure to react to the criminal approach of the Israeli entity, has emboldened Israel to continue that approach in violation of international law and international humanitarian law. It has continued its ethnic cleansing policy towards Palestinians, expelling them from their lands and replacing the original residents of the land of Palestine with settlers. Its intentions in forcibly displacing the people of Gaza are clearly apparent as an attempt to repeat the tragedy of the Nakba in 1948.

The Israeli entity is actively destroying infrastructure and continuing its inhumane siege by cutting off water, food, medicine and electricity, preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid, using internationally banned weapons and employing a scorched-earth policy against the Palestinian people, including women and children. Its brutality has reached a point where it is threatening to wipe Gaza out of existence and has attacked a hospital where vulnerable people had been forced to take shelter owing to Israeli death threats. They believed that the hospital was protected under international humanitarian

law. How fierce has Israel's contempt for humankind become? Its extremist ideology and terror strategy have made it the reverse side of the terrorist organization Da'esh.

What is happening in the occupied Palestinian territories did not begin on 7 October. Rather, it started many decades ago as a result of Israel's continued denial of the Palestinian people's right to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, and the accompanying continuation of its occupation and intensification of the aggressive practices it began in 1948. In that context, the Syrian Arab Republic stresses that the region will never enjoy stability as long as the Israeli entity and the Western countries supporting it continue their denial and attempt to hide that historical and humanitarian truth. We reaffirm our support for a settlement of the Palestinian question, which is the central Arab cause. We will spare no effort in standing by our brother Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle to restore the rights that were stolen from them more than seven decades ago, including their legitimate and inalienable right to defend themselves and liberate their land. It is the duty of all of us to provide support to the Palestinian people in their resistance.

Meanwhile, the Israeli occupation forces have continued their repeated attacks on the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. They launched three attacks in the space of 48 hours on the civilian international airports of Damascus and Aleppo, most recently on Saturday, 14 October. The attacks materially damaged both airports and put them out of service, and represent no less than the Israeli terrorist authorities' frenzied efforts to spark war throughout the region. And neither will the Syrian Arab Republic remain silent regarding the violations of the Israeli occupation forces and their attacks on Syrian lands and on our people in the occupied Syrian Golan. We want to once again warn Israel of the consequences of continuing to commit such violations, and to condemn the continued support or silence regarding such practices on the part of some countries that claim to stand up for international humanitarian law and human rights law. It makes them complicit with the perpetrators of those crimes and shows clearly the extent of their double standards.

In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic holds the Western countries that support Israel, especially the United States, responsible for the massacres of the Israeli occupation. The day when they will be held accountable for those crimes is no longer far off. By supporting Israel, those countries are partnering it in all the systematic killings it commits against the Palestinian people. My

country also rejects those countries' approach whereby they distort human values by confusing the aggressor with the victim and condemning the victim rather than the aggressor. How can we equate the Israeli occupier with the Palestinian people, who are living under occupation? It is now more important than ever for the Security Council to fulfil its duties under the Charter of the United Nations in order to put an end to these brutal attacks on our brother Palestinian people, by calling for an immediate ceasefire and working to bring humanitarian aid into Gaza and prevent the forced displacement of its population.

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

Mr. Al-Fatlawi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for your efforts in convening today's meeting.

We commend efforts and positions aimed at ending the serious violations being committed by the Israeli occupation forces. We thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for their comprehensive briefings.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

For decades, the Security Council has held dozens of meetings in this Chamber to discuss the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the repeated crimes committed against the Palestinian people. Yet all those meetings have either not led to binding measures taken in relation to those crimes, in line with the Charter of the United Nations, or were ignored notwithstanding the Council's resolutions. That encouraged Israel to continue to commit those crimes, undeterred, under baseless pretexts, in violation of international law and the United Nations Charter.

The Government of the Republic of Iraq condemns in the strongest terms the heinous crime perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces, which bombed the Al Ahli Hospital, claiming the lives of hundreds of martyrs and wounding innocent Palestinian citizens. That crime is an extension of the crimes and violations that have been committed by the Israeli occupation forces for seven decades. Iraq calls on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to assume their legal and moral responsibility in maintaining international peace and security by putting an end to those violations, massacres and genocide, as those practices are serious

violations of international law, international humanitarian law, the United Nations Charter and all international humanitarian instruments and norms related to the protection of civilians. We also call for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

Iraq also calls on the Security Council to stop applying selectivity and to take urgent measures to lift the blockade, end forced displacement and open crossings to ensure access to humanitarian assistance and basic necessities, such as fuel, medicine, water and food. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of the innocent victims. The Republic of Iraq is coordinating with the countries concerned to dispatch humanitarian and medical aid to the Gaza Strip.

In conclusion, Iraq reiterates its firm stance in support for the Palestinian question in order for them to enjoy their legitimate inalienable rights, in line with resolutions of international legitimacy and their right to self-determination by establishing an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Skoog.

Mr. Skoog: First of all, let me thank Brazil for all its efforts to enable the Security Council to address the severe humanitarian situation unfolding in the Middle East.

We are horrified and appalled at the destruction and death toll at the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza. That most recent event illustrates how dramatic the situation is. Our thoughts have been with all victims since the start of the crisis. We also deplore the deaths of staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Gaza, and our thoughts are with all humanitarian staff who tirelessly work in support of the people in Gaza at this time.

Let me recall the basic principles of international humanitarian law — the protection of all civilians must

be ensured everywhere, at all times. Attacks against civilian infrastructure are illegal.

The European Union (EU) has been clear. We condemn Hamas and its brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks against Israel. We call for the immediate release of all hostages without any preconditions. There is no justification for terrorism. We support Israel's right to defend itself in line with humanitarian law and international law in the face of such violent and indiscriminate attacks.

The people of Gaza are now facing a disastrous humanitarian situation. It is vitally important to provide urgent humanitarian aid to all those civilians who are in dire need of water, electricity, food and medicine.

The EU is taking action. We have stepped up our emergency assistance to the Palestinian people. We have tripled our humanitarian assistance to €75 million to support civilians in need in Gaza at this time. We have launched an EU humanitarian air bridge operation, with several flights to Egypt to bring life-saving supplies to humanitarian organizations on the ground in Gaza, including shelter items, medicine and hygiene kits. Additional emergency items from EU emergency stockpiles are available and ready to be deployed to our humanitarian partners as soon as requested. Unimpeded access must be granted throughout Gaza to deliver humanitarian aid.

The EU remains committed to lasting and sustainable peace, based on the two-State solution, through reinvigorated efforts in the Middle East peace process. We underline the need to engage broadly with the legitimate Palestinian authorities, as well as with regional and international partners that could have a positive role to play in preventing further escalation.

The meeting rose at 2.35 p.m.