



Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Séjourné/Mr. De Rivière/Mrs. Broadhurst Estival/ (France)
	Mr. Olmedo
<i>Members:</i>	
	Algeria Mr. Attaf
	China Mr. Zhang Jun
	Ecuador Mr. De La Gasca
	Guyana Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Japan Mr. Uemura
	Malta Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique Mr. Afonso
	Republic of Korea Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation Mr. Lavrov
	Sierra Leone Mr. Sengeh
	Slovenia Ms. Fajon
	Switzerland Mr. Cassis
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . Lord Ahmad
	United States of America Ms. Zeya

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 2.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): I would like to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, Ministers and other high-level representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

Before each member is a list of speakers who have requested to participate in accordance with rules 37 and 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, as well as the previous practice of the Council in this regard. We propose that they be invited to participate in this meeting.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I propose that the Council invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Observer State of Palestine 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.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki.

I also propose that the Council invite the observer of the Holy See 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.

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

I give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: Over 100 days have passed since more than 1,200 Israelis and others were killed in the horrific terror attacks launched by Hamas against Israel, with over 250 people being taken hostage. For all those affected, these have been 100 days of heartache and anguish. Nothing can justify the deliberate killing, injuring or kidnapping of civilians, the use of sexual violence against them or the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards civilian targets. I once again

demand the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. In the interim, they must be treated humanely and allowed to receive visits and assistance from the Red Cross.

Last week in Davos, I had another moving meeting with families of hostages, and in this case even some former hostages themselves. Since the beginning, I have maintained close contact with Qatari and Egyptian authorities on the efforts for their release. And yesterday, I received from the Israeli Mission a list of many of the remaining hostages. It was also reported yesterday that Israel is proposing a two-month pause in hostilities in exchange for a phased release of all the remaining hostages. I will continue, in my limited capacity, to pursue all efforts to contribute to their release.

The past 100 days have been heartbreaking and catastrophic for Palestinian civilians in Gaza. More than 25,000 people, mainly women and children, have reportedly been killed in operations launched by Israeli forces. More than 60,000 others have been reportedly injured. In recent days, the military offensive has intensified in Khan Yunis, with many additional casualties. The entire population of Gaza is enduring destruction at a scale and speed without parallel in recent history. Nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is appalling. With winter bearing down, 2.2 million Palestinians in Gaza face inhumane, squalid conditions, struggling to simply make it through another day — without proper shelter, heating, sanitary facilities, food or drinkable water. Everyone in Gaza is hungry, with a quarter of Gaza's population — more than half a million people — grappling with catastrophic levels of food insecurity. Meanwhile, nearly 1.5 million people are now crammed inside Rafah governorate. Disease is spreading as the health system collapses. Only 16 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are even partly functional. That means that the people of Gaza not only risk being killed or injured by relentless bombardments; they also run a growing chance of contracting infectious diseases such as hepatitis-A, dysentery and cholera. Without functioning hospitals, and with minimal opportunities for patients to exit Gaza, thousands suffering from chronic diseases such as cancer and kidney failure are at risk of dying. A functioning medical evacuation system is urgently needed.

In the face of colossal human suffering and enormous obstacles, our United Nations humanitarian operations are striving to deliver. Tragically, 153 of our colleagues have been killed — a source of bottomless grief for us all. At the same time, the women and men of the United Nations, alongside our partners in Gaza, are working heroically every day to reach people in need. Many have lost loved ones and left behind shattered homes. They have been distributing ready-to-eat meals and other food items to shelters. They are supporting the very few bakeries that are still functioning. They are delivering medicines, medical supplies, bottled water and trucked water, hygiene kits and cleaning kits, tents, tarpaulin sheets and blankets, but in quantities that are far from enough. In the south, food distributions are helping to bring down prices, and 250,000 Palestinians in Gaza were able to buy bread at a subsidized price.

I welcome the agreement facilitated by Qatar and France of an operation to deliver additional medicines and health-care supplies to civilians in Gaza and to hostages held in Gaza.

I also welcome Israel's announcement that it will allow a United Nations assessment mission to the north. However, that mission is on hold because of renewed fighting.

Under-Secretary-General Sigrid Kaag started her work as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza on 8 January, in line with Security Council resolution 2720 (2023). She visited Gaza today and will update the Council next week on her overall efforts. I ask all parties to the conflict to cooperate with her, as demanded by the Security Council.

Let us face it: despite all the efforts I described, no effective humanitarian aid operation can function under the conditions that have been forced on Palestinians in Gaza and those doing everything possible to help them. The quantity of aid is highly insufficient in the light of the needs. It is a fantasy to think that 2.2 million people can survive on aid alone. Basic commodities from the private sector must enter in meaningful quantities, as they did for many years before the current fighting. That is essential to address rising needs and avert both a complete breakdown and an ever-mounting death toll. For our part, we are determined to do much more to scale up the distribution of food items, tents and shelter materials, medicines, clean water and spare parts to repair critical sanitation infrastructure.

Humanitarian delivery is not an exercise of counting trucks. It is about ensuring that the right volume and quality of assistance reaches people in need, in line with Security Council resolution 2720 (2023). But to be able to do our work, a set of operational requirements must be met.

We need safety. We are operating in a war zone. The current humanitarian notification mechanisms do not offer any real confidence for operations and planning humanitarian responses. A number of serious incidents have shown how those essential mechanisms need to be substantially improved. Safety also entails reliable and cleared roads inside Gaza and unimpeded crossings at checkpoints.

We need to be equipped to do our job. That includes telecommunications equipment, so that convoys can communicate with each other; armoured vehicles and protective gear, given the ongoing hostilities and widespread contamination of explosive remnants of war; far greater logistical capacity; spare parts for infrastructure, such as desalination plants; and other critical humanitarian items.

We are grateful to Member States for their funding support. We are finally seeing a few signs of progress in the authorization of entry permits for certain goods and some measures to reduce screening and crossing times. But we still face a cumbersome process of verifications and multiple unjustified rejections of desperately needed items. We need more crossing points into Gaza to reduce congestion and avoid choke-points.

The provision of aid to Gaza via the Ashdod port in Israel must also resume. A first shipment of flour reached Gaza from Ashdod, but much more is required.

We need access to the north. In the first two weeks of January, out of 29 planned humanitarian missions to deliver lifesaving supplies north of Wadi Gaza, only 7 were fully or partially accomplished. The majority of missions were denied access by Israel. After over 100 days of operations in the north, insecurity and fighting has continued.

We also need visas. Dozens of humanitarians have been waiting for months to receive their visas from the Government of Israel. I call for rapid, safe, unhindered, expanded and sustained humanitarian access throughout Gaza.

I repeat my call for an end to all violations of international humanitarian law. The use of human

shields is unacceptable, as are the unprecedented levels of devastation and civilian killings. I am also deeply troubled by reports of Israel's inhumane treatment of Palestinians detained during military operations.

I renew my appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. This will ensure sufficient aid gets to where it is needed, facilitate the release of hostages and help to lower tensions around the Middle East. War and misery in Gaza are fuelling turmoil far beyond. We are seeing dangerous developments across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where tensions are off the charts, with a dramatic increase in casualties. Dozens of Palestinians are being arrested daily. Over 6,000 Palestinians have been detained since 7 October, with many subsequently released. Settler violence is also another major concern. The demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned houses and other structures continues. The Palestinian economy is in crisis. Israel's withholding of a significant portion of Palestinian tax revenues, the continued prohibition of nearly all Palestinian workers entering Israel since 7 October and severe movement and access restrictions across the West Bank are all contributing to soaring unemployment and poverty. I hope that ongoing negotiations will allow for the full payment of employees of the Palestinian Authority.

The risks of broader regional escalation are now becoming a reality. Turning to the north, daily exchanges of fire across the Blue Line, including strikes on civilian areas, have killed six Israelis and 25 Lebanese civilians and driven tens of thousands of people from their homes on both sides. The risk of miscalculation is dangerously high. I urge all parties to refrain from aggressive rhetoric and to immediately end activities that could further inflame tensions. My Special Coordinators and I continue our extensive outreach to all key stakeholders to reduce regional tensions, and I welcome the efforts of the United States and several European and Arab Governments for a negotiated de-escalation.

The situation in the Red Sea is also deeply worrisome. Houthi attacks are disrupting global trade. Those have been followed by air strikes by the United States and the United Kingdom on Houthi positions in Yemen. De-escalation is essential, and all attacks on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea must cease immediately.

Meanwhile, there are almost daily attacks on facilities hosting United States and international

coalition forces in Iraq and Syria. In response, the United States has launched air strikes targeting individuals and groups suspected of those actions. In Syria, air strikes that Iran and Syria have attributed to Israel have targeted officials of Hamas and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran. I urge all parties to step back from the brink and to consider the horrendous human cost of a regional conflict.

Beyond the need for immediate de-escalation, each situation demands the implementation of a clear political road map that would contribute to long-term regional stability. In Syria, that is a United Nations-facilitated political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) that meets the needs of all Syrians. Along the Blue Line, we need the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). In Yemen, we need the establishment of a United Nations road map to implement the commitments made by the parties and prepare for a Yemeni-owned, inclusive political process under the auspices of the United Nations.

A lasting end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can come only through a two-State solution. Israelis must see their legitimate needs for security materialized, and Palestinians must see their legitimate aspirations for a fully independent, viable and sovereign State realized, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements. Israel's occupation must end.

Last week's clear and repeated rejection of the two-State solution at the highest level of the Israeli Government is unacceptable. That was despite the strongest appeals from even the friends of Israel, including those sitting around this table. That refusal and the denial of the right to statehood to the Palestinian people would indefinitely prolong a conflict that has become a major threat to global peace and security. It would exacerbate polarization and embolden extremists everywhere. The right of the Palestinian people to build their own fully independent State must be recognized by all. And any refusal to accept the two-State solution by any party must be firmly rejected.

What is the alternative? How would a one-State solution look with such a large number of Palestinians inside without any real sense of freedom, rights or dignity? That would be inconceivable. The two-State solution is the only way to address the legitimate aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians.

(spoke in French)

The role of the international community is clear. We must unite to support the Israelis and Palestinians in taking strong steps towards a genuine peace process.

Over the past two decades, the two-State solution has been criticized, denigrated and left for dead time and again. However, it remains the only way to achieve a lasting and equitable peace — in Israel, in Palestine and in the region as a whole.

As we have tragically seen over the past three months, it is also the only way out of the endless cycles of fear, hatred and violence. This terrible time for Israelis and Palestinians must spur the parties to the conflict, as well as the international community, to act with courage and determination to achieve a just and lasting peace.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Malki (Palestine): Allow me at the outset to thank France and you, Mr. President, for convening the Security Council at the ministerial level, as we meet once again in the shadows of the deadly Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, which continues unabated, taking thousands of innocent civilian lives, destroying everything in its path and threatening regional and international peace and security.

Allow me also to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, but more importantly, for his relentless efforts in pursuit of an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the protection of civilians and the provision of desperately needed humanitarian assistance. Under his leadership, the United Nations agencies on the ground have persisted in their valiant efforts to perform their sacred mission in the most impossible of circumstances.

Those circumstances are impossible by design. They are not the result of a natural disaster or a regrettable consequence of the war, but rather a premeditated effort to inflict maximum pain on the Palestinian population by combining three factors: one, the most savage and indiscriminate bombing campaign in the post-Second World War era; two, massive destruction and cruel siege, depriving the population of the essentials for its survival, leading to the spread of famine, dehydration, disease, destitution and despair; and three, forcible

displacement at a scale and speed not witnessed in modern history, with virtually the entire Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip, 70 per cent of whom are refugees from the 1948 Nakba, displaced, often multiple times, in desperate search of safety anywhere, yet faced with death and devastation everywhere.

No home hospital, school, mosque, church or shelter belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is safe from Israel's bombardment, with 2,000-ton bombs dropped with no care whatsoever for civilian lives. More than 25,000 civilians have been killed, including more than 11,000 children. More than 63,000 civilians have been injured, with thousands permanently maimed and disabled, and more than 7,000 are buried under the rubble. Dozens more will be killed in the hours that the Council meets, and thousands more will be killed as the Council continues to be prevented from calling for an immediate ceasefire.

This is an assault of atrocities that shock and shame the human conscience. In making that determination, the faith of the perpetrators is irrelevant. The faith of the victims is irrelevant. The only thing that matters is the countless innocent lives destroyed and the violent shattering of the laws enacted after the Second World War in order to preserve humankind.

From Kampala, where the global South was gathered, to Brussels, where Arab ministers met their European counterparts, to the United Nations, in New York, the world is calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. A ceasefire is indispensable to achieve what the Security Council has called for — the protection of civilians, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, humanitarian assistance at scale throughout the Gaza Strip, the release of those held captive, the rejection of forced displacement and the achievement of a peace consistent with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

On one side there is the will of the international community and, on the other, the whims of an Israeli Prime Minister driven by a single goal — his own political survival, at the expense of the survival of millions of Palestinians under Israel's illegal occupation and peace and security for all. There is a dividing line between those who want peace and those who are determined to prevent it. The latter believe that there is a people too many in our region, while the former believe that there is an independent State, too-long denied its rightful place among the community of

nations and its people denied their inalienable right to self-determination. For the leaders at the helm in Israel, the Palestinian people are a people too many. The leaders deny the existence, rights and humanity of the Palestinian people — whether in Gaza, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, be they Palestinian refugees or Palestinian prisoners. They do not see our people as an empirical and political reality to coexist with, but as a demographic threat to get rid of through death, displacement or subjugation. Those are the choices they offer us: genocide, ethnic cleansing or apartheid. I know that some here are uncomfortable with those words, but they are the reality that we live under. And trust me, those people should be much more concerned with the existence of that reality than the words used to describe it.

There are only two paths ahead. One starts with Palestinian freedom and leads to shared peace and security in our region. The other continues denying that freedom and dooms our region to further bloodshed and endless conflict. The Arab world has been unequivocal in choosing the first path, the one that enjoys support by the international community, as a whole. Meanwhile, Netanyahu boasts publicly and repeatedly that he played a key role in preventing the independence of the Palestinian State and peace in our region and pledges to continue. Israel should no longer entertain the illusion that there is somehow a third path whereby it can choose continued occupation, colonialism and apartheid and, somehow, still achieve regional peace and security. That is not a viable or legitimate path. Our people are not less deserving of freedom, security or peace. Our children's lives are not less sacred. Our cause is just, and the resilience and steadfastness of our people — their *sumud* — is epic and worthy of the international solidarity they have received from across the globe.

But as the poet Mahmoud Darwish once said, their hope is for a normal life in which they are neither heroes nor victims, a life where they are able to live, thrive, see their children grow and become whatever they wish to be. They should not have to fight every day for their survival, their most basic and fundamental rights or their simple dream of living in freedom and dignity on their ancestral land. The Nakba should not be prolonged any further, nor should it be repeated time and time again. It must come to an immediate end. It is time for international law and United Nations resolutions to be fully respected and for non-compliance to be penalized. It is time for accountability. Justice is paramount. It is the foundation of any sustainable peace. Attempts to

frame the pursuit of justice as somehow opposed to peace must cease. It is time to convene an international peace conference with a clear objective — upholding international law and implementing United Nations resolutions through resolute action by all States, organizations and the United Nations. It is time to recognize the admission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations. We were not granted the right to veto Israel's admission to the United Nations 75 years ago. Israel does not have a right to veto the admission of the State of Palestine 75 years later.

The international consensus on two States on this land must be upheld in word and deed. There can be no more pretexts for endless delays and obstruction. The disregard for Palestinian life, for international law and for the regional and international desire to bring about just and lasting peace should no longer be tolerated. We are running out of time. There are two choices — spreading fire or a ceasefire. The alternative to freedom, justice and peace is what is happening now. We must make sure that it stops now, and we must make sure that it never happens again — never again.

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

Mr. Erdan (Israel): At the outset, I would like to thank France and to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your recent appointment. I wish you the best in your crucial position.

Today the Council has a historic opportunity to shift its focus to the real and grave security threat. The Middle East is suffering from a cancer, and until today the Security Council has only ever discussed providing aspirin. Cancer is not treated with aspirin. The time has come for the Council to address and eliminate the root of that cancer, not just its side effects.

We live in a backwards world. Eighteen years ago, Israel fully withdrew from Gaza in hopes of building trust with the Palestinians and charting a path towards a joint future. Instead, the Palestinians voted in the Hamas terror organization, and since then, under the nose of the United Nations and its agencies, Hamas has exploited international aid and turned Gaza into the war machine that it is today. Hamas has dug hundreds of miles of terror tunnels and manufactured tens of thousands of rockets. It has not hidden its genocidal goals of annihilating Israel. The world knew that. The United Nations knew that.

On 7 October, Hamas's agenda of Jewish genocide became a reality. My people were deliberately butchered, with 1,200 murdered in a single day and 240 children, men, women and elderly people taken hostage. That act of sheer evil was proportionally 20 times bigger than 9/11, and Hamas's leadership has publicly sworn to commit such massacres again and again until Israel is destroyed. Shockingly, however, many here on the Security Council are advocating for a permanent ceasefire while giving no thought to the implications. What does the Council think will happen if there is a ceasefire? This is what will happen. Hamas will remain in power. It will regroup and rearm and soon Israelis will face another attempted Holocaust. Is that the outcome that the Council seeks for all of us? That Israel will once again be forced to carry out another defensive operation in Gaza? Does the Council truly expect us to leave our hostages in Hamas's terror tunnels?

As long as Hamas remains in power, a very dark future is inevitable for all of us. How can Council members call for a ceasefire and suggest a solution to the conflict at the same time? That is a complete oxymoron. We cannot have both — it is impossible. Hamas seeks to annihilate Israel, and if the Council supports a position that will leave Hamas in power, it cannot pretend to wish for a solution to the conflict. The past 18 years have proved that. But there is a formula that can end the bloodshed, and if the Council stands united behind it, it will materialize. Should Hamas turn in those responsible for 7 October and release all the hostages, this war would be over immediately. It is not a war that Israel chose, but we will defend our future just as all members here would defend their countries' future.

Today's meeting is a demonstration of the pinnacle of the absurdity of the United Nations. Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad are vile terrorists. But those forces of terror are a mere symptom of the true security threat in the region and beyond. There is a regime responsible for sponsoring 90 per cent of Hamas's terror budget, as well as for arming and training those who carry it out. It is the same regime that supplies Hizbullah with precision missiles and provides the Houthis with ballistic missiles. All of that is being done in order to wreak havoc and instability in the Middle East, and soon those acts of terror will be carried out under a nuclear umbrella. Yet the Council basically ignores that enormous threat — the threat that is the ayatollah regime of Iran. How absurd is it that the Foreign Minister of the number-one State sponsor of terrorism aspiring to destabilize the Middle East is here today to address the

Council? Can anyone imagine Hitler's Foreign Minister participating in a serious discussion on how to defend the Jews during the Holocaust? This is an upside-down world. The representative of a regime that publicly calls for the annihilation of the State of Israel is advising on how to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is a truly upside-down world.

We hear calls for avoiding a spillover of the conflict. I want to clarify that this spillover is not happening magically. It was planned and instructed. The person directly responsible for the terror attacks throughout the region and for this spillover since 7 October will be sitting here soon. Mr. Amir-Abdollahian represents the regime that arms and instructs Hizbullah to target our civilians. He represents the regime that transfers weapons and intelligence to the Houthis. Without Iran, the Houthis would not possess advanced cruise missiles or unmanned aerial vehicles for targeting merchant vessels in the Red Sea. If we look at this picture, what we see are Iranian weapons that were seized by the United States Navy on their way to the Houthis. This is clear proof of who is masterminding this so-called spillover. Has Iran's Foreign Minister come here to be held accountable? We all know the answer to that. Iran always stands in the shadows and pulls the strings. It always claims deniability, but the evidence is right here, just as in many other cases. Will the Council finally address the real threat to regional security?

Every country in the region has been affected by Iran's tentacles of terror. Saudi Arabia has been attacked with Iranian-supplied UAVs and ballistic missiles. The United Arab Emirates suffered several drone and missile attacks on its soil, including a strike on the Abu Dhabi International Airport. And recent Iranian strikes in Iraq, Syria and Pakistan are further proof that Iran will stop at nothing to expand its Shiite hegemony.

In Lebanon, just as in Yemen, Iraq and Syria, Iran is the architect of instability. Even the people of Iran themselves suffer daily, and Council members know it. The Iranian regime murders women and innocent protesters. And, just yesterday, another innocent Iranian, Muhammad Ghobadlou, was executed. And while innocent Iranians swing from the gallows, Minister Amir-Abdollahian will sit here and lecture us on the sanctity of human life. Iran is even responsible for arming and training the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro to carry out terror attacks in Morocco, and its hegemonic ambitions can be felt in the Sudan, Mali and the Niger as well.

But Iran's terror does not affect only the Middle East and Africa. Albania was hit with an Iranian cyberattack. And as we all know, Iranian drones are being used by Russia to kill civilians in Ukraine. Iran's terror will reach all Council members. We all know that. It will even reach Russia, which collaborates with Iran.

If the Council continues to focus only on providing aid to Gaza, which is truly important, but ignores the root of the dire threat to the Middle East and the world — the Iranian threat — then our collective future will be a very dark, radical Shiite future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France.

I took the initiative of holding this Security Council debate at the ministerial level under our presidency. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his powerful statement, and in my national capacity, I would also like to refer to the tragic situation in Gaza and the risk of conflagration in the region. That risk is real.

In the light of what is at stake between Israelis and Palestinians, there are two possible paths for the Council. On the one hand, there is the choice being made by some — the choice of division, polemics and one-upmanship; the choice of fanning the flames; and the choice of those who invade their neighbour and trample on their sovereignty, in Ukraine as in the Middle East, and seek division rather than unity here.

For my part, I will make another choice and say two things. We can, we must, show solidarity with both Israelis and Palestinians. We can, we must, say difficult things to both.

France is acting for the good of both peoples in the name of peace. It is a friend of Israel, just as it is the friend of the Palestinian people. Therefore, I have to say to Israel, which enjoys the friendship of the French people, that there must be a Palestinian State; that violence against the Palestinian people, in particular that committed by extremist settlers, must end; and that international law applies to everyone. And I must say to the Palestinian representatives, who are aware of France's historic commitment to a Palestinian State, that France will continue to fight against terrorism vigorously and with determination. There can be no ambiguity about Israel's right to live in peace and security and to exercise its right to self-defence in the

face of terrorism. As a friend, France says to both sides that the path ahead will be difficult for all.

Three principles will guide France's action within the Security Council in the days and weeks ahead. I would like to spell them out here.

The first is the principle of humanity. All hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. That is an absolute necessity. We have called for that repeatedly. The Council, too, has clearly called for it. On behalf of the principle of humanity, we must condemn unequivocally and without further delay the terrorist attacks of 7 October, which were massive, barbaric and heinous attacks committed by terrorists. Our Council must also open its eyes to the sexual violence used by those terrorists as a weapon of war.

Also, in the name of the principle of humanity, we must act in favour of the civilian population of Gaza and work for a ceasefire. The suffering they are experiencing is appalling. France is among those in the Council who are taking action. The President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, took the initiative to convene an international humanitarian conference. One billion euros in humanitarian aid for Gaza's civilians was announced there. Today I am once again calling on all our international partners to stay mobilized.

France is now one of the main supporters of Gaza's civilians, in particular because we have massively increased France's contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). More than half of the €100 million in humanitarian assistance that France announced for Gaza in November will be channelled through UNRWA. In 2024, we will be supporting the Palestinians even more by providing an additional €100 million. We are also taking tangible steps in the region: 1,000 tons of cargo are transiting through Egypt; 1,000 medical interventions have been carried out, in full cooperation with Egypt, on board the *Dixmude*; and humanitarian cargo was parachuted into Gaza with the help of Jordan.

The Council, in its two humanitarian resolutions (resolution 2712 (2023) and resolution 2720 (2023)) established requirements. They must be respected. Let us listen to the suffering of the women and men and children of Gaza. Let us listen to the helplessness of humanitarian actors. Civilians, civilian infrastructure, hospitals and schools must be protected. Humanitarian workers from the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other organizations

on the ground must also be protected. I pay tribute to their courage, commitment and dedication. I want to say to them that France will continue to support them relentlessly and will not give up. I also want to say that they must be able to use all the necessary crossing points and deliver their vital cargo to the north of the Strip, beyond Wadi Gaza. We must immediately work for a lasting ceasefire, which alone will bring an end to their suffering.

The second principle guiding France's action is that of justice. The war and the atrocious suffering oblige us and the Council to take action. We have a duty to make every effort to find a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To achieve that, we must relaunch the peace process and do so in a decisive and credible manner.

We know the parameters of the solution: two States living side by side in peace and security, within safe and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines and with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. That is the framework set out in international law. It is also France's constant position. And that is why it is not up to Israel or anyone else to decide for the Palestinians how they will be governed tomorrow or the extent of their sovereignty.

Within the context of the two-State solution, we must also think, starting now, about the future of Gaza. It is not up to Israel to decide the fate of the Palestinian population in Gaza. Gaza is Palestinian land, and it is up to the Palestinian Authority, which we support, to exercise its full authority for that to become a reality. The United Nations has and will have an important role to play. In that regard, I congratulate Ms. Sigrid Kaag on her appointment as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. The entire international community will have to mobilize to rebuild Gaza. The situation in the West Bank requires our full attention. The attacks by violent settlers against Palestinian civilians is unacceptable. Once again, we condemn them in the strongest terms. They must end now. At the right time, together with its partners, France will take the necessary initiatives so that the Council is seized of all of these political issues.

Lastly, the third principle of our action will be that of responsibility, given the risks of further escalation. We must do our utmost to prevent a regional conflagration and further spread of the conflict. Some might be tempted to use groups that are loyal to them to add to the chaos and undermine stability in the region. We have a

warning for them. We are seriously concerned about heightened tensions around the Blue Line. We call on the parties to exercise strict restraint and do their utmost to bring a definitive end to the escalation. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon must be allowed to discharge its mandate under the proper conditions.

We are also concerned about the attacks committed by the Houthis in the Red Sea. These are extremely serious violations of the law and of international trade. France will continue to shoulder its responsibilities. In the same vein, we condemn the violations of Iraq's sovereignty.

France will continue to work and take the initiative to ensure that our Council discusses all aspects of the crisis so that it can finally condemn the barbarous attacks of 7 October. That is to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected and responds to the needs of the civilian population in Gaza to make progress, once and for all, towards a resolution to the conflict and the two-State solution. The Council can count on our commitment.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and National Community Abroad of Algeria.

Mr. Attaf (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I cannot begin my remarks without conveying, within the context of today's Council debate, a message from my President, Mr. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, to the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, and to the various bodies of the United Nations system expressing his appreciation and gratitude for all their efforts to alleviate the suffering of Gaza, heal its wounds and put an end to the bloodshed. It is a message of support and appreciation for their tireless efforts despite attempts to damage their credibility and authority, along with provocations and blackmailing by an occupying Power whose tyranny knows no bounds.

The Secretary-General has our utmost respect and encouragement. At the same time, we pay tribute to all those who served humankind under the flag of the United Nations and lost their lives in Gaza as they defended the loftiest of ideals. Similarly, we convey a message of mercy for the souls of the martyrs who died for their homeland and for their cause, a homeland that was theirs and a cause that is theirs and ours.

The aggression against Gaza is about to enter its fifth month, and the likelihood of dissuading the

Israeli occupation from continuing its aggression is nil. Such a situation imposes three main challenges. The first challenge is ensuring respect for United Nations resolutions. It is unacceptable to tolerate serious violations of the resolutions that it adopts for civilized coexistence among its members. The second challenge is ensuring that no Member State sets itself above all others and benefits from special treatment through exemptions, exceptions, privileges and unwarranted and unacceptable immunities. The third challenge is subjecting the Israeli settlement occupying Power to international legal controls and strictly ending the lack of accountability and impunity.

Algeria would welcome and commend efforts putting an end to the preferential treatment received by some. We note the commendable and courageous initiatives to compel the Israeli occupying Power to shoulder its responsibilities. I would mention specifically the initiative of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to bring together lawyers and various international judicial organizations to bring the Israeli occupying Power to justice before international bodies in order to end the decades of impunity and lack of accountability it has enjoyed. I would also mention the initiative by the Republic of South Africa, which has petitioned the International Court of Justice in relation to the genocidal war waged by the Israeli occupying Power against Gaza.

There are other initiatives, such as those by Chile and Mexico to seize the International Criminal Court of the various types of crimes being committed by the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip. All those initiatives should be supported, commended and encouraged as steps in the right direction.

We call on the international judicial bodies to assume their responsibilities and fully implement their mandate. We also underscore the need for the Security Council to shoulder its political and security responsibilities as the primary organ that protects and ensures international peace and security.

Speaking of the responsibilities and duties linked to the current situation in Gaza, there is no doubt that the utmost priority is to ensure a ceasefire. Every day more rejection and resentment are expressed for the delaying of the ceasefire and for it not being given the attention it deserves. Currently, there is no higher goal than that of ending the ongoing aggression, genocide, displacement, starvation, destruction, vandalism and desecration.

When those goals are reached, the talk about post-war arrangements will have meaning and the diplomatic efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict can be effective. There is no doubt that what is happening in Gaza today highlights more than ever before the urgent need to address the root causes of the conflict by intensifying and reiterating our collective commitment to a two-State solution, which the international community has rallied around as a just, lasting and definitive solution. We need to see a resolute response from the Security Council and our Organization to the Israeli voices that have loudly rejected that solution, underestimating the global consensus and expressing nothing but denial and contempt for international legitimacy.

From this Chamber, Algeria reiterates its support for granting the State of Palestine full membership in the United Nations. That was the call made at the most recent summit of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries as an urgent measure to preserve the basic foundations of a two-State solution and an integral step in maintaining the legal components for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State across the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. We also call for adopting a new approach aimed at activating the peace option and achieving a fair and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question.

In these decisive times, it is vital that we oppose the illusion of the Israeli settler occupation that security can be achieved by eliminating the Palestinian national project. It is vital that we prevent and ultimately end the continuing occupation campaign to seize and annex Palestinian lands and encourage the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements, designed to make it impossible to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State. It is vital that we resist the Israeli occupation and its fantasies of reviving the project of building a Greater Israel on the rubble, ashes and debris of the Palestinian national project.

In view of all those considerations, Algeria reiterates the historical demand that an international peace conference be convened under United Nations auspices, with a view to reaching an agreement to definitively end the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the concept of a two-State solution, under the strict supervision, close follow-up and assured guarantees of the international community.

After Gaza, we cannot return to what was before. After Gaza, we cannot put the Palestinian question

back in a drawer and leave it trapped there for another indefinite period. After Gaza, we cannot limit international efforts to tending to the legacy of war and turning a blind eye to the war's causes. Above all, we cannot allow the goal of peace and security in the Middle East to be held hostage by the Israeli occupation, which does whatever it pleases by wheeling and dealing, flattering and pressuring others. May Gaza be a lesson for us all, a lesson to be learned, to be inspired by and to strengthen our upcoming endeavours. Most importantly, may it be a lesson that we do not forget.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovenia.

Ms. Fajon (Slovenia): I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General for his briefing and you, Mr. President, for organizing today's high-level debate.

I have a single message today, and it is a clear one. We need an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the region. I would therefore like to try to explain our reasoning behind the call for a ceasefire.

Only a ceasefire respected by all the parties to the conflict can ensure the protection of civilians. The more than 100 days of the conflict have led to too many civilian casualties on all sides — one in every 100 Palestinians in Gaza has been killed, and enough is enough. The vast majority of those killed in Gaza are women and children. The living are starving in overcrowded and unsafe shelters with a health system that has collapsed. Only a ceasefire can enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance at the scale required. The humanitarian community has an impossible mission as it faces a multitude of challenges. For the sake of humanity, we must lay the foundations for meaningful humanitarian action, and it is our collective responsibility to do so.

Only a ceasefire can create the conditions for the safe return of the displaced. I want to make it clear that we reject and condemn the statements by Israeli officials proposing the mass displacement of Palestinians from Gaza. However, we are also deeply concerned about the conditions that the internally displaced Palestinians in Gaza are living in. People are forced to flee again and again and are being pushed into safe zones that are subsequently bombed anyway. We need to establish the conditions for people's safe return on all sides — in Gaza, the West Bank, Israel and Lebanon.

Only a ceasefire and a renewed vision of a two-State solution can prevent the proliferation of extremism and

extremist ideologies. Slovenia condemns all forms of terror, including Hamas's terrorist attacks of 7 October and its continuing attacks on Israel. We repeat our call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and for the International Committee of the Red Cross to be granted access to them. A ceasefire has to bring them home, and only a ceasefire can bring about the conditions for peace. The current hostilities and decades of tensions are providing neither peace nor security for anyone in the region. There is no military solution to the conflict, and the only way to peace is through a two-State solution. I therefore repeat my call for us to start preparing an international peace conference to address all the puzzle pieces of a two-State solution in a comprehensive manner. We must be serious about that. As the Security Council, we need to advance discussions about the day after. Gaza and the West Bank belong to Palestinians.

A ceasefire will also enable accountability. We cannot turn a blind eye to all the violations that have taken place in recent months, from the terrorist attack on 7 October and the reports of sexual violence by Hamas to all the other violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. A strong international legal system is a guarantee of international peace and security.

Only a ceasefire will help to calm the region. In my most recent speech before the Council (see S/PV.9489), I spoke of a potential spillover. I am afraid that this conflict has already generated further escalation in the West Bank, along the Blue Line and in the Red Sea, or served as a pretext to generate such escalation. We condemn the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, which must immediately cease. The freedom of navigation and maritime security are critically important for the movement of essential goods, including food, fuel and critical humanitarian assistance intended to reach populations across the world. Tensions in the region are mounting, and we will soon reach a point of no return. A ceasefire will enable the reconstruction of Gaza under the leadership of a revitalized Palestinian Authority, with the strong support of the United Nations and the international community. By "ceasefire", I mean a process starting with the cessation of hostilities respected by all parties to the conflict and incorporating all of the elements mentioned, leading to an independent Palestinian State, a safe and secure Israel, a peaceful region and the people of all countries in the region living free of fear and terror.

The 26,000 victims — Palestinian and Israeli alike — are not statistics. Each of them had a life, family, dreams, hopes and plans. The best way for us to show respect to those who have lost their lives in the conflict is to pave the way for peace. It is time for a ceasefire.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland.

Mr. Cassis (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and express my heartfelt condolences to him on the loss of his 153 humanitarian colleagues.

Switzerland shares the principles of humanity and peace that guide the work of the Security Council. We reiterate our unequivocal condemnation of Hamas's attacks on Israel and demand the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas. The statements made in this Chamber remind us of the extreme level of hatred and suffering in the Middle East that has been reached. While, since 7 October, there has seemed to be no limit to the violence in Israel and Gaza and throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, one question in particular has concerned me: What can we do about it? The Council has adopted two undeniably critical resolutions (resolution 2712 (2023) and resolution 2720 (2023)), but we are failing to implement them. Only some of the hostages have been released; civilian casualties from the fighting continue on a daily basis; and international humanitarian law continues to be violated, all of which is happening as we commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

When we see that, despite all our efforts and all the energy that the Council has put into the adoption of those two resolutions, the violence continues, only one word comes to mind: "frustration". But we cannot give into frustration. We cannot allow ourselves to become discouraged. In the face of such inhumanity, we have no right to do so. If we are to work together to find a solution commensurate with our responsibilities, we need to take a step back and address, without fear of raising taboo subjects, the obstacles preventing the Council from doing its job.

I would like to stress three major points that must be taken into account on the road to lasting peace in the Middle East.

First, the world has changed. The Middle East is no longer same region that it was at the time of the Camp David Agreement or the Oslo Accords. The States of the region have evolved a great deal. They are voicing their legitimate aspirations. Those States now want to play a key role. No lasting peace in the Middle East will be possible without a regional political consensus.

Secondly, Israel has shaped a new diplomatic dynamic within the region. I see that as a sign that there is political common ground and that common interests have been mutually acknowledged for both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

Thirdly, lasting peace continues to fundamentally depend on a two-State solution. That is the solution that will provide both Israelis and Palestinians with the possibility of living in peace and security.

I would like to cite Eleanor Roosevelt, who said, (*spoke in English*)

"It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it".

(*spoke in French*)

We can no longer simply manage the conflict, which the current impasse that we are at in Gaza demonstrates. We have reached a tipping point. We must now take further concrete steps towards a political resolution of the conflict, which has already cost the lives of far too many people.

How do we take concrete action? I call for a joint approach. We must all work towards that end — the parties to the conflict, the States of the region, which I stress, and the members of the Council. Together we must imagine a future based on a comprehensive approach that includes all the key elements of the conflict. By that I mean the release of the remaining hostages, a humanitarian ceasefire, unimpeded access to humanitarian aid and unconditional respect for international humanitarian law against, all of which must be against the backdrop of a political solution. I am well aware that those elements are part of the concerns of the Council, but we must think of them within a new geography of peace.

Your country, France, Mr. President, was the cradle of the Enlightenment. You will certainly understand my approach, which sees critical thinking and questioning as the driving force that will enable us to move forward

and overcome challenges to reach the light of peace. I believe that all of us here at the United Nations can come together and change our outlook. Some will think that that is a utopian vision. But I prefer utopias to dystopias. Together with everyone, including the Israelis, the Palestinians and the States of the region, Switzerland is ready to play its role in this difficult, but critical process, to achieve peace. We stand ready to bring together the key players in the conflict and support all efforts to pave the road towards achieving peace, such as the one put forward by the European Union yesterday.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Today's meeting on the situation in the Middle East, first and foremost the Palestinian question, and our discussion come at a truly dramatic moment. Not only major political considerations but also universal human morality demand that we take urgent action to bring about a ceasefire and end the human suffering in Palestine. Steps to prevent further destabilization in other parts of the Middle East are also required. The Security Council has thus far been unable to respond adequately to this historic challenge. The reason is well-known — the position of the United States, which has blocked all efforts and initiatives aimed at stopping the bloodshed in the occupied territories. The cunning of American diplomacy is astonishing, oscillating between vetoing ceasefire resolutions and calling for a reduction in the intensity of hostilities in Gaza. Clearly, it serves as *carte blanche* for the collective punishment of Palestinians to continue.

Yesterday we made yet another attempt to elicit a united response from the Council to what was happening and proposed a draft presidential statement demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. However, the United States and its allies blocked that document, too, thereby confirming that saving the lives of Palestinian civilians is not one of their priorities. The humanitarian consequences of such a policy are dire: almost 30,000 civilians, including a large number of women and children, have been killed; northern Gaza is almost completely destroyed and uninhabitable; and 80 per cent of the overall population in the Gaza Strip are internally displaced persons. It is a true humanitarian tragedy, with no end in sight.

The shortage of all basic necessities has reached alarming proportions. I would also like to draw

members' attention to a *Jerusalem Post* article dated 6 January, which interviewed a professor from Ben-Gurion University, Ms. Nitzan. She previously worked as a coordinator at the World Health Organization (WHO), focusing on emergencies. The article draws on assessments from environmental experts, including Israeli experts. According to those assessments, there are doubts as to whether Gaza will be inhabitable once the conflict ends. The soil, subsoil, coastal waters and air have all been polluted on an unprecedented scale by the bombardments, by the chemicals that have been released from explosions and fires, by the equipment and ammunition that have been disposed of, and by the biomass that is now rotting — as awful as that sounds — in addition to other household waste and sewage. There are no more natural water sources. Practically all of the sanitation infrastructure is gone. It is estimated that 22 per cent of agricultural land in Gaza will never be restored. We have seen tens of thousands of cases of diarrhoea, acute respiratory illnesses, scabies, skin diseases and other diseases. We have seen an increased risk of an epidemic. The lack of humanitarian access has been recognized by the WHO as the main obstacle to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Specifically, the WHO has had to call off six of its planned humanitarian missions in the north of the Gaza Strip, starting from the end of December 2023, because its requests for access were denied.

In order to alleviate the suffering of the people of Gaza, Russia, like a number of other countries, has sent hundreds of tons of food, medical equipment and medicines to the Gaza Strip. We support the efforts of United Nations humanitarian agencies on the ground, which, unfortunately, have also fallen victim to the war, with roughly 150 deaths. The Secretary-General just told us about that, stating that it is unprecedented in the history of United Nations involvement in operations in conflict zones.

Of particular concern is the dissemination of abhorrent ideas such as the mass forcible displacement of Palestinians from their homes. Such a scenario is unacceptable and should not be allowed to come to pass under any circumstances. The mass violence being inflicted by the Israeli army and Jewish settlers in the West Bank must also be stopped immediately, and any attempt to undermine the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem must be thwarted.

The Council's inability to take exhaustive measures has allowed the current escalation of the conflict

in Palestine to metastasize throughout the region. Again, that is not without the nefarious participation of the United States and its allies, whose military presence in the Middle East, as in other parts of the Eurasian continent, is creating unacceptable new risks to international security. We categorically condemn the wholly unjustified aggression against Yemen undertaken under the leading role of the United States and the United Kingdom without the approval of the Council. The actions of the Anglo-Saxons pose a direct threat to international peace and undermine the world order, which is not based on the Anglo-Saxons' rules but on the rule of international law and the central role of the United Nations. We also condemn the Israeli strikes on Syria, the stated targets of which are the structures that are legally located in Syria at the invitation of its legitimate Government. Political assassinations must end.

The situation on the Israeli-Lebanese border is also particularly dangerous. It is obvious that unilateral military actions only exacerbate the already difficult situation in the Middle East. It is a situation that did not just develop yesterday and reflects a long history. We are talking about the repeated invasions of independent States by the United States and its satellites, which led to hundreds of thousands of deaths in Iraq, the destruction of statehood in Libya, the war in Syria, massive flows of refugees and an unprecedented surge in international terrorism.

Russia will not accept terrorism in any form. We categorically condemned the attacks on civilians in Israel on 7 October 2023. Unlike some of our Western colleagues, who practise double standards, we do not divide extremists into good and bad, us and them. We insist on the release of all detainees in Gaza, regardless of their nationality and origin.

Today, what we hear increasingly often, particularly from our Western colleagues, are calls to focus not on today but on the day after the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as if the escalation in Gaza had already ceased and the situation there no longer required the Council's attention. But the cunning logic of Western delegations is obvious: by blocking all of the Council's much-needed efforts to call on the parties to a ceasefire, the United States and its allies want to turn this extremely uncomfortable page in their history as soon as possible, which makes them complicit in the carnage unleashed on the peaceful civilian population in Gaza.

I would like to emphasize that the Security Council must continue to fulfil its mandate and call for a ceasefire. Otherwise, there is no guarantee that hostilities will not resume with renewed vigour. In the absence of such a guarantee and the unconditional implementation of United Nations decisions on the creation of a Palestinian State, all talk of tomorrow is not only premature but also pointless. That is well understood by potential donors who could invest in the future reconstruction of Gaza. When it comes to discussing the parameters of tomorrow, the following two factors of fundamental importance should be taken into consideration.

First, there is the consolidated will of the Palestinian people themselves. The Palestinians, who have been deprived of the chance of statehood for decades, deserve for that issue to be finally resolved. The first and main condition for that is the unity of the Palestinian nation itself. We trust that our Palestinian brothers and sisters will show strategic wisdom and reject all short-term considerations and any internal fighting, which impede nation-building. They should decide for themselves what their future State should look like, who should govern it and how. I think that that is what our Western colleagues call democracy.

The imposition of solutions from the outside and the social engineering so beloved by our Western colleagues are categorically unacceptable here. At the same time, no less important is the unity of the positions of all external players, who should be guided not by their political interests in the region, trying to pursue them through various Palestinian factions, but by the imperative of finding a speedy solution to the centuries-old conflict. Russia has made its proposals on how to achieve that objective. They could become an important element of a new effective mediation mechanism that would enjoy the trust of both Palestinians and Israelis. We will continue working towards that.

Another key factor is the unshakeable foundation of the two-State solution for a settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and it will be crucial for it to happen as soon as possible. We are extremely concerned about the Israeli leadership's statement calling that into question. We also want to draw attention to the vague statements made in that regard by senior officials of the United States Department of State. We do not want to see Washington once again relying on its supposedly effective — but in fact utterly failed — bilateral diplomacy, hoping that somehow, ahead of its elections

in November, it can fix parameters for a settlement in the Middle East that suit Washington, without any regard for the long-term consequences.

We have seen this many times. Every turn of the United States' arrogant, unilateral policy in the Middle East, with its separate shuttle negotiations with regional players accompanied by financial promises, ends with an increasingly bloody eruption into escalation, just as has happened this time. Washington first buried the work of the Middle East Quartet and since then has consistently blocked all international efforts for de-escalation within the framework of the Security Council. The cynical short-sightedness of the United States leadership was exemplified just a week before 7 October by the words of Jake Sullivan, the National Security Advisor to the President, when he said that the Middle East was quieter today than it had been in two decades.

I want to say to my Western colleagues that the whole world is waiting for them to realize that their stubborn disregard for and outright sabotage of multilateral diplomacy brings tragic results over and over again. For Russia, along with an overwhelming majority of the international community, it is obvious that the logic of confrontation on the question of Palestine can be overcome only through collective efforts underpinned, first and foremost, by the interests of the States of the region. It is they that should ultimately decide the fate of the Palestinian issue. The green shoots of those positive processes are already emerging. The normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia has begun with China's help, Syria's membership in the Arab League has been restored, and a dialogue is being established between Damascus and Ankara. It is the job of any international mediation efforts not to interfere with those processes or turn the region into an arena for geopolitical struggle, but rather to create the most favourable external conditions for restoring trust between the countries of the region.

That is what Russia's initiatives for a Middle East settlement are aimed at. After the acute phase of the current crisis is over — which should be facilitated by a united call from the Security Council for a ceasefire — we propose convening consultations at the ministerial level to consolidate the positions of the key regional players and develop practical steps on that basis to help restore Palestinian unity. At the next stage we will require the format of an international conference on a Middle East settlement, as many representatives

who spoke before me have said. The purpose of the conference would be to proclaim a Palestinian State and develop measures to ensure Israel's lasting security and normalize its relations with all Arab States and with Muslim States generally. Incidentally, I think it was 15 years ago that Russia put forward the idea here in this Chamber of convening such a conference, and I hope the idea will receive the attention it deserves. What also remains on the table is the broader initiative of creating a system of collective security in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East as a whole, a system that would enshrine confidence-building and transparency measures and guarantee equal security for every country in the region. As the Council is aware, Russia has specific proposals in that regard that we have long been discussing with all interested parties. All of that represents our vision for the way forward, but first, I repeat, we must achieve a ceasefire in the Palestinian territories without delay.

In conclusion, I would like to once again call on Council members not to be lulled by the United States' assurances that it supposedly has everything under control and is resolving the problems on the ground, and not to once again put off the question of establishing a Palestinian State until things improve. It is important not only for the Security Council to reaffirm that there can be no alternative to the existing international legal framework on this critical issue but also to outline concrete ways and timelines for its realization. That is not just obligations emanating from the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Council, the Madrid principles and other decisions. It is the moral duty of the international community, and we call for it to be fulfilled.

Today some delegations saw fit to reiterate the memorized list of accusations against Russia in connection with our special military operation against the Nazi regime in Kyiv. I will leave those statements to their consciences, although, of course, I realize that their consciences do not bother them very much. I would like to underscore one vital thing at issue. We do not have the right to allow a decision of the United Nations on the creation of a Palestinian State to be buried in the way that the 2015 Minsk agreements, which were unanimously approved by the Council, were. They were guaranteed by France and Germany, which later admitted that they had never planned to implement them. We cannot allow the possibility of such criminal actions being taken again, this time against the Palestinian people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Chief Minister of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Sengeh (Sierra Leone): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important ministerial-level meeting. I am also grateful to Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing.

“The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” has been a long-standing item on the Security Council’s agenda. The recent escalation since 7 October of last year indicates that arriving at a definitive solution is a matter of extreme urgency. And it is very clear that the situation continues to have far-reaching implications for regional stability, global peace and security.

Global peace is possible, and we have to work together for it. This protracted conflict must be analysed in the context of Israel’s continuing occupation of the Palestinian territories. We must vigorously and persistently pursue a consensus based on a just, mutually acceptable solution, consistent with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

With regard to the current escalation, Sierra Leone condemns in the strongest terms Hamas’s heinous attack of 7 October on Israeli civilians, which according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs led to the killing of more than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals, including 36 children, with reports of the perpetration of sexual violence and the taking of civilian hostages. We want to emphasize that those responsible must be held accountable. Sierra Leone calls for the release of all hostages, immediately and without conditions.

Sierra Leone is gravely concerned about the escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip over the past 100 days, which has led to the death of more than 25,000 Palestinian civilians and the displacement of 1.9 million more, with women and children being the worst affected. We deeply regret the unacceptable human cost, including the ultimate price that has been paid by health-care workers, United Nations personnel and other humanitarian workers and journalists. We express our deepest condolences to the families of the more than 150 United Nations personnel who have lost their lives in the course of their duties, the vast majority of whom were staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Sierra Leone acknowledges the Security Council’s engagement since the start of the conflict and the

significant efforts that were made to adopt resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023). Those resolutions reaffirm the need for the parties to the conflict to adhere to their obligations under international law and ensure the protection of all civilians, in particular children. Between the adoptions of resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023), the Secretary-General invoked Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations (S/2023/962), which was last done more than 50 years ago, warning the Security Council of an impending humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. Although the Council fell short of demanding a ceasefire, Sierra Leone welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2712 (2023) (see S/2024/26), as mandated in resolution 2720 (2023). The report informed us of the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza and outlined some of the progress made in addressing the existing humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip. We welcome Ms. Kaag’s appointment, and Sierra Leone looks forward to engaging with her in the near future.

For the many civilian lives lost, at risk or in serious straits, Sierra Leone calls for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. That will guarantee the safety of all civilians, protect civilian objects and enable humanitarian assistance to reach those in need unimpeded. For any humanitarian operation to be successful in the Gaza Strip, securing a full and comprehensive ceasefire is the minimum required.

Before I conclude, and in addition to calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, I would like to make the following critical observations.

First, Sierra Leone is deeply concerned about the fact that Israel’s ongoing military operation has been accompanied by rhetoric on the forcible displacement of Palestinians from Israeli political actors. Sierra Leone condemns that rhetoric and rejects any attempt to remove Palestinians from the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, temporarily or permanently.

Secondly, Sierra Leone calls for accountability for all responsible for violations of international law, in particular international humanitarian law, and for crimes of serious concern to the international community.

Thirdly, Sierra Leone notes with concern the rising tensions in the West Bank, across the Blue Line in Lebanon, in the Red Sea, including in Yemen, and in other parts of the region. Sierra Leone calls on the

relevant parties to desist from embarking on any action that will further endanger the lives of civilians, escalate regional tensions or threaten global peace and security.

In conclusion, Sierra Leone emphasizes the importance of continuing to explore all diplomatic and political avenues geared to finding a just and lasting solution to the conflict and based on a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living together side by side in peace, security and stability.

Lord Ahmad (United Kingdom): I too would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his very detailed introduction to today's very important debate.

What is very clear is that the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is worsening daily. People have lost their families and their homes. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are now facing the risk of famine. Their suffering is frankly unacceptable, and our priority must be to alleviate it.

Last month, together with my Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron, I visited Al-Arish, near the Rafah crossing. Among other engagements, it was a privilege to meet staff of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, who along with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and many other international organizations are working tirelessly to get life-saving aid into Gaza. I would like to put it on record that we sincerely commend all the United Nations and humanitarian teams for their ongoing work amid hugely difficult conditions on the ground. As we have heard, many have already paid with their lives. I have also heard first-hand reports of what can only be described as shocking and harrowing medical operations and procedures taking place, including on young children, in desperate conditions with no anaesthesia, against a backdrop of mass burials. To put it succinctly and directly, that must end.

Agreements are needed now. The United Kingdom is calling for an immediate humanitarian pause, which is necessary to get life-saving aid in and hostages out. We must alleviate the pain and suffering of all. At the same time, and in accordance with resolution 2720 (2023), we urgently call on Israel to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza, including by opening Ashdod port and increasing access through Kerem Shalom. That needs to happen, and it needs to happen now. The United Kingdom has trebled its financial aid commitment to support Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories this year. I want to assure the Council that

we will continue to do everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings.

Yes, the United Kingdom supports Israel's right to self-defence, but that must be in line with international humanitarian law. And of course, like others, we condemn all forms of terrorism. Hamas's horrific terrorist attacks have had an irreversible impact on innocent lives. I have seen that first-hand, as I did last week in my meetings with the Foreign Secretary with families of some of the hostages still held in Gaza.

But what is very clear is that the conflict must not go on a moment longer than necessary. We must collectively work for a sustainable ceasefire that will end the shocking destruction, the fighting and the loss of life and prevent a resumption of hostilities. What do we need to do to achieve that? Hamas will have to agree to release all hostages. It can no longer be in charge of Gaza, and it must no longer pose a threat to Israel through terror attacks. We also need an agreement in place for the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, as well as the complete rejection of any forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza.

Peace remains the only way to once and for all end the tragedy and suffering that have engulfed Israelis and Palestinians. Stability, peace, justice and security are the only way forward. For a peaceful solution, four things must also happen. There must be a Palestinian-led Government in Gaza and across the West Bank; there must be a concrete plan to help revitalize and support the Palestinian Authority; there must be a massive reconstruction plan for Gaza and, importantly, there must be a political horizon for the delivery of a two-State solution.

Now is the time, in the tragedy that is engulfing us, to grasp the moment, to choose hope over despair and peace over conflict, and to once again commit to working together to make that vision for peace a true living reality of two States, Israel and Palestine, side by side in the Middle East.

Ms. Zeya (United States of America): I thank you for convening us, Mr. President, and I thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing today.

In November I visited Al-Arish, where I saw the United Nations and its humanitarian partners' life-saving work and action. In the wake of that visit, the United States facilitated an extended humanitarian pause during which hostages were reunited with their loved ones and more aid got into the hands of Palestinians

in Gaza. Since then, Israel, Egypt and Jordan, with the support and encouragement of the United States, have also taken steps to expand the flow of aid into Gaza, opening Kerem Shalom and establishing a new route from Jordan. But more needs to be done to rapidly provide assistance at scale for civilians in all of Gaza.

We welcome the Secretary-General's appointment of Sigrid Kaag as the new Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, charged with this mission. She must have the resources and support she needs because her success is the success of the United Nations in Gaza. And the Organization's role is irreplaceable.

Secretary Blinken was pleased to have secured Israeli support for a United Nations assessment team to visit northern Gaza, including support for a surge in aid to civilians in the north, who have largely lacked access to aid for more than a month and are increasingly desperate. We urge that visit to happen as soon as it is safe to do so, as it is a critical step to assess the humanitarian situation and enable the ultimate voluntary safe return home for those displaced by the fighting. The perilous security situation in northern Gaza, driven by renewed Hamas rocketing of Israel and attacks, has delayed that assessment.

We reiterate that there can be no forced relocation of Palestinians and that Palestinian civilians must be allowed to voluntarily and safely return home, with dignity, as soon as conditions allow. Furthermore, we reject calls for a relocation of Palestinians outside of Gaza and the dehumanizing language used by some officials on all sides of the conflict. We continue to convey to Israeli leaders that they need to do more to protect civilians and take feasible precautions to minimize civilian harm, in line with international humanitarian law.

Far too many Palestinian civilians have been injured or killed in Gaza since 7 October. More needs to be done to protect them. United Nations and other humanitarian personnel are demonstrating extraordinary courage and also require greater protection. Many are themselves displaced. We mourn the loss of more than 150 staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the largest collective loss of personnel in the Organization's history.

Continued incidents during the past week demonstrate that deconfliction remains a serious problem. That must change. The United States

joins other Council members in reaffirming that humanitarian personnel must be protected so that they can save other lives. In addition, they require reliable access to telecommunication services in Gaza to do their jobs safely.

We also remain concerned about the current intense fighting around major hospitals in western Khan Younis. The protected nature of those facilities must be respected so that they can continue to provide civilians with medical assistance. Hamas and other terrorist groups must not use hospitals or other civilian infrastructure to launch attacks, and civilians must be permitted to reach hospitals.

We must not forget that Hamas's brutal terrorist attacks on Israel unleashed this conflict. The eyewitness accounts of Hamas atrocities and conflict-related sexual violence against innocent women are undisputed and horrific. Hamas has continued its abhorrent use of Palestinian civilians and hostages as human shields, and its repeated statements affirming its intent to repeat the 7 October attacks underscore why we can never go back to the reality in Gaza before 7 October.

There also can be no progress towards a durable peace without resolution of the hostage crisis. More than 100 individuals are still held in Gaza by Hamas and other armed groups. The hostages continue to be kept from their loved ones and are denied access to humanitarian services. For more than 100 days, hostages and their families have lived in agony. No one should have to endure even one day of what they have gone through, much less over 100 days. It is time for the Council to unequivocally condemn Hamas's atrocities and terror and to reiterate its demand that Hamas immediately release all the hostages and allow medical access. In that regard, we welcome the Qatari and French announcement of an agreement to deliver medicine to hostages and medical facilities in Gaza.

The United States has repeatedly warned Iran and its proxies not to engage in opportunistic attacks that risk instigating a wider conflict. We condemn Iran's attacks, which harmed and killed civilians, on locations in Iraq and Pakistan. We also condemn the Houthis' attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea, which, as resolution 2722 (2024) rightly demanded, must cease. We know that without Iran's support, the Houthis would struggle to track and strike commercial vessels. We seek a diplomatic solution along the Blue Line that would allow civilians in Israel and Lebanon to return home. We again call for the full implementation of resolution

1701 (2006). And let me be clear. The United States will continue to take defensive actions, as appropriate and in line with international law, to protect our personnel and interests in the region.

We are also deeply troubled by the situation in the West Bank, where forced displacement and unprecedented levels of violence by extremist settlers present an urgent threat to peace and stability. We condemn the killing of Palestinian civilians, and we urge Israel to prevent and investigate settler violence, as well as hold perpetrators accountable.

As we respond to the Gaza crisis, a key component of United States diplomacy is to pursue a pathway both to a Palestinian State and to normalization and integration between Israel and other regional States, some of whom join us today for this open debate. The goal is a future where Gaza is never again used as a platform for terror and where Palestinians have a State of their own, Israel's security is assured and Israelis and Arabs can live in peace.

Secretary Blinken recently heard from countries of the region a willingness to participate in the reconstruction of Gaza if there is a path to a Palestinian State. A stronger, reformed and revitalized Palestinian Authority that can more effectively deliver for its own people and both the West Bank and Gaza must also be a part of the equation. I know that this may be difficult to imagine at this difficult moment, but it is President Biden's firm conviction that two States, with Israel's security guaranteed, are the only path to durable peace, as well as the only guarantor of a secure and democratic Israel and of Palestinians' legitimate aspirations to live in a State of their own. It is the only way to end this violence once and for all.

To achieve that future, the Israeli and Palestinian people, as well as their leaders, must make hard choices. We do not purport to make those decisions for them. But we believe strongly that if they are willing to pursue these goals, they can help to usher in an era where Palestinians and Israelis can live side by side in peace.

On a final point, we lament that Russia ignored several Council members' requests to condemn Hamas for their attacks on 7 October in the draft presidential statement circulated late last week. It is bewildering that the Council still cannot condemn Hamas for its heinous terrorist attack that killed more than 1,200 individuals from over 30 nations in Israel on 7 October or that the

Council cannot, without qualification, reiterate its call for the release of the more than 100 hostages held by Hamas and other terrorist groups.

We and others offered input to this product in good faith, and our input is consistent with what we have advocated for since 7 October. Russia's choice to reject those edits only underscores its cynical approach to the work of the Council, as it chooses to try to divide the Council rather than bring it together to address global challenges.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I wish to thank France for convening this important Security Council meeting, and I thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing on the current catastrophe in Gaza.

One hundred and nine days have now passed since 7 October, when 1,200 men and women, girls and boys and young and old civilians in Israel were brutally massacred by Hamas. We once again condemn the heinous terrorist attacks by Hamas and urge the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages. The accounts of sexual violence committed by Hamas must be fully investigated, and all perpetrators must be held accountable.

We have also witnessed the extreme suffering of Palestinians in Gaza. More than 25,000 people have reportedly been killed during Israeli military operations in Gaza. Seventy per cent of those killed are women and children. Every day, we see and hear their tears, their fears, their cries and their pleas for protection against a backdrop of air strikes, looming famine and displacement. Tragically, people can get easily accustomed and desensitized to ever-increasing casualty numbers — 100 and 200 sound different, while 24,000 and 25,000 may sound similar. No, they are not. They too had happiness and dreams like us. Everything they strived for is now under the rubble. United Nations workers have not been safe in this conflict either. More United Nations staff have been lost in the first three months of this conflict than the number of United Nations staff lost in conflict areas and terrorist incidents around the world in the last 12 years.

For those who have survived in Gaza, the conditions are beyond desperate. A total of 85 per cent of Gaza's entire population is internally displaced, with many families displaced multiple times. And, as hospitals and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East facilities are besieged or

under constant attacks, there is no safe place, even in the so-called “safe zones.” Humanitarian assistance is not enough, and even the insufficient volume of humanitarian aid is constantly met with obstacles and entry impediments. In that regard, the Security Council has adopted two resolutions (resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023)). However, there has been little progress on the ground. Once again, we call for rapid, safe, unhindered, expanded and sustained humanitarian access into and across Gaza, in line with resolution 2720 (2023).

The Council has repeatedly urged compliance with international humanitarian law, of which the core pillar is the protection of civilians. However, that call has not been heeded during this conflict. We therefore call for a sustainable humanitarian ceasefire. All hostilities by all parties must be ceased. All hostages must be released, and sufficient humanitarian aid and commercial goods must be able to enter Gaza. Only based on these conditions can the ongoing agony of Palestinians and the insecurity of Israelis be resolved, and sincere talks for the realization of the two-State solution begin. To achieve that goal, all non-State actors in the region should also cease their provocative actions. Any action that hinders navigational rights and freedom by the Houthis must immediately and unconditionally stop. At the same time, parties across the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon must exercise the utmost restraint and heed the ongoing diplomatic efforts.

Israel’s right to security and the Palestinian people’s right to live on their own land are inherently interconnected. The permanent security of Israel can only be guaranteed when both Israelis and Palestinians are able to live, side by side, in peace within secure and recognized borders, consistent with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. In that connection, any forcible transfer of Palestinians or resettlement of Gaza is simply not acceptable. Settlement activities and settler violence must also stop in the West Bank. Any attempts against the realization of the two-State solution must be rejected. At this perilous juncture for the region, a sustainable humanitarian ceasefire can serve as a meaningful starting point for the resumption of vital talks to realize the common aspiration of the Palestinians, Israelis and the people of the entire world.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): Mozambique wishes to praise the French presidency for convening this important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The French

initiative is particularly timely, as it translates our collective concern over the unfolding catastrophe in the Gaza Strip, especially in its humanitarian dimension. We convey our most sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his briefing to the Council. On these and other matters, he has been the voice and the conscience not just of our Organization but also of the international community at large, particularly when invoking Article 99 of the Charter, drawing the attention of the United Nations membership and the entire world to the humanitarian plight that has befallen the Palestinian people.

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is at the heart of our concern today. It is a conflict that is further aggravated by Israel’s illegal settlement activities, which are contrary to international law and undermine the prospect for an independent and sovereign State of Palestine. We deeply deplore this ongoing conflict, which has resulted in the loss of many lives and has caused immense suffering to both Israelis and Palestinians. The situation requires our objective and urgent attention. Guided by the Charter and the relevant decisions of this body, we need to find ways and means of bringing about sustainable and long-lasting peace to the region.

After more than 100 days of war, Mozambique echoes the deepest concern expressed by several Member States of the United Nations, including in the Council, various entities and international organizations on the calamitous and catastrophic situation that the people of Gaza are facing. Following Hamas’s attacks on 7 October 2023, which caused 1,200 Israeli deaths, we cannot remain indifferent to what is happening in Gaza, namely the reported killing by the Israeli Defence Forces of nearly 25,000 people, 70 per cent of whom are women and children.

As the Secretary-General said recently, “people in Gaza are dying not only from bombs and bullets, but from lack of food and clean water, and hospitals without power and medicine”. And, as further stated in a document by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, this is a major human-made humanitarian disaster. Refusing water, food and medicine to civilian and innocent people in a war situation is contrary to the basic principles of human dignity. The modern laws of war and our own moral standards do not accept such a situation. The relentless attacks against the civilian population of Gaza must cease, as they constitute a clear violation of

international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In that connection, the current situation calls for an immediate and urgent humanitarian ceasefire, a cessation of hostilities and, ultimately, a ceasefire not only to ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered without restriction or hindrance to those in need in Gaza but also to allow for the release of all the hostages and for the peace process to commence and be allowed to proceed.

As military operations intensify on the ground, at a time when there is no safe place in Gaza, the ongoing war will have major security consequences for both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples. It will worsen tensions between communities and feed extremists. Furthermore, a regional escalation of the conflict is a clear and present danger. In a troubled region such as the Middle East, where conflict begets conflict, we ought to be cautious and prudent in every move we make, in every step that we take. We need to avoid unimaginable political and security consequences that could jeopardize global peace and security. We are therefore duty bound, as members of the Council, to pool together our efforts in order to maintain peace and international security and bring to an end the catastrophe in Gaza. Our action and influence on the parties to the conflict is of extreme importance. To the extent of our individual capacity, we need to contribute to peace, security and stability in the Middle East.

Towards the end of 2023, the Council adopted two humanitarian resolutions (resolution 2712 (2023) and resolution 2720 (2023)) of crucial importance which need to be respected and observed. In that context, we reiterate our call for an immediate and sustained humanitarian truce and the cessation of hostilities so that resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) can be implemented with the collaboration and the monitoring of the United Nations and other relevant bodies.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our recognition of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty. That is a right that is inherent to each and every people and nation on Earth. It is also enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, and it constitutes the bedrock of the present international legal order.

I would like to conclude my statement by reaffirming Mozambique's principled position. We strongly believe that the foundation for our lasting peace and security in the region resides in a two-State solution for Israel and Palestine, with both States living side by side in peace

and security as good neighbours, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Japan.

Mr. Uemura (Japan): I thank His Excellency Mr. Séjourné, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, for his initiative. My appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing.

More than 100 days have passed since 7 October. First and foremost, I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to all the victims who have lost their lives in the conflict, including United Nations staff members and their families.

As a result of the conflict, which began with Hamas's heinous attack, what have we been left with? Many innocent people have been taken hostage and their families and loved ones are still spending sleepless nights hoping for their release. Countless children and women in Gaza have lost their lives with fear in their hearts as they hear the ceaseless sound of air raids and bombings.

That is the cruel reality of Gaza that we must face. What is the most realistic action we can take to change the situation?

The Security Council adopted two resolutions (resolution 2712 (2023) and resolution 2720 (2023)), after intense negotiations, to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Those resolutions were the result of the toil and sweat of Council members who desired to end the cycle of sorrow and hatred. We do not want more blood or tears, so those resolutions must never end up as mere pieces of paper. And we must foster the serious negotiations that are under way by several countries concerned outside this Chamber. We must think tirelessly of what we should do to ensure that an increased supply of humanitarian aid reaches the Gaza Strip and that United Nations humanitarian staff can work in a safe environment. In that regard, the Council should provide its utmost support for the work of Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza Ms. Kaag, who just began her mission this month, in line with resolution 2720 (2023).

Hamas must release all hostages immediately and unconditionally. That is the starting point for everything. The terrorist acts are unacceptable for any reason.

At the same time, let us further imagine the lives and livelihoods of the people in Gaza. If one's son or daughter is killed or if one's parent is killed, all that remains within the heart of the bereaved is deep grief and hatred that cannot easily heal. This humanitarian catastrophe must be stopped. And all parties to the conflict must comply with international law, including international humanitarian law.

I hope that today's debate will lead to action. We have an undeniable responsibility for many fragile lives and for history as well. We are witnessing the spillover to the West Bank, Lebanon, the Red Sea, Yemen and even more areas, which is seriously concerning. We are at a crossroads at which it will be determined whether those conflicts turn into a more large-scale regional confrontation. We must stop that from happening.

In order to tackle all those serious challenges, a two-State solution has even more importance than ever. The key is for the people of both Israel and Palestine to be able to lead a normal life without any fear for their own safety and survival.

Japan will continuously work to build confidence between the parties through its own initiatives.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate what I said here 45 days ago (see S/PV.9489). Japan, in good times and bad times, runs alongside Palestine, Israel and all the people living in the Middle East.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I would like to thank Minister for Foreign Affairs Séjourné for coming to New York specifically to preside over today's meeting. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing earlier. China welcomes the participation of the Foreign Ministers of Palestine and many Arab and other countries in today's meeting.

More than 100 days have passed since the outbreak of this new round of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The international community has continued to make unremitting efforts to reach a ceasefire, stop the hostilities, protect civilians, secure the release of hostages and avert a humanitarian disaster. In that regard, the Security Council has adopted resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023). Regrettably, however, the war in Gaza has continued unabated, with the number of civilian casualties increasing every day, along with the continued suffering of the Palestinian people and a risk of further escalation of tensions in the region. There can be no question that the tragedy in Gaza violates the

conscience of humankind and the fundamental tenets of international law. There is no justification for it, and it absolutely should not continue. Today's Council meeting should send a message of unity and clarity. In fact, there has long been overwhelming consensus in the international community about the importance of an immediate ceasefire, and it is regrettable that because of one country's repeated use of the veto, relevant resolutions of the Security Council could not be adopted.

The history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, spanning more than seven decades, has long pointed to the fundamental path to peace. However, political will and determination are absent. Today the international community, especially the United Nations and the Security Council, must demonstrate firm will and take vigorous, effective action, with the greatest sense of urgency, together with practical steps to extinguish the flames of war and restore peace. An immediate ceasefire must be the top priority. Rather than providing greater security for any of the parties, a protracted war will only cause more deaths and make the prospects for peace even more distant. An immediate ceasefire does not just mean restraint on the part of one party. It is a requirement for all parties. It is the basic prerequisite for saving lives, rescuing hostages, expanding humanitarian assistance and realizing peace. Israel should immediately reverse its course and stop its indiscriminate military attacks and its destruction of Gaza. All parties in the international community should make unanimous diplomatic efforts to promote an immediate ceasefire. While pushing for a ceasefire in Gaza, every effort should be made to prevent a spillover of the situation in Gaza to the Red Sea and the wider region. We call on all the parties to exercise restraint and avoid any action that could lead to an escalation of tensions.

We must remove every obstacle to the expansion of humanitarian assistance. As Secretary-General Guterres said, people in Gaza are dying not just as a result of the bombing but also from hunger and the accelerated spread of infectious diseases, which are claiming increasing numbers of lives, especially of children. Resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) must be fully implemented, and Israel must cooperate fully to that end. The obstacles to humanitarian assistance through the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings should be removed as soon as possible and direct crossings from Israel to northern Gaza opened without delay. Resolution 2712 (2023) calls for deconfliction

mechanisms to protect humanitarian organizations. Concrete arrangements should be made for such mechanisms as soon as possible to ensure that as a matter of priority, hospitals and United Nations agencies do not become targets of military operations. China supports the work of Under-Secretary-General Kaag and looks forward to her report to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 2720 (2023) and on the obstacles encountered after communicating with all parties. The Council should stand ready to take further action to facilitate the safe, rapid and unhindered access of adequate humanitarian assistance into Gaza.

The concept of a two-State solution must be revitalized. It is the only viable path to peace for Palestine and Israel. It is a solemn requirement under the relevant Security Council resolutions. We are gravely concerned about the Israeli leadership's statements last week rejecting the possibility of a two-State solution and denying Palestine's right to statehood. That is unacceptable. Any discussion of post-war arrangements for Gaza that does not involve the implementation of a two-State solution is tantamount to building a house on quicksand. The most important issue right now is to stop any further erosion of the foundation of a two-State solution, which first and foremost demands an end to Israel's forced transfer of the Palestinian population in Gaza, to the building of settlements in the West Bank and to searches, arrests and attacks on Palestinians.

China calls for intensifying diplomatic efforts to convene an international conference and launch meaningful multilateral processes as soon as possible, with a view to reviving the political prospects for a two-State solution. Independent Palestinian statehood must be an irreversible process, and we support Palestine's full membership in the United Nations as soon as possible as a first step in that process. In the current circumstances, the Security Council must send a clear and unequivocal message reaffirming the urgency of a two-State solution as the sole feasible road to a settlement. In November of last year, China submitted a draft presidential statement on a two-State solution to the Security Council, while the draft presidential statement proposed by Russia last week also included important elements related to such a solution. It is regrettable that those draft statements were not adopted, but that will not stop us from continuing to push the Council to take the necessary action. We will continue to work tirelessly to that end.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's very important and timely meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing on the situation in Gaza and his update on the implementation of resolution 2712 (2023). The information provided painted a stark picture of the brutal reality that Palestinian men, women and children are living through — a reality that has progressively worsened since the events of 7 October 2023. Guyana unequivocally condemns the violent, subhuman treatment to which the Palestinian people continue to be subjected.

The desperate humanitarian situation in Gaza has rightly attracted outrage and condemnation worldwide, and Guyana underscores the collective responsibility of the members of the Council to respond adequately in order to protect and relieve the Palestinian people. In that vein, we welcomed the Secretary-General's appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, pursuant to resolution 2720 (2023). We look forward to the speedy establishment of a United Nations mechanism designed to accelerate humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza and urge all stakeholders to cooperate fully with the Coordinator and the mechanism, once it is established.

While Guyana acknowledges that those are important steps for the relief of the Palestinian people, we emphasize that their impact will not be sustainable without the establishment of a lasting ceasefire. Guyana has taken note of the Secretary-General's observation that an effective aid operation requires "security staff who can work in safety, logistical capacity and the resumption of commercial activity". Those conditions do not exist currently and can never be met amid constant and unrestrained bombings. Guyana therefore urges intensified efforts towards the achievement of a ceasefire and is prepared to work with fellow Council members, and indeed with all, to that end.

The continued violations of international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in the Gaza Strip and in the occupied West Bank should never be met with silence. Guyana deplores such violations by all parties and underscores the obligation to adhere to and respect international law. We condemn the ongoing and indiscriminate attacks against hospitals, refugee camps and United Nations facilities and call on the Israel Defense Forces to cease the killing of

innocent civilians. Those actions do not align with the obligations of States Members of the United Nations and are contrary to the purposes and principles of the Organization, as outlined in the Charter. There must be consequences for those illegal actions.

As is the case with war everywhere, this war in Gaza is devastating in myriad ways. The delivery of education has been jeopardized. The delivery of quality health-care services has been seriously compromised, and the health-care system brought to its knees. The scarce economic opportunities that previously existed for Palestinian people have now dwindled. Almost the entire population of Gaza has been internally displaced. The extent of the crisis in Gaza is exponential and places the Palestinian people even farther behind in the global quest for sustainable development. The anticipated long-term impacts of the war confirm that.

The hostilities must end so that the Palestinian people can rebuild their lives. On this latter note of rebuilding their lives, we must seriously consider what that would entail after this war ends. We must seriously contemplate what must be done to change the worsening circumstances that the people of Gaza, and indeed the entire Palestinian population, have been experiencing for more than seven decades. This is a difficult question, the answer to which lies in altering certain deep-rooted ideologies that justify policies of discrimination against the Palestinian people. Frankly, this discriminatory stance cannot be reconciled with the Charter of the United Nations, which mandates Member States to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours. Let me also underscore Guyana's rejection of any plans for the forced resettlement of the population of Gaza to foreign countries. Any such move would be contrary to international humanitarian law and would violate the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Guyana therefore urges the Council and the international community to do everything in their power to prevent such an occurrence.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating the need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. We also need meaningful actions geared towards improving the standard of living of the Palestinian people; facilitating the enjoyment of their human rights, including their inalienable right to self-determination; and most importantly, achieving the two-State solution. Peace can never be carved out through violence and conflict. Security can never be achieved through insecurity and chaos. The

instruments of war must be set aside, and we must work to implement a peaceful and lasting solution to the Palestinian question. We cannot miss the opportunity that this moment provides to advance the two-State solution. Guyana is ready to contribute constructively to genuine efforts to that end.

Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing. I reiterate Ecuador's appreciation for his work and that of all United Nations personnel, as well as our condolences for the many United Nations staff members who have lost their lives in recent months.

This open debate provides an opportunity for the Council to hear the views of the States Members of the United Nations. I will therefore be brief.

It has now been more than 100 days since the heinous terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023. Ecuador take this opportunity to once again condemn those attacks in the most emphatic and unequivocal manner. We have not forgotten the horrors of that day — the massacre of innocent civilians, the indiscriminate firing of rockets and the sexual violence — nor have we forgotten the hostages who have yet to regain their freedom. That is why we insist on demanding that all of them be released immediately and unconditionally.

Likewise, after more than 100 days of war, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is heartbreaking. We have just heard the reports that attest to that. The numbers of dead and wounded continue to grow. Hunger, overcrowding and disease are gaining ground, while humanity is losing ground. The full implementation of resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) is crucial to alleviate the conditions faced by the civilian population in Gaza. Facilitating the safe arrival of sufficient and timely humanitarian aid to all those in need is essential. To that end, a humanitarian ceasefire is imperative.

Preventing the suffering and death caused by wars is the reason this Organization was established more than 78 years ago. This must be the last war of this long conflict. Our objective should be to create conditions conducive to a peaceful, negotiated, definitive and just solution for the parties, with the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, on the basis of the 1967 borders and the relevant resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Every word or act that undermines the prospect of the two-State solution serves to perpetuate the conflict and does nothing to improve security. That should be

obvious to everyone, after so many years of violence and death. For that reason, I wish to conclude by calling upon all actors to exercise restraint, avoid exacerbating tensions and prevent further expansion of the violence to other areas. It is time to focus on achieving, once and for all, the much-desired peace.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank the Secretary-General for his valued insights.

More than 100 days have passed since Hamas launched its brutal and deadly attack on innocent civilians in Israel, during which hundreds were taken hostage. Many Israelis are still living the nightmare of knowing that their loved ones continue to suffer in captivity. It has also been more than 100 days of intolerable and perilous conditions for millions of civilians in Gaza, who continue to live under a relentless siege. More than 24,000 Palestinians have been killed, and more than 60,000 have been wounded during Israel's military campaign, two thirds of them women and children. An entire generation of Palestinian children will be physically and psychologically marred by this war.

Malta has consistently condemned the Hamas terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023 and the continued barrage of rockets fired at Israeli population centres. We are also gravely concerned by reports of sexual violence committed on 7 October and call for them to be thoroughly investigated. We repeat that terror has no justification. Malta will continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages held by Hamas.

However, the collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza equally has no justification. Israel's actions should be in strict accordance with its obligations under international humanitarian law and its foundational principles, including distinction, proportionality and precaution. All the parties are obliged to ensure that civilians and civilian infrastructure are protected. Yet nowhere and no one in Gaza is safe — no United Nations facilities, no hospitals, no schools, and no places of worship. Whether they are under a white flag or a blue one, civilians, doctors and journalists are facing the horror of this war without the protections that they are guaranteed under international law.

Recent reports of intensified bombing in southern Gaza, including around hospitals where thousands are seeking refuge, are deeply disturbing. The people are living with a daunting spectre of human-made

starvation, coupled with looming threats of disease, malnutrition and other health crises. Urgent action is needed to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid both into and within Gaza. Additional crossing points must be opened. Arbitrary bureaucratic impediments hindering effective humanitarian operations must cease. Furthermore, respect for the inviolability of United Nations premises, medical staff, facilities and humanitarian notification and deconfliction is essential. Too many United Nations staff members and their implementing partners have already been killed or continue to work in treacherous conditions. We applaud their heroism. The immediate implementation of resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) is crucial to addressing those concerns.

Malta remains convinced that only a humanitarian ceasefire will ensure that a sufficient and effective humanitarian response operation can be properly executed. It would also enable the establishment of conditions that are conducive to a return to dialogue and eventually to peace. Palestinians and Israelis equally deserve to live in peace, dignity and security. That is all the more urgent since the conflict is also fostering turmoil across the Middle East. We continue to witness rapidly deteriorating situations in the West Bank. We are concerned about recent reports highlighting an increase in intensified armed exchanges, the destruction of basic infrastructure, the imposition of widespread restrictions on movement and mass detentions extending across the occupied West Bank, including in refugee camps. The demolition of property owned by Palestinians, and their displacement in East Jerusalem, including in the Old City, should also be condemned. We further stress that illegal settlements are in violation of international law and that Israeli settler violence must be addressed effectively and without impunity. Malta condemns the forced displacement and transfer of Palestinians from their land and homes.

In looking to the broader region, we are alarmed at the provocative skirmishes along the Israeli-Lebanese border and in the Red Sea. Malta condemns all violations along the Blue Line, including attacks on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, and Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea. We urgently call on all parties, including non-State actors in those areas, to exercise restraint, de-escalate tensions and uphold the norms of international law. It is in times like these, when the threats of war loom large, that we must work together towards a more stable and peaceful future for the Middle East — a peace

that is 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 two States, living side by side in peace and security, in line with all the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Mr. Safadi (Jordan): The clock is ticking. The Israeli aggression in Gaza has lasted for far too long. It has massacred far too many lives, with 109 days of brutality, more than 25,000 innocent lives taken, thousands of children buried under the rubble, mothers and fathers helplessly watching as their sons and daughters die from pain and malnutrition, and people carrying the remains of their families in plastic bags. Israel is making a mockery of international law, and the Security Council has yet to demand a ceasefire. It has yet to enforce its own resolution (resolution 2712 (2023)) demanding that food get to those who are starving, medicine get to those who are sick or wounded and anaesthesia get to children undergoing surgery to treat injuries caused by indiscriminate Israeli shelling of their homes, schools, hospitals, mosques, churches and shelters. In what world should an uncle be forced to operate on his teenage niece without anaesthesia? Dr. Hani Beseiso did. On day 101 of the horror, besieged in his home, he amputated his 16-year-old niece's foot, without anaesthesia, on his dining-room table. A hospital was just five minutes away, but Israel's war prevented him from getting to it. According to Save the Children, his niece A'hed is one of 10 children who lose a limb every day in Gaza. Save the Children's Director for the occupied Palestinian territory has said,

“Even in a war zone, the sights and sounds of a young child mutilated by bombs cannot be reconciled, let alone understood, within the bounds of humanity.”

Stop the massacre. Every day that goes by without ending the aggression means more innocent lives lost to Israeli firepower, hunger and disease. The threat of a devastating regional spillover is real. The West Bank is boiling. Tensions elsewhere in the region are rising dangerously. Secretary-General Guterres was right when he said that Gaza has become a graveyard for children. No place in Gaza is safe. Even the dead have not escaped the inhumane onslaught. Israeli soldiers literally dug them out of their graves in 16 cemeteries.

Those crimes are not the actions of rogue soldiers. They are an expression of the extremist, racist agenda that is propelling the war and that has systematically dehumanized almost 5.5 million Palestinians under Israeli occupation in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. That ideology of hate, embraced openly by Israeli Ministers, is normalizing the mass murder of Palestinians.

Israel has destroyed a whole community. It has displaced more than two thirds of Gaza's population — 1.9 million people — who are now suffering the indignity of overcrowded shelters and are denied access to water, food and medicine. It has starved civilians by deliberately impeding humanitarian assistance. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) assessment for Gaza released last month confirmed that the entire population of Gaza is facing acute levels of hunger. Of them, more than half a million people are enduring the most extreme stage of hunger — IPC level 5 — which means that half a million Palestinians are being starved by Israel. The number of people in that category in Gaza is four times that of the rest of the world. No IPC analysis has ever recorded such unprecedented levels of food insecurity anywhere in the world in recent history. That brutality cannot be allowed to continue. The Council must stop it. Adopting a binding Security Council resolution to force an end to the misery is the least that it can do.

Occupation, violence and war cannot continue to haunt our region. Peace is the only guarantee of security and safety for the Israelis, for the Palestinians and for the whole region. Partial solutions will not achieve that peace. All talk about approaches that will deal with Gaza outside a comprehensive solution that will end the occupation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza, will simply not work. There cannot be more of the same. There cannot be more siege and more oppression. Gazans cannot be told that they have to once again endure living in the open prison that Israel has made Gaza for decades.

The only path to peace is the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State — with occupied Jerusalem as its capital, along the 4 June 1967 borders — that will live side by side with a secure and accepted Israel. All members support the two-State solution, but the Israeli Government is undermining it. Israel is openly defying all members. The Israeli Prime Minister has vowed to never allow the Palestinian people to realize their right to freedom and statehood.

That means that he will continue to oppress the Palestinian people. His policies and actions are making it impossible for peace to be achieved. That defiance cannot continue without consequences. Israel must be held accountable for its actions, for its war crimes and for preventing the achievement of peace. The future of the region cannot be taken hostage by the political ambitions and the radical agendas of Israeli extremists who describe the Palestinians as human animals, unworthy of life, and who enable settler terrorism against the Palestinian people.

We are facing a decisive moment of truth. The whole international community has an urgent choice to make: allow the Israeli Government to doom the region to more conflict or recognize the Palestinian State and put our region on an irreversible path to peace. There is no shortage of ideas for the plan that will bring about that peace. However, there is a shortage of will — the will of the Israeli Government to allow Palestinians their inalienable rights and the will of the international community to pay more than lip service to the two-State solution.

The clock is ticking. The stakes are too high. What is needed is a transformational move for peace. Make that move. It is a move that must begin with stopping this inhumane aggression. And it must conclude, soon enough, with ending the occupation — the root cause of all evil. Members must impose peace, for if they do not, the Israeli Government will continue to impose more war, impose more death and impose more hatred on our region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Türkiye.

Mr. Fidan (Türkiye): We met in this Chamber almost two months ago (see S/PV.9489). We warned about the risks of Israeli attacks to regional and global peace and security. One hundred and nine days into the conflict, it is a shame that the international community is still unable to stop the bloodshed in Gaza and the West Bank.

Gaza used to be an open prison. Now it is a battleground, where the Israeli Prime Minister runs military operations to kill civilians in order to extend his political life. The argument that the current war is about providing security for Israel is far from convincing, yet the proponents of that argument never talk about the security of Palestinians nor the Palestinians' right to self-defence. The situation in Gaza and the West Bank

clearly demonstrates who needs security and the right to self-defence most.

Israel commits serious war crimes. Those responsible must be held accountable to restore faith in international law and the rules-based order. We are seriously concerned about the reports that Israel's war crimes in Gaza may amount to genocide. We welcome the application before the International Court of Justice concerning Israel's violations of its obligations under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It is a timely attempt to protect the Palestinian people against further harm.

We also underline the need to avoid the geographical escalation of the conflict. Türkiye consistently warned about the risk of spillover. Today that risk has become reality. Recent incidents in the Red Sea, Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Pakistan are very alarming. This escalation has the potential to turn into a geostrategic vortex from which no one could easily escape. I urge Israel and its supporters to seek a diplomatic solution while we can still achieve it. The ongoing war in Gaza and beyond cannot lead to peace or submission. We have a historical responsibility to stop this war. The Security Council, time and again, has failed in maintaining international peace and security. An immediate and permanent ceasefire, the release of all captives by both sides and a continuous flow of humanitarian assistance to Gaza are musts on the road to peace.

To that end, we need Israel to comply with all the requirements of peace and security. We need a unified Palestinian leadership to achieve the national quest for the dignity, independence and sovereignty of that resilient nation. We all know by now that temporary measures will not work. The scenarios for the day after should not be about who will govern Gaza — the future of Gaza is up to the Palestinians and the Palestinians only. The only day-after question that needs our attention is: how will we be able to safeguard a just and lasting peace based on the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders? The focus should be on the creation of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. To that end, I would like to reiterate our call for the establishment of a guarantorship mechanism that monitors and ensures peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Most of the members of the international community agree on the urgency of a ceasefire, humanitarian assistance and the two-State solution. But there is no

effective mechanism for getting Israel to implement that. The continuation of the current situation in Gaza will further undermine the very fundamental principles and moral values of the international system. Therefore, we should act now to stop the erosion of those values, which we will need for the future of humankind.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Amir-Abdollahian (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this timely meeting.

We have all gathered today in the Security Council in a situation in which the occupying and apartheid regime of Israel is not observing any red line in the genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. The United States, as the practical supporter of the Israeli regime in its crimes, has prevented this body from effectively fulfilling its inherent duties in stopping the overt genocide of a nation and establishing a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

On the one hand, the United States repeatedly expresses its grave concern about the spillover of tensions in the region, and yet it continues to give its full support to the Israeli regime's war machine and is even violating the sovereignty of Yemen and expanding the scope of the conflict. The United States must bear the responsibility for the consequences of its actions. Instead of calling on others to exercise restraint, it must compel the Israeli regime to stop the war and extract itself from the trap that the Israeli regime has set in order to drag the United States into direct conflict.

We believe that the future of Palestine belongs to all Palestinians. I stress that the killing of innocent civilians, especially women and children, must stop immediately. War is not the solution. Security cannot be achieved by resorting to the use of force and committing the crime of genocide in Gaza. The killing of civilians in Gaza and the West Bank cannot continue until the so-called total destruction of Hamas is achieved, because that time will never come and because the Palestinian nation's will of steel has never once weakened in the past 80 years. The Security Council must therefore fulfil its legal responsibility under the Charter by ending its prolonged inaction and adopting a decisive resolution on the matter.

I want to emphasize that it is essential to completely lift the inhumane blockade of Gaza and ensure

unrestricted delivery of humanitarian aid to all areas in both north and south. I also want to underscore how urgent it is to facilitate the return of the people of Gaza to their own areas, to resettle the displaced and homeless and to enable help from the international community for rebuilding infrastructure. In that context, we support South Africa's recent action to bring a case at the International Court of Justice. Various political ideas for the future of Palestine are being discussed today. Whatever ideas are under consideration, the leaders of Palestinian groups and the Palestinian people should have the right to choose their own fate.

The United States and the United Kingdom have made a strategic mistake with their military attacks on Yemen, which risk further expanding the scope of the war in the region. While we all believe that maritime safety and security are vital for global trade and energy security, security is an interconnected concept. The course of developments shows that stopping the genocide in Gaza is the main key to restoring security in the region.

Netanyahu seeks his own political life in war, and the survival of the Israeli regime relies on regional crises and a potential spillover of the conflict. The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly supports restoring security in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon.

Mr. Bouhabib (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Despite the difficult circumstances, I am pleased that we are meeting today in this international forum to discuss and exchange views about the situation in the Middle East, thanks to the invitation of France, which along with other friendly countries is constantly striving to promote security and stability in the region.

I would like to take this opportunity to express Lebanon's deep appreciation for the role and sacrifices of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). My country appreciates its work and contribution to establishing security and stability in southern Lebanon. The problems currently facing the region reaffirm the important and constructive role of UNIFIL, and of the United Nations as a safe haven for small States such as Lebanon, in protecting our sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

We are meeting today more than 75 years after the beginning of the biggest crisis in the Middle

East — the establishment of Israel on the land of Palestine and the displacement of more than half of the Palestinian population to neighbouring countries. We have continued to seek out temporary solutions from time to time whenever the conflict has intensified, most recently in response to the events that the region has been witnessing since 7 October of last year. From generation to generation, and for many decades, our region has enjoyed neither peace nor security. The conflict has created a heavy legacy of hatred, bitterness and increasing violence that has been passed down from one generation to the next.

What can we ask ourselves in the light of the current explosive situation in the Middle East? Have we learned anything from the lessons of the past? Is it not time to admit that we cannot cancel one another out? When will we start working on a sustainable solution to this conflict? Will we leave it to future generations? The continued wars, grudges and woes have shown for at least the past 75 years that we must find a definitive solution to the Palestinian question, because it is the key to peace and the gateway to security in the Middle East.

From this Chamber, I call on the wise and rational people of the world to put pressure on Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories so that we can live together and recognize one another, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, which emerged from the summit of Arab leaders in Beirut in 2002. The Peace Initiative proposed recognizing Israel in exchange for ending the occupation and implementing a two-State solution based on the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. There can be no sustainable peace without justice for the Palestinians. Half-measures and temporary settlements breed further wars and destruction.

We are meeting here today as Israel continues to threaten to keep waging its grotesque war, without any clear political horizon or vision for sustainable peace. It is turning Gaza into ashes in order to eliminate Hamas, but if that were achieved it would only breed more extremist groups, ever more determined to erase Israel from existence. Is the killing of more than 25,000 Palestinians in Gaza, most of them women, children and elderly persons, not enough? That is more than 1 per cent of Gaza's population, which is equivalent to 3.5 million American citizens or 4.5 million Europeans. How will giving Israel *carte blanche* to blindly kill

people reflect on the image of the West in our world, as the West continues to call for respect for human rights? In the eyes of many peoples around the world, the West has become the biggest loser in its defence of human rights after it turned a blind eye to the mass killing of women, children and elderly persons in Gaza.

We are following with grave concern the escalation in the Red Sea and the threats posed to freedom of navigation, the global economy and regional peace and security. We are also following with concern the situations in Iraq, Syria and specifically south Lebanon. We dread any miscalculation that would drag the entire region back into the Stone Age, while high-level Israeli officials continue to threaten Lebanon. We are tirelessly trying to prevent that war, and we urge all stakeholders not to fall into Israel's trap, which seeks to expand it. In our view, such a war would be unprecedented in terms of geographic expansion, multiple fronts and cross-border involvement. We fear that the consequences of such a war will not spare any place in the Middle East. Such a war would not be a walk in the park for the Israelis, as some war supporters believe for their own political reasons.

As much as we fear witnessing the domino effect of that conflict in the Middle East and especially in Lebanon, we also see a historic opportunity for sustainable calm along the southern Lebanese border. Lebanon does not want war. We have never sought war, and we will never seek it, because we have endured a 15-year war and learned from its tragedies and scourges. Israel's wars and invasions led to destruction and the death and injury of thousands of people. We therefore today choose peace and stability, as it is the shortest and best way towards prosperity.

Resolution 1701 (2006) had ensured relative stability since the end of the war in July that year. Until 7 October 2023, no military operations were carried out to threaten regional peace and security along Israel's withdrawal line from southern Lebanon in 2000, known as the Blue Line. However, the war in Gaza shook the relative stability in southern Lebanon and led to the displacement of tens of thousands of Lebanese people from southern towns to safe northern regions.

Our vision to achieve sustainable security and stability in southern Lebanon is based on the comprehensive and full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) as part of a comprehensive solution with clear international guarantees, thus promoting

comprehensive and sustainable security and stability. The following should be observed.

First, the recognition of the international southern border delineated in 1923 between Lebanon and Palestine, which was recognized in the truce signed between Lebanon and Israel in Rhodes, Greece, in 1949 under the auspices of the United Nations, and the full and explicit commitment by both countries to those borders. That requires an agreement on all the remaining 13 disputed border points, following the initial agreement on 7 points, under the supervision of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). That will lead to Israel's withdrawal to its internationally recognized borders, starting from point B1 in Ras Al Naqoura, which is within the Lebanese border, towards the outskirts of the town of Al-Mari, which is in part an urban expansion of the town of Al-Ghajar. Israel should also fully withdraw its forces from Sheba'a Farms and the Kafr Shuba hills.

Secondly, Israel's air, land and sea violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and internationally recognized borders must end once and for all. There have been nearly 30,000 such violations since 2006. Israel must not use Lebanese airspace to target Syrian territories.

Thirdly, the United Nations and friendly countries can support the Lebanese Government in extending its authority over all Lebanese territories by strengthening the Lebanese Armed Forces, by promoting the Lebanese army's deployment south of the Litani River, and by providing all necessary equipment to the army in cooperation with UNIFIL so that there can be no weapon that has not been approved by Lebanon's Government and no authority beyond that of the Lebanese Government.

Fourthly, it is necessary to facilitate the safe and dignified return from border areas of persons who were displaced after 7 October.

Fifthly, the war on Gaza must end so as to facilitate the implementation of that vision. A mechanism must be swiftly established to find a long-term solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

In conclusion, let us give peace a true chance before it is too late. We have had enough of wars, conflicts, killing and destruction. Let us stop working on piecemeal solutions that have led only to the tragedies we are living today. What happened on 7 October did not happen in a vacuum. Those tragedies will only

happen again, but they will be even more violent and terrible if we do not reach a comprehensive, just and lasting solution whereby Israel implements all of the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Despite the ongoing painful events in the Middle East, we have a historic opportunity today to establish peace, security and prosperity. Let us seize it, since such a historic opportunity may not come again in the foreseen future. If we fail to do so, what happened on 7 October and prior to that date will occur again, but will be worse, unless Israel accepts that the Palestinian people will not vanish, disappear or even drown in the sea. Their State will inevitably be established.

Let us save time and suffering for both sides and pave the way towards a better future for the peoples of our region. Let us rid the entire world from the consequences of that conflict for generations to come.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway.

Mr. Eide (Norway): I thank France for convening us today at this crucially important moment for the Middle East.

My thoughts are with the people of Gaza, who are not only fleeing bombardments, fighting and military confrontations, but who are also suffering from increasing malnutrition, hunger and lack of medical facilities and clean water. It is a deep humanitarian crisis — one of the most dramatic in recent times, as we heard from the Secretary-General and all the United Nations agencies involved in the process. My thoughts are with them.

My thoughts are also with the people of Israel, who suffered the horrible, heinous attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023, which included the use of sexual and other types of violence. My thoughts are with those being held hostage and their relatives, and I call for the hostages' immediate release.

My thoughts are also with the people of the West Bank, who are experiencing increasing violence, including settler violence and greater danger to their lives. Nothing would be more tragic in our pursuit of a peaceful path than to also see a collapse in the West Bank. Last, but not least, my thoughts are with all the United Nations workers and all of the people in the humanitarian community who are struggling to continue providing services, a shocking number of whom have lost their lives.

International humanitarian law has to be respected. Violations are unacceptable. If we start accepting violations of clear rules of humanitarian law, the rules will lose their meaning and the rules will be harder to uphold in future conflicts. And those rules have to be upheld equally across similar situations.

Norway was among the first Western countries to call for a sustained, enduring humanitarian ceasefire. We continue to do so, and I am happy to see that more countries are coming along. We call for the radical stepping up of humanitarian efforts, not only with regard to volume. I echo the Secretary-General in pointing out that we cannot simply count trucks, but must also look at the content, the efficiency of delivery and access to that aid throughout the whole territory of Gaza, as well as better coordination.

As many today have done, Norway welcomes the appointment of Sigrid Kaag in her new, crucially important and really difficult role. These are imperatives, and we must get them done. They are a prerequisite for any further action. But I also agree with all those who say that these are not solutions in themselves — they are prerequisites; they are necessary; they are imperatives, but the solution must be political. The solution requires that we return to the political track, which Norway has been trying to support for more than three decades after the Oslo process. As Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, we need a political track towards Palestinian statehood.

Norway recognizes the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to have their own State, not only in theory, but also in practice. We believe that the quest for a Palestinian State is good for the Palestinian people, but also for the people of Israel, because we believe that it is the only route in which both communities and societies can live in peace with themselves and each other. We underline, as we have always done, that Israel has the right to necessary security guarantees, just as the Palestinian people do.

There must be a united Palestinian governance of the old territory of Gaza and of the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority. In order to get there, we also have to make sure that we strengthen and help further develop the Palestinian Authority. Norway has made itself available to see if we can be helpful when it comes to the transfer of money to the Palestinian Authority — because before it can be strengthened, it must be supported in order to survive this terribly difficult situation. That is important for us. Alongside

efforts to coordinate with others on the humanitarian track, we need legitimate, credible institutions to run the entire Palestinian territory in future. I want to commend the good work carried out by several ministers, many of whom are in this Chamber, from Arab countries and other Organization of Islamic Cooperation countries in trying to develop a comprehensive plan, because I think it is very important that we think about the immediate future, the near future and the longer future.

We cannot skip any of those steps because we need to have a credible vision and horizon towards Palestinian Statehood. Norway believes that paving a path to Palestinian Statehood should and must be connected to the idea of a broader regional peace and a broader regional settlement, with the necessary and legitimate security guarantees for both Israel and Palestine.

The founding fathers of the United Nations set up the Security Council to deal with exactly these kinds of issues and challenges. I strongly call on all the members of the Council to act and to take that responsibility seriously in the midst of this deep crisis, where we see immense suffering in Gaza, terror attacks on Israel, the rising tide of violence in the Middle East and the risk of spreading to the Red Sea, to Lebanon and to the entire region.

This is also an opportunity for the international community to come together and stop the immediate fighting, deal with the legitimate security concerns of all sides, help build a Palestinian State and bring us all to a two-State solution, which would solve many of the challenges of Israel, Palestine and the region.

I therefore call on the members to take on the responsibility that was entrusted in them and the countries we voted for when we elected the members of the Security Council. This is truly an opportunity not to be missed.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia.

Mrs. Marsudi (Indonesia): I am here today, for the third time in three months, to join the Council's debate on Palestine in order to reaffirm Indonesia's unwavering commitment to stand with Palestine, to declare that Indonesia will not rest until we see justice and dignity restored for the Palestinian people. I am also here to remind Council members that they have a great mandate to maintain international peace and security and to not tolerate wars, especially genocide.

The Charter of the United Nations is clear: Security Council resolutions are binding and must be enforced. My question today is — how many resolutions have been adopted on Palestine? How many are being enforced? Where must Palestine go when, for decades, the Council fails to act on its own resolutions while Israel kills Palestinians with impunity?

I once again urge Council members to stop the everyday horrors faced by the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Is the death of more than 25,000 people, with increasing numbers dying from hunger and the freezing cold, including babies and children, too little for us to act? We all have the responsibility to uphold international humanitarian law, without exception, in the face of the situation in Gaza.

On 18 January Prime Minister Netanyahu openly declared that he would not allow a Palestinian State to exist. Indonesia strongly rejects that statement, which is unacceptable and confirms Israel's ultimate goal to wipe Palestine from the world map. Will the Council remain silent in the face of such an intention? The threat of a full-blown war in the Middle East is a real and present danger.

In that context, I emphasize several points.

First, we demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire, which will be a game changer for everything. Most importantly, it will provide space to address the humanitarian situation in Gaza and to begin work on post-conflict reconstruction and the process for a two-State solution. At the same time, it is critical to support the efforts of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza to pave the way for the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to Gaza.

Secondly, Palestine must be granted immediate and full membership to the United Nations. That is essential to starting fair and balanced work on the two-State solution and to stop Israel's brutal aggression.

Thirdly, the flow of arms to Israel must stop. Every weapon sent to Israel can be used to kill innocent civilians.

Israel must be held accountable for its actions, including the atrocities committed in Gaza. No nation is above the law. Next month, Indonesia will present its oral statement before the International Court of Justice and request an advisory opinion from the Court, seized of the matter under the mandate of the General

Assembly. Indonesia will take all possible avenues to support Palestine.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria.

Mr. Schallenberg (Austria): In a region that has seen more than its fair share of suffering, the last 109 days have brought a new dimension of devastation for Israelis traumatized by the slaughter, torture and sexual violence of 7 October and who still fear for the more than 130 innocent hostages held captive in Gaza, among them an Austrian citizen. The same holds true for Jews around the world who are facing rising antisemitism and for the Palestinians in Gaza who have lost countless loved ones and who lack shelter, food and medical aid. All of this is heartbreaking. Hamas's barbaric terror attacks have brought Gaza and the whole region to the edge of the abyss.

Let me be clear. No country on Earth would tolerate such a murderous band of extremists in its neighbourhood and we should all acknowledge that. Israel has not only a right but a duty to defend its people. At the same time, there can be no doubt that much more needs to be done to protect civilians in Gaza. More humanitarian aid must reach those in need. In the end, that will add to Israel's security, not detract from it. As a country with a special historic responsibility, Israel's security is our guiding principle. Hamas is a security threat to Israelis and Palestinians alike, just as Iran's proxies in Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq are. A resolute and successful fight against terrorism is essential to Israel's security. It is as essential as not sowing the seeds for the next generation of terror. But I must also make it clear that settlements, settler violence, provocations at the holy sites and talk of forced displacement undermine security as well, and we categorically reject that.

They say that the Middle East is a cruel place for optimists. And yet I still believe that peace is possible. Normalization delivers a political and economic dividend for everyone. Arab partners should not allow themselves to be taken hostage by Hamas. Israel's long-term security will be best guaranteed by two States living side by side in peace. The Palestinian Authority needs to finally live up to the rightful expectations of its own people. And we as the international community also need to do more by bringing home all hostages, easing the humanitarian suffering in Gaza, jointly fighting terrorism and laying the foundations for a life in peace and dignity for all, Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.

Mr. Hasan (Malaysia): First and foremost, Malaysia would like to thank your delegation, Madam President, for convening this debate, and the Secretary-General for his briefing this afternoon.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Malaysia also congratulates and welcomes the new members of the Council to our shared responsibility for upholding peace and security across the globe.

Just last week, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths said that Gaza is a stain on our collective conscience, and that our inaction would be a permanent black mark for humankind. Indeed, the Council's inability to call for a ceasefire is partly responsible for what has now been more than 100 days of carnage in Gaza — more than 100 days of children being orphaned, of mothers and fathers becoming parents without children, of streets becoming graveyards and of Palestinians being called “the children of darkness” by the regime that is raining down bombs on their homes and hospitals.

More than 23,000 Palestinians have been killed since this crisis began. On average, more than 250 Palestinians are being killed every day, which is more than 10 murders every hour. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as many as 1.9 million people, or nearly 85 per cent of Gaza's population, have been forcibly displaced. Malaysia is appalled that Israel has been allowed to carry out what can only be described as indiscriminate bombing. Homes, shelters, evacuation routes and even medical centres have been bombed. Those who have not been killed by bombs or bullets face the prospect of disease and starvation. They are being denied food, water, medicine, electricity, fuel and other basic needs. Gaza is on the brink of a human-made famine, and its population is being starved as a method of warfare. It is a fact that those are war crimes. Israel has made sure that no one is safe, not even children. The crisis has introduced a most unwelcome new term into the English language. The acronym WCNSF stands for “wounded child, no surviving family”. That is used to describe what is now an everyday sight in Gaza.

Malaysia demands an immediate ceasefire and condemns the forced displacement of Palestinians. The

right to live in peace and security is fundamental, and we urge all parties to respect that basic human right. We call for United Nations agencies and aid organizations to be given access so that they can provide essential aid without delay and hindrance.

Malaysia demands accountability for Israel's clear violations of international law. We welcome and support the decision by South Africa to institute proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice. The lack of accountability for Israel's war crimes undermines the legitimacy of international law and the efforts to end the illegal occupation of Palestine. With regard to upholding international law and the rights of the oppressed, on 23 July 2023 Malaysia, along with 56 other countries, submitted a written statement for the Court's advisory opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's ongoing violations in the occupied Palestinian territory. Malaysia will now also participate in the public hearing to be held on 19 February. We condemn Israel's apartheid practices and persecution of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories. As a Member State of the United Nations, Israel must respect and implement the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. The Council cannot allow Israel to behave as an exception to the rule.

The international community must make scaling up all necessary amenities for the Palestinian people a priority. Access to basic services is a human right that should not be compromised. Israel's collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza is illegal, immoral and must cease immediately. Our position is clear. There should be no reduction of the Palestinian territory. Any attempt to grab Palestinians' land violates international law and further undermines the prospects for peaceful coexistence. Malaysia calls for the full and swift implementation of resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023). In October and December of last year, we joined an overwhelming majority of Member States in voting for two General Assembly resolutions (resolutions ES-10/21 and ES-10/22) demanding the protection of civilians and the upholding of legal, as well as humanitarian, obligations in relation to Gaza. The majority has spoken and their demands should not be ignored.

Malaysia welcomes the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, pursuant to resolution 2720 (2023). We hope that Ms. Kaag, who has vast experience, especially in Lebanon, will be given the

support she needs to effectively discharge her mandate and alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. We encourage collaboration among the parties concerned for a just and lasting solution to the bloodshed.

We are witnessing a great historical irony in Gaza. The State of Israel was born from the horrors of the Second World War. And yet, for the past 75 years, it has been inflicting that same deliberate destruction on the Palestinian people and is now pursuing it to its premeditated end. That illegal and immoral pogrom of total annihilation should lead to a single decision by members of the Council. It is time to recognize what Israel has been doing as genocide. And it is time to accept the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

No nation and no people should be made to suffer the prolonged indignity of being mere observers of their own slow, painful and humiliating demise. In the United Nations of all places Palestine should be given the right to face its occupiers, not as second-class citizens but as equals with a legitimate voice and an equal vote. We have failed them for far too long. We must stop this charade.

The Palestinians deserve nothing less than a free and independent Palestine, on the basis of a two-State solution, based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Malaysia will continue to do all that is within its means and within its rights to bring an end to the injustice and illegality. The State of Palestine must be admitted as the 194th Member of the United Nations. We urge the Council to act now. The Council must take united and decisive action to stop the war, save civilian lives, end collective punishment and stop the killing now.

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

Mr. El-Khereiji (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Republic of France for its concrete efforts during its presidency of the Security Council and for its initiative to convene this meeting on the situation in the Middle East. I also commend the Secretary-General and the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza for their efforts and constructive role.

The Security Council is meeting once again as the difficult circumstances and the bitter reality worsen in Gaza with the escalation of tension in the region due to the continued Israeli aggression. Victims are falling

owing to the indiscriminate and widespread bombing of the Israeli war machine, which has taken the entire Gaza Strip — its neighbourhoods, homes, hospitals, places of worship and United Nations buildings — as legitimate targets. Approximately 30,000 people have been killed as a result of the escalation, and the death toll is increasing by the day. How can this tragedy continue without serious action being taken to end it and without concrete steps being taken to stop the mass killing and abuse of unarmed civilians in Gaza?

The effects of the brutal war have become clear. We have a shared responsibility to contain its regional and international effects. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has previously warned about the expansion of the conflict and its impact on regional and international security and stability. The military operations in the Red Sea and in the Republic of Yemen are a cause for concern. We stress the need to take the necessary measures to contain the repercussions of the crisis, which affects neighbouring countries and international peace and security.

The priority now is to alleviate the human suffering and put an end to the military operations in Palestine. No measures to enhance regional security or deter threats can replace addressing the root causes of the Palestinian crisis and reaching a just and lasting solution.

In that regard, the Council, which has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, must take immediate action to bring about a ceasefire, establish peace, alleviate the suffering and enable the Palestinian people to preserve their dignity and enjoy their legitimate rights. How can the Palestinian people hope for a better future, a decent life and development under the yoke of the occupation and under the continuous fire of the Israeli war machine?

General Assembly resolution ES-10/22, which calls for an immediate ceasefire, confirms the existence of an international position in favour of ending the aggression and saving civilians in Gaza.

We strongly reject linking the war to the pretext of self-defence. We also reject the forced displacement measures against the people of Gaza and the racist, incendiary and irresponsible statements of the occupation authorities. We condemn the unacceptable disregard for the lives of the Palestinian people, as if the protection of civilians were the exclusive right of one people and not another. All of that fuels acts of

violence, hatred and extremism in the region and makes it possible for the cycle of violence to be periodically repeated without a willingness to engage positively in the near future.

My country has always sought and will continue to seek peace. We will spare no effort to bring peace, security and development to the region. From that standpoint, we have repeatedly called for the revival of the Middle East peace process and commitment to the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and the Security Council resolutions.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia categorically rejects violations of international humanitarian law by any party and under any pretext. We condemn the targeting of civilians anywhere and call upon the Council to take a firm position to oblige Israel to respect international law and put an end to the suffering.

The continuation of military operations will lead only to the bloodshed of more innocent people. The lack of an agreement on a unified position regarding a ceasefire and the delay in implementing adopted resolutions threaten to further damage the credibility of the Security Council. The escalatory attitude of the Israeli occupying forces fuels the tensions and threatens to undermine international efforts to promote stability in the region and find peaceful solutions. The continuation of the status quo will lead the region from one conflict to another and undermine the interests, security and stability of the entire region, including Israel.

The peace to which we aspire will be achieved only through the creation of a credible and irreversible path towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, guaranteeing the rights and dignity of the Palestinian people, paving the way towards coexistence, common security, stability and development for all.

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

Sheikh Al-Sabah (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I extend to you, Madam President, and to your friendly country, the Republic of France, my congratulations on your presidency of the Security Council during the month of January and wish you success in facilitating the work of the Council to strengthen international law, in line with the purposes, principles and values of the Charter of the United Nations.

In the light of exceptional and catastrophic developments, we meet again today at the United Nations, which is responsible for maintaining international peace and security. Nonetheless, it has become clear that what we have witnessed in the Gaza Strip — unspeakable crimes and human suffering that has shocked our conscience — has been caused by the Security Council's failure to live up to its political, legal and humanitarian responsibilities. That is the result of practising double standards, as the Council has failed to take a principled position in the face of the Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip.

The Security Council stood idly by while occupation forces continued their gross violations of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as well as resolutions of international legitimacy, including resolutions of the Council, which was also unable to adopt a resolution demanding the immediate cessation of the criminal Israeli acts. That is a direct result of narrow geopolitical interests prevailing over the importance and centrality of applying the law to everyone, without exception.

The Gaza Strip has been subject to collective punishment, indiscriminate bombing, the killing of innocent civilians — whose number has now exceeded 25,000, including children and women — the destruction of infrastructure, the demolition of homes, the targeting of journalists and relief workers, the killing of more than 150 United Nations staff members and the continued targeting of hospitals and places of worship. All of that is inconsistent with international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which we all endorsed when the Organization was established to defend the rights of humankind.

Today we have come to the Security Council to defend our brotherly Palestinian people and international law, as a whole. We have no choice but to resort to international law and the United Nations Charter to preserve our dignity and rights as individuals and our security and stability, as Member States of the Organization.

In this Chamber, the State of Kuwait reaffirms its steadfast and historical position in support of Palestinian rights and stresses that the main reason for the conflict is an occupation, with no end in sight. If we want sustainable peace and security, the Palestinian question must be resolved, in accordance with the agreed terms of reference and international resolutions, in particular the relevant Security Council

resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, to ensure that the brotherly Palestinian people can enjoy all their legitimate political rights and their right to self-determination and an independent, sovereign Palestinian State is established, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of 4 June 1967.

The State of Kuwait reiterates its strong condemnation and denunciation of the continued blatant aggression against the Gaza Strip by the Israeli occupation forces. That devastating war must end immediately. Humanitarian and relief aid must reach wounded Palestinians without any obstacle, to ensure respect for international law and accountability for crimes against humanity, which were committed and continue to be committed against the defenceless Palestinian people. In that context, my country welcomes the step taken by the Republic of South Africa, which filed a case with the International Court of Justice against the Israeli occupation for committing the crime of genocide against the brotherly Palestinian people.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait once again calls on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and provide international protection for the Palestinian people. We appeal to the international community to support the resilient Palestinian people on their land. We warn against any attempts to displace them and exacerbate the issue of refugees, whose rights must be maintained. The passage of time and waves of forced displacement cannot deprive the brotherly Palestinian people of their right to return to their homeland.

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

Mr. Martínez Belío (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): The conflict and tensions in the Middle East are continuing to worsen despite our efforts, and we must therefore redouble those efforts. The international community cannot resign itself to innocent Palestinian civilians continuing to die, to the humanitarian situation in Gaza continuing to deteriorate and to Israeli hostages and displaced persons being unable to return home. Women and children make up 70 per cent of those killed in Gaza.

Our priority is to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza that enables the release of hostages, the provision of humanitarian relief for the population and the stabilization of the situation in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in southern Lebanon and northern Israel. In resolutions 2720 (2023) and 2712 (2023), the Council set out the parameters for our humanitarian

work, in which the United Nations will play a central role. I would like to call upon all parties to cooperate actively in that regard. I would also like to pay heartfelt tribute to the extraordinary work being done by all United Nations personnel in Gaza, some of whom have even sacrificed their lives.

Spain tripled its humanitarian and cooperation funds to address this crisis, providing €48 million in 2023. We will continue our development cooperation with Palestine, while providing greater support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, humanitarian agencies and the Palestinian Authority, which represents the Palestinian people and is our partner for peace.

Since the outset, we have said that Israel has the right to object to the cowardly terrorist attack of 7 October 2023, which we condemn without reserve. It must do so with full respect for international humanitarian law and international law. A distinction must be drawn between terrorist targets and civilians. Hamas has shown that it is no more than a terrorist group and that it cannot have a governing role in Gaza, but innocent civilians cannot pay for its crimes.

Experience has shown that the only true guarantee of security for Israel is the re-establishment of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza. At the same time, the best way to revitalize the Palestinian Authority so that it assumes that responsibility is to achieve a political solution to the conflict. The Palestinian people have the right to their own sovereign, viable State, with East Jerusalem at its capital.

The international community must assume its responsibility and provide the context within which to achieve the two-State solution, without further delay. To that end, Spain has proposed convening an international conference as soon as possible, and 84 countries have formally endorsed this idea at the highest level — the members of the European Union, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

To achieve this agenda for peace, we must prevent the crisis from spreading in the region. In Lebanon, a full implementation of all elements of resolution 1701 (2006) would provide a clear road map, and Spain has been firmly committed to it since the outset. We call upon all regional and international stakeholders to take an active and constructive role to reduce tensions and prevent further bloodshed.

The international community must be consistent throughout the process. The value of human life and respect for international norms and principles must be universal and be affirmed equally in all international crises and in all circumstances. The developments that we have experienced since 7 October cannot reoccur. The region needs more than ever before to turn a new page, based on the implementation of the resolutions of the Security Council, the achievement of the two-State solution and mutual recognition as a path to comprehensive peace. Out of the urgency to bring an end to the current crisis and to prevent a spillover, a fresh mobilization, this time a definitive one for peace, must emerge.

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

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): We have all heard today how the scale of suffering in Gaza competes with some of the darkest periods in our history. This moment can be an inflection point, or it can be the point of no return.

We are seeing the conflict spill over in the Middle East. The Houthis are holding maritime trade hostage by their opportunistic attacks in the Red Sea. Militias and other armed groups are sabre-rattling, risking increased instability in our region. A little more than a week ago, the world was engrossed in the proceedings at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. That such a case has been initiated and has generated such international interest and support underlines the gravity of the situation.

The United Arab Emirates would like to define three steps to bring these crises in the Middle East to an end.

First, as has been said, we need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. The overwhelming majority of the international community has called for this repeatedly, and it is time that the minority view stop obstructing it from happening. We cannot wait another 100 days. The intolerable effects of the ongoing Israeli bombardment of Gaza have resulted in what the United Nations has described as the worst humanitarian crisis in the history of the Organization. More than 25,000 people have died so far in Gaza, in addition to the 1,000 Israelis who died in the 7 October attack. But today Gaza is also being starved. One in four people are now experiencing famine-like conditions. The humanitarian imperative at this moment must be our top priority, in

addition to the ceasefire, so that life-saving aid can enter at scale and hostages can be allowed out and safely returned to their families. The United Arab Emirates will not cease calling for such a humanitarian ceasefire.

Secondly, and even as we continue to push for a ceasefire, shorter truces would enable urgent humanitarian aid and services to reach those in need, in parallel with the release of hostages. The truce at the end of November enabled additional assistance and humanitarian activities in Gaza, and we need more of them to start tomorrow. Finding pathways to similar agreements is essential. Resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) must be fully implemented. That includes ensuring that the United Nations Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza is able to fulfil her crucial mandate, including through the establishment of a United Nations mechanism. Ms. Sigrid Kaag has hit the ground running, and we urge the United Nations and its Member States to give her their full support, including for any recommendations that she makes to the Council in her first report next week.

We also stress the need to end the so-called dual-use restrictions that are seeing trucks carrying basic medical supplies being turned away. Humanitarians describe this as a cruel policy that inflicts enormous suffering on the population in Gaza. We need to see the Karam Abu-Salim/Kerem Shalom border crossing fully opened to both humanitarian flow and commercial trade. The opening and facilitation of new routes as well as the reopening of the port of Ashdod, the removal of restrictions on the movement of humanitarian workers and full guarantees of safety for those accessing and distributing aid must all be prioritized.

Thirdly, any resolution to this conflict must be anchored in a two-State solution. The United Arab Emirates will not support a return to the failed status quo. Before all of this, a two-State solution was the endpoint that we envisioned our diplomatic efforts would lead us to. Today it must be our starting point. On both sides, the future must be led by those who speak responsibly, who understand that peace demands dignity and equality for both peoples and who will begin negotiations on that basis. There are those who resist a two-State solution — even now — without a viable alternative. We ask what they propose as a just and sustainable path to peace in the absence of such a solution. What is needed is a valid, defined, benchmarked and agreed-upon way towards a two-State solution, and one that includes a workable governance structure. It is the only way to

end this conflict sustainably and prevent the cycle of violence that has been inflicted on both Palestinians and Israeli from forever being repeated. It is not only a moral and political duty to end the war on Gaza but also a strategic imperative if there is to be any hope of a prosperous future for our region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Abdelaziz (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to read out a statement on behalf of Mr. Ahmed About Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, who was unable to participate in this important meeting owing to an emergency.

“I would like to begin by expressing the appreciation of the League of Arab States for France’s initiative to elevate this meeting to the ministerial level, and by thanking the Ministers and deputies for their participation. I also thank Secretary-General Guterres for his strong statement today, especially following the alarming deterioration of the situation in our Arab region.

“That situation has been the result of undeterred and unchecked Israeli arrogance and recklessness, and of the Security Council’s inability — all the warnings notwithstanding — to create a political horizon for resolving the Palestinian question and providing the defenceless Palestinian people with the necessary protection from years and years of blatant Israeli violations. They include Israel’s violations of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), concerning settlements. Those violations, which have been confirmed and documented by reports of the United Nations and human rights organizations, led to the explosive situation that erupted on 7 October and subsequently to Israel’s fiercest and most violent illegal military operation against defenceless Palestinian civilians. That operation has now lasted more than 100 days, with devastating humanitarian repercussions. According to many estimates, it amounts to apartheid and genocide.

“The humanitarian tragedy in Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories is worsening every day, compounded by the use of the veto power by some Council members in order to prevent the adoption of resolutions calling for a ceasefire. It raises deep concerns among the 153 countries, from

all groups and orientations, that have formally affirmed in the General Assembly their demand for an immediate ceasefire. Today those countries are wondering if the rules of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law apply to Israel, the occupying Power, in the same way that they apply to other States Members of the Organization. They are wondering how long it will take for Israel to be held accountable for its flagrant violations against the Palestinian people. Will the double standards practiced by the Council and its sharp geopolitical polarization prevent the application of international law to Israel in order to protect narrow electoral interests, on the one hand, and to enable some extremist leaders to escape punishment, on the other?

“The depth and gravity of this crisis are compounded by Israel’s relentless attempts to exploit the weaknesses in the Council’s performance and expand the scope of the conflict regionally by bombing Syrian airports and attacking Syrian territories; by carrying out attacks and assassinations in southern Lebanon and relentlessly trying to drag other parties in the region from outside the Arab family into military conflict; and to top all that off by accusing those who criticize its illegal practices of being antisemitic. That has had a damaging effect on all the main organs and figures of the United Nations, including the Council, the Secretary-General and senior officials.

“At this point, I would like to put on record the Arab League’s great appreciation of the humanitarian relief efforts of the United Nations and its partners. We sympathize with the families of the victims who have fallen doing their noble duty. Despite the reported differences between the views of major international leaders supporting Israel and those of the extreme right-wing Israeli leadership on Israel’s strategies and practices in its blatant war on Gaza, the Palestinian people and other Arab countries, we have not seen any concomitant change in the Council’s official positions. Considering that the Israeli escalation will expand the scope of the military conflict in the region in a manner that threatens to result in the outbreak of a new regional war, the Council and the countries of the region will face harsh choices, especially with the increasing heavy losses on both sides and their catastrophic humanitarian repercussions.

“In that regard, the Council must realize that the unlimited support that Israel enjoys from key Powers in the Council will only continue to succeed in creating a growing sense internationally that it is inevitable that Israel should be subject to international judicial accountability and those involved in its extreme right-wing Government to international criminal prosecution — as has been demonstrated by the Arab, African, Islamic and international support for the unprecedented initiatives by the General Assembly and South Africa and other countries to turn to the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court in order to see Israel and its officials prosecuted for those violations. The civilized international community, which believes in the international collective security system, is eagerly awaiting international judicial bodies to issue ad interim and permanent rulings and orders to accomplish what the Council was unfortunately unable to achieve under the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

“Invoking Article 99 of the Charter, the Secretary-General sent a letter to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/962) conveying a realistic warning, endorsed by the League of Arab States, about the seriousness of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and in the Middle East as a whole. Statements by the Secretary-General to the Council in December 2023 and January 2024 have confirmed the bleak situation resulting from Israel’s military escalation pursuing the delusional goal that Israel can eradicate Palestinian resistance and Hamas. Despite warnings at the regional and international levels, namely, by the European Union, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the African Union, the League of Arab States and other organizations, the Council has failed to adopt a resolution calling for a ceasefire, including even on humanitarian grounds. It has been unable to ensure practical guarantees to facilitate the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid to Palestine.

“At the meeting requested by Algeria on behalf of the League of Arab States on Friday, 12 January (see S/PV.9531), members of the Council were unanimous in their categorical rejection of Israel’s declared intentions to internally displace people of Gaza or to forcibly transfer them to neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, the Council has not taken

any practical measures to stop those plans. That is why the League of Arab States is looking forward to the Council adopting, as soon as possible, a clear resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire that includes specific executive measures to stop the transfer of Palestinians, as part of the full implementation of resolution 2720 (2023) on mechanisms to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid. Such a resolution should include innovative mechanisms to effectively ensure the protection of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights from acts of aggression by the Israeli army and hordes of settlers until they are able to establish their own sovereign and independent State.

“In parallel, the Security Council must confront all Israeli attempts to destroy the two-State solution. Only recently, the Prime Minister told the media last Friday that he was opposed to the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. The Council must respond with practical steps by advocating for the establishment of a clear political horizon to launch direct negotiations between Israel and the State of Palestine in order to pave the way towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. This should also include the convening of a high-level international conference to that end. Immediate action must be taken to ensure that the State of Palestine becomes a full-fledged member of the United Nations.

“In conclusion, the League of Arab States is working tirelessly with the European Union and peace-loving nations in the East and the West to create the necessary political horizon to implement the two-State solution and establish an independent Palestinian State. However, achieving that goal requires an immediate ceasefire. Furthermore, it requires that Israel immediately refrain from provoking Syria and Lebanon with its military operations against the two countries. Israel should stop expanding the conflict at the regional level. It should cease its attempts to alter the geographic and demographic status of Gaza or any other part of the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel must realize that establishing relations with Arab countries and living in peace with them will not be achieved solely based on the so-called Abraham Accords. It will remain contingent on reaching a comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestinian question — the central question for

the entire Arab world — at the core of which lies the establishment of an independent Palestinian State along the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital. Israel must recognize that the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted at the Beirut summit in 2002, remains a just foundation to reach such a settlement if Israel truly wishes to achieve peace, security and stability for all peoples of the Middle East, without exception, including the Israeli people.”

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

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

At the outset, I congratulate you, Madam President, on presiding over this important open debate. I also thank the delegation of France for its efforts during its country’s presidency of the Security Council for this month. I sincerely congratulate the newly elected members of the Council, namely Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia, on beginning their term in the Council. The Arab Group wishes them every success in their endeavours. I also reaffirm the Group’s support for the delegation of Algeria in defending shared Arab issues and building on the productive and tireless work undertaken by the delegation of the United Arab Emirates in the Council.

I would like to welcome all ministers to this meeting. Their presence attests to the importance accorded to the issue of Israel’s ongoing systemic aggression against the brotherly Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip for more than 100 days now. The number of victims of that aggression has reached horrific proportions and is still increasing, owing to the ongoing aggression against the brotherly Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip, which is under siege. It has also led to the systemic destruction of civilian infrastructure and facilities and has exacerbated the suffering of Palestinian civilians, who are facing disastrous humanitarian conditions caused by the aggression. The aggression is also threatening stability and security in the region, as His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres stressed in his briefing. I would like to take this opportunity to once again express the appreciation of the Arab Group for the Secretary-General and his noble efforts and repeated calls for a humanitarian ceasefire.

The Arab Group reaffirms its call for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. We stress the need for the

Security Council to shoulder its main responsibility, namely the maintenance of international peace and security, by ending Israel’s dangerous and ongoing violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The Council must ensure that Israel complies with the international community’s will, as set forth in General Assembly resolution ES-10/22, adopted by the Assembly at its resumed tenth emergency special session by 153 Member States at a time when the Security Council was unable to shoulder its responsibility by adopting a ceasefire resolution. The international community and the Security Council must protect civilians and accelerate the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip, in line with resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023), to respond to the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

The Arab Group reaffirms that ending the humanitarian suffering and disaster that has befallen more than 2 million people in Gaza requires an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. We also stress the need to support the efforts of Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, in shouldering her responsibility. It is important to enable her to carry out her mandate and implement resolution 2720 (2023), including by establishing a United Nations mechanism to facilitate the entry and oversight of humanitarian and relief assistance to the Gaza Strip. The Arab Group also calls on the international community to provide further safe and continuous humanitarian assistance to the brotherly Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip to meet their needs and ease their severe suffering.

The Arab Group categorically rejects the collective punishment policy adopted by the Israeli Government against the people of the Gaza Strip and the other occupied Palestinian territories. We reject any attempt at the forced displacement of Palestinians from their land. We reaffirm our strong condemnation of the most recent extremist and racist statements made by members of the Israeli Government pertaining to the forced displacement of Palestinians outside the Gaza Strip, its reoccupation and the building of settlements there, which constitute an explicit and blatant violation of international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. We condemn Israel’s ongoing illegal practices, including in the West Bank and Al-Quds Al-Sharif, which only undermine the peace process and exacerbate tension, escalation and instability in the region.

The international community should address the crimes perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, in its war against the people in the Gaza Strip. It is targeting civilians and destroying vital infrastructure, places of worship, schools, universities and hospitals. It is cutting off water and energy, starving the people of Gaza and committing other blatant violations of international humanitarian law. We also stress the right of the Palestinian refugees and displaced people to return to their home.

The Arab Group supports South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice against Israel for genocide and the violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948. We commend the principled position taken by South Africa to defend the rights of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian question as an important step towards a ceasefire, accountability and justice. We stress that we will continue to support that noble effort.

The number of victims of the Israeli aggression on the Palestinian people has exceeded 25,000 martyrs, mostly women and children. There are tens of thousands of injured people and dead bodies under the rubble, let alone more than 153 United Nations staff, including from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and no fewer than 117 journalists. The Israeli aggression is destroying civilian infrastructure and facilities in blatant violation of international law and international humanitarian law. An immediate, lasting and comprehensive ceasefire in the Gaza Strip is the only way to save the lives and alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, along with protecting civilians and meeting their humanitarian needs. That is the inherent right of unarmed civilians ensured by international legal instruments and principles of human rights. That is also an ethical, legal and political duty that the international community and the Security Council should shoulder.

Furthermore, the Arab Group condemns the repeated Israeli acts of aggression on the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Lebanese Republic. It is important to safeguard safety and security in the neighbouring countries, so that war does not spill over. The Arab Group believes that the crises in the Middle East are intertwined, and the latest dangerous developments in the occupied Palestinian territories will have grave repercussions on the Middle East. We have seen that happening. Therefore, any effort to stop escalation and a regional conflict should take into

account the root cause of instability, namely, the Israeli aggression on the Palestinian people.

In that regard, the Arab Group calls upon all countries that have yet to recognize the State of Palestine to immediately do so based on 4 June 1967 borders. We also support the full membership of the Palestinian State at the United Nations. We call for the holding of an international peace conference based on the resolutions of international legitimacy. A just and sustainable solution to the Palestinian question in line with resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative is the only guarantee for stability and security in the region.

The Arab Group reaffirms the urgent need to promote international efforts to end the Israeli occupation and ensure the independence of the State of Palestine along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and in line with the two-State solution and the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. We stress that peace in the Middle East requires the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan. We also call upon the Council to shoulder its legal responsibility in that regard and to give hope to the peoples of the region for security, stability and a free, dignified life.

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

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): Liechtenstein is gravely worried by the catastrophic situation in the Gaza Strip and the signs of increasing escalation and instability in the wider region. We are deeply concerned about the massive displacement of the civilian population and the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation, the large-scale loss of civilian life, in particular the shocking number of children killed, and the incalculable suffering that continues to be visited on the people of Gaza.

Liechtenstein's most immediate priority remains the protection of civilians. To that end, the conflict parties must fully respect international humanitarian law without exception, including by granting immediate, full and unhindered access to humanitarian organizations to provide the necessary emergency relief. We have joined the vast majority of the United Nations membership in demanding an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian ceasefire as a

prerequisite to that end. Regrettably, that urgent call has not yet been heeded.

We remind the Security Council of its primary responsibility, under Article 24 of the Charter of the United Nations, for the maintenance of international peace and security, which it exercises on behalf of the membership as a whole, and of Article 25, in which Member States explicitly committed to carrying out the decisions of the Council. Every moment that passes, the Security Council remains conspicuous by its absence to echo the call by the membership for a humanitarian ceasefire. We have seen, after the adoption of resolution 2720 (2023), that Council pronouncements can be followed by a cessation of hostilities on the ground. The Charter makes clear the need for the Council to act preventively and in a timely manner. We implore it to explore all possible avenues in that regard.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is disastrous. Disease is rife. Children are being operated on and women are giving birth without anaesthesia. Civilians risk dying of hunger mere miles from the trucks that have been sent to bring them food. The clear and evident risk of famine that we see today is not the result of a natural disaster or a lack of resources; it is man-made. We again call on all parties to fully abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law, including with respect to the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Liechtenstein is committed to the rule of law at the international level. We therefore support the role of the International Court of Justice in the settlement of disputes, including under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which we have ratified. We are following closely the ongoing proceedings in the case brought by South Africa against Israel, including the consideration of provisional measures, and emphasize the importance of compliance with any measures ordered by the Court in any case.

We reaffirm the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and our strong support for a two-State solution as the only way to bring about a peaceful, stable and sustainable solution for the people of Israel, the people of Palestine and the region.

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

Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Last week, 15 January marked 100 days since the beginning of the escalation of hostilities in the

Middle East. During that time, the civilian population in Gaza has suffered innumerable losses and has, on a daily basis, faced the difficult task of surviving in the face of the international community's inability to protect it pursuant to international humanitarian law. Neither has it been possible to make progress towards a cessation of hostilities in line with the resolutions adopted during the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly.

After Hamas's reprehensible terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, Mexico, and the majority of Member States, warned of the need to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Our call has not been heard, and now we are facing an unacceptable reality. More than 25,000 people have been killed in Gaza, 70 per cent of them women and children. The occupied Palestinian territory has suffered incalculable damage to its infrastructure and other civilian assets, complicating future prospects for survivors and posing additional challenges to the viability of a Palestinian State. The majority of the hostages taken on 7 October 2023 continue to be held by Hamas. Against that bleak backdrop, I will focus my statement on three points.

First, Mexico reiterates its emphatic condemnation of any indiscriminate or targeted attacks against the civilian population or medical and humanitarian personnel. Such acts violate the principles of distinction, necessity and proportionality enshrined in international humanitarian law and could constitute war crimes. We acknowledge the efforts of the United Arab Emirates and Egypt that led to the adoption of resolution 2720 (2023). We also welcome the appointment of Sigrid Kaag as the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, and I reiterate my country's full support for her difficult work. In line with that resolution, and given the precarious situation facing the people in the Gaza Strip, we urge the opening of new humanitarian corridors to facilitate the entry of basic goods and for the easing of restrictions on the safe movement of humanitarian workers.

Secondly, in view of the continuing hostilities in Gaza and their grave humanitarian consequences, Mexico, together with Chile, decided to refer the situation in the State of Palestine to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court for investigation into the possible crimes committed under the Court's jurisdiction. We seek to contribute to an impartial investigation aimed at attributing responsibility, ensuring effective accountability and enabling access

to justice for victims in the absence of a jurisdiction in Palestine capable of fulfilling those objectives. Our decision complements proceedings that have been opened at the initiative of other countries at the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.

Thirdly, Mexico expresses its great concern about the increasing tensions in the Middle East, running the risk of a further escalation that would have grave consequences for the entire region. Echoing the call of the Secretary-General, Mexico urges all the parties to the conflict to exercise maximum restraint, whether on the Lebanon-Israel border or in the Red Sea, and to take urgent measures to de-escalate tensions with a view to preventing devastating consequences for the entire region.

The Security Council and the international community have a collective obligation to promote a political process towards achieving a lasting peace on the basis of the two-State solution that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and enables the establishment of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State within secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Organization. We reiterate the need for all States to refrain from actions such as transferring massive quantities of weapons, in order to ensure and end to the vicious cycle of violence.

Finally, we urge for redoubling efforts with a view to restricting the use of the veto in situations in which mass atrocities may be being committed. We therefore call on all States that have not yet done so to join the French-Mexican initiative for voluntary restraint on the use of the veto, to which already 106 States have become signatories. Mexico will support all efforts aimed at establishing a peace based on mutual respect and full compliance with international law. We therefore express our support for the convening of an international conference for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, in line with what many speakers have mentioned during this debate. We have an obligation not to fail the thousands of Palestinian and Israeli children. They deserve a peaceful and prosperous future.

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

Mr. Ragutthalli (India): I thank the French presidency for convening today's high-level open debate.

The conflict in Gaza has been raging for more than 100 days, with loss of lives, a deteriorating humanitarian situation and growing instability in the region and beyond. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas has led to a large-scale loss of civilian lives, especially of women and children, and has resulted in an alarming humanitarian crisis. That is clearly unacceptable, and we have strongly condemned the killing of civilians. It is critical to prevent a further escalation of violence and hostilities. It is imperative to prevent the loss of civilian lives in any conflict situation.

India has a long-standing and uncompromising position against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We are aware that the immediate trigger for the conflict was the terror attacks committed in Israel on 7 October 2023. There can be no justification for terrorism and hostage-taking. Our thoughts are with those who were taken as hostages, and we reiterate our demand for their immediate and unconditional release.

The ongoing conflict is also affecting the safety of maritime commercial traffic in the Indian Ocean, including some attacks in the vicinity of India. This is a matter of great concern to the international community and has a direct bearing on India's own energy and economic interests. This fraught situation is not to the benefit of any party, and that must be clearly recognized.

The leadership of India is in constant touch with the leaders of the region, including those of Israel and Palestine, and we have voiced our views in multilateral forums. The message that India has conveyed since the start of this conflict is clear and consistent: it is important to prevent escalation and to ensure the continued delivery of humanitarian aid. The humanitarian situation needs to be addressed in earnest. We welcome the efforts of the United Nations and the international community in that regard. India has delivered shipments of relief material to the Palestinian people in Gaza. We have also provided \$5 million, including the \$2.5 million we provided at the end of December, to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which will go towards supporting the Agency's core programmes and services, including education, health care, relief and social services provided to Palestinian refugees.

I wish to conclude by reiterating India's long-standing support for a two-State solution whereby the Palestinian people are able to live freely in an independent country within secure borders, with due

regard for the security needs of Israel. We firmly believe that only a two-State solution, achieved through direct and meaningful negotiations between both sides on final-status issues, will deliver the enduring peace that the people of Israel and Palestine desire and deserve. To that end, we urge all the parties to de-escalate, eschew violence, refrain from provocative and escalatory action and work towards creating conditions for an early resumption of direct peace negotiations.

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

Mr. Fepuleai (New Zealand): I thank the President for organizing today's debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The situation in Gaza is a humanitarian disaster. The loss of life is appalling. The conditions for Gazan citizens, the vast majority of whom are now displaced, are intolerable. The parties to this conflict have obligations under international humanitarian law. New Zealand has strongly condemned Hamas's shocking attacks on Israel. We again call for the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages held in Gaza.

We support Israel's right to defend itself, but in doing so it is obligated to protect civilians and ensure its military action is targeted and proportionate. Israel also has responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure that the civilian population of Gaza has the necessary essentials for life.

Conditions on the ground, however, are preventing the humanitarian response from keeping up with the enormous level of need. We continue to hear that nowhere is safe in Gaza. Civilians, humanitarian actors, health-care workers and journalists must be protected. There need to be appropriate and reliable deconfliction systems to ensure movement for humanitarian actors and goods. Responders need unimpeded access. It is unacceptable that denials and burdensome inspection and approvals processes are delaying the delivery of vital life-saving assistance. Multiple functional supply lines for aid are critical. Responders must be allowed to get aid into Gaza and to deliver it to wherever it is needed, including the north of Gaza. Similarly, the restoration of communications networks and other essential services is required to aid the response.

We again call on Israel to facilitate safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance and

protection immediately, and to work constructively with the United Nations and other humanitarian actors.

New Zealand was pleased to see the Security Council adopt resolution 2720 (2023) last month. We welcome the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza and offer her our full support in her important work ahead.

We call on the Security Council to rise above politics and point-scoring to advance the cause of peace. The single best way to alleviate civilian suffering is to stop the fighting. New Zealand has supported the calls in both the Security Council and the General Assembly for humanitarian pauses or truces to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid. New Zealand has repeatedly called for urgent efforts towards a sustainable ceasefire. We repeat those calls today.

The risks of the wider region being further drawn into this conflict are alarmingly high and of deep concern. We are particularly concerned about the situation along the Blue Line.

New Zealand firmly supports the vision laid out in numerous Security Council resolutions, most recently in resolution 2720 (2023), of a two-State solution with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders. We must hold onto that vision. Achieving it is not impossible, but it will require steps from all parties. Gaza must never again be a platform for terrorism. There must be no displacement of Palestinians and no reduction in Palestinian territory.

Israel must ask itself whether its current efforts to protect its legitimate security interests will ultimately make its people more or less secure. The price of defeating Hamas cannot be the continuous suffering of all Palestinian civilians. That will not break the cycle of radicalization and division.

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

Mr. Mnguni (South Africa): I thank France for convening this important open debate today on the situation in the Middle East and for providing all United Nations States Members an opportunity to address the Council on developments in the region.

We meet at a time when the Middle East region is once again engulfed in myriad conflicts. As is almost always the case, when there is conflict it is innocent civilians who are most affected. Recent reports indicate

that more civilians were killed in armed conflict over the past year than any other year for more than a decade, and civilians in the Middle East region make up most of those lives lost.

South Africa reiterates its horror at the atrocities being committed in Palestine through the targeting of civilians, civilian infrastructure, United Nations premises and other vulnerable targets. The actions that we are all witnessing daily by Israel are a violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional. In its attacks on, and kidnapping of, innocent civilians, Hamas has also violated international law.

There can be no doubt that the illegal occupation of Palestine by Israel for several decades has led to bitter hatred and increased violence. The ongoing Nakba of the Palestinian people, through Israel's colonization of Palestine since 1948, has systematically and forcibly dispossessed, displaced and fragmented the Palestinian people, deliberately denying them their internationally recognized and inalienable right to self-determination and the internationally recognized right of refugees to return to their towns and villages in what is now the State of Israel.

It is important to stress that the ultimate solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the establishment of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace. The Palestinian State should be created along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and in line with United Nations resolutions. For that two-State solution to materialize, a peace process initiated by the United Nations must commence urgently.

If those negotiations were to commence, and for there to be peace, all of us must insist on a comprehensive ceasefire. The killings must come to an end. The brazen bombing of hospitals, schools, residential areas and places of worship and the denial of basic necessities must stop.

The collective punishment that Israel is exacting on all Palestinian people is an affront that has existed for decades. The world has expressed horror but has not acted effectively to save Palestinian lives.

As we have consistently stressed, we cannot proclaim the importance of international law and the importance of the Charter of the United Nations in some situations and not in others, as though the rule of law applied only to a select few. For international

law to be credible, it should be uniformly applied and not selective.

The events of the past few months in Gaza have illustrated that Israel is acting contrary to its obligations in terms of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. As a United Nations Member State and owing to South Africa's painful past experience of a system of apartheid, that impresses on us, as Member States, to take action in accordance with international law.

South Africa has therefore opted to resort to international judicial mechanisms, including at the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, to seek justice for the people of Palestine. For that reason, on 11 January 2024, lawyers representing the Government of South Africa appeared before the International Court of Justice to call on the Court to issue provisional measures that include ordering Israel to stop its military campaign in Gaza, which we believe is necessary to protect against further, severe and irreparable harm to the rights of the Palestinian people.

Several countries and regional organizations have made public statements in support of South Africa's proceedings against Israel, and some States have also indicated their desire to intervene in the proceedings after the hearing on provisional measures. South Africa welcomes expressions of support for the case before the International Court of Justice and encourages States to intervene, should they so wish, in the merits stage of the proceedings.

In conclusion, South Africa would like to underscore that war is never wise. When the use of force is utilized anywhere in the world, irrespective of whether it is lawful or unlawful, the laws of war must be applied, and civilians must be protected.

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

Mr. Novicio (Philippines): The Philippines would like to thank you, Madam President, and France for convening today's Security Council open debate on the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning.

The Philippines is deeply concerned about the escalation of the conflict in the Middle East and urges all parties to prioritize dialogue for a peaceful

resolution. We champion diplomacy and are committed to collaborating with nations, under Security Council resolutions and international law, to achieve a lasting solution to the conflict. The Philippines reiterates its dedication to supporting peace and stability in the Middle East, with a focused commitment to resolving the Israeli-Hamas conflict.

The presence of a significant Filipino community in the Middle East and Israel underscores the direct relevance of this issue to the Philippines and highlights the importance of our profound concern about the peace process. There is a need to de-escalate the situation in order to prevent it from spilling over to other areas of the region and negatively impacting innocent people that are not otherwise involved in the conflict. The safety and security of all civilians is essential, and critical facilities, including humanitarian shelters and hospitals, need to continue to address the humanitarian needs of those affected in a sustained and resolute manner.

The Philippines supports the full and immediate implementation of General Assembly resolution ES-10/22, adopted by the Assembly during the tenth emergency special session, on the protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations, and of resolution 2712 (2023), on urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors in Gaza, as well as of resolution 2720 (2023), on scaling up and monitoring humanitarian aid going into Gaza. Indeed, the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance into Gaza is urgently needed on a daily basis.

We recognize the staggering loss of life and the suffering of all civilians affected by the conflict and condemn all forms of violence and aggression by any party. We also express deep concern about the unprecedented destruction of public and private buildings because of the ongoing conflict in Gaza. We share fears that the widespread damage will lead to a lost generation of young people. We join the international community's calls to immediately stop those attacks and release all hostages.

The Philippines supports the efforts of the United Nations to deliver urgent humanitarian assistance and essential supplies to Palestinian civilians trapped and helpless in the Gaza Strip. We commend the extraordinary efforts being undertaken by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other United Nations agencies in responding to the humanitarian needs

of affected populations in the ongoing conflict, even under extraordinary and dangerous conditions.

We also support the ongoing efforts of newly appointed Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator to Gaza, Sigrid Kaag, to accelerate the flow of aid into Gaza and expedite the delivery of the direly needed assistance to civilians in Gaza, given the acute humanitarian conditions they are experiencing. To complement United Nations efforts to increase aid, we echo the Secretary-General's call for the parties to respect international humanitarian law, respect and protect civilians and ensure that their essential needs are met.

The Philippines reiterates its firm support for a two-State solution, in harmony with international agreements and pertinent United Nations resolutions. We see that as a viable and sustainable pathway to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. Both Israelis and Palestinians deserve a future in which their rights, aspirations and security are recognized and upheld. All parties must therefore refrain from unilateral actions that undermine the prospects for a two-State solution.

The Philippines recognizes that the conflict can never be resolved through violence, only through meaningful dialogue and negotiations, in accordance with international law. Diplomacy must continue to be the driving force in achieving a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We all want a comprehensive, just and sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East.

Finally, we support the peaceful implementation of all United Nations resolutions and initiatives in order to resolve the Middle East conflict and support all efforts to revive the Middle East peace process. Given the significant impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the region's stability, we believe that a lasting resolution can emerge only from diplomatic engagement, dialogue and comprehensive negotiation, all rooted in international law.

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

Ms. Leendertse (Germany): I want to thank you, Madam President, for organizing this important debate today.

Germany fully aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms Hamas's brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks across Israel on and since 7 October 2023, including horrendous acts of sexual and gender-based violence. Israel has the right to defend itself.

For over three and a half months, Hamas has continued to attack Israel with rockets on a daily basis and is using Palestinian civilians as human shields. We reiterate our call for Hamas to immediately release all hostages and lay down its weapons to stop this war.

At the same time, Germany is most gravely concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. To be clear, life in Gaza is hell. The suffering of so many innocent civilians must end. We call on Israel's military to better protect civilians in Gaza. We urgently need increased and extended humanitarian pauses, improved humanitarian access and new border-openings to facilitate the distribution of aid to the people in need. In that regard, we stand ready to support the efforts of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag. The relevant Council resolutions need to be implemented immediately by all parties.

We must do our utmost to prevent both regional escalation and a deterioration of the situation in the West Bank, as the German Foreign Minister stressed during her recent trip to the region. Our collective goal is to pave the way for a sustainable ceasefire leading to lasting peace, based on the implementation of the two-State solution.

Gaza and the West Bank belong to the Palestinians, and they must not face expulsion from Gaza or displacement by settlers in the West Bank. Israelis and Palestinians will be able to live side by side in peace, on the basis of the two-State solution, only if each side recognizes the other's suffering and understands that the security of one is intricately linked to the security of the other.

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

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate our friend France on presiding over the Security Council this month. I also thank you, Madam President, for convening this ministerial-level meeting at a very critical time for the Palestinian question and for peace and security in the Middle East as a whole. I also thank the Secretary-General for his valuable briefing.

The Kingdom of Morocco, under His Majesty King Mohammed VI, has been chairing the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and remains convinced of the centrality of the Palestinian question in the Middle East region. We believe that resolving that question will lead to the establishment of security and peace in the region. Regrettably, the bloody and horrifying events that have been taking place in the occupied Palestinian territories, in general, and the Gaza Strip, in particular, for more than three months, are threatening regional peace and security, with global repercussions.

In that context, the Kingdom of Morocco reiterates its deep concern and resentment about the disastrous humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. We reaffirm that the Israeli military operation in Gaza runs counter to international law and international humanitarian law. The Kingdom of Morocco once again calls for an end to the military aggression, a permanent and monitored ceasefire and the protection of civilians, in line with international law and international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian assistance must be delivered to the people of Gaza in sufficient quantities. The hostages and detainees must also be released, and there should be a political prospect for the Palestinian question. The Kingdom of Morocco reiterates our rejection of all the violations, the collective punishment and the forced displacement that have been inflicted, as well as of imposing new reality and threatening the national security of neighbouring countries. We reaffirm that the Gaza Strip is an integral part of the Palestinian territories and a unified Palestinian State.

The Security Council adopted two resolutions in response to the tragic humanitarian situation suffered by the fraternal Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip (resolution 2712 (2023) and resolution 2720 (2023)). The Council called for the adoption of concrete measures for increasing the flow of humanitarian assistance. We thank the Secretary-General for the early establishment of the mechanism called for in resolution 2720 (2023) for facilitating and monitoring the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Strip, as well as for appointing Ms. Sigrid Kaag as the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. We once again call on the international community to provide sufficient and continuous humanitarian assistance to Gaza and to support Ms. Kaag in implementing the mandate entrusted to her by the Council.

In the context of the steadfast commitment of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, to the Palestinian question, and upon instructions from His Majesty, the Kingdom of Morocco sent urgent humanitarian assistance to the affected people in Gaza through the Rafah crossing. Beit Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif of the Al-Quds Committee also sent humanitarian assistance upon royal instructions to hospitals and main social institutions that deal with urgent medical and social cases as a result of the developments in the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, His Majesty King Mohammed VI recently gave instructions to provide additional financial assistance to Palestinian students from the Gaza Strip studying at universities and higher institutions in the Kingdom of Morocco, in coordination with the Palestinian Authority. That Royal initiative is related to the commitment of His Majesty to the just Palestinian question and solidarity with the fraternal Palestinian people amid these difficult circumstances.

The repeated Israeli actions and provocations in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, undermine efforts towards peace and hamper international initiatives towards de-escalation, reducing tensions and ending the cycle of violence. His Majesty King Mohammed VI, as the Chair of Al-Quds Committee, has been closely monitoring all the developments on the Palestinian question and calls for maintaining the legal, cultural and religious status quo of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as the common heritage of humankind, a symbol of peaceful coexistence among the three monotheistic religions and a centre for mutual respect and dialogue, in line with the Jerusalem Call, which was signed by His Majesty and Pope Francis in Rabat on 30 March 2019. In parallel, the Al-Quds Committee undertakes its political and practical role in supporting the Palestinian people in general, and the residents of Al-Quds in particular, in tandem with the political endeavours of His Majesty and the field work undertaken by the Beit Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif under the personal and actual aegis of His Majesty.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Morocco reiterates its full solidarity with the legitimate rights of the fraternal Palestinian people, in line with international legitimacy. In that regard, I would like to recall the letter of His Majesty to the participants in the joint Arab-Islamic extraordinary summit of 11 November held in Riyadh:

“We must address this critical stage with historic responsibility. There is no alternative to

establishing genuine peace in the region that will ensure the Palestinian people their legitimate rights as part of a two-State solution. There is no alternative to the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. There is no alternative to strengthening the Palestinian Authority headed by my brother President Mahmoud Abbas Abu Mazen. There is no alternative to establishing mechanisms for sustainable regional security based on respecting international law and agreed international terms of reference”.

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

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): Pakistan congratulates France and you, Madam President, for a successful presidency of the Security Council this month. Pakistan also thanks you for convening this important debate on the dire situation in Palestine and the Middle East. We welcome the high-level participation in this debate, and we thank the Secretary-General for his substantive briefing and his eloquent appeal for peace this morning.

Over the past three months, the world has witnessed the most brutal slaughter of civilians in the twenty-first century. Over 25,000 civilians, mostly children and women, have been killed by the Israeli onslaught in Gaza. Over 2 million have been displaced, and humanitarian help has been deliberately impeded by the occupying Israeli army. This brutal and indiscriminate killing of innocents and the suffering imposed on an entire population amounts to genocide, as asserted in the case filed by South Africa at the International Court of Justice. Every tenet of international humanitarian law has been violated with impunity by the Israeli occupation. It is sad that, despite the calls by the General Assembly in two resolutions (resolution ES-10/21 and resolution ES-10/22), despite the near-unanimous votes in the Security Council, the international community has failed to stop this genocide taking place before our eyes.

As we feared, violence and war have spread to adjacent areas of Palestine, to the Israel-Lebanon border, to Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Unless the Israeli war machine is stopped, there is every likelihood of further escalation in which many nations may be engulfed. A heavy responsibility rests on the Security Council for having failed to prevent the continuation of Israel's war and its atrocities against the Palestinian people in Gaza and the accompanying brutalities in the West Bank.

We welcome the diplomatic efforts deployed to revive the prospects for a two-State solution. It is the only viable option for realizing a sustainable peace between Israel and the Palestinians and between Israel and the Arab and Islamic world. Unfortunately, despite world opinion, despite the advice of its closest allies and of many of its own people, the extremist Israeli leadership remains adamant in continuing this brutal war and rejecting the prospect of a Palestinian State and the two-State solution. This will consign the Middle East to perpetual conflict.

It is now time for the Security Council and for the entire membership of the United Nations to consider measures by which to reverse this wanton rejection of peace. We hope the Council will be able finally to adopt a draft resolution demanding a complete cessation of hostilities, full access to humanitarian assistance for the besieged population of Gaza and international protection for the Palestinian people. This revived peace process should be conducted within the framework of the Security Council and with the involvement of all relevant States and stakeholders. If the Israeli leadership persists in refusing peace, the Security Council, the General Assembly and indeed all United Nations States Members must take steps to hold it accountable. There are numerous precedents of measures that can and have been taken to encourage compliance with the decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Also, in order to ensure the inevitability of the two-State solution, it is time to admit Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

Beyond the eloquent words heard in this Council debate, we look for concrete steps to halt the slaughter of innocents and bring peace to Palestine, to Israel and to the Middle East.

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

Mr. El-Sonni (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by thanking you, Madam President, for organizing this important meeting during your presidency.

History is being written and history will remember that 100 days have passed since the beginning of the brutal acts of aggression against innocent Palestinian civilians. The Security Council has been clearly and completely unable to play the role for which it was created, namely, the maintenance of international peace and security. We therefore would like to thank the

Secretary-General for his courage and professionalism during those events. We thank him for his continued calls for an immediate ceasefire and for supporting the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

It is unfortunate that many United Nations staff have been killed. That is a precedent that we have not witnessed at this scale in recent history. Representatives of the occupation forces continue to criticize and attack the United Nations and all its organs. That makes us wonder as to why they participate in our meetings? Why have they not withdrawn from the Organization or suspended their membership in it?

The General Assembly recently adopted, by an overwhelming majority, resolution ES-10/22 calling for a ceasefire. The Security Council also adopted resolution 2720 (2023) which is supposedly aimed at coordinating the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. However, what has resulted from that adoption? Nothing — there have been only meetings and statements, but the reality has not changed.

There are now more than 25,000 martyrs, including more than 8,000 children. It is the biggest mass graveyard for children. Thousands of civilians remain under the rubble. Hundreds of thousands are forcibly displaced. Whole families have been killed without mercy. Places of worship, hospitals and schools have been demolished. There is no safe place in Gaza. Even United Nations facilities have all been targeted. Does the Security Council know, for instance, that the Office of the United Nations Development Programme in Gaza, which had been a shelter for families of United Nations staff and civilians, was targeted? Its yard is now being used as a graveyard to bury victims because families have not found any place to bury their loved ones. Imagine a United Nations facility with a raised United Nations flag has become a graveyard. Council members can look at the images to confirm what I am saying. Death is everywhere. Where is the conscience of Council members? Where is the global conscience? That is all being recorded in history.

The Security Council has turned into a political wrestling arena to settle scores at the expense of the suffering, pain and blood of the peoples of the world. That has been demonstrated in its inability until now to adopt any binding resolution to stop those violations, which are directly broadcasted by audio and video and which amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. We all now know that it is a systematic campaign of genocide.

Where is Council members' conscience? Why are they still silent? How do they justify their silence before their people? History is being recorded. History records all those failures, the position of those who supported, justified or remained silent in the face of those massacres and in the face of the deliberate killing of women and children. These are criminal acts that will remain a disgrace for humankind. The aggression and silence have shown that the human rights slogans are false and are implemented only for certain peoples. That is all being recorded in history.

History is recording the double standards. There is no need to remind delegations of the positions of a number of countries in recent history regarding the situation in Ukraine. Those countries have exercised pressure and are still exercising pressure to ensure respect for the Charter of the United Nations, implement the principles of international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of civilians. So what happened today? Are the people of Gaza not human? Are there different levels of human beings? Where is justice in all of that? Stop the hypocrisy and stop distorting the truth, because everything will be recorded in history.

To those who are still trying to distort the truth, we say that the crisis cannot be reduced to the events of 7 October, and one cannot forget all the massacres that have been committed to date over more than seven decades in Gaza and the West Bank. Tragedies that are happening there are being covered up, as if usurping the land in 1948 and expelling people from their land were not the reason for the conflict. That is why Libya will not accept the request to condemn the resistance of the Palestinian people and describe them as terrorists at a time when terrorism by the occupation forces and extremist right is met with silence and justified under the pretext of self-defence. We wonder from whom is the self-defence? Is the oppressor defending itself from the oppressed? Is the aggressor defending itself from the victim? Is the occupier practicing self-defence from the one whose land is usurped? The executioner occupier is now portraying itself as the victim. Has anyone heard of a colonialist and an occupier being a victim? Has any Member State in this Chamber — and there are many examples — achieved independence from a colonialist without resistance, especially in the absence of peaceful solutions and justice?

In Libya, for example, Italian colonialists described the “Lion of the Desert”, Omar Al-Mukhtar, and other resistance fighters as subversive actors and outlaws.

Italy considered Libya its historic heritage and its fourth coast. Hundreds of thousands innocent people were displaced and put in concentration camps. Many of them were exiled. We obtained independence because of our resistance over decades. Italy apologized for its actions at the time. Did Italy have the right to defend itself during that time of occupation? Were the Libyan resistance fighters during that time terrorists?

At the main entrance to the United Nations Headquarters, there is a statue of Nelson Mandela, who was also described, along with his supporters, as terrorists by many countries because he was resisting the apartheid system. He resisted for freedom and justice. Today everybody in this Chamber recalls his history of struggle with his people and of resistance for freedom. What is the difference today between what is happening to the Palestinian people, who are subjected to oppression and genocide based on apartheid, and what happened in South Africa?

That is why I repeat Nelson Mandela's words.

(spoke in English)

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we had made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”

(spoke in Arabic)

That is why I say to Council members that history is recording what is happening, and they can choose how they are recorded in history. On this occasion, we value the courageous and historic position taken by South Africa, which filed a case at the International Court of Justice in the light of the genocide being committed against the people in Gaza. In that regard, despite the challenges faced by my country, Libya has also fulfilled its moral, humanitarian and national responsibilities. We joined South Africa in that case as well as in another case about practices and violations perpetrated against the Palestinian people. We call on all countries to join that humanitarian move to support the just question of the Palestinian people. It will all be recorded in history.

It is strange to hear today some talking about future political solutions and reconstruction projects in Gaza as bombing and destruction now continue. There are children still dying under the rubble. Stop the aggression first, and then start talking about the day after. Members must determine their position regarding

the representatives of the occupation forces who openly rejected the establishment of a Palestinian State. More recently, prior to the events of 7 October, their Prime Minister held up a map of his presumed State here at the United Nations, which included no place for the land of Palestine. What is the Council's position on that? Palestine's political future concerns only Palestinians. No one has the right to design solutions for the Palestinian people.

From this Chamber, I address our people in Palestine, especially Palestinians in Gaza: What we are doing today is the least we can do as compared to your sacrifices. It is an attempt to wake up those who are asleep because, like you, we have lost our trust in the international community due to the double standards. You must know that we in Libya, along with the free peoples of the world, are with you in your struggle. We will not abandon you. We will support your right to resistance and self-determination.

All States around the world must prove to their peoples that the human conscience is still alive and that they will address this aggression and blatant injustice that have claimed the lives of innocent people, including women and children. We must work together, using every possible means, to stop this unjust aggression and reach a ceasefire immediately. We must stop the genocide, acts of destruction and forcible displacement. We will not wait for another Nakba to occur. That is why we reiterate Libya's firm position: there will be no peace without restoring hope, especially for this generation.

The first step is to grant full membership to the State of Palestine in the United Nations. The Palestinian people must be granted their full legitimate rights. All refugees must return to their homeland. An independent Palestinian State must be established, with Jerusalem as its capital. There is no peace without justice. Remember, everything is recorded in history.

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

Mr. Kridelka (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank France for organizing today's important debate and welcome the efforts made by the French presidency of the Security Council to secure tangible results in the matters of which the Security Council is seized, specifically the situation in the Middle East.

(*spoke in English*)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the three Benelux countries — the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and my own country, the Kingdom of Belgium.

While aligning ourselves fully with the statement of the representative of the European Union and notwithstanding our respective and well-known national positions on the conflict, the Benelux countries would like to take this opportunity to focus solely on the implementation of the mandate of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. We welcome the expeditious appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Coordinator and fully support her in her endeavours.

The Benelux countries are deeply concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and its grave impact on the civilian population, especially the disproportionate effect on children. International humanitarian law must be respected by all parties at all times. Civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, should never be a target.

With regard to this dire humanitarian situation, including the levels of acute food insecurity, the Benelux countries would like to stress three urgent points of action that require immediate operational steps by the parties involved. We hope that the appointment of Ms. Kaag will be instrumental in their implementation, and we call on the members of the Council and the entire United Nations membership to fully support her.

The first point is access. All relevant border crossings and all other feasible options must be fully used. Humanitarian actors should have full, unimpeded and safe access to the whole of Gaza, notably via safe corridors throughout the Strip. Access arrangements should be facilitated and streamlined as much as possible.

My second point is volume. Based on improved access, delivery to Gaza needs to be drastically increased, in order to meet the actual needs. Clearing and monitoring procedures need to be simplified in order to enable humanitarian organizations to deliver aid effectively and efficiently. Of course, humanitarian aid will not be enough to reverse the worsening hunger among the population. The restoration of a functioning market, allowing for essential supplies to enter Gaza and private actors to operate, should also be a priority.

The third point is trust. We are confident that, through her actions, Ms. Kaag will also be able to improve the level of trust between the parties concerned. We call on those parties to allow her to operate effectively, to engage with her in good faith and to provide her with the necessary room to achieve tangible results for civilian population in Gaza.

The successful implementation of the Coordinator's mandate is an objective to which we should all be committed. As a first minimum imperative, the focus should be on the implementation of an immediate temporary humanitarian ceasefire and on the creation of conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities. Furthermore, we call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

Under international humanitarian law, the parties have clear obligations regarding the provision of humanitarian assistance. Resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) are unequivocal. The parties should allow, facilitate and enable the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale directly to the Palestinian civilian population throughout the Gaza Strip. Parties must also ensure the functioning of critical infrastructure and provide essential services. Israel and the other actors on the ground have an obligation to results. Now is the time to deliver.

Finally, we look forward to the Coordinator expeditiously establishing a United Nations mechanism for accelerating the provision of humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza. The Benelux countries again call on all members of the Council and the parties to work constructively with Ms. Kaag and her team in this regard.

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

Mr. Elshandawily (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on the friendly Republic of France's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I thank you for convening today's important meeting.

It is a turning point in the war being waged by Israel against the occupied Palestinian territories. It is a war in which we continue to witness atrocities that the international community has not seen since the beginning of the century. Even the dead victims of those atrocities were not spared, with their graves exhumed and the sanctity of their final resting place

violated. In that context, we look forward to the decision of the International Court of Justice with regard to provisional measures and to its ruling on the case brought by South Africa before the Court under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the Secretary-General for the valuable briefing we have listened to and for the courageous positions he has taken throughout the crisis, positions that have championed the truth and have not hesitated to defend it.

In his statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States, with which my delegation aligns itself, the Permanent Representative of the sisterly Kingdom of Bahrain addressed the magnitude and gravity of the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and set out the unified position of Arab States on those unfortunate developments. Allow me to add the following points.

First, it has become crystal clear that the immediate cessation of this brutal war has become the international community's top priority, especially after the war's scope began to expand geographically into areas beyond the occupied Palestinian territories, a development that Egypt has repeatedly cautioned against. The current situation — including in the Red Sea region, a vital artery for global trade — poses a clear and present threat to the security of all countries of the world and cannot in any way be addressed apart from the war in the occupied Palestinian territories; hence our repeated calls for an immediate ceasefire.

Secondly, the tragic humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially the Gaza Strip, necessitates the immediate implementation of resolution 2720 (2023); the prompt activation of its provisions regarding the opening of all crossings, including those under Israeli control, to the flow of humanitarian aid; and the speedy establishment of the relevant mechanism under the leadership of Ms. Sigrid Kaag. In that connection, we reaffirm our full support for the efforts of the United Nations Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, as the delivery of aid and the cessation of war are the only way to prevent further suffering. It is imperative to oppose Israel's premeditated intention to displace the Palestinian people, which we once again condemn and reject as a desperate attempt by the current Israeli Government to liquidate the Palestinian question.

In that context, I reaffirm once again before the Council that the Rafah crossing has never been closed by Egypt and that, since the first day of the war, Egypt has sought to bring aid in, facilitate access to aid in coordination with all donors and remove the injured and those in critical medical condition.

Thirdly, those who imagine that the occupation is sustainable are delusional, as are those who imagine that it is possible to liquidate the Palestinian question and resolve the current situation in the Palestinian territories by force, or to address security concerns exclusively using military means, which have failed miserably so far and have succeeded only in claiming civilian lives and sowing hatred.

Fourthly, the current landscape — a natural consequence of the political stalemate and of Israel's torpedoing the peace process while rejecting all means of reviving it — drives us to demand the abandonment of all partial solutions that have proven to be a failure and a return to the only logical solution to the current crisis, which is to enter into a comprehensive negotiating process based on the two-State solution, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In conclusion, what I have just said regarding the establishment of the Palestinian State constitutes an unprecedented international consensus that Israel alone rejects. I end my statement by requesting a review of any support that results in the continuation of the occupation or violations. We should heed the cries of the people of Palestine, the children of Palestine and the women of Palestine, join the consensus and stand with what is right.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mrs. Kuzee: I congratulate France on its presidency of the Security Council in the month of January, and I thank you, Madam President, for elevating this meeting to ministerial level in consideration of the urgency of prioritizing the matter at hand. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and tireless advocacy for peace and justice, including a just solution to the question of Palestine.

The sombre briefing and tragic figures we heard are an urgent call to overcome the prevailing inertia

and push for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. It is the fundamental requirement for saving human lives, protecting civilians, ensuring their sustenance and welfare and salvaging the prospects for peace. The Gaza Strip has been subject to one of the most intense bombardments in modern history, reflected in the more than 25,000 Palestinians killed — most of whom were women and children — and the more than 61,000 people injured; the denial of access to food, water, fuel and other essential supplies, causing starvation, the spread of disease and extraordinary levels of want; and the vast destruction of homes, hospitals, schools and other vital civilian infrastructure.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People echoes the overwhelming demand of the international community for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and for the unconditional release of all hostages and detainees. We call for full adherence by all parties to their obligations under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and to all relevant resolutions, including General Assembly resolutions ES-10/21 and ES10/22 and Security Council resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023).

Israel's indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks have consistently breached the distinction between civilians and combatants as well as between civilian and military objects. Israel has also consistently breached its obligations as the occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Prisoners must be provided humane and dignified treatment. However, disturbing reports and images of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of Palestinian prisoners continue to emerge. Thousands of Palestinians, including children, have been detained in just over three months.

Journalists and media professionals must not be targets of attacks or reprisals. Their families must also not become extended targets to coerce those professionals into silence.

Throughout Gaza, the freedom of movement and access to humanitarian relief remain severely limited despite the clear provisions of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The weaponization of starvation as a method of warfare is prohibited under international law; that practice has been decried by the United Nations and must be halted. As the Secretary-General has repeatedly underscored, nowhere and no one is safe in Gaza. So-called safety zones, where civilians were forced to flee, are further subjected to

Israel's attacks. More than 1.9 million Palestinians in Gaza have been forcibly displaced. This was a forced displacement of an occupied people, most of whom were 1948 Nakba refugees. The majority of them are sheltering in 155 schools and facilities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which continue to come under Israeli attack. Repeated calls by Israeli Ministers to forcibly transfer the Palestinian civilian population out of Gaza are abhorrent and must be prevented, as such transfer would constitute a war crime. The escalating violence by Israeli forces and settlers in the occupied West Bank is turning this year into the deadliest on record for children not only in Gaza, but in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with 344 Palestinians killed since 7 October 2023, including 88 children.

Israel's indiscriminate attacks against civilians in Gaza are the latest episode in its 16-year blockade, 56 years of occupation and 76 years of the Nakba. Israeli Ministers openly discuss their wish and actions to make Gaza unliveable for Palestinians. For that reason, several members of our Committee have referred the situation in Palestine to the International Criminal Court, urging accountability for the crimes being perpetrated against the Palestinian people. We commend South Africa, a proud member of our Committee, on its application instituting proceedings against Israel at the International Court of Justice, asking for immediate provisional measures to prevent violations of the Genocide Convention in Gaza.

There is no time for semantics or room for paralysis. We must not succumb to exceptionalism, double standards or international *omertà*. The Committee reiterates its calls for an immediate Gaza ceasefire, prioritizing the protection of Palestinians. We emphasize the need for urgent humanitarian assistance and immediate efforts to realize a durable and just solution in the Middle East. That involves ending occupation and respecting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including self-determination, independence and the right of return for refugees, as per international law and United Nations resolutions. The time is now to pursue without hesitation the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders, the long-standing international consensus for a just solution. The Committee seconds the call for an international peace conference and a multilateral negotiating process aimed at resolving the question of Palestine in all its aspects. To paraphrase Nelson Mandela, our collective pledge of leaving no-one behind will be incomplete without the

freedom of Palestine. For that reason, the Committee further demands the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations so that it can take its rightful place in the international community.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Head of Delegation of the European Union.

Mr. Lambrinidis: I speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia, as well as Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union calls for the immediate implementation of resolutions 2720 (2023) and 2712 (2023). The EU is gravely concerned about the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the latest reports by United Nations agencies alerting that Gaza is at a high risk of famine and that the health system is in a state of collapse. We welcome Israel's decision to open the Kerem Shalom border-crossing point and the role that Egypt and other regional partners play in providing and facilitating that humanitarian aid reaches those in need. We must continue to provide humanitarian assistance to all those in need in Gaza, including through increased capacity at border-crossings and through a dedicated maritime route, while ensuring that such assistance is not abused by Hamas and other terrorist organizations.

Rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access is an obligation under international law and is urgently needed to deliver life-saving aid to avoid the further worsening of an already-catastrophic situation. Aid needs to reach those in need through all necessary means, including humanitarian corridors and pauses for humanitarian needs, or the cessation of hostilities. We welcome the cooperation of regional actors aimed at opening humanitarian access to Gaza. We stand ready to support the efforts of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag. The European Union will continue supporting those civilians most in need in Gaza. We have already earmarked an initial €125 million for humanitarian aid in 2024. Individually, EU member States have provided financial support amounting to more than €600 million for the occupied Palestinian territories since 7 October 2023.

We commend the strong efforts of the United Nations and all humanitarian actors to deliver life-saving aid in extremely dire conditions. We deplore

the deaths of an unprecedented number of United Nations staff members and other humanitarian workers. The EU will continue its strong support to the United Nations and other humanitarian actors. In particular, we commend the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which plays an even more crucial role in the current situation, as well as with regard to stability in the region. The EU and its member States are by far the largest donors to UNRWA and will continue to support the Agency in all its fields of operations, including in East Jerusalem, and to call for urgent increased funding.

The protection of all civilians and unhindered humanitarian access must be ensured by all parties at all times in the conflict. Full respect of international law, including international humanitarian law, by all sides is of paramount importance. We urge all sides to respect international law and note that there must be accountability for violations of international law. We condemn in the strongest possible terms Hamas's brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks across Israel on 7 October 2023. The use of civilians as human shields by Hamas is a particularly deplorable atrocity. As stated by the European Council in October 2023, Israel has the right to defend itself in line with international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. Military operations must be proportionate and in line with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We call on Hamas to immediately cease the continued missile attacks on Israel and to release all hostages, many of whom are EU citizens, without any preconditions. Human suffering cannot be a bargaining chip. The International Committee of the Red Cross must be granted access to the hostages. We welcome the cooperation of regional actors on the matter.

Preventing further regional escalation remains crucial. Nobody stands to gain from it. The EU is actively discussing with partners and key stakeholders — and we call on regional actors — to refrain from any action that can further aggravate the situation. We are following with concern the situation across the Blue Line, and we recall the absolute necessity of respecting resolution 1701 (2006). The EU condemns the Houthi attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea, which are undermining the freedom of navigation. The EU calls for the immediate implementation of resolution 2722 (2023). Upholding the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea is vital to the free flow of global commerce and to regional security.

The EU is equally concerned about the situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where settlement expansion and settler violence have reached record levels. Settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. Israel must stop settlement expansion and legalization, prevent settler violence, evictions and forced transfers and ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable. We remain committed to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. The EU is ready to contribute to reviving a political process, including through the Peace Day Effort initiative, welcomes diplomatic peace and security initiatives and supports the holding of an international peace conference soon. We are already engaging with our partners in the region, and beyond, towards revitalizing a political horizon, including at the Foreign Ministers' meeting yesterday in Brussels.

Allow me to turn to the situation in Syria, where, in the interest of time, I will restrict myself to only one comment. More than 12 years into the conflict, the international community must redouble efforts to advance a sustainable and comprehensive political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) — the only path to sustainable peace in Syria. The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate in vast parts of Syria. We take positive note of the six-month renewal of the permission to use the Bab Al-Hawa crossing. We call on the regime in Damascus to seriously engage in the political process, to seriously work on the implementation of the measures it announced in its statement on cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the return of refugees, to effectively operate to improve the livelihood of the population and to prevent the use of this territory to perpetrate attacks that contribute to jeopardizing regional security.

The EU has a message for the Syrian people: we will not forget them. We stand firm as the main humanitarian donor and in support of Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to advance on all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015). It is beyond time to revive the Syrian political process.

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

Mr. Chindawongse (Thailand) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate France on its presidency of the Security Council and on the progress made since the beginning of the year. I would also like to commend France for organizing this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and to thank the Secretary-General for sharing the latest information on the situation on the ground.

(*spoke in English*)

Lives continue to be lost, communities and families to grieve and loved ones continue to wait, hope and pray for the hostages to come home. The deteriorating situation in the Middle East, with its serious and severe humanitarian consequences, remains our deep concern. Added to that are the heightened risks of the conflict assuming a more regional dimension, and that is why the immediate resumption of a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza is more urgent than ever.

To be clear, we reiterate our condemnation in the strongest terms of all forms of violence and attacks — wherever they take place — against innocent civilians regardless of their nationalities. We are appalled at the devastating and growing toll of the ongoing conflict in Gaza on civilians, and we are opposed to actions that would result in the forced displacement or transfer of civilians from Gaza. International humanitarian law must be respected at all times. The protection of civilians must be a priority at all times.

Beyond the humanitarian assistance front, Thailand welcomes the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag of the Netherlands as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza pursuant to resolution 2720 (2023), which will hopefully help to improve the humanitarian situation in the Middle East. We hope that, under Ms. Kaag's supervision, adequate humanitarian aid will be delivered to those in need in Gaza in a safe, efficient and timely manner. We deeply appreciate the diplomatic efforts of all parties involved in facilitating the release of some hostages, including 23 Thai nationals, during the temporary ceasefire last year. We thank those involved for all their efforts. Since then, we have remained gravely concerned about the safety of the remaining Thai nationals and all those who are being held hostage. In line with the resolutions of the Security Council and the tenth emergency

special session of the General Assembly, we continue to appeal for the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages, including Thai nationals, and pending their release, we also call for continued proper treatment of and care for those hostages. Let all hostages return home.

To implement the recently adopted resolutions of the Security Council and the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, we need resolute political determination. That means a determination to pursue an urgent and sustainable cessation of hostilities, which is essential in order to allow rapid, safe, unhindered, expanded and sustained humanitarian access into and across Gaza for those in need. We appeal to the international community to continue to mobilize humanitarian assistance in these difficult times. It also means a determination to exercise the utmost restraint and take immediate and necessary measures to prevent the risk of the conflict having more regional dimensions. And it means a determination for genuine dialogue and diplomacy with a view to finding a mutually agreed peaceful solution to the issue, in accordance with the two-State solution, according to which the States of Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders, consistent with relevant Council resolutions.

In conclusion, Thailand appeals to the Council to do its utmost to support peaceful efforts and to help bring about peace and security in the Middle East in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. And, indeed, we find useful the three guiding principles referred to earlier this afternoon by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France — humanity, justice and responsibility. As for Thailand, we reaffirm our support for the collective efforts towards diplomacy, de-escalation and peaceful means to help to end the suffering and achieve an enduring peace. Indeed, an enduring peace is the best guarantee against future suffering.

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

Ms. Al-thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the assumption of your friendly country to the presidency of the Security Council, and I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, and would like to congratulate the newly elected members of the Council.

We align ourselves with the statements made on behalf of the Group of Arab States and to be made on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Gaza Strip is today the largest humanitarian catastrophe in the world. According to United Nations reports, there are no safe places there, and the conditions for a dignified life are diminishing. Nearly all of the population in Gaza — more than 2 million people — has now been displaced and is at risk of famine.

In 100 days, the number of victims has reached 100,000 people, mostly women and children. That includes people who have been killed, injured, permanently disabled, lost under the rubble or suffering from settler violence and that of the occupation in the occupied West Bank. That is why multiple international officials have stressed that they have seen nothing like the current situation in Gaza, prompting the Secretary-General to address the Council based on Article 99 of the Charter (see S/PV.9498), warning of the collapse of the humanitarian system and public order and calling for an urgent humanitarian ceasefire.

The State of Qatar reiterates its condemnation of all forms of targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, collective punishment and depriving civilians of food, water and medicine. We also condemn violating their rights and attempts to implement forced displacement. We condemn as well the statements by Israeli officials on the displacement of the population of Gaza, which is another form of occupation and a serious violation of international law. That will undermine prospects of peace.

We welcome the measures taken to implement resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023), including the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. We emphasize the need for the full implementation of those resolutions. At the same time, we stress that the dire humanitarian situation, the blatant violations of international law and the grave impact on the security and stability in the region require an immediate ceasefire. That is the only solution for ending the suffering and preventing a dangerous escalation in the region.

The call for ending the war represents the will of the international community demonstrated during the resumed tenth emergency session by voting of 153 countries in favour of General Assembly resolution ES-10/22. That is a responsibility that falls upon the international community to ensure the implementation

of international law without any discrimination or double standards.

Since the beginning, the State of Qatar has made, and continues to make, diplomatic efforts at the highest levels in coordination with regional and international partners to achieve the priorities of ending the war, ensuring the delivery of sufficient and sustained humanitarian assistance, releasing prisoners and hostages and preventing the conflict from spilling over into the region. Thanks to the State of Qatar's mediation in partnership with the United States and the Arab Republic of Egypt, a humanitarian truce was reached and extended in November 2023, which allowed the delivery of more humanitarian assistance and the release of hundreds of women and children detained in Gaza and of Palestinian prisoners. Since then, the efforts made by the State of Qatar have not stopped. We have announced the successful mediation undertaken in cooperation with the Republic of France to reach an agreement between Israel and Hamas for the delivery of medicines and humanitarian assistance to civilians in the Gaza Strip, especially in the most affected areas, and for the delivery of the medications needed by those detained in the Strip, provided that the medicines and aid are sent from the State of Qatar by air through El Arish Airport.

We look forward to building on the diplomatic efforts we have achieved so far and moving towards achieving a comprehensive and sustainable agreement that stops the bloodshed and leads to serious negotiations and a political process towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, based on the principle of a two-State solution that guarantees the establishment of an independent Palestinian State across the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the enjoyment by the brotherly Palestinian people of all their inalienable rights. We affirm that is the only way to guarantee sustainable peace. Any policies outside of that path will not change the fact that the Gaza Strip has always been and will remain Palestinian territory.

We should not lose sight of the dangerous escalation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The State of Qatar condemns the decision of the occupying authorities to confiscate Palestinian land in East Jerusalem, which is yet another unilateral measure that violates international law and hinders the two-State solution. We also condemn the allowing of

extremist demonstrations under the slogan of imposing control over Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque, as that constitutes a dangerous provocation that contributes to increasing tensions and violence. We once again call upon the Council to shoulder its responsibilities and to compel Israel to stop its measures aimed at changing the historical and legal status of the city of Jerusalem and the Islamic and Christian holy sites.

The State of Qatar continues to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip. It has so far sent 68 planes loaded with more than 2,000 tons of humanitarian aid. We also continue to implement the initiative of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, to provide treatment to 1,500 wounded people from the Gaza Strip, of which eight batches have arrived so far. Furthermore, a Qatari medical team is providing assistance in treating the wounded at El Arish, within the framework of the State of Qatar's full support for the brotherly Palestinian people until they overcome their ordeal.

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

Mr. Nguyen (Viet Nam): I would like to express Viet Nam's appreciation to France, as President of the Security Council, for convening this very important open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his informative and insightful briefing.

As we have passed the 100-day mark of the conflict in Gaza, the international community's grave concern about the ongoing humanitarian situation has only deepened. The staggering number of casualties, with more than 25,000 Palestinians killed and thousands more missing, predominantly women and children, underscores the critical need for an immediate ceasefire. The substantial damage to civilian objects, including homes, hospitals, schools and United Nations facilities, is alarming. With the majority of Gaza's population of 2.2 million people displaced, facing acute shortages of food, water and basic necessities, the situation is desperately dire.

Viet Nam once again condemns all indiscriminate attacks against civilians and essential infrastructure. Those actions contravene international law, particularly international humanitarian law, and undermine the relevant United Nations resolutions. The role of the Security Council in addressing this multidimensional crisis is crucial, yet its response has been insufficient to halt the worsening calamity. The resolutions

adopted to date have not effectively stemmed the tide of destruction and suffering. We therefore urge the Council to redouble its efforts.

Protecting innocent civilians, including ensuring the safe release of hostages, must be a top priority. The provision of rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian assistance is essential to mitigate the risk of further fatalities resulting from violence, disease and malnutrition. The ongoing intense fighting, particularly near Khan Younis and Nasser Hospital, highlights the urgent need for the United Nations and the international community to facilitate the movement of humanitarian aid. The severe situation in northern Gaza, where people are enduring desperate shortages of basic supplies, amplifies the urgency for us to take collective action.

Furthermore, the conflict's escalation has exacerbated tensions in the broader region. In the West Bank, the situation has deteriorated, with hundreds of Palestinians killed, thousands arrested and many barred from accessing Jerusalem. Meanwhile, recent incidents in the Red Sea have heightened global concerns, particularly about the safety and freedom of navigation, in addition to their implications for the sovereignty of affected nations. Those developments, along with ongoing tensions across the Middle East, underscore the critical need for restraint and diplomatic engagement, including here at the Security Council.

Finally, I take this opportunity to reiterate Viet Nam's steadfast support for the two-State solution, with the establishment of an independent State of Palestine based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and coexisting in peace with the State of Israel, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. We believe that that vision continues to be the cornerstone for a long-term and sustainable peace in the region.

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

Mr. Larsen (Australia): Australia has chosen to intervene in this open debate because we see this as a critical time, as fighting continues and humanitarian suffering worsens in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. That criticality was underscored by the visit of Australia's Foreign Minister, Penny Wong, to the region last week. Action is needed now.

Australia unequivocally condemns the Hamas attacks on Israel. Those were abhorrent acts of terror against innocent civilians. We call for the immediate

and unconditional release of all the hostages. As Foreign Minister Wong stressed again last week, Israel has the right to defend itself; however, the way it does so matters. All parties must respect international humanitarian law and protect civilian lives and infrastructure.

Australia repeats its urgent call for safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. We want to see further humanitarian pauses to enable the scaled-up delivery of aid, the safe passage for civilians and the release of hostages. Australia wants to see a sustainable ceasefire, and we see humanitarian pauses as important steps on the pathway to that goal. No ceasefire can be one-sided, and no ceasefire can be unconditional. Any solution in Gaza must not involve the forcible displacement of the Palestinian people or the use of Gaza as a platform for terrorism. Australia urges all parties to prevent regional escalation and to work towards containing the conflict.

We express our deep concern about the dangerous actions of regional actors seeking to take advantage of the situation. We unreservedly condemn Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. Those attacks constitute a threat to navigational rights and freedoms, international

commerce and maritime security. Australia remains committed to upholding the rules-based order on the high seas and the central principle of the freedom of navigation.

Practical steps are urgently needed to find an enduring solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It remains Australia's view that achieving long-term peace and security for Israel in its region requires the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. And we stress the importance of efforts to restart a political process that leads to a future Palestinian State. We reiterate our commitment to working towards a just and enduring peace that enables Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in security within internationally recognized borders.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until tomorrow at 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 8.10 p.m.