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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 3 November 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Joyini (South Africa)
later: Mr. Pérez Ayestarán (Vice-Chair) (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 49: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
([A/78/13](#), [A/78/279](#), [A/78/305](#) and [A/78/314](#))

1. **The Chair** said that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) played a critical role in providing services to and protecting the rights and dignity of the more than 5.9 million Palestine refugees, some 20 per cent of the total number of refugees around the world. UNRWA currently faced an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and enormous challenges in some of its other fields of operations. In addition, it remained chronically underfunded. While she commended those Member States that had contributed towards preserving the vital services of UNRWA, including for the Flash Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, more needed to be done.

Statement by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA

2. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Director, UNRWA Representative Office, New York), speaking on behalf of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini, and presenting the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA ([A/78/314](#)), said that the Commissioner-General was regrettably unable to address the Committee because he was fully engaged in the Agency's response to the humanitarian and human catastrophe in Gaza. The previous three weeks had been horrific. Almost everyone in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the broader region was in mourning. The horrific attacks perpetrated by Hamas in Israel on 7 October 2023 and the relentless bombardment of the Gaza Strip by the Israeli forces were shocking.

3. Since the start of the conflict, the Commissioner-General had spent time in Gaza with the UNRWA team on the ground, where he had experienced one of the saddest days of his 30-year humanitarian career. He had visited an overcrowded school hosting thousands of displaced persons, beset with levels of distress and unsanitary living conditions that were beyond comprehension. Everyone had been asking for water and food; rather than being at school to learn, children had been asking for a sip of water and a loaf of bread. The school had also been damaged by bombardments in which one person had been killed and 80 injured. In addition, on 2 November, four schools in Gaza sheltering nearly 20,000 displaced persons had been hit during bombardments, which had led to the deaths of at least 23 and injury of at least 35 people.

4. Since the beginning of the war, nearly 50 UNRWA buildings and assets had been affected, and some had been directly hit. Entire families had moved to UNRWA shelters in the hope that they would be safe in a United Nations building, under a United Nations flag. UNRWA staff in Gaza had reported that basic services, including health care, were collapsing. Fuel, medicine, food and water were all running out. Depriving an entire population of items essential for survival was collective punishment and a violation of international humanitarian law. The streets of Gaza had started overflowing with sewage, which would soon lead to a massive health hazard. Recurring communications blackouts also aggravated panic and distress among civilians.

5. Seventy-two UNRWA colleagues had lost their lives in less than one month, which was the highest number of aid workers killed in a conflict in such a short time in the history of the United Nations. Like most Gazans, UNRWA staff had lost relatives, friends and neighbours, and they themselves were displaced with their families. Nonetheless, at least 5,000 UNRWA staff members worked in Gaza every day to operate 150 UNRWA shelters, keeping one-third of health centres open and running 80 mobile health teams. They also supported the entry of humanitarian convoys and the storage and distribution of aid, while also distributing the little fuel that was left to hospitals, bakeries and shelters. UNRWA staff were a glimmer of hope for the entire Gaza Strip; a ray of light as humanity sank into darkness. However, they would soon be unable to operate unless immediate and decisive action was taken. A handful of convoys being allowed through Rafah did not constitute a meaningful humanitarian operation, nor was it commensurate with the intense political and diplomatic shuttling that had been taking place. It was difficult to understand how a near-complete siege could be imposed for two weeks and then lifted slightly, allowing the entry of a trickle of aid and no fuel. The system in place to allow aid into Gaza would fail without the political will to make the flow of supplies meaningful, matching the scale and magnitude of the needs of over two million people.

6. Hunger, despair and a sense of abandonment were turning into anger against the international community. Gazans could not comprehend how the world could watch such a tragedy unfold without protecting and assisting civilians. There were also fears that their anger would soon shift towards the United Nations and UNRWA, as the Agency was generally equated with the international community in Gaza. United Nations colleagues in Gaza were warning of a breakdown in civil order, the beginning of which had been seen when scores

of people had broken into United Nations warehouses on the day of a complete blackout in communications. More such incidents were anticipated if the Organization did not deliver the protection and assistance which people expected. A breakdown of civil order would make the continuation of UNRWA operations extremely difficult, if not impossible, and would exclude the possibility of bringing in convoys. UNRWA was the last lifeline for the Palestinians in Gaza.

7. There was also trouble brewing far beyond the borders of the Gaza Strip. The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, was simmering with tension, as violence had reached unprecedented levels. Rising settler attacks and restrictions on movement had displaced over 800 people in the West Bank since 7 October 2023. The Israeli military was conducting daily incursions into refugee camps. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the total number of Palestinians killed by the Israeli forces or settlers since 7 October 2023 was at 123, including 34 children. Street demonstrations were becoming increasingly violent, and restrictions on movement across occupied territory were severely undermining the ability of UNRWA to deliver services.

8. Along the Israeli-Lebanese border, regular clashes and civilian casualties were reported, and the situation inside several Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon had been intensifying for years. The latest conflict between Palestinian factions in the Ein El Hilweh refugee camp had caused the displacement of 4,000 people and rendered UNRWA schools, which provided education to nearly 6,000 people, unusable. That conflict had come in the context of unprecedented economic hardship for Palestine refugees, who had virtually no economic prospects in the country. In July, UNRWA had opened 13 vacancies for sanitation labourer posts and had received 37,000 applications, including from refugees with university degrees, something that showed how little opportunity there was for Palestine refugees to lead lives of dignity.

9. In Syria, Palestine refugees had endured the civil war, economic crises and a devastating earthquake. They were currently at risk of further instability: there were increasing reports of strikes on various actors' positions on Syrian territory.

10. Widespread protests were taking place across Jordan in solidarity with the people of Gaza, against a backdrop of soaring poverty and unemployment. Those conditions had the greatest impact on the most vulnerable: Palestine refugees from Syria and those who had come from Gaza in 1967.

11. The international community must immediately agree on urgent measures to be taken together. First, strict adherence to international humanitarian law was crucial. Protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, including humanitarian and United Nations facilities and particularly those sheltering civilians, was crucial, regardless of their location. Hostages must also be released. An immediate humanitarian ceasefire was needed, and the flow of humanitarian aid, including fuel, should be safe, unimpeded, substantial and continuous, reaching all people across Gaza. Adequate financial resources should be made available to enable UNRWA to lead the humanitarian response in Gaza. While generous contributions had been received for its initial flash appeal, without a fully funded core budget, the Agency would be unable to pay the salaries of its staff, including those in Gaza, in November and December.

12. In view of the alarming violence in the West Bank, the protracted conflict in Syria, the fragile stability in Jordan and the near collapse of Lebanon, it was time to stand firmly with UNRWA, which was one of the most stable entities in an otherwise unstable region. Over the previous 10 to 15 years, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been deprioritized by the international community; such political stagnation had resulted in the chronic underfunding of the Agency. Before the current conflict, UNRWA had already been heading towards financial implosion. However, since 7 October 2023, it had established itself as the most authoritative international voice on the tragic developments in Gaza, thanks to the continued work and reporting of UNRWA staff. Member States, the media and political analysts had all sought the views, statistics and policy advice of UNRWA, while recognizing it as a pillar of stability for civilians and local communities in Gaza. However, in order to play its stabilizing role in Gaza and beyond, UNRWA required a sustainable model. Over the previous two years, the Commissioner-General had put forward several solutions, but none had served as the gamechanger that Palestine refugees, the hosts and the region needed. Member States must step up, be bold and find concrete solutions to ensure that a stable and predictable UNRWA remained the greatest asset of the international community within the region.

13. There was no going back to the pre-war status quo that had fuelled the present disaster. Over two million people had been under air, sea and land blockade in the world's largest open-air prison for 16 years, and that situation was untenable. Israelis and Palestinians were neighbours with intertwined fates, and they would need to find a way to co-exist. The actions currently being undertaken against the civilian population of Gaza

would only poison that shared future. A political solution had become a matter of life and death for millions of people and must be put firmly back on the table. A genuine prospect of Palestinian statehood and security for all was critical to stabilize the current situation and to step back from the brink, before it was too late. All Member States must change the trajectory of the crisis; with their help, UNRWA was ready to do its part.

14. **Ms. Brandt** (Netherlands) said that her delegation was horrified by the reports of the lives lost and suffering of so many people. It paid tribute to the 5,000 brave UNRWA staff members and other humanitarian workers who continued to work tirelessly to provide relief under extremely difficult circumstances, and offered its condolences for the staff who had lost their lives.

15. International humanitarian law must be respected, and every possible measure must be taken to protect innocent lives, but also to keep United Nations premises safe and allow its staff to undertake their essential, life-saving work safely and unhindered. The situation in Gaza and for Gazans was unimaginable, but what they needed was clear: safe and unhindered humanitarian assistance, food, water, fuel and medicine. Her delegation was grateful to the States that were working to make such provisions possible.

16. While 329 aid trucks had crossed into Gaza, that number paled in comparison with what was needed. Every effort must therefore be made to ensure the immediate and massive scaling up of assistance. The Netherlands was also concerned by the situation in the West Bank and beyond, where the Agency must be able to continue its essential work. More funding and resources were needed for that purpose. Her Government had already committed an additional 25 million euros for urgent humanitarian relief, 8 million of which were for UNRWA, in addition to its annual contribution of 90 million euros. The Agency required the help of all to attain a funding situation that would be sustainable beyond the current crisis. It was time for everyone to stand firmly with UNRWA, as a matter of urgency.

17. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) asked how the current war on Gaza was affecting the ability of UNRWA to provide core services other than humanitarian assistance under its mandate, such as education, especially in areas of operation outside of Gaza.

18. **Ms. Shapir Ben Naftaly** (Israel) said that, at the previous session of the Committee, her delegation had asked what UNRWA was doing to combat incitement in its textbooks (see [A/C.4/77/SR.23](#)). It had been

subsequently dismissed with claims of political attacks against the Agency. She had personally received a letter of complaint from the UNRWA Representative Office in New York. She therefore wished to know whether, since 7 October 2023, any internal reflection had taken place on how the incitement to terror and violence and the glorification of terrorists in UNRWA textbooks had contributed to the massacre of 1,400 people by Hamas terrorists and celebrations thereafter in the streets of Gaza.

19. In November 2022, in the yard of an UNRWA school in Beit Hanoun, in Gaza, the Agency had identified a human-made cavity and described it as a serious violation of the neutrality of UNRWA and a breach of international law, while failing to state that it was a Hamas-built terror tunnel. She asked whether UNRWA should have clearly condemned and taken active steps to address the continued abuse of United Nations facilities including UNRWA schools – not to mention hospitals and mosques – by Hamas for their terror activities. She also wished to know what UNRWA had done to raise the issue of the 242 hostages held in Gaza by Hamas.

20. On 16 October 2023, the Agency had posted a message on the social messaging service X (formerly known as Twitter), to the effect that the de facto authorities in Gaza had been removing fuel and medical equipment from the UNRWA compound. However, soon after, that post had been deleted. If the Agency was truly interested in supplying humanitarian aid to civilians in need, it should clearly condemn Hamas for stealing and hoarding tens of thousands of litres of fuel from the United Nations.

21. **Mr. Van Schalkwyk** (South Africa) said that it was disheartening to hear the accusations levelled against UNRWA. Large numbers of UNRWA staff members had been killed by Israel, and the representative of Israel had expressed the view that UNRWA was colluding with Hamas. That view reflected mistrust in and low regard for the Agency. He therefore wondered what the international community could do, aside from providing funding, to rebuild trust in UNRWA and ensure it would be able to fulfil its mandate without coming under attack. He would also welcome further details on the issue of fuel, particularly in response to the allegation that any fuel provided to UNRWA would be stolen.

22. **Ms. Abdelhady** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that, as she spoke, Palestine refugees were being terrorized by Israeli bombs in an inhumane war on a defenceless civilian population in Gaza, consisting mainly of children. Her delegation paid

tribute to the 72 UNRWA staff members who had been killed. Israel was conducting an abhorrent war against innocent civilians and humanitarian workers in a grave violation of international humanitarian law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, under which UNRWA facilities were protected. There was no possible justification for the war crimes that were being committed.

23. The UNRWA staff members who had lost their lives were themselves refugees who had never been accorded the respect they deserved in the United Nations system. The international community had not heeded the risks to their lives and had failed to insist on their protected status as refugees. Their honourable service should be memorialized and should serve as an inspiration.

24. Even as it was under financial duress, UNRWA continued to go to extraordinary efforts to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the escalating crisis in the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, while also serving millions of Palestine refugees in other fields of operation. Her delegation appreciated the longstanding support of host countries, the contributions from donors worldwide and the efforts of other humanitarian agencies. She asked what the UNRWA was doing, beyond securing funding and humanitarian supplies, to scale up its protection of civilian lives.

25. Contrary to the claims made by the Israeli representative, the textbooks did not teach hate; the vicious occupation and killing of families were what would harden the hearts of Palestinian children. One could only imagine what a Palestinian child would think upon discovering that the human rights and tolerance that she had learned about in UNRWA schools were not intended for her or her people, given that the occupier had no tolerance, no mercy and only hatred for her people, as demonstrated by all the bloodshed and destruction around her.

26. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Director, UNRWA Representative Office in New York) said that, while it was difficult to identify the direct impact of the situation in Gaza on UNRWA efforts in other fields of operation, restrictions on movement and violence were affecting the Agency's work in the occupied West Bank. The situation in at the Ein El Hilweh camp in Lebanon had also affected education services for thousands of students, but tensions there had calmed. The Agency welcomed the contributions it had received for the Flash Appeal. Nevertheless, if its core budget was not fully funded, the Agency would not be able to pay its

employees' salaries, something that would affect its operations in all fields.

27. UNRWA adhered to humanitarian principles and had a system in place to vet its staff and its textbooks. Its schools educated students in human rights, conflict resolution and tolerance and had a well-respected youth parliamentary programme. The Agency was disheartened by the allegations repeatedly levelled against its students, which did not at all square with the first-hand experience of anyone who had visited its schools and talked with the students. UNRWA was not aware of any looting whatsoever at any of its facilities in Gaza. The Agency took allegations seriously and did everything it could to abide by the rules that the United Nations had established for its operation. Given its excellent track record, the Agency should have earned a certain degree of trust.

28. In the light of the ongoing emergency in Gaza, UNRWA needed to focus on providing humanitarian assistance and safe shelters. It required the help of the international community to ensure that warring parties respected international humanitarian law, as was required under the Geneva Conventions. There was an urgent need for a humanitarian ceasefire so that UNRWA could bring in enough assistance to ensure that the population would be able to survive. Fuel was vital to ensuring that convoys could operate, bakeries could make bread, desalination plants could provide water and municipal authorities could keep the streets free from sewage; without it, UNRWA would not be able to provide services. There was an urgent need to focus on the current emergency, because people, including UNRWA's students, were dying every day.

Statement by the Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA

29. **Ms. Havn** (Norway), Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, introducing the report of the Working Group ([A/78/314](#)), said that the meetings of the Working Group had taken place at a time of critical financial challenges for the Agency, which threatened the development of Palestine refugees and stability in the region. Those financial difficulties had become more dire in recent weeks amid the worsening situation on the ground. The General Assembly and the international community were responsible for ensuring that the Agency could fulfil its mandate and maintain its services in order to meet the needs of the refugee population, which had grown exponentially in the past month.

30. The Working Group urged all Governments to increase their contributions to the Agency and to

contribute to the three funding portals, and particularly to its programme budget. Contributions should reflect appropriate international burden-sharing and should keep pace with the requirements of the Agency while taking into account the effects of inflation and other factors driving the cost of providing services. It urged all Governments to provide unearmarked multi-year funding where possible, make sustained and predictable contributions to UNRWA and disburse their contributions early in the year where feasible.

31. The Working Group commended UNRWA for its efforts to increase efficiency while maintaining the quality of its services to Palestine refugees, as well as for the measures it had taken to increase its transparency by reporting to the International Aid Transparency Initiative. The Working Group encouraged the Agency to continue implementing those measures, making efforts to mobilize resources and exploring ways to diversify its access to funding. It took note of the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the operations of UNRWA (A/71/849) and all resolutions related to the financing of UNRWA, with a view to addressing recurring budget deficits and sufficiently and predictably supporting its work. In view of the Agency's extremely critical financial situation, it was important to provide sustainable options to secure durable solutions for the Agency's future, including for its financial stability.

Interactive dialogue

32. **Ms. Abdelhady** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the situation in the Gaza Strip was worsening by the minute as the world sat by and watched unbridled violence against a civilian population. Palestine refugees were at the centre of a human catastrophe, in which thousands of lives had been lost, entire communities had been destroyed and many had lost livelihoods, dignity and hope. An entire nation had been stripped of their homeland, deprived of their rights, colonized, dehumanized and persecuted in a Nakbah that had never ended. Over the past 28 days, indiscriminate Israeli attacks had killed more than 9,300 Palestinians, including 72 UNRWA staff members and 74 survivors of the 1948 Nakbah. Most were refugees, and all had suffered occupation, blockade and continued Israeli wars against their existence.

33. Israel did not refer to Palestine refugees as human beings but rather as a "demographic threat" to be contained or eliminated. That view was at the crux of Israel's malign treatment of Palestine refugees and persistent denial of their right of return, in breach of international law and General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

34. Israel was systematically targeting civilian areas, which had left nowhere safe for any living being. There must be accountability for the war crimes and crimes against humanity that were being perpetrated, including the massacre committed by the Israeli occupying forces in the Jabalia refugee camp just a few days earlier. Refugee camps in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, were also being targeted by Israeli military raids in which 140 Palestinians, including 41 children, had been killed, more than 2,000 civilians had been injured and hundreds had been arrested and detained.

35. The Israeli attacks in Gaza had injured more than 23,000 people. UNRWA health centres were unable to provide care because the Palestinian health system was being brought to collapse by an Israeli siege that had cut off food, water, medical supplies and fuel following a 16-year blockade. Without a ceasefire, unimpeded humanitarian access and emergency aid, the death toll would continue to climb. Entire families had been massacred, and many were being buried in mass graves. Women and children accounted for more than 60 per cent of the casualties, and one child was killed every ten minutes by Israel's genocidal war machine. The death toll did not include the more than 2,000 people buried under the rubble of their homes, who were unlikely to have survived, nor did it reflect the number of children orphaned and left without a single family member. Nearly half of civilian structures in Gaza had been destroyed. Homes, hospitals, schools and UNRWA facilities, which were sheltering over 690,000 of the 1.4 million internally displaced Palestinians, continued to be attacked systematically in grave breach of international law and every standard of human decency. That day alone, there had been reports of Israeli strikes on four more UNRWA shelters and on ambulances at Shifa' Hospital.

36. The genocidal intentions of Israel against the Palestinian people could no longer be denied and must be stopped. Extremist Israeli officials, military forces and settlers were carrying out horrific carnage and threatening a "greater Nakbah" on the Palestinian people, whom they had called "human animals" and "children of darkness". The existential threat to the Palestinian people must be stopped, beginning with an immediate ceasefire to end the bloodshed and destruction, a halt of any attempts to forcibly transfer the population from Gaza, protection of civilians and immediate, unimpeded humanitarian aid.

37. The indispensability of UNRWA was being proven in real time. The humanitarian aid, protection, stability and modicum of hope that the Agency provided to more than 5.8 million Palestine refugees must be sustained. To expedite and ensure humanitarian assistance at scale

in Gaza and to ensure that UNRWA could fulfil its mandate and meet the enormous needs of refugees, the chronic funding crisis at UNRWA must be addressed, including through a larger contribution from the United Nations regular budget.

38. **Ms. Clune** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer), speaking in accordance with General Assembly resolution [65/276](#), said that the European Union extended its condolences on the deaths of so many UNRWA staff members and commended the enormous efforts made by UNRWA in Gaza since the start of the hostilities, as the Agency sheltered the displaced population and provided basic services despite the difficult security situation. The European Union called for the protection of civilians at all times in line with international humanitarian law and for the protection of all civilian infrastructure.

39. UNRWA continued to provide Palestine refugees with the necessary protection and services, including health care and education. The European Union would continue to support it in all fields of operations, including in East Jerusalem. The Agency made a key contribution to the viability of the two-State solution, and the European Union was ready to contribute to reviving a political process in pursuit of such a solution. The generosity and efforts of the host countries were greatly appreciated. The European Union and its member States were, collectively, the largest contributors to the UNRWA budget and continued to answer its calls for additional funds. The European Union would remain a staunch and predictable supporter of the Agency. Additional financial support from other and new donors was appreciated, and all partners should translate that step into multi-annual contributions, which guaranteed predictability and facilitated budget management.

40. **Mr. Alwasil** (Saudi Arabia), speaking on behalf of the Group of Arab States, said that the question of Palestine refugees remained central to the question of Palestine. The Group of Arab States was committed to upholding the inalienable right of Palestine refugees to return to their homeland, in accordance with internationally recognized resolutions, especially General Assembly resolution [194 \(III\)](#), and the Arab Peace Initiative.

41. The destructive war on Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip was the latest in a long series of crimes committed by the Israeli occupation authorities. Occupation forces and settler militias were conducting daily raids on refugee camps in the West Bank, killing, injuring or detaining numerous Palestine refugees and forcibly displacing Bedouin communities. The most

recent escalation had been enabled primarily by the absence of accountability. In order to ensure that war did not spread across the region, it was essential to protect civilians in accordance with international law.

42. More than 70 UNRWA staff members had now laid down their lives to fulfil their noble mission. It was essential to secure a ceasefire, an end to all Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip, and immediate access for humanitarian and medical supplies. All obstacles to the Agency's work must be removed. The Group denounced in the strongest possible terms any attempt to settle the question of Palestine by forcibly displacing the Palestinian people, whether within occupied territory or to neighbouring States, irrespective of the spurious pretexts invoked by Israel and the States that justified its act of aggression.

43. The Group commended the work done by UNRWA despite the war in Gaza and the financial difficulties that impeded the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Agency continued to enjoy the support of the Main Committees of the General Assembly and of the international community as a whole. Failure to meet its financial needs would have serious repercussions for the humanitarian situation of refugees, not to mention regional security and stability. In view of the unprecedented budgetary shortfall, the Agency required support to maintain its vital services, particularly education and health care.

44. The Group of Arab States fully supported the mandate of UNRWA and rejected any attempt to undermine or alter that mandate or transfer responsibilities from the Agency to any other entity. UNRWA must continue to fulfil its mandate of providing vital services to Palestine refugees in its five areas of operation, including occupied Jerusalem, until a just solution to the question of refugees was found, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [194 \(III\)](#). The Group commended the host countries, which enabled Palestine refugees to remain resilient. The Group was grateful to the Secretary-General and the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for their courageous stance, and to the staff of international humanitarian and relief organizations, journalists and aid workers who had laid down their lives.

45. **Mr. Al Busaidi** (Oman), speaking on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, said that those countries condemned in the strongest terms the targeting of defenceless civilians and of civilian infrastructure in Gaza. An immediate and permanent ceasefire must be put in place in order to allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the inhabitants of Gaza. The Agency must continue to receive political and financial

support in order to meet the humanitarian and development needs of the 5.7 million Palestine refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in neighbouring States.

46. The Gulf Cooperation Council countries commended the Commissioner-General and staff of UNRWA for their hard work under tragic circumstances. It extended its condolences on the killing of 72 UNRWA staff members in the line of duty in the Gaza Strip. It was concerned by the continuous bombardment of UNRWA facilities, which provided shelter for some of the over 600,000 displaced persons. It was essential that civilians, humanitarian workers and United Nations facilities be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law. Crossings must be opened urgently in order to allow the entry of humanitarian and relief assistance. Any endeavour to forcibly displace Palestinians from occupied territory must be rejected. UNRWA must also continue its vital work in neighbouring States, particularly with a view to improving infrastructure and providing education, health care and food, pending a just and comprehensive solution that would, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), allow the Palestine refugees to return to the homes from which they had been displaced.

47. The Israeli occupation authorities should respond to calls for peace and engage in serious, good-faith negotiations to achieve peace on the basis of the two-State solution. The Gulf Cooperation Council countries firmly supported the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

48. **Ms. Lassen** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), said that Nordic countries aligned themselves with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union. The events of the past month had confirmed the need for a strong, effective UNRWA. The Agency was a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, providing shelter and vital basic services to almost 700,000 displaced persons. The deaths of the 72 UNRWA staff members who had been killed since 7 October 2023 underscored the urgent need for greater protection of humanitarian workers. Protection of civilians was not only vital but a core obligation for all parties to conflict under international humanitarian law. All necessary measures, including humanitarian corridors and pauses, should be taken to ensure that humanitarian aid could reach all those in need throughout Gaza.

49. Beyond the current crisis, UNRWA had a unique mandate to protect and provide direct services to millions of Palestine refugees living in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. It played an important role in mitigating the risks of migration and radicalization, promoting regional stability and ensuring that no one was left behind. The international community should ensure that the Agency received adequate funding to fulfil its mandate. UNRWA had taken important steps towards diversifying its funding sources and modernizing its systems to ensure more efficient service delivery, but further efforts to broaden its donor base were needed.

50. The Nordic countries had been reliable partners of UNRWA, providing around \$120 million in core contributions in 2022 and contributing \$11.2 million in extraordinary humanitarian contributions to the flash appeal for the current crisis. The work of UNRWA would remain crucial for stability in the region until a just, political two-State solution could be brokered, for that was the only way to ensure development and sustainable peace.

51. **Mr. Malovrh** (Slovenia), speaking also on behalf of France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and Spain, said that civilians and civilian infrastructure, including United Nations facilities, schools, hospitals, places of worship and shelters must be fully protected at all times and in line with international humanitarian law. A humanitarian truce was urgently needed to enable the swift, safe and unimpeded distribution of humanitarian aid within Gaza. All parties should ensure that the United Nations and its agencies were granted access. The international community should massively scale up humanitarian assistance to respond to the immense needs of the deteriorating humanitarian situation. Slovenia and the other States concerned had recently made a substantial increase to its funding to the UNRWA core budget and to the Flash Appeal. Predictable financing and new donors were of crucial importance, and options for a more sustainable financing model to facilitate the work of UNRWA should be explored.

52. **Mr. Salah** (Tunisia) said that, for 27 days, the Israeli authorities had been attacking UNRWA facilities in the Gaza Strip, including schools where refugees had been sheltering. The international community must mobilize to protect civilians by prevailing on the occupier to comply with international humanitarian law. It had a political and moral responsibility to ensure that UNRWA could continue to provide its vital services to Palestinian refugees, particularly the tens of thousands of civilians displaced in Gaza. His delegation rejected any attempt to equate the occupier with the occupied. It condemned the attacks perpetrated by the occupation

forces and supported the imprescriptible rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish its own State on its own land. A ceasefire must be declared urgently, and humanitarian and medical assistance must be delivered to the Gaza Strip immediately and without hindrance. Any attempt to forcibly displace the Palestinian people must be rejected. Lastly, his delegation extended its condolences to the families of UNRWA staff and other Palestinians who had been killed, and rejected all the accusations levelled against the Agency.

53. **Mr. Abushaibah** (Kuwait) said that the question of Palestine and the plight of Palestine refugees remained the central issue in the Arab and Islamic worlds. The latest humanitarian crisis could exacerbate the number of Palestine refugees. Against that backdrop, the international community must extend full support to UNRWA and uphold the fundamental, inalienable right of return of Palestine refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution [194 \(III\)](#) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

54. The Israeli occupation authorities had carried out revenge attacks that had claimed the lives of tens of thousands of innocent civilians, damaged civilian infrastructure, and cut off electricity, water, food and fuel. They had committed the worst forms of crime against humanity, besieging the Gaza Strip and forcing its inhabitants to choose between death and forced displacement.

55. His delegation denounced the occupation's crimes in the strongest possible terms. The Israeli occupation must be prevailed upon to comply with United Nations resolutions, international law and international humanitarian law. Safe corridors must be established in order for relief and medical assistance to enter the Gaza Strip. Any attempt to forcibly displace the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip must be resisted.

56. His delegation condemned the killing of UNRWA personnel, which flagrantly contravened Security Council resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#). It continued to support the Palestinian people in their endeavour to exercise their legitimate rights, including the establishment of an independent State of Palestine on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

57. **Mr. Akram** (Pakistan) said that his delegation fully supported UNRWA and would continue to do so until the Palestine refugees were able to return to their homeland after establishing a viable, independent and contiguous State of Palestine within the pre-1967 borders and with Al-Quds al-Sharif (Jerusalem) as its capital. Despite the overwhelming call by the General Assembly for an immediate and sustained humanitarian

truce, Israel had continued an uninterrupted, brutal campaign of bombardment, air strikes and now a ground invasion for over 26 days. The international community was witnessing war crimes and crimes against humanity committed with complete impunity, under the cover of those who had prevented the ceasefire and enabled the continued slaughter. As courageous United Nations officials had said, a genocide was occurring. Pakistan would continue to provide all possible support to the besieged Palestinians and was sending supplies through Egypt in the hope of providing some measure of relief. His delegation commended UNRWA for its courageous work and rejected the vile allegations against the Agency made by the representative of Israel. Pakistan hoped that the Secretary-General would honour the 72 UNRWA staff members killed in the same way that fallen United Nations peacekeepers were honoured.

58. First and foremost, there must be an unconditional and sustained ceasefire. The blatant crimes that were being committed must be called out and documented, and accountability for those crimes must be demanded. Efforts must also be made to ensure that substantial humanitarian aid, including fuel, could flow freely into the Gaza Strip. Lastly, the international community must ensure that UNRWA had the funding that it needed to care for its staff and those under their care. His delegation urged those delegations that had voted against or had abstained on General Assembly resolution [ES-10/21](#) to reconsider their position.

59. *Mr. Pérez Ayestarán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

60. **Mr. Chindawongse** (Thailand) said that ending the violence and suffering must be the top priority. Thailand joined the call in General Assembly resolution [ES-10/21](#) for an immediate humanitarian truce, full compliance with obligations under international law and the immediate, unconditional release of all civilians. Humanitarian assistance must be urgently provided, and efforts should be made to enable UNRWA and other humanitarian workers to attend to the needs of those affected. The recent announcements of commitments and contributions to support the work of UNRWA were welcome, but that additional support needed to be sustained. The Agency's budget from voluntary contributions had been falling far short of what was needed even before the recent crisis, and the financing gap could expand with the ongoing violence. While efforts by UNRWA to broaden and diversify its donor base were welcome, Member States and other partners should shore up their support. For its part, Thailand had contributed \$80,000 to the Flash Appeal in addition to its \$200,000 multi-year pledge.

61. The international community needed to renew its commitment to achieving peace in the Middle East. Thailand supported a genuine dialogue with a view to finding a mutually agreed, peaceful two-State solution in which the States of Israel and Palestine would live side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders. Immediate steps must be taken to deescalate the ongoing situation, implement an immediate ceasefire, provide humanitarian assistance and return hostages safely.

62. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) said that his country condemned in the strongest terms the killing of 72 UNRWA staff members as a direct consequence of ongoing Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip. The large number of fatalities was a testament to the monstrous scale and indiscriminate nature of the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. It was imperative to implement General Assembly resolution [ES-10/21](#) immediately, including its call for an immediate, durable and sustained truce leading to a cessation of hostilities, and for immediate, full, sustained, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for UNRWA and other United Nations humanitarian agencies.

63. Egypt absolutely condemned any and all attempts to forcibly transfer the Palestinian civilian population. Such abhorrent calls, sometimes made under the false guise of “protection”, were merely attempts to undermine the Palestinian cause and the stability of neighbouring countries.

64. UNRWA must receive adequate, predictable and sustainable funding in order to fully discharge its mandate, which had been assigned to it by Member States, a fact that unfortunately was sometimes forgotten by some. UNRWA must be afforded all possible support the Palestinians could return to live in a fully independent State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

65. **Mr. Jassim Abdulaziz Al-thani** (Qatar) said that the catastrophic situation in the Gaza Strip had placed an unprecedented burden on UNRWA. The Israeli occupation forces had attacked civilian facilities including hospitals, schools and residential areas. In particular, they had bombarded the Jabalia refugee camp, killing hundreds of innocent people. The international community must respond urgently and bring an end to the policy of collective punishment and forced displacement of civilians in Gaza.

66. The Agency currently faced an existential quandary, with a chronic shortfall in voluntary funding from Member States. It was also hampered by the unpredictability of its funding. Qatar had been a member of the UNRWA Advisory Commission since 2018. In

line with the principle of burden sharing, and in accordance with the calls made by the General Assembly, Qatar had increased its contribution to the Agency’s budget over the previous few years, and had been the first Arab country to conclude a multi-year agreement with UNRWA. In June 2023, it had pledged \$18 million to the core resources of UNRWA for the biennium 2023-2024. The Palestinian people must be enabled to exercise their legitimate right to establish an independent State on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

67. **Ms. Robledo López** (Mexico) said that an immediate and lasting ceasefire must be implemented throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as demanded by the General Assembly in its resolution [ES-10/21](#). In particular, all parties should halt direct and indirect attacks on civilians. Her delegation condemned all indiscriminate attacks on civilians, as well as medical and humanitarian personnel, and against civilian objects and essential infrastructure, which were contrary to the principles of proportionality and distinction and could constitute war crimes. Her delegation welcomed the entry of humanitarian convoys into Gaza, even if the aid had thus far been insufficient. It was vital to re-establish basic services and lift restrictions on the movement of persons and goods in Gaza and the West Bank, and to allow civilians to pass through the humanitarian corridor.

68. The Government of Mexico planned to increase its voluntary contribution to UNRWA, which needed sustainable and reliable funding so that it could carry out its humanitarian work in the region, particularly the provision of such vital services as health care and education.

69. If the structural causes of the current conflict, including oppression and recurrent human rights violations, were not addressed, the cycle of violence and destruction would continue. Mexico supported a comprehensive political solution that would address the legitimate security concerns of Israel and allow for the strengthening of a politically and economically viable State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel within secure internationally recognized borders, in accordance with relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

70. **Mr. Pieris** (Sri Lanka) said that, in the absence of a political solution, the role of UNRWA in upholding the rights of Palestine refugees and addressing their needs was of the utmost importance both from a humanitarian standpoint and for regional stability. A humanitarian ceasefire permitting an uninterrupted flow of aid was long overdue.

71. UNRWA required immediate support to sustain its vital work. His delegation was deeply concerned about the Agency's critical budget deficit, which threatened its ability to meet its operational costs. The General Assembly, and the international community as a whole, had a shared responsibility to safeguard UNRWA services by increasing its funding, ensuring that contributions were disbursed promptly, and giving it the flexibility to adapt to evolving requirements.

72. His delegation commended UNRWA for its innovative initiatives, such as telemedicine. It also recognized Agency's efforts related to mental health and psychosocial support, including to address the social determinants of mental health during the ongoing crisis.

73. **Mr. Zuhuree** (Maldives) said that his Government condemned in the strongest terms the ongoing Israeli military aggression against innocent civilians in the Gaza Strip. The fact that 120 countries had voted for General Assembly resolution [ES-10/21](#) reflected the solidarity of the international community with the people of Palestine and offered a glimmer of hope. Hundreds of thousands of people had been internally displaced, and many were taking refuge in UNRWA facilities. It was therefore essential for Israel and neighbouring States to ensure substantial and unimpeded humanitarian aid and services. The international community should intensify its efforts to guarantee the safety of UNRWA staff and other humanitarian workers.

74. The suffering that was currently unfolding was the harrowing culmination of a systematic and calculated system of repression that had been meticulously enforced by Israel over seven decades. Through the dispossession and displacement of Palestinians from their own homes and land, Israel had entrenched a system of discrimination, creating two vastly different realities living side by side. Israeli illegal settlement practices subjected Palestinians to dire living conditions marked by inadequate access to power, water, health care and other basic necessities, along with severe travel restrictions.

75. It was important to uphold Security Council resolutions [476 \(1980\)](#) and [478 \(1980\)](#), under which all measures purporting to alter the status of Jerusalem were null and void, and resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), in which States were called upon to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. The Security Council should enforce its own resolutions, both to maintain its credibility and as a moral imperative. The plight of the Palestinian people could be addressed only by ending the occupation and implementing a two-State solution,

including the establishment of an independent Palestinian State based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and with sovereignty over its own territory and resources.

76. **Mr. Habashneh** (Jordan) said that the international community must take immediate and effective action to put a stop to the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the Gaza Strip. Israel, the occupying Power, was violating international norms on a daily basis without being held accountable. Since the beginning of its war on the Gaza Strip, it had killed more than 9,000 Palestinians, including 3,700 children and 2,300 women. Some 2,000 others, half of them children, were unaccounted for. The United Nations must prevail upon Israel to put a stop to its ruthless war; protect the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory; prevent Israel from forcibly displacing the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip; and protect medical teams, humanitarian workers, medical and United Nations facilities, and places of worship. Immediate, full, sustained, safe and unhindered access must be provided for essential goods and services, including water, food, medical supplies, fuel and electricity. By continuing to hinder the supply of such basic necessities, Israel was committing a war crime. In coordination with Egypt, Jordan would continue sending all the assistance at its disposal and supporting the work of United Nations entities.

77. The current emergency had exacerbated the Agency's budget shortfall, and it was essential that the international community give it the necessary financial support to fulfil its mandate. For seven decades, UNRWA had helped to alleviate the suffering of Palestine refugees by providing them with health care and education. His Government was grateful to the Governments of Sweden and Norway for helping to garner resources for the Agency.

78. His delegation remained convinced that peace could be achieved only through an end to the Israeli occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the establishment of a free Palestinian State on the borders of 4 June 1967 on the basis of the two-State solution and in accordance with international law, the agreed terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

79. **Ms. Dhanutirto** (Indonesia) said that her country condemned the attacks against Palestinians in Gaza and continued to call on the occupying Power to stop the aggression, provide unhindered access for humanitarian assistance and rescind the call for the forced displacement of Palestinians. The deaths of 72 UNRWA workers in the attack on Gaza was truly appalling, and also a war crime. The world could not allow the

alarming trend of attacks on international humanitarian workers to continue.

80. UNRWA needed sustainable, predictable and adequate funding. For its part, Indonesia would triple its voluntary regular contribution to UNRWA. In addition, Indonesia and UNRWA continued to develop innovative partnerships beyond traditional funding resources. Indonesia was also in the process of deploying in-kind humanitarian assistance to Gaza through Egypt. It was essential to ensure unimpeded access for the delivery of all humanitarian assistance.

81. Beyond ensuring support for UNRWA, it was important to address the root causes of the conflict and focus on achieving the safe and dignified return of Palestine refugees. As long as Israeli occupation continued, they would continue to endure oppression, violence, displacement and denial of their fundamental rights. The peace process must resume in order to create a safe environment for the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland.

82. **Mr. Sabarudin** (Malaysia) said that the inhumane, barbaric and indiscriminate attacks carried out by Israel in Gaza clearly constituted a serious breach of international humanitarian and human rights law. His delegation condemned in the strongest terms the ongoing crimes of collective punishment by Israel against the Palestinian population, which constituted a grave threat to international peace and security, and called for an immediate humanitarian truce, leading to cessation of all violence.

83. Malaysia had consistently rendered financial and in-kind assistance to the Government and people of Palestine, including through UNRWA. It had pledged a long-term contribution of \$1 million over five years in 2021 and allocated an additional emergency contribution in response to the current extremely dire humanitarian condition in Gaza. In the wake of the recent Israeli aggression, Malaysia was seriously concerned about the Agency's operational efficiency, as the ongoing attacks had decimated the hospitals, health centres and schools in Gaza. His delegation called on the international community to continue to provide financial support to UNRWA.

84. There could be no sustainable peace without the fulfilment of the basic rights of the Palestinian people. The international community should stand up against the acts of aggression and atrocities committed by Israel and work together to find a concrete, just and lasting solution to the prolonged cruelty against the Palestinian people. Their inalienable rights must be restored, including the right to establish an independent and

sovereign State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

85. **Ms. Özgür** (Türkiye) said that an immediate, unconditional and lasting ceasefire was crucial to prevent further civilian casualties. The practices of siege and collective punishment imposed on the civilian population of Gaza were unacceptable. Her delegation condemned the indiscriminate attacks that had claimed the lives of 72 UNRWA personnel, in addition to thousands of civilians, and called upon all parties to facilitate unimpeded and large-scale humanitarian access to and within Gaza.

86. It was disappointing that the Security Council had yet again been unable to fulfil its responsibility to maintain international peace and security; however, the overwhelming support for the adoption of General Assembly resolution [ES-10/21](#) had shown that the wider international community would not remain silent.

87. The world had a responsibility to ensure that UNRWA was adequately funded so that it could continue its critical work. As part of its continued commitment, Türkiye had donated \$10 million to the Agency in 2023. The perpetuation of the conflict had caused immense suffering and destruction. The international community must engage seriously in order to set in motion a political process for viable solution based on a two-State vision.

88. **Mr. Løvold** (Norway) said that UNRWA staff were performing heroically, delivering aid to Palestinian refugees at great personal risk while their own families struggled to find food, water and safety. After weeks of warfare and enormous destruction, Gaza was facing a humanitarian catastrophe and the population had nowhere to flee. Norway was deeply concerned about increased tensions in the West Bank, as well as the risk of further regional escalation.

89. It was crucial, including from a stability perspective, to increase financial support for UNRWA to ensure that it could continue to address the needs of Palestine refugees. His delegation welcomed the fact that Member States and donors had begun responding to the Agency's humanitarian appeal. Norway had recently announced a new contribution to UNRWA of approximately \$5.4 million, which was in addition to approximately \$27.2 million already disbursed for the Agency's regional activities in 2023. Member States had a shared responsibility to ensure that UNRWA was sufficiently funded to deliver on its mandate, especially in the long term. An important next step would be to follow up on the decision taken by the General Assembly in 2022 to increase UNRWA financing from the Organization's regular budget.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

90. **Mr. Jardali** (Lebanon), responding to comments made by the Israeli representative at the twentieth meeting of the Committee (see [A/C.4/78/SR.20](#)), said that he had not employed the narrative of Hizbullah; he had, in fact, quoted the Israeli Permanent Representative and Israeli politicians, who had cast doubt on the legitimacy of the United Nations. He had also quoted from official reports of the United Nations. Furthermore, the Israeli representative had justified attacking the premises of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and thereby effectively admitted responsibility. Those arguments did not stand, as the premises of UNIFIL, not to mention the life of civilians in Gaza, were inviolable under international law without exception.

91. The Israeli representative had also mentioned an incident involving the killing of one peacekeeper and the injury of three others. That incident had been condemned at the highest levels of the Government of Lebanon. There had been a judicial follow-up, and seven people had been indicted, one of whom was in custody, while six remained at large, as had been conveyed by the Secretary-General in his reports on the implementation of Security Council resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#). One might ask, however, whether there had been any accountability for the attacks perpetrated by the Israeli army on UNIFIL positions in 1996, 2006 and on 28 October 2023. Israel had merely claimed that the attacks had happened by mistake, something that was a lie, because the Israeli army was always warned of the locations of the targets in advance. Such events had led to the killing of peacekeepers, and nobody had ever been held accountable.

92. **Mr. Ghelich** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the representative of the Israeli regime, in his comments at the twentieth meeting of the Committee (see [A/C.4/78/SR.20](#)), had made unfounded allegations against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The reality of actions on the ground had been reported by various United Nations entities, including UNRWA and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: more than 8,500 Palestinians, almost all of them civilians, had been killed and more than 25,500 injured, while approximately 1.5 million people had been displaced from their homes.

93. It seemed that there was no end in sight to the brutality of the Israeli war machine as it continued to destroy the lives and livelihoods of the defenceless Palestinian people. However, there was a consensus that the question of Palestine was the core issue in the

Middle East and that it affected directly or indirectly all other problems in the region.

94. The Israeli regime often referred to its opponents and those who opposed its occupation as “terrorists” and used that fake excuse to hide its brutality behind the right to self-defence. An entity which served as the primary source of threats, terror and intimidation in the Middle East and throughout the world was in no position to level fabricated and baseless accusations against other nations. In that regard, it should be recalled that resistance groups composed of Palestinians and other nations under Israeli occupation had been established to oppose Israeli occupation and aggression. Peace and security could be achieved only by ending the occupation of the Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories. As long as the occupation continued, the resistance of nations under occupation would continue.

95. The actions and decisions taken by the Palestinian resistance, which were determined solely by Palestinians themselves, were grounded in their right to self-determination. They represented a completely legitimate reaction to seven decades of oppressive occupation and numerous atrocities committed by the Israeli regime. That regime had paid no attention to the numerous resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly, including the most recent one, which had been adopted by a more than two-thirds majority and in which the Assembly had called for an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce.

96. Lastly, it was absurd that the representative of that regime was trying to convince the Committee that his regime was concerned about attacks against personnel in peacekeeping missions.

97. **Mr. Bendjama** (Algeria) said that he had been shocked and perplexed at the violent reaction of the representative of Morocco at the twentieth meeting of the Committee (see [A/C.4/78/SR.20](#)) to the statement he had delivered at the nineteenth meeting of the Committee (see [A/C.4/78/SR.19](#)). At no time had he mentioned Morocco; his only crime had apparently been to emphasize the need to endow the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) with a human rights component, like all other United Nations peace operations. Morocco apparently could no longer bear to hear the terms “referendum” or “Western Sahara”, both of which were an integral part of the acronym MINURSO. Western Sahara was a well-known geographical term; one just had to open a dictionary to find it. Western Sahara was also one of the main questions on the agenda of the Committee, which focused on special political and decolonization matters.

98. Morocco had persistently refused to accept a multilateral mechanism for human rights monitoring in Western Sahara. One wondered whether that unwillingness stemmed from a fear that multiple human rights violations in Western Sahara would be revealed, in a Territory that, according to the United Nations, was still to be decolonized through a referendum organized by the United Nations. Those violations had been raised in the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/729), which had included references to the detention of Sahrawi activists opposed to the Moroccan occupation in order to prevent them from meeting with the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General; increased shrinking of civic space, for Sahrawi activists, human rights defenders and student movements; intimidation and restrictions on assembly; denial of entry into or expulsion from Western Sahara of international observers; and detention in inhumane conditions of Sahrawi prisoners, including the Gdeim Izik group, which had launched a hunger strike in protest.

99. For the eighth consecutive year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had not been able to conduct a visit to promote and protect human rights, or to send special rapporteurs. The High Commissioner had deplored the lack of access to first-hand information and the absence of independent, impartial, comprehensive and sustained monitoring of the human rights situation, which was detrimental to a comprehensive assessment of human rights in the region.

100. Not once had he referred to Morocco; rather, he had legitimately spoken about MINURSO and Western Sahara, which were integral parts of the Committee's agenda. He hoped that the Moroccan delegation would exercise similar wisdom and not continue to pursue such provocations.

101. **Ms. Ouazzani Chahdi** (Morocco) said that, as her delegation had repeatedly highlighted, each time the Moroccan Sahara was mentioned, Morocco reserved the right to reply. The representative of Algeria had spoken of the Moroccan Sahara and MINURSO, which was hosted by her country.

102. The Moroccan Sahara was not a question of decolonization but rather the completion of the territorial integrity of Morocco, as definitively recognized by the United Nations through the Madrid Accord, which had been deposited with the Secretary-General on 18 November 1975. The referendum of which the delegation of Algeria dreamed was definitively dead and buried; the Security Council had not mentioned it in its resolutions for two decades. The only solution to the question of the Moroccan Sahara

was a political, realistic, pragmatic and durable one that was based on compromise. The Moroccan autonomy initiative had been welcomed by the Security Council and recognized as serious and credible, most recently in resolution 2703 (2023).

103. It should be recalled that the human rights situation in Algeria was a black mark on the history of the United Nations. In September, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association had declared that urgent attention must be given to the current situation of legal restrictions and prosecutions of individuals and associations in Algeria. In February 2023, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders had expressed concern over an escalating crackdown against civil society by Algerian authorities after the dissolution of important human rights associations in Algeria. In March 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had reiterated before the Human Rights Council her deep concern regarding human rights violations committed by the Algerian authorities, noting increasing restrictions on fundamental freedoms, including an increase in arrests and detentions of human rights defenders. Also in 2022, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances had criticized Algeria for its grave human rights violations.

104. **Mr. Bendjama** (Algeria) said that the Committee had been discussing peacekeeping operations, and he had spoken about MINURSO, yet in response he kept hearing about Algeria, which was not on the Committee's agenda. The only honourable solution was for Morocco to stop hindering MINURSO as it fulfilled its mandate, which was to organize a referendum to be held by the United Nations in Western Sahara.

The meeting rose at 6.11 p.m.