



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

**9638**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 29 May 2024, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. Afonso . . . . . (Mozambique)

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Bendjama
China . . . . .	Mr. Fu Cong
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. De La Gasca
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Guyana . . . . .	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Yamazaki
Malta . . . . .	Mrs. Frazier
Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation . . . . .	Ms. Evstigneeva
Sierra Leone . . . . .	Mr. Sowa
Slovenia . . . . .	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Israel, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the observer 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.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to participate in the meeting.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

**Mr. Wennesland:** Over seven months have now passed since 7 October. The horrific terror attacks perpetrated by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups and the ensuing Israeli military campaign and relentless hostilities in Gaza have caused widespread suffering on a totally unimaginable scale. There are a reported more than 36,000 Palestinians and over 1,500 Israelis and foreign nationals killed, while 125 hostages are still being held in Gaza and tens of thousands of people have been injured, the vast majority of them Palestinians. Nearly 2 million Palestinians have been displaced from their homes in the Gaza Strip, many of them multiple times, and some 100,000 Israelis have been displaced from communities in Israel's north and south. Agreement on a deal to achieve a ceasefire and secure the release of hostages is blocked and, as Israel rolls out a significant ground operation in and around Rafah, the devastation is only intensifying. The appalling incident on Sunday, when a reported 45 Palestinians were killed and 200 were injured as the tents they were sheltering in burned around them, does not stand alone amid a shocking number of civilian casualties. I remind all parties of their obligations to protect civilians.

At the same time, the occupied West Bank remains a pressure cooker of negative trends. The risk of a regional conflagration is constant and is mounting every day the war continues. That trajectory must change if we are to avoid further catastrophe. I urge all parties to return to the negotiating table immediately and in good faith. I reiterate my and the Secretary-General's repeated calls for the immediate release of hostages held in Gaza and for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

Palestinians in Gaza face another round of mass displacement, with 1 million fleeing from Rafah, many being displaced multiples times. Overcrowded conditions and acute shortages of food, water and medicine have led to misery and the spread of diseases. The humanitarian response is woefully inadequate to address those needs.

On 24 May, the International Court of Justice delivered its order on the request of South Africa for the modification of the order of 28 March in the case *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)*, reaffirming its previous provisional measures and indicating new measures.

Humanitarians are heroically continuing to deliver life-saving assistance in an incredibly difficult environment. Unsafe conditions resulting from dangerously deficient humanitarian notification mechanisms are compounded by overcrowding, desperation and a breakdown of law and order, imperilling humanitarian operations and costing the lives of humanitarian workers — including some 200 United Nations staff. Just hours ago, that breakdown of law and order resulted in a well-organized looting of the UNRWA Rafah logistics base, making it more or less inoperative, and that is the key centre of our operations. While we are still investigating the circumstances, I condemn any violence on United Nations premises.

As I briefed the Council a little over a week ago (see S/PV.9631), the opening of two crossings in the north, alongside the entry of humanitarian goods arriving from Ashdod and from Jordan, as well as through the United States-built floating pier via Cyprus — which is, by the way, now under repair — are positive developments, but highly insufficient. I reiterate the Secretary-General's calls for an immediate reopening of the Rafah crossing and for unimpeded humanitarian access throughout the Gaza Strip.

Let me also focus on the occupied West Bank, where violence and other negative trends continue at an alarming rate. Large-scale Israeli operations persist, which are often met by lethal exchanges with armed Palestinians, as well as a spike in settler violence and attacks by Palestinians against Israelis. Friction points around the settlements are getting worse as the settlement enterprise expands in a very well-planned manner.

I am particularly concerned by Israel's lifting of the military order banning Israelis from entering three evacuated settlements in the northern West Bank, a policy in effect since the 2005 disengagement law was put in place, and I take note of the subsequent military order declaring the area a closed military zone, effectively preventing the entry of Israelis and Palestinians.

Around the region, the threat of a serious escalation has intensified. Exchanges of fire across the Blue Line between Israel and Hizbullah and other non-State armed groups in Lebanon continued. In addition to the deeply concerning escalation between Israel and Iran witnessed last month, aerial attacks towards Israel from militants in the region and Houthi attacks against international shipping in the Red Sea persisted. That is a combustible mix.

It is clear that all sides must urgently change course. It is right that we are all focused on preventing a further deterioration or looking for solutions to the most pressing needs, yet without linking those urgent efforts to a longer-term political strategy, any solution will be short-lived or even counterproductive. No attempt to address the humanitarian and security challenges will be sustainable unless it is part of a broader approach that addresses Gaza's political future. That future is an integral part of a single, unified Palestinian State, which is a crucial foundation for realizing a two-State solution. That continues to be the key focus of my own efforts.

Throughout recent months, the Secretary-General and I have engaged extensively with the parties, the region and international actors to encourage a common approach to addressing the complex humanitarian, security and political crises affecting not only Gaza, but the whole of the occupied Palestinian territory, Israel and the region. We must reach an agreement to release the hostages and put in place an immediate ceasefire. There is absolutely no time to lose. The United

Nations remains in regular contact with the mediators and parties, and we are committed to supporting the implementation of any such agreement. A sustained ceasefire will be critical to a full-scale humanitarian and early recovery response to meet the immense needs in Gaza.

At the same time, we should be putting in place the framework for Gaza's recovery, and doing so in a way that tangibly moves us towards, rather than away from a long-term political resolution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I previously outlined some of the key principles that should guide us in that work — allow me to reiterate and expand on several of them here.

First, there should be no long-term Israeli military presence in Gaza, while at the same time Israel's legitimate security concerns, particularly in the wake of the acts of terror committed on 7 October, must be addressed.

Secondly, Gaza is and must remain an integral part of a future Palestinian State, with no reduction in its territory.

Thirdly, Gaza and the West Bank must be unified politically, economically and administratively. They must be governed by a Palestinian Government that is recognized and supported by the Palestinian people and the international community. If transitional arrangements are required, they must be designed to achieve a unified Palestinian Government within a precise and limited time frame. There can be no long-term solution in Gaza that is not fundamentally political.

My message in Brussels, where we met with the international partners meeting on Palestine, was along those lines. That is the same message I am giving the Council today, and it is straightforward and it is urgent — we must strengthen and preserve the institutions of the Palestinian Authority (PA) before it is too late, while rejecting any steps that seek to systematically undermine its viability, such as the ongoing Israeli withholding of the PA's clearance revenues. It is a very serious fiscal situation for the Palestinian Authority. I warned over a year ago that 30 years of State-building in Palestine were at grave risk. That is even more true today, and the consequences are even more serious.

Affirming a path to the two-State solution means preserving and safeguarding the very institutions that are meant to govern such a State. Moreover, those

institutions will be vital to the essential objective of ensuring Palestinian-led governance in Gaza. The new technocratic Palestinian Government under Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa, with eight ministers from Gaza, represents an important opportunity for us all to support tangible steps in the right direction, and in line with the principles for Gaza's future I just outlined.

The international community should provide support to, and work with, the new Government to address the Palestinian Authority's dire fiscal crisis, strengthen its governance capacity and prepare it to reassume its responsibilities in Gaza and ultimately govern the entire occupied Palestinian territory. Political, institutional and economic reforms will be needed, but they must be achievable, credible and financed. We should ensure that the Palestinian Authority is an integral part of planning for Gaza's recovery and reconstruction. I urge all actors to recognize the critical role that the PA should play in Gaza and to work towards enabling its return, because there is actually no credible alternative. We already know that the scale of damage is immense. The World Bank and the United Nations, with support from the European Union, conducted an interim damage assessment of the impact of the first four months of conflict in Gaza, quantifying the cost, at that point, of the physical damages to critical infrastructure, such as hospitals, housing and basic roads, at around \$18.5 billion. The final cost will be multiple times that figure.

The massive scale of the effort will clearly require the mobilization of the widest possible coalition of donors and private sector sources of financing, as well as significant improvements to how reconstruction materials should enter Gaza. We already know that donors and investors will not be forthcoming without concrete steps by the parties to find a political solution and ensure that Gaza is not rebuilt only to be destroyed yet again. Let me be clear: the political framework and structures that we establish now will play a significant role in the success or failure of what follows. That requires us to plan and act deliberately and thoughtfully, knowing that today's decisions will not only shape the future governance of Gaza but will also determine the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more broadly.

I am aware of the many challenges in trying to achieve those objectives while war rages in Gaza and while our attention is rightly focused on the urgent needs on the ground. But it is time to make difficult political

choices. If we neglect to lay the foundations of a lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and end the occupation, the price of failure will reverberate for generations. Those foundations will be laid not only in Gaza but also in the occupied West Bank, and they must be put in place not just by donors and the international community but by committed leaders on all sides of the conflict. The drivers of the conflict must be addressed, including violence, settlement advancement and militant activity. Israeli measures that undermine the PA must halt now. Without progress on each of those, we will begin the process of undermining what we have not yet even started. After the horrors of the past seven months and the past few days, Palestinians and Israelis desperately need a political horizon. Without that, there will be no sustainable path out of the suffering and misery that we are witnessing every day.

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

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

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing this morning. It is clear that the situation in Gaza remains dire, and we also remain concerned regarding the situation in the West Bank.

We are heartbroken and horrified by the deaths of dozens of Palestinian civilians and the more than 200 individuals who were seriously injured, including children, following an Israeli air strike on 26 May. Words cannot capture the sense of loss felt by the families whose lives were shattered by that tragic incident. The Palestinians affected by the 26 May air strikes had been displaced multiple times, heeding Israeli evacuation orders and seeking shelter in the camps impacted by last weekend's Israeli air strikes. Israel said that the civilian deaths were a mistake, potentially caused by secondary explosions, and that the strike was aimed at two senior Hamas terrorists, who also died. We have urged Israel to do more to protect innocent Palestinian lives and to undertake a swift, transparent and comprehensive investigation.

As we have said before, Israel has a right to defend itself against Hamas, but Israel also has obligations to protect civilians. The fact that Hamas's leaders and fighters hide among civilians does not lessen the requirement for Israel to conduct its operations in accordance with international humanitarian law. Israel

must do more to protect innocent Palestinians in Gaza. We have also emphasized that Israel must connect its military operations to a political strategy that can ensure the lasting defeat of Hamas, the release of all the hostages and a better future for the Palestinian people. The continued pattern of significant civilian harm resulting from incidents like Sunday's air strikes undermines Israel's strategic goals in Gaza.

Many members have mentioned last week's order by the International Court of Justice, which, we note, echoes the United States position that Israel must avoid a major military operation in the heart of Rafah. Such an operation would put huge numbers of civilians at risk. We continue to believe that there are alternatives to a major operation that would better advance Israel's goal of the enduring defeat of Hamas and also protect innocent Palestinians.

We remain concerned that too little aid is flowing into Gaza and reaching those in need. In that regard, we welcome Egypt's decision to allow the shipment of aid through Kerem Shalom, and we call on Israel to remove all barriers to the flow of aid at scale through all crossings and routes. More must be done to ensure that more aid is getting into Gaza through all routes and is able to be safely distributed to those in need throughout Gaza. The closure of the Rafah border crossing has had an impact on the humanitarian and security situation. As Gaza faces famine, it is essential that we increase food, fuel, and supplies reaching those in need. Attacks by violent extremist settlers on humanitarian aid convoys bound for Gaza and on Palestinian civilians must stop. We condemn those attacks and have made clear that Israel must provide security for the convoys and their drivers and take action to ensure accountability for those individuals committing violent acts and hindering the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians in need.

We take note of Special Coordinator Wennesland's discussion of reconstruction in Gaza and underscore Senior Coordinator Kaag's important role in that effort. The United States has made its views on reconstruction clear. Chief among them is that there must be no occupation of Gaza or reduction of territory following the conflict. Also, there can be no forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza, no attempt to blockade or besiege Gaza and no use of Gaza as a platform for terrorism or other violent attacks. Furthermore, Palestinian voices, self-determination and aspirations must be at the centre of post-crisis governance in Gaza,

and Gaza must be unified with the West Bank under a reformed Palestinian Authority. For that to be achieved, a sustained mechanism for reconstruction is needed.

We remain concerned about the situation in the West Bank. Special Coordinator Wennesland made clear the economic impacts of the Israeli Government withholding revenue transfers. We believe that that policy is counterproductive and that, with all necessary safeguards, those funds should continue to flow. It is wrong to withhold funds that provide basic goods and services to innocent people. The United States has been clear: withholding funds destabilizes the West Bank and undermines the Palestinian people's search for security and prosperity, which is in Israel's interest. We are also troubled by Israel's threat to cut off Palestinian banks from their Israeli correspondent banks. Those banking channels are critical for processing transactions that enable almost \$8 billion a year in imports from Israel, including electricity, water, fuel and food, as well as facilitating almost \$2 billion a year in exports on which Palestinian livelihoods depend. It is essential that those banking channels remain open, and that Israel stop withholding funds.

The United States is committed to advancing enduring peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike — including through practical, time-bound and irreversible steps to establish a Palestinian State to stand side by side with Israel. That is the only way to advance an enduring peace. To that end, we recognize the need to revitalize the Palestinian Authority so that it can most effectively advance the aspirations of the Palestinian people and deliver for them. Secretary Blinken has been engaged with the Palestinian Authority leadership on reforms. Proposed ideas, if implemented, would be a step in the right direction. We also continue to work towards a framework that would better integrate Israel into the region so that it enjoys normal relations with the Arab States, including Saudi Arabia. That would present a powerful front to deter aggression and uphold regional stability.

Those efforts — to free the hostages, to reform the Palestinian Authority, to support regional integration, to increase humanitarian assistance and to protect civilians — are all consistent with President Biden's long-standing view that, ultimately, a two-State solution is the only way to ensure a strong, secure, Jewish, democratic State of Israel, as well as a future of dignity, security and prosperity for the Palestinian people.

The United States will continue to engage here in New York, in Jerusalem, in Ramallah and throughout the region to work towards those ends. And we would urge others to do the same.

**Mr. Sowa** (Sierra Leone): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing and valuable insights on the protracted conflict in the occupied Palestine territory, and in particular the ongoing hostilities in the Gaza Strip with catastrophic consequences.

The conflict remains a global concern with a range of security, political and humanitarian issues that warrant both our immediate attention to secure a permanent ceasefire, as well as long-term attention for post-war reconstruction and a political horizon of a two-State solution. We therefore welcome the recent actions by some European Union member States to recognize the State of Palestine as positive actions, which will not only contribute to global efforts towards lasting peace between Israel and Palestine but could also facilitate economic and infrastructural support and development in post-conflict Palestine.

Every day, civilians in the Gaza Strip grapple with the difficulties of living in an extremely unsafe environment with the constant threat of bomb attacks, indiscriminate bombardment and the lack of the most basic essential services needed for their survival, including food, water and medicine. The intense military operation in Rafah since the start of May has exacerbated the situation, as Rafah city, the last refuge in the Gaza Strip for more than 1.4 million displaced Palestinians, has turned into an active war zone, with daily reports of increased civilian casualties and breaches of international law principles to protect civilians. Incidents around the Egypt-Rafah border, particularly reports of an exchange of fire between Israeli and Egyptian soldiers, which led to the death of at least an Egyptian soldier, are also very concerning, as are the escalating cross-border missile launches and retaliatory attacks between Hizbullah and the Israel Defense Forces. Additionally, attacks launched by Hamas from the occupied Palestinian territory on the Israeli city of Tel Aviv is another escalatory action in the conflict which will lead only to a vicious cycle of violence.

Sierra Leone notes with deep concern the events in recent days, in particular the attack on a camp for displaced people in Rafah that killed at least 45

civilians, many of whom were women and children. Sierra Leone condemns all attacks against civilians and protected persons in the ongoing conflict, recalling the clear obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law. And we reiterate our call for parties to the conflict to respect and protect civilians and civilian objects at all times, in accordance with their said obligations under international law.

Sierra Leone is further disturbed by the appalling humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, characterized by closures or very limited access through designated crossing points that prevent the supply of humanitarian assistance to a starving population. Furthermore, we are also deeply disturbed by reports of actions targeting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) aimed at limiting its activities and mandate delivery. We reiterate our support for UNWRA and our stance that UNWRA is a lifeline for the Palestinian people, not only in Gaza and the West Bank, but also in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

The conflict in the Gaza Strip has long-standing, complex roots, but it is not an intractable situation. In that regard, Sierra reiterates the following points.

First, we call on the Council to remain united in its call for a lasting ceasefire and a peaceful resolution to the conflict and resolute in its support of all meaningful efforts to reach a political horizon of the two-State solution. We must utilize all appropriate political and diplomatic tools at our disposal to compel the parties to the conflict to comply with international law and the resolutions adopted by the Council, including resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023) and 2728 (2024).

Secondly, Sierra Leone notes with keen interest actions initiated by the international judicial systems to ensure accountability and combat impunity in the Gaza conflict. We therefore call on parties to the conflict to adhere to their obligations, as outlined in the International Court of Justice provisional orders of 26 January, 28 March and 24 May, with the latter, among other things, requesting the State of Israel to “immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate” (*Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)*, para. 57 (2)(a)) and maintain open the Rafah crossing for unhindered provision at scale of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance.

Thirdly, we reiterate the need and legal obligation, as per the International Court of Justice orders, for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas since 7 October 2023.

Fourthly, we call on parties to the conflict to ensure the protection and safety of humanitarian agencies and their workers providing life-saving services in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territory. We denounce direct attacks on them and acts of or misinformation or disinformation campaigns that seek to discredit them and their operations.

In conclusion, my delegation looks forward to the resumption of negotiations between Israel and Hamas, facilitated by Egypt, Qatar and the United States. We acknowledge our unwavering commitment to the peace process. Sierra Leone stands ready to engage on any Security Council product and/or action that will assist in significantly easing the suffering of the Palestinian people and facilitate the achievement of lasting peace between Israel and Palestine.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing and all his efforts.

Switzerland is outraged by last Sunday's events in the Middle East. We strongly condemn the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas against Israel, as happened on Sunday, 26 May. We recall that indiscriminate attacks constitute violations of international humanitarian law.

Switzerland strongly condemns the Israeli strike which, according to the United Nations, caused dozens of civilian casualties, including many children, in a camp for displaced persons in Rafah on the same Sunday evening. We express our sincerest condolences to their families. We recall that international humanitarian law requires parties to distinguish between civilians and combatants and between civilian objects and military targets. It also requires parties to take all feasible precautions to spare the civilian population and avoid damage to civilian objects.

Civilians in Gaza are living in unacceptable conditions and are totally unprotected, even as they face repeated displacement, starvation and incessant hostilities.

Switzerland reiterates its opposition to the current military operation in Rafah and its call for an immediate ceasefire. The new provisional measures adopted by the International Court of Justice on 24 May require Israel to halt its military offensive in the Rafah governorate.

Switzerland recalls that the Court's orders are binding on all parties. We expect Israel to comply and take all necessary measures to do so.

Furthermore, the Council must ensure the implementation of the three resolutions it has adopted since the acts of terror of 7 October, which Switzerland has strongly condemned. Resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023) and 2728 (2024) require the parties to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law. That includes the obligation to protect civilians and to allow and facilitate the safe, rapid and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians. Humanitarian aid entering Gaza remains largely insufficient. Aid must be able to be delivered through all crossing points and reach the whole of the Gaza Strip — as also required by the International Court of Justice.

Finally, respect for international law also means the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

The situation in the West Bank also deserves the full attention of the Council.

In an already tense context, we urge the leaders of all parties to refrain from inflammatory language, provocations and unilateral measures that could lead to further escalation. We reiterate the need to respect the historic status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem and Jordan's custodial role in that regard.

Violence and civilian deaths, including in the West Bank, continue to break appalling records. Switzerland condemns the violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers, including against the offices of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in East Jerusalem and humanitarian aid convoys in the West Bank. On Friday, the Council adopted resolution 2730 (2024), which reaffirms the obligation of States and parties to conflicts to respect and protect humanitarian personnel and assets. That certainly applies to distribution centres in Gaza, which must not be looted — something that, as we have just heard, has taken place.

We also recall that the use of force during law enforcement operations, as in Jenin last week, must comply with the criteria of necessity and proportionality and protect every individual's right to life and security.

In conclusion, Switzerland reiterates that respect for international law and the resolutions of the Council are sine qua non conditions for de-escalation and a first step towards the establishment of a lasting peace

between Israelis and Palestinians. We reiterate our firm support for the negotiated two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine, of which Gaza is an integral part, living side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders.

**Mrs. Frazier** (Malta): I too thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Malta expresses its grave concern about the crisis that continues to unfold. We reaffirm our call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

Malta reiterates its unequivocal condemnation of the 7 October Hamas terror attacks on Israeli civilians and the continued indiscriminate rocket fire at Israeli territory, including the recent barrage launched from Rafah. We once again call for the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages.

Our concern also continues to mount for Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Tens of thousands have already been killed or injured. Millions have been forcibly displaced, on multiple occasions, and the entire population is under siege. An intensification of Israeli military operations in Rafah and a return to fierce fighting in north Gaza, coupled with evacuation orders imposed on desperate civilians, highlights the severely compromised security and humanitarian crisis. On Sunday, more civilians lost their lives and were harmed following an Israeli air strike on a refugee camp in Rafah.

The constant bombardment of hospitals, combined with aid restrictions has led to the collapse of the health-care system. That is putting the lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians at risk as they are unable to access essential services. It is also putting mothers and their newborns at risk of significant physical and mental harm. More than 155,000 pregnant and lactating women are unable to access essential services. Reports that an estimated 17,000 children are currently unaccompanied or separated from their families are staggering. We stress that international humanitarian law provides special protection for children, as persons who are particularly vulnerable.

The seizure and closure of the Rafah crossing by Israel has also crippled the provision and distribution of aid, compounding an already dire situation. In accordance with international humanitarian law, Israel is obliged to facilitate unimpeded aid relief into and across the Gaza Strip. We call for the Rafah crossing to be reopened and for a massive surge of aid to the

civilian population. The safety and security of aid workers, in accordance with resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023), must equally be guaranteed.

Furthermore, Malta underlines its support for the indispensable life-saving role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza and the wider region. Consistent with our endorsement of the shared commitments on UNRWA, we stress the need for the Agency to receive adequate and sustained political and financial support.

The immediate priorities are clear. We need full compliance with, and implementation of, the relevant Council resolutions and the full, immediate and effective implementation of the orders of the International Court of Justice, including those issued on 24 May. We need a ceasefire, the release of hostages, a surge of humanitarian aid and a stop to the launch of rockets on Israeli towns and cities.

We must also address the question of long-term priorities so as to ensure that Israelis and Palestinians both enjoy a future of peace and dignity. That includes a commitment to accountability, as justice and peace are complementary. Judicial proceedings seeking to counter impunity are critical for long-term stability.

We reaffirm that settlements in the West Bank are illegal and an obstacle for peace. Israeli settlement activities and violence against Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories must cease.

Fundamentally, influential and regional parties must mobilize the political will and the courage to support restorative dialogue processes and ensure that a return to a political horizon is reaffirmed as a priority. That must include support to revitalize the Palestinian Authority for it to have the capacity for governance over both the West Bank and Gaza.

Malta supports all efforts towards initiating a comprehensive peace plan, which would pave the way for a credible and irreversible realization of the 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 relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.



**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Tor Wennesland for his briefing, and I once again pledge France's full support.

France calls for an immediate ceasefire and reiterates its opposition to the current Israeli military operation in Rafah, which has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians. That operation must cease, without delay. On Monday, President Macron expressed his indignation concerning the recent Israeli strikes, which caused numerous civilian casualties.

Pursuant to the order of the International Court of Justice, Israel must immediately halt its military offensive and any other action carried out in the Rafah governorate. The Israeli authorities must also maintain open the Rafah crossing for unhindered provision at scale of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance.

France demands the immediate release of all hostages still held by Hamas and other terrorist groups. It laments the recent death of one of the three French hostages.

France has repeatedly condemned the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023. We also condemn last week's Hamas rocket attacks targeting civilian areas in the Tel Aviv region and central Israel.

It is essential that large-scale humanitarian aid reach the civilian population of Gaza. All crossing points must be opened without delay.

France strongly condemns the Hamas attack on the Kerem Shalom crossing point, as well as the attacks on a Jordanian humanitarian convoy by Israeli settlers on 7 May. We call on the Israeli authorities to put an end to settler violence against aid convoys and to bring the perpetrators to justice. We also reiterate that it is imperative that the delivery of aid not be hindered and be for the benefit of the civilian population of Gaza. France calls for strict respect for international humanitarian law and recalls the imperative of protecting civilians and humanitarian personnel.

France has used the maritime corridor to deliver humanitarian aid to the civilian population of Gaza, but that corridor cannot replace the delivery of aid by land. As the International Court of Justice has done, France calls on Israel to immediately reopen the Rafah crossing.

France is also deeply concerned about the situation in the West Bank and in the region more broadly. We deplore the consequences of the military operation in

the Jenin refugee camp. France reiterates the importance of respecting the principle of distinction between the civilian population and combatants.

The Israeli settlement policy in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which is contrary to international law, is continuing unabated. French President Emmanuel Macron has condemned the recent settlement announcements and the undermining of the disengagement law and has stressed his determination to step up sanctions in that area, including at the European level. France condemns the violence committed by certain settlers against the Palestinian population. They must be brought to justice.

France is committed to avoiding a regional conflagration. We call for de-escalation, in particular on both sides of the Blue Line.

The Security Council has already adopted three resolutions (resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023) and 2728 (2024)) on stopping the fighting and the delivery of humanitarian aid. Those resolutions are binding and must be respected.

The Council must speak out urgently on the situation in Rafah and call for an end to that offensive. The Council must also work towards a two-State solution, which is the only solution capable of giving Palestinians and Israelis the prospects of peace. France will continue to work to that end with its international partners and the Arab contact group, which the President of the Republic and the Minister for Foreign Affairs hosted in Paris on 24 May. On that occasion, the President Macron reiterated France's support for a strengthened Palestinian Authority and its return to the Gaza Strip, which should become part of the Palestinian State, with the support of the international community. The United Nations has a central role to play in that respect.

The draft resolution we are proposing addresses those political dimensions, and I call on all members of the Security Council to support it.

**Ms. Evstigneeva** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his overview of the situation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in which Israel's brutal military operation, which has entered its eighth month, has led to the deaths of more than 36,500 Palestinian civilians, a number of casualties not seen since the Second World War. The vast majority of the casualties are women and children,

who are dying in search for life-saving assistance in areas of the enclave that cannot be accessed by United Nations entities.

The Israeli air force is continuing its indiscriminate bombardment of southern and central Gaza in defiance of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, as well as the rulings of the International Court of Justice. That tragic fate has also befallen the city of Rafah, where approximately 1 million civilians have amassed after, according to data by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), approximately 800,000 Palestinians had fled.

Every day, people in that city are dying, including United Nations personnel. On 13 May, a United Nations Department for Safety and Security staff member was killed and another one was wounded when a United Nations vehicle was hit while en route to the European Hospital in Rafah. On the night of 26 May, an Israeli Air Force attack on an internally displaced persons (IDP) tent camp north-west of Rafah killed at least 45 people, including young children, and wounded dozens more. That happened just two days after another International Court of Justice order on provisional measures, demanding an end to the Rafah offensive. Furthermore, an Egyptian soldier was killed at the Rafah checkpoint in an exchange of fire between the Israeli soldiers and Egyptian border guards.

The absolute majority of members of the international community, including the heads of the foreign ministries of the Arab countries, have condemned Israeli actions in Rafah. Secretary-General António Guterres has also spoken out, calling on Israel to conduct a thorough investigation to determine the perpetrators and take urgent measures to protect civilians.

We condemn the air strike on the Rafah IDP camp and call on West Jerusalem to put an end to the war crimes against the Palestinian people. We demand that Israel strictly abide by the provisions of international humanitarian law. Attacks on United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers on the ground are unacceptable. We support the call by Secretary-General Guterres for an immediate ceasefire, unimpeded humanitarian access and the unconditional release of all hostages to put an end to the suffering of the civilian population of the enclave.

Based on the views expressed by the Special Coordinator, it is clear that we should not expect Israel's war machine to stop its actions any time soon. We see that West Jerusalem intends to continue the military operation in the Gaza Strip, despite its increasingly obvious inability to achieve its stated goals, namely, the safe return of hostages and the elimination of Hamas. At the same time, the negotiation process between Israel and Hamas through mediators on the exchange of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners is stalled.

Under those circumstances, the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe is increasing by the day. For three weeks now, the Israeli military has been blocking the entry of 3,000 trucks with humanitarian aid from crossing at the Rafah and Kerem Shalom border crossings. Consequently, according to United Nations specialized agencies, Gaza has run out of all humanitarian aid — water, food and fuel. Those who manage to escape the bombings, must confront famine, infectious diseases and the absence of necessary medical care. There was a public outcry about the discovery of a mass grave in Khan Younis containing more than 300 bodies of Palestinians.

Russia is doing its utmost to ease the dire situation of the civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory. Since 19 October 2023, aircraft from the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Russia have delivered more than 500 tons of humanitarian supplies to Egypt for onward shipment to the besieged Palestinian enclave through the Egyptian Red Crescent Society. In addition to governmental efforts, various Russian non-governmental organizations and civic organizations, as well as private individuals, have joined in the collection of humanitarian assistance for Palestinians. Through their efforts, hundreds of tons of medicines, warm clothes, tents, food and basic necessities were collected across Russia, to be sent to the conflict zone.

We must note with regret that, given the current escalation, the prospects of returning the Palestinian-Israeli settlement process to a political and diplomatic track and establishing a ceasefire look bleak. In that regard, the Security Council must continue to exert pressure on both Israel and its ally, Washington, which adopted a bill allocating \$26.4 billion in military aid. That step, against the background of the lack of proper funding for UNRWA, is causing growing discontent and outrage even within the United States, where anti-Israeli demonstrations have already spread to the campuses of most major universities.

At the same time, attempts by the Israelis to build up and publicize the topics of sexual violence and the alleged involvement of UNRWA staff in the 7 October Hamas attack have backfired. Following a visit to Israel and the West Bank, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General failed to confirm in her report the vilest accusations presented by Israel but did identify numerous violations against arbitrarily detained Palestinian women. We also note the conclusions of the independent review group headed by Catherine Colonna, which confirmed that UNRWA has adhered to the principle of neutrality and has played a key role in assisting Palestinians.

The current aggravation of the situation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict zone shows the tragic consequences of Washington's attempts to monopolize mediation functions in order to satisfy its unjustified ambitions to solve all the world's problems alone. At the same time, the Americans are blocking any efforts by the international community to find ways to resolve the Middle East conflict and to redress the historical injustice against the Palestinians. Among those steps are the United States veto of Security Council draft resolution S/2024/312, recommending to the General Assembly to admit Palestine as a full-fledged member of the United Nations.

Against the backdrop of the continuing bloodshed in Gaza, we welcome the efforts of Algeria to promote the adoption of a document in the Security Council. We believe that the Council urgently needs to send a unified signal demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

Furthermore, we reiterate our consistent position, alongside measures to overcome the acute phases of the crisis, on the need to start laying the groundwork for a direct dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis on the entire range of final-status issues. The outcome of that process should be the implementation of the internationally endorsed two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine coexisting in peace and security within the 1967 borders.

**Mr. Yamazaki** (Japan): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his informative briefing.

As we approach eight months since the gruesome acts of terror by Hamas and others, we must uphold our strong condemnation of those actions and call for the immediate return of all remaining hostages.

At the same time, we must recognize the ongoing horrors and hostilities in Gaza. We are bearing witness to unimaginable suffering, catastrophic levels of civilian casualties and starvation and disease on the rise. There is no safe place in the Gaza Strip — not even for aid workers, journalists, women or children.

Despite the strong calls for restraint from the international community, Israel has begun military operations in Rafah. As humanitarian agencies had warned, the impact has already been devastating. Around 1 million Palestinians have been forced to flee yet again — most to areas that are not fit for human habitation.

While we recognize the activation of the United Nations mechanism established by resolution 2720 (2023), the Rafah crossing is currently not functional, thus depriving civilians of the primary means of getting aid into Gaza. Famine has already taken hold in the north, and the situation in the south is on the brink of collapse, while the Rafah crossing has stopped functioning and the people are again forcibly displaced.

Against that background, the International Court of Justice issued additional provisional measures last week, ordering Israel to immediately halt its military offensive in Rafah, as it could result in the physical destruction of the Palestinians in Gaza. The orders of provisional measures of the International Court of Justice are legally binding on parties to disputes and must be observed in good faith.

Japan is deeply concerned about the critical humanitarian situation in Gaza, as it is about the Israel Defense Forces' air strikes in Rafah and other military operations entailing a large number of civilian fatalities, including many women and children. We cannot accept that so many people, especially women and children, fall victim to the fighting. As Ms. Kamikawa Yoko, our Foreign Minister, conveyed to Israel's Foreign Minister earlier this week, Japan is opposed to a full-scale military operation in Rafah, and reiterates that humanitarian activities, including through the Rafah crossing, should not be impeded.

Japan joins others in calling for an immediate ceasefire so as to ensure a conducive environment for unhindered humanitarian activities and the release of the hostages, and sincerely hopes that this will lead to a sustainable ceasefire. In that regard, we strongly support the negotiations led by Egypt, Qatar and the United States seeking a way out of this devastating crisis.

Beyond Gaza, Japan deplores the violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where more than 480 Palestinians have been killed since 7 October. We also unequivocally condemn the arson of the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. An environment in which international organizations can execute their missions safely and effectively is essential.

**Mrs. Blokari Drobnič** (Slovenia): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

In recent weeks, the Council has been clear in its rejection of the operation in Rafah. In resolution 2728 (2024), our most recent resolution, we made a clear demand for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, together with the release of all hostages and guaranteed safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access.

Last week, the International Court of Justice adopted a new order on provisional measures regarding Gaza. Among other things, the Court clearly ordered Israel to immediately halt its military offensive in Rafah. The Court also ordered that the Rafah crossing be maintained open and the guaranteed unhindered provision, at scale, of basic services and humanitarian assistance, with the full cooperation with the United Nations. Despite that order, the operation continues, with even more intensity.

The resolution of the Security Council and the decisions of the International Court of Justice are binding. Yet, as we meet today, the operation in Rafah continues, despite the international community's demands and pleas to the contrary — and in defiance of the order of the International Court of Justice. Earlier this week, we saw heartbreaking evidence of why the operation must stop immediately. Our worst fears of the severe impact of the operation on the civilian population have come true. Slovenia once again firmly condemns the strike on the displaced persons in Rafah, in what was supposed to be a safe zone. It proved once again that no place is safe for the civilians in Gaza.

We reject forced displacement. We are appalled by the humanitarian conditions for the internally displaced in Gaza. One million people was once again displaced from Rafah in the past few weeks. Clearly, there are not enough resources to respond to humanitarian needs, in particular food, water, fuel, medicine and shelter. We are talking about people — the old, the young and children — people who instead of fulfilling their

dreams and aspirations face nothing but struggles. For many of them, there is only one dream left — to wake up tomorrow.

We have also been consistently briefed about the mounting struggles of people in the West Bank, further aggravated by the deteriorating fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority. We are deeply concerned about the challenges faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, including the vote on the new legislation in the Knesset.

International law is not a menu to choose from. It is also not something pushed on us. It is something we have willingly signed on to and accepted. United Nations Member States must uphold the Charter of the United Nations with an unwavering commitment to international law. That means full respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. It means respect for the decisions of international courts. It also means ensuring accountability for grave violations of international law. The decisions of the International Court of Justice are not guidance, and they are not recommendations. They are obligations. They are binding.

It is important to underline that the most recent strike on the displaced persons camp in Rafah is not an isolated incident. There have been several incidents in Gaza. And in one case after the other, we were told that investigations were taking place. However, the Council has not received any information or follow-up. In order for the Council to act responsibly in preventing the violations and ensure accountability, it needs to know what is happening on the ground. Credible international investigations are best fit for that purpose.

The Council itself must show an unwavering commitment to international law by assuming its responsibilities. By merely observing grave violations, we are allowing the international system we know — the one based on respect for international law — to collapse in front of our eyes. It is time for the Council to stop observing the situation in Rafah. The tragedy is not imminent. It is happening. And we should act, including by adopting a clear resolution.

Like everything else, one day, this moment will be history, and we will be judged on the basis of our reaction to it. The Council must make sure to be on the right side of history, and for Slovenia, the right side of history is the protection of civilians. We once again call for an immediate ceasefire.

**Mr. De La Gasca** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing this morning and reiterate Ecuador's support for his valuable efforts.

Since the terrorist acts perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023, which once again Ecuador unequivocally condemns, the Council has repeatedly heard reports of terrifying violence, deaths, wounded, displaced persons and pain for the people of Palestine and Israel. In the past few days alone, there have been several disheartening reports, especially coming out of Gaza — bombings that seriously affect the civilian population in Rafah and cause dozens of dead and wounded, unending fighting, insufficient humanitarian assistance and rocket attacks launched indiscriminately towards Israel. The images coming out of Tell es-Sultan this weekend will be hard to forget. It is time to stop the cycle of violence and suffering.

On 20 May, I noted that the situation was becoming more difficult by the day, and I recalled the obligation to implement all the Council resolutions, as well as the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice (see S/PV.9631). Today, after the International Court of Justice has decided on new provisional measures and the situation in Rafah has become more violent, I must reiterate what I said and call once again for the decisions taken by the relevant United Nations organs to be respected, for an immediate cessation of hostilities, for humanitarian assistance to reach all those in need in a safe, sufficient and timely manner, and for the hostages still being held by Hamas to be released immediately and unconditionally.

I must also recall that the norms of international humanitarian law are binding on all parties and that their violation entails grave responsibilities. The relevant investigations must be conducted to allow for proper accountability.

Negotiations between the parties must be resumed to allow for a ceasefire and the release of the hostages. It is also very important for those negotiations to be conducted in good faith. My country supports and appreciates the mediation efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States and urges the parties to be as flexible as possible to make an arrangement viable as soon as possible. Actors who are in a position to influence the parties have the responsibility to exercise that influence

urgently and decisively, and the Council must also make its voice heard in the face of a situation that has exceeded all limits.

It is also necessary to work to ensure that this is the last war of this conflict. To that end, it is necessary to create the conditions to move towards 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.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett** (Guyana): Guyana thanks Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing on the ever-worsening crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory. Another meeting on the Palestinian question, another list of statements calling for an end to the war — a sense of helplessness is enveloping this small, elected member of the Council in the face of the dehumanization of a people, the disregard for the rule of law and impunity. When will it end? Who and what can make it end? And yet we cannot afford to remain silent, as too many have been already tragically silenced forever in the war.

And so, at the outset, I express Guyana's strong solidarity with the Palestinian people — a people with a rich history, culture and land. It is perhaps one of the greatest tragedies of modern times that the desire for their homeland has brought so much cruel suffering to the Palestinian people. A greater tragedy, though, is that the United Nations has not yet been able to bring that injustice to an end.

It has been 76 years since the Palestinian people were forcibly displaced from much of their homeland, despite the General Assembly adopting a plan for the creation of an Arab and a Jewish State as the settlement of the Palestinian question. Force and displacement have characterized the Palestinian existence from that time to now, as they have experienced cycle after cycle of violence pushing them off their ever-shrinking homeland. Where they have been allowed to remain, their existence has been one most miserable owing to the iron fist of the occupying Power that reaches into every sphere of Palestinian life.

Today marks 235 days of the most recent cycle of violence, and words are inadequate to capture the devastating results. The death toll has surpassed 36,000. More than 80,000 have been physically injured. Once the rubble in Gaza is cleared, the death toll is expected to climb. Against that backdrop of death and injury,

the health-care system has been severely incapacitated. Medical supplies, as with other humanitarian essentials, are extremely limited owing to the lack of humanitarian access at scale. The level of food insecurity has led to full-blown famine in the north.

The impact of the war on children is especially disturbing. Many of them have been killed, maimed and orphaned. The long-term psychosocial impacts on those children is a particular source of concern.

It had seemed that the Gaza crisis could not get any worse, until we learned of last Sunday's events in Tal Al-Sultan, Rafah, where displaced Palestinians sheltering in tents were set on fire after Israeli air strikes. People were injured and burned alive — and all of that in a designated safe zone — a chilling reminder that there is no place safe in Gaza. Guyana calls for a swift, independent and international investigation to establish the facts surrounding this incident, including to identify the perpetrators.

The Council must not continue to accept the all-too-familiar explanations of those incidents being mistakes or miscalculations. There is no justification for the killing of innocent civilians, and the Geneva Conventions of 1949 are clear on the obligation to protect civilians.

That leads me to emphasize the obligation of all parties to the conflict to adhere strictly to international law, including international humanitarian law. The International Court of Justice has issued three sets of provisional measures, but there is no compliance. Indeed, two days had not yet passed following the Court's last order, for Israel to halt military operations in Rafah, when the attack in Tal Al-Sultan took place. The Council must seriously consider how to address this blatant disregard for the rule of law.

In the context of this quagmire of illegalities, there are still more than 100 persons in Gaza taken hostage by Hamas from Israel on 7 October. They must be immediately and unconditionally released, and their welfare must be protected.

In the light of that, Guyana makes three important calls.

First, we once again call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and for the removal of all obstacles that are contributing to the suffering of the Palestinian people. Unless the violence ends, the humanitarian situation will not improve, and the

suffering will continue. A ceasefire is also one critical element for improving the security situation so that humanitarian personnel can operate unimpeded.

Secondly, we call for the opening of all land routes into Gaza in order to improve the flow of humanitarian goods. The needs in Gaza are massive, and the non-operation of several crossings has rendered the humanitarian response ineffective. The Rafah crossing must be reopened, unwieldy verification processes must be corrected, and Gaza must be flooded with humanitarian aid. Commercial activity must be fully resumed, even as we acknowledge that many have been pauperized by this war.

Thirdly, Guyana demands serious long-term efforts towards achieving the two-State solution. The Palestinian people must exercise their inalienable right to self-determination, and it is the United Nations that must guarantee the exercise of that right. The majority of the Organization's membership has demonstrated its support for Palestinian self-determination and statehood. It is therefore the Council's responsibility to honour the wishes of the Palestinian people in that regard. That is also the most viable way to address many of the dimensions of the Palestinian question, including the unresolved refugee problem, which necessitates a continued mandate for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Guyana takes this opportunity to reiterate its unwavering support for UNRWA and is deeply concerned about moves to designate it as a terrorist organization, which we reject.

In conclusion, Guyana is prepared to work with the Council in order to achieve peace for Palestinians and Israelis. Contrary to the strategy embraced by some, peace cannot come from violence and war. Neither can security be spawned from insecurity.

**Mr. Fu Cong** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Almost eight months have passed since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza. As the siege and attacks on civilians continue and the unprecedented humanitarian disaster intensifies, the people of Gaza are deeply mired in despair and the situation has long been precarious. Allowing the fighting in Gaza to continue will only deepen the humanitarian catastrophe and plunge the entire region into a greater integrated turmoil. The international community and the Security Council, in particular, must take further actions to promote an immediate ceasefire, save lives and alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

For some time now, the international community has been closely following the situation in Rafah and has repeatedly called for an immediate ceasefire. The Security Council has discussed it many times and has explicitly issued a strong signal that attacks on Rafah must stop. The International Court of Justice issued an order on provisional measures demanding that Israel immediately halt its military offensive in Rafah, in accordance with the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Nevertheless, despite the strong opposition of the international community, Israel bombed more than a dozen internally displaced persons camps in Gaza, resulting in the death of a large number of innocent civilians. China strongly condemns those actions. China supports the draft resolution circulated by Algeria yesterday, which responds to the overwhelming call of the international community and represents the minimum action the Council should take at this time. We hope that all members will put aside political calculations, prioritize saving lives and support its adoption by the Council as soon as possible.

Concrete actions must be taken to ease the humanitarian disaster in Gaza. On one side of the Rafah crossing, more than 2,000 trucks loaded with humanitarian supplies are anxiously waiting for access, while, on the other side, are millions of people struggling with hunger, sickness and despair. Relief may seem close at hand but is out of reach because of artificial barriers. China firmly opposes the politicization of humanitarian issues, the use of hunger as a weapon and the use of humanitarian assistance as a bargaining chip. Israel should effectively implement its obligations as the occupying Power by immediately opening all land crossings and ensuring adequate and expeditious access for humanitarian supplies, the safety of humanitarian agencies and personnel and the safe and orderly distribution of humanitarian supplies. The repeated attacks on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East facility in the West Bank must be thoroughly investigated, and the perpetrators must be held accountable.

The fundamental solution to the Middle East question is the implementation of the two-State solution. It is the long-cherished dream of the Palestinians to create an independent State, and the historical injustice they have suffered should not be perpetuated. China calls for greater international and regional diplomatic efforts to reshape the credible multilateral process and revitalize the political prospects for the two-State

solution. China proposes the convening of a larger-scale, more authoritative and more effective international peace conference with a timetable and road map for implementing the two-State solution. We support Palestine's full membership in the United Nations at an early date.

The tenth Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum will be held in Beijing tomorrow. The leaders of Bahrain, Egypt, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates are currently visiting China. China will continue in-depth discussions on the question of Palestine with the leaders and foreign ministers of the Arab countries who are visiting China and participating in the conference and will make our common voice heard. The goal is to end the conflict in Gaza as soon as possible and to achieve peace, and for the international community to implement the two-State solution with greater determination and more concrete actions so as to bring about lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.

**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his detailed briefing on the ongoing catastrophe in Gaza and the alarming developments in the West Bank.

The world is now watching the expanding ground operations in Rafah with grave concern. Around 1 million Palestinian civilians in Rafah have once again been forcibly displaced. However, nowhere is safe in Gaza. Israel claims that the killing of dozens of civilians last weekend in tents in a so-called safe zone in Western Rafah was a tragic mistake. But when such incidents are repeated again and again, and children and aid workers continue to be killed, it would be difficult for anybody to regard them as just mistakes. We call on Israel to immediately halt its offensive in Rafah.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is even worse than before, as the delivery of humanitarian aid throughout Gaza has been seriously hindered or nearly blocked. The Rafah crossing has been closed for almost a month, and the shooting incident that killed an Egyptian soldier on Monday shows that tensions are growing, further destabilizing regional peace and security and crossing the red lines of neighbouring countries. It is unfortunately innocent civilians who are dying from a lack of aid, as the countries concerned are finger-pointing among themselves regarding the malfunctioning of both the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings.

The maritime corridor had been providing a semblance of hope. We appreciate the efforts by the relevant countries, including the United States and Cyprus. However, it is regrettable that the maritime corridor has not yet achieved its goal, owing to an inability to distribute aid inside Gaza and damage caused to the pier by bad weather. It is also regrettable that the launching of the new mechanism under resolution 2720 (2023) was obstructed before its full implementation, as it coincided with the beginning of the Israeli ground operation into Rafah on 7 May. We recall that Israel made a set of commitments just two months ago, following the World Central Kitchen killings, to expand humanitarian aid through various means. We believe that those commitments were made in good faith and are still valid, yet we have seen no results to that end. Rather, we have witnessed a drastic decrease in the volume of humanitarian aid entering Gaza since 7 May, at the very same time as famine is spreading throughout Gaza. We therefore urge Israel to immediately open all available crossings in cooperation with the relevant parties and to take all appropriate measures against looting and diversions.

The situation in the West Bank is also extremely concerning. We are appalled that more than 500 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since 7 October 2023. We are also alarmed by the provocative rhetoric by Israel's high-level officials calling for harsh punitive measures against the Palestinian Authority, including the approval of additional settlements in the West Bank. We urge Israel to immediately stop all illegal settlement activities. We also appeal for an end to inflammatory action at holy sites in Jerusalem.

The Republic of Korea takes serious note of the order issued by the International Court of Justice on 24 May regarding South Africa's request for additional provisional measures in the light of the situation in Rafah. We hope that those efforts by the international community can contribute to the protection of Palestinians and an easing of the humanitarian calamity on the ground, as well as the execution of any necessary investigations. The Republic of Korea also reiterates its sincere hope that the diplomatic efforts by the United States, Qatar and Egypt will lead to fruitful outcomes. There is no time to waste. We once again call for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all remaining hostages and an expansion of humanitarian aid throughout Gaza. We must all keep in mind that an ongoing catastrophe in Gaza, triggered by Hamas's

terrorist attacks against Israel on 7 October 2023, would make it impossible to resume any meaningful talks towards the two-State solution, and failure to relaunch those negotiations would be a serious misfortune for the future of the region and beyond.

**Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom):** I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

First, the United Kingdom is appalled by the deeply distressing scenes emerging from Rafah following Israeli air strikes over the weekend. As the Foreign Secretary has said, we call on Israel to launch a swift, comprehensive and transparent investigation. The United Kingdom's position is very clear: we do not support a major military operation in Rafah without an acceptable plan to protect the hundreds of thousands of civilians who remain there. We have seen no such plan. Hundreds of thousands have already been displaced from Rafah, many for the second time and to locations without the suitable provision of shelter, food, water and access to medical treatment. We strongly condemn Hamas's actions, which put civilians at severe risk by using them as shields. We call on Israel to take care to limit operations to military targets and to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects in line with international humanitarian law.

Secondly, there is an urgent necessity to get more aid to the people of Gaza who are in such desperate need. Israel has made a number of commitments in recent weeks to increase the supply of aid, including a commitment to flood Gaza with aid. That included increasing the daily number of trucks of aid entering Gaza to 500 and opening the Ashdod port to humanitarian aid and additional crossing points for aid in North Gaza. While we welcome the progress made towards those commitments, including the delivery of flour from the Ashdod port into Gaza by the World Food Programme, overall progress has been too slow, and the quantities of aid being delivered remain well below those levels. We welcome the agreement between Egypt and Israel to allow United Nations agencies to deliver aid, but operations in Rafah have increased the need for aid at a time when flows have been reduced by the closure of the Rafah crossing point and reduced deliveries of aid through Kerem Shalom. The humanitarian situation is now catastrophic. We call on Israel to urgently fulfil those commitments, allow aid in quantity through all crossing points, including Rafah, and ensure an environment within Gaza that allows aid to reach those who so desperately need it. That includes



establishing an effective deconfliction system to allow humanitarian workers to distribute it safely and supporting the minimum operating requirements of the United Nations and its agencies.

Finally, all of this could stop now if Hamas laid down their arms. They are causing this suffering to the Palestinian people. We call on Hamas to immediately release all of the hostages, who have now been held for more than seven months. We urgently need to see a deal that stops the fighting, allows for unhindered access for life-saving aid to Gaza and gets the hostages out. We must then work with our international partners to turn that pause into a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.

**Mr. Bendjama** (Algeria): I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his insightful briefing. His remarks are a sobering reminder of the dire situation across the entire occupied Palestinian territory, including Gaza, the West Bank and Al-Quds Al-Sharif. That grim reality reflects the brutal and senseless nature of the Israeli occupation.

In recent months, the Security Council and the international community have focused predominantly on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. However, it is crucial to remember that the original sin of that suffering is the ongoing occupation, the ongoing oppression. Addressing the symptoms without tackling the root cause, by which I mean the occupation of Palestinian land, will not lead to lasting peace. The suffering of the Palestinian people began with the occupation, and it will only end when the occupation is over.

In that regard, the Security Council bears primary responsibility and must fully implement its relevant resolutions. Resolution 2334 (2016), for instance, clearly states that settlements are illegal and constitute a flagrant violation of international law. Despite that, approximately 800,000 settlers currently reside illegally in the West Bank, making life a nightmare for Palestinians. The Israeli occupying authorities have just proposed building 10,000 new housing units, and they are allocating additional funds for those settlements, without having sanctions imposed on them by the Security Council. Furthermore, the occupying Power continues its policy of demolishing Palestinian houses and structures, with more than 470 demolitions since 1 January 2024. They persist in their efforts to Judaize Al-Quds and its holy site. We have recently witnessed assaults by settlers on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and on the Sheikh Jarrah area. Those actions risk exacerbating tensions and further escalating the situation.

This dark reality in the West Bank and Al-Quds Al-Sharif is compounded by the situation in Gaza. It is not necessary to recall figures. The human cost is self-evident and appalling. The crimes speak for themselves. Haunting images from Gaza flood our screens, all over the world. If they do not stir the spirit of humanity in all of us, then words will be useless.

Upon instructions from the President of the Republic, Mr. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Algeria, as a responsible member of the Security Council, and with the support of the Group of Arab States, has decided to submit a draft resolution urging everyone in the Council to shoulder their responsibilities. We hope that that concise draft resolution will garner the support of everyone in the Council. We need a united Council and a unified Council, because waiting for the occupying Power to voluntarily abide by international law and Security Council resolutions is pointless. The occupation authorities have made it clear: they will not comply with the orders of the International Court of Justice. Instead, they continue to cover up murders and commit what they call tragic mistakes.

The Security Council is responsible, under Article 94, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations, for ensuring the implementation of the decisions of the International Court of Justice. We demand that the Council assume its legal responsibilities.

The current policies of the occupying Power seek to spoil the Palestinian aspirations for statehood and self-determination. By depriving Palestinians of their lands, livelihoods and means of resilience, life in Palestine is becoming unbearable.

We are witnessing repeated attacks on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), an organization vital for aiding Palestinian refugees and affirming their right to return home. After failing recently to discredit the Agency, the occupying authorities have proposed a bill to classify that Agency, UNRWA, as a terrorist organization, effectively removing it from the occupied territories. We warn against that move and call on the Council to defend that crucial organization, for the stability of the Middle East.

Amidst the darkness, a glimmer of hope persists thanks to the growing international recognition of the Palestinian State. That recognition, along with Palestine's full membership in the United Nations, is essential for solidifying the right of the Palestinians

to establish their independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in the face of an occupying force determined to annihilate the Palestinian people.

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

We wish to begin by extending our sincere gratitude to Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his important and insightful briefing.

We are deeply saddened by the unprecedented human tragedy that is unfolding in the Gaza Strip, home to approximately 2 million residents. At the origin of the tragedy is the Israeli military offensive launched against Gaza, and in particular at this moment against the city of Rafah. Despite the chorus of international warnings about the potential for mass casualties in an area where displaced civilians have sought shelter, the military offensive has proceeded, exacerbating what is already a catastrophic humanitarian situation. On 26 May, Israel carried out a strike on a camp for displaced people in Rafah. According to the Gaza authorities, that attack resulted in the death of dozens of civilian Palestinians with many more injured, mostly women and children. The resulting global outrage and condemnation from all over the world further enhances Israeli's international isolation.

We have just concluded in the Council a momentous week devoted to the topic of the protection of civilians. The entire global community warned against the danger of normalizing the attacks on civilians and humanitarian workers.

We, on our side, strongly oppose and condemn that trend, and in particular the ongoing Israeli military operation in Rafah. In that connection, we echo the calls for a global and concerted action for the end of Israel's military operation in Rafah, which is causing untold human suffering of the Palestinian population. Those horrendous acts are perpetrated in blatant violation of all humanitarian norms, against all laws of war and all moral standards. They clearly constitute a grave violation of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, against the Palestinian people.

The Security Council has the responsibility to collectively take effective measures in order to stop the operation in Rafah and bring to an end the daily systematic killing of the innocent civilian population

in Gaza. We emphasize the binding nature of the resolutions adopted by the Council, in particular resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023) and 2728 (2024). Those resolutions are compounded by the orders enacted by the International Court of Justice in January, March and May. The decisions of those two United Nations organs — that is, the Security Council and the International Court of Justice — are the solid basis for our collective action.

We take this opportunity to call for the immediate implementation of resolution 2730 (2024), which we just adopted, regarding the protection of humanitarian and United Nations personnel and their facilities and assets, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the backbone Agency of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees.

We express our total condemnation of the crimes that were discovered in the mass graves in the Nasser and Al-Shifa Hospitals in Gaza. We reiterate the urgent need for a credible, independent and impartial investigation to lift the veil that covers the truth about that monstrous crime. We need to abide by the imperative of accountability so that the perpetrators of those heinous crimes are brought to justice.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

**Mr. Bamyia** (Palestine): If the Israeli assault stopped today and we decided to hold a funeral every single day for each Palestinian killed in the past eight months, it would take us nearly 100 years to honour them all. The Council adopted only a week ago a resolution on the protection of United Nations and humanitarian personnel (resolution 2730 (2024)). It would take us, if we held one funeral a day for those humanitarian personnel, over a year to honour them all.

There is barely anything left in Gaza. Israel has destroyed everything. But there is everything left still in Gaza — 2.3 million people who have been in a constant battle with death for the past eight months. They are victims. They are heroes because they refuse to surrender to death, but they are victims who deserve to be helped as victims, not only admired as heroes. Eight months later, we have yet to tell them that help is on the way.

One cannot unhear the screams of a mother who did everything in her power to save her children and failed. There are parents who, having lost a child, have to carry the others to safety, without time to mourn and without finding safety anywhere. There are orphans being taken care of by the next closest relative until none of them are left. There are families wandering the streets, traumatized, aching, desperate, coming from nowhere, heading nowhere. They are in a land devoid of life, trying to make it to tomorrow, when it will start all over again. There are people starving only a few feet away from aid and yet unable to reach it.

Despite several binding orders by the International Court of Justice in the case of genocide brought by South Africa, Israel has ensured that famine sets in, obstructing aid and allowing its destruction by its extremists and settlers, and instead of halting immediately its offensive on Rafah, as ordered by the world's highest Court, it bombed the people it displaced while they were sheltering in tents. The whole world sees that there is no safe zone in Gaza. The world saw Palestinian families, including children, burned alive. It is unbearable to see a loved one killed before one's eyes, but imagine the pain of seeing them burned alive, screaming in agony, of holding a beheaded child in one's arms or pulling their charred corpse from that hell. The whole world warned of what an Israeli offensive in Rafah would mean and opposed such an offensive. And yet Israel proceeded, with the consequence that all foresaw: unbearable human suffering.

Israel wants Palestinians to understand that if they remain in Gaza, that is their fate — death or displacement, or perhaps I should say death and displacement, displacement and death. When will it be enough? What other level of cruelty must be reached before the assault is finally brought to an end? There is no red line imposed by legality, rationality or humanity that Israel has not crossed. It is now crossing the red line set by the entire world on Rafah, and it is the Council's duty to uphold that red line — human lives are at stake — and to take decisive action to force Israel to halt its military offensive, withdraw its occupation forces and ensure an immediate ceasefire. The adoption of the draft resolution put forward by Algeria yesterday would be an important step in that direction.

The whole world sees the targeting of civilians and indiscriminate attacks against them, the use of starvation as a method of war, the summary executions in the streets, including of people who were blindfolded

and handcuffed. They have seen hospitals turned into graveyards, the mass graves. But somehow we should trust Israel when it says that it is investigating the conduct of the self-proclaimed “most moral army in the world”, an army that is committing war crimes on a daily basis. Anyone interested in the truth or in accountability should not be interested in Israel's sham investigations. Israeli investigators and Israeli courts are designed to perpetuate and enable the occupation and its crimes and exactions against the occupied people, whom Israel, as the occupying Power, should be protecting. They, the people it should be protecting as an occupying Power, are its targets. Those Israeli mechanisms are not designed to achieve accountability. That is why Israel rejects international investigations and fears them. If, after bombing three different cars of a humanitarian convoy from the world-renowned World Central Kitchen, which had given their coordinates, and killing seven international aid workers Israel reprimanded and dismissed a couple of officers — those are the measures that it has taken, to reprimand and dismiss for the killing and targeting of humanitarian personnel — what chance do Palestinians stand of one day seeing accountability based on Israeli investigations and decisions? What hope is there for justice?

Israel can kill any Palestinian and call them either a terrorist or a human shield to justify their murder. It uses both terms extremely loosely, so that they can cover anyone and everyone. Israel has called any form of opposition to its occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people terrorism, including the defence of human rights, diplomatic action and requests for judicial institutions to examine its action. All legal actions have been characterized by Israel as terrorism. Similarly, it thinks that it can bomb entire neighbourhoods using indiscriminate and massive bombardments and simply say, about the thousands of Palestinians it has killed, that unfortunately they were human shields.

Members of the Council have experienced first-hand how loosely Israel uses those terms, as the Israeli representative accused members of the Council and the entire United Nations membership, the Secretary-General and the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court of being antisemites, supporters of terrorism and collaborators of Nazism in his usual measured and responsible way. The difference is that Israel does not decide whether members live or die. It does however decide the fate of every Palestinian. Members have learned to live with Israel's irrational

and racist behaviour, but we die because of it. The incitement by the Israeli representatives against the United Nations has real-life consequences and cannot be tolerated any longer. It signals to their soldiers and extremists that the United Nations is an enemy and a legitimate target. That explains why this is the deadliest conflict for United Nations personnel, why they can be arrested and tortured, why the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East headquarters in Jerusalem could be attacked and set ablaze — because of that incitement.

What is the most outrageous is that Israel is outraged by the very actions it undertakes as long as it is not the one undertaking them. When it undertakes them, they become justified and defensible. Israel can come here and explain how horrifying it is to see civilians killed in indiscriminate attacks or in the safety of their homes, while obliterating entire Palestinian families at a time. It can come to explain the fear that Israelis feel as they have to shelter when hearing sirens, while it conducts massive bombardments against a Palestinian population that has nowhere to shelter, that no longer has the energy to be afraid. It will come to demand action for those held in captivity for the past seven months, while it has held Palestinians in captivity, one generation after another, for the past seven decades, and while there is evidence of it abducting thousands in the past seven months alone, killing several Palestinians while in detention and imposing such abuse and ill-treatment on others that they had to suffer amputations.

It will say how despicable it is to use people as human shields, while it has a long record of using Palestinians as human shields during its military incursions and operations in the occupied territory, sometimes placing them on the front of its military jeeps during its incursions into our cities and refugee camps. I have heard the Israeli representative here in New York saying that detaining bodies was barbaric as it deprived the families of the ability to mourn and offer a dignified burial to their loved ones. Israel has detained the bodies of hundreds of Palestinians whom it has killed, sometimes for more than three decades — three decades without being able to bury our loved ones as they are detained by Israel in graves bearing numbers instead of their names, so we cannot establish where they are buried. But that is humane when Israel does it, not barbaric.

Israel accuses many of seeking its destruction and says that all its actions are justified by the existential threat that it faces, while it actively and

openly pursues the destruction of our country and our people. It expresses outrage at the slogan “Palestine will be free from the river to the sea” and says that it is a genocidal call, while its own Prime Minister has not only repeatedly used the phrase “Israel from the river to the sea” but also held up a map at the General Assembly podium showing Israel stretching from the river to the sea and with Palestine having disappeared altogether, and he is acting accordingly on the ground, including by committing a genocide in Gaza and pursuing the colonization of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Those are not words, they are actions. It wants occupation and violent oppression for Palestinians and peace and security for itself. It does not understand what the big deal is and why the world fails to support it in achieving that absurd goal — occupation and oppression for Palestinians, peace and security for Israel.

Certainly, Israel explains the lack of support by attributing it to antisemitism, not because what Israel wants is illegal, immoral and goes against every possible fibre of human decency in one’s body. Never mind that experience has proven that it is impossible to achieve. It continues to invoke the Holocaust and its 6 million victims to justify its crimes, forgetting that the greatest lesson of the Holocaust is that war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide can never be justified and must always be combated, regardless of the identity of the victims or that of the perpetrators. No civilians should be harmed, regardless of their nationality, origin, religion or race. Those factors are all irrelevant. Civilians should be protected. Therefore, given Israel’s mindset, it is logical that this Israeli Government would, somehow, interpret the recognition of the State of Palestine by Spain, Ireland and Norway as an attack against Israel. Never mind that those countries recognized Israel decades ago, without asking for anyone’s approval. It was not unilateral when they recognized Israel; it only becomes a unilateral move when they recognize the State of Palestine. Never mind that they advocate a two-State solution, where Palestine and Israel live side by side and where Palestinians and Israelis live in peace and security. Never mind that these countries all have a strong record of support for international law and just peace. Never mind that the Palestinian people have a right to self-determination, including to the independence of their State, and that Israel cannot be allowed to have a veto right over those Palestinian rights.

How did Israel respond? It responded by promising more criminality and colonization, including the breach of the historical status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, stealing our money. A State only behaves in that manner if it has been above the law for so long that it has no problem acting as an outlaw State.

We thank the three countries for their important decision in support of freedom and peace, just as we thank Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas, as well as all the countries that made a similar choice over the years. We call on all the countries that have yet to recognize the State of Palestine to do so as an investment in freedom and peace in these tragic times. We also thank all the countries that supported the membership of the State of Palestine in the United Nations. The day is coming when we will be members in the United Nations and free.

How is it possible that Israel cannot see how absurd its position is, how evident its selective outrage is? The answer is because it considers us to be sub-human or, to use the words of Israeli leaders, “human animals”. Across history, ethnic cleansing, apartheid and genocide have always been made possible by dehumanizing a nation. That is what is happening here. Israel has been dehumanizing us for so long that it does not understand the indignation when Palestinians are killed. It does not understand the issue. Why is Israel being brought here to discuss that matter? It does not understand how, despite the historical record, how anyone can speak of historical injustice against the Palestinians when addressing our fate. It does not understand why anyone would decide to recognize our existence as a people, our rights as a nation and our State.

Israel does not understand how anyone can dare equate its civilians and ours, because our civilians are lesser than theirs. We are lesser human beings. That is an equivalence that Israel truly rejects when it speaks of the International Criminal Court. That is the equivalence that vexes Israel — that Palestinian victims could be considered victims. Israel is forgetting that the Court’s responsibility is towards the victims, not the perpetrators. Israel wants Palestinian victims to be left without protection and for Israeli perpetrators to continue to be shielded. That is unacceptable, and everyone should say so.

Why does Israel trust that it will get away with its crimes? The answer is: 75 years of experiencing full-fledged impunity. Any statement that reinforces

the feeling of somehow being a State above the law or being entitled to an exceptional status will only encourage Israel to continue acting as an outlaw State. This must be a time for accountability. If after Gaza there is no accountability, if after the genocide there is no accountability, when will we have it? And does anyone believe that, if Israel’s impunity is preserved, it will change course — that it will wake up one day and say “Yes, we want to have peace with the Palestinians; that is the reasonable choice to make”? That will not happen.

Each and every State can make the colonial occupation costly and, thus, contribute to bringing it to an end. Tomorrow’s freedom and peace will be made possible by the decisions everyone takes today. Allow us to tell our people who are suffering unbearable pain that help is on the way and that this nightmare, this hell on Earth, will end, and that the solidarity that they see in every corner of the globe will translate into resolute action to stop this genocide, achieve freedom and advance peace. There is no objective more worthy. There is no time more pressing. There is no greater responsibility.

Palestinians should no longer have to die and suffer in order to remain on their land. Life, freedom and dignity in our homeland — that is our simple dream, which must prevail over the nightmare imposed on our people for so long.

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

**Mr. Miller (Israel):** The Council has convened, for the umpteenth time, to discuss the just and moral war that Israel is fighting against the bloodthirsty, genocidal terror organization of Hamas. Yet again, as has been the case for nearly eight months, the Council still refrains from convening to discuss Hamas and from laying the blame where it belongs, on the shoulders of terrorists.

This war began when Hamas carried out the most heinous atrocities wrought upon Israelis in history, and it continues because the very same terrorists are still holding 125 innocent hostages in Gaza, while continuing to fire rockets on Israel’s towns and cities, even from within designated humanitarian areas in the south of Gaza. Hamas has sworn to commit the horrors of 7 October again and again until Israel is annihilated, and we are fighting this war to ensure that such atrocities can never be repeated.

This war against terror is not just Israel's right as a sovereign nation, but our obligation and duty. Each and every member of the Council would do the same, because that is what countries do to protect their futures. But instead of focusing on the facts, the Council prefers to do anything it can to end this war, even if that means endangering Israel's security.

Israel has been very clear from the outset that this war could end today, without one more shot being fired. All that is required is for Hamas to release the hostages and lay down their arms. Those are our conditions, and we are not asking for anything more. But the reality is that Hamas refuses those terms. Hamas chooses to hold innocent hostage. Hamas chooses to continue firing rockets. Hamas chooses to exploit the civilians of Gaza as human shields. The terrorists chose to terrorize. As a result, they must be held fully accountable.

Yet, sadly, the Council chooses to place the blame where it does not belong. Instead of echoing Israel's demands and holding the terrorists responsible, the Council chooses to convene almost weekly, even biweekly at this point, to hold Israel accountable for a war that we did not choose or want. Perhaps such behaviour is not surprising for an Organization that eulogizes mass murderers. That the General Assembly will convene tomorrow to lament the death of a dictator that butchered his own citizens speaks volumes.

If Hamas refuses to release our hostages and surrender, Israel may have only one option: to bring the hostages home ourselves and eliminate Hamas's terrorist capabilities. And that is what we have to continue to do. There are still four Hamas battalions in Rafah, and many of the hostages are being held there. Hundreds of terror shafts to tunnels have been discovered, while thousands of Hamas terrorists have been eliminated. I wish to also point out that Israel recently returned the bodies of murdered hostages to their families, bodies found in a facility belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Gaza.

In order to accomplish our mission, we have no choice but to root out the terrorists in southern Gaza. That is why we conducted the precise strike on Sunday, targeting and eliminating two senior Hamas terror officials with the blood of many on their hands, Israelis and others. Israel's war is only against Hamas and terror organizations, not the people of Gaza. And every strike or advance is carried after extensive verification to mitigate civilian casualties.

The strike on Sunday took place nearly two kilometres from the designated humanitarian zone, and the loss of civilian lives that followed is being thoroughly investigated. Preliminary findings indicate that the fire broke out due to secondary explosions from terror munitions stored near the civilians. Where are the condemnations of Hamas for using Gazans as human shields and civilian sites as weapon depots? The loss of life on Sunday is a tragedy. It is Hamas who must be held accountable.

The Council must face the facts on the ground without being influenced by the half-truths and falsehoods portrayed in the media and through biased reports. There is a concerted effort to rewrite the truth and falsely paint Israel as the root of all evil, and that cannot be tolerated. South Africa failed yet again in its cynical attempts to exploit the International Court of Justice in order to undermine Israel's inherent right and obligation to defend its citizens from the ongoing Hamas attacks and to secure the release of hostages still being held in Gaza in brutal captivity.

The charges levelled against Israel are false and morally repugnant. Israel is fighting an offensive and just war, and every action taken is consistent with moral values and is in compliance with international law. Israel has not and will not conduct military actions in the Rafah area that could inflict on the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza conditions of life that would bring about its physical destruction, in whole or in part. That is our moral code, and those are the facts.

I will reiterate — Israel is fighting a war against Hamas, not the civilians of Gaza. That is why Israel is committed to facilitating the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza from every possible point of entry. Despite Hamas rocket fire on the Kerem Shalom crossing, it is fully functional and aid trucks are entering. Israel is fully committed to ensuring the entry of as much aid as possible.

It is imperative that the Council uphold its mandate, stop accepting the lies of terrorists as facts, stop emboldening those who seek Israel's annihilation, stop parroting politically charged falsehoods designated to bash Israel. There is only one way for this conflict to be resolved. Standing blindly with one side while demonizing the other is not how to advance a solution, and it is surely not conducive to bilaterally recognize a Palestinian State following the most brutal massacre of Jews since the Holocaust. Such steps only serve to

reward terrorism and embolden the Palestinians with the understanding that solutions can be found with no negotiations and zero concessions. That is not the road to peace; it is the road to further terror, bloodshed and destruction.

Israel is fighting not only on behalf of our hostages and on behalf of our security, but on behalf of all civilization. Stop taking the side of terrorism.

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

**Ms. Joyini** (South Africa): South Africa wishes to thank you, Mr. President, and the members of the Security Council for giving us an opportunity to address the Council at this meeting today. We also thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

The Security Council is convening yet again to discuss the perilous situation in the Middle East. We remind the members of the Security Council that the situation in Palestine and Israel has been on its agenda for almost as long as this Organization has been in existence. We remind Council members of their mandated role, under the Charter of the United Nations, to maintain international peace and security. We remind Council members that a failure to act decisively in order to contribute to preventing and stopping wars will result in more people dying, being injured and living in intolerable conditions. How many times does the Council have to be reminded of these matters before it can meaningfully act to make a call that it is duty bound to make — a call for a ceasefire.

That is what the majority of the members of the United Nations and thousands of people all across the world have been demanding for months — a call for a ceasefire so that we can halt the senseless killing of thousands of civilians, including innocent children, women and men. The response from the Council to that call has not been entirely forthcoming. The legally binding resolution calling for a short-lived ceasefire in Ramadan was ignored. And the Council has not acted accordingly.

In December 2023, noting its obligations as a State party to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, South Africa approached the International Court of Justice seeking an order to prevent Israel from committing genocide against the Palestinian people. As Israel continued to defy the Court's orders, including through its latest Rafah offensive, South Africa went back to the Court

seeking additional provisional measures in order to prevent Israel's persistent acts of genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. Contrary to what we just now heard from the representative of Israel, the Court, in its decisions, has asserted that the Palestinians have a legal right to protection against genocide and that South Africa had shown that there was a real and imminent risk to the irreparable violation of that right.

The International Court of Justice's orders make it clear that there is a serious risk of genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. Third States must, therefore, also act independently and immediately in order to prevent genocide by Israel and to ensure that they, themselves, are not in violation of the Genocide Convention, including by aiding or assisting in the commission of genocide. That necessarily imposes an obligation on all States to cease funding and facilitating Israel's military actions, which are plausibly genocidal.

We regret that, since the provisional measures were issued by the Court — including in its latest decision on 10 May 2024 where it ordered Israel to halt any action in Rafah that may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction, in whole or in part — Palestinians continue to suffer immeasurably under the occupying Power's intensified military operations. The events of the past seven months in Gaza have illustrated that Israel's actions are plausibly genocidal and are contrary to its obligations under international law, including those pursuant to the Genocide Convention.

Today, in a letter addressed to you, Mr. President, which we request that you circulate to the members of the Security Council, South Africa provided the Council with a public dossier of evidence relating to the State of Israel's intent and incitement to commit genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. We remind the members of the Council that Article 94, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations, states that,

“[i]f any party to a case fails to perform the obligations incumbent upon it under a judgment rendered by the Court, the other party may have recourse to the Security Council, which may, if it deems necessary, make recommendations or decide upon measures to be taken to give effect to the judgment”.

South Africa therefore requests that the Security Council give effect to the Court's judgments in the case *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip*

(*South Africa v. Israel*). We keep saying and reiterate today that the international community cannot proclaim the importance of international law and the importance of the United Nations Charter in some situations and not in others, as if 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 global governance system that was created for States to voluntarily join and commit to working collectively to address global challenges requires us to accept that no one is beyond reproach. No one State is more equal than another. No one State can be allowed to breach international law and, at the same time, call on others to abide by it. As we approach the Summit of the Future and consider the future of the Organization and the challenges facing multilateralism, as a whole, let us accept that when we sign on and accept to be part of the United Nations, we accept to be bound by its rules. That should be noted, in particular, by those that seek leadership positions within the Organization.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

I thank Special Coordinator Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing, which highlighted the catastrophic situation caused by Israel's war against the Gaza Strip.

The attacks that we have seen since the beginning of this week on the displaced persons camps in Rafah are unspeakable and demand the explicit condemnation of the entire international community. The heinous massacre committed by the Israeli occupation forces last Sunday against hundreds of civilians, while they were sleeping in their tents, in addition to the Al-Mawasi massacre yesterday, are merely the latest episodes in a series of systematic war crimes against the Palestinian people.

There are no words to describe the horror of children killed by fire or phrases that can express the shock of a mother holding the remains of her burned infant. No language can describe the cries of pain of a crippled old man taking his last breath amid burning tents.

Those bloody attacks came less than two days after the International Court of Justice issued new provisional measures demanding that Israel immediately stop its military operations in Rafah. That followed the

displacement, during the past two weeks, of more than 900,000 Palestinians — more than 60 per cent of the displaced people in Rafah — due to Israel's escalation of its aggression against the governorate of Rafah, forcing many of them to flee again, seeking a safe place away from the Israeli war.

After nearly eight months of bombing, killing, abuse and displacement, there is no longer a safe or liveable place in Gaza. Every so-called safe zone has been targeted, and everything protected under international humanitarian law has been violated.

The tragedy of repeated displacement is but one aspect of the suffering endured by the displaced people, who also suffer from a total lack of water, food and sanitary materials — especially after Israel closed the Rafah crossing and banned humanitarian aid from entering. All of that is happening even as the Gaza Strip is suffering from famine.

Israel has persistently and deliberately crossed all red lines and is blatantly and unequivocally defying international law and the resolutions of the Security Council. Moreover, Israel has — for the third time — ignored the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice.

The eyes of the world today turn not only to Rafah, but also to the Council, which is responsible for maintaining international peace and security. This level of criminality requires a firm and clear response from the Council. When the United Nations was founded on the ruins of two devastating World Wars, its Member States pledged to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. The Security Council bears the primary responsibility to fulfil that pledge.

Where are the people of Gaza in that pledge? What is happening in the Gaza Strip undoubtedly shows the true face of the scourge of war and the atrocities it inflicts on innocent people.

The Arab Group calls on the Council to positively and constructively engage in the negotiations related to the draft resolution put forward by the State of Algeria yesterday. The draft resolution aims to stop the Israeli military attack on Rafah and demands an immediate ceasefire. In that regard, we stress the importance of adopting the draft resolution, as the Security Council has been very late in taking such a necessary step.

Ending that war, which has been described by the United Nations as a war against children, has indeed become an urgent demand. During the war, we have seen



repeated massacres targeting hospitals, aid distribution centres, children and other innocent people. We have also seen Israel killing humanitarian, medical and media personnel, along with the elderly, women and children. Furthermore, Israeli bombings have targeted health centres, schools, camps, bakeries, mosques, churches, universities and United Nations facilities. We note that targeting civilians constitutes a war crime, and its perpetrators must be held accountable before the law.

The double standards have become clear as day, and its repercussions will destabilize not only our region, but the entire world. The Arab Group therefore stresses the importance of implementing international law, including international humanitarian law, uniformly and evenly and without exception or discrimination. The implementation of Security Council resolutions should not be selective or based on double standards.

Israel, like any other State, is required to respect its obligations under international legal frameworks and to stop its illegal actions against the Palestinians, including in the West Bank, where tensions are rising to dangerous levels due to the accelerated pace of new settlements, land confiscation and almost daily raids on Palestinian cities and camps — not to mention the ongoing raids by Israeli extremists against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, under the protection of the Israeli occupation police, and the ban on worshippers entering the Mosque. That constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and the existing historical and legal status of

Jerusalem and its holy sites. The oppression imposed on the Palestinians has no limits, and the situation in the region could spiral out of control at any moment.

In conclusion, the Arab Group reiterates its demand for the Council to take firm steps to end the war on Gaza and to ensure the immediate and unobstructed entry of humanitarian aid in order to save what can be saved. The Arab Group also stresses the need for taking immediate action before it is too late. In that context, we appreciate the vigorous efforts of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Qatar to reach a ceasefire agreement and alleviate the suffering in Gaza.

This dangerous juncture in the history of the conflict makes it imperative for the Security Council and the international community to make all possible efforts to save the two-State solution, end the occupation, stop the violence, establish security and stability in the region and achieve an independent Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Achieving just and lasting peace also requires strong support for the full membership of the State of Palestine in the United Nations, as well as for its recognition. Many countries have recently recognized the Palestinian State, and we highly value their support for the legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people.

*The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.*