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Seventy-ninth year

Provisional

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New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Polyanskiy	(Russian Federation)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Fu Cong
	Ecuador	Mr. De La Gasca
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana	Ms. Persaud
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sangjin Kim
	Sierra Leone	Mr. George
	Slovenia	Mr. Žbogar
	Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	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 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Antonia Marie De Meo, Deputy Commissioner-General for Operational Support, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; and Mr. Muhannad Hadi, Deputy Special Coordinator, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

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

I give the floor to Ms. De Meo.

Ms. De Meo: I thank you, Mr. President, for giving the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) this opportunity to brief the Security Council at this pivotal time.

UNRWA is the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza, but it is facing enormous challenges. Gaza is in ruins, and the threat of a larger regional war looms. At the same time, the Agency is under unprecedented attack, including imminent threats of being expelled from occupied East Jerusalem and being designated a terrorist organization by the Israeli Parliament. Our operating space in the occupied Palestinian territory is shrinking by the day. Those developments demand the urgent attention and action of the Council.

For nearly 10 months now, Palestinians and Israelis have lived through untold suffering, grief, sorrow and loss. More than 2 million people in Gaza remain trapped in an endless nightmare of death and destruction on a staggering scale. Their lives are dominated by fear, thirst, hunger, disease, dehumanization, lack of basic sanitation and repeated displacement. It is a relentless and often hourly struggle, day in and day out.

Famine remains a risk, including in southern Gaza. Communicable diseases are on the rise. Children are bearing the brunt, with 625,000 deeply traumatized children out of school. Prior to 7 October 2023, half of them attended UNRWA schools. With the war coming so soon after the coronavirus disease pandemic, we risk depriving an entire generation of girls and boys of formal education, sowing the seeds of hatred, resentment and future conflict. Education cannot wait. That is why, even amid the enormous challenges of war, we are committed, together with our United Nations partners, to resume learning for all the children of Gaza. That process starts next week with providing mental health and psychosocial support, transitions to teaching reading, writing and math in informal settings and culminates in a return to formal education in schools.

The Security Council has already adopted several resolutions aimed at ending the war through a ceasefire, the release of all hostages and the scaling-up of humanitarian aid. UNRWA has thousands of staff on the ground, spearheading the humanitarian operation in close cooperation with other United Nations agencies. We have welcomed the adoption of those resolutions in New York. But in Gaza, we have seen woefully little impact. Instead, the fighting continues without reprieve, and the suffering continues to mount. As my colleague, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Muhannad Hadi will describe in greater detail, delivering humanitarian aid remains an impossible task amid military operations, insecurity, lawlessness, damaged and destroyed infrastructure, fuel shortages and restrictions on access and telecommunications.

In Gaza, the blatant disregard for international humanitarian law is now commonplace. Women, children, journalists and humanitarian workers all continue to pay a tragically high price. UNRWA is no exception. A total of 199 colleagues have now been killed, the vast majority with their families. Nearly two thirds of the Agency's premises — some 190 buildings — have been hit, some twice. Many of our schools have been demolished and can no longer

be used as schools. In the past two weeks alone, eight UNRWA schools, all serving as shelters for displaced people, were struck. Our headquarters offices in Gaza have been destroyed beyond recognition. More than 560 displaced people, including many women and children, have been killed while sheltering under the United Nations flag. And just this week, two United Nations convoys heading north were shot at, despite coordination, deconfliction and authorization from the Israeli army.

Humanitarian workers must never be targets of war. They must be protected at all times and in all locations. But in Gaza, too often they have come under attack, been injured and even killed. We have said it many times before, and I repeat it again: no place is safe in Gaza. No one is safe, including humanitarian aid workers.

Concerted efforts to dismantle UNRWA continue unabated. As I speak today, many United Nations staff and staff of non-governmental organizations have been refused visas to enter Israel. The visa of the UNRWA Commissioner-General expired more than a month ago and has not yet been renewed. And for United Nations staff who have been granted visas, most visas are only two or three months long, requiring repeated and lengthy bureaucratic processes. Misinformation and disinformation about UNRWA are spreading on social media, at times crossing the line of incitement to violence. That puts all our colleagues at serious risk, especially in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Earlier this week, on 22 July, Israel's Parliament approved on first reading three draft legislative bills related to UNRWA: one seeking to ban UNRWA operations in occupied East Jerusalem; a second seeking to revoke United Nations privileges and immunities afforded to UNRWA since 1949; and a third designating UNRWA a terrorist organization. To become law, those draft bills must still pass through second and third readings by the Knesset. Those bills make a travesty of the multilateral responsibilities of States Members of the United Nations. They erode the very foundations of international law and multilateral norms. If the bills pass — which could happen as early as next week — the ramifications will be dire and immediate. They will put all UNRWA staff and the Agency's General Assembly mandate in direct danger. While UNRWA will face the impact today, make no mistake — the entire United Nations system around the world will feel the impact tomorrow. We cannot afford

that to become a new standard for future humanitarian operations in conflict zones across the world.

The campaign against UNRWA is often framed by its detractors as motivated by the Agency's alleged failure to uphold the humanitarian principle of neutrality. Following serious allegations that several UNRWA personnel in Gaza were involved in the abhorrent attacks against Israel on 7 October 2023, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) opened an investigation, and the Secretary-General launched an independent review of how UNRWA upholds neutrality in its work. The OIOS investigation into the allegations against those individuals is ongoing. If any of those allegations are proven to be true, it would constitute an appalling betrayal of Palestine refugees, UNRWA and United Nations values.

Meanwhile, the independent review published its findings in April. It confirmed that UNRWA "possesses a more developed approach to neutrality than other similar United Nations or NGO entities". The review further emphasized that protecting neutrality is a shared responsibility between the United Nations and Member States, especially Member States in which United Nations entities are based, including Israel. UNRWA is fully committed to implementing the review's recommendations, together with Member States, in that spirit of shared responsibility. To that end, we thank the members of the Council for signing the statement on shared commitments to UNRWA.

Together we must push back against calls to dismantle the Agency. UNRWA is targeted because of its role in safeguarding the rights of Palestine refugees and because it embodies the international community's commitment to a just and lasting political solution. UNRWA exists because a political solution does not. It exists because a Palestinian State that can deliver public services in its place does not.

To reopen the pathway to peace, we need the support of the Council. Please allow me to conclude with three asks.

First, I urge the Council to persist in its efforts to secure a ceasefire. That should bring desperately needed respite to the people of Gaza and the region, the immediate release of all hostages and an increase in the flow of humanitarian supplies and commercial goods into Gaza.

Secondly, I urge the Council to protect the mandate of UNRWA, including within the framework of a transition. UNRWA must continue providing services until a political solution is at hand. There is no credible alternative to UNRWA in Gaza and across the region. We need political and financial support now more than ever to continue our vital task of serving one of the most vulnerable communities in the world. We hope that the Council will speak out in one voice against attacks — legislative or otherwise — on the Agency.

Thirdly and finally, I urge the Council to advance a peaceful solution to this seven-decade-long conflict. The longer the war in Gaza persists, the further we drift from achieving a peaceful solution that would bring Palestinians and Israelis together, recognize our shared humanity, heal and learn to live side by side in peace and security. That solution must also, at long last, bring an end to the plight of Palestine refugees.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Ms. De Meo for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Hadi.

Mr. Hadi: The United Nations asks have been repeated by the Secretary-General and United Nations principals time and again since 7 October: first, a ceasefire; secondly, the ability to provide aid to the Palestinians in Gaza in line with humanitarian principles; and thirdly, an immediate and unconditional release of hostages. Those asks are neither new nor impossible.

Allow me to begin by sharing some voices from Gaza.

“In my shelter, I hear women cry all night for help.”

“We wake up every day just to search for food and water.”

“As a mother I am forced to witness my child starve and cry all night long.”

“We want the war to stop and dream of the day we can go back to our homes in the north.”

“I went four months without taking a shower.”

“We have to cut our hair because of lice and lack of shampoo and hygiene material.”

Those are just some of the things that women told me when I met them in Deir Al-Balah in Gaza on 9 July.

All of them spoke about the lack of safety, dignity and privacy in overcrowded camps. Many women said that they had suicidal thoughts. Their deepest suffering, especially as parents, is that they cannot protect their children — and that is all parents’ duty to their children.

Thousands of those children have sustained horrific injuries such as third-degree burns, amputated limbs and profound mental trauma. Sadly, many of the amputations would not have been necessary if adequate medical care had been available. The children who die often do so slowly and painfully. The ones who survive will have lifelong disabilities and sad futures.

Some 625,000 children have been deprived of an entire school year of education. Needless to say, a child without education is a child without a future. Children wander around internally displaced person (IDP) sites 24/7, often unaccompanied, exposed to huge risks and further injuries from playing in rubble filled with unexploded ordnance. They are also at risk of contracting dangerous diseases such as polio from the mountains of garbage and rivers of sewage that flow through IDP settlements.

Everyone in Gaza is exposed to risks of injury and disease. Those who survive the bombs and bullets still face the threats of hunger, unsanitary conditions and lack of health care. People with pre-existing medical conditions, such as cancer, kidney failure or diabetes, are not getting the treatment they need. Several tens of thousands of patients require immediate medical evacuation.

Overcrowding in IDP sites has increased community tensions and violence, including gender-based violence. As a result of the war, there is no public order anymore. What public order can we expect from 2 million people, who are constantly forced to move around a devastated strip of narrow land, during heavy fighting? Without public order, there will never be accountability and protection. Protection is urgently needed for the civilian population in Gaza, but also for humanitarian operations. Humanitarian staff and assets must be protected from all forms of violent attack.

Among the destruction of social fabric and infrastructure, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are sparing no effort to provide life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable. We know what needs to be done to aid the people in Gaza, but there is a gulf between what should be done and what humanitarians can do. The commitment or willingness

of the aid workers is not the issue, it is the inability to achieve our mandate, and that is beyond our control. My predecessors and colleagues, early in this conflict, warned about a lack of an enabling environment. Almost 10 months into the crisis, a safe enabling environment for the provision of humanitarian assistance still does not exist in Gaza. As one of my colleagues put it, “it is as if our kneecaps were smashed, yet they tell us to jump.”

UNRWA has been shouldering the burden of the crisis. The campaign against UNRWA, attacks against its premises and the legislative efforts to declare UNRWA a terrorist organization in order to end its operations are utterly unacceptable and endanger our operations. As the Secretary-General has said before, UNRWA is the backbone of our operations in Palestine.

Today the United Nations is not in a position to provide the necessary assistance to the people in Gaza, let alone to scale up, unless specific factors are in place. The enabling factors required for humanitarian operations are not new.

First and foremost, we need to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including all humanitarian staff and assets. It is the responsibility of warring parties to protect humanitarian actors. Duty of care for all humanitarian staff is one of our major concerns. Today, the risks inside Gaza are unacceptable. To mitigate those risks, we need systems and equipment, among other things.

Secondly, the unhindered and safe reception, dispatch and delivery of all humanitarian assistance must be ensured immediately. The procedures currently in place for getting aid and fuel consignments from crossings to people in need are cumbersome, dangerous and costly. All crossings must be utilized simultaneously and with streamlined procedures, including the Rafah crossing. Rafah must also be reopened for the medical evacuation of patients and the movement of people, humanitarian workers, goods and fuel.

In order to expedite the delivery of aid, we have been asking that our trucks be allowed to drive directly from Egypt and Jordan to the humanitarian destinations inside Gaza. Aid should not wait. We have also repeatedly asked for all checkpoints within Gaza to be opened simultaneously in order to enable movement from the north to the south, and vice versa.

Thirdly, there should be no limitations on the amount and type of humanitarian items that can go into Gaza. Today, we are still struggling to bring in certain medical devices and supplies, in addition to spare parts to repair civilian infrastructure.

Fourthly, without visas for all United Nations staffers and non-governmental organizations, workers will not be able to carry out their duties. The list of prerequisites is long. Humanitarian aid alone cannot sustain a population that lacks all basic services and utilities, especially not under the prevailing conditions in Gaza. Whatever shape the conflict may take in the near future, humanitarians must be able to safely access populations in need, wherever they are in Gaza and throughout the Strip.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the United Nations and our partners in Gaza will never give up. We will continue to provide desperately needed assistance, but we will need a safe enabling environment in order to do so. The human impact of this conflict cannot be overstated. That impact will haunt all of us — not for years, but for generations to come. We need a ceasefire, the ability to deliver aid to the Palestinians in Gaza, in line with humanitarian principles, and the immediate and unconditional release of hostages. Moreover, all parties must fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law. Those obligations include protecting civilians, ensuring that their basic needs are met, allowing them to leave for safer areas and allowing them to return, as soon as circumstances allow.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Hadi for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

We would like to thank Ms. Antonia De Meo, Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and Mr. Muhannad Hadi, Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory and Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for their detailed briefings and objective assessments of the situation on the ground.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip remains dire. After 300 days, there is virtually nothing left of one of the most densely populated areas in the world. The number of civilian casualties is staggering — almost 40,000 killed and more than 90,000 wounded, two

thirds of them women and children. More than 50,000 bombs have been dropped on the enclave. The housing stock has been destroyed, as has civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools.

The people in Gaza have virtually no food, water or health care, let alone basic hygiene facilities. Wastewater is flooding the streets, and there is rubble and unexploded ordnance everywhere. Those who survived the bombing and shelling have to continuously move around Gaza in search of shelter and safety. Some Palestinians, including those who have children, have already sought a different place of refuge for the tenth time. And once again, they end up under Israeli shelling because there are no safe places left in Gaza. Eyewitnesses, United Nations staff and humanitarian personnel, to a person, confirm that. Many of them confess that never in their lifetime have they seen such horror or suffering faced by an entire people. Unfortunately, there is as yet no hope that that suffering will end in the foreseeable future. Worse still, an American journalist who spent a month in Gaza even saw snipers targeting children. That is what we get from the rhetoric stating that every Palestinian over the age of three is a terrorist already, which is what we heard from some Israeli ministers in the initial stages of the conflict.

Neither are we optimistic about the recent updates from Khan Younis about the number of people killed or wounded there, and about yet another evacuation of hundreds of thousands of civilians. The risk of the confrontation spreading beyond Gaza to neighbouring Lebanon and Syria remains grave. Other groups are also becoming involved in the confrontation with Israel, such as the Houthis, who carried out a significant strike on Tel Aviv on 19 July.

We are also concerned about the inadequate humanitarian response. We probably should not have expected anything else in the absence of a ceasefire. As a result, all the Council's "humanitarian" resolutions remain words on paper. The United Nations mechanism for delivering humanitarian aid established pursuant to resolution 2720 (2023) is obviously not yielding any meaningful results. The attempt to establish a corridor between Cyprus and the floating pier in Gaza has failed. The pier, which was designed for river conditions, was literally washed out into the sea. The Rafah border crossing, through which a significant volume of humanitarian supplies used to be delivered, is closed. The roads that are supposed to be used for

the delivery of supplies have been destroyed. As far as we can tell, the Israeli authorities continue to hinder the delivery of humanitarian supplies. Funding is insufficient, and people trapped in Gaza can only hope for external assistance because there is no longer any manufacturing or agriculture in the Gaza Strip.

"Deconflicting" and the proverbial notifications in the course of active hostilities are clearly not working either, hence the tragically high figures — 278 humanitarians have been killed, 197 of them UNRWA staff. On 21 July, yet another humanitarian convoy heading to Gaza was shelled. And that is just the humanitarians. Journalists also fall victim frequently, with over 160 having been killed, as do health-care workers, 500 of whom have been killed.

It is high time to sound the alarm bells and to do so regularly. That is why it is difficult for us to understand why some of our Western colleagues on the Security Council are sidestepping what is happening in Gaza and prefer to convene meetings on other, much less urgent topics. That certainly is no credit to them.

Also at an impasse are attempts to achieve a settlement, owing to the fact that the interests of one of the conflicting parties are being insufficiently attended to, if not neglected outright. For example, the notorious "Biden Plan" remains on paper and, as we warned during the voting on resolution 2735 (2024), it has become a spoiler of sorts in that it allows Israel and the United States to contain any attempts by Security Council members to raise the issue of a new resolution that would demand an immediate and unconditional ceasefire.

We are also extremely concerned about the ongoing disinformation campaign against UNRWA. As far as we understand, the most disreputable allegations by Israel concerning the Agency's staff have not been confirmed, while the findings of the independent review group led by Ms. Colonna have confirmed that UNRWA is acting in accordance with the principle of neutrality and playing a key role in providing assistance to the Palestinians. The members of the Security Council should not play along with the attempts to discredit the Agency, and we call on everyone to stand up in its defence. There is no alternative to UNRWA, and that understanding should be the crux of the Council's efforts. The Knesset draft resolution aimed at banning UNRWA's activities in East Jerusalem and designating

the Agency a terrorist organization can be interpreted only as a slap in the face of the entire United Nations.

We call on the Israeli authorities to uphold the norms of international humanitarian law and to bear full responsibility for the people under occupation. I refer, first and foremost, to the obligations to ensure food, health care and law and order. What must also happen is the halting of the settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, which is a flagrant violation of international law. As a result of the intensification of such actions by the Israeli authorities, the situation in the West Bank is now nearing a breaking point.

At the same time, we have repeatedly reaffirmed that we oppose violence and terrorism in all its manifestations, as well as attacks against civilians in any place and in any country. That also applies to the attack on Israeli civilians on 7 October 2023, which we immediately and unequivocally condemned. There can be no justification for such actions, but what is happening in Gaza now can be called only collective punishment and an attempt to totally eliminate the civilian population.

Israel has the right to ensure its security, but that goal can be attained only through a comprehensive Middle East settlement, and first and foremost, through rectifying the historical injustice against Palestine and establishing an independent Palestinian State in accordance with Security Council and General Assembly decisions. Any other questionable mechanisms to reconcile Israel with its neighbours without a fair resolution of the Palestinian issue will not achieve that goal and can only trigger outbreaks of violence similar to what the region is experiencing now.

What we need to do now is to pool our efforts in support of a just Palestinian-Israeli settlement on the basis of the international legal framework endorsed by the Security Council. Achieving that goal would finally improve the situation in the region. There should be no monopolization of the mediation efforts, which we have recently seen in the actions taken by the United States, nor should there be competition among the main actors. All aspects are important, and every effort and initiative matters.

In that context, we welcome the understanding reached recently between Fatah and Hamas at a meeting in the Chinese capital, which was the culmination of a series of preparatory meetings, including one in Moscow. Palestinian unity is a guarantee that the

interests of the Palestinian people will not be ignored once again. We expect that this success will have a positive impact on the ongoing negotiations on the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners, which should finally lead to a ceasefire that the people of Gaza need so much.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): I extend my gratitude to Ms. Antonia Marie De Meo and Mr. Muhannad Hadi for their courageous accounts of the catastrophic intervention and humanitarian situation in Gaza. Their words have not only informed us; they have shaken us to our core.

Russia, China and my own country, Algeria, called for this meeting to highlight the urgent need to coordinate our response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Our meeting today signals hope — hope that we can set aside our differences and unite in our shared humanity. But hope alone is not enough. The people of Gaza need more than our sympathy, more than our compassion. They need our decisive action.

In Gaza, children are crying out in hunger. Hospitals are overflowing with the wounded and dying, and families are huddling in the rubble of what was once their homes. That is not a distant tragedy. It is a catastrophe happening in real time on our watch, challenging the very essence of our humanity. And we cannot turn away. We cannot remain silent, and we must not fail to act.

The eyes of history are upon us, and the voices of Gaza's suffering people echo in this Chamber, asking us two simple questions. If not the Security Council, who? If not now, when?

Today 96 per cent of Palestinian children and women are facing food insecurity in Gaza. The images of Palestinian children queuing to get something to eat or eating tree leaves should question our humanity and push us to act. The world is watching; history will be the judge. Let our voices thunder and our deeds resound. Not one more day must pass with starvation used as a tool of war in Gaza. Meanwhile, the Council is still discussing the number of trucks entering Gaza

and debating the obstacles deliberately put by the occupying Power.

Today we are again facing challenges related to access to and the distribution of food. Both are the result of a deliberate Israeli policy. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, during the first two weeks of July, only 86 trucks entered Gaza per day. That is clearly below the level required. That is clearly below the 500 trucks entering Gaza every day last year.

Owing to the lack of order and security, humanitarian actors are facing enormous challenges in delivering aid within Gaza to the civilian Palestinian population.

We are talking about human beings. We are talking about lives. We are talking about children who have their own dreams — dreams now destroyed by the barbaric Israeli occupying Power.

Let us be clear — we reject any attempt to absolve the occupying Power or shift responsibility for this disaster to the United Nations or to humanitarian actors. The responsibility lies squarely with the occupying Power, which now targets the Blue Helmets. It targets and handcuffs the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the only humanitarian agency that has capably distributed aid there. The Agency is yet another part of Israeli policy. Any attempt to discredit UNRWA undermines the principles of the international cooperation and solidarity and should be opposed by the Security Council.

Furthermore, the 16 July report by the World Health Organization (WHO) is alarming — the polio virus lurks in Gaza's sewage, another silent threat poised to explode. This deadly virus now stalks a population already brought to its knees, its health system having been demolished. In the rubble of hospitals and clinics, a new epidemic looms. This is not just a crisis; it is an absolute catastrophe.

We cannot ignore the WHO warnings about disease outbreaks among displaced populations. Overcrowding, poor hygiene and lack of water and sanitation in shelters create breeding grounds for hepatitis A and other epidemics. These preventable diseases will claim additional lives due to shortages of essential medical equipment unjustly restricted under dual-use pretexts.

Urgent action is needed to address these critical health risks. Israel's brutal tactics are nothing of

collective punishment — a heinous war crime. As the occupying force, Israel bears full responsibility for the immense suffering and countless innocent Palestinian lives lost. This reign of terror must end. The world can no longer stand silent in the face of such unspeakable cruelty.

To address the dire humanitarian situation, Algeria calls for certain actions to be taken.

First, all border crossings should be opened, including Rafah, which should be operated exclusively by Egypt and the Palestinian Authority.

Secondly, resolution 2720 (2023) should be implemented by deploying monitors in Rafah in order to ensure the smooth access of humanitarian aid.

Thirdly, we must enable UNRWA and other humanitarian actors to distribute humanitarian aid throughout the Gaza Strip, including the north of the territory.

Fourthly, the WHO must launch a massive vaccination campaign in order to prevent the spread of polio among children. The innocent lives of children should be protected.

Fifthly, there must be a ceasefire, without which, all the aforementioned measures will be useless. Only a ceasefire in Gaza will allow for effective humanitarian action.

The wounds inflicted on Gaza today will scar the world for generations to come. Our children — the future leaders, thinkers and citizens of the globe — are watching us with eyes wide open. They see how we respond to the cries of Palestinian children, to the tears of mothers, to the anguish of a people pushed to the brink of existence. Our actions shape their understanding of justice, compassion and the value of human life.

In this critical moment, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice stands as a beacon of hope and a step towards a sustainable solution to the crisis in the Middle East. The International Court of Justice's crystal-clear ruling declared Israel's occupation illegal, and its settlement activity a violation of international law. Those who believe in the international order should work to implement this judgment. It is not only a legal document, but also a moral compass pointing us towards a world where international law protects the vulnerable and holds the powerful to account. But make no mistake: if we fail to heed this call, if we allow the

suffering in Gaza to continue, we are planting seeds of bitterness and despair that will bear terrible fruit.

The only path to end this horrific tragedy is crystal clear, as President Abdelmadjid Tebboune boldly proclaims,

“We must secure the Palestinian people’s inalienable right to their own independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its rightful capital. It is a moral imperative, a historical debt that humanity must urgently repay. The price of our failure will be paid not just in geopolitics, but also in human lives and shattered dreams.”

Let us work together to establish a Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. That is the only path to peace and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Deputy Commissioner-General Antonia Marie De Meo and Deputy Special Coordinator Muhannad Hadi for their briefings.

The conflict in Gaza has been going on for over nine months, causing an unprecedented, ever-worsening humanitarian catastrophe, with nearly 40,000 innocent civilian lives lost. The red lines of international law and international humanitarian law have been crossed repeatedly. The unfolding tragedy in Gaza is testing the moral conscience of humanity and rocking the very foundation of international justice. It will be remembered as a stain on human history, one that is hard to erase. We cannot help but ask, how many more lives must be lost? How many more women and children must die? And how many more homes must be destroyed before this tragedy can cease, before the flames of war in Gaza can die down?

It has been almost two months since resolution 2735 (2024) was adopted. While certain countries keep asserting that negotiations for a ceasefire are under way, Israel has continued its large-scale military operations over the past two months. From Rafah to Khan Younis, from internally displaced persons camps to hospitals, from United Nations schools to the “safe zones” designated by Israel, the bombings and attacks have not stopped even for a moment, and innocent civilians are dying each and every single day.

Civilian lives must not be used as a bargaining chip for negotiations and military offensives cannot create the conditions for the release of hostages. Negotiations must not go on indefinitely. There is not a moment

to lose when lives are at stake, and alleviating the humanitarian catastrophe allows no delay. We urge Israel to immediately cease all military operations in Gaza. We urge the United States to put greater pressure on Israel to help to bring about an immediate ceasefire. China supports the Council in taking further actions that are necessary to pushing for the implementation of the relevant resolutions.

China reiterates that humanitarian issues must not be politicized and starvation must not be turned into a weapon of war. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), operating under a General Assembly mandate, is the mainstay of humanitarian assistance in Gaza. China is firmly opposed to attempts to attack and discredit UNRWA and to throw a spanner in the works of the implementation of UNRWA’s mandate. In an alarming development, an UNRWA humanitarian transport vehicle was recently shot at by Israeli forces. The safety and security of humanitarian workers must be ensured. The incident in question must be thoroughly investigated, and those responsible must be held accountable. China urges Israel to genuinely fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law by opening all land crossings to give rapid access to humanitarian delivery at scale and provide security and other required assistance to humanitarian agencies.

China reiterates that the implementation of the two-State solution is the only viable way to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Settlement activity in the West Bank violates international law and relevant Security Council resolutions and chips away at the foundation of the two-State solution. We firmly oppose that. All settlement activity must be halted and the ever-worsening settler violence must be effectively curbed.

China has always been a staunch supporter of the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people as a nation. Earlier this week, the intra-Palestinian groups held a reconciliation dialogue in Beijing and reached an important consensus, making a significant step forward for operationalizing the principle of Palestinians governing Palestine and preparing for post-war governance in Gaza. China firmly supports independent Palestinian statehood and calls for a more broad-based, more authoritative and more effective international peace conference to work out a timetable and a road map for the implementation of the two-State solution, with a view to putting the

Palestinian question back on the right track towards a political settlement.

The negative spillover effects of the Gaza conflict are spreading and echoed in other conflicts in multiple sites in the region, and the situation between Lebanon and Israel, and the developments in the Red Sea are troubling. Allowing the flames of war and the instability to spread even further would only lead to a catastrophe that would engulf the entire region. China calls on all parties concerned to exercise calm and restraint and to refrain from any action that would exacerbate tensions.

China is ready to work with the rest of the international community in our tireless efforts to bring an early end to the war in Gaza, mitigate the impact of the havoc and help the two-State solution become a reality so that Palestine and Israel can live alongside each other in peace and durable peace and stability can prevail in the Middle East.

Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Deputy Commissioner-General De Meo and Deputy Special Coordinator Hadi for their reports on the humanitarian situation in Gaza and for their invaluable and tireless work.

As a consequence of more than nine months of war, almost 200 staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have been killed. I renew my country's condolences to the families of the victims and reiterate its support for the work of UNRWA, which is crucial to alleviating the situation for the civilian population in Gaza and in other areas of the Middle East. For that reason, I reiterate the appeal to all those who are able to do so to contribute to the funding of its operations, the continuity of which affects stability throughout the region.

The Security Council has today heard, yet again, reports of fresh bombings of areas inhabited by civilians and of more dead, more wounded and more displaced people. We have again been informed of attacks on humanitarian convoys, the catastrophic health situation and the inexorable deterioration in living conditions for the population of Gaza. Meanwhile, at least 120 hostages continue to be held, as they have since Hamas perpetrated the terrorist acts of 7 October 2023 — acts which Ecuador again condemns. Those hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally.

Ultimately, the situation has not since improved as, notwithstanding the efforts of various actors and the urging of the Council in resolution 2735 (2024), an agreement has not yet been reached that would allow hostilities to cease, the hostages to be released and aid to be delivered to the civilian population. Given the situation, I must underscore, yet again, that the implementation of all the Council's resolutions is necessary and mandatory, as is compliance with the rules of international humanitarian law, the violation of which incurs grave responsibility. Civilians and humanitarian personnel are not, and cannot be, targets and must be protected. There is no justification for attacking them or for flouting the principles of necessity, proportionality and distinction.

Likewise, I reiterate the appeal I made to the parties last week to demonstrate political will and flexibility so as to conclude an agreement that will allow for an end to the violence and for the path to peaceful coexistence between the peoples of Israel and Palestine to begin.

I conclude this statement by reiterating my country's commitment to reaching 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.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): We thank the Russian Federation, Algeria and China for calling this meeting on the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We are also grateful to Ms. Antonia Marie De Meo, Deputy Commissioner-General for Operational Support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and to Mr. Muhannad Hadi, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, for their briefings on the matter.

The adoption of resolution 2720 (2023) marked a significant step towards protecting civilians and enabling immediate humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in dire need. However, we are deeply concerned that the objectives laid out in that resolution remain unfulfilled, as the conflict in Gaza continues to escalate, causing unprecedented civilian casualties, mass displacement and a severe humanitarian crisis.

We strongly condemn the ongoing Israeli air, land and sea attacks across the Gaza Strip, which have resulted in additional civilian casualties, displacement and the destruction of homes and critical civilian infrastructure. Such actions blatantly violate international law, international human rights law and

international humanitarian principles. In addition, the forced evacuation orders for the population in certain areas and persistent hostilities have deprived Palestinian civilians of basic goods and services, including health care, water, food, fuel, commercial supplies and electricity. Moreover, we condemn the continued attacks by Israeli armed forces on United Nations humanitarian convoys. As a result of those attacks, the safety of humanitarian aid workers remains at grave risk, with reports indicating the deaths of at least 278 workers, including 201 United Nations staff in the line of duty, since October 2023.

There is no plausible reason for the current unjustified and unbearable suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza. The humanitarian disaster in Gaza must cease, and, to that end, the war has to come to a halt immediately. We demand the immediate and full implementation of resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024). Furthermore, we urge Israel to comply with the International Court of Justice rulings calling for an immediate ceasefire. It is imperative that Israel allow unhindered humanitarian assistance, including the provision of necessary basic goods and services, to flow into Gaza. The opening of all border crossings, in particular Rafah, is critical in order to allow the rapid and unrestricted entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

We call upon the international community to provide full support to UNRWA, as it is a pillar of regional stability and a lifeline of hope for millions of Palestinian refugees. We, therefore, call on donors to provide the Agency with the necessary and predictable financial resources to operate and fulfil its mandate.

In conclusion, we reiterate our unwavering support for the necessary implementation of the two-State solution, envisioning two independent and sovereign States, Israel and Palestine, coexisting peacefully as Members of the United Nations.

Mr. George (Sierra Leone): I thank Ms. Antonia Marie De Meo, Deputy Commissioner-General for Operational Support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and Mr. Muhannad Hadi, Deputy Special Coordinator, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for their comprehensive briefings. We welcome the presence of

the representatives of the State of Palestine, Israel and Iraq in this meeting.

On 17 July 2024, during the briefing to the Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the Chef de Cabinet, delivering the Secretary-General's statement, informed the Council that "the humanitarian support system in Gaza is close to total collapse" (*S/PV.9687*, p. 2). While Israel continued to intensify its military operations in the Gaza Strip, "there has been a complete breakdown of public order" (*ibid.*).

Slightly over a week later, reports outlined that the situation remains dire and chaotic, with continuing sustained military operations exacerbating an already desperate humanitarian crisis. Approximately 274 humanitarian personnel, including 197 from UNRWA, have lost their lives since 7 October 2023.

We are still alarmed by reports of new evacuation orders from the Israeli security forces that demand the immediate transfer of civilians from areas initially considered to be "humanitarian safe zones" in the Al-Mawasi area of Khan Younis, among others. Those actions do not only contravene the provisions of international humanitarian law but create psychological distress for those affected, including but not limited to long-term fear, anxiety and trauma.

The attacks on United Nations convoys and humanitarian workers are a violation of international humanitarian law and hinder the ability of humanitarian agencies to deliver critical assistance to civilians in desperate need. On that note, we condemn the recent attacks on UNRWA and UNICEF convoys, the latter carrying five Palestinian children, including a baby, to be reunited with their father.

Mass displacement and overcrowding in camps is creating a desperation for food, shelter and medical aid, as resources and the existing fragile infrastructure are stretched to breaking point. The health-care system continues to be affected by reduced service availability, as its operational capacity is affected by hostilities, continuous evacuation orders, damaged infrastructure and shortages of fuel and essential medical supplies. Women and children remain gravely affected, as an estimated 30,000 pregnant women are facing acute levels of hunger, in Integrated Food Security Phase Classification phase 3. The majority of women lack privacy, which is interfering with their dignity,

increasing their exposure to sexual-based violence, rape and domestic abuse.

Access to full and unhindered humanitarian aid remains a challenge owing to denials or delays by the Israel Defense Forces of coordinated movement and attacks by criminal gangs on humanitarian convoys. The prevailing circumstances are made worse by the fact that only two crossings, namely Karem Abu Salem/Kerem Shalom in the south and Zikim in the north, remain partially operational.

The recent International Court of Justice advisory opinion of 19 July 2024 on the legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and its provisional measures on the *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)*, all point to one direction, which is ending the unlawful occupation, ensuring unhindered access to humanitarian aid and releasing the hostages and wrongfully detained prisoners.

Sierra Leone reiterates the demand for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the entire occupied Palestinian territory to achieve all of the abovementioned. A ceasefire would improve the security situation in the Gaza Strip, curtail lawlessness and social disorder, guarantee the protection of civilians and facilitate the unhindered passage of humanitarian relief to the millions of people in urgent need.

We call for the respect of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in all aspects. We emphasize that the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution be applied to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects. That could be enhanced by establishing an effective deconfliction notification mechanism to remove obstacles to humanitarian action and prevent potential hazards to humanitarian personnel.

We strongly support the mediation efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States, and we urge both parties to approach the negotiations in good faith and with the determination and courage needed for a positive outcome. In the words of the Secretary-General, there needs to be a “surge in diplomacy for peace”, which “is the best way to, at the same time, help us to limit human suffering in all dimensions”.

Let me close by acknowledging the indispensable role of UNRWA in the current and future humanitarian architecture for Palestinian refugees. UNRWA should be strengthened and not weakened. UNRWA should be funded and not defunded. UNRWA staff should be honoured and not killed.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Ms. De Meo and Resident Humanitarian Coordinator Hadi for their briefings.

As we have heard from our briefers, the situation in Gaza is beyond catastrophic. Humanitarian aid continues to be blocked without any legitimate administrative or bureaucratic reason. Over the past 10 months, the pleas of the people of Gaza, the United Nations and the countless medical and humanitarian staff who have sought to aid them have gone unanswered by Israel. Alternative attempts at aid delivery via sea and air have failed, and the situation has quickly reverted to the status quo: hopelessness.

Today the human-made humanitarian disaster in Gaza is worse than at any point in the past 10 months. Millions of people face starvation and dehydration. Humanitarian assistance remains politicized, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continues to be targeted and vilified. No hospital in Gaza remains fully functioning. No university has been left standing. There are no more police, kindergarten teachers, bus drivers, medical specialists or shopkeepers. The social fabric has been completely torn apart, perhaps irreparably. All that remains are individuals who have lost all sense of hope and purpose, while struggling for their daily survival amid terror, starvation and criminality.

We have heard this morning how Gazans view the United Nations as complicit in their plight, especially amid the breakdown of law and order. The resolutions that the Council has adopted have not been implemented, and that is unacceptable. As a Council, we must redouble our efforts and continue to apply pressure on all parties to comply with their obligations under international law.

As things stand, humanitarian organizations remain unable to carry out basic emergency operations. Women in Gaza face a severe lack of privacy and security. Instances of rape and sexual violence in inadequate lavatory and sanitation facilities are alarmingly prevalent, and that represents only the tip of the iceberg. It is profoundly concerning that diseases

such as polio and diphtheria are re-emerging. Israel has the responsibility to ensure that essential aid convoys and facilities in both the West Bank and Gaza are not unduly delayed or destroyed. The Palestinian people cannot continue to endure this situation, which is effectively akin to hell on Earth.

The advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice has clearly exposed the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and must be heeded. All new settlement activities must cease, and existing settlements must be evacuated. Those settlements are the root cause of the ongoing violence and the perpetual crises that we see in the region today.

The international community must heed that advisory opinion. The survival and credibility of our multilateral system are at stake if we fail to do so. That starts with the implementation of resolutions 2334 (2016), 2712 (2023), 2720 (2024) and 2735 (2024) and compliance with the provisional orders of the International Court of Justice issued in January. Nothing less will suffice.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Ms. De Meo, and the Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Hadi, for their briefings.

Switzerland is grateful for the important humanitarian work done by their staff, who risk their lives every day to meet enormous needs in a highly precarious context. I offer my most sincere condolences to the United Nations, in particular UNRWA, and to the relatives of those killed in the line of duty.

When describing the situation in the Gaza Strip, the Secretary-General spoke of a “landscape of destruction and death”, with a degree of chaos that affects every Palestinian and those who seek to help them. Since the acts of terror committed by Hamas almost 10 months ago, men, women and children have been living in unacceptable conditions, without any protection and vulnerable to repeated displacements, famine and incessant hostilities. In addition, the breakdown of law and order is contributing to the lack of security, including for humanitarian workers. Conditions continue to deteriorate, and the situation remains alarming. Switzerland condemns the fact that hostilities continue to claim many victims and displace

thousands of civilians, as was the case last Monday in the Khan Younis refugee camp.

Switzerland condemns all violations of international humanitarian law, including indiscriminate attacks and violence against civilians, persons hors de combat and civilian objects, in addition to human rights violations and abuses. Those violations must cease immediately. Those responsible must be held accountable. With resolution 2730 (2024), the Council reaffirmed the responsibility of States and parties to conflict to respect and protect the civilian population, including humanitarian personnel. It is high time that those obligations were respected.

There is an urgent need to restore immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to the entire affected population through all crossing points and throughout the Gaza Strip. That also applies to UNRWA, the main humanitarian actor in the Gaza Strip. Incidents in which clearly identified United Nations vehicles are fired upon must cease. Furthermore, Switzerland condemns the continued use of inflammatory language, despite our repeated calls for such language to no longer be used. In this already extremely volatile environment, such language is likely to endanger the safety of United Nations operators and the lives of employees working to help the civilian population.

In view of those observations, we reiterate three main messages.

First, and once again, Switzerland calls on the parties to comply strictly with international humanitarian law. Attacks on the civilian population, including humanitarian and medical personnel, and the deliberate use of starvation as a method of warfare are war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Respect for and implementation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in particular the protection of civilians, must remain a priority for the Council.

Secondly, we call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages.

Thirdly, we demand the full implementation of the Council’s binding decisions, in particular resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024). An immediate and lasting ceasefire is essential to improve the situation of the civilian population.

Those elements are only the first steps towards a political resolution of the conflict. We call on the

members the Security Council and on States with influence over the parties to the conflict to take the necessary measures to put an end to the violence and to relaunch a process of dialogue with a view to implementing the two-State solution.

Mr. Žbogar (Slovenia): I also want to thank the two briefers, Ms. De Meo and Mr. Hadi, for their very clear messages.

From the beginning of the war, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has been the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza. We are therefore particularly pleased that, together with the large majority of United Nations Member States, all current and incoming Council members have joined the shared commitments on UNRWA, reaffirming the vital role of the Agency.

While serving people on the ground, UNRWA has been facing continuous challenges. Among the many challenges it faces, as Council members heard today, are the alarming legislative proposals in the Knesset and decisions to replace UNRWA-run services in East Jerusalem.

UNRWA has also paid one of the highest prices in Gaza, with 199 staff members killed and a high number of its installations damaged or completely destroyed. That includes the main UNRWA compound in Gaza. UNRWA facilities that were supposed to serve as designated shelters in times of conflict have turned into death traps for hundreds of displaced persons. We echo the call of the Deputy Commissioner-General for accountability for every action committed in blatant disregard of international humanitarian law, irrespective of the perpetrator.

We have repeated many times our concern about the situation of groups in vulnerable situations, including children, women, older persons and others. Today, I would like to especially underline the need to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities.

As we mark the fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2475 (2019), we are appalled by the circumstances in which persons with disabilities are living in Gaza, namely, in profound physical distress and with trauma, destroyed hospitals, a lack of access to medical care, a lack of psychosocial support, a lack of access to sanitation and a lack of access to assistive devices, many times owing to dual-use restrictions.

Gaza is twice the size of Washington, D.C. It has been bombed over and over again for 10 months. There is probably nothing left there but a pile of rubble — a pile that continues to be bombed. On that small piece of land, 2 million people are being chased from one corner to the other. They never know if they will reach the other corner fast enough to stay alive.

What are we, the Council, doing? That is a question that we are getting from our citizens. We have had numerous briefings on the humanitarian situation, on hunger, on amputations without anaesthesia and on attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel. We adopted four resolutions, established a mechanism for humanitarian aid and called for a ceasefire and the release of hostages, but the nature of the briefings has not changed. We have been waiting for ceasefire negotiations to be finalized and bring peace. For months, we have been waiting, supposedly getting closer and closer but never close enough to end the suffering. Meanwhile, we let Rafah happen.

My response to people in Slovenia was that we do not have the power to enforce a ceasefire. As a member of the Council, we see our role as sending messages or offering proposals, putting pressure on other members, on those who can influence the parties to act. But is it enough? I am convinced we are all asking ourselves: are we doing enough to end the suffering of civilians in Gaza?

I listen carefully to our statements on Gaza. Over the months, our frustration about the lack of progress grew and so did emotions in our speeches. The situation should not make us feel tired, frustrated or helpless. As Mr. Hadi said today, we shall never give up. Martin Griffiths used to say, we continue to try. Indeed, we should continue to try. That is why we were elected to the Council. That is why we have meetings such as today's. History is the harshest critic of inaction, and history is being written as we sit here today.

Maybe we differ in terms of nuances as to where the fault lies for the fact that the suffering has not ended, but we all share a concern for the suffering of civilians. Maybe that is a good enough starting point — putting Gazans and hostages at the centre of our efforts.

For us, that would translate into the following actions of the Council, the following fine-tuning of resolution 2735 (2024). First, we would demand that Israel and Hamas finalize, with a short deadline, a ceasefire deal. Secondly, we would demand a pause in

the fighting while the ceasefire deal is being finalized, an Olympic truce, as it were. And thirdly, after that grace period, if a ceasefire deal were still not in place, we would take further action to make Hamas and Israel comply.

In addition, we believe it is time to start reflecting on the time beyond a ceasefire; on how to support transitional governance in Gaza; on security arrangements; on bringing back normality to Gazans and to children there, if that is at all possible; on reconstruction; as well as on the final resolution of the conflict for two peoples and two States. That is what we believe the Council could do to move beyond briefings and beyond lamenting over the humanitarian situation.

We are ready to engage. Again, we should put civilians at the centre of our action.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Deputy Commissioner-General De Meo and Deputy Special Coordinator Hadi for the continued work of their teams to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

The confirmation of vaccine-derived poliovirus in Gaza is worrisome and underscores the need for urgent action to address the significant and growing health risks to the population of Gaza. The fighting has brought Gaza's health system to the brink of collapse and complicated the international community's ability to respond to outbreaks. It has also led to the failure of waste management systems and the critical infrastructure required to provide for the basic needs of Palestinians. Meanwhile, poor nutrition and interrupted routine immunizations have significantly heightened the health risks to the population and further undermined their ability to combat the spread of infectious diseases. Those and other humanitarian challenges will only intensify absent a conclusion of the ceasefire deal called for in resolution 2735 (2024).

During his meeting yesterday with Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Biden expressed the need to close the remaining gaps and finalize the deal as soon as possible to bring all of the hostages home and reach a durable end to the war in Gaza. It is vital that the Security Council maintain pressure on Hamas to reach a final agreement and begin implementation without delay or further conditions. The President also raised the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the need to remove obstacles to the flow of aid and to restore basic services

for those in need, and the critical importance of protecting civilian lives during military operations.

Indeed, a ceasefire would enable us to surge humanitarian assistance, begin to restore basic services — such as electricity and sanitation — and enable Palestinian civilians to begin returning to their homes. A ceasefire would also create a safer and more conducive environment for health workers to carry out needed immunization campaigns and provide other health interventions.

We have been clear that all parties to the conflict must do more to protect aid workers trying to deliver desperately needed help to civilians. We have called on Israel to investigate incidents where humanitarian workers have been killed or injured, to hold anyone found responsible for misconduct accountable and to take steps to prevent such incidents from recurring. The United States has long been opposed to any actions that undermine the personal safety and/or ability of United Nations personnel to carry out their mission, whether in Gaza or any other conflict zone in the world. That includes the personnel of all United Nations agencies.

Heated rhetoric and attacks aimed at United Nations organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as well as United Nations personnel performing humanitarian functions, put the safety of all United Nations and humanitarian aid workers at risk. They do nothing to get humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza.

We also reiterate our call for the United Nations to investigate all credible claims of United Nations personnel that might be affiliated with or involved in acts of terrorism. It is vital that ongoing investigations are concluded swiftly and that United Nations organizations, including UNRWA, implement recommended reforms. In the same spirit, we encourage Israel to work with the United Nations to establish a system for the smooth and regular exchange and analysis of information regarding any staff suspected to belong to a terrorist group.

Even as we press all parties to facilitate life-saving work, we must not ignore how Hamas's actions continue to put civilians, including humanitarian personnel and their families, at risk. And as we have long argued, Hamas could begin to end the suffering in Gaza tomorrow if it immediately accepted and agreed to implement, without delay or further conditions, the

ceasefire agreement on the table, which the Security Council called for it to accept more than a month ago.

With a ceasefire in place, efforts to restore basic services — including electricity, water and sanitation — could be accelerated and bring much-needed relief to the Palestinian people. It would also enable the movement of Palestinian civilians out of Al-Mawasi, thus alleviating the catastrophic humanitarian situation that has developed in the south.

The implementation of the ceasefire deal would also facilitate the release of all hostages held by Hamas. Those hostages have been held for nearly 300 days and have never been visited by a humanitarian agency. Among them are eight Americans and citizens from many other countries. The United States is committed to doing everything possible to bring these hostages home, to reunite loved ones with their families. We are committed to working to close gaps at the negotiating table, to improve sustained humanitarian access at scale and to continue working towards a two-State solution in which Israelis and Palestinians alike can live in peace and with dignity.

In conclusion, I must address another Russian attempt to play politics with the tragic situation in Gaza. In his statement the Permanent Representative of China indicated the need to avoid politicizing the humanitarian situation in Gaza. I agree completely. Russia continues to try to portray itself as a great humanitarian actor when it comes to Gaza, yet it does very little when it comes to trying to address the humanitarian situation. Nothing in the Russian Permanent Representative's statement referenced what it is doing to help relieve the humanitarian situation. Let us not forget the humanitarian disaster it has created in Ukraine. As I have said many times, Russia does not help solve humanitarian crises; it creates them. I therefore call on the Russian representative to heed the call of his Chinese counterpart and to stop playing politics with the situation in Gaza.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to start by thanking Deputy Commissioner-General De Meo and Deputy Special Coordinator Hadi for their briefings.

On his recent visit to the region, my Foreign Secretary met Israelis and Palestinians and heard their stories of suffering, pain and anguish. He came away determined to help improve the situation and further convinced that there is no military solution to this

conflict. That is why we are calling for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages and an immediate scale-up of aid into Gaza. We urge both sides to accept the deal on the table, which has been endorsed by the Council.

While mediation efforts continue, people in Gaza urgently need a drastic improvement in the humanitarian situation.

First, civilians need better protection and designated civilian spaces. We are deeply concerned about Israel's incursion into Khan Younis and into the only remaining humanitarian zone — as designated by the Israel Defense Forces — of Al-Mawasi, where some 1.5 million people are sheltering. We call on all sides to comply fully with international humanitarian law, and on Hamas to release all the hostages immediately.

Secondly, civilians in Gaza need much more aid. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is central to those efforts. That is why we announced \$27 million in new funding for UNRWA last week, with some of it earmarked to support the management reforms recommended by the Colonna review. We call for full cooperation with United Nations and humanitarian teams, including UNRWA. Visas must be granted, equipment allowed in and all aid routes into Gaza must be opened, including the Rafah crossing. Deteriorating law and order must be addressed urgently so that aid can reach people safely.

Finally, after nine months of devastation, civilians need functioning hospitals and essential supplies such as water and electricity. We are appalled by the stories of women and children living in unsanitary conditions, and that disease, including polio, is spreading.

West Bank settlement expansion and settler violence have reached record levels. The Israeli Government has seized more land this year than in the past 20 years combined. That is unacceptable; it runs counter to multiple Council resolutions and undermines the viability of a two-State solution.

The only way out of this cycle of violence and suffering is through diplomacy, with Israelis and Palestinians committing to a renewed peace process resulting in a two-State solution, with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. We are committed to giving the people of the West Bank and Gaza the political perspective of a

credible route to a Palestinian State and a new future. And it needs to be irreversible.

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): I thank Ms. Antonia De Meo, Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and Deputy Special Coordinator Muhannad Hadi for their sobering briefings.

Let us be clear — a ceasefire is the only way forward and the critical first step to alleviate the immense suffering that has lasted for far too long. That is why the Republic of Korea has repeatedly called for an end to the current conflict in Gaza. Too many people have been killed since the terrorist attacks by Hamas on 7 October.

More changes to the terms of the ceasefire deal will result only in more suffering for Palestinians in Gaza and Israeli hostages. In accordance with resolution 2735 (2024), both parties must immediately finalize and implement the deal, which is the most reliable and realistic path towards an immediate ceasefire. The international community, including the Council, should make efforts to support the deal and press the parties to finalize it in order to stop the bloodshed, release hostages and deliver aid at scale.

The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is deepening further, with even more harrowing challenges to civilian lives now ensuing. In Gaza, 2.3 million people are suffering from repeated evacuation orders and a debilitating lack of humanitarian assistance, as law and order have totally broken down. We reiterate our appeal for the opening of all land crossings and the elimination of all impediments to the delivery of humanitarian aid.

We are particularly worried about the possible outbreak of widespread disease, including polio, as the briefer said. Only 16 hospitals are partially functioning in that densely populated area amid an unprecedented food, water and sanitation crisis. All measures, including the unhindered provision of enough vaccines, should be implemented to prevent the spreading of infectious diseases.

We are also alarmed by the repeated Israel Defense Forces attacks on humanitarian workers, including the shooting at a United Nations convoy on 21 July and another shooting at a UNICEF convoy on 23 July. Humanitarian workers and civilians must be protected under international law. All measures to protect

them, including the provision of adequate equipment, must be implemented, and the perpetrators should be held accountable.

As many Council members said, UNRWA is the backbone of humanitarian efforts in Gaza and essential to ensuring dignified lives for millions of Palestinian refugees in the region. Any attempt by a national institution of a State Member of the United Nations to hamper its activities and legitimacy is a dangerous challenge to the architecture of global governance based on the United Nations and, thus, cannot be tolerated.

We take note of the advisory opinion that the International Court of Justice delivered last week. That opinion is all the more significant as the situation in the West Bank deteriorates, with ongoing violence by Israeli security forces, settlers and Palestinian groups, as well as surging settlement expansion. Indeed, UNICEF reported this week that one Palestinian child has been killed in the West Bank every two days since October 2023.

As resolution 2334 (2016) clearly states, settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity. We call on Israel to cease all settlement activity and respect the rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination.

The entire world is paying the utmost attention to the Middle East. Amid the ongoing armed presence of various militias in southern Lebanon, notably Hizbullah, which is in contravention of resolution 1701 (2006), we are witnessing daily exchanges of fire across the Blue Line — another clear violation of the same resolution. Those violations are consistently threatening the lives of civilians and United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon personnel, including those of the Republic of Korea. In addition, the unjustifiable and reckless drone attack on Tel Aviv by the Houthis as well as Israel's military response are troublesome, as both resulted in the loss of civilian lives. All parties in the region must exercise maximum restraint and international efforts to enhance de-escalation in the region should be encouraged.

The commitment of the international community to the vision of a two-State solution is strong and steadfast. Any inflammatory rhetoric, whether from Israeli politicians or from Hamas members, cannot have any impact on that firm global aspiration. Gaza and the West Bank should be unified under a reformed

and strengthened Palestinian Authority. Any measures intended to weaken the Palestinian Authority will have negative impacts on the security of Israel by prolonging the long-standing agony, confrontation and instability, not only in Israel and Palestine, but also in the wider region.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I also thank United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Deputy Commissioner-General De Meo and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Hadi for their sobering briefings.

Nearly 10 months ago, the conflict began with the reprehensible terror attack on Israel by Hamas and other militant groups. Japan once again unequivocally condemns the attack and the taking of hostages, more than a hundred of whom are still unable to return to their homes.

However, since then, the relentless fighting has brought Gaza to a state in which life is barely tenable, with too many civilian deaths and injuries, mostly among women and children. Desperate Palestinians are facing acute food insecurity, if not famine, and are left searching for the most basic essentials: safe drinking water, basic sanitation, medical care and shelter. We are extremely worried by the detection of cholera and polio in Gaza, which poses a grave risk of spreading owing to the breakdown of the water and sanitation systems. Furthermore, Israel's repeated evacuation orders have forced nearly 1.9 million to relocate, multiple times in the case of many.

Japan is appalled by the heavy civilian casualties caused by the ongoing hostilities, including the Israel Defense Forces new military offensive in Khan Younis, which reportedly killed dozens and forced thousands to flee. The reduction in the size of the so-called humanitarian zone in Al-Mawasi is deeply troubling. Those recent events demonstrate even more clearly that there is no safe place in Gaza, and we reiterate the urgent need for all parties to strictly abide by international law, including international humanitarian law, especially the protection of civilians.

A prompt and an extensive delivery of humanitarian aid is essential, yet the Rafah crossing has remained closed since early May. It should be reopened immediately.

Japan commends the humanitarian aid workers, who are bravely working under dangerous conditions,

and calls for their safety to be ensured. But the breakdown in public order creates enormous challenges for their life-saving work. The role of UNRWA is vital and, as Secretary-General Guterres has stated, nothing can replace it. Yet since the conflict began nearly 200 of its staff have been killed, and nearly 200 of its premises have been damaged or destroyed. That is unacceptable. We are also concerned about a number of proposed measures that may disturb UNRWA's activities.

The only viable solution to stopping the ongoing horror is the three-stage ceasefire proposal endorsed in the form of resolution 2735 (2024). Japan amplifies its call for all parties concerned to steadily work towards the release of all hostages and a sustainable ceasefire, as well as the safe and effective distribution of humanitarian assistance at scale throughout Gaza. We reiterate our strong support for the painstaking diplomatic efforts led by the United States, Egypt and Qatar to that end.

Once a ceasefire is achieved, the international community will have to help to rebuild Gaza and restore a political horizon for a two-State solution, which is the only path that can finally bring peace to Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr. De Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for their briefings.

The deterioration in the situation in Gaza has continued unabated for 10 months. There is an urgent need for a ceasefire to end the suffering of the population. The hostages must finally be released.

The Council has managed to adopt four resolutions since 7 October 2023, but none of them have been complied with. France backed the United States proposal, which the Council endorsed on 10 June in the form of resolution 2735 (2024). Six weeks on from that vote, it is time for that resolution to finally be implemented.

France once again condemns the terrorist attacks committed by Hamas and other terrorist groups on 7 October 2023.

I would like to stress four points.

First, respect for international humanitarian law is incumbent on all. President Macron reiterated our

opposition to the Israeli operations in Khan Younis and Rafah, which only exacerbate an already disastrous situation. The Israeli strikes on an UNRWA school and a camp for displaced persons are unacceptable. Famine has set in, with 80 per cent of civilian infrastructure damaged or destroyed, including 100 per cent of educational infrastructure. The long-term consequences for an entire generation of children are catastrophic.

Secondly, the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance is a crucial issue. We call on Israel to allow unhindered humanitarian access through all possible channels. That means Israel must guarantee passage by land and issue all necessary authorizations. The revocation of visas for United Nations personnel is unacceptable. France supports the work of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag. She must also be able to plan for reconstruction.

Thirdly, humanitarian assistance must also be able to circulate within the Gaza Strip and be distributed. The incidents involving United Nations convoys at the beginning of the week are unacceptable. We condemn all obstacles posed by Hamas and other armed groups. We call on all actors to ensure the effectiveness of deconfliction mechanisms.

Fourthly, the protection of humanitarian workers must be guaranteed. France pays tribute to all the humanitarian workers killed in Gaza and to all those who risk their lives to help the population.

Faced with the immense needs, UNRWA's role remains essential. UNRWA staff must be able to continue providing aid to the population. Obstacles to the Agency's work must cease. France's support for 2024 amounts to €38 million euros, making it the fourth largest donor to UNRWA. The reform of UNRWA must continue to ensure its neutrality.

France reaffirms the urgency of reaching a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-State solution — the only solution capable of bringing a just and lasting peace to Israelis and Palestinians alike and of ensuring stability in the region. Challenges to that imperative, recognized as such by the vast majority of the international community, must cease. France will remain mobilized to achieve that and will shoulder all its responsibilities to that end, including within the Council.

Ms. Persaud (Guyana): Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. President, along with the delegations of Algeria and China, for requesting this briefing. It is critical for the Council to maintain an active and consistent focus on Gaza, as should be the case for every other conflict situation where the level of civilian suffering is of enormous proportions. I also thank Deputy Commissioner-General De Meo and Deputy Special Coordinator Hadi for their sobering briefings.

At the outset, Guyana stresses the critical role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) amid the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and urges the Council's strong support for the Agency as it faces ongoing attacks.

We are approaching 300 days of Israel's war on Gaza. For those civilians dwelling in the beleaguered enclave, the days since 7 October 2023 have been characterized by destruction and decimation of an unprecedented magnitude. Humanitarians after humanitarians have emphasized that, in many decades of field work, they had never witnessed a crisis of such proportions. The humanitarian principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution continue to be disregarded, despite the obligation to adhere to those important tenets of international humanitarian law. As a result, an extremely dangerous operating environment has been created for humanitarians, exacerbated by the nonfunctioning of deconfliction and notification mechanisms.

Guyana has taken note that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) continues its aerial, land and maritime bombardment across the Gaza Strip. Civilians, who have been ordered to evacuate multiple times and relocate to so-called humanitarian safe zones, have not been spared those bombardments, since the IDF has not been distinguishing between civilians and legitimate military targets. In fact, we continue to witness a deliberate targeting of schools and shelters housing displaced persons on the pretext that the IDF is targeting Palestinian fighters. Were the thousands of children killed and maimed in Gaza Palestinian fighters? Were any measures at all taken to spare those little ones from harm? Guyana condemns in the strongest terms the wanton killing of civilians and calls on all parties, including the IDF, to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians.

Guyana is concerned about the frequent attacks on humanitarian personnel, including those travelling

in convoys utilizing clearly marked vehicles. We have too frequently heard the complaint that even though movement coordinates were shared with the Israeli authorities or approval was given for passage, convoys were still shot at, endangering the lives of humanitarians. We condemn those attacks and call on Israel to respect the humanitarian nature of the work that those personnel are undertaking in response to the catastrophic, human-made humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Further, there must be accountability for those violations of international law.

Guyana has taken note of how the breakdown of law and order in the Gaza Strip has become a prominent factor inhibiting the delivery of aid across Gaza. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, that is engendered by desperation stemming from slow and inadequate delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza and is perpetuated by the lack of civil authority created by the unprecedented nature of the war. That could likely create persistent challenges even after a ceasefire is achieved, and Guyana stresses the need for the Council to begin considering how those potential challenges could be staved off.

The consequences of the operating environment, which I have hitherto elaborated, were outlined by our briefers today. We also continue to receive media reports and reports from the various United Nations agencies about the situation on the ground, including details about the deeply inhumane treatment of Palestinian civilians both in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The report of a confrontation between Palestinian civilians and Israeli security forces in the occupied West Bank in which the former threw stones at the Israeli security forces and elicited live ammunition, rubber-coated metal bullets and tear-gas canisters in response, is illustrative of the wider paradigms of the conflict. It is one of defenceless Palestinians pitted against a war machine intent on dispossessing, subjugating and annihilating them.

How do we stop this? I believe the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on the *Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem* of 19 July gives us the answer — an answer we have known all along. Allow me to quote from the opinion.

“The precise modalities to bring to an end Israel's unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian

Territory is a matter to be dealt with by the General Assembly, ... as well as the Security Council. Therefore, it is for the General Assembly and the Security Council to consider what further action is required to put an end to the illegal presence of Israel ...

“ [T]he urgent necessity [is] for the United Nations as a whole to redouble its efforts to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which continues to pose a threat to international peace and security, to a speedy conclusion, thereby establishing a just and lasting peace in the region”.

I am compelled to recall the practice of many displaced Palestinians to hold on to their home keys, signifying the hope of returning to their homeland. That practice is ripe with messages for the Council, and I want to highlight just three.

First, consensus in the Council on the critical matter of mandating the end of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory is key to ending the decades-long conflict.

Secondly, consensus in the Council on the equally critical matter of enforcing such a mandate is also key to ending the decades-long conflict.

Thirdly and finally, consensus in the Council is key for the injustice against Palestinians to be remedied. The key is consensus in the Council.

I will conclude by reiterating the urgency of achieving a ceasefire in Gaza, of securing the release of hostages and of a surge in humanitarian assistance to Palestinians. Guyana also calls for an immediate halt to settlement activities and the accompanying violence in the occupied West Bank. Those are the immediate, short-term measures needed. The solution, though, is for the collective feet to be taken off the back of Palestinians, paving the way for them to exercise their right to self-determination. Achieving a free and independent State of Palestine is the international community's responsibility, and Guyana remains ever committed to doing its part to that end.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation, I would like to make an additional statement.

The representative of the United States seems to really enjoy hurling what he probably thinks are devastating invectives at Russia. This time he even

invoked China as an ally, which on other occasions he never tires of ostracizing under any pretext that he deems worthy. Nevertheless, we are very grateful to the representative of the United States for clearly demonstrating what a statement by a State claiming to be a responsible international actor, or rather a self-proclaimed leader of all international actors, should not look like.

If the United States spent on humanitarian aid for Gaza and other regions in need even a small share of what it spends on supplying weapons to hotspots, the world would be very different. Billions of dollars have been spent on weapons for Israel, including \$6.5 billion allocated after 7 October 2023, and an additional tens of billions of dollars were spent on weapons for Ukraine — weapons provided by the United States of America that kill thousands of Palestinians and Ukrainians. That is Washington's real contribution.

And when it comes to Gaza, the first thing that comes to mind is the pathetic project of Gaza's floating pier, a masterpiece of pontoon architecture that was basically washed away into the sea. As far as we understand, almost \$300 million was spent on the pier. That is approximately the same amount that was allocated by the United States for humanitarian aid to Gaza in 2024 through bilateral channels. We also recall the air-dropped containers with aid that killed dozens of Palestinians on the ground. And all that was done instead of forcing Israel to abide by a ceasefire.

Russia is providing humanitarian aid to Palestine through non-governmental organizations, the Government and the World Food Programme. The Palestinians are well aware of that.

In general, I would like to give my colleagues a piece of friendly advice. Before lecturing others, they should at least pay their contribution to the United Nations and stop causing a liquidity crisis, which hinders the humanitarian efforts of our Organization.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the United States has asked for the floor.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): It is very interesting to hear the Russian Federation kind of belittle the humanitarian contributions that the United States gives around the world. We are one of the leaders, if not the leading single State, in contributing

to humanitarian assistance. I would be very interested to hear what Russia spends on humanitarian assistance as a percentage of its gross domestic product.

The United States is a lead player on humanitarian assistance around the globe. Russia is not. If Russia spent just 1 per cent of what it is spending to carry out barbaric atrocities in Ukraine, then it could make a claim that it was doing something to solve humanitarian crises around the world. Therefore, Russia is in no place to criticize the United States for what it does for humanitarian causes around the world. And I will repeat — Russia does not help solve humanitarian crises, it creates them. Council members should look at Ukraine.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I do not plan to continue this discussion.

In my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation, I will just say very briefly that I would like to know what percentage of the gross domestic product of the United States is represented by the supplies of weapons around the world delivered by the United States.

And I just want to ask a question, and I hope it is not rhetorical. When will the United States finally pay its contribution to the United Nations budget?

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Allow me, at the outset, to thank Russia, Algeria and China for convening this meeting. Allow me also to thank the briefers and, through them, the humanitarian community.

Humanitarians in Palestine are trying to deliver on their noble mission under impossible circumstances and at the peril of their life. Our support should match their courage.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains under attack. The baseless and shameless terrorism charge against a United Nations humanitarian Agency is no longer a talking point but a license to kill. The killing, maiming and arrest of its staff members and the setting ablaze of its headquarters was a direct result of such incitement. The real target of Israel in that attack are the millions of Palestinians who rely on UNRWA to stay alive and to secure their most basic needs.

I ask Council members to listen to the words of leading humanitarian non-governmental organizations from a few days ago:

“Our presence in Gaza is solely due to the unwavering commitment of our colleagues on the ground, despite great risks to their own lives. Our continued presence should not be mistaken for a sign of something worthy of being called ‘access’ — it is despite its very absence. The risks our colleagues are exposed to each moment are unacceptable. Today, the issue is not just a shrinking humanitarian space; there is hardly any space left to operate at all.”

They are the ones that should be supported and cheered — not those attacking them, not those killing innocent civilians — along with anyone trying to help them, rescue them, heal them, feed them or simply report their unjust and untimely death.

We have collectively failed. The Security Council has failed. We can continue counting aid trucks and speaking of routes and imagining alternatives, but the only true measure of our success is our ability to alleviate human suffering. And the suffering of Palestinians is Israel’s goal and desire. Whatever solutions the Security Council comes up with, it will continue ensuring they fail until it is forced to change course. And the first indispensable step is an immediate ceasefire. All Council members are asking for an immediate ceasefire, so I wonder, who is stopping them from implementing the ceasefire? If Council members tell me that the mighty Security Council — the 15 members, including the permanent five — are calling for an immediate ceasefire, are they going to prevail or will they allow the criminals to prevail? Council members must make up their mind. If they are the mighty Security Council and are unable to control a violator of international law, a criminal killing tens of thousands of Palestinians, then they have to review their authority and their power.

We have collectively failed. There is no speech that can convey the shouts of a child being amputated or dealing with severe burns, the silent agony of a father watching his child turning into bones before his eyes until all life leaves his body, the tears in a doctor’s eyes as he counts the days and hours in lives he could not save or the anguish of a mother who has become the first and last line of defence after every shelter was destroyed. As we speak, refugees are running in the streets from

one death to another, as every school sheltering them has been bombed, as even tents were bombarded, with no regard for human life, for any rule of international law or for any sense of humanity.

In a parallel world, Netanyahu stood before the United States Congress and claimed Israel was not killing or starving Palestinians. Against all evidence, all logic and any hint of human decency, his speech was the speech of a warmonger dedicated to the dehumanization of Palestinians and the denial of their rights, a speech of war, a speech of a person who is against peace. He said this was a clash between civilization and barbarism, as he was conducting barbaric attacks against a civilian population, using a lexicon Council members know well from the experiences of their own countries. It is the language used throughout history by colonial Powers to justify atrocities.

The Israeli Government demands Council members adhere to its supremacist views and be complicit with its crimes. Anyone who refuses that dictate is dubbed a terrorism supporter and an anti-Semite. But we will remain steadfast in our defence of humanity and international law, freedom for the Palestinian people and peace for all. And we know many will continue standing by our side in these halls and across the globe, and we are grateful for that support.

Vice-President Harris is now being criticized by anonymous Israeli sources for speaking with compassion about Palestinian victims. She stated:

“What has happened in Gaza over the past nine months is devastating — the images of dead children and desperate, hungry people fleeing for safety, sometimes displaced for the second, third or fourth time. We cannot look away in the face of those tragedies. We cannot allow ourselves to become numb to the suffering. And I will not be silent.”

And to silence her is exactly the goal of those outraged by the fact she evoked the right of the Palestinian people to freedom, dignity and self-determination.

We reiterate here our support for resolution 2735 (2024) and the need to ensure its immediate and full implementation. We need to put an end to this horrific assault and make sure such a tragedy never occurs again by sparing no effort to achieve freedom and peace, as both of them go hand in hand. We also express our appreciation for the efforts of China in helping us to

put our house in order. We also thank Egypt, Algeria, Russia and many others in that regard.

The highest Court in the world has concluded that Israel's occupation is illegal and must be brought to an end as rapidly as possible. The International Court of Justice has provided us with its authoritative interpretation of the binding rules of international law and spelled out Israel's obligations, as well as the obligations of all States and the United Nations. The judges have delivered on their sacred mandate. Now it is time for all States and the United Nations to perform theirs. We will not ignore a single element that the International Court of Justice articulated in its historic advisory opinion on the *Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem*. We will seek the implementation of every detail in the advisory opinion on the illegal, criminal act against our people perpetrated through the continuation of the occupation, which must end as soon as possible.

In the coming weeks, we will act within the General Assembly and the Security Council to ensure the opinion is fully upheld, towards a more just, free and secure Middle East. Life, liberty and human dignity must prevail, and for that, international law must be upheld as well.

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

Mr. Erdan (Israel): What an absurdity to again be called to the Security Council to again discuss the humanitarian situation in Gaza, especially when the Council has failed to hold one single meeting on the real reasons behind this terrible war, behind the horrific attack on 7 October 2023.

The Council should be discussing Hamas, a word that I did not hear from my colleague — he does not know that it exists — and its destructive and barbaric public agenda to destroy Israel, orchestrated by Iran. Iran's current intention is to destroy the Israeli people using its terror proxies; in the future, it will also be its nuclear capabilities.

While we sit here, our hostages are still being held in Gaza in the hands of Hamas. Just this week, our forces rescued five hostage bodies from a terror tunnel. Where? In a humanitarian zone. You heard correctly: hostage bodies in a humanitarian zone. And yet there has not been one formal meeting of the Council — not

on what started the war, and not even to discuss ways to advance the release of the hostages. Not even one formal meeting. This fact disgraces the Council.

Israel is, and will always be, committed to our extensive humanitarian efforts in the Gaza Strip. When earnestly examining the facts at hand, the Council will see the immense lengths to which Israel has gone to protect civilian lives. Does it think that a country that wants to harm civilians would allow 828,000 tons of aid to enter the Strip — not from the Egyptian border only, but also from our borders? Would such a country permit over 42,000 trucks to enter via land routes, 9,931 pallets of aerial drops and 432 trucks through the maritime route? It is the State of Israel that organized and facilitated that aid, all while under massive attacks from Hamas on our own forces as we facilitate the entry of that aid.

We continue to work tirelessly with our international partners to support the people of Gaza. We have facilitated direct and around-the-clock contact among the United Nations, the Israel Defense Forces Southern Command and the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories. But the Council did not bother to visit our side, of course, and see the efforts, only the Egyptian side. Eleven field hospitals have been established thus far, with three under construction. Since 7 October, Israel has consistently ushered in food, water, fuel, medical supplies and other essentials. Israel stands ready to provide further support.

And to those who falsely and maliciously claim that Israel has prevented the provision of aid, the real numbers show that, of the 42,000 aid trucks, less than 1 per cent have been refused entry since October, and only for security reasons. But of course, United Nations representatives are focused only on — and amplify — that 1 per cent. At the same time, the United Nations finds itself overwhelmed by the aid being provided, which it is unable to distribute because of its own problems. The failure to distribute the aid is the main reason for the bottleneck. Why is that not the topic of today's discussion?

While Israel meets its obligations, the world is being fed casualty numbers and data by the Hamas-run Gaza Ministry of Health. How can we even hold a meeting on the situation in Gaza without verifiable data? Why has the Security Council not called a meeting to ask the United Nations for an independent process to secure

reputable information, rather than trusting the words of child killers and rapists?

Not only does the United Nations falter in its duties to coordinate aid distribution, but its agency, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), is complicit in the perpetuation of this conflict. We have provided Commissioner Lazzarini more than 100 names and military identifications of terrorist operatives currently employed by UNRWA in Gaza. They pay their salaries there. The list is part of an ongoing process and does not yet reveal the full extent of the infiltration of UNRWA by the Hamas terrorists. Why has UNRWA failed to terminate, up until today, those terrorist employees?

We have also discovered numerous UNRWA facilities and headquarters used by Hamas to provide humanitarian cover for their crimes. The Council likes to call them “high schools”. Hamas tunnels and weapons warehouses were found under 30 UNRWA schools. How can the Council claim that those facilities are entitled to protection? Why are we not here discussing the desecration of those schools by Hamas and UNRWA? Why has this never been discussed? Why does the Security Council not invite an international law expert to brief it that a school used for terror has lost its protection under international law? Probably, if they invite one, they will invite a Palestinian legal expert, I assume.

Hamas has twisted much of the aid intended for civilians into weapons of war. Where we see a water pipe, Hamas sees a rocket. Where we see a hospital, Hamas sees a headquarters. Where we see a school, Hamas sees terror tunnels.

On 7 October, terrorists invaded our homes, raping, murdering and kidnapping our civilians. May I remind members again: Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip 19 years ago. Today Hamas terrorists continue to strike Israeli villages from designated humanitarian zones. Hizbullah rains down thousands of rockets and uncrewed aerial vehicles upon our north, burning town after town. There are still 100,000 Israelis displaced from their northern communities. And just last week the Houthis struck Tel Aviv, after more than 200 attacks since 7 October. The Council calls it “clashes”.

Until the Council addresses the head of the snake in Tehran, there is no way to bring stability to the region. Only a blind person or someone with a political agenda

would not see this as a coordinated attack by proscribed terror groups to terrorize our citizens. Every single member knows what the reaction to this attack would look like if it targeted Moscow, London, Beijing, Paris or Washington, D.C., instead of Israel.

One hundred and fifteen hostages are still being held captive by Hamas Nazis. The most crucial element for the end of this conflict has been excluded from this conversation. And it is not enough to remind of their existence as a footnote. We cannot simply stand by as our men, women and children remain at the mercy of these mutilators. Again, where is the meeting demanding the return of our hostages? Without their immediate and unconditional release, there is no hope for peace and security.

When the brutalities of Iran and its proxies are dismissed, Israel must take its future into its own hands. We will continue to carry out the necessary operations to defeat Hamas, along with anyone who attacks our citizens. Ultimately, Israel remains committed to providing life-saving aid to Gaza, while Hamas remains committed only to destroying lives.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to say that any meeting of Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Gaza implies discussing the issue of hostages, which was the case today. We all know the formula. And I think I speak on behalf of all the members of the Council when I say that we do know how to ensure their release as soon as possible — a ceasefire is needed. Without that, unfortunately, it will not happen.

I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al-Fatlawi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

At the outset, I would like on behalf of the Arab Group to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip owing to the continued Israeli aggression and in the light of the worsening humanitarian crisis there. I would also like to thank Ms. Antonia Marie De Meo and Mr. Muhannad Hadi for their important briefings and field information.

The Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip has led to an unprecedented humanitarian disaster, according to all United Nations bodies and international relief organizations working on the ground. We also listened to all the repeated warnings and calls by

those organizations that the Gaza Strip is becoming an uninhabited disaster area and that the situation is getting worse, especially for children. They confirm that the only way to save civilians in the Gaza Strip is through an immediate and sustainable ceasefire.

However, Israeli military attacks against the Gaza Strip have continued unabated, with a scarcity of medical and health care, the spread of disease and a lack of food, medicine and shelter. That is being done as part of a deliberate, systematic policy by the Israeli occupation, which uses starvation as a weapon of war and humanitarian assistance as a bargaining chip. That has aggravated humanitarian suffering in the Gaza Strip, and all the warnings have become reality in the light of the continued war of genocide by Israel against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, which violates all international standards and disregards the relevant Security Council resolutions and its commitments as the occupying Power.

At the same time, Israel is impeding and preventing the entry of assistance into the Gaza Strip and its distribution to those in need through its continued attacks on relief operations and storage and distribution points. Humanitarian workers are also under threat and targeted, with 500 of them becoming martyrs, the highest number ever recorded in any conflict across the world. Furthermore, the Israeli invasion of the city of Rafah in May has led to forced collective displacement, an increase in the number of civilian casualties, the closing of the main crossings and the imposition of more restrictions. That has resulted in a halt to medical evacuations and deprived Gaza of humanitarian aid.

In the past weeks, Israel has continued to bomb the Gaza Strip, including attacks against schools run by the United Nations that are being used as shelters for the displaced. There is now no safe place in the Gaza Strip for the displaced to find refuge. The medical capabilities in the Gaza Strip are undermined by putting most of the Strip's hospitals completely out of service. Medical teams are targeted and arrested. That has exacerbated the ability to respond to the number of increasing injuries on a daily basis owing to Israel's continued targeting of Palestinian civilians, even in their displacement tents.

The humanitarian suffering in Gaza must be addressed in a more serious and decisive manner. We cannot remain idle while looking at the shocking

suffering in the Gaza Strip as Israel continues to close and destroy crossing points and continues to obstruct the delivery of aid into the Strip, with aid piled up at the seaports and crossings. We cannot allow Israel to repeat inaccurate figures about the trucks entering the Gaza Strip, knowing that their numbers do not reflect the effectiveness of the humanitarian response. The assistance that actually reaches those in need makes the difference in the Strip, especially in the north, in addition to the type of assistance that is allowed into Gaza, which is mainly obstructed by Israel.

An immediate and sustainable ceasefire, a full commitment to international humanitarian law and the opening of all the crossing points into Gaza to humanitarian and commercial supplies are the only way to meet the basic humanitarian needs of civilians. As the occupying Power, Israel is responsible for providing and facilitating such assistance. We call upon the Security Council to bring pressure to bear on Israel to accept a ceasefire and allow relief operations in the Gaza Strip to be conducted safely so that the international community can respond to the humanitarian suffering in Gaza in a more effective manner to save civilians and start the healing and recovery process. The Group of Arab States emphasizes once again the need for immediate action before it is too late. In that context, we appreciate the tireless efforts by the Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Qatar towards reaching a ceasefire agreement and to ease the people's suffering in Gaza.

In conclusion, the Arab Group would like to thank all humanitarian organizations working in the Gaza Strip despite all the risks and challenges. We thank them for their determination to ease the suffering of Palestinians. We provide our full support and solidarity to those organizations and their teams in their noble mission, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is being targeted by an Israeli smear campaign. We call upon the international community to stand against that illegal campaign and to provide UNRWA with political and financial support, as we are all aware that the provision of any assistance in the Gaza Strip is impossible without UNRWA spearheading relief operations, especially in the areas of health and education.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.