



General Assembly

Seventy-eighth session

51st plenary meeting
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New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Francis (Trinidad and Tobago)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Niang (Senegal),
Vice-President, took the Chair.*

It was so decided.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 138

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations

Letter dated 8 January 2024 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/78/707)

The Acting President: In keeping with established practice, I would like to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/78/707, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly about Member States in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations. I would like to remind delegations that under Article 19, a Member of the United Nations in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years. The General Assembly may, nevertheless, permit such a Member to vote if it is satisfied that the failure to pay is due to conditions beyond the Member's control.

May I therefore take it that the General Assembly takes note of the information contained in this document?

Agenda item 63 (continued)

Use of the veto

Special report of the Security Council (A/78/691)

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now hold a debate, pursuant to resolution 76/262 of 26 April 2022, on the situation in which a veto was cast by a permanent member of the Security Council at the 9520th meeting of the Council on 22 December 2023 under the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". In connection with this debate, the Assembly has before it a special report of the Security Council circulated in document A/78/691.

I will now read the following remarks on behalf of the President of the General Assembly.

Statement by the President

The Acting President: "Our discussion today is a demonstration that two main organs of the United Nations — the General Assembly and the Security Council — can and must work together on matters of international peace and security, within their respective mandates. It is a reminder of the need for collaboration and accountability in our endeavour to create a peaceful and more secure world. In that regard, I acknowledge the timely submission of the special report of the Security Council (A/78/691) on

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the veto cast in the Council on 22 December 2023 (see S/PV.9520). The Security Council's subsequent adoption of resolution 2720 (2023) is a welcome development. Among other provisions, it calls for urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered and expanded humanitarian access and create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities.

"I urge all parties to fully implement resolution 2720 (2023) and all other relevant resolutions, including those adopted in the context of the General Assembly's tenth emergency special session. Our immediate priority must be to protect civilians and save lives. I encourage all Member States to keep that shared goal at the forefront of today's debate. The Office of the President of the General Assembly will continue the practice of sending a short summary of the plenary debate to the President of the Security Council."

Mr. Wood (United States of America): The United States welcomed the Security Council's adoption on 22 December 2023 of resolution 2720 (2023), which called for urgent steps to be taken to immediately allow safe, unhindered and expanded humanitarian access in Gaza and create the necessary conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities. The resolution's adoption demonstrated the commitment of the United States to working with other Council members to speak out on this humanitarian crisis. We worked closely with the United Arab Emirates, members of the Group of Arab States and many other Council members, engaging in good faith to craft a strong, humanitarian-focused resolution. That work supports the direct diplomacy that the United States is engaged in to get more humanitarian aid into Gaza and help get hostages out of Gaza.

It is unfortunate that rather than contributing to the hard work of diplomacy, one permanent member of the Security Council has continued to put forward amendments and ideas that are disconnected from the situation on the ground. It is also deeply troubling that so many Member States seem to have stopped talking about the plight of the more than 100 hostages being held by Hamas and other groups. The United States remains committed to bringing all of the hostages home — every single one. Israel has been clear that it would welcome returning to a pause and the further release of hostages. However, Hamas reneged on commitments that it made during the first pause for hostage releases, and we question whether it is in fact

willing to resume that effort. Nevertheless, we remain engaged in efforts to secure another pause and once again get hostages out of Gaza. It is also striking that even as we hear many countries urging an end to the conflict, which we would all like to see, we hear very few demand that its initiator — Hamas — stop hiding behind civilians, lay down its arms and surrender. It would be over if Hamas's leaders had done that. It would be good if we had a strong international voice pressing Hamas's leaders to do what is necessary to end the conflict that they set in motion on 7 October 2023.

As I think everyone knows, Secretary Blinken is once again in the region, on his fourth trip since the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023. He has discussed ongoing efforts to better protect civilians in Gaza and stressed the imperative of expanding and sustaining safe access for humanitarian organizations to deliver food, water and medicine, as well as for commercial goods to enter all areas of Gaza. And he has focused on the need to prevent the conflict from expanding — an effort in which the United States continues to invest significant diplomatic resources. This is not just a regional issue. It is a matter of global concern. As Israel moves to a lower-intensity phase of its military operation in the north, we believe the United Nations has a crucial role to play in evaluating what needs to be done to allow displaced Palestinians to return home.

On humanitarian aid, we have made progress in increasing the assistance into Gaza, but we know that it is still insufficient to meet the massive needs. Too many Palestinian civilians are suffering from insufficient access to food, water, medicine and other essential supplies. The United Nations is playing an irreplaceable role in delivering and distributing life-saving assistance to people in Gaza, as the Council affirmed in resolution 2720 (2023). The resolution created the new role of Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, and to that end, we welcome the Secretary-General's prompt appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag to that important position. We expect that every country in the region will support her efforts to streamline and accelerate the delivery of assistance, at scale, to those who urgently need it in Gaza, and we look forward to working with her on the implementation of resolution 2720 (2023).

Whether we can achieve enduring peace and lasting security for both Israelis and Palestinians depends, in large part, on whether we succeed in laying the foundation now. Importantly, resolution 2720 (2023) does not support any steps that would leave Hamas

in power, which would undermine the prospects for a two-State solution, where Gaza and the West Bank are reunited under a single governance structure, under a revamped and revitalized Palestinian Authority.

We must work towards a future where Israelis and Palestinians live side by side in peace. That is the only way forward.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I stand here representing a people being slaughtered, with families killed in their entirety, men and women shot in the streets; thousands abducted, tortured and humiliated; children killed, amputated, orphaned and scarred for life. No people should endure that. It must stop.

No one can understand how the Council is calling for the protection of civilians, deploring attacks against them, is calling for immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and for humanitarian assistance at scale, rejects forced displacement and is concerned about regional spillover, while at the same time is being prevented from calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, which is indispensable to achieve all those aims. This schizophrenia needs to end.

The whole world is calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. One hundred fifty-three States across the globe have voted for a ceasefire. The moral voices of our time have pleaded for a ceasefire. The Secretary-General and the United Nations have called for a ceasefire. Humanitarian organizations have urged a ceasefire. Millions — maybe hundreds of millions — in the streets of capitals and cities across the globe are calling for a ceasefire, including in the United States of America. They all know that the horrors need to end, and the only way to end them is a ceasefire.

How can anyone believe all those people and organizations I just mentioned are wrong and that they are, somehow, right? There is no pride in being wrong alone, for so long, and with such tragic consequences.

This assault is without precedent in modern history in the scale and pace of killing of children, of United Nations personnel, of medical and rescue teams, of journalists. This is a war of atrocities. How can one reconcile opposing those atrocities and vetoing a call to end the war that is leading to their commission?

The State of Palestine has long supported the proposal of France and Mexico for the suspension of the veto in the case of mass atrocities, when crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes on a large-scale are committed. The Israeli assault on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip demonstrates how vital this proposal is. Supporting an immediate ceasefire is the only moral, legitimate and responsible position.

There have been 90 days of hell on earth, 90 days of massacres. How many more Palestinians must be killed until one says enough is enough? How many more tragedies must there be? How much more destruction? During those 90 days, 11 Palestinians were killed every hour, including seven women and children — every single hour for 90 days. To this day, hundreds are being killed every day.

One per cent of the Palestinians in Gaza have been killed. I ask everyone to take a moment and imagine what that represents, compared to their own population. It is the equivalent of 3 million Americans. Three per cent of Palestinians in Gaza have been wounded. I ask everyone to take a moment and imagine what that represents, compared to their own population. It is the equivalent of 10 million Americans. Eighty-seven per cent of Palestinians in Gaza have been displaced. I ask everyone to take a moment and imagine what that represents compared to their own population. It is the equivalent of 284 million Americans.

The United Nations now speaks of famine, the spread of infectious diseases and death in new forms and shapes at the doorstep of thousands more Palestinians. These are not unforeseen consequences of war; they are some of the methods of the Israeli war. This is a human-made, an occupation-made humanitarian catastrophe. Israel is destroying everything to make Gaza unliveable. The choice it is offering the Palestinian people is destruction or displacement, genocide or ethnic cleansing. This is not about Israel's security; it is about Palestine's destruction.

The interests and objectives of this extremist Israeli Government are clear and incompatible with the interests and objectives of any country that supports international law and peace. This extremist Israeli Government has attacked not only the United Nations, but also States around the world that criticize its actions. This extremist Israeli Government has spared no effort to ridicule its closest ally — the one it calls

on for military, political and financial support — and ignores when it does not like what its ally is asking for.

Netanyahu does not care about jeopardizing regional and international peace and security, vital United States interests or the security of Israelis. He cares only for his own political survival. That is a choice he makes without any hesitation. No one should accept to play by his playbook. When so many lives hang in the balance, when the stakes are so high, moral clarity and political responsibility dictate a decisive stance and resolute action, not half positions.

Security will never come through the death, destruction or dehumanization of the Palestinian people. It will never come through further dispossession, displacement or denial of rights. Enough — our people have a right to life, to freedom and to justice. Palestine is here to stay. The Palestinian people are here to stay. The Palestinian people will not disappear, but their resilience is no reason to prolong their suffering.

How can anyone support a war with such criminal means deployed to achieve such criminal objectives? And how can anyone oppose its criminal objectives and give Israel the means to pursue them?

Do not call for peace and spread fire. If you want peace, start with a ceasefire — a ceasefire now.

I hope that each and every Member State will have a sign like that every day, like the hundreds of millions who are on the streets, including when President Biden speaks in South Carolina, and who go to Congress demanding a ceasefire now. Everyone is saying, “Ceasefire now!” And we all should be able to succeed in imposing a ceasefire to save the lives of the Palestinians, of the Israelis and of everyone.

Mr. Erdan (Israel): More than three months have passed since Hamas committed the most widespread massacre of Jews since the Holocaust. Ninety-six days have passed since Hamas butchered, incinerated, raped and exterminated 1,300 Israelis in cold blood and since it brutally took 240 Israelis hostage. And today — nearly 100 days later — neither the General Assembly, nor any United Nations body, has even condemned those horrors.

On 7 October 2023, little Kfir Bibas, who was taken hostage by Hamas along with his mother, Shiri; his father, Yarden; and his 4-year-old brother, Ariel, was merely nine months old. And for the past three months, he has been held in a dark Hamas terror tunnel.

Many representatives in this Hall are parents or grandparents, and they know that each milestone in their children’s life — their first step, their first word, that first smile and laugh — is a celebration. Babies are a source of light and hope, a symbol of life. Yet Kfir, little baby Kfir, has become a symbol of the vilest cruelty known to man — the cruelty of Hamas. And tragically, Kfir is about to spend his first birthday as a hostage of Hamas. A quarter of Kfir’s life has been spent as a hostage. He was kidnapped before he could even learn to say “Mama”. Is he getting the food and vitamins he needs to grow and develop? Is he crawling? How can a baby be a deliberate target? What kind of monsters intentionally take a baby hostage and treat him like an enemy?

It is so painful that a baby is being held hostage by terrorists. Instead of love, Kfir is surrounded by sheer evil. But above all, it is utterly heart-wrenching that, to the United Nations, the pain of an innocent baby has been all but forgotten. For heaven’s sake, a baby is about to spend his first birthday as a hostage — a hostage in the hands of the rapists and murderers of Hamas. A sweet baby is being held hostage, and the members of the General Assembly prefer to discuss a ceasefire that will keep the Hamas Nazis that abducted him in power. Kfir is in the hands of Hamas, and members are focused on supplying aid to those who took him. How is bringing Kfir home not the top priority for the United Nations? How morally bankrupt has this body become?

Yesterday, I spoke with members of Kfir’s family. They cannot fathom how the whole world has not mobilized to ensure his release, how this Hall is not trembling with deafening calls to bring him home. Why is the Assembly not holding Hamas accountable for the most heinous war crimes? Hamas has not even permitted the Red Cross to visit Kfir. It is a stain not just on the United Nations, but also on each and every member of the Assembly.

Despite the United Nations moral rot, the citizens of Israel are resilient. We have faith, we have hope and unbreakable resolve, and we will continue fighting to defend ourselves.

But sadly, if the Assembly ignores the suffering of our children, the suffering of little baby Kfir, I will stand here today and mark Kfir’s first birthday. I will remind Assembly members of their moral obligation to fight for Kfir and his right to celebrate his birthday.

This birthday cake is for Kfir. He is the reason Israel is fighting day and night. I only wish, for Kfir's first birthday, that next year, God willing, he will celebrate his birthday surrounded by the love of his family and that we will live in a world where the suffering of Israeli babies is important to the United Nations.

I ask that Kfir's cake remain here as a painful reminder, so that every speaker today remembers Kfir and our duty to bring him home.

The United Nations, an Organization that remains silent when babies are taken hostage and women are viciously raped, has become an accomplice to terrorists. And if the United Nations is an accomplice to terrorists, it has no justification to exist.

I ask members to look at Kfir and imagine that was their child. Would they stop fighting to bring him home? Not in a million years.

Fear is one of 136 hostages held in Gaza. When members make empty declarations calling for the release of hostages while continuing to focus only on ceasefires and the situation in Gaza, they quickly forget that every hostage is an entire universe. They are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, grandparents and friends. Twenty-one-year-old Almog Meir Jan is a fun and loving son and grandson. He spent the Friday night before he was kidnapped at the Nova music festival taking care of his grandfather. He loves music and soccer, and he wants to study computer science. Twenty-three-year-old Evyatar David is a musician. He plays the guitar. He loves jamming with his brother, Ilay, and his sister, Yeela. He is warm and modest. Orit Meir and Galia David, the mothers of Almog and Evyatar, are here with us today. They are watching and waiting. They are waiting for their sons to come home, but they are also waiting for the United Nations to act. The United Nations is failing them.

I hope that everyone has seen this picture. It was on the front page of the *Daily Mail* yesterday. Let us look at these girls. These are the before-and-after pictures of Lili Albag, Karina Arieiev, Daniela Gilboa and Agam Berger, who were taken hostage by Hamas. We can see how the hope in their eyes has turned to horror, and how their smiling faces have been beaten and bloodied after violent abuse. Look at their faces. Why is everyone silent? What has the Assembly done here to bring them home? Nothing.

The Hamas Nazis viciously raped Israeli women before executing them and used sexual violence as a weapon of war. CNN, *The New York Times* and many other media outlets have published extensive evidence of Hamas's sexual violence. But here at the Organization that is supposedly a bastion of human rights, there has been silence. Israeli women are not women, and Israeli children are not children. I cannot imagine what all the hostages, women and men, are suffering right now. It breaks my heart to think about it. What if it was the children, sisters or brothers of Members who were held hostage? What would they expect the United Nations to do? What would they expect the world to do? Surely they would not expect them to continue in such shameful indifference. Instead of a focus on bringing the hostages home, on making that the primary goal for the past 96 days, what have we seen? United Nations agencies, bodies and officials have been obsessed solely with the welfare of Gazans — the people who voted for Hamas, who overwhelmingly support the massacre, murder and rape of our women and the burning of our babies. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis are displaced, either because their communities were decimated by Hamas or because Hizbullah has rained rockets down on their homes completely unprovoked. But all the Israeli victims have been ignored. After all, they are Israeli, and as far as the United Nations is concerned, Israeli victims are probably not victims.

The United Nations has become another tool of war in the arsenal of terrorists, and every one of its agencies and bodies has been weaponized against Israel. It has become the epitome of a dystopian reality. South Africa's baseless and libellous case at the International Court of Justice is exact proof of that. How can it be that the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted in the wake of the Holocaust, the genocide of the Jewish people, is now being weaponized against the Jewish State while serving the Hamas terrorists who perpetrated the massacre of 7 October 2023 and whose charter commits them to repeating the Holocaust.

Is that normal? Now even irony has died a thousand deaths. There are no morals here, only bias and hypocrisy. I have screamed it from the rooftops, but sadly the United Nations does not care. That is so clear. All we need do is look at the General Assembly's central goal for the past three months, which is keeping the Hamas rapists in power. That is what a ceasefire means. By calling for a ceasefire, that is exactly what

it is doing. A ceasefire is a victory for Hamas, nothing more. It is an opportunity for Hamas to rearm, regroup and recommit to the atrocities of 7 October 2023. It is a green light for Hamas to continue its reign of terror in Gaza. The damage that the United Nations is causing extends far beyond the conflict in Gaza. Believe me, it is setting a murderous precedent, because by calling for a ceasefire while hardly noting the hostages and crimes perpetrated by Hamas, it is sending a clear message to terrorists all around the world. It is also encouraging Hizbullah and empowering the Houthis and their puppet master in Tehran, and very soon Members will all regret that deeply. The United Nations is sending a message to terrorists that rape as a weapon of war is fine and that taking babies hostage has no international repercussions.

Again and again, Members are focused only on a ceasefire and on tying Israel's hands in the fight against terror, because the United Nations suffers from what we call the street-light effect. Let me explain what that is. It is a phenomenon that makes people do only what is easy, not what is productive or useful. Here is a parable that will clarify what I mean. A drunk man is stumbling around under a streetlight at night, looking for his keys. A police officer approaches him and begins to help him search for his keys. But after a couple of minutes, the police officer turns to the man and says that he cannot see his keys and asks him whether he is sure that he lost them under the streetlight. The drunk man says that he is sorry, that he lost them in the park, but it is pitch dark in the park so he is looking for them under the streetlight because there he can see.

Today the United Nations is the drunken man. The United Nations, with its bias, keeps searching only under the same streetlight, following its distorted moral compass. Sadly, its Members do not have the courage to combat terror and radicalism or the resolve to truly care about human rights and to fight for women, children or hostages. But let me be clear: there is nothing to be found under the streetlight. It is just easier to spend time there. It is much easier to make demands of Israel's law-abiding democracy of Israel. We are the streetlight. It is so simple to blame Israel, but it is so much more challenging to condemn the Hamas terrorists, who have turned Gaza into a terror war machine under the nose of the United Nations for 17 years. Hamas, which uses civilian infrastructure — schools, mosques and hospitals — to store weapons, firing rockets from within civilian areas.

The United Nations must take a stand against the terrorists' use of millions of Gazans as human shields once and for all. Israel does not need calls for humanitarian aid. We are providing it anyway. Israel is facilitating the entry of aid into Gaza every day. We support every single humanitarian initiative. We have facilitated field hospitals and floating hospitals. We are facilitating the entry of fuel to hospitals, bakeries, everything — to all critical infrastructure. Not a single shipment of food or water is held up or turned around. Those who are delaying the humanitarian aid are Hamas terrorists. They are looting critical aid before it even reaches the people of Gaza. Yet the General Assembly is incapable of dealing with Hamas and that is because the Assembly does not even exist for Hamas. It does not recognize the existence of international law. Can the General Assembly confront the Hamas terrorists? Sadly, that is not one of the solutions under the streetlight.

The time has come for Member States to drag the United Nations out from under the streetlight and not the other way around. The time has come to focus on bringing baby Kfir and all the hostages home, holding Hamas fully accountable for the situation in Gaza and showing terrorists around the globe that the international community will not be silent in the face of evil. Perhaps if everyone here told the people of Gaza who is truly responsible for their suffering, who started this war and is exploiting them, they would rise up against Hamas and end its reign of terror. If the United Nations wants a real ceasefire, one that can last forever, it must demand one from Hamas and tell its members to turn themselves in and release the hostages. This war would then end immediately, and that is the only ceasefire that the Assembly should be advancing.

Mr. Alrowaieci (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

At the outset, I would like to thank the President for convening this debate on a permanent member of the Security Council's use of the veto against an oral amendment to a draft resolution on the expansion of humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip, submitted by the then Council member the United Arab Emirates and adopted by the Council as resolution 2720 (2023) on 22 December 2023 (see S/PV.9520). We want to thank the United Arab Emirates sincerely for its important role in championing Arab causes and its decisive initiatives during its membership of Council for the 2022–2023

term. The Arab Group also extends its support and assistance to the delegation of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria in its defence of the common Arab positions during its term on the Council, and we wish it success in that endeavour.

The Arab Group has noted the Security Council's adoption of resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) in response to the catastrophic humanitarian situation that our brother people of Palestine are enduring in the Gaza Strip. We would like to express our appreciation for the efforts of Secretary-General António Guterres in beginning to implement measures to establish the mechanism outlined in the resolution for facilitating and accelerating the entry of aid into the Gaza Strip, through his appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag to the position of Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. In that context, the Arab Group calls on the international community to provide substantial, smooth and uninterrupted humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. However, the Arab Group reaffirms that an immediate humanitarian ceasefire is the only way to end that tragedy as called for by the 153 Member States that voted on 12 December 2023 in favour of resolution ES-10/22, during the Assembly's resumed tenth emergency special session.

The more than three months of the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip have resulted in the killing of more than 22,000 civilians, mostly women and children, not to mention the deaths of more than 144 United Nations staff, 142 of them belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Furthermore, the Israeli aggression has led to the destruction of civilian facilities and infrastructure, in clear violation of international law and international humanitarian law. The Security Council is still unable to carry out its duty to establish a ceasefire, an inability that will continue to affect the credibility of the United Nations in its efforts to deal with current and future crises.

The Arab Group once again calls on the Security Council to fulfil its duty and responsibility to maintain international peace and security. It also calls on the international community to take the necessary measures in the context of international law to respond to the Israeli Government's illegal practices, including in the West Bank, and its policy of collective punishment of the inhabitants of Gaza. International protection must be provided to our brother Palestinian people. The Arab Group stresses its categorical rejection of

the forced displacement of Palestinians from their land in the Gaza Strip and condemns in the strongest terms the recent racist and extremist statements made by members of the Israeli Government regarding the forced displacement of Palestinians outside the Gaza Strip, the reoccupation of the Strip and the construction of settlements there, statements that are in clear contravention of the principles of international law and internationally recognized resolutions and are likely to undermine the peace process and spread tensions and instability in the region —

The Acting President: I call for order in the gallery and request security to restore order.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Arab Group stresses that establishing an immediate, lasting and comprehensive ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, providing protection to civilians there and meeting their humanitarian needs are inherent rights of unarmed civilians that are enshrined in international legal frameworks and recognized principles of human rights. They are also a political, legal and moral obligation for the Security Council and the international community at large. The Arab Group reaffirms the need to maintain the security and safety of the neighbouring countries of the region.

The Arab Group believes in a just solution to the Palestinian question, in line with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative. A just and comprehensive peace is the only way to achieve stability and security in the region. The Arab Group reaffirms the urgent need to promote international efforts to end the Israeli occupation and ensure the independence of the State of Palestine along the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Peñalver Portal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Our views on resolution 76/262, entitled "Standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council", remain valid. Given the gravity of the current situation in the Gaza Strip, Cuba appreciates the convening of today's meeting.

Despite the fact that on 22 December 2023 the Security Council succeeded in adopting resolution 2720 (2023) on the situation in Palestine — after strenuous efforts to stave off the United States use of the veto for a second time — it is regrettable that the resolution did not include a call for an immediate cessation of hostilities to facilitate the delivery of

humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza. Establishing a ceasefire is the immediate priority for the efforts to stop the genocide against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip. Without it, the international community will simply stand idly by as we witness the extermination of the Palestinian people. As of 3 January, after 90 days of escalation in the Gaza Strip, Israeli military forces had killed more than 23,000 Palestinians, including more than 9,000 children. None of them will ever celebrate a birthday again. Nothing justifies the collective punishment that the Palestinian people are currently being subjected to in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

The United States collusion with Israel, the occupying Power, is clear. Not only is it hindering the Security Council's ability to take decisions, but it is also arming and resupplying the war machine that is massacring the Palestinian people. The United States is on the side of the aggressor country, which is committing crimes against humanity, including ethnic cleansing, and its abuse of the undemocratic right of the veto further implicates it as an accessory to the crime. The paralysis in the Council has therefore entrenched its loss of credibility in its role as the main United Nations organ responsible for ensuring international peace and security. The double standards, selectivity and political manipulation that are undermining that noble goal must stop. The Security Council must fulfil its mandate to end Israel's impunity for its crimes against humanity and violations of international law and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We condemn in the strongest terms the killing of civilians, especially children, women and humanitarian workers in the United Nations system; indiscriminate bombing, including of refugee camps; the destruction of homes, hospitals and civilian infrastructure; and depriving the Palestinian population of water, food, electricity and fuel services, which is significantly exacerbating the already precarious humanitarian situation resulting from the long-standing blockade of the Gaza Strip. We also condemn in the strongest terms the forced displacement of the Palestinian population from the land that they own by right. The violence and illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem must stop. With the coordination of the United Nations, the delivery of emergency humanitarian aid must continue in order to address the catastrophic

situation in Gaza. We reiterate our call on all the parties concerned to enable the entry and distribution of that vital assistance to the Palestinian people.

We call for finding a speedy resolution through negotiations to stop the massacre and the escalating violence, together with their grave humanitarian consequences for the Middle East and the danger that the conflict may develop into a regional one. We reiterate the urgent need for finding a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the establishment of two States, which would enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their right to self-determination and an independent and sovereign State, within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as guaranteeing the right of return of refugees. We reaffirm Cuba's willingness to contribute to legitimate international efforts to end the current crisis. Now is the time to act. Let us ensure that humanity prevails over violence and barbarism.

Mr. Chindawongse (Thailand): We are gathered here in the General Assembly at a meeting held pursuant to resolution 76/262 of 26 April 2022, on a situation in which a veto was cast in the Security Council on 22 December 2023 under the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (see S/PV.9520). The ongoing situation continues to be of serious concern to the Assembly and the international community, in view of the continued fighting and loss of lives and their devastating humanitarian consequences. The letter dated 5 January 2024 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2024/26) sums up the bleak and terrible conflict in its references to the devastating levels of death and destruction, as well as its grave impact on the humanitarian situation, the work of the United Nations and relevant personnel and, most importantly, the loss of lives and livelihoods and the holding of hostages.

In the light of all of that, Thailand remains deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation, the plight of all the civilians affected and the possibility of a further escalation of the conflict. We condemn in the strongest terms all forms of violence and attacks on innocent civilians, regardless of their nationalities, wherever they take place. The protection of civilians must be a priority at all times. We urge all sides to respect and fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law. Because of the urgency of the situation, we join the call for an urgent and

sustainable cessation of hostilities to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza for those in need. We encourage all sides to do everything possible to achieve a resumed ceasefire, just as we hope to see the eventual establishment of a permanent ceasefire. We continue to appeal for the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages, including Thai nationals, and call for continuing proper treatment and care for them. Let all the hostages come home.

Thailand welcomes the Security Council's adoption of resolution 2720 (2023), on scaling up and monitoring aid to Gaza, and strongly urges all parties to act in accordance with its resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023). Thailand also welcomes the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag of the Kingdom of the Netherlands as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, pursuant to resolution 2720 (2023), which should help improve the humanitarian situation in the Middle East. We hope that under Ms. Kaag's supervision, adequate humanitarian aid will be delivered to those in need in Gaza in a safe, efficient and timely manner. As we welcome those resolutions, it is critical that we ensure their full implementation. Indeed, the resolutions of the Security Council and of the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session have outlined all the necessary foundations for de-escalation, the delivery of humanitarian aid, the cessation of hostilities and the promotion of peace in the Middle East. We therefore call on all sides to implement those resolutions in full. We would like to express our appreciation to those who have worked to implement the resolutions in order to help bring an end to this conflict and pave the way for a mutually agreed solution to the problem in accordance with a two-State solution, whereby the States of Israel and Palestine can live side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, consistent with Security Council resolutions.

Lastly, as we are meeting pursuant to resolution 76/262, Thailand shares the view of a vast majority of Member States that the right of veto is not a privilege but an international responsibility. We believe that resolution 76/262 can help enhance the efficiency and accountability of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council. But as we have seen in the almost two years since its adoption, the exercise of the veto has not been reduced in comparison to the last few years before the adoption. In order for the United Nations, including the Security Council, to be more effective and accountable — and thereby to contribute to the

more effective multilateralism that we all seek, whether under the Summit of the Future process or other General Assembly processes — the United Nations generally, and the Security Council in particular, must therefore be more united in discharging their responsibilities as laid down in the Charter of the United Nations. They must be more open and transparent in their work and more collaborative and focused in exercising diplomacy and other peaceful means. A polarized United Nations and Security Council serve no one's interests.

On this matter, Thailand will therefore work closely with the Member States and the international community to forge a pragmatic and consensual path towards a more effective and transparent United Nations, including the Security Council, that can deliver more effectively, especially on critical issues of international peace and security.

Mrs. Narváez Ojeda (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this formal meeting of the General Assembly to discuss the 22 December 2023 veto in the Security Council (see S/PV.9520).

Chile once again calls on the permanent members of the Security Council to refrain from making use of the veto in situations of armed conflict that affect civilian populations, as is the case in Gaza, where the situation has already claimed more than 22,000 lives, primarily women and children. The veto does not foster the unity of the Security Council or promote efforts to achieve a collective understanding. Quite the contrary, it erodes the credibility of the whole multilateral system. The veto is the crudest possible expression of power and a last resort when diplomacy fails. My country has been a steadfast defender of limiting the use of the veto, and all the more so when dealing with scenarios in which international humanitarian law is being violated, as is the case in Palestine. The use of the veto confirms the urgent need to restructure the Security Council and its working methods and the need to implement accountability measures for permanent members. Refusing to demand an urgent suspension of hostilities runs counter to the very mission of the Security Council. We demand that the Council fulfil its mandate and put an end to this cruel war. The veto is not a privilege but a responsibility.

In its classical sense, tragedy expresses a set of impossibilities that maintain that human will can desire something but cannot achieve it. The current tragedy presents a similar set of circumstances. The

vast majority of the members of the Assembly have called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, but the will of a handful of members has prevented us from bringing an end to the violence. Only an immediate cessation of hostilities can enable safe and unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza in accordance with resolution 2720 (2023), adopted by the Council on 22 December 2023.

Chile unreservedly and categorically condemns the cruel actions of Hamas on 7 October 2023 and indeed any terrorist attack on civilian populations. In that regard, we demand the immediate, unconditional release of all the hostages who are still held by Hamas. The protection of civilians is a fundamental obligation. The Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law must therefore be upheld. The Government of Chile also categorically rejects the recent statements by Israeli Government authorities proposing the mass displacement of the Palestinian population of Gaza to third countries. Any action that involves people's forced displacement runs counter to international law, international humanitarian law and human rights. The most recent warnings from the World Food Programme and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reinforce the reality of the threat of famine and disease in densely populated areas to which tens of thousands of people have fled in order to escape the intense bombing campaigns in the north and centre of the Gaza Strip.

We reiterate our full support to the devoted and courageous work being done on the ground by the United Nations and its agencies, particularly UNRWA, and deeply deplore the deaths of Agency staffers during this war. Last week the Government of Chile arranged the urgent delivery to Gaza of resources from Chile's fund against hunger and poverty, which will be channelled through the United Nations Population Fund to meet the specific needs of women, adolescents and girls. That most recent contribution is aimed at meeting in some way the most basic needs of women and girls in the Gaza Strip, who find themselves embroiled in a conflict in which the basic rules of war are not respected.

Last month we commemorated the International Day of Human Rights, recalling that 75 years ago this same General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, we are concerned and pained to note that those rights are not being upheld in

the Gaza Strip. We emphasize that there is absolutely no contradiction between the legitimate defence of a State in the fight against terrorism and respect for the lives of civilians. Attacking critical civilian infrastructure, including homes, health and education establishments and shelters, among other things, is simply not permissible. We therefore ask that all the facts be investigated by the competent international bodies in order to determine the actors involved and ensure that they are held accountable.

We support the right of the Palestinian people to establish a sovereign State as enshrined in United Nations resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 181 (II) and Security Council resolution 242 (1967). We urgently call for the full and prompt implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), which reaffirms that the establishment of settlements by Israel in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and a significant hindrance to achieving a two-State solution and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

We would like to point out that Chile strongly supported resolution 77/247 and made a written submission to the International Court of Justice in the context of the request for an advisory opinion on the implications of Israel's continued violations of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. We hope that the Court can assist the international community by clarifying the legal obligations that will provide a basis for the quest for a definitive solution that guarantees the human rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine.

Chile will not remain indifferent to the current situation and the pain of the Palestinian people. That is why we will shortly submit a referral of the situation in Palestine to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to request an investigation of the international crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian territories, an initiative that we hope other countries will join. All the parties involved, along with the international community, must work together to end this war and initiate a real and fruitful dialogue process that will allow us to move towards the existence of two States, recognizing the right of Israel and Palestine to coexist in peace within mutually agreed and internationally recognized secure borders, in accordance with the resolutions adopted by the United Nations.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The current round of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been going on for more than three months now. Gaza is enduring an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe, with innocent civilians losing their lives every day in an ever-worsening situation. The international community has been making a universal call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, which is the most basic requirement if peace is to be restored. However, the Security Council has yet to reach a consensus on a call for a ceasefire to end the fighting.

We were disappointed by the United States regrettable exercise of yet another veto in the Security Council on 22 December 2023 (see S/PV.9520). China has repeatedly pointed out that achieving a ceasefire is an overriding prerequisite. The international community must pool all its efforts to promote an immediate ceasefire in order to end the fighting. An immediate ceasefire is required to save civilian lives. This round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has resulted in the loss of almost 23,000 lives and the displacement of nearly 90 per cent of the population of Gaza. Allowing the fighting to continue will only result in more casualties and will not help find a way to rescue the hostages.

Secretary-General Guterres has repeatedly warned that while it is under fire, Gaza does not have the conditions in place that United Nations agencies need in order to deliver humanitarian assistance. China urges Israel to stop its indiscriminate military attacks and collective punishment of the people of Gaza and provide the conditions necessary for humanitarian agencies to deliver aid. If regional instability is to be avoided, an immediate ceasefire is essential. As the conflict in Gaza continues, tensions are escalating in the West Bank between Lebanon and Israel, between Syria and Israel and in the Red Sea, with the entire Middle East facing turbulence. International peace and security are being threatened. Only a ceasefire in Gaza can fundamentally eliminate the spillover effects of the conflict and prevent the wider region from being dragged into war and conflict.

Upholding the possibility of a two-State solution demands an immediate ceasefire. We oppose the forcible transfer and forcible relocation of the Palestinian people and the expropriation of Palestinian land. We are extremely concerned about the open rejection of a two-State solution by some Israeli political figures. China calls for intensified international and regional

diplomatic efforts to promote an immediate ceasefire, help the people of Gaza end their displacement and return to their homes as soon as possible and prevent a total collapse of the foundations for a two-State solution.

China will continue to work with the international community to urge the Security Council to take timely, responsible and meaningful action and make unremitting efforts to end the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible, effectively implement a two-State solution and achieve peace and stability in the Middle East.

Ms. Oehri (Liechtenstein): I would like to thank the President for convening today's meeting in accordance with resolution 76/262, which for the first time is being done in response to a veto of an amendment to a draft resolution presented to the Security Council (see S/PV.9520). Every veto, including on amendments, falls within the scope of resolution 76/262 and is accordingly subject to discussion by the United Nations membership as a whole. We thank the Security Council for producing a special report (A/78/691) in a timely and efficient manner and the President of the General Assembly for issuing a summary of today's debate, as has been done in previous meetings resulting from the veto initiative. We acknowledge the participation in this debate of the State that cast the veto.

The vetoed amendment was in line with the content of previous resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in emergency special sessions by an overwhelming majority, including a majority of Security Council members. We encourage Council members to bear in mind the will of the United Nations membership as a whole, including where it is expressed through resolutions, and to note that in carrying out its duties, the Security Council acts on behalf of the entire membership. At the same time, we note that the vetoed amendment was brought to the Council only at the last minute and in a situation where the draft resolution as a whole reflected delicate and fragile concessions made by Council members following lengthy and arduous consultations, undertaken with a view to enabling the Council to carry out its duties in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Council members should aspire to the most transparent and accountable working methods at all times, including by presenting amendments with sufficient time for consultations whenever possible.

While we were grateful to see the Security Council ultimately adopt resolution 2720 (2023),

we regret that the Council has not been able to call for an urgent suspension of hostilities, let alone an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, as demanded by the General Assembly last month as well as by relevant humanitarian organizations. A humanitarian ceasefire remains essential to the protection of civilians, which must be our highest priority. It is the most important step towards ensuring full, immediate, safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access, including by fulfilling the Council's demand in resolution 2720 (2023) that the parties to the conflict allow and facilitate the use of all available routes to and throughout the entire Gaza Strip. It will also be vital to enable the new mechanism that the Council has created to accelerate the provision of humanitarian relief consignments and ensure the release of all hostages. Every day that goes by without a suspension of hostilities causes more suffering and devastation.

In conclusion, Liechtenstein reiterates that the only sustainable solution to the conflict will come through diplomatic means. The inalienable rights of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples can be ensured only by upholding the right to self-determination, expressed through a two-State solution.

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank the President for convening this important meeting to address the pressing issue of the unwarranted and irresponsible use of the veto by the United States that hindered the Security Council from fulfilling its vital duty of maintaining international peace and security (see S/PV.9520). Despite all international calls on the Security Council to fulfil its obligation and halt the bloodshed in Gaza, that organ has once again fallen short of its duties, owing solely to yet another obstruction by the United States. Unfortunately, through the use of the veto on the proposed draft amendment put forth by Russia, which aimed at a sustainable cessation of hostilities in Gaza, the United States once again indicated a lack of commitment to ending the violence in Gaza and safeguarding civilian lives. Indeed, the veto granted Israel unchecked freedom for additional, unrestricted and indiscriminate bombings on civilian infrastructure and the population of Gaza, without any time constraints.

Each passing day of the war in Gaza exacerbates human suffering and destruction, as the Israeli regime continues its relentless bombardment and genocidal aggression against innocent people in Gaza. As a result of huge attacks, almost all residential parts of the Strip

have been destroyed. No place in Gaza is safe, and the imminent risk of a total collapse of the humanitarian support system is still present. The obstruction by the United States of the Council's duties under the Charter of the United Nations starkly contrasts with global appeals for an end to the bloodshed, defies the inherent desire of human nature to preserve life and violates fundamental principles of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

Iran notes the adoption of Security Council resolution 2720 (2023), by which the Council urged facilitating the use of all available routes to and throughout the entire Gaza Strip, including border crossings. Furthermore, Iran acknowledges the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza pursuant to Security Council resolution 2720 (2023) and would like to offer its full cooperation in the fulfilment of her mandate. We hope that the newly established monitoring mechanism will carry out its mandate efficiently, free from any form of obstruction or interference by the Israeli regime. In addition, we look forward to the Secretary-General's timely reporting to the Council on the implementation of the resolution.

Lastly, we are of the firm belief that the only practical way to proceed is to prevent and stop the criminal and genocidal aggression against innocent civilians in Gaza, establish a sustainable and durable ceasefire, ensure access to humanitarian assistance on a large scale and halt the forced displacement of the people in the Gaza Strip. Without a sustainable ceasefire, the tragedy will worsen, leading to the loss of innocent lives, including children and women. Furthermore, Israel shall be punished for all its international wrongdoings, which have set the whole region on fire. The United States faces a critical choice: it can either persist on its current trajectory, or it can choose to refrain from providing unconditional support. Without such support, Israel would encounter difficulties in sustaining its actions of mass violence and genocide against the Palestinian population.

Mr. Mythen (Ireland): Ireland recalls its opposition to each and every use of the veto and its consistent calls for it to be abolished, and we would like to thank the President for convening today's very important meeting.

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the continuing heroic efforts of United Nations staff, especially those working on the front line in Gaza,

who are carrying out their role in exceptionally challenging circumstances. I would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the families of those who have been killed.

The situation that is unfolding on the ground in Gaza is increasingly catastrophic. The level of civilian deaths is simply unacceptable. The recent assessment of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification was deeply shocking. It found that 100 per cent of people in Gaza are estimated to be acutely food insecure, while a quarter of its population faces catastrophic hunger and starvation. The adoption, on 22 December 2023, of Security Council resolution 2720 (2023) was a step in the right direction. It provides for a number of vital actions that must be taken by all parties to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale. Ireland welcomes the appointment of Sigrid Kaag, as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, and we call for the implementation of the resolution to be urgently stepped up.

However, we regret that resolution 2720 (2023) did not go far enough. It is now manifestly clear that the situation on the ground demands an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. We urge the Security Council to call for such an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, in line with the overwhelming view of the international community. We also call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, urgent and effective humanitarian access and the protection of civilians.

As we enter a new year — and the fourth month of the conflict — it is imperative that we take stock of the overall situation and context. Ireland has consistently condemned the attacks launched by Hamas on and since 7 October 2023. The rape and murder of civilians, destruction of civilian property, taking of hostages, use of human shields and firing of indiscriminate rockets at urban centres are serious, grave violations of international humanitarian law for which those involved must be held responsible and accountable. However, it is equally incumbent upon all of us to recall that international law limits the use of force in self-defence to no more than what is necessary and proportionate.

Ireland's view is that those limits are being exceeded, as illustrated by the unacceptable death toll and the massive destruction of property, including homes, throughout Gaza, the displacement of up to 2 million people and the ensuing humanitarian

catastrophe, to which we have referred. Furthermore, international humanitarian law requires that, in any armed conflict, military operations respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. Ireland is increasingly concerned that the use of heavy munitions with a wide blast-area cannot be limited to military objectives located in heavily populated urban centres and is therefore indiscriminate. Their use in such circumstances unavoidably and inevitably leads to the extensive destruction of nearby civilian property and the loss of civilian life. The use of those munitions must cease. Events across the region in recent days are a stark reminder of the potential for regional escalation. A widening of the conflict would have devastating consequences for the region and the world. Ireland urges all parties in the region to exercise restraint and avoid such escalation.

The overall trajectory is deeply concerning and must be reversed. In the first instance, the international community, including parties in the region, must redouble efforts to end the conflict in Gaza. However, our ambition should not be limited to de-escalation. We must take concrete steps to achieve long-term peace, stability and security for all Palestinians, all Israelis and the region, as a whole. That can be done only through sustained and serious commitment to a two-State solution. And that requires genuine political goodwill and political effort. In that regard, Ireland condemns the recent comments by Israeli government ministers calling for the resettlement of Palestinians outside Gaza. Such statements are inflammatory, irresponsible and unacceptable.

In conclusion, Ireland recalls that, in February 2023, the Security Council reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to the vision of the two-State solution, whereby two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, would live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders, consistent with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. The achievement of this vision is more pressing than ever.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the General Assembly for convening today's meeting on the use of the veto, in the context of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The Middle East conflict has great potential for regional escalation and is, therefore, a threat to peace and security throughout the world. Responding to such

a threat is the primary responsibility of the Security Council. Regrettably, the constant risk of a veto reduces its capacity to act.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is catastrophic and carries a real risk of famine, while infectious disease rates are already soaring. For that reason, Switzerland welcomes the adoption of the resolution presented by the United Arab Emirates to the Security Council (resolution 2720 (2023)), which is aimed at increasing and supervising humanitarian aid. A sharp increase in humanitarian aid and the release of the hostages are necessary. Given its positions and relevant statements, Switzerland has supported draft resolutions in the Security Council calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and, consequently, supports a suspension of hostilities in order to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access and create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities.

Switzerland would like to recall that all parties must respect international humanitarian law and human rights. They are obliged to respect these rules even if the opposing party does not.

The credibility of the Security Council depends on its ability to act quickly and decisively in the face of crises and conflicts around the world. Consequently, we are committed to negotiations aimed at achieving a convergence of positions that will allow such action to be taken. Switzerland welcomes the fact that the adoption of resolution 2720 (2023) was not paralysed by another veto. Nevertheless, the threat of such a veto determined the negotiation process and the substance of resolution 2720 (2023). Whatever the context, negotiations in the Security Council must be based on trust, conducted in good faith and free from any threat of use of the veto. Switzerland attaches considerable importance to a consensus-oriented negotiation process.

In general, Switzerland has long been committed to a limited use of the veto in the Security Council. We recall the code of conduct proposed by the Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency Group on its use, signed by more than two thirds of the members of the Assembly to date. It is high time to intensify, together, efforts to implement it. That would be a clear sign for transparent, responsible and effective multilateralism.

Switzerland will continue to be committed in all forums to the promotion of peace, respect for international law, humanitarian assistance and the

protection of civilians in conflict situations, including throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

Ms. Schwalger (New Zealand): On 26 April 2022, member States took the landmark decision to adopt by consensus resolution 76/262, entitled “Standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council”. New Zealand actively supported the veto initiative from its inception and remains a proud proponent of resolution 76/262. The resolution created a mechanism to ensure accountability between United Nations organs, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, and to ask permanent members of the Security Council that have cast a veto to explain themselves to the wider United Nations membership.

The veto is the most undemocratic element of the United Nations. New Zealand has been a vocal opponent of the use of the veto since its inception in 1945. This is the ninth time that resolution 76/262 has been triggered since its adoption. On previous occasions, ensuing General Assembly debates have demonstrated strong desire for more inclusive multilateralism.

New Zealand was pleased that the Security Council was able to adopt another humanitarian-focused resolution on the pressing crisis in Gaza (resolution 2720 (2023)). We meet today because the veto was deployed against an oral amendment to that resolution (see S/PV.9520). It was disappointing that a last-minute proposal that the authors knew would not achieve consensus detracted from the weeks of intense negotiations to achieve a text acceptable to all. It is hard to view this as anything other than cynical political manoeuvring that was intended to undermine efforts to achieve a unified international response. However, any use of the veto is highly disappointing. Once again, we underline that every use of this outdated and undemocratic mechanism erodes the Council’s credibility and undermines its ability to fulfil its mandate for the maintenance of international peace and security.

New Zealand is gravely concerned about the impact of this conflict on civilians. The loss of life and level of suffering in Gaza is utterly devastating. New Zealand condemns absolutely Hamas’s terrorist attacks on Israel. These are clear violations of international law. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

New Zealand recognizes Israel’s right to defend itself against Hamas’s terrorist attacks. But in defending

itself, Israel must respect international humanitarian law. Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected. We are alarmed at the diminishing safe space for civilians in Gaza.

The delivery of humanitarian assistance remains a crucial priority. We urge the immediate implementation of resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) to enable unhindered and sustained assistance and protection, in line with humanitarian principles, to those who desperately need it. We continue to urge all parties involved in the conflict, as well as countries with influence in the region, to take urgent steps towards establishing a sustainable ceasefire. Ultimately, no military solution will bring about a just and lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians. As the Secretary-General has said, too many lives, and the fate of the entire region, hang in the balance. We cannot afford to fail. We must act now.

Finally, if resolution 76/262 is invoked again in the future as a result of the Security Council's failure to perform its responsibilities, it is incumbent upon all of us, as members of the General Assembly, to continue to exercise our collective political responsibility under the United Nations Charter to address matters of international peace and security.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Today's meeting of the General Assembly is being held in connection with yet another use by the United States of the veto right in the Security Council, to block calls for an end to violence in the Gaza Strip. Given that it has been more than three weeks since then, I would like to recall how the Council's debate unfolded on 22 December 2023 (see S/PV.9520).

A few days earlier, the United Arab Emirates delegation, on behalf of the Arab States, had submitted a very robust draft resolution on expanding the humanitarian assistance to Gaza (S/2023/1029), which also contained a crucial political element: a clear and unequivocal call for a cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip. Naturally, such a document was not to the liking of Washington, which played an extremely unscrupulous game to water it down as much as possible in order to ensure free rein in Gaza for its principal ally in the Middle East. The most dirtiest means of pressure and blackmail were employed, referred to slyly by our American colleagues as "effective bilateral diplomacy". We witnessed that in all its glory during the negotiations on the draft

resolution, and frankly speaking, it was a very ugly spectacle. After several days of active arm-twisting, the United States succeeded in completely distorting the original intent of the draft resolution. Instead of a call for a cessation of hostilities, the wording in the text reflected the complete opposite — a call to create the conditions for a cessation of hostilities. That is de facto licence for Israel to kill Palestinian civilians in Gaza under the pretext that cleansing the Strip is supposedly a step towards creating those conditions.

Guided by our unconditional moral imperative to save civilian lives in Gaza, we could not allow the Security Council to adopt a document tailored to American needs that would sanction the continued extermination of Gazans. The Russian Federation therefore proposed an amendment to the draft resolution that would have restored the wording from the original draft of the United Arab Emirates on the need for a cessation of hostilities, supported by the Group of Arab States. The amendment was supported by 10 Council members. The United Kingdom, Japan, Switzerland and Albania abstained, which is also very telling, given the statements they have made regarding their commitment to international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians. Only one delegation — the United States — voted against it. In doing so, Washington really revealed its true colours, showing that the real aim of all that behind-the-scenes intrigue was not to develop a compromise text, as the American delegation hypocritically claimed earlier, but rather to push through the Council the ability to give a free rein to the Israeli leadership to take any steps, including the most inhumane ones, to further cleanse Gaza.

As a result, the discussion on Gaza in the Council in 2023 ended on a sad, if not tragic, note. But it is not the case that the Council was unable to fulfil the mandate entrusted to it to maintain peace and security because of its institutional peculiarities. In December last year, the Council came closer than ever to a consensus on demanding a ceasefire from the parties in order to ensure safe conditions for the delivery of necessary humanitarian assistance to all those in need in the region's oldest conflict hotspot. The only reason for the Council's failure to demand a ceasefire is the destructive policy of the United States, which has used every political and diplomatic lever in its arsenal — not for the sake of peacemaking, but to deliberately undermine multilateral efforts under the

auspices of the United Nations in order to serve its own vested geopolitical interests in the Middle East.

The sad outcome of this is that in the three months of escalation in Gaza, the Council has been able to adopt only the toothless Security Council resolution 2712 (2023), adopted on 15 November 2023, and the abovementioned highly dubious resolution 2720 (2023) of 22 December 2023. It is regrettable that no proper response was given to António Guterres' appeal to the Council invoking Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations. Russia abstained in the voting on both resolutions. We refrained from voting against them solely based on the requests of Palestinian and Arab representatives. But I want to reiterate once again that we categorically disagree with the content of the current operative paragraph 2 of resolution 2720 (2023), and we believe that the responsibility for all its possible ramifications should fall on those States that gave their consent to the version pushed through by the United States.

There have been no glimmers of hope in the horrific humanitarian situation in Gaza. More than 22,000 Gazans have died, approximately 53,000 people have been wounded, and some 10,000 more are missing or under the rubble. Instead of humanitarian aims being achieved, according to the World Food Programme, more than half a million people in the Gaza Strip are suffering from hunger, and children who have fled to the south of the Gaza receive only 10 per cent of their daily needs in water. One of the six Israeli border crossing points, Kerem Shalom, was not opened until 71 days after the Israeli operation began. The Secretary-General and the heads of the United Nations specialized humanitarian agencies have stated time and again that it is not possible to deliver aid to Gaza under the conditions of massive strikes and bombings, that the goods that do get allowed in are a drop in the ocean of human suffering and needs, and that the civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities, has been almost completely destroyed.

In that context, we believe that a clear call by the Security Council for a comprehensive ceasefire remains an imperative. Without it, as we have already seen from resolution 2712 (2023), implementing the Council's decisions in Gaza is simply not possible. During his briefing to the Council on 8 December 2023 (see S/PV.9498), Secretary-General Guterres unequivocally pointed that out. A similar conclusion can be drawn from his letter circulated to the Council with the options for monitoring resolution 2712 (2023).

We believe, however, that no matter how much the United States resists in order to favour its principal ally in the Middle East, the Council will nonetheless return to this issue and clearly and unequivocally demand a cessation of hostilities. Without that, all humanitarian efforts will be paralysed.

Since the 7 October 2023 attacks, which we categorically condemned, the spiral of violence that the world is witnessing on a daily basis has taken on truly catastrophic proportions. It is clear that this will continue to occur in the Middle East until the long-standing injustice at the root of this conflict is addressed and the Palestinian people are able to enjoy the right provided for them in the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly to establish their own independent State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Only such a balanced approach based on international law will bring a lasting peace. In the current circumstances, our shared goal is to assist the parties in establishing a negotiation process. All contentious issues must be resolved within that framework. What is needed is a collective diplomatic mechanism focused on creating conditions for implementing the decisions of the international community. One of the most pressing and urgent tasks is the restoration of Palestinian unity.

For our part, well before the October 2023 escalation of the confrontation in the Gaza Strip, last spring we proposed holding ministerial consultations to consolidate the positions of the regional players involved in order to help to restore the unity of the Palestinian people and organizations. That initiative remains on the table. Otherwise, amid the paralysis of the Palestinian question, the world will have no choice but to watch the Gaza Strip — the people of which have been deprived throughout their history of any hope for peaceful skies over their heads — be wiped off the map.

Mrs. Güven (Türkiye): As a co-sponsor of resolution 76/262 on the veto initiative and a vocal supporter of Security Council reform, Türkiye welcomes the convening of this debate. Resolution 76/262 strengthened the collective response of the wider United Nations membership to the use of the veto by the five permanent members of the Council.

We are here today because the Security Council, which holds the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, has failed to deliver. We are here today because the

deadliest and most destructive catastrophe in recent history has been unfolding in Gaza, in total disregard for international law. As the conflict enters its fourth month, civilians in the Gaza Strip continue to be targeted in relentless bombardments by Israel. Civilians are increasingly at risk from preventable diseases and malnutrition. The obvious risk to international peace and security led the Secretary-General to invoke Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations for the first time during his tenure.

Yet over 22,000 civilians have lost their lives in just three months, while the demands for a ceasefire and even for a cessation of hostilities fell on deaf ears. Almost 60,000 civilians have been wounded, while resolutions aimed at bringing an end to that humanmade disaster were obstructed. As we speak, almost 2 million Gazans are displaced and in dire need of safe shelter. It is the largest displacement of Palestinians since 1948. Driving an entire population out of their homes is a grave violation of international law. We categorically reject the unacceptable statements on the resettlement of Palestinians outside of Gaza.

The only viable solution to the conflict is a political solution based on a two-State vision, not war and destruction. The risk of regional spillover is grave. All of those points amount to clear evidence that there is an urgent need for an immediate ceasefire.

Under this roof, as the larger membership, we are proud to have adopted two resolutions that call for a ceasefire (resolutions ES-10/21 and ES-10/22) and to have remained on the right side of history. My country also adopted a principled approach in rejecting the war in Ukraine and manifested its position by supporting all relevant General Assembly resolutions. Despite the very strong calls from within this Hall, from United Nations agencies and from the international community, and the outcry of the millions of people who took to the streets all around the world, the Security Council was unable to adopt a single resolution on Gaza for over a month. The two resolutions that were eventually adopted (Security Council resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023)) failed to call for what is fundamentally needed to stop the bloodshed in Gaza, namely, an immediate ceasefire.

The General Assembly is the sole entirely universal and therefore most representative organ of the United Nations. As the epitome of multilateralism, the Assembly has priority over all organs. The use of the veto at the Security Council has become an arbitrary and

detrimental tool whereby common good is sacrificed for individual interests. The inaction on Gaza has been another case in point. The pursuit of self-interest in that organ not only undermines multilateralism, but also weakens the credibility of the United Nations system as a whole. The need for Security Council reform is indisputable and undeferrable. The reform process needs to address and eliminate the current shortcomings of the Security Council, primarily the use of the veto.

Humankind deserves a more representative, democratic, transparent, accountable and effective Security Council. To that end, Türkiye will continue to constructively engage in reform efforts, promoting a comprehensive and inclusive approach that would benefit all Member States.

Mr. Lagatie (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): We welcome the adoption by the Security Council of a resolution (resolution 2720 (2023)) that should enable the acceleration of the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Belgium also welcomes the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag to the post of Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza and will fully support her in the exercise of her duties. The resolutions of the Security Council, in particular resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023), must be implemented as soon as possible.

Belgium considers that the following points must be afforded our full attention so that they may be taken up as quickly as possible in resolutions adopted by the Security Council or by the Assembly.

First, Belgium regrets that Hamas and the other terrorist groups involved in the 7 October 2023 attacks have still not been condemned by the Assembly or by the Security Council. Terrorism and violent extremism claim victims everywhere, as the tragic events of the past week have once again reminded us. They must be denounced and fought against in all circumstances. Belgium supports concrete actions in that direction, in particular with a view to putting an end to the financing of such groups and the arms transfers from which they benefit.

Respect for international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, is a cornerstone of peace and security. Belgium calls for all violations of international law and international humanitarian law to be listed and investigated so that their perpetrators are held to account. The indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force; obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid; the use

of civilians as human shields; the use of humanitarian infrastructure for military purposes; the forced displacement of populations; and settlement actions are illegal under international law. The Assembly and the Security Council must act to put an end to them.

Belgium is horrified by the acts of sexual violence perpetrated on 7 October 2023 and since that date. Such acts constitute war crimes on which full light must be shed. Belgium therefore advocates and supports the following actions.

First, the implementation of a lasting humanitarian ceasefire that could ultimately lead to an end to hostilities. Safe, unhindered and expanded humanitarian access must be guaranteed immediately, and the delivery of humanitarian assistance must be increased. Belgium contributed €22.8 million, including €4 million allocated since 7 October 2023. The risk of famine in Gaza is unbearable and must make us take action without further delay.

Secondly, all hostages must be released immediately and without conditions.

Thirdly, there must be support for the investigation by the International Criminal Court, which has jurisdiction over all acts committed in the Palestinian territories or by nationals of States parties to the Rome Statute, and therefore over Hamas terrorists.

Fourthly, provocations by both sides must cease. The escalation of the situation and the conflagration of the region will only benefit the enemies of peace.

Finally, it is necessary to establish a political horizon whereby Israel is guaranteed the possibility of living in peace and security, the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people is realized, and the foundations for a two-State solution are laid.

Mr. Gaouaoui (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): We meet today after the veto was used against a proposal requesting a cessation of hostilities in Gaza (see S/PV.9520). That was an extremely important request in view of the tragic humanitarian circumstances that Gaza is experiencing due to acts of aggression by the occupying forces.

Rejection of the cessation of acts of aggression has doubled the suffering of Palestinians and has unfortunately hindered the ability of the international community to provide timely support. The number of those killed has exceeded 22,000, 70 per cent of whom

were women and children. There is no drinking water whatsoever in northern Gaza, and children in southern Gaza lack 90 per cent of their basic needs for water. Moreover, 85 per cent of Gaza's residents have been forcibly displaced. From this rostrum, Algeria therefore reiterates its categorical rejection of all schemes aimed at forcibly displacing Palestinians from their land or forcefully evicting them from it. Everyone must realize that there is no place for Palestinians except on their land, and any displacement is a blatant violation of international law.

We cannot claim that Security Council resolution 2720 (2023) meets the requirements of humanitarian actors. The Secretary-General was clear when he stated after the adoption of that resolution that "a humanitarian ceasefire is the only way to begin to meet the dire needs of people in Gaza".

We must stand solemnly and firmly to put an end to the violations to which the Palestinian people are being subjected. There must be an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza. That is a collective responsibility that we must all work to achieve as a first step. Our utmost objective must be to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their legitimate rights and the establishment of their independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Larsen (Australia): Australia welcomes the special report provided by the President of the Security Council on the use of the veto at its 9520th meeting (A/78/691). We thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting in line with resolution 76/262, known as the veto initiative. Australia is a long-standing supporter of the initiative as a mechanism for bringing greater transparency and accountability to the use of the veto. To that end, we thank the United States for its statement explaining its use of the veto on 22 December 2023.

Australia unequivocally condemns the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks as abhorrent acts of terror. We continue to call for the immediate release of all hostages. We have consistently reaffirmed Israel's right to defend itself, but we have also said that the way it does so matters. Israel must respect international humanitarian law and protect civilian lives and civilian infrastructure.

Australia welcomes the Security Council's adoption of resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) and the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza.

We are concerned by the Secretary-General's report that resolution 2712 (2023) remains under-implemented. We call for its full and expedited delivery. We also want to see humanitarian pauses resume so that urgent aid can flow to civilians in Gaza. Such pauses are important steps towards a permanent and sustainable ceasefire.

Australia remains concerned about the potential for the conflict to spill over regionally, and we urge restraint along the Blue Line and for parties to respect Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). We reiterate that ongoing Houthi attacks in the Red Sea are unacceptable and destabilizing.

Australia made its position on this conflict clear in our statement at the resumed tenth emergency special session on 12 December 2023 (see A/ES-10/PV.45), and we reiterate that position. We remain committed to a just peace in the form of a two-State solution whereby Israelis and Palestinians live securely side by side within internationally recognized borders.

Finally, today's proceedings remind us of our collective interest as members of the Assembly in full implementation of resolution 76/262.

Mr. Jadoon (Pakistan): I thank you the President for convening today's meeting following the use of veto by a permanent member of the Security Council on 22 December 2023 (see S/PV.9520).

Israel's war in Gaza is brutal — a veritable genocide. Israel's indiscriminate slaughter of innocent Palestinian civilians, including children and women, is a flagrant violation of international law, including the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. This genocidal war must be stopped forthwith in accordance with the international community's resounding call for an immediate and unconditional humanitarian ceasefire in resolutions ES-10/21 and ES-10/22, and also reflected in the 13 votes cast in favour of a ceasefire in the Security Council, as well as the Secretary-General's invocation of Article 99 of the Charter to end this war.

Pakistan strongly and unequivocally condemns Israel's rejection of a humanitarian ceasefire. The Security Council, entrusted with the primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security, has regrettably failed in fulfilling its obligation to impose a ceasefire. The Council has been paralysed owing to the resistance and negative vote of a permanent

member. A heavy responsibility rests on those who have enabled the prolongation of this war and the continuing slaughter of innocent civilians in Gaza. This most recent exercise of the veto reinforces our conviction that the reform of the Security Council should not add more permanent members to its composition.

The failure to halt the Israeli war poses an imminent risk of escalation that could engulf the entire region. Pakistan therefore reiterates its call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. Beyond the imperative of an immediate and sustainable humanitarian ceasefire, we must ensure the provision of adequate humanitarian assistance to the besieged population of Gaza. The right to life and dignity must not be sacrificed at the altar of geopolitical interests.

Israel's refusal to stop the slaughter and impede the supply of humanitarian assistance, coupled with forced displacements in Gaza, represent blatant violations of established international law. There must be consequences and accountability for such criminal actions that we have been witnessing for far too long in occupied Palestine. Pakistan welcomes South Africa's initiative to bring Israel's transgressions under the Genocide Convention to the International Court of Justice. Pakistan also looks forward to the advisory opinion of the Court on the legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The root cause of this crisis lies in Israel's prolonged occupation and denial of Palestinians' inalienable right to self-determination. Israel's brutal campaign against the occupied people of Palestine struggling for their freedom cannot be justified under the guise of self-defence. The international community cannot accept the *fait accompli* Israel is seeking to impose to destroy Palestinian nationhood. The choice before us regarding Palestine is stark: engage in a determined and sustained diplomatic endeavour to implement the two-State solution or bear witness to the ongoing genocide perpetrated by extremist Israeli leaders, with the tacit or explicit support of some foreign political leaders. Indeed, there is no choice. We must work collectively to prevent the genocide in Palestine, achieve a two-State solution and establish a secure, viable, contiguous and sovereign State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Song Kim (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Despite the efforts of the international

community for peace and stability, the situation in Gaza is worsening by the day. We are witnessing a catastrophe and unbearable tragedy in Gaza, where more than 20,000 innocent Palestinian people have been killed and critical civilian infrastructure has been completely destroyed by the indiscriminate bombardment of Israel. The urgent suspension of hostilities and a ceasefire is not just a choice, but also an obligation under international law, including international humanitarian law.

However, the unanimous desire of the international community for an immediate ceasefire and a suspension of hostilities in Gaza was mercilessly trampled once again owing to the United States exercise of its veto power.

At the Security Council meeting held on 22 December 2023 (see S/PV.9520), the United States cast a veto on the oral amendment calling for an urgent suspension of hostilities to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access merely because the oral amendment was proposed by the Russian Federation. This means that, on issues of international peace and security, the United States bases its decisions not on the norms of international law but on its own discretion and criteria of who initiated the action instead of what action was initiated.

At Security Council meetings in October and December (see S/PV.9442 and S/PV.9499), the United States exercised its veto power on draft resolution S/2023/970 calling for an immediate ceasefire and on draft resolution S/2023/773 calling for a humanitarian pause, proposed by the United Arab Emirates and Brazil, respectively, while talking about Israel's right to self-defence, thereby actively patronizing Israel's atrocity of the massacre of civilians in the Gaza Strip. That is a typical manifestation and expression of illegal double standards.

The United States branded our exercise of the right to self-defence as a threat to international peace and security, but it is actively patronizing and whitewashing Israel's massacre of civilians and atrocities as the exercise of the right to self-defence.

Before exercising its veto power on the ground of Israel's right to self-defence, the United States should have explained why the sanction resolutions of the Security Council against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea do not contain a single word recognizing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's right to self-defence.

As long as the United States consistently resorts to its one-sided support policy for Israel, the painstaking efforts of the international community to achieve an immediate ceasefire, suspend Israel's hostilities and save the lives of a great number of innocent Palestinian people will fail.

We expect urgent action to be taken to ensure the implementation of resolution 2720 (2023) adopted at the Security Council to immediately allow safe, unhindered and expanded humanitarian access and to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of the hostilities by Israel.

In conclusion, my delegation once again expresses its unwavering support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just struggle to regain their legitimate national rights, including the establishment of an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): Malta regrets the context that has necessitated the holding of this debate. The gravity of the situation in the Middle East is undeniably severe. It is unfortunate that the Security Council was unable to respond to that severity with clear and necessary terms.

Unity among Council members on such issues is necessary in order to protect the principles of the Charter of the United Nations which remain a backbone of effective multilateralism.

At the meeting in which Security Council resolution 2720 (2023) was adopted, on 22 December 2023, Malta had supported the amendment that was subsequently vetoed (see S/PV.9520). Had the amendment been adopted, the resolution would have called for the urgent suspension of hostilities in a more determined and decisive manner.

We reiterate our belief that an immediate humanitarian ceasefire is the only way to put an end to the unprecedented human suffering unfolding in Gaza and in Israel.

The reports of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that Gaza has become effectively uninhabitable are extremely troubling when one also considers that Gaza is still home to more than 2 million Palestinians, half of whom are children. The civilian population remains besieged by heavy Israeli military attacks, compounded by extremely limited access to

life-saving necessities. The risks of famine and a public health crisis are growing every day.

International humanitarian law and the laws of war are clear. They apply to all parties. Military actions during hostilities must always be in line with the principles of distinction, proportionality and necessity. Parties are also obliged to ensure that civilians and civilian infrastructure are protected. Unhindered humanitarian aid and the safety of United Nations and humanitarian workers must be guaranteed.

In that regard, Malta calls for the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023). Adherence to those resolutions is crucial if we are to reduce the staggering level of human suffering.

At the same time, Malta unequivocally condemns Hamas's terror acts of 7 October 2023 and the recurring indiscriminate rocket fire at Israeli civilians. We denounce Hamas's tactic of embedding itself among civilians and civilian infrastructure in Gaza, as well as reports of sexual violence. Malta calls for the immediate release of hostages per Security Council resolution 2712 (2023) and deplores any violence they endure in captivity.

Turning to the broader region, the conflict has awakened increased regional turbulence and risks of conflagration. Flashpoints of spillover in the West Bank, the Israeli-Lebanese border and the Red Sea are deeply concerning and must be mitigated as a matter of urgency. We call for all parties concerned to exercise restraint, de-escalate and respect the norms of international law.

As the Gaza hostilities persist, a focus on immediate challenges is crucial, yet planning for the future is also imperative. A post-hostility scenario demands reinforcing the Palestinian Authority for effective governance, aligned with a two-State solution, with Gaza as part of an independent Palestinian State. A serious strategic dialogue aimed at realizing those objectives is imperative.

Malta reiterates its commitment to the realization of a two-State solution along the pre-1967 borders, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States, living side by side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

Mr. Young (United Kingdom): We have heard repeated warnings from humanitarian experts on the ground in Gaza that 9 out of 10 people are getting only one meal a day, that more than half a million people are projected to be facing catastrophic levels of hunger and that disease is spreading in overcrowded areas as people go without basic health care, shelter and clean water, so it is devastating to hear that aid is still piling up outside Gaza, undelivered to those in desperate need.

The United Kingdom reiterates its strong support for Security Council resolution 2720 (2023), of which it voted in favour, and reiterates its thanks to the United Arab Emirates for its leadership. The resolution set out the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access, the release of hostages and steps towards a sustainable ceasefire, where Hamas can no longer pose a threat to Israel.

The United Kingdom, as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, considers the veto to be a heavy responsibility to be used in the interests of securing the peace and security that people around the world seek. It should be exercised responsibly and with caution.

Resolution 2720 (2023) is definitive. It demands that the parties to the conflict allow, facilitate and enable the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout the Gaza Strip. We call on all parties to implement that resolution in full. We want to see at least 500 aid and private sector trucks enter Gaza every day — far more than the 150 currently taking place.

Israel should accelerate and rationalize its screening, clear the backlog of loaded trucks in Egypt and do everything else it can in order to facilitate aid into Gaza. Israel should also open more entry points for longer — 24 hours a day, seven days a week — if security allows.

The United Kingdom warmly welcomes the appointment of Sigrid Kaag as the Organization's Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. She brings a vast wealth of experience to this crisis. All parties to the conflict should cooperate fully with her and her team.

The United Kingdom is also clear that Israel should renew visas for the staff of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. The Foreign Secretary has consistently raised those issues with his

Israeli counterparts, including Foreign Minister Israel Katz and Israel's Minister of Strategic Affairs, Ron Dermer. The Foreign Secretary also appointed Mark Bryson-Richardson, in December, as his Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the occupied Palestinian territories in order to coordinate our efforts to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Mr. Abd Karim (Malaysia): My delegation and I would like to thank the President for convening today's plenary meeting following the veto cast by a permanent member during the meeting of the Security Council on 22 December (see S/PV.9520) under the agenda item "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

While we welcome the convening of this meeting, pursuant to resolution 76/262, we regret the exercise of the veto by a permanent member of the Security Council, which has led to this plenary meeting. The exercise of the veto prevented the adoption of an oral amendment calling for an urgent suspension of hostilities, which was proposed by another permanent member.

Malaysia believes that the call for an urgent suspension of hostilities, which received 10 votes in favour in the Security Council, would have made a significant difference had it not been vetoed. With a Security Council resolution calling for urgent suspension of hostilities, the killing of innocent Palestinian civilians could have been stopped and more humanitarian aid could have reached those in desperate need.

Alas, that did not come to pass due to the absence of unity in the Security Council on the Palestinian question. The unconditional support of a permanent member for Israel once again prevented the Security Council from discharging its primary responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations, leading to further loss of innocent lives on a daily basis.

As it stands, the death toll in Gaza has exceeded 22,000, about 70 per cent of which are women and children. Tragically, more than 9,600 children have been killed. Many more have been maimed and orphaned. At least 79 journalists and media personnel have also died — the highest number recorded in any conflict ever. In addition, 146 United Nations staff have also been killed. How many more innocent lives — humanitarian and health workers, media personnel, the elderly, women and children — have to

die before those opposing a ceasefire in the Security Council can see that enough is enough?

My delegation continues to be appalled by Israel's continued belligerence in Gaza, with excessive and disproportionate force, showing utter disregard for its duty to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Hospitals continue to be targeted, and there is little protection for health and humanitarian workers.

The flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza and throughout Gaza continues to be impeded. United Nations humanitarian agencies have long described the humanitarian condition in Gaza to be dire. Three months into the war, Martin Griffiths, head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said that the people of Gaza face a daily threat to their very existence and that Gaza is now uninhabitable. He warned that famine is looming and that a public health disaster is unfolding in Gaza.

Eighty-seven per cent of the population of Gaza — 1.9 million Gazans — have been internally displaced a few times over. Since the war began, and for a long time now, nowhere is safe in Gaza. Israeli forces have been relentless in bombing the Gaza Strip, including in the south, to where it had told Palestinians to evacuate. We condemn and reject the calls by some Israeli ministers and legislators for the Palestinians to be resettled out of Gaza. That brings to mind ethnic cleansing and is a clear violation of international law.

Malaysia joins other Member States in calling for the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. The Council must act responsibly and decisively to stop Israel's unlawful collective punishment of the Palestinians. As the war in Gaza rages on, we will soon come to a point where any action taken by the Security Council would only be too little, too late. Let us be clear that those opposing a ceasefire will be complicit in the genocide of Gazans and have blood on hands.

The impunity enjoyed by Israel challenges the legitimacy of international law. It also undermines efforts towards a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict, in accordance with the two-State solution. In that regard, Malaysia welcomes the decision by South Africa to institute proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice concerning violations by Israel of its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in relation to Palestinians in the

Gaza Strip. The proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice are a timely and tangible step towards legal accountability for Israel's atrocities and violations of international law in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territory at large.

Malaysia holds the position that the exercise of the veto by permanent members of the Security Council should be regulated to prohibit it from being used unjustifiably or abused by permanent members against the wishes of the majority of Member States. It should not be used in situations involving mass atrocity crimes, such as genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. Malaysia is also of the view that to be effective and more accountable, the veto should be exercised by at least two of the five permanent members and supported by three non-permanent members of the Security Council. The decision must then be supported by the General Assembly with a simple majority vote. However, in the long run, we believe that the veto has no place in a modern and democratic multilateral architecture. Malaysia wishes to reiterate our call for the veto to be abolished.

The veto and its undemocratic nature runs against the very principles upon which the United Nations was built. Malaysia will continue to work constructively with other Member States through the intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform in order to improve the United Nations by making it more efficient, open, transparent and inclusive.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): In the last days of its 2022–2023 mandate as an elected member of the Security Council, Brazil voted in favour of both resolution 2720 (2023) and the amendment proposed by the Russian Federation. We regret that there is still no consensus among Council members, despite repeated calls by the majority of the international community, including the General Assembly, for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and a cessation of hostilities in the conflict in Gaza.

The dire situation in Gaza worsens every day, and the remaining hostages have not been released. The protection of civilians in conflict is an obligation of all parties involved and should be respected at all times. No one is allowed to violate the strict norms of international humanitarian law.

Following the adoption of resolution 2720 (2023), Brazil welcomes the appointment by the Secretary-General of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Humanitarian and

Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. We look forward to her contributions to alleviating the unbearable suffering of Palestinians in Gaza. We appreciate the efforts of all those who have facilitated the use of available crossings by United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners. We look forward to seeing Security Council resolutions implemented and respected by all.

Throughout Brazil's most recent tenure on the Council, and particularly in the aftermath of the 7 October 2023 terrorist attacks against Israel that triggered this new phase in the 75-year Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we have been unwavering in our support for peace and a sustainable future for both Palestinians and Israelis. It is essential that the Security Council remain engaged in seeking an end to hostilities and in paving the way for renewed and effective peace talks. Brazil encourages Council members to raise their level of ambition and to never give up in the face of difficulties in providing a stronger response to the crisis. As we have always done and as we insisted in the Council, we will continue to reiterate our consistent and firm commitment to a two-State solution to the Palestinian question, with a viable State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Marschik (Austria): We gather here in the General Assembly today once again because a veto was cast in the Security Council (see S/PV.9520). That is why we are here: to discuss that veto. My remarks will therefore focus on that. Austria's position on the situation in the Middle East and the desperate humanitarian crisis in Gaza has been outlined in detail on other occasions.

Let me start by thanking the President of the General Assembly for convening the meeting, and the representative of the United States for outlining the reasons for casting the veto. As members know, the veto in question was cast against an oral amendment. That makes it slightly different from previous instances in which we have met in the General Assembly to discuss the use of a veto. This time, the Security Council was not prevented from acting. It was still able to adopt a resolution (Security Council resolution 2720 (2023)). In previous situations — whether in the Middle East, such as in Syria, or in Mali or Ukraine — draft resolutions as a whole were vetoed and one or more permanent members blocked Council action. But on 22 December 2023, a resolution on humanitarian aid for the Gaza

Strip was adopted. We welcome the fact that the Council thereby lived up to its mandate to maintain international peace and security in that particular case. In our view, the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security was discharged correctly in accordance with Article 24 of the Charter of the United Nations.

The wider purpose of the veto initiative (see resolution 76/262), as we understand it, was to hold the Council accountable to the General Assembly in case it is completely unable to act. Although the United States vetoed an oral amendment proposal by the Russian Federation, it did not prevent the Council from discharging its function in that case. That is different from the actions of permanent members in the other situations to which I referred.

While we have political understanding for the concerns of the United States, we are, however, of the view that every veto in the Security Council should be met with the same consequences. We therefore welcome the holding of this debate to increase transparency. The veto initiative as a whole strengthened the General Assembly to react in situations regarding matters of peace and security. We also take note that the special report (A/78/691) was submitted in a timely manner.

The five permanent members of the Council have been accorded a special responsibility with their right to veto. We are relieved that, in this case, the use of the veto did not hinder the Council in fulfilling its mandate. But we call on the Council members to put peace and people's lives at the centre, to put national interests second and to enable the Security Council to effectively assume its role as the guardian of international peace and security, especially in cases of humanitarian crises.

Mr. Van Schalkwyk (South Africa): I thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this debate on the use of the veto in the Security Council.

First, we would like to express our sadness and condolences to all those who are going through the harrowing experience of unabated war in Gaza, Israel, the West Bank and the greater region.

On 22 December 2023, the Security Council attempted to adopt a resolution calling for an urgently needed ceasefire in Gaza. Unfortunately, owing to a veto from a permanent member of the Security Council, text calling for a ceasefire was removed and replaced with text outlining a complex set of arrangements to

deliver humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza (see S/PV.9520). Although the people of Gaza need all possible assistance, the final text of the resolution (Security Council resolution 2720 (2023)) is detached from the ongoing painful reality on the ground.

We cannot allow for senseless bombing to continue under the misleading and inaccurate guise of the right to self-defence. If we, as the international community, truly hope to alleviate the suffering of the residents of Gaza, we must demand an immediate ceasefire. Let us remind ourselves that the United Nations was created to avert war and not to stand by and allow it to continue. Over the past few months, we have witnessed dramatic and horrific images of civilians killed, wounded and captured. We have seen daily images of families leaving their livelihoods behind, internally displaced in a territory that has been under siege and largely deprived of water, food and other basic supplies. All of that has occurred while the Security Council has been unable to adopt a resolution that sufficiently curtails the violence and brings us closer to a peaceful solution to that long-standing conflict.

It is important to us to note that the current and ongoing atrocities are just the most recent chapter in a painful history of suffering, deprivation, oppression, occupation and conflict going back more than 75 years. From the attitude of some, it appears as though Palestinians do not hold the same human rights or human dignity as their neighbours in Israel. That is unacceptable and needs to change. It is reminiscent of the behaviour of colonialism and subjugation that parts of the world, including Africa, have incurred in the past.

The ongoing bombardment of Gaza by Israel is creating one of the worst human-made humanitarian catastrophes. Those engaged in active warfare must be reminded that the targeting of civilians is illegal and against international law.

Likewise, the targeting of civilian infrastructure is illegal under international humanitarian law. What we have seen in Gaza over the past months are indiscriminate attacks and bombardment — two elements that international humanitarian law expressly prohibits. It is for that reason that we appeal to all actively involved in this conflict to bring about a ceasefire that allows for the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Successive Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 have provided the United Nations Human

Rights Council with reports on the appalling conditions in the occupied territories, including Gaza. Human Rights Watch and the current Special Rapporteur, Ms. Francesca Albanese, have also characterized the area as an open-air prison, with movement in and out of the Strip restricted.

The current military actions of Israel towards Gaza are also reminiscent of the collective punishment conducted by South Africa's apartheid Government as it sought to destroy those fighting for their legitimate rights and freedoms. It is our obligation as members of the international community to prevent violations of international law and indiscriminate attacks against civilians.

We cannot proclaim the importance of international law or the rules-based international order and the importance of the Charter of the United Nations in some situations, but not in others. For international law to be credible, it should be uniformly applied and not selectively. No country or people should be immune from its application. We must affirm that United Nations resolutions and international law matter. The international community cannot avoid its duty to act, and together we must shoulder the responsibility to remove obstacles to peace and violations of international law.

It is for that reason that South Africa has submitted an application to the International Court of Justice to investigate crimes of genocide and to provide provisional measures to protect the rights of those living in Gaza. As we have repeatedly stated, since the latest explosion of war engulfed Gaza, there must be an immediate cessation of acts of war between the two sides, the opening of humanitarian corridors and a United Nations-led negotiation process towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We emphasize also that the solution must be led by the Palestinians and the Israelis themselves, which we hope will lead to a just and lasting peace that satisfies the human rights, dignity and aspirations of all people on both sides of this conflict. We have to accept that no real and lasting peace in Israel, Palestine and the region is possible in the absence of a just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict. Israelis, Palestinians and the region do not stand to gain anything from escalated tensions, increased violence, growing instability and continued and protracted violence and conflict.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): The President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, called

for immediate work towards a lasting ceasefire, with the help of all regional and international partners. The delivery of more humanitarian aid to the civilian population of Gaza is urgently needed. France recalls that international humanitarian law must be implemented in all circumstances and that we must be able to guarantee full, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian workers. The number of humanitarian workers and United Nations staff who have lost their lives since the beginning of this conflict is unacceptable. In that regard, I commend the critical engagement of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East on the ground.

For all those reasons, France voted in favour of resolution 2720 (2023), which must now be fully implemented. France commends the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza and assures her of our full support. France also voted in favour of resolution 2712 (2023) and the two resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on this matter (resolutions ES-10/21 and ES-10/22). We echo resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) in calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. The Security Council and the General Assembly must condemn the terrorist attacks committed by Hamas and other terrorist groups on 7 October 2023, including the sexual violence used to terrorize their victims.

France will continue to mobilize the Security Council on all aspects of the crisis — security, humanitarian and, above all, political — in order to contribute to a rapid resolution to the crisis based on the two-State solution — the only one that can build a just and lasting peace. It is more necessary than ever to refrain from any unilateral measures on the ground that would distance us from that prospect.

Ms. Brattsted (Norway): Norway co-sponsored resolution 76/262, the landmark veto initiative. The adoption of that resolution was important and a significant step in making the Council more transparent and accountable. It is our opinion that all vetoes deserve to be held to account, including those cast on proposed amendments. We therefore appreciate the opportunity to meet today.

The adoption, on 22 December, of Security Council resolution 2720 (2023), on aid to Gaza, was an important call for safe and unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza. For that to succeed, an immediate humanitarian

ceasefire is urgently needed. We therefore regret the use of the veto on the proposed amendment to the resolution (see S/PV.9520).

As pointed out by the Secretary-General, the international community has the responsibility to use all its influence to prevent further escalation and end the crisis in Gaza. The impending risk of collapse of the humanitarian system entails potentially irreversible implications for peace and security in the entire region and places the civilian population, especially children, in desperate conditions. Norway therefore reiterates its call for a durable and sustained humanitarian ceasefire. The suffering in Gaza must stop. The hostages must be released.

I would like to end by thanking the presidency and the members of the Security Council for sending the General Assembly a special report (A/78/691), submitted pursuant to resolution 76/262. Furthermore, we encourage the President of the General Assembly to send a summary from today's debate back to the Security Council.

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): The catastrophe in Gaza is unimaginable. More than 22,000 people, 70 per cent of whom are women and children, are reported killed in Gaza since 7 October 2023. The protection of civilians is the core pillar of international humanitarian law, but with the continued air strikes and shelling, civilians are in constant danger. We again urge all parties to strictly abide by the rules under international law, including international humanitarian law.

While we stress the utmost importance of the protection of civilians, we must not forget how this atrocity was triggered three months ago. In that regard, we once again strongly condemn the horrific terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel and urge the immediate and unconditional release of all the remaining hostages. We believe that all States have the right and duty to protect themselves and their citizens, but this right must be exercised in compliance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law.

Last month, after an extended discussion among relevant parties, and with the support of countries of the region, the Security Council adopted resolution 2720 (2023), demanding compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of

humanitarian assistance at scale, and calling for urgent steps to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities. We understand that this resolution is not a perfect one. However, this was an important step not only to save lives on the ground, but also to steer the current catastrophe towards a sustainable cessation of hostilities.

The implementation of resolution 2720 (2023) is vastly more important than its mere adoption. And every day matters. In that vein, we welcome the Secretary-General's appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. Cooperation and support for her work, by all relevant countries, are essential to accelerate the delivery of life-saving humanitarian aid to those in need in Gaza.

While we are deeply concerned by the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, we are also alarmed by the escalating spillover to other parts of the region. We urge maximum restraint by all actors in the region. The ongoing hostilities and their dire consequences clearly indicate that achieving a sustainable solution to this conflict is desperately needed now more than any time before. Now is the time for us to more seriously consider the day after the conflict. We all know the only way to stop the cycle of violence is the realization of the two-State solution. The Republic of Korea, being a member of the Security Council, will work tirelessly in cooperation with other members of the Security Council to contribute to the realization of this aspiration of the entire world.

Mr. Malovrh (Slovenia): Humanitarian organizations, United Nations entities, medical personnel, journalists, people on the ground and many countries in the General Assembly, including Slovenia, are calling for one thing: a ceasefire. Twenty-two thousand civilians have been killed and over 57,000 wounded, mostly women and children. Only a cessation of hostilities can prevent the continuation of the current alarming scale of killing, suffering and destruction.

Slovenia has been clear and will continue to condemn the terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023. We are also deeply concerned by the information about sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas. Once again, we call upon Hamas to immediately and unconditionally release all hostages. However, what we are witnessing in Gaza today are grave violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law. Despite appeals by the General Assembly

and the Security Council and the endeavours of many countries and humanitarian organizations, the amount of humanitarian aid entering Gaza remains critically insufficient. That is also clearly highlighted in the letter from the Secretary-General dated 5 January (S/2024/26).

There is today a higher percentage of people facing hunger in Gaza than anywhere else in the world. The people in Gaza are in dire need of medical supplies, fuel and shelter equipment. More than 400,000 cases of infectious diseases have been reported thus far. It is imperative to re-establish essential services, such as health care and safe water supply, and to provide shelter for 1.9 million displaced persons — that is almost as much as the entire population of Slovenia.

We welcome the adoption of two Security Council resolutions on specific aspects of the crisis (resolution 2712 (2023) and resolution 2720 (2023)). However, the steps taken thus far have not been enough. We therefore regret the use of the veto. Given the numerous reports of the devastating situation on the ground, we should not be merely taking steps to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities. People are dying, starving and are without water, appropriate shelter and access to basic health care and security. This is a dire humanitarian situation that needs our decisive action. We therefore urge all parties to intensify efforts towards ensuring the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance, and to uphold the principles of international law, prioritizing the protection of civilians.

The General Assembly has been clear: 153 States called for a ceasefire (see resolution ES-10/22). In June last year, the same number of countries voted to elect Slovenia to serve as an elected member of the Security Council (see A/77/PV.75 (Resumption 1)). We took on this new role with a great sense of responsibility and with a clear priority of protecting the most vulnerable. We can achieve that only by fully respecting international law, especially international humanitarian and human rights law. Nothing less should be acceptable. It is imperative that we take immediate action to alleviate the ongoing suffering and destruction occurring in Gaza. By doing so, we can begin to rebuild trust within the Organization and demonstrate our commitment to uphold international law and protect the most vulnerable populations. It is only through responsible and decisive action that we can bring about a sustainable and lasting solution to the human catastrophe in Gaza and embark on a meaningful political process that will lead to a two-State solution.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this morning. We will hear the remaining speakers this afternoon at 3 p.m. in this Hall after the consideration of agenda item 13, as announced in *The Journal of the United Nations*.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 63.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.