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New York

President: Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America)

Members:

Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mr. Dharmadhikari
Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
Japan	Mr. Yamazaki
Malta	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Republic of Korea	Mr. Sangjin Kim
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Sierra Leone	Mr. George
Slovenia	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

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

There being no objection, it is so decided

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations; Ms. Shira Efron, Director of Research at the Israel Policy Forum; and Mr. Michael Levy, brother of Or Levy, who is being held hostage by Hamas.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Khiari.

Mr. Khiari: Since the submission of the Secretary-General's written report on Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), hostilities and violence have continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. In the Gaza Strip, hostilities between Israel Defense Forces and Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups, including heavy Israeli bombardment throughout the Strip, have resulted in heavy casualties. In the occupied West Bank, high levels of violence persist amid ongoing Israeli operations, exchanges with armed Palestinians, settler-related violence and Palestinian attacks against Israel.

Among other deadly strikes in Gaza, on 14 and 15 December at least 69 Palestinians, including women and children, were reportedly killed in four Israeli strikes on schools sheltering internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Gaza City, Beit Hanoun and Khan Younis, including 20 killed in an air strike hitting a

school of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Al-Mawasi, in Khan Younis. The Israel Defense Forces said they were targeting Hamas militants. More than 250 Palestinians were killed in such strikes in Gaza over the past week, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health.

The death toll of this war continues to mount. Since 7 October 2023, more than 45,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the Ministry of Health, and more than 1,700 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed in attacks in, or originating from, Gaza, according to Israeli sources.

In the occupied West Bank, on 12 December, an Israeli boy was killed in a shooting attack on a bus near the Al-Khader junction in the occupied West Bank, south of Jerusalem. Israeli authorities said that the Palestinian perpetrator later turned himself in. On the same day, Israeli forces reportedly killed a Palestinian man in an exchange of fire in the Balata refugee camp, near Nablus.

Serious clashes have also taken place between Palestinian armed groups in the occupied West Bank and Palestinian security forces since the written report, particularly in the Jenin camp, following the Palestinian arrest operation and the seizure of Palestinian Authority vehicles by militants. Over several days, Palestinian security forces have killed an unarmed 19-year-old and detained numerous Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants, while the clashes have caused significant damage to the camp.

I will now highlight some of the Secretary-General's observations regarding the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

"I once again strongly condemn the horrific attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Israel on 7 October 2023 and the continued holding of more than 100 hostages in Gaza. Nothing can justify those acts of terror. All remaining hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. I remain appalled by the fact that there are reasonable grounds to believe that hostages may be subject to ongoing sexual violence and abuse. While in captivity, hostages must be treated humanely and allowed to receive visits and assistance from the Red Cross. I reiterate that there is no justification for the deliberate killing, maiming, torture and abduction of civilians and

other protected persons, or for the use of sexual violence against them. The use of human shields and the firing of indiscriminate rockets towards Israeli population centres are violations of international humanitarian law and must cease.

“Turning to the situation in Gaza, a ceasefire is long overdue. The continued collective punishment of the Palestinian people is unjustifiable. The relentless bombardment of Gaza by Israeli forces, the large number of civilian casualties, the blanket destruction of Palestinian neighbourhoods and the worsening humanitarian situation are horrific. The widespread devastation and deprivation resulting from Israel’s military operations in north Gaza, especially around Jabaliya, Beit Lahya and Beit Hanoun, are making the conditions of life untenable for the Palestinian population there. I condemn Israel’s use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in densely populated areas, which has caused massive casualties and damage to residential buildings, schools, hospitals, mosques and United Nations premises. United Nations premises are inviolable at all times.

“I reiterate my unequivocal condemnation of the widespread killing and injuring of civilians in Gaza, including women and children, and the deprivation of essentials to survive. I am concerned over what may amount to violations of international humanitarian law in the conduct of hostilities, including non-compliance with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions, in attacks and against the effect of attacks. International humanitarian law always applies to all parties to a conflict, and its application does not depend on reciprocity. The protection of civilians is paramount. There must be full accountability for any atrocity crimes that have been committed.

“I mourn the United Nations personnel killed in Gaza and strongly condemn the killing of all health and humanitarian personnel and journalists. I also condemn the looting of aid in the context of a breakdown of law and order. That is unacceptable and must stop immediately. I reiterate my call for the full investigation of all such incidents and for accountability for any violation of international law.

“Owing to continued restrictions imposed by Israel, looting by armed Palestinians and overall

insecurity, supplies have entered Gaza at levels that are inadequate to meet the overwhelming needs of the population, including large numbers of IDPs living in extremely overcrowded conditions. To address the needs, the United Nations and its partners urgently require the predictable entry and unimpeded movement of food, shelter materials, medicine and fuel and the capacity to repair essential, life-saving infrastructure, including the healthcare system. Noting its opening of additional entry points for humanitarian aid, I call upon Israel to fulfil its obligation as the occupying Power under international law, including allowing and facilitating the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need into and throughout Gaza, and to create the conditions that will permit the return of Palestinians to their homes.

“I note the relative success of the polio vaccination campaign. While falling short of our targets in the north of Gaza, the use of tactical pauses and examples of functioning coordination with Israel demonstrated what is possible and achievable.

“I reiterate my call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages in Gaza. The United Nations is continuously engaged with all stakeholders towards those objectives and stands ready to support the implementation of an agreement. I welcome the continued efforts, including by Egypt, Qatar and the United States, to overcome the significant obstacles and reach a deal.

“I remain deeply alarmed by the relentless Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which is fuelling tensions, impeding access by Palestinians to their land and threatening the viability of a future independent, democratic, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State. I reiterate that all Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and are in flagrant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. I am deeply concerned that, over the past year, the Government of Israel has continued to systematically promote policies that have strengthened the involvement of civilian officials in control over the occupied West Bank,

including transferring some security functions to civilian control, while some Government officials call for the annexation of areas in the occupied West Bank. I urge the Government of Israel to cease all settlement activities immediately.

“In that regard, I note the recent findings by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion of 19 July 2024 (see A/78/968), which declared, *inter alia*, that Israel’s continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful and must end as rapidly as possible.

“The demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures, including internationally funded humanitarian projects, as well as structures related to income generation and the provision of essential services, entail numerous violations of international law and raise concerns about the risk of forcible transfer. I once again call upon the Government of Israel to end that practice and to prevent the displacement of Palestinians, in accordance with its international obligations under international law, and to approve plans to allow Palestinians to build legally and address their development needs.

“The escalating violence and tensions in the occupied West Bank are highly concerning and could trigger a broader explosion. Intensified operations by Israeli forces, increased settler violence and attacks against Israelis have also exacerbated tensions and led to exceedingly high levels of casualties, detentions and destruction. I am alarmed by the lethal attacks carried out by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, including sometimes in the proximity and with the support of Israeli security forces, and by Palestinians against Israelis. All perpetrators of attacks must be held accountable.

“I reiterate that Israeli security forces in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable to protect life. I call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and to ensure thorough, independent and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force, while holding those responsible to account.

“I am particularly appalled that children continue to be victims of violence on all sides. I am also concerned that Palestinian children

continue to be arrested in large numbers and held for prolonged periods of time, including in administrative detention. I reiterate my call for Israel to use detention as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period, to prevent all forms of ill-treatment in detention and to end the administrative detention of children, who are entitled to special protections.

“I am disturbed at the numerous instances during the reporting period in which officials glorified violence and engaged in dangerous provocations, incitement and inflammatory language, which will lead only to greater polarization and risks further bloodshed. Leaders have an obligation to clearly and explicitly condemn acts of terror and violence directed against civilians. The incitement to violence must stop immediately.

“I reiterate my call to the parties for the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem to be respected and upheld, taking into account the special and historic role of the Kingdom of Jordan as custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

“I am deeply concerned by the adoption by the Knesset of Israel of two laws concerning the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Those laws, if implemented, could prevent UNRWA from continuing its essential work in the occupied Palestinian territory, which would have devastating consequences for Palestine refugees, considering that there is no viable alternative to UNRWA that could adequately meet their needs. I again urge Israel to act consistently with its obligation under the Charter of the United Nations and its other obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, and those concerning the privileges and immunities of the United Nations. National legislation cannot alter those obligations.”

It is vital that the international community provide immediate support to the Palestinian Government to address its fiscal challenges, strengthen its governance capacity and prepare it to reassume its responsibilities in Gaza. We must establish political and security frameworks that can address the humanitarian catastrophe, start early recovery, rebuild Gaza and lay the groundwork for a political process to end the occupation and establish a viable

two-State solution as soon as possible. It is vital that those frameworks facilitate a legitimate Palestinian Government that can reunify Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, politically, economically and administratively, while reversing the steadily deteriorating dynamics throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. Any attempt to establish settlements in Gaza must be firmly rejected. There must be no attempt to reduce or annex the territory of Gaza in whole or in part.

The devastation and misery of the past year have reinforced once again the simple truth — Palestinians and Israelis can no longer wait to establish a viable political horizon. Now is the time to lay the foundations for a better future for Palestinians, Israelis and the broader region. Israelis, Palestinians, the States of the region and the broader international community must urgently take steps that will enable the parties to re-engage on the long-delayed political path to achieving a two-State solution.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis in ending the occupation and resolving the conflict in line with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements in pursuit of the vision of two States — Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State, of which Gaza is an integral part, living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

The President: I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Efron.

Ms. Efron: I would like to thank you, Madam President, and the members of the Security Council, for the invitation to brief the Council today. It is truly an honour.

Especially at the United Nations, the birthplace of the plan to partition Mandate Palestine into two States, one Jewish and one Arab, it is pertinent to acknowledge that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a tragedy today for both Jews and Arabs. At the same time, it is also crucial to recognize, as the General Assembly did back then, that practical solutions exist and should be pursued.

As an Israeli Jew, I speak from my lived reality. The trauma in Israel is palpable, with society still frozen in

the horror of 7 October 2023, the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust. On that day, Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists murdered more than 1,200 Israelis and nationals of other countries, abducted 251 people and committed atrocities, including large-scale sexual violence. Today, 439 days later, 100 people, including a soon-to-be 2-year-old toddler and an 86-year-old grandfather, remain in captivity in Gaza, while their families, as members of the Council will hear in just a few minutes, endure daily torment. We are all praying for their immediate release. Border communities bear the scars of destruction and displacement. Israelis continue to face insecurity, with ongoing bombardments from multiple fronts and terror attacks on our streets.

In Gaza, the devastation is unimaginable, with countless lives lost and families shattered, including those of my dear friends, Khalil and Ahmed, homes reduced to rubble and populations struggling for survival, with scarce basic necessities such as food, water and healthcare. The West Bank, meanwhile, is gripped by rising violence and economic hardship.

For both societies, the wounds of this war are deep and will take years to heal. Yet even now, steps can be taken to halt the suffering and begin charting a path towards stability and hope for both Israelis and Palestinians. The collective challenge before us as Israelis, Palestinians, countries of the Middle East and the international community is to seize this moment of profound tragedy and turn it into a bold diplomatic process that leads to peace, security and prosperity for people across the region.

While international actors frequently invoke the language of a two-State solution with goodwill and intent, reliance on mere sloganeering and rhetoric has done little to build trust or address the structural dynamics of the conflict. And while we at the Israel Policy Forum also view the two-State option as the only viable framework that acknowledges the legitimate national aspirations of both sides and as the only way to guarantee the future that Israel's founders envisioned — a Jewish, democratic and secure State of Israel — we realize that the two-State reality will remain only a vision unless we change our approach. What is needed now is a coherent, inclusive and actionable strategy that moves beyond rigid thinking so that we can end the war, stabilize Gaza and shift trends in the West Bank — from creeping annexation to peaceful separation. Regional actors should leverage the potential for normalization with Israel to empower

pragmatic actors while countering spoilers. This moment demands a shift from platitudes to planning, with a coordinated road map that addresses security and governance, delivers tangible short-term wins and lays the foundation for our shared long-term vision.

Nowhere is that more apparent than in the discussions about “the day after” in Gaza. As we anxiously hold our breath for a hostage and ceasefire agreement, there is still no shared coherent plan for post-war Gaza. The international community sees basically one viable path out of this morass: establishing a transitional non-Hamas Palestinian administration in Gaza, with the aim of eventually restoring full Palestinian Authority governance once it is reformed and strengthened. Clearly, without a green light from the Palestinian Authority, regional and other international partners will not commit to Gaza’s recovery. However, mostly for political reasons, whether we like it or not, the Israeli Government has until now vetoed the involvement by the Palestinian Authority, thereby exacerbating the risk of either the full Israeli occupation of Gaza or Hamas resurgence, or both. Notably, in this Chamber, it is important to acknowledge that, despite extreme voices, most Israelis do not want to control the Palestinians in perpetuity, but they are scared and see no plausible alternative.

To soften Israeli resistance, there is a need for a gradual, benchmark-driven approach, with assurances, that capitalizes on success stories, even if those are small. The existing Palestinian Authority capacity in Gaza can — and should — be mobilized for humanitarian efforts, for example, by relying on former security personnel and senior representatives in key government positions, including in the monetary and water authorities, with whom Israel already interacts today. Involving the Palestinian Authority and ensuring the capacity to succeed would also help alleviate fiscal and economic pressures in the West Bank, which is a deep concern for the Israeli security establishment. It would also incentivize sustained and more strategic donor engagement and enlist regional Middle East partners in restoring public order in Gaza’s chaos.

Furthermore, consent for a meaningful Palestinian Authority role in Gaza should be explicitly leveraged to propel genuine Palestinian Authority reforms with clear objectives, a defined road map and key performance indicators. The Palestinian Authority should demonstrate that it can really be part of the solution by reforming the so-called prisoner and martyr

payment systems, creating a conducive environment for the private sector, strengthening judicial independence, reorganizing the security sector, addressing incitement, undertaking educational reform and working towards a credible election horizon that allows for the political participation of next-generation leadership. Without such reforms, speaking realistically, Israel will continue to withhold tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority, United States restrictions on aid will remain and States in the region will be hesitant to invest in the Palestinian economy and infrastructure, which will further deepen the Palestinian Authority’s fiscal crisis and legitimacy crisis and jeopardize stability both in the West Bank and Gaza.

For its own long-term interests and to enable the Palestinian Authority to succeed, Israel must also take critical steps to shift its policy in Gaza and the West Bank. That includes easing financial pressures on the Palestinian Authority, allowing it the operational space to effectively govern and secure the territory under its jurisdiction, freezing settlement expansions in areas that undermine territorial separation — and in those only — and taking decisive action to stop settler violence. United States leadership, security guarantees and Arab-Israeli normalization can — and should — play a key role in driving those measures forward.

There are no quick fixes to those long-standing issues, unfortunately, and the situation on the ground cannot wait for all our clocks to synchronize. Yet Israel and the international community should identify and amplify positive signals, such as Israel’s decision to extend indemnification for correspondent banking between Israel and the West Bank, as well as the current efforts of the Palestinian security forces to regain control of the refugee camp in the town of Jenin. Importantly, that initiative, alongside ongoing security cooperation and coordination between Israel and the Palestinians, even in the past 15 months, is the result of a long-term strategic international investment in the Office of the United States Security Coordinator. Building on such success stories is essential to both strengthen and improve the Palestinian Authority’s capacity, while simultaneously alleviating Israel’s legitimate security concerns.

So much depends on Israelis, Palestinians and the support of Member States, and especially of the United States leadership. But the United Nations as an institution has an integral role to play as well.

Effective United Nations capacity is necessary for the humanitarian response, recovery and reconstruction, stabilization and for assisting the Palestinian State in the making — in deeds, not only in words. Internally, that requires tight coordination across United Nations agencies and among the leadership, together with streamlined funding and operational mechanisms and the strategic flexibility needed to step back from overly rigid approaches when pragmatism is needed. At the same time, the United Nations and Israel must repair their fractured relationship, which has reached an unprecedented low. Both sides have legitimate grievances, but there is too much at stake to allow them to get in the way of efficient and forward-looking cooperation that is in both their interests.

I would like to speak about the Israeli perspective. There is a long-standing sense of bias at the United Nations, compounded by what Israel sees as an insufficient reaction to 7 October and its aftermath, as well as the evidence that personnel of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East have ties to Hamas. That trust deficit has real policy shortcomings — that is, the possibility of losing all support in and leverage with Israel. Israelis need to hear an unequivocal United Nations condemnation of Hamas and its actions. And like the Palestinians, Israelis also need an international reaffirmation of the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in a State of their own and acknowledgement of the Jewish connection to the land of Israel. Neither side will be partners in a political process, which we both need, if that process denies the legitimacy of those rights.

In conclusion, just as it did when it adopted the partition plan in 1947 (General Assembly resolution 181 (II)), the United Nations has an important role to play in helping Israelis and Palestinians move beyond what has been the darkest period in their shared history. That can happen by zooming in on what is possible and achievable rather than what is perfect, and by focusing on the solutions rather than getting stuck on the problems.

The President: I thank Ms. Efron for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Levy.

Mr. Levy: Today I stand before the Security Council not just as Michael Levy but as a brother, a son, a human being — and as someone whose life has been shattered by unimaginable loss and despair. My brother, Or Levy, is one of the 100 innocent hostages

currently held by Hamas in Gaza. For 439 days, Or has been missing from our family — 439 days of fear, anguish and an unbearable silence that echoes louder than any words ever could.

On 7 October, Or and his wife Eynav went to a music festival, seeking a brief moment of joy. They arrived just nine minutes before all hell broke loose. Missiles flew over their heads, and they had to run to a nearby shelter, thinking they would be safe. From the shelter Or called my mother, repeating the terrifying words, “Mom, you do not want to know what is going on here.” That was the last time we heard his voice. Ten minutes later, Hamas terrorists stormed the shelter. They threw grenades, sprayed bullets, murdered Eynav and kidnapped Or into the tunnels of Gaza. The last image we have of him is heartbreaking. He is covered in his wife’s blood, shocked and terrified.

Or is more than just a number. He is a real human being. He is father to an amazing three-year-old son named Almog, who lost his mother in the horrendous terror attack of 7 October and is now essentially orphaned. That baby had to celebrate his third birthday without his parents. Members should try to imagine their own children celebrating their birthdays without their parents and going through life’s milestones without them. They should imagine not knowing whether their child is okay and who is taking care of him. Almog keeps asking about his mom and dad, and even when we try to explain, he does not understand why he cannot see his dad and what it means when we say that his mom will never come back. That baby still has a father — a father who can come back to him. I am asking Council members to make sure that he does not become an orphan. They have the power to save his father.

For 439 days, I have woken up every morning with a pit in my stomach, wondering where my brother is, wondering if he is cold, if he is hungry and if he has managed to survive another day. Every moment that he remains in captivity is a moment of unbearable suffering for him and for all of us who love him. I am here today to remind the Council — and the world — of its duty. Not just as diplomats, but as people, as mothers, fathers, siblings and friends. Because this is not merely a political issue. It is a human and a moral issue. I want to ask all the members of the Council what they would do if that was their child, their brother or their loved one.

Hamas's actions are not just a blatant violation of international law but an assault on humanity itself. Holding civilians hostage — men, women and children — is a violation of the principles that this very Council was created to protect. Yet the silence of Council members is deafening and their inaction is suffocating. For every day that the Council fails to act, the message to the world is clear — some lives are worth saving and others are not. But I refuse to accept that message. I refuse to accept a world in which my brother's life can be used as a bargaining chip and be forgotten. And I refuse to believe that the Council, which was created to uphold the highest ideals of humankind, will turn its back on those who need it most.

This is the moment for the Security Council to act, to lead, to show the world that it has the courage to stand for what is right and to send a resounding message that terror will never prevail. I am asking members to prove that international law means something, and that human rights are not just words but principles that they will fight to protect. I call on the Council to demand the release of Or and of all the hostages. Those 100 lives are not just numbers. They are fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, brothers and sisters. They are people with families waiting desperately to hold them again.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to the American nation and all the other nations that have supported our campaign by standing with us in this dark hour. Their unwavering belief in freedom and justice is a beacon of hope for families like mine that are desperate for a lifeline. I want to say to President-elect Trump and President Biden that we place our deepest hopes and faith in them that they will bring this tragedy to an end. Their decisive leadership has already brought light to a situation that feels so hopeless. We believe in their strength, leadership and commitment to justice to help bring our loved ones back home.

I want to finish on a personal note. Today is my birthday — the second birthday I am celebrating without my baby brother. I am not asking for presents, celebrations or even a cake. My only birthday wish is sitting in a Hamas tunnel, waiting to be brought back to his son. Bring my brother home. Bring them all home.

The President: I thank Mr. Levy for his briefing.

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

Mr. George (Sierra Leone): I would like to thank Assistant-Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his important briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), and Ms. Shira Efron of the Israel Policy Forum and Mr. Michael Levy for their perspectives on the situation in the occupied Palestine territory.

We acknowledge the Secretary-General's report and regret that the reporting period was marked by continued hostilities between Israel and Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip. That contravenes the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) that call for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror and acts of destruction. As reported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, an estimated 26,000 of the wounded civilians in the Gaza Strip have suffered injuries that could lead to lifetime deformity and disabilities, especially among children. We note with concern that the highest number of child amputees per capita in the world has been recorded in the Gaza Strip. In the same vein, we also recall that Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups have continued to hold the remaining hostages since 7 October 2023 without granting the necessary access or providing updates on their well-being.

In resolution 2334 (2016), Israel, the occupying Power, is reminded of its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. However, the past 14 months in the Gaza Strip have presented compelling evidence that does not align with the provisions of the resolution. That is reflected in the current death toll estimated in the range of more than 45,000 and the number of those wounded estimated at 106,000, with 70 per cent of such casualties being women and children. The civilian population has been trapped in a deep humanitarian crisis, at a scale and magnitude far beyond human comprehension. Those statistics bring into question our conscience and collective responsibility to advance a durable peace and save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, as stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations. As families and communities are displaced due to the widespread destruction of their homes and critical infrastructure, the already vulnerable population in the north and elsewhere in Gaza have been exposed to extreme weather conditions this winter.

What the Palestinians are currently experiencing represents a disruption of their livelihoods, social networks and overall well-being. The alarming rate of violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in the context of Israel's operations, armed exchanges between Palestinians, including armed groups, Israeli security forces and settlers, often leading to access restrictions, forced displacement and demolitions, contravenes Council resolutions and the International Court of Justice advisory opinion of 19 July on the *Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem* (see A/78/968). All those actions on the ground seem to be counterproductive to the search for lasting peace in the Middle East. We are encouraged, however, by the increased political momentum in support of addressing some of the critical issues surrounding the Middle East peace process and the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

With that in mind, Sierra Leone welcomes the observations highlighted in the Secretary-General's report and would like to reiterate the following.

First of all, we condemn the continuous killing and injury of civilians and the never-ending cycle of violence. To end that situation, we demand an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, respect for international humanitarian law and the implementation of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, including the most recent General Assembly resolution ES-10/26. We also call for the unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas. We further reiterate our support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its pivotal role in supporting the Palestinians. We express concern that any action to undermine its operations will be detrimental for Palestinian refugees in particular — not only in Gaza but across other areas of operations. We welcome the various initiatives of the international community, including the diplomatic efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States, as well as the launch of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution.

Sierra Leone recalls the International Court of Justice advisory opinion of 19 July and calls on Israel to immediately and completely stop all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as they present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability and delivery of a two-State solution. We further caution against

any action that may threaten the economic, political and administrative status of Palestine. We reject the escalation of violence in the occupied West Bank and call on Israelis and Palestinians to desist from all acts of incitement, inflammatory language and provocations that may fuel tensions.

In conclusion, we urge the parties to recommit to a constructive dialogue embedded in the principle of the two-State solution and to address the legitimate aspirations and concerns of both sides.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I begin by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari, Ms. Efron and Mr. Levy for their briefings.

Today we meet to discuss the latest report of the Secretary-General on resolution 2334 (2016). That resolution underscores that Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory are in violation of international law and represent a significant obstacle to peace and the two-State solution. That position was further supported by the International Court of Justice advisory opinion of 19 July on the *Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem* (see A/78/968), which called for the cessation of such activities. The international community's position is evident. On 18 September, the General Assembly adopted, with broad support, resolution ES-10/24 urging Israel to bring to an end its presence in the occupied Palestinian territory without delay.

Despite those clear calls and legal obligations, Israel remains present within the occupied Palestinian territory, which constitutes a clear obstacle to justice for the Palestinian people. We have not failed to note during the past two years the statements and actions that appear to have as an objective the potential annexation of significant areas of the West Bank, including measures to construct new illegal settlements, efforts to use the legal system to legitimize illegal outposts and programmes transferring administrative powers relating to land and settlements from military to Israeli civilian control. Those measures are inconsistent with international law and hinder ongoing efforts to achieve lasting peace.

At the same time, the unacceptable situation in Gaza has been exacerbated by the obstruction of humanitarian aid and disruptions in aid delivery, as well as the breakdown of security. The northern Gaza Strip remains under effective siege. As we come to

the end of our term on the Council, we will continue to articulate our clear stance on this crisis. We need an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire across Gaza and the broader region. It is equally crucial that this be accompanied with unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to deliver aid at the scale required to address the population's critical needs.

We also reiterate our condemnation of the horrific 7 October 2023 attacks and maintain our call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. Equally concerning is the rapid and steady degradation of the situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We are deeply concerned about the continued expansion of settlements, settler violence and the dispossession and transfer of Palestinian communities. Recent escalations have seen a significant rise in demolitions and evictions, particularly targeting Palestinian homes and infrastructure. In addition, settler attacks on Palestinian civilians, often carried out with impunity, have intensified, with reports of coordinated incidents in vulnerable communities. Such violence is compounded by measures restricting Palestinians' movement, severely affecting access to basic services, education and livelihoods. Illegal settlements, settler violence and the presence of the settlers themselves remain among the root causes of most of the human rights violations in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. And on top of being subjected to violent raids, women also face extremely limited access to maternal and reproductive healthcare, compounded by mental-health challenges. Such actions risk entrenching the occupation and further diminishing the prospects for a two-State solution. We call on Israel to reverse those measures and to uphold its commitments under international law.

Inflammatory rhetoric on the future of the West Bank and the status quo of the holy sites must be avoided. The international community has a responsibility to promote accountability for violations of international law and to advance measures that foster peace and justice in the region. That requires addressing the root causes of the conflict and supporting mechanisms that ensure accountability.

In conclusion, the international community must unite behind an irreversible realization of a two-State solution, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. That should put an end to the illegal occupation and ensure the equal fulfilment both of Palestinians' aspirations

for statehood and Israel's security requirements. Hand in hand with that, we must see an increase in the international community's support to a revitalized and economically sustainable Palestinian Authority, as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. The Authority's commitment both to reform and to maintaining stability in the West Bank, particularly in refugee camps, should be sustained. It is the only way to bring about a lasting end to the unprecedented suffering and to ensure a just peace in the region.

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and Ms. Efron for their briefings. I also thank Mr. Levy in particular for his touching testimony.

The region has been experiencing its darkest moment for more than 14 months, not only in Israel and Palestine but in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and beyond. The vicious cycle of spillover has been engulfing the entire region with endless violence and instability. We are now witnessing, with both hope and concern, some positive regional developments, including the recent ceasefire across the Blue Line and the political transition in Syria. However, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is showing no signs of change.

The Republic of Korea remains committed to its principled call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, along with the release of all hostages. Only that can save innocent lives, ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid and create the conditions for the reconstruction of a completely flattened Gaza. We therefore appreciate the unceasing efforts by the mediators and sincerely hope that the recently resumed negotiations can soon lead to valuable outcomes that will stop the horror. But we must be clear that a ceasefire in Gaza will not be the end but should serve as a true starting point for a better future for both Palestinians and Israelis. It is deeply concerning, however, that in recent years the world has been witnessing a negative trend that is hampering the vision of a two-State solution. As the Secretary-General mentions in his report, for the past two years Israel has advanced, approved or tendered more than 38,000 housing units in settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Those settlements will add tens of thousands of Israeli settlers to the area.

Resolution 2334 (2016) affirms that the establishment of settlements has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law.

The Israeli settlements are also a violation of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which provides that the occupying Power shall not deport or transfer its own civilian population into the occupied territory. Another alarming aspect is that Israeli settlements, coupled with impunity, are laying the groundwork for settler-related violence directed at Palestinian civilians. We are deeply troubled by the ongoing settler violence, including the September attacks on a Palestinian primary school near Jericho, as well as numerous incidents targeting the olive harvest, a key source of income for Palestinians. Israel's settlement activities, coupled with the persistent confiscation of Palestinian lands, are also displacing Palestinians from their land. It is alarming that Israel's routine demolitions of Palestinian homes are accelerating that displacement. The settlement-induced fragmentation of the occupied Palestinian territory is also obstructing the free movement of Palestinians, another violation of fundamental human rights. Checkpoints, closures and curfews compound those daily indignities.

The most troubling aspect of all is that the Israeli settlement activities represent the major obstacle to the achievement of a negotiated two-State solution, as they are slicing the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority into numerous non-contiguous pieces of land. The Republic of Korea firmly believes that a two-State solution is the only viable path to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. The status quo one-State reality cannot be a substitute for that enduring aspiration. We once again stress our call that Israel should cease all its settlement activities.

In order to contribute to international efforts to reinvigorate the concept of a two-State solution, the Republic of Korea participated in the two rounds of meetings of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution. As was reiterated at those meetings, the Republic of Korea will maintain its support for all relevant efforts, including its steadfast support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and a reformed Palestinian Authority. We hope that Israel will act more reasonably in responding to the calls of the international community and supporting the work of the United Nations agencies.

As we head towards the end-of-year holiday season, we hope for a 2025 that can bring a better future based on peace and coexistence, not only in Israel and Palestine but in the wider region as well. We hope that

the ceasefire in Lebanon, albeit fragile, will be the beginning of the end for the widespread violence in the region.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): We commend the United States presidency for convening today's meeting addressing the ongoing situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We thank Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General, for his comprehensive briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We are also grateful to the civil society briefers for the information they provided on the matter.

Mozambique is deeply concerned by the persistent violations of resolution 2334 (2016). The continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures in the occupied West Bank, as documented in the report of the Secretary-General, represents a significant impediment to peace and stability. The ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hamas in Gaza have resulted in a devastating humanitarian crisis. The loss of thousands of lives, extensive civilian displacement and the systematic destruction of critical infrastructure have aggravated the already dire humanitarian situation faced by Palestinian communities. Such actions — including the expansion of settlements, acts of terror and violence against innocent people and the destruction of private infrastructure — constitute blatant violations of international law. Those developments have systematically undermined international efforts to de-escalate tensions and pursue a comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict. We therefore call on all parties to immediately cease those destructive actions and create meaningful opportunities for constructive dialogue and the peaceful resolution of the protracted conflict. We further call on the parties to refrain from the rhetoric of incitement to violence, inflammatory provocations, hate speech and other provocative actions that will only fuel the conflict.

In conclusion, we call for an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, the release of hostages and the establishment of an unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, in line with resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024). We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the two-State solution — a vision predicated on the establishment of two independent, sovereign States of Israel and Palestine, coexisting harmoniously, side by side, and each enjoying full membership in the United Nations.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and Ms. Efron for your briefing. I also thank Mr. Levy for sharing his brother's story with us. The suffering that Mr. Levy and his family have been through is unimaginable.

Let me state, at the outset, that the United Kingdom stands with Mr. Levy and with all those families of hostages seeking desperately to bring their loved ones home. We reiterate our condemnation of the abhorrent Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023 and the kidnapping of more than 250 hostages, including Emily Damari and three hostages with links to the United Kingdom. The hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally.

Let me make three additional points.

First, the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza is appalling. More than 45,000 Palestinians have died since 7 October 2023. The past two months were the worst for aid since October 2023. The United Nations has reported a shocking increase in cases of acute malnutrition in children, and that Gaza now has the highest number of child amputees per capita in the world. The United Kingdom continues to urge Israel to do much more to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and to abide by its international obligations. That includes facilitating rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian aid and basic services to the Palestinian people. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays a crucial role in delivering that life-saving aid. On 11 December, my Prime Minister committed an additional \$16.5 million to UNRWA to support vital services for Palestinian refugees in the occupied Palestinian territories and the wider region, bringing the United Kingdom's support to UNRWA to \$52m since April of this year.

Secondly, northern Gaza must not be cut off from the south. The United Kingdom is clear: there must be no forcible transfer of Gazans from or within Gaza. There must be no reduction of the territory of the Gaza Strip. Israel's expansion of military infrastructure and the destruction of civilian buildings and agricultural land across the Strip is unacceptable.

Thirdly, the United Kingdom calls on Israel to stop settlement expansion on Palestinian land, which is illegal under international law, and to hold violent settlers to account. Continued instability and settler violence in the West Bank should not be tolerated

by Israel and the culture of impunity must end. It does nothing to bring about peace and security for Palestinians or Israelis. We also note the decision of the Government of Israel to extend correspondent banking relations for 12 months and continue to urge Israel to remove its restrictions on clearance revenues.

The fall of Al-Assad and the ceasefire in Lebanon offer a moment of hope for the people of the region. We must now use that momentum to deliver the long-sought-after ceasefire, secure the immediate release of all hostages and put an end to the humanitarian crisis and suffering in Gaza.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his report and reiterate my country's support for the work of the United Nations and all its agencies. I also thank Ms. Efron and Mr. Levy for their statements.

The first meeting on this issue in which Ecuador participated as an elected member of the Security Council was held on 5 January 2023 (see S/PV.9236). On that day, my country stated that remembering the history of the issue was essential to preventing the reoccurrence of acts that had already caused violence, destruction and death in Israel and Palestine in the past. Since then, Ecuador has repeatedly called on the parties to refrain from acts of provocation and incitement, avoid acts of violence and terrorism, halt the expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, control settler violence, respect the status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem and comply with the relevant Council resolutions. Although those calls have not been heeded, we reiterate them today, for they are as valid now as they were then — because if those calls been followed, the situation today would be different.

On Sunday, 8 October 2023, the Council held emergency consultations. On that occasion, my country expressed its strongest and unequivocal condemnation of the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas the previous day and demanded that the hostages be released immediately and unconditionally. Since then, we have consistently reiterated that there is no possible justification for attacking innocent civilians and that such appalling acts are the immediate cause of the war raging in Gaza to this day. On the same occasion, Ecuador pointed out that Hamas' terrorist attacks do not represent the Palestinian people, or their inalienable right to self-determination, or their

legitimate aspirations to live in security, freedom, justice, opportunity and dignity.

There were warnings that such a grave escalation of the conflict would lead to the deaths of innocent civilians, including women and children; that violence would lead to more violence; and that the already precarious humanitarian situation of the civilian population would be aggravated, making the events of 7 October all the more incomprehensible. It was stressed that the principles of international humanitarian law must be respected at all times, that it was necessary to avoid affecting the civilian population, that the right to self-defence was not a *carte blanche* for revenge and that it was necessary to break the vicious circle that had led to the current situation. On that 8 October, my delegation said that

“Ecuador will support from the Council any measure or initiative that encourages the parties to stop the violence and to resume those negotiations”.

Today, at the final meeting scheduled on this subject during our current term, I can say that Ecuador has fulfilled its commitment. My country has influenced and voted in favour of all the initiatives that have pursued those objectives — those vetoed by some, those vetoed by others and the four that were adopted and that must be upheld. Today Ecuador once again calls for the immediate implementation of those four adopted resolutions, namely, resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024). An immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages and the entry and distribution of sufficient and timely humanitarian aid into Gaza cannot be postponed.

I have said it many times before, and I say it again for the final time from this seat: this conflict will not be resolved by force. Nearly eight decades of unsuccessful attempts to do so should suffice. The only way out is to move towards a negotiated, peaceful, definitive and just solution for the parties, with the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, on the basis of the 1967 borders and the relevant resolutions. That will require political will, courage and long-term vision on the part of decision makers. My country hopes that one day in the not-too-distant future, with good faith, those qualities will prevail and that both peoples will finally live in peace, dignity and security, each recognizing in the other human beings with rights and aspirations as valuable as their own.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing and Ms. Efron and Mr. Levy for the perspectives they shared.

Guyana notes with concern that no steps were taken by Israel to comply with the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) since the Secretary-General's most recent report on the implementation of that resolution (S/2024/480). That ongoing stance of non-compliance is even more concerning, considering that the International Court of Justice has established that the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are in violation of international law. The Court further established that Israel has an obligation to immediately cease all new settlement activities and to evacuate settlers from the occupied territories. Despite those clear legal provisions, however, Israel continues to violate international law through both its policies and its practices regarding settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. In that context, the Secretary-General's report sets out very clearly the violence and other human rights abuses that are the hallmark of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory. Guyana therefore reiterates its call on Israel to strictly abide by its legal obligation as an occupying Power to safeguard the rights and interests of the Palestinian people.

Guyana has taken note of the impact of Israel's settlement policies and practices on Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We note, for example, the increasing number of fatal incidents, and we are alarmed that most Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in the context of Israeli operations. We have also taken note of the continuing incidence of displacement of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, attributed to demolitions and other illegal activities by Israelis. It is unjust that Palestinians — even when they are engaged in routine activities, such as picking olives from their olive groves — are forced to live with the constant threat of violence and even death by the Israeli security forces and Israeli settlers. Guyana deplores those acts in the strongest terms and underlines Israel's legal and moral obligation to desist.

The Secretary-General's account of the situation in Gaza remains a point of deep concern for Guyana, as it does for the international community. According to Gaza's Health Ministry, the death toll has surpassed 45,000. That is shocking in any context and would

elicit urgent and strong measures from the Council, were we to act solely based on our mandate under the Charter of the United Nations. It is deeply lamentable that the Council has been unable to achieve consensus to act for the Palestinian people, while hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians are killed, disabled, displaced, orphaned, widowed and starved, among other violations whose depth and scale no report can perhaps adequately capture. What would it take to stop this seemingly unending suffering and killing of civilians? The answer is clear: strong political will that translates into action to end the impunity with which the rights of the Palestinian people have been violated for all these decades.

We urgently need a political horizon to move us beyond the status quo. We already have the relevant frameworks established by the resolutions adopted both by the General Assembly and the Council. The international community must work unceasingly to unclench the fist that holds Palestinian self-determination in its grip — a state of affairs that has persisted since the birth of the United Nations. That continues to be manifested in cycles of violence meted out against the Palestinian people with impunity and in the denial of their requests for full membership in the United Nations, for recognition and to chart their own political path, among others. In all of that, the two-State solution continues to be effectively undermined. We cannot allow that to continue. The Council and the entire United Nations membership must continue to spare no effort to achieve a two-State solution.

I conclude by highlighting four points.

First, we need an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza. We have seen media reports about a potential deal between Israel and Hamas, and we urge the parties to prioritize the lives of civilians and to cease the hostilities. We also reiterate our demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

Secondly, Israel cannot continue to turn a blind eye to its international obligations concerning the Palestinian people. The illegal settlement activities must end, and Israel must repatriate all settlers from the occupied Palestinian territories. Additionally, Member States must uphold their obligation to distinguish, in their dealings, between the State of Israel proper and Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Thirdly, the Council must unite as one and uphold its Charter mandate. We must achieve consensus to end the impunity with which Israel has continued to violate all of the United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine.

Finally, we must deliver peace for the Palestinian people. That entails support for establishing strong governance by Palestinians for Palestinians, even as we take decisive measures to bring the Israeli occupation to an end. Peace must also entail a resolution of all final status issues, including the refugee question. On that latter note, Guyana reiterates its strong support for the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, noting that unless the refugees are able to exercise their right of return, that mandate cannot be unilaterally brought to an end by Israel or any other party.

Guyana commits to continue its strong engagement on the question of Palestine with a view to contributing to a just and lasting solution for peace in Palestine and Israel and in the Middle East.

Mr. Dharmadhikari (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing and Ms. Efron and Mr. Levy for their testimonies.

The Security Council must respond to the acceleration of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem to ensure the implementation of its own resolutions on the subject, including resolution 2334 (2016). France's position is well known and consistent. Colonization runs counter to international law, and we condemn it. The International Court of Justice stated in its advisory opinion of 19 July (see A/78/968) that Israel has an obligation to end its presence in the occupied Palestinian territory as soon as possible. France will never recognize the illegal annexation of territory or the legalization of illegal colonies. We have been implementing the policy of differentiation set out in resolution 2334 (2016), which aims to establish the legal distinction between the internationally recognized territory of Israel and the occupied areas.

The settlement policy is a major obstacle to a just and lasting peace based on a two-State solution. It is also a factor in the tension and violence on the ground. In that regard, the policy of terror being carried out by some Israeli settlers against the Palestinian population in the occupied territory must end. As the occupying Power, Israel has a responsibility to take the necessary

measures to protect Palestinian civilians without delay. In East Jerusalem, the historic status quo regarding the holy sites must be maintained. In the Gaza Strip, the war must stop. The suffering of civilians must end. France calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

Our position on another important issue is also unambiguous. All the hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. France supports the efforts of Egypt, the United States and Qatar to achieve that. We once again condemn the barbaric terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas and other terrorist groups on 7 October 2023, and the Council must also be able to condemn them unambiguously. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is catastrophic. We must ensure full and unhindered humanitarian access into and within the Gaza Strip. The population must be rescued. At the humanitarian conference held in Cairo on 2 December, our Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs announced new humanitarian aid of €50 million, including €20 million for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The Council has a responsibility to lay the foundations for a political settlement. As we know, that involves the implementation of a two-State solution. France reaffirms its unwavering commitment to Israel's security and to building a viable, sovereign and contiguous State for the Palestinians. We call for the establishment of a reformed Palestinian Authority, capable of exercising its responsibilities over the entire Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip. Only a two-State solution will make it possible to meet the legitimate aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians for peace and security. It is in that spirit that France will co-chair an international conference next June, alongside Saudi Arabia, on the implementation of a two-State solution. The Council must act to respond to the urgency of the situation and finally put together a political solution. The United Nations should play a central role in that regard.

Mrs. Blokar Drobič (Slovenia): I would like to start by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing and Ms. Efron and Mr. Levy for their testimonies.

As always, today's meeting is a sobering reminder that peace in the Middle East will remain elusive without an investment of staggering effort. The region is shaking, and the tremors are affecting the lives of individuals on a daily basis, with no end in sight. In Gaza, strikes

have continued, including on densely populated areas, as well as displacement and widespread destruction, in complete violation of international humanitarian law. They are coupled with extreme hunger, disease, severe restrictions on humanitarian assistance and attacks on and the looting of humanitarian convoys and humanitarian actors. International humanitarian law is clear regarding the rapid and unhindered delivery of aid. The suffering of civilians is intensifying, including for the hostages still held in Gaza. All of that is further exacerbated by a complete absence of law and order. We repeat that only a ceasefire can pave the way for peace.

In the occupied West Bank, the advancement of new housing units is appalling, and we emphasize our long-standing position on the illegality of settlements, which are a violation of international law. Once again we underline, in line with the International Court of Justice advisory opinion (see A/78/968), that the occupation must end. The downward spiral in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, must end. That includes the demolitions and seizures of property. We deplore the intensification of settler-related violence and of killings and injuries, including during operations, demonstrations, clashes, air strikes and other incidents.

We share the concerns about the large number of Palestinians, including children, detained by Israeli forces and in administrative detention. Numerous reports of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, including sexual violence, are profoundly distressing. Independent monitoring bodies' access to detention facilities must be ensured. We are also very concerned about the deep crisis affecting the Palestinian economy, prolonging and worsening the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. We support the efforts to address the Palestinian Government's fiscal challenges, strengthen its governance capacity and prepare it to resume its responsibilities in Gaza.

Slovenia will continue to support the efforts and the role of the United Nations. We praise the work of United Nations personnel on the ground, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to address the suffering of civilians. We repeat our call on the Israeli Government not to implement laws concerning UNRWA. The Agency contributes to the broader efforts to achieve a two-State solution, which is the only just and sustainable path to peace and security for both Palestinians and Israelis. We admire the dedication of

the United Nations representatives, and in that regard I would like to take this opportunity to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his work.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his presentation. We listened attentively to Ms. Efron's presentation and Mr. Levy's poignant story. Since 7 October 2023, Switzerland has strongly condemned the acts of terror and hostage-taking by Hamas and other affiliated groups in Israel.

I would like to raise one of the issues that has deeply concerned Switzerland throughout its term on the Security Council — the protection of civilians, and in particular humanitarian personnel. Switzerland is shocked by the facts reported on that topic, among others, in the Secretary-General's most recent report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). According to the report, Israeli air strikes killed several humanitarian workers on 30 November, including a Save the Children employee and three World Central Kitchen employees. Those victims were added to the list of more than 330 humanitarians killed, the vast majority of them employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Since 7 October 2023 tens of thousands of civilians have been killed, including in the past few weeks. Switzerland condemns all attacks on civilians in the strongest possible terms. Respect for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of hostilities are obligations under international humanitarian law. In resolution 2730 (2024), drafted by Switzerland, and in the proposal for its implementation put forward by the Secretary-General and recently endorsed by 115 Member States, the Security Council reaffirmed the obligation to protect personnel and assets involved in humanitarian operations. That protection is even more crucial in the light of the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. In particular, the civilian population is exposed to the risk of starvation. The use of starvation as a method of warfare constitutes a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Switzerland will continue to call for an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire, and for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages. In that connection, we commend the mediation efforts under way. We note the obligation of strict compliance

with international humanitarian law, including the rapid, safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid to all those in need in Gaza.

Those same demands were endorsed by an overwhelming majority of Member States in the General Assembly at the most recent meeting of the emergency special session on 11 December (see A/ES-10/PV.59). This attests to a shared determination to put an end to this war and its appalling human toll. It is also a reminder of the central role currently played by UNRWA — whose mandate has been conferred by the General Assembly since 1949 — as the main humanitarian actor in the Gaza Strip, providing State-like basic services throughout the occupied Palestinian territory and as an important bulwark against further destabilization of the region.

Switzerland supports the 19 July advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/78/968), to which it contributed. There is no doubt about the illegality of the continuous Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory since 1967. The occupation must end as soon as possible.

We deeply regret the lack of implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and of the four resolutions adopted by the Council since the acts of terror of 7 October 2023. Throughout the world, failure to comply with the Council's decisions is synonymous with obstacles to peace, suffering for populations and failed peace processes. A case in point is the situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where violence is at an all-time high, as a result of settler attacks and operations by Israeli security forces.

Switzerland is also concerned about the violence in connection to the presence of armed groups, particularly in Jenin. It reiterates its call on all parties to respect their obligations under international law. Operations carried out in the West Bank must meet the criteria of necessity and proportionality and respect the right of every individual to life and security of person. All those responsible for violence against civilians and the deliberate destruction of civilian property and infrastructure must be brought to justice.

Switzerland condemns the announcements by Israeli leaders, as recounted in the Secretary-General's report, to expand settlements, illegal under international law, in the occupied Palestinian territories. Such announcements are likely to further fuel the spiral of violence and are clear obstacles to peace.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating Switzerland's full support for the two-State solution, which is the only possible option for Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace, security and dignity, within secure and recognized borders, in accordance with international law and internationally agreed parameters.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his detailed briefing on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. We listened attentively to Ms. Shira Efron and Mr. Michael Levy.

We express our sympathy to Mr. Levy and his family, as well as to all the families of those held hostage by Hamas and other Palestinian groups. We hope for their speedy release. To our great regret, all efforts by the Security Council to establish a ceasefire and release the hostages have been blocked by the United States, which has used its veto six times since 7 October last year so that the Israeli military operation in Gaza could continue. As a result, the lives of the hostages continue to be in danger. As we understand it, only a third of the initially captured Israelis are now on the lists discussed by the negotiators. We wish that Mr. Levy will eventually be reunited with his brother. As for the Council's silence and alleged unwillingness to condemn the Hamas action, the Security Council was ready to do so on 18 October 2023, but our American colleagues vetoed the corresponding draft resolution (see S/PV.9442), which they do not like to be reminded about.

As Mr. Khiari's statement makes clear, resolution 2334 (2016) is not being implemented. The Israelis continue to push ahead with plans to build new settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Under the false pretext of lack of building permits, Palestinian homes are being systematically destroyed. This is the height of cynicism, where Palestinians who cannot afford to pay expensive fees to the Israelis are then compelled to demolish their homes with their own hands. This is a mockery of human dignity.

The ongoing illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, undermines the negotiated solution to one of the final-status issues, namely, territory and borders. This is in violation of Security Council and the General Assembly decisions, including General Assembly resolution ES-10/24, adopted in September

by the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, in support of the second advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the *Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem* (see A/78/968).

Against that backdrop, statements by Israeli officials about the forcible change of the demographic composition of Gaza in order to recolonize the enclave are particularly alarming. We are outraged by the Knesset's adoption of a law on deporting the families of terrorists, which gives Israel the right to send to Gaza those Palestinians who did not inform the Israeli security forces about the criminal plans of their relatives. Any Palestinian who is considered suspicious by the Israelis can end up in Gaza, where he will be doomed to die from hunger or bombing. Those are the laws being adopted in the country that claims to be the only democracy in the Middle East.

We consider such steps unacceptable, as are public appeals by some members of the Netanyahu Government to annex the West Bank. We categorically reject the policy of creating facts on the ground. In any event, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory is illegal from the point of view of international law, and there is no justification for it. We call on West Jerusalem to immediately begin implementing resolution 2334 (2016) and to cease all settlement activity.

Today many people spoke about the ongoing violence in the occupied Palestinian territories and cited horrifying statistics. Since the beginning of the escalation in Gaza, 45,000 Palestinians have already been killed, and that is only the confirmed deaths, most of whom were women and children. Against the backdrop of those horrifying figures, the West Bank statistics are somewhat overshadowed. But 736 Palestinians were killed there from October 2023 to 31 October 2024, and this is without an official military operation. The life of Palestinians in the West Bank is essentially unbearable.

The Secretary-General's report provides a vivid illustration of the senseless and relentless violence by Israeli settlers. On 5 October, a group of 40 Israelis armed with rifles, clubs, crowbars and pepper spray went on a hunt for olive pickers. The attackers beat 25 Palestinians, broke their limbs and cracked their skulls. Among the victims were a child, a disabled person, a woman and an elderly person. After that, the settlers

threw out the entire harvest. What did the Israeli police officers who arrived at the scene do? Their role, after all, is to maintain law and order in a lawful State, according to the Israeli authorities. They dispersed the Palestinians using stun grenades. This attitude towards Palestinians as second-class citizens is unacceptable, and the international community must insist on ending this monstrous policy of West Jerusalem.

The situation in the West Bank cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader context of the escalation in Gaza. These events have been ongoing for more than a year. Members of the Security Council have repeatedly put forward draft resolutions demanding an unconditional ceasefire in Gaza as a first step to stabilizing the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Unfortunately, the United States, as we have already said, has consistently vetoed those documents, stating that no one should impose a peaceful solution on Israel.

We are not questioning whether Israel is a sovereign State or its right to ensure its own security. However, we are concerned that Israel invokes that right not only to justify counter-terrorism action on its territory but also to impose a collective punishment of the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank, bombard Lebanon and Syria and occupy Syrian territory. It seems that Israeli authorities believe that in order to fully ensure their defence they need to create a barren wasteland around Israel, and that that wasteland should be targeted by Israeli tanks, drones and fighter jets. And engaging in negotiations with the Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians is something that West Jerusalem is planning to do only from a position of force and intimidation, expecting that Washington will always cover for it and provide it with the necessary diplomatic and military support. But that is not the way to resolve conflicts — that is how to deepen them. If people are pushed into a situation in which they have nothing to lose, then we should not be surprised that radical ideas have become so popular. Neither should we be surprised that there is currently a freeze in the process of normalizing relations between the actors in the region and Israel amid the bloodshed in Gaza.

Instead of looking for solutions to existing problems, West Jerusalem is creating new ones. The entry into force early next year of the Knesset bills banning the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) from operating in Israel will mean the termination

of the functions and the dismantling of a key agency that provides assistance to the Palestinians — and for which there is no alternative. Not only does such a step directly violate the Charter of the United Nations, the resolutions of the General Assembly on UNRWA's mandate and international law but it also paves the way for removing the refugee issue as one of the final-status issues, together with the borders, water resources and Jerusalem. Israel's actions in Gaza in recent months do not make us hopeful that Israel, as the occupying Power, will take over all UNRWA's functions.

We believe that there is an alternative to what is happening in the occupied Palestinian territories. That alternative is in the will of the international community, which manifested itself at the most recent meeting of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, when the overwhelming majority of Member States adopted resolutions ES-10/25, in support of the UNRWA mandate, and ES-10/26, demanding a ceasefire in Gaza.

Russia's principled position on a Middle East settlement concurs with the will of the international community. We call for an unconditional ceasefire, unimpeded humanitarian access, the release of all hostages and forcibly detained persons and the relaunch of the peace process on an internationally agreed legal basis. Only by taking those actions will it be possible to achieve a lasting peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis and remove the current source of destabilization for the entire region.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): I thank Assistant-Secretary-General Khiari and Ms. Efron for their informative briefings. I am also deeply grateful to Mr. Levy for his brave testimony. I express our great sorrow at the harrowing experiences he and his family have endured. Let me reiterate Japan's strong condemnation of the brutal acts of terror by Hamas and others and its demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all the hostages.

The Middle East is at a crucial turning point. While the situation in the region remains fragile, recent events have offered a ray of hope for peace. In Lebanon, Israel and Lebanon agreed to a ceasefire. Japan welcomes that achievement and commends the mediation efforts of the United States and France. All the parties should take all measures to fully implement that ceasefire agreement and bring about stability. In Syria, the Al-Assad regime has fallen. We need to follow that situation with caution,

as it could be the start of a spiral of social unrest. Nevertheless, Japan strongly hopes that historic event will lead to fundamental and positive developments inside and outside the country. The future of Syria — a future that has significant ramifications for the entire region — must be determined by the Syrian people themselves. Japan is committed to fully supporting an inclusive and peaceful Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition process leading to lasting peace and stability.

We hope that the evolving circumstances will help to realize a breakthrough in the devastating conflict in Gaza, where many hostages continue to be held and the military operations of the Israel Defense Forces remain active. The enormous number of casualties of innocent Palestinians and severe damage to the civilian infrastructure in Gaza are totally unacceptable. The persisting humanitarian catastrophe is also intolerable. Israel's response to the situation appears inconsistent with its obligations under international humanitarian law. A ceasefire in Gaza and the release of hostages are long overdue. The dramatic expansion of humanitarian aid delivery is urgently needed. And for that purpose, we need the continued presence of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). At the same time, UNRWA should take steps to ensure its neutrality. That is why last week Japan voted in favour of General Assembly resolutions ES-10/25 and resolution ES-10/26, which received the support of more than 150 countries. We urge all the parties, including Israel, to listen to the voices of the international community.

A negotiated settlement between the parties is also key to making a real difference on the ground. In that regard, Japan is encouraged by the reports of a resumption of the ceasefire talks and the seemingly forward-looking progress. We support the tireless efforts of the mediators. Both parties should seize the opportunity to finally conclude an agreement. But a ceasefire, even if it materializes, does not mark the end of the tragedy. Tremendous challenges lie ahead to rebuild Gaza and provide for the well-being of the people living there. As a country that has experienced destruction and restoration after the Second World War and many natural disasters, Japan stands ready to meaningfully contribute to the early recovery and reconstruction of Gaza.

Ultimately, the only viable way out of this conflict is the peaceful co-existence of Israel and Palestine.

Japan remains steadfastly committed to that vision. We oppose Israel's illegal settlement activities and any attempts to annex the West Bank. Those would undermine the viability of a two-State solution and must stop immediately. We will also spare no effort to revitalize the Palestinian Authority financially and politically, both here at the United Nations and through our own initiatives, even after our current term on the Security Council is over.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): We thank Mr. Khiari for his comprehensive briefing and we take note of the statements of the civil society representatives.

We extend our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his sobering report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). It is a report filled with anguish and despair for the Palestinian people — a stark testament to the ongoing impunity with which the Israeli occupying Power disregards international law. It also reflects the paralysis of the international community in the face of such blatant and systematic violations. That report is yet another painful reminder of our collective failure to uphold the rights and dignity of the Palestinian people.

In Gaza, people are not living; they are simply waiting to die. As the Secretary-General himself recalled, "the catastrophe in Gaza is nothing short of a complete breakdown of our common humanity". The death toll now exceeds 45,000. Of those, 70 per cent are women and children, and more than 107,000 others are injured. Entire neighbourhoods in Gaza have been demolished. Violence, disease and starvation are omnipresent threats today. The humanitarian aid remains highly inadequate to the immense needs of the population. Quite simply, Gaza has turned into a graveyard for the living. As if those miserable conditions were not enough, the Israeli occupying army systematically hunts Palestinian civilians from one shelter to another. On 15 December, just three days ago, four schools sheltering displaced families were bombed, killing at least 50 people. For those who have questioned the gravity of the violations of international humanitarian law under Israeli occupation, the facts presented in the Secretary-General's report leave no room for ambiguity or doubt. Objective observers will reach the conclusion that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. That is meticulously documented by Amnesty International in a recent report, pertinently titled *'You Feel Like You Are Subhuman': Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza*.

What will the international community do in the face of that genocide? Will it continue to perpetuate impunity and immunity? Will it continue to obstruct international justice? Will it continue to deprive Palestinians of their fundamental rights? Is it not time for justice and accountability? For us, stopping this ethnic cleansing is a moral and legal duty. A ceasefire in Gaza is long overdue. We deeply regret the Council's inability to demand an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire. The Security Council could have acted decisively to fulfil its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. We cannot continue to look away.

The situation in the West Bank, including in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, is equally alarming. The Security Council, the General Assembly and the International Court of Justice have reaffirmed that Israel's settlements and associated practices constitute flagrant violations of international law. Yet the settlement activity continues unabated. Plans for more than 13,000 housing units have been advanced in 2024 alone. Meanwhile, the houses of Palestinians are being destroyed. Palestinians are living in terror of violence from settlers emboldened by the protection of the occupying authorities. While we acknowledge the very light sanctions that some countries have imposed on a few settlers, the Council cannot remain silent.

Furthermore, the daily killing of Palestinians, including women and children, underscores the relentless violence that they are enduring. On average, one Palestinian child is killed every two days in the West Bank — a chilling reminder of the human toll of the Israeli occupation. Moreover, the Palestinian national project is now facing yet another threat, that of annexation. We strongly condemn the statements by several Israeli officials calling for the annexation of the West Bank, which is a clear violation of international law and jeopardizes any prospects for peace. It undermines the efforts aimed at establishing a State of Palestine. The Council must stand resolutely against those plans.

We reiterate our strong condemnation of the decisions that the Israeli authorities have enacted aimed at halting the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the occupied Palestinian territory. If implemented, those measures will deny Palestinians any access at all to the life-saving services that UNRWA provides. I want to make it clear that UNRWA is irreplaceable. It operates based on a mandate from the

General Assembly, and it reflects the collective will of the international community. Any attempt to undermine it is an affront to the international community as a whole. We must all work together to preserve UNRWA and ensure that it can continue its critical work.

In conclusion, the developments in Gaza, the West Bank and the broader region offer a stark reflection of the true intentions of the Israeli occupying Power. Nevertheless, while the situation is dire it is not irreversible. The Council must rise to the moment, uphold international law and ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law. We owe it to the Palestinian people to translate our words into meaningful and decisive action so as to bring hope where there is despair.

As President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of Algeria has said, stability and security in the Middle East are closely linked to the resolution of the Palestinian issue, which requires an end to the occupation and a restoration of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights. The establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is not merely a legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people but the cornerstone of achieving lasting peace in the whole Middle East.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and the civil society briefers for their briefings.

Last Wednesday, the General Assembly adopted resolutions ES-10/25 and ES-10/26 by an overwhelming majority at its tenth emergency special session, demanding an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, the removal of obstacles to humanitarian access and the guarantee that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) would be able to carry out its duties. Regrettably, in the week since then, hundreds more innocent Palestinian lives have been lost to Israeli bombardment in Gaza. Currently, more than 2 million people are still languishing amid war, hunger, disease and the cold, looking to the international community for the dawn of peace in Gaza.

The Security Council has made great efforts to end the hostilities and ease the disastrous situation. However, due to the repeated obstructions of a permanent member, the Council's responses on the Palestinian-Israeli question have failed the international community profoundly. We have noted

the relevant country's claim that a ceasefire agreement is about to be achieved, but the attacks on Gaza and its bombardment have not stopped and innocent lives continue to be lost. China supports the Council in using all options in its toolbox and taking all necessary actions to end the conflict in Gaza. We urge the country concerned to refrain from blocking Council actions. At the same time, China urges Israel to heed the strong calls of the international community, immediately cease military operations in Gaza, fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law, lift the blockade on Gaza and restrictions on humanitarian access, stop actions that stifle UNRWA and other humanitarian institutions and provide security guarantees for humanitarian operations throughout Gaza.

As many national representatives noted in their statements at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly on the Palestinian question, piecemeal crisis management alone will not prevent a relapse into a vicious cycle of conflict and turmoil. Only a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine can usher in a genuine and lasting peace between Palestine and Israel and start a new chapter of peace and stability in the Middle East. China believes that we must stay committed to the two-State solution, which is the only viable way to resolve the Palestinian question. The international community should stop Israel's barbaric expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank and reject any dangerous attempts to annex the West Bank. Gaza is an inseparable and important part of Palestine. Its future arrangements should be predicated on Israel's withdrawal of forces and should be decided by the Palestinian people through autonomous consultation.

The illegal occupation must end. History clearly demonstrates that a prolonged occupation will only be a hindrance to the Palestinian people's national self-determination and give Israel the power to single-handedly deny them statehood. It will breed only more hatred and antagonism, sowing the seeds of instability in the Middle East. The Israeli occupation is a violation of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and international law. Israel must fulfil its international obligations to immediately end the illegal occupation. An independent Palestinian State must be established. While the Jewish nation has long since had an independent State, the Palestinian people's right to statehood, survival and return has long been ignored.

Only when the two States of Palestine and Israel live in peace as neighbours can lasting peace be truly realized.

China supports the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign Palestinian State, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital. We support the State of Palestine's full membership in the United Nations. Together with the international community, China stands ready to continue its efforts to help bring a swift end to the conflict, restore peace to the region and achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States of America.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing. I also wish to thank Ms. Efron for her briefing and her recommendations. I especially want to thank Michael Levy for sharing his anguish and frustration with the Security Council. We will continue our efforts to do everything possible to bring his brother Or home to his loving family.

The United States is committed to finalizing a ceasefire in Gaza, with a release of hostages that allows for a surge in humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians — that is our north star. Despite progress coming in fits and starts and despite progress feeling at times frustratingly slow, there is still a reason for hope. Thanks to the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, Hamas is isolated. As we sit here, negotiators are in the region, working hard to close the remaining gaps between the parties. Now let me be clear. I am not starry-eyed — there are still difficult issues to resolve — but we cannot give up on diplomacy. We cannot give up on the 2 million Palestinians in Gaza who, for more than a year, have lived through hell. It is a hell that was ignited by Hamas when it attacked Israel on 7 October 2023. That was not an effort at peace, it was a declaration of war. And as we heard from Michael Levy, we cannot give up on the 100 plus remaining hostages, including seven Americans, or their families, who have also endured the unimaginable over these past 14 months.

Granting Hamas, a terrorist organization, its demand for an immediate, unconditional ceasefire offers no path to durable peace. It will not end the suffering or cycles of violence for Israelis and Palestinians. Instead, we must speak with one voice and demand that Hamas agree to release the hostages they are holding, so that we can implement the deal on the table to end the suffering

of hostages from more than a dozen Member States and millions of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, and to put the parties back on a path towards the two-State solution.

It is also time for Israel and the United Nations to stop working against each other and instead take pragmatic steps to ensure that there is no interruption of humanitarian aid delivery to Palestinians in desperate need. We reiterate our concern that Israel must not in any way restrict the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Gaza, imposing obstacles that must be removed. Going forward, Israel must also ensure that the implementation of recent legislation does not further impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance and critical services, including by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which remains a vital lifeline for Palestinians. It is equally vital that as the aid delivery architecture in Gaza evolves, the United Nations must work with all relevant parties and have a viable plan in place to facilitate aid deliveries.

The Secretary-General's recent letter regarding UNRWA and the future of aid delivery in Gaza suggests that the United Nations has not yet begun an earnest conversation with Israel regarding implementation of the legislation. Nor does it appear that the relevant United Nations agencies have had detailed conversations regarding the steps they could take to help ensure the continuity of United Nations aid deliveries to Gaza. With lives in the balance, that must change. The United Nations must demonstrate that it will continue to work to find a path to support the people of Gaza.

Cynicism will not end the horrific conflict, but bold leadership can offer the prospect of a durable peace, one in which Palestinians and Israelis live side by side with equal levels of dignity, security and opportunity. To put a finer point on it, a durable peace between Israelis and Palestinians will be achieved only through a negotiated two-State solution consistent with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. There is no other path that guarantees that Palestinians can live with the freedom and dignity they deserve, and there is no other path that guarantees an enduring peace between Israel and its neighbours. That is a peace worth striving for, and one that the United States has worked tirelessly to advance, even in the darkest hours since 7 October.

Even as we work to surge relief into Gaza right now, we must therefore also think about a day

after — one in which Gaza is reunited with the West Bank, under the control and governance of a revitalized and reformed Palestinian Authority. Economic security in the West Bank offers a foundation on which the parties can build. In that regard, we welcome the Israeli Government's recent decision to extend correspondent banking relationships between Israeli banks and their Palestinian counterparts for another year. It is a step in the right direction to help build trust and deepen economic links, but it is just a start. We need to see a resumption of the economic activities, including worker permits, that ground to a halt in the wake of 7 October.

We also remain deeply concerned about the fact that other Israeli actions in the West Bank are undercutting the Palestinian Authority's ability to meet the needs of the Palestinian people, and more broadly are dampening the prospects for a two-State solution. We reiterate our position that the advancement of Israeli settlements in the West Bank is an obstacle to the achievement of a two-State solution — the end result that we all want to see as we seek to bring the fighting in Gaza to a close. Yet this past year more settlement units were approved than in any other 12-month period in this decade. We reiterate our belief that Israel's programme of support for the expansion of settlements is inconsistent with international law and serves only to weaken Israeli security.

We also remain deeply concerned about the violence committed by extremist settlers in the West Bank. A disproportionate amount of that violence emanates from illegal outposts, several dozen of which have been established over the past year. To be clear, those outposts are illegal under Israeli law. The hundreds of violent attacks over the past year have forced Palestinians to abandon their homes and vacate more than a dozen of their villages. What is even more alarming is the fact that last year saw the highest number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank since the United Nations began collecting data in 2005. We condemn the attacks by extremist settlers in the strongest possible terms and reiterate that Israel must intervene and stop them — or better yet, prevent them from happening in the first place. To that end, we urge Israel to halt the efforts to legalize outposts in the West Bank and to do everything possible to de-escalate tensions and hold all perpetrators of violence accountable, regardless of the background of the perpetrators or the victims.

I first addressed the Council on this topic in March 2021 (see S/2021/302), during my first presidency. I had

arrived at the Permanent Mission of the United States of America to the United Nations just a few weeks before, and I outlined three pillars of United States policy with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first was to sustain our ironclad commitment to Israel's security; the second was to help both Israelis and Palestinians take steps towards a two-State solution, ensuring Israel's future as a democratic and Jewish State, while upholding the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations for a State of their own; and the third was to deliver aid to the Palestinian people. I said then, "Let us strive to achieve peace and prosperity for all."

So much has changed since that meeting nearly four years ago. So many lives have been shattered before and on 7 October, and in the months that have followed, as a result of the catastrophic conflict that Hamas instigated. But now, as in 2021, the United States remains committed to bringing that cycle to an end. And we will therefore continue to work tirelessly to advance diplomacy on the ground — for a ceasefire with the release of hostages, for a surge of aid in Gaza today and in the days after, for a reaffirmation of the dignity and security of Palestinians and Israelis alike and of opportunity for them both, for a two-State solution and a new day for the next generation. Let us strive to achieve that peace and prosperity for all.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, allow me to thank the Council members who will be departing at the end of the year — Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland — for their tireless efforts to uphold international law, including by achieving a ceasefire, which is the necessary prerequisite for everything else that the Council has called for. I would also like to say that while we deplore the fact that the United States has resorted to the veto several times during the past year, I want to commend your personal engagement, Madam President, and your constructive approach, always seeking to move the needle in the right direction in ways that the wider public is unaware of. I would also like to thank the briefers, to whom we listened carefully, as well as the Secretary-General and his representative, Assistant Secretary-General Khiari, for the report on

the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and for their diligent efforts.

Another year is ending, but the massacres have yet to end. Almost a year ago to the day, the Council adopted resolution 2720 (2023). Yet a year later, starvation and famine are still an integral part of the Israeli assault on our people. In Gaza, every Palestinian life has been either upended or completely ended. There have been more than 150,000 casualties; Palestinian children, women and men have been murdered, wounded and maimed by a ruthless Israeli military onslaught by air, land and sea that continues as we speak, claiming more lives every single day. More than 17,000 Palestinian children have been orphaned or separated from their parents. Our children now represent the largest cohort of child amputees per capita in the whole world. More than 12,000 Palestinians are detained. Many of them have been abducted, subjected to torture and sexual abuse and even killed. Thousands more civilians are unaccounted for, and those who survive face untold torment. Trauma, terror, destruction and devastation are inflicted on the Palestinian people, with no end in sight. It is a mass collective punishment unseen in our world in this century.

More than a year ago, and from this same Chamber, we called for a ceasefire that would allow Palestinian and Israeli families to be reunited in life, not death. We called for respect of civilian life — all civilian life, not preferring some over others. We warned of what would come if a ceasefire was not imposed (see S/PV.9489). And yet, only a few weeks ago, another draft resolution put forward by the 10 elected members of the Security Council and calling for an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire (S/2024/835), which enjoyed the support of 14 Security Council members, was vetoed by the United States (see S/PV.9790). The General Assembly, acting under the Uniting for Peace formula and taking action where the Council failed to, demanded that immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire.

And we call yet again on the Council if such a ceasefire does not come about in the coming days — and we hope it does — we ask the Council to act under Chapter VII to demand an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. That is the only way to bring to an end to the massacres, to secure the release of prisoners and hostages, to ensure humanitarian aid reaches all those in need, to end the forcible displacement of our people

and the annexation of our land and to ensure the full withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces.

Eight years ago, the Council adopted the landmark resolution 2334 (2016) to put an end to the land grab and to pave the way to ending the Israeli occupation and achieving a just peace. But unfortunately and predictably, Israel persisted in pursuing its colonial agenda, flagrantly and wantonly breaching international law and United Nations resolutions. And the Council and all States are yet to adopt the measures that hold Israel accountable for its crimes, bring them to a halt and reverse its unlawful annexation of Palestinian land. Since the onset of the occupation, Israel has confined Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory to the areas already built up and inhabited — only 13 per cent of East Jerusalem and 40 per cent of the rest of the West Bank. The aim has always been to ensure that Israel could seize maximum Palestinian land with minimum Palestinians. But even that was not enough, and Israel decided to violently displace and replace our people, to forcibly displace Palestinian families and communities, to demolish their homes, to build settlements in the heart of our cities and in such a manner as to destroy the territorial integrity of our State and to fragment our people and our land.

The International Court of Justice has stated in no uncertain terms that

“The sustained abuse by Israel of its position as an occupying Power, through annexation and an assertion of permanent control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory and continued frustration of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, violates fundamental principles of international law and renders Israel’s presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory unlawful.”
(A/78/968, para. 261)

The Court called for an end to Israel’s unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory as rapidly as possible and reminded all States and the United Nations of their obligations in that regard. Only resolute action and measures of accountability by the international community as a whole shall lead Israel to stop its methodical destruction of the Palestinian people, of the Palestinian State, of the two-State solution and of the prospects of peace in our region. In that regard, we await and expect in the coming days the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolutions ES-10/24 and ES-

10/26 to inform future action by the membership. We will study it thoroughly — we hope that Council members do so — and then we will decide on the next steps forward.

We welcome the launch of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution and the decision of the General Assembly to hold a high-level international conference in June 2025 — and I think my French colleague referred to it — on the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions pertaining to the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the two-State solution. We call on all States to act without delay, in line with their obligations under the Charter and international law, to bring an end to Israel’s unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory and to ensure the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination and independence.

In parallel to its full-fledged assault against the Palestinian people, Israel is attacking all those trying to support Palestinian rights and to save Palestinian lives. We have seen it with the United Nations, and especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. And we welcome the overwhelming support of the General Assembly for the Agency in the face of relentless Israeli attacks. And we have seen it against international non-governmental organizations, most recently Amnesty International, following their report concluding that Israel is committing genocide in the Gaza Strip. And we have seen it against States — most recently, against Ireland. The Israeli Foreign Minister closed the Israeli Embassy in Dublin stating that “Ireland has crossed every red line”. Is that really the case? Therefore, Israel continues its genocide, starves and forcibly displaces a people, colonizes and annexes land, but it is Ireland that has crossed every red line for denouncing those crimes and insisting on respect for international law and human rights? That must be a joke. How much more absurd can the situation get? How much more indecent can Israeli officials get? Israel has now accused the United Nations, almost every State on Earth, the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, the world’s most renowned non-governmental organizations and the public figures and moral voices of our time of antisemitism. Jews around the world cannot be held responsible for Israel’s actions, and neither can Israel speak in their name or use them as a shield to deflect the condemnation of its violations.

We reject the deliberate conflation between the actions of a State — I should say the crimes of a State — and those who belong to a given faith. We should all consider that as dangerous and a terrible disservice to the fight against antisemitism, and we must demand that it stop. Ireland and other countries around the world have shown that they will not be deterred or distracted by Israel's baseless attacks and smear campaigns. They will hold to their principled positions despite the bullying, threats and harassment. We salute all those who are standing up for freedom, justice and peace, many of them informed by their own histories and struggles and pushed to take action by their commitment to international law and human rights.

Those who think that they can end this conflict by taking more Palestinian lives and unlawfully colonizing more Palestinian land or that they can bypass or ignore the Palestinian question and somehow establish peace in our region are delusional. They are ignoring 77 years of history, which demonstrate that there is no way around the Palestinian issue and that there will be no peace in our region without the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

We are out of time but we are not out of options. We are not powerless. Occupation, war and death are not our only horizon. But we must all take the required action to bring them to an end. There can be no more delays, no more excuses, no more half measures, no more strong speeches and weak actions. Actions speak louder than words. It is time to show resolve, be guided by moral clarity and lead by example. We call on all States to examine what more they can — and must — do to uphold international law and implement United Nations resolutions, and we tell them that they have a responsibility before history and humankind, for our people and for all peoples, to act now, so that freedom, justice and peace can prevail. They must act now to end the massacres and genocide in Gaza, end the ethnic cleansing and apartheid, end the illegal occupation, end the conflict and achieve peace.

We ask for nothing more than the rights that international law guarantees our people, but we also cannot accept anything less. The Palestinian people need the Security Council's continued support and solidarity, now more than ever. Please do not forsake them.

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

Mr. Danon (Israel): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and Ms. Efron for their briefings. I would also like to thank the United States for allowing the voices of the hostages' families to finally be heard in the Security Council. I thank Mr. Levy for his brave and incredibly powerful briefing. We will do everything we can to bring his brother and all the hostages home. I must note my disgust at the fact that the representative of Algeria could not bring himself to acknowledge Mr. Levy and the pain he suffers every day because of Hamas, or even to mention the crimes of Hamas in Gaza.

As we reach the end of a very long year, I would like to ask the members of the Council to cast their minds back over the past 12 months, to the pain and suffering felt by so many people, including the families of the 100 hostages still held by Hamas and the sacrifices made to protect the innocent from terrorists. However, they have also been 12 months of immense transformation and ahead of us lies opportunity. In 2024, the Middle East has become virtually unrecognizable. We continue to dismantle Hamas and we continue to eliminate any threat that they might pose and rid Gaza of its terrorist oppressors. Moving north, Hizbullah, once Iran's most vicious and dangerous proxy, has been heavily degraded. Arch-terrorists — members will recall the names Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif, Hassan Nasrallah, Ibrahim Aqil and dozens of others who have caused unimaginable suffering to millions of people, not only Israelis — have been eliminated. Now the Al-Assad regime, responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of its own people, has crumbled to dust.

It is obvious to all that those are not isolated events. They are all connected and together they present an extraordinary opportunity for the Council and the world. The chance before us is clear: to finally end the Islamic regime of Iran's aspirations for a supremacist Shiite empire and liberate the world from a most corrupt, violent and destabilizing regime. Israel has acted decisively. We have struck the terror networks that once cast a shadow over our region. But the burden of securing peace does not rest solely on Israel's shoulders. Iran's provocations continue to escalate, with shameless threats about its nuclear ambitions. Its proxies in Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq remain active and deadly, spreading chaos far beyond the region. That is

not a localized threat — the Islamic regime of Iran is a danger to the entire world.

The recent report of the International Atomic Energy Agency on Iran's nuclear progression (GOV.2024/61) and the recent letter from France, Germany and the United Kingdom (S/2024/862) highlighting Iran's "near-total non-compliance" were cries for immediate action. They wrote about a hypothetical future, but the danger is already here, looming on the horizon. The time to act is now. The Council must implement crushing sanctions to suffocate Iran's ability to fund its proxies. It must designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps — Iran's tentacle of terror — as a terrorist organization. Those steps are not optional. They are imperative. The Islamic regime thrives on inaction and indecision. If the Council fails — if it is silent instead of acting decisively — it will be complicit in enabling a campaign of terror.

Let me be unequivocal. Israel has no intention of occupying Syria or parts of Syria. We are not empire-builders. We are defenders. Defenders of our people, our borders and our right to live in peace. Our actions are limited and defensive.

We are now approaching the holiday of Hanukkah. It is a time for reflection and resilience and a time to draw lessons from history. Hanukkah tells the story of two miracles, the first of the oil that lasted for eight days in the temple, which was a divine act beyond human control. But the second miracle, the triumph of the Maccabees over the mighty Greek empire, was a testament to human courage, and to the will of a small but determined people who refuse to bow to tyranny. Just two weeks ago, we saw another cruel and evil regime overthrown by a determined population whom it had oppressed for decades. We all know what Al-Assad did to his people.

I now want to approach the brave and ancient people of Iran and to tell them not to miss this rare historic opportunity and to take action now. The people of Israel are standing by their side, and I want to say to them — in their own language — that we know the cost of freedom and the courage it demands. Their fight is not just for themselves, but for the millions of lives that their regime has destabilized and destroyed. They have in their hands the power to restore the beautiful Iranian

nation and rebuild a land rich in history, culture and resilience.

As we reflect on the hope of Hanukkah, we must also confront the unfinished work before us. The scars of terrorism remain fresh. There are still 100 hostages held by Hamas in Gaza, enduring conditions that are beyond comprehension. As we speak, Israel is negotiating for their freedom. Hamas's crimes against humanity are despicable, and yet much of the world remains silent.

While we are dismantling Hamas's terror network, we are continuing our humanitarian efforts to ensure that assistance reaches those in need. Hundreds of trucks are entering Gaza on a daily basis, and the total aid amount has now reached 1.2 million tons. Just this past Saturday, we coordinated the entry of 5,000 litres of fuel for operating essential hospital systems. Alongside the fuel, we delivered hundreds of boxes of medical equipment and food. Additionally, 36 patients and caregivers were transferred to more stable hospitals in Gaza. Yet we also see what happened on the same day — as we delivered life-saving medical aid to Gazan civilians, Hamas terrorists fired rockets just 50 metres from an international aid warehouse. That is the reality we are facing. We will continue to do our work. We will continue to open new aid crossings and to facilitate aid with our international partners.

As we conclude this painful yet transformative year, Israel looks to the future. We are all intelligent enough to recognize that there are two sides at this table, and let us be honest about it — one side truly desires a constructive, meaningful and peaceful future. The other side, however, is using this conflict as a tool to promote its own agendas. Some are using it to distract from conflicts in their own corner of the world, while some are using it to sustain their failing organizations and others to serve their domestic political interests.

Ultimately, Israel will remain clear-eyed. We will bring back all of our hostages. We will continue to do what is necessary to see that peaceful, constructive future realized, regardless of the noise, the bias and the agendas that we see play out in this Chamber and beyond.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.