



Security Council

Eightieth year

9840

th meeting

Friday, 17 January 2025, 3.30 p.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Bendjama	(Algeria)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Denmark	Ms. Lassen
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Greece	Mr. Sekeris
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Pakistan	Mr. Akram
	Panama	Mr. Moscoso
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sangjin Kim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Kanu
	Slovenia	Ms. Jurečko
	Somalia	Mr. Osman
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Ms. Wu

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

* Reissued for technical reasons on 10 March 2025.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Security Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Israel, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations; and Major General Patrick Gauchat, Head of Mission and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix: I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation with respect to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). I will commence with a briefing on UNIFIL, and after that Major General Gauchat will deliver a briefing on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).

As I briefed the Council earlier this week on 13 January, the cessation of hostilities between Lebanon and Israel, while fragile, continues to hold. During the ongoing visit to Lebanon by the Secretary-General, I have had the opportunity to visit the UNIFIL area of operations earlier today — with the Secretary-General, of course — and we saw first-hand the situation on the ground. We also met with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and with the caretaker Prime Minister in Beirut. From what I observed and based on what our interlocutors shared, the Lebanese authorities are committed to upholding their commitments under the cessation of hostilities agreement and resolution 1701 (2006). And I reiterate: the United Nations, including UNIFIL, is absolutely committed to supporting the parties in this regard.

The Lebanese Armed Forces have deployed to 93 locations south of the Litani River as of 15 January, compared with an estimated 10 locations on 27 November 2024. UNIFIL has supported the Lebanese army in its deployment to many of these locations. As part of a plan to deploy an additional 6,000 troops south of the Litani River, the Lebanese Armed Forces have deployed 262 newly recruited personnel to the South Litani Sector, while another 673 recruits are undergoing training. An additional 600 individuals are undergoing pre-recruitment screening. I acknowledge the efforts of the military technical committee, with the participation of several troop-contributing-countries, which is also supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces in their recruitment and deployment efforts.

To facilitate closer coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, UNIFIL has stationed a liaison officer at the LAF South Litani Sector headquarters. With additional capabilities in the south and a renewed commitment from the Lebanese Armed Forces to fulfil their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006), we expect further improvements in the collaboration with UNIFIL moving forward.

We are encouraged to hear that a plan for a sequenced withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces was presented at the meeting of the cessation of hostilities mechanism on 6 January. With 10 days until the end of the stated 60-day period for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon, however, Israeli demolitions of tunnels, buildings and agricultural land continue. Some airstrikes have also been reported, as have ongoing violations of

Lebanese airspace. In addition, UNIFIL continues to detect trajectories of projectiles fired from south to north of the Blue Line, although at a much lower level than that of before 27 November 2024. UNIFIL has only detected three trajectories fired from north to south of the Blue Line since 27 November 2024 and none since 2 December 2024.

Noting that the Israel Defense Forces has stated that its actions are targeting Hizbullah assets and personnel, the continued presence of the Israel Defense Forces in Lebanon is a violation of resolution 1701 (2006). We urge the Israel Defense Forces to withdraw from Lebanese territory, certainly by the end of the period envisaged in the announcement of the cessation of hostilities.

The last year has clearly demonstrated the significant presence of unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons related to Hizbullah and other non-State armed groups south of the Litani River in blatant violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Encouragingly, the Lebanese Armed Forces have shown increased resolve in dealing with these in recent weeks. The mission has itself located 116 caches of weapons and ammunition, including rocket-propelled grenade launchers, rockets, anti-tank mines and rifles. It has also observed some potential tunnels and Hizbullah sites. In all these instances, UNIFIL informed the Lebanese Armed Forces for their appropriate action. It is vital that the Lebanese authorities continue to actively fulfil their commitments under the cessation of hostilities agreement and resolution 1701 (2006). The Secretary-General will of course underscore this message in his meetings with Lebanon's newly elected President, Speaker of Parliament and Prime Minister-designate in Beirut tomorrow. At the same time, UNIFIL is adjusting its posture and operational activities to support the cessation of hostilities, in line with its mandate under resolution 1701 (2006). We certainly hope that, with the new political dynamics and the new political set-up in Lebanon, more space and political support will be forthcoming to UNIFIL, as we move forward, for the Force to fully fulfil its mandate.

The mission is working with United Nations headquarters and troop-contributing-countries to deploy strengthened capacities in the areas of mine clearance, unexploded ordnance disposal and engineering to clear roads and facilitate a return to full patrolling and monitoring functions across the area of operations. Meanwhile, UNIFIL is stepping up its operational activities in areas where the security situation allows for this. This includes areas further north of the Blue Line in Sector West. UNIFIL is now conducting an average of 50 operational activities and 28 logistics activities per day, compared with just 16 per day in total before 27 November 2024, and UNIFIL will further strengthen and expand its operations. The mission will also seek to utilize technology to enhance its monitoring capacity along the Blue Line and throughout its area of operations. The acceptance by the parties of the use of technology in this regard will be a testament to their continued commitment to uphold the cessation of hostilities agreement and take real steps towards the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). Furthermore, UNIFIL is continuously developing and fine-tuning its public messages to address mis- and disinformation and to bolster public understanding of its mandated functions, as part of an increasingly robust strategic communications strategy.

UNIFIL monitors and reports on violations of resolution 1701 (2006), and we will continue to report on such violations to this Council.

With respect to the mechanism chaired by the United States of America, with the participation of France, we urge the parties to utilize that forum as a means to resolve outstanding issues through coordination, rather than unilateral action. In consultation with the parties, the United States and France, UNIFIL is sharing information related to violations of resolution 1701 (2006) with the mechanism, with the consent of the parties.

Critical to supporting the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) is the mission's unrestricted freedom of movement and full access throughout its area of operations. Currently — seven weeks since the cessation of hostilities came into effect — most contingents often remain confined to base and, on occasion, must seek shelter in bunkers, owing, in particular, to nearby IDF military activity or IDF advisories for UNIFIL to take shelter for their safety and security. A notable example of that occurred on 6 January when UNIFIL personnel at Naqoura headquarters took shelter for approximately three hours early morning while the IDF conducted demolitions nearby. That afternoon, the IDF commenced its withdrawal from locations around Naqoura, coinciding with the meeting of the mechanism hosted by UNIFIL on the afternoon of 6 January.

UNIFIL's operational activities are further constrained by the presence of unexploded ordnance, IDF roadblocks at various locations in the area of operations and interference from local individuals. The mission has protested all restrictions of movement to the parties, and we will underscore those messages in our meetings with Lebanese officials this week. Despite those challenges, the mission is increasing the number and intensity of its operations.

As the IDF has been replying to few, if not very few, of the Mission's requests for deconfliction, the Mission has adjusted to a notification system for critical operational and logistics movements. The Mission continues to engage with the Israel Defense Forces to remove Level 2 — that is, stay in-base — restrictions so that it can return to Level 1, normal activity, in all locations in which the IDF is no longer present.

While challenges remain, there is reason for optimism, coupled with a strong determination that there be no return to the past. Confidence in security and stability along the Blue Line is necessary for the communities of southern Lebanon and northern Israel. The ongoing returns of residents to southern Lebanon will continue as Israeli forces withdraw and as reconstruction efforts gather speed. And we note that Israel has also presented a plan for the return of its residents to communities close to the Blue Line in March 2025.

The election of a new President in Lebanon and the designation of a Prime Minister tasked with forming a new Government are important steps towards the strengthening of State institutions and the extension of State authority throughout all of Lebanon's territory. In that regard, unequivocal political and material support from the Lebanese authorities for the strengthened deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces south of the Litani River will be vital. The new Lebanese authorities' ongoing support of UNIFIL's actions will also be crucial. At the same time, we encourage renewed support from the international community for those efforts. To those Member States contributing troops to UNIFIL and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization's Observer Group Lebanon, we again extend our most sincere gratitude.

Major General Gauchat, who is serving temporarily as Acting Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNDOF until the deployment of Major General Anita Asmah in February, will now be providing a briefing on the situation in the UNDOF area of operations. I would like to commend the efficiency and dedication of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan. Their military and civilian personnel are serving in increasingly difficult circumstances.

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

I now give the floor to Major General Gauchat.

Major General Gauchat: I am grateful for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the challenges faced by our peacekeepers in the Golan.

The fall of the Al-Assad Government on 8 December 2024 has had an impact on the UNDOF area of operations and UNDOF activities. For example, the Syrian military is no longer represented in the fortnightly inspections carried out through Observer Group Golan on the military position of the Syrian security forces, nor is it represented in discussions on presumed violations. While UNDOF has had continuous contact with Syrian interlocutors throughout those recent developments, liaison by UNDOF with Syria is affected. The mission is working on establishing stable communication channels with the caretaker authorities. I note recent public statements by the caretaker authorities regarding their commitment to the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces.

UNDOF personnel, supported by United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) military observers serving in Observer Group Golan, remain at all their positions occupied before December 2024. They continue to carry out their mandated activities, which include monitoring and observing the area of separation and the ceasefire line, in addition to patrolling the area of limitation.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) remain present in the area of separation. The IDF continue to carry out construction work inside the area of separation with heavy equipment. They also set up communications equipment inside the area. The IDF informed UNDOF that

“it would enter the area of separation as a temporary defensive measure to prevent it from being occupied by non-State armed groups following the withdrawal of the Syrian authorities”.

UNDOF has informed its Israeli counterparts that their presence and actions in the area of separation constitute a violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, and UNDOF continues to reiterate, in its ongoing contacts with those counterparts, the need for full respect of the Agreement. I must restate that the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces remains valid.

The full operational movements of United Nations personnel in the area of separation, including patrolling and logistical movement, has been affected by the IDF presence and roadblocks in the area. UNDOF used to conduct approximately 55 to 60 daily operational and essential logistical movements, and it is currently restricted to approximately 10 essential logistical movements per day in the area of separation. But at the same time, UNDOF and Observer Group Golan were able to adapt their operations in the area of limitation on the Bravo side and increased the number of patrols from 10 to 40 per week. Also, UNDOF was able to neutralize a few units of unexploded ordnance that were found in public areas on the Bravo side, which represented a danger for the population.

Residents in the area of separation have reached out to UNDOF to appeal for its assistance to ask the IDF to leave their village centres and lift roadblocks affecting their agricultural work. They have protested that the IDF have disrupted their communities, and they have expressed fear, reporting instances of damage and destruction, allegedly by IDF battle tanks, to roads, water pumping stations and solar panels. A number of residents have also protested IDF searches in their villages, with some reporting arrests of their relatives. UNDOF is liaising with the Israeli authorities, including the IDF and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in that regard, and, recently, several discussions indicated positive exchanges and real progress.

It is imperative that the United Nations peacekeepers be allowed to carry out their mandated tasks without obstruction. The mission has consistently called on all parties to maintain the ceasefire, to refrain from any actions that are in violation of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement and to respect UNDOF and its mandate. The mission maintains its liaison with the IDF to ensure that it can continue to carry out

its operational activities in a safe and secure manner, without any hindrance to its freedom of movement, to fully implement its mandate.

There should be no military forces or activities in the area of separation, other than UNDOF. It is imperative that all parties respect their obligations under the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and uphold the terms of the Agreement to preserve stability on the Golan.

We count on the continued support of Member States to ensure that UNDOF continues to have at its disposal all means and resources for an effective and efficient level of operational activities. The Mission needs to return to its full mandate implementation, as prescribed in the Disengagement of Forces Agreement signed by the parties and mandated under resolution 350 (1974).

Let me conclude by extending once again our heartfelt condolences to the family of Brigadier General Amitabh Jha, who passed away on 23 December last year, during his tour of duty as Deputy Force Commander of UNDOF.

I am grateful to the countries providing military personnel to UNDOF and UNTSO for their critical contributions, which are key factors in the Force's ability to implement its mandate. I commend the efficiency and dedication of the personnel — military and civilian — of UNDOF and the Observer Group Golan.

The President: I thank Major General Gauchat for his statement.

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

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Major General Patrick Gauchat, Head of Mission and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), for their comprehensive briefings on the situations in the areas of operation of Blue Helmets in Lebanon and in the Golan Heights. We are also grateful to the Algerian presidency for organizing today's meeting.

Against the backdrop of heightened tensions in the region, it is of key importance to what extent the United Nations Member States and the Security Council are prepared to stand up for peacekeepers in the face of direct threats to their security and obstacles to the implementation of the mandate. That is precisely what the future of peacekeeping depends on, and without the firm support of all Security Council members, it is simply impossible to achieve confidence in peacekeeping.

From the briefings, it is clear that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) face the same specific challenge. That is Israel's high-handed actions in the areas in which those missions are deployed in violation of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and international agreements.

In Lebanon, during the recent ground invasion, Israel Defense Forces units occupied part of the territory north of the Blue Line and attacked UNIFIL facilities, including using tanks. The Israeli military and political leadership, at the height of the war, even demanded the withdrawal of peacekeeping forces from southern Lebanon, in violation of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 2749 (2024). To the peacekeepers' credit, they did not waver in the face of those direct threats and did not retreat one step. We are convinced that their firm position, supported by the members of the Security Council, the troop-contributing countries and the Secretariat, contributed to an early ceasefire agreement in Lebanon on 26 November 2024.

Unfortunately, in anticipation of the expiration of the 60-day deadline for the Lebanon agreement, as reported by the United Nations itself, many provisions of the document are still far from being implemented. According to reports, West Jerusalem

has sent signals that it intends to maintain control over three strategic heights in the south of Lebanon. Israel continues to violate the airspace, including by launching arbitrary airstrikes. Israeli shelling in the immediate vicinity of peacekeepers has also been reported. Of particular concern are the widespread Israeli destruction of civilian infrastructure and housing, and the prohibitions on the movement of Lebanese, preventing them from returning home.

Against the backdrop of the numerous violations of ceasefire agreements, the renewed monitoring mechanism in Lebanon, of which UNIFIL is a member, should clarify its ability to prevent them. We reaffirm our support for the initiative of our Algerian friends to send a Security Council mission to that country, including in order to send a clear message in favour of maintaining the ceasefire.

The situation in the area of separation is even more unpredictable. In Syria, the Israelis, taking advantage of the change of Government in Damascus, have inflicted enormous damage on Syria's military capabilities, seized more than 500 square kilometres of land, in violation of the terms of the 1974 Agreement on the Disengagement of Forces, and have occupied the buffer zone in the Golan region, the Bravo side, and the south-eastern slope of Mount Hermon and have advanced deep into Syria's Quneitra province. There have been alarming signals from West Jerusalem that the 1974 Agreement was no longer valid and that Mount Hermon should be returned to Israel. Under the current circumstances, the Blue Helmets cannot effectively carry out the tasks assigned to them.

At the same time, the new Syrian authorities confirmed their consent to the deployment of United Nations peacekeeping forces in the buffer zone in the Golan Heights. The Lebanese authorities have also provided unwavering support to the peacekeepers. We express our full support for UNIFIL and UNDOF, which play a key role in maintaining stability in the region and call on all parties to strictly ensure the security of the Blue Helmets and to refrain from any action that restricts their freedom of movement or impedes the implementation of their mandate. We recall that, as reaffirmed in presidential statement S/PRST/2025/1 on Lebanon, adopted yesterday, peacekeepers should never be the target of attacks.

The important work of UNIFIL and UNDOF is impossible as long as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the two Arab republics are threatened and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions are not implemented. That applies above all to Israel, which has invaded the territories of neighbouring Arab countries. We call on the Security Council to unequivocally defend those principles. Without which, the stabilization and improvement of the situation in the region will be impossible.

All those problems have not arisen out of thin air, but against the backdrop of unprecedented military operations by Israel, whose leadership claims to be fighting a war on seven fronts. Those operations have until recently enjoyed the unconditional support — military and political — of Washington, whose failed policy has led to the crisis affecting the entire Middle East region, its civilians and the peacekeepers working there, who continue to heroically fulfil their duty in accordance with the mandate entrusted to them.

The most recent developments in the Arab-Israeli conflict inspire cautious optimism. In that connection, the full and good-faith implementation of agreements on the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon and between Israel and Hamas are of particular importance. The key elements are well known — the cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of Israeli forces, ensuring unimpeded humanitarian access and a return to the universally recognized international legal principles of the Middle East peace process, as enshrined in the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Ms. Wu (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Major General Gauchat for their briefings today.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) maintain a critical role in upholding stability in the region. UNDOF remains a vital presence in the region and has an essential liaison function between the parties and with communities on the ground. Similarly, UNTSO is essential to monitoring ceasefires, supervising armistice agreements and preventing isolated incidents from escalating.

UNIFIL has an important role to play in helping the Lebanese State move towards full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). The United States commends the more than 10,000 peacekeepers from over 50 countries serving with UNIFIL and the more than 1,200 peacekeepers serving with UNDOF. Their operating environment has been dynamic and at times volatile in recent months, and we thank the peacekeepers for their flexibility and resilience and their commitment to remaining in place and carrying out their missions during this challenging period.

As we discussed earlier this week, the United States remains committed to supporting Israel and Lebanon in their efforts to implement the arrangement they reached on 27 November in order for civilians to safely return to their homes on both sides of the Blue Line. We reiterate our call on all parties to respect the safety and security of UNIFIL personnel and premises and to avoid incidents that expose them to risk or harm. That is key to UNIFIL's ability to conduct patrols and provide the Council with information regarding conduct inconsistent with resolution 1701 (2006). The United States has consistently reaffirmed its support for Israel's ability to exercise its right to self-defence, consistent with international law. It is critical that all groups be mindful of the need to establish stability in Syria. In that regard, we take note of comments by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham stating that Syria should not pose a threat to any of its neighbours, and we hope to see further action to that end. We note with concern reports that a civilian was killed in an attack on the Bravo side of the area of limitation on 15 January. We urge all parties in the area of limitation to fully use UNDOF's critical liaison function to avoid miscommunication, and we hope to see a reduction in clashes and the restoration of calm in the buffer zone.

Ultimately, we want to see lasting stability between Israel and Syria and support all sides upholding the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces of 1974, including on the terms of the buffer zone and the means for its enforcement. We reaffirm our support for the Agreement. Israel has made clear its intent to uphold the terms of the Agreement, as soon as conditions allow, and that its actions are temporary and limited to defending its borders. To that end, we hope to see a reduction in clashes and the restoration of calm in the buffer zone. We also again emphatically state that United Nations peacekeeping personnel and positions must never be the target of an attack. We condemn any deliberate attack against United Nations personnel and positions. The safety and security of peacekeeping personnel are of the utmost importance.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Major General Gauchat for their briefings.

After more than a year of conflict and suffering across the Middle East, we now stand at a moment of hope for the people of the region, with the Syrian people free from Al-Assad's tyranny, political progress in Lebanon and news that a ceasefire and hostage release deal have been finalized for Gaza. The United Kingdom will continue to work tirelessly to ensure we seize this opportunity and deliver much-needed peace. The past year has seen continuous and devastating violence across the Blue Line. We strongly believe that a ceasefire and a lasting political solution are the only viable route to peace, stability and security for the Lebanese and Israeli

people. As we approach the end of the 60-day ceasefire period, every effort must be made to continue to make progress and avoid a return to conflict. Violations of the agreement will only bring us back to the brink, and we call on parties to uphold the commitments to which they agreed.

Against that backdrop, the United Kingdom commends the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for maintaining its visibility and operational activities in difficult circumstances. The United Kingdom will continue to support UNIFIL's essential role in maintaining calm along the Blue Line and enabling the enhanced Lebanese Armed Forces deployment to southern Lebanon, consistent with the ceasefire agreement and resolution 1701 (2006).

We have consistently condemned attacks on United Nations peacekeepers. They must never be targeted. All parties have an obligation under international law to ensure the safety and security of United Nations peacekeeping personnel and premises.

Turning to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces remains vital for stability at this pivotal moment for Syria and the wider region. Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected. That is more important than ever as Syria embarks upon a political transition in pursuit of a more secure and peaceful future. The United Kingdom is clear that we expect Israel to adhere to their commitment that their presence in the area of separation is both limited and temporary. We call on Israel to lay out timelines for their withdrawal from the area of separation. Let me once again reiterate United Kingdom's long-standing position that the Golan Heights are occupied territory, and we do not recognize Israel's annexation.

Finally, after months of despair, news of the agreement between Israel and Hamas offers much-needed hope. The hostages and their families have endured unimaginable agony, and the level of suffering in Gaza defies belief. This deal is the basis for progress, to bring the hostages home, bring relief, reconstruction and hope to long-suffering civilians and achieve a long-awaited two-State solution, with Palestinians and Israelis living in peace and security.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Major General Gauchat for their briefings.

Lebanon and Syria have recently been rocked by turmoil, severely affecting and challenging the operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). The international community should act in unity of purpose to support both missions' effective mandate implementation. I would like to speak on the following four imperatives with regard to that matter.

The first is respect for the missions' mandates. UNIFIL and UNDOF are Security Council-mandated missions. They are instrumental in keeping the situation on the ground generally stable in their respective areas of operations. Some time ago, UNIFIL's mandated operations met with interference, and restrictions were imposed on UNDOF patrols. The country concerned has an obligation to lift all restrictions without delay, as per Council resolutions, to ensure the mission's freedom of movement.

The second is the protection of peacekeepers. Some time ago, the Israel Defense Forces attacked uniform position and observation tower and in doing so injured UNIFIL personnel. Unauthorized individuals also forced entry into UNDOF's camp. I wish to reiterate that no United Nations mission may be targeted in military operations, and all deliberate attacks on peacekeepers constitute a gross violation of international law. The acts I just mentioned must be investigated to establish accountability. China supports the Secretariat and the missions in taking the

necessary steps to enhance their situational awareness, reconnaissance, surveillance and information analysis capabilities so that they can better respond to emergencies. Troop- and police-contributing countries should step up security training and capacity-building for their peacekeepers.

The third is respect for national sovereignty. In December 2024, while claiming that it was taking “limited and temporary measures”, Israel deployed troops in the area of separation and has kept them there to this day. That must not be allowed to become a new normal. The Golan is internationally recognized as an occupied Syrian territory. We urge Israel to respect Syria’s sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, implement the relevant Council resolutions and the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, withdraw from Syrian territory without delay and cease and desist from any action that may complicate the situation.

The fourth is full commitment to efforts to achieve a ceasefire. While China welcomes the cessation of hostilities agreement between Lebanon and Israel, we note with concern ongoing strikes against Lebanon. On 15 January, the mediators announced that an agreement had been reached on a ceasefire in Gaza, which China welcomes. We sincerely look forward to the effective implementation of the agreement so that a comprehensive, permanent ceasefire can materialize in Gaza and contribute to de-escalation of tensions in the wider Middle East.

Nonetheless, Israel has yet to give the agreement its final approval, as the Israel Defense Forces continue operations in Gaza, having increased the toll of casualties by 80. All of that suggests that the current situation between Lebanon and Israel and in Gaza remains very fragile. The international community, and the Security Council in particular, must remain united and work in unity to promote and facilitate the implementation of the ceasefire agreements and to maintain regional peace and stability.

Last but not least, I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the personnel of both missions, each and every one of whom are holding the fort amid upheaval and volatility, and to convey our appreciation for their hard work in the service of peace and security. China stands ever ready to work with the international community, to continue lending staunch support for the mandate implementation and to pursue peace and security in the Middle East.

Mr. Moscoso (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful to Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Major General Patrick Gauchat for their informative briefings.

The current situation in the Middle East, in particular in Lebanon and Syria, represents one of the sternest tests of our collective commitment to international peace and security and demands our most urgent attention and our greatest diplomatic skills. Against that backdrop, Lebanon and Syria represent opportunities in which international efforts are essential to building a lasting peace and to ensuring regional stability.

The United Nations peacekeeping missions that are the subject of our debate today are continuing to play an essential role amid increasingly complex circumstances and are contending with significant constraints that must be urgently addressed. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has played a vital role in monitoring the cessation of hostilities and in supporting the Lebanese Government in the exercise of its sovereignty. However, recent months have witnessed increasing restrictions on its freedom of movement and direct attacks on its personnel, which are in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and jeopardize not only the Blue Helmets but also regional stability. The Council must ensure that resolutions 1701 (2006), 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), which emphasize the importance of Lebanon’s sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity, are fully implemented.

In that connection, we must stress our hope that the 26 November 2024 cessation of hostilities agreement between Israel and Lebanon will hold. Nonetheless, we have concerns about subsequent violations.

The recent formation of a new Government marks an important step towards political stability after months of uncertainty. Panama congratulates President Joseph Aoun and the new Prime Minister Nawaf Salam and wishes them the very best. Likewise, we acknowledge the efforts that they are spearheading to restore the population's confidence in institutions and bolster democratic governance amid one of the severest crises in the country's history. Panama acknowledges the crucial role of the Lebanese Armed Forces in strengthening national security and the support that they are providing to the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

I turn now to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). The Force is playing a crucial role in monitoring the ceasefire in the Golan Heights. Nonetheless, recent violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement have put regional stability and the safety of United Nations personnel at risk and are hampering their capacity to fulfil their mandate. It is imperative that the Council step up support for the mission.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria continues to affect millions of people. More than 6.7 million internally displaced persons and 5.5 million refugees are facing extreme hardship, compounded by a lack of access to basic services, such as drinking water, food and medical treatment. Panama underscores the need for unimpeded humanitarian access to ensure that aid reaches those most in need. It is vital to protect civilians, especially women, children and minority communities, and to safeguard essential infrastructure.

The implementation of the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015) remains the benchmark for an inclusive, Syrian-led political transition, supported by the international community. Territorial fragmentation and the influence of external actors are impeding that transition. The international community must support an inclusive and sustainable national reconciliation process, in which the participation of all sectors of Syrian society is guaranteed.

The events in Lebanon and Syria are intrinsically connected to other regional conflicts, including the war in Gaza, which are compounding instability in the region. Those dynamics have intensified cross-border tensions, increasing the mass displacement of people. Against that backdrop, a coordinated and resolute response from the Council is vital. Likewise, cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, such as the League of Arab States, must be strengthened to afford sustainable solutions that address the complex state of affairs in the region. In that context, we urge all parties to respect the inviolability of United Nations personnel and facilities.

We reaffirm the need to implement the relevant resolutions in full, including resolution 1701 (2006), in relation to Lebanon, and resolutions 350 (1974) and 2254 (2015), in relation to Syria, so as to ensure a cessation of hostilities and support for political and humanitarian processes. We support efforts to strengthen democratic institutions in Lebanon and promote an inclusive dialogue in Syria as the basis for a lasting peace. We consider it essential to ensure sufficient financial and logistical resources so that UNIFIL and UNDOF can carry out their mandates effectively. We reaffirm our commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and Syria, and we urge all parties to respect the internationally recognized borders.

Peace in the Middle East is the collective responsibility of all States Members of the United Nations. The UNIFIL and UNDOF missions are a tangible demonstration of our commitment to international peace and security, and their success depends on our continued and resolute support. Panama reaffirms its readiness to work with all

actors to ensure that those Missions continue to serve as a catalyst for stability and hope in the region.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the Russian Federation for convening this important briefing. We also thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Major General Gauchat for their useful briefings.

Peacekeeping operations remain a cornerstone of the United Nations efforts to promote international peace and security. Nowhere is that more important than in today's Middle East. The mandates of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) are essential to ensuring stability and compliance with international agreements and in advancing the broader goal of sustainable peace. We are deeply concerned about the increasing threats faced by UNDOF and UNIFIL peacekeepers.

We strongly condemn Israel's ongoing aggression in Syrian territories and the illegal incursion of the Israel Defense forces into the separation areas established under the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Those actions constitute flagrant violations of the Charter of the United Nations and pose a grave threat to regional peace and stability and the territorial integrity of Syria. The 1974 Disengagement Agreement remains binding and must be upheld without exception. No force except UNDOF should have a military presence between the alpha and beta lines. Any unilateral actions that undermine that agreement are unacceptable.

Similarly, Pakistan recognizes the essential role of UNIFIL in maintaining stability in southern Lebanon, under resolution 1701 (2006).

Pakistan welcomes the 26 November cessation of hostilities arrangement between Lebanon and Israel. We support the new Lebanese leadership in their commitment to fulfil that arrangement, but we are deeply alarmed by the continued violations of the arrangement by the Israel Defense Forces, including airspace violations, air strikes and restrictions on UNIFIL's freedom of movement.

Israel must adhere to the 60-day timeline stipulated in the arrangement and complete its withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Any delays or deviation from that timeline could jeopardize the fragile arrangement. Any security concerns should be promptly reported to the appropriate mechanisms, including UNIFIL, instead of resorting to unilateral violations of the arrangement and of resolution 1701 (2006). The unrestricted freedom of movement of UNIFIL and full deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces are crucial to achieving security and stability, as outlined in resolution 1701 (2006).

Pakistan urges the Security Council to ensure the full and unhindered implementation of the mandates of both UNDOF and UNIFIL. They must have the sustained political and operational backing of the Council. UNDOF and UNIFIL must be equipped with adequate resources and modern technologies to enhance their operational efficiency and to ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers. The safety and security of United Nations missions and UNDOF and UNIFIL peacekeepers is paramount. Those who attack United Nations peacekeepers must be held accountable.

Finally, UNDOF and UNIFIL are essential to preserve peace until the underlying disputes are resolved. The withdrawal of Israel from Lebanese and Syrian territories, including the Golan Heights, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and Syria, and the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian territories are essential conditions for sustained peace and security in the region. We hope that the ceasefire in Gaza is real and that it will be the first step towards a comprehensive solution, including the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State.

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Major General Gauchat for their briefings.

At the outset, my delegation warmly welcomes the agreement reached for a long-awaited ceasefire and release of hostages in Gaza. After 15 months of violence and instability, the realization of this ceasefire in Gaza rekindles hope, at long last, for a more peaceful year ahead for the Middle East.

Yet behind this long-awaited milestone lies the sacrifices of peacekeepers in the region, who endured deliberate attacks as they valiantly upheld peace. Honouring their courage, let me make the following three points.

First, we condemn, in the strongest possible terms, any attacks against peacekeepers, their installations and facilities. Since last October, the Security Council has constantly received disturbing reports of dozens of deliberate assaults against peacekeepers in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Never before have we witnessed such an escalation of targeted violence against Blue Helmets. As a troop-contributing country, we are deeply alarmed that this may set a dangerous precedent. Let us be clear: there is no conceivable justification for deliberately attacking United Nations peacekeepers or missions, which may constitute war crimes. Such actions run counter to international law and betray the trust that Member States place in the United Nations.

Secondly, even if the attack is not deliberate, all parties must refrain from taking actions that may risk the safety and security of peacekeepers. We are gravely concerned that such attacks have resulted in peacekeeper casualties and damage to United Nations facilities. Safeguarding peacekeepers is not only a matter of human life and dignity, but it is also central to the fulfilment of mission mandates.

In our capacity as both a troop contributor and Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, we have made it our top priority to address peacekeeper safety and security. We look forward to the upcoming peacekeeping operation ministerial preparatory meeting in April, which we will co-host with Pakistan, in order to ensure that United Nations peacekeepers can carry out their duties without fear of harm.

Thirdly, we urge all parties to prioritize creating a conducive environment in order to ensure the safety and security of the UNIFIL and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) peacekeepers. In Lebanon, ongoing ceasefire violations not only breach resolution 1701 (2006), but also threaten to derail progress towards permanent peace across the Blue Line.

Similarly, in Syria, Israel's military activities in the Area of Separation and beyond the Bravo line remain concerning. Although Israel contends that its operations are temporary and defensive, the ongoing expanded occupation casts serious doubt on such claims.

Also worrisome is that Syrian communities in and around the area of separation are reportedly expressing their deep anxiety and concern about Israel's presence, which may lead to heightened tensions and instability in and around the area of UNDOF operations.

We urge Israel to abide by its commitment to the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces. We also call on all regional parties to open a new era of coexistence.

Mr. Kanu (Sierra Leone): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting at the request of the Russian Federation.

I also thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Major General Patrick Gauchat for their important briefings.

Given the focus of the meeting, Sierra Leone, at the outset, expresses its condolences to the United Nations, the Republic of India and the bereaved family on the passing of the late Brigadier General Amitabh Jha, Deputy Force Commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in December last year.

Sierra Leone commends the efforts of UNDOF and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in carrying out their vital mandates in perilous conditions amid escalating challenges in the Middle East. Those missions remain essential to maintaining stability and preventing further escalation of tensions in their respective areas of operation in the Syrian Golan and in southern Lebanon.

Sierra Leone views the cycle of violence and the instability and uncertainty, as a result of the recent political upheaval and military activities in Syria and Lebanon, with grave concern, especially as it relates to the operations of UNDOF and UNIFIL. The situation in the Syrian Golan is one of continuous attacks on peacekeeper positions, leading to injuries, in violation of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces and undermining the operations of UNDOF to maintain peace in the Syrian Golan.

UNDOF continues to play a crucial role in monitoring the ceasefire between Israel and Syria in the Golan Heights. However, we are deeply concerned about the increasing challenges faced by peacekeepers, including restrictions on their freedom of movement, heightened security risks and the ongoing presence of Israel Defense Forces soldiers and other unauthorized actors within the area of separation. Those obstacles not only hinder UNDOF's ability to carry out its mandate effectively, but they also risk undermining the fragile calm in the region. We call on all parties to respect the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and provide full cooperation to ensure UNDOF's safety and operational effectiveness.

In addition, actions by both parties resulting in the use of heavy construction equipment and materials other than the designated separation features are grossly unacceptable and undermine the ceasefire. Those physical structures have potentially restricted UNDOF's area of influence in terms of carrying out patrols and responding to other emergencies.

Sierra Leone commends the efforts of UNDOF and the cooperation of other parties in facilitating the safe return of individuals from both sides and the administration of medical services to the wounded in the spirit of upholding human dignity despite the prevailing security situation. Those actions demonstrate enduring political and military cooperation to build trust and promote relationships between parties to the conflict.

Similarly, in Lebanon, UNIFIL faces an increasingly precarious operating environment, compounded by heightened tensions along the Blue Line and acts of hostility that jeopardize peacekeepers' safety. The mission's ability to carry out its mandate under resolution 1701 (2006) is further hampered by restricted access and misinformation, which threaten to erode trust with local communities. We urge all parties to fully respect UNIFIL's mandate, refrain from provocative actions and work towards the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) to ensure stability in southern Lebanon.

Furthermore, it is concerning to note that, on 4 January, UNIFIL observed an IDF bulldozer destroying a blue barrel marking the line of withdrawal between Lebanon and Israel in Labbounch, as well as an observation tower belonging to the Lebanese Armed Forces immediately beside a UNIFIL position there. We are of the view that the IDF's deliberate and direct destruction of both clearly marked, identifiable UNIFIL property and infrastructure belonging to the Lebanese Armed Forces is a flagrant violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and of international law. We therefore

call on all actors to avoid any actions, including the destruction of civilian property and infrastructure, that could jeopardize the cessation of hostilities agreement.

Notwithstanding those violations, we note that the Israel Defense Forces have commenced its withdrawal from areas around Naqoura. We also note that, even though the IDF is still present elsewhere in the UNIFIL area of operations, the preparations for its phased withdrawal, in parallel with the increased deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces to southern Lebanon, is continuing.

We commend UNIFIL for supporting the redeployment of the Lebanese forces to positions in Naqoura and Alma Al-Shaab after Israeli forces withdrew. It is our hope that the United Nations peacekeepers in southern Lebanon will continue to liaise and coordinate with both parties to de-conflict and support the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

We take note of the emergence of a new Government in Lebanon and a caretaker Government in Syria, and we believe that those developments could have significant positive implications for the safety and security of UNIFIL and UNDOF peacekeepers, as well as for the effective implementation of their mandates.

In addition, the cessation of hostilities and related commitments on enhanced security arrangements and towards the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) between Israel and Lebanon is a welcome development and offers hope that the conflict in southern Lebanon can be resolved, which in turn will facilitate the effective implementation of UNIFIL's mandate. In that vein, we positively note the statement by the Chair of the Cessation of Hostilities Implementation Mechanism on 15 January that Lebanese Armed Forces

“checkpoints and patrols operate effectively throughout south-west Lebanon, and the soldiers are dedicated to their mission as Lebanon's sole security guarantors. Their presence creates a sense of security and stability, which will be important for the civilians who will soon resume normal activities in the area”.

UNIFIL and UNDOF are vital to preserving regional stability. We call on all stakeholders to uphold their commitments, provide unimpeded access to peacekeepers and prioritize constructive dialogue to address underlying tensions. In that regard, the Council should not only prioritize actions that guarantee the safety of peacekeepers but also facilitate the effective implementation of the mandates of the respective missions. Let us reaffirm our collective responsibility to support those missions, including through a visit to Lebanon, and ensure their safety, effectiveness and ability to contribute to long-term peace in the region.

In conclusion, in the conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere, we express our regret to note a disturbing disregard for international law compliance and application. That includes the prohibition of attacks against peacekeepers. Regrettably, the seeds of impunity, which were sown over time, are now taking root through the entrenched selective and inconsistent application of international law and sustained covert and overt acts to undermine accountability. The issue of accountability for crimes against peacekeepers, from the outset, has been related to their safety and security, and therefore must be prioritized by the Council. We therefore recall resolution 2589 (2021), in which the Council called for a renewed focus on measures to bring to justice the perpetrators of all acts of violence against United Nations peacekeepers and other personnel serving in peacekeeping operations.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was the first to convict persons for attacks against United Nations peacekeepers. We therefore condemn all acts of violence against United Nations personnel serving in peacekeeping operations. We urge full respect for international law and applicable international obligations, as well as status-of-forces agreements and status-of-mission agreements between United Nations missions and host States.

Ms. Jurečko (Slovenia): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Major General Gauchat for their briefings.

This week has been marked by an important breakthrough. Filled with hope, we welcome the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, and we call for the full implementation of the agreement. After more than a year of suffering, this is a crucial step to pave the way for peace for Israelis and Palestinians, as well as the people in the region.

While witnessing changes in the region that give us hope, it is important to note that peace is fragile if commitments are not upheld. This is the moment for actors in the region to deliver on the promises made and the agreements reached, whether recent or decades old. It is the moment for actors in the region to respect sovereignty and territorial integrity and to show restraint to prevent any further escalation.

Slovenia underlines its strong support for the work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, (UNIFIL), the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). Their presence is — and must remain — a factor of stability. The freedom of movement of personnel must be ensured, together with their safety and security, which remain an utmost priority. We are concerned about the challenging operational environment, and including by some of the issues presented today.

First, we underline that there should be no military forces or activities in the area of separation overseen by UNDOF. All parties must uphold the terms of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, maintain the ceasefire and preserve stability on the Golan. We are therefore deeply alarmed by the presence and operations of Israeli forces, including the positioning on Syrian Mount Hermon and recent airstrikes. Those are violations of the Agreement. Slovenia reiterates its long-standing position that we do not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

Secondly, we welcome the notable progress in Lebanon in the recent weeks, both on the security and political fronts. Therefore, it is all the more important that the international community show strong support to those positive developments. In relation to the ceasefire agreement, it is crucial that the provisions of the agreement be fully upheld. That includes the timely and full withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which certainly needs bolstered assistance. UNIFIL plays an important supporting role, which we welcome.

We are concerned about the violations that still persist and underline our call for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) without exceptions. We also underline that only positive measures to build trust and continuous steps to implement the ceasefire agreement in its entirety will ensure that hostilities do not resume and that peace and stability prevail.

Mr. Osman (Somalia): I would like to thank the Russian Federation for calling this meeting, and I express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Lacroix and Major General Gauchat for their comprehensive briefings on this pressing matter today.

The situation in the region demands our immediate and focused attention. We face the sobering reality of a ceasefire agreement that stands at a critical juncture. The potential expiration of that ceasefire agreement and the ongoing violations by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) pose significant risks to regional stability and to the safety of civilian populations.

I would like to raise the following three points.

First, we are deeply concerned about the reported violations by the IDF in Lebanon and Syria, which undermine the very foundation of the Charter of the United Nations. Those breaches of the ceasefire agreement in Lebanon and of the

1974 Disengagement Agreement not only jeopardize the fragile peace, but they also threaten to spark a broader regional conflict. Each violation erodes the trust that is essential for a sustainable peace. We underscore the enduring significance of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement. That foundational accord has served as a crucial framework for stability in the region for nearly five decades. In addition, resolution 1701 (2006) remains the cornerstone of our approach to peace and security in the region, and its full implementation and that of other relevant Security Council resolutions are imperative. We join the call for all parties to honour their obligations under those agreements and Security Council resolutions without exception or delay.

Secondly, the roles of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) remain critical. Let me emphasize in the strongest possible terms that the safety and security of United Nations personnel must remain inviolable. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to their sacrifice and dedication in increasingly dangerous conditions. Their freedom of movement and their unimpaired access in the fulfilment of their mandate and responsibilities must be facilitated.

Thirdly, my delegation reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both Lebanon and Syria. Those principles are fundamental to international law and to regional stability. Any actions that compromise those sovereign rights or the ongoing political process must be addressed promptly and decisively.

In conclusion, as we move forward, we must strengthen our collective resolve to support UNDOF and UNIFIL in their crucial missions. Their presence serves as a vital mechanism for stability and conflict prevention. We reiterate our call upon all parties to facilitate their operations and respect their mandate. The enforcement of the ceasefire agreement, which expires in less than two weeks, is very critical. The complete and timely withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanese and Syrian territories must proceed in accordance with international law. The path to lasting peace requires unwavering commitment from all stakeholders. We must work together to prevent any escalation of tensions and create conditions conducive to dialogue and reconciliation and to the success of a political process in Lebanon and Syria. We remain committed in that regard.

Mr. Sekeris (Greece): I would also like to express my gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, and to the Head of Mission of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, Major General Patrick Gauchat, for their valuable contributions to the issue at hand.

In a world trapped in the vortex of regional tensions and increasing instability, peacekeeping missions often operate in areas in which there is simply no peace to keep. They carry out their mandated tasks in a dangerous environment. They try their best to make a real difference in places in which the reality sometimes defies comprehension.

Yet the ongoing tensions in the wider region of the Middle East have not left the Blue Helmets untouched — a deeply regrettable fact if we take into account the loyalty, devotion and commitment of the peacekeepers in the restoration of peace and security, in both Lebanon and Syria.

With regard to developments in Lebanon, the election of Mr. Joseph Aoun as the new President, in combination with the designation of Mr. Nawaf Salam as the new Prime Minister, present a unique opportunity to restore political unity in a country tormented by instability for years. In this moment of optimism, we commend today's visit to Lebanon by the Secretary-General, a visit of solidarity with the Lebanese people, as the Secretary-General himself referred to it. My country, Greece, stands ready to play a strong role in this new, promising chapter. After all, our Prime

Minister, Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis, was the first European Union leader to visit Beirut since the 26 November ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hizbullah.

It is beyond doubt that the ceasefire agreement has created a positive momentum, a spark of hope in overcoming 13 enormously difficult months of hostilities. Therefore, the parties should not let that impetus slip through their fingers. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), a peacekeeping mission that has been playing a constructive role in monitoring the cessation of hostilities, is key to the full and sustainable implementation of the ceasefire and, ultimately, to a long-lasting peace in the region.

At the same time, the commitment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to extending their control over all Lebanese territory is remarkable. Greece stands ready to support the LAF in that consequential task, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006). However, the cooperation between the LAF and UNIFIL is equally important on the path towards the restoration of peace.

On the peacekeeping front, slightly to the east of Lebanon, another peacekeeping mission holds the keys to the door of peace: the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). In that case, the Blue Helmets have been trying to help both Syria and Israel to close the chapter of conflict for years, while maintaining the ceasefire and supervising the implementation of the Disengagement Agreement.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that, similar to the current positive dynamics in Lebanon, another important challenge is the achievement of an inclusive political transition in Syria. In that regard, Greece supports the unity, independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria and the creation of conditions for an inclusive political transition that ensures the protection of human rights and of members of religious and ethnic minorities. Meanwhile, Greece expresses its full support for UNDOF and calls on all parties to respect the 1974 Disengagement Agreement.

There is no question that, in the wake of those momentous developments in both countries, UNIFIL and UNDOF constitute a collective investment in regional peace, security and stability. It is an investment worth protecting, given that the peacekeepers remain steadily committed to the protection of civilians, even at the risk of their own lives. In that vein, Greece is deeply concerned about the targeting of UNIFIL and UNDOF in the past few months.

In conclusion, in line with its principles, Greece calls on all parties to refrain from any actions that may put the Blue Helmets in danger. After all, when push comes to shove, the peacekeeping missions represent a pillar of stability, unity and peace in a region that has been lured into repeated cycles of instability, division and discord for decades. Even though the missions' success is never guaranteed, they can achieve what others cannot, and they can deal with conflicts that others cannot or will not address.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Lacroix and Major General Gauchat for their briefings.

The Near East has experienced an unprecedented period of tensions since October 2023. In that context, France is committed to putting an end to that cycle of violence, in conjunction with its partners. In Lebanon along the Blue Line, France has worked with the United States to conclude the 26 November 2024 agreement on the cessation of hostilities, constituting a major milestone in the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). The President of the Republic, Mr. Emmanuel Macron, is in Beirut today, meeting with President Aoun and Prime Minister-designate Salam to convey the support of France during this critical period. The situation remains delicate, but the reduction in hostilities has been significant. The Israeli forces have begun to withdraw, in parallel with the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces. It is necessary that the 60-day deadline for those operations be respected. Ultimately,

the objective remains the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). In Gaza, France has worked tirelessly to secure the release of the hostages and to achieve a ceasefire. We welcome the announcement of an agreement between Israel and Hamas, made possible thanks to the efforts of the United States, Qatar and Egypt. We must now adopt a medium- and long-term approach based on the two-State solution, which is the only way to enable the building of a State for the Palestinians and to guarantee the security of Palestinians and Israelis. In June, France and Saudi Arabia will co-chair in New York an international conference on the implementation of the two-State solution.

Finally, in Syria, the fall of the Al-Assad regime offers many hopes. France calls on the de facto authorities to guarantee that the transition process will be representative of all components of Syrian society and organized in the spirit of the main principles established by resolution 2254 (2015). In that context, it is important that Syria and Israel respect the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, which implies that Israel must withdraw from the area of separation provided for in the agreement and cease its operations on Syrian territory.

In recent months, the three United Nations peacekeeping operations — the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization — have played a key role in halting the cycle of violence and easing tensions. France commends the courage, professionalism and ongoing commitment of their personnel. It pays tribute to the troop-contributing countries and the peacekeepers on the ground, many of whom have been injured since October 2023.

France is fully playing its role, deploying almost 700 French soldiers within UNIFIL. We are helping to meet the mission's needs by strengthening its engineering capabilities, so that it can best adapt its activities to the current situation.

It is crucial that all three operations are able to implement their mandates without impediment. We therefore condemn all attacks on United Nations missions, their personnel and premises, as well as all attempts to undermine their work.

Finally, it is important for those missions to be able to adapt their activities should the situation on the ground change. Following the cessation of hostilities agreement reached in Lebanon and yesterday's adoption, at France's initiative, of the presidential statement supporting the United Nations contribution to the implementation of the agreement (S/PRST/2025/1), France encourages the missions to reflect on the adaptations to UNIFIL's position that are needed to take into account the new situation, within the framework of its mandate, in order to facilitate the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

Ms. Lassen (Denmark): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Major General Gauchat for their briefings.

The Middle East stands on the cusp of monumental change. These past months have witnessed the fall of the Al-Assad regime in Syria, the cessation of hostilities between Lebanon and Israel and the election of a new Lebanese President after that post had been vacant for more than two years. Wednesday's ceasefire and hostage agreement also inspires hope for the people of Gaza and Israel. Those are profound developments that can hopefully light a path towards a brighter future for Syria, Lebanon and the broader region.

In the wake of the sudden change, the need for stability has never been more apparent. For more than 50 years, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) has monitored the disengagement zone. For almost two decades, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has, under its current mandate, executed similar tasks around the Blue Line between Lebanon and Israel. Those missions have been integral to bringing safety and certainty to peoples on both sides

of the borders. Day in day out those peacekeepers risk their lives in support of peace. Some have made the ultimate sacrifice. In executing those tasks, we underline the duty of all actors to ensure the safety and security of peacekeeping personnel and premises in line with international law.

There are three points I would like to focus on in that regard.

First, UNDOF and UNIFIL contribute to the de-escalation of tensions in the region. They are and they will be integral to securing continued de-escalation going forward. However, to do that, the right conditions need to be in place. That means that peacekeepers must be granted unhindered freedom of movement and sufficient resources to be able to implement their mandates. It also means that patrols, logistic convoys and resupply missions need to be able to move freely. Their positions must not be threatened, challenged or dismantled by the use of brute force. Politically, mission mandates must also be supported. Political rhetoric from any actor must not undermine the immunity and impartiality of peacekeepers. It is reassuring that the Council remains united in support of both UNDOF and UNIFIL. That support will remain vital as we work to achieve durable peace in the region.

Secondly, with regard to UNDOF, Denmark is proud to have contributed to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and, by extension, to UNDOF for years. We believe that a new Syria can emerge only if the new authorities are able to secure the country's borders. Denmark reiterates that Israel must withdraw from the area of separation. UNDOF must be allowed to implement its mandate without interference, in line with resolution 350 (1974). We remain concerned about reports of permanent Israeli structures in UNDOF's area of operation, Israel Defense Forces incursions further into Syrian territory and rhetoric about moving Israeli settlers into occupied Syrian Golan. Such actions are prohibited under international law, including international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, Denmark remains fully committed to UNIFIL, the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and to making the ceasefire agreement permanent. UNIFIL must have political and operational support to effectively implement its mandate alongside the Lebanese Armed Forces after the withdrawal of all other armed actors from southern Lebanon. In time, we envisage the Lebanese Armed Forces taking over all tasks in southern Lebanon, and Denmark is proud to contribute financially to the Lebanese Armed Forces in support of that crucial mission.

In conclusion, to consolidate the positive change in the region, we need to build on a stable and trustworthy foundation. UNDOF and UNIFIL remain critical pillars in that foundation. We remain fully committed to ensuring that those two missions can implement their mandates by patrolling freely, maintaining internationally recognized borders and providing credible information about the situation on the ground.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Major General Gauchat for their briefings.

As conflict proliferated across the Middle East over the past year, the essential roles played by the peacekeepers and civilian staff of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) could not have been more clearly demonstrated. In these times of heightened tensions, conflicts and instability, UNDOF and UNIFIL continue to make invaluable contributions to de-escalation efforts and, furthermore, continue to provide vital reporting to inform the decisions of the Council. I take this opportunity to reaffirm Guyana's heartfelt appreciation and support for their unwavering commitment to the execution of their respective mandates and for their unflinching bravery even under increasingly dangerous circumstances and at great risk to their personal safety.

The situation in the Golan Heights continues to present significant challenges to regional stability. It is described as a tense and unpredictable security situation, with many daily violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, including the unauthorized installation of communications equipment and the prolonged presence of Israeli forces in the area of separation.

Similarly, the complex dynamics affecting UNIFIL's role in maintaining peace in southern Lebanon requires sustained international cooperation and dialogue to achieve the urgent resolution of the challenges. The mission continues to encounter many obstacles in the implementation of its mandate. The security of Lebanon and its people is paramount, and there should be no deliberate undermining of their safety.

We condemn all attacks on peacekeepers and call on all parties to abide by their obligations under international law, to refrain from any action that compromises the safety and security of UNIFIL personnel and premises, and to respect the freedom of movement of UNIFIL personnel.

We must also underscore that while both UNDOF and UNIFIL have operated in an exemplary manner, we should not expect the missions to operate under those unstable and dangerous circumstances without the necessary resources to ensure the safety and security of their personnel. Guyana therefore urges the Council to provide robust support to the missions, both through the provision of the requisite resources and political backing to fulfil their important roles. The Council must also work to bring enduring peace to the region. Guyana remains deeply concerned about Israel's actions in both southern Lebanon and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and its incursions into other areas of Syria. The many reported incidents of violations of the ceasefire agreement by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the slow pace of the IDF's withdrawal from southern Lebanon puts at great risk the opportunity to achieve a sustained cessation of hostilities. Guyana reiterates its call for full respect for the provisions of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement and for the parties to meet their obligations under the ceasefire agreement and resolution 1701 (2006).

As we focus on the situation in Lebanon and the occupied Syrian Golan, it is important to keep in view the fact that the challenges in both contexts are directly linked to the situation in Palestine engendered by Israel's ongoing brutal occupation. We are hopeful that the announcement of a ceasefire agreement in Gaza will pave the way for a reinvigoration of the Palestinian peace process with progress towards the achievement of the two-State solution. That is critical for the people of Palestine and the stability and peace of the entire Middle East, including Israel. We also note with optimism the significant progress made in Lebanon with the election of a President and a Prime Minister. The Council and other partners must support the Government and the people of Lebanon at this critical juncture as they work to set the country on a path of stability and prosperity.

Guyana is steadfast in our commitment to the hard work that it will take to achieve peace across the Middle East region. We will continue to advocate for a stable, united and prosperous future for the peoples of both Lebanon and Syria. Again, to the brave and dedicated peacekeepers and civilian staff of UNDOF and UNIFIL, our gratitude cannot be overstated.

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

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Major General Patrick Gauchat for their insightful briefings.

The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) operate in an extremely challenging context, facing multiple threats to their personnel and premises. The ongoing violations in the areas of operation of UNIFIL and UNDOF by the Israeli military

forces are a source of grave concern. Algeria reaffirms its unwavering support for the missions and its strong commitment to ensuring the safety and security of peacekeepers. We reiterate that attacks against peacekeepers constitute war crimes. In that regard, we condemn in the strongest terms the deliberate attacks by the Israeli occupying forces on UNIFIL personnel and the intentional destruction of its premises. We call for impartial and comprehensive investigations and the pursuit of full accountability.

Furthermore, the Security Council adopted resolution 2766 (2024) almost one month ago, renewing UNDOF's mandate. Algeria calls for its full implementation and endorses the resolution's key provisions, including the obligation to first, fully respect the terms of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces of 1974; secondly, exercise maximum restraint and prevent breaches of the ceasefire and of the area of separation; and thirdly, ensure that there is no military activity of any kind in the area of separation. Israel's actions in the area of separation and its multiple incursions into Syrian territory pose a grave threat — not only to Syria, which is navigating a sensitive period, but also to regional and international peace and security. The Security Council must reaffirm its resolutions and act decisively to stop those actions.

UNIFIL and UNDOF are mandated by the Council to monitor the ceasefire and provide information on the ground. After the briefings by Mr. Lacroix and Major General Gauchat, the situation is clear to all. It is now incumbent on the Security Council to act. No one should be above the law, and accountability must be ensured. We firmly believe that the roles of UNIFIL and UNDOF are not intended to be permanent.

Addressing the root causes of conflict in the region by ending the occupation of all Arab lands is essential for achieving a durable peace in the Middle East. The current cycle of violence has once again served to underscore an irrefutable truth: we cannot afford to address the region through piecemeal solutions. Its challenges are interconnected, and it is only through a holistic approach that we can hope to achieve genuine and lasting peace.

We welcome the ceasefire agreement announced on Wednesday, which will hopefully bring an end to the devastating bloodshed in Gaza. While that development is welcome, let us be clear: it cannot, and must not, be our ultimate goal. The agreement must serve as a stepping stone towards a lasting and just solution. It must chart the course for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

In conclusion, Security Council resolutions, including 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 497 (1981) and 1701 (2006), constitute the framework for a stable and peaceful Middle East. Our collective efforts should focus on accelerating their full implementation. The time for half measures has long passed. We can no longer afford to simply manage the conflict in the region. Let us engage resolutely together on the path towards a lasting and durable solution that brings peace and justice to the Middle East.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The presidency gives the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Zoghbi (Lebanon): (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, as this is the first time that Lebanon takes the floor this month in the Council, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency of the Council. I would like to thank Algeria for its continued support for Lebanon, as brotherly Algeria has always stood by our side in defending just causes. I also thank the United States for its presidency last month and Russia for convening the meeting.

I wish to thank the briefers, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, who is currently in Lebanon with the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres. I also want to take the opportunity to express Lebanon's gratitude for that visit made in a show of solidarity. I also wish to thank the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, Major General Patrick Gauchat.

We meet at the beginning of this year as Lebanon is embarking on a new chapter, with the election of His Excellency General Joseph Aoun as President of the Republic and the appointment of Judge Nawaf Salam as Prime Minister, who has been tasked with forming a Government. This constitutional milestone has given hope to the Lebanese people, especially to women and young people, that Lebanon will rise again and its future will be brighter.

In the statement that he made upon taking the oath of office as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and Chairman of the Supreme Defence Council, His Excellency the President affirmed the right of the State to monopoly over bearing arms and controlling its borders in order to be able to combat smuggling and terrorism, preserve our territorial integrity, implement international resolutions and prevent Israeli aggression against Lebanese territory. Lebanon reaffirms its commitment and adherence to the declaration of a cessation of hostilities and the commitments related to the enhanced security arrangements regarding resolution 1701 (2006), which Lebanon has taken concrete steps towards implementing.

Following the withdrawal of the Israeli forces, units of the Lebanese army are completing their deployment in Ra's Al-Naqoura, Tyre and towns in the western sector of south Lebanon. My country is working to enhance positioning and securing important points, in coordination with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the five-member committee responsible for monitoring the cessation of hostilities. In that context, specialized units of the Lebanese army are continuing to conduct engineering surveys in order to remove unexploded ordnance and rubble and open roads. In addition, an initial contingent of trainees joined the army as part of the first phase of the plan to reinforce the military units deployed in the south, which includes the recruitment of 6,000 troops for the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety. Volunteers have begun training on the specialized equipment to be distributed to the units.

Whereas Lebanon has reaffirmed its commitment to abiding by the cessation of hostilities, Israel continues to violate the agreement. Between 27 November and 22 December, Israel carried out more than 816 attacks on Lebanon by land and air. On multiple occasions, Israel destroyed the barrels that mark the Blue Line, the most recent such incident being on 4 January. That day, Israel used bulldozers to destroy a Lebanese army observation tower near a UNIFIL position, in flagrant violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Israel continues to bomb villages on the Lebanese border, booby-trap houses, destroy residential neighbourhoods and block routes in a bid to obstruct the return of displaced Lebanese people to their homes, thereby hampering the reconstruction process. Lebanon would like to warn against those repeated violations and attacks against its sovereignty. They represent a grave threat to international efforts aimed at ensuring security and stability in the region and are undermining efforts to restore calm to the borders.

Lebanon calls on the Council, and in particular on the countries that sponsored the declaration, to adopt a firm and clear position on Israel's repeated violations and to compel Israel to honour its obligations under the declaration of cessation of hostilities and the relevant international resolutions. Lebanon underscores the necessity of respecting the sovereignty of Lebanon and its territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and the obligation on Israel to withdraw without delay from all Lebanese territory within the 60-day time frame set by the

declaration. We underscore that the Lebanese army has confirmed its readiness to redeploy to villages in southern Lebanon, as has been already demonstrated. Secretary-General Guterres, speaking today at UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura, stated that Israeli forces' continued occupation of UNIFIL's area of operations and its military operations on Lebanese territory constitute a violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and an ongoing threat to the safety and security of UNIFIL personnel and that they must cease.

Lebanon would like to again express its gratitude to the United States and France for the vital role that they have played in adoption of the declaration of cessation of hostilities.

Lebanon pays tribute to the United Nations and the Council, through which UNIFIL has supported the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and underscores the need to respect the inviolability of UNIFIL positions and personnel. In that connection, we condemn Israel's repeated attacks on UNIFIL positions, the deliberate direct targeting of it and threatening its personnel. Lebanon underscores the important role that UNIFIL will play in confirming the Israeli army's withdrawal and in monitoring compliance with the cessation of hostilities agreement with a view to bringing lasting stability to the border. Lebanon stresses the importance of continued coordination with the Lebanese army.

Lebanon looks forward to receiving the support of the international community for its institutions and security agencies, in particular for the Lebanese army, and for its reconstruction efforts. Lebanon, which has suffered so greatly, deserves the Council's support.

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

Mr. Danon (Israel): Israel has always stated, and I reaffirm it here today, that we will do everything that we can to bring our people home. That unwavering commitment to our citizens remains at the heart of all that we do.

For years, Israel has warned about the growing threats in our region, about Hizbullah's build-up in southern Lebanon and about the violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement in Syria. For years, those warnings were dismissed. Today we meet with some hope for progress. We must reflect on those ignored warnings and the heavy price that was paid. Israel has consistently taken action to protect its people and ensure stability, and we remain steadfast in that commitment. Those letters contain the evidence — the countless, hundreds of letters we wrote, the warnings and detailed reports that Israel submitted — about Hizbullah's build up in southern Lebanon, as well as about violations of the Disengagement Agreement in the area of separation with Syria. Those letters are proof that we told the Council that this would happen. Those papers should have been calls to action. Instead, they were ignored, left to gather dust. Only when Israel was forced to act did the Council find its voice. When it did find its voice, it still failed, unfortunately, to condemn the terrorists targeting our civilians.

For years, the Council has heard warnings about the growing threat Hizbullah posed to Lebanon, Israel and the region as a whole. We warned of their stockpiling of thousands of rockets and anti-tank missiles, the smuggling of advanced weapons from Iran and the construction of thousands of tunnel shafts and hidden military networks. We exposed Hizbullah's transformation of southern Lebanon into a fortress of terror. Today we stand in the aftermath of a historic turning point. Hassan Nasrallah is gone, as are several of his successors, and Hizbullah has suffered a decisive blow. A ceasefire is in place. Lebanon has managed to elect a new president — a significant step forward after years of political chaos.

But let us not mistake quiet for peace. The scars of Hizbullah's aggression remain etched into the land and the lives of those who endured it. Over 22,000 rockets rain down on Israeli homes, displacing more than 63,000 civilians. Israel uncovered and dismantled over 10,000 explosive devices, 870 launchers and 60,000 communication devices. Much of that infrastructure was built just metres from the positions of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). It was not the Council or UNIFIL that confronted Hizbullah's terror network; it was Israel. Through our determination and resilience, we not only defended our people, but created an opportunity for Lebanon to reclaim its sovereignty.

It is time for the Council to recognize what Israel's actions have achieved. By dismantling Hizbullah's terror infrastructure, we have given the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Lebanese Government the breathing room to begin reclaiming their nation. This is a moment of opportunity — an opportunity to free Lebanon from being a failed State held hostage by a terrorist organization. But let me be clear. This opportunity will not last forever. Already we see attempts by Hizbullah to rebuild. Weapons are being smuggled across the Syria-Lebanon border. Funds are being funnelled to rearm Hizbullah, whose operatives remain active south of the Litani River, in blatant violation of resolution 1701 (2006). We will not allow history to repeat itself.

That brings us to the situation in Syria. From September to November 2024 alone, there were hundreds of documented breaches of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Military positions have been established within the area of separation, in blatant violation of the Agreement. Armed individuals routinely infiltrate the Alpha line and tamper with the land in Israeli territory. Those activities are not hidden. They are visible and have been reported extensively to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). In response to the emerging situation in Syria, Israel has taken limited and temporary measures in strategic areas to neutralize immediate threats. Those actions were not taken lightly, but they were necessary to protect our citizens and prevent armed groups from threatening Israeli territory. Israel remains committed to the framework of the Disengagement Agreement, including the principles regarding the area of separation. We maintain close coordination with UNDOF, and I want to remind the Council what happened on 7 December, when our forces helped safeguard UNDOF forces from attacks.

However, the ongoing violations undermine the fragile stability of the region. Israel recognizes the vital role of peacekeepers on the ground in maintaining stability and placing the highest importance on their safety. But it is time to address the failures in their mandates, which have failed to prevent aggression. Peacekeeping missions must not just exist. There are many troops and soldiers, which cost a great deal of money, but they are not there just to be there. They must be empowered to act decisively. They must succeed in their mission by actively enforcing mandates and holding violators accountable. The discovery of massive terrorist infrastructure during the conflict highlights years of operational failures. UNIFIL's modus operandi must change to effectively prevent further violations and ensure that resolution 1701 (2006) is fully enforced. UNDOF must ensure that violations are transparently documented and acted upon.

Israel is committed to upholding international agreements, including the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. But our commitment to those agreements must not be mistaken for weakness. We will act against any threat to our security. Israel will not allow security threats to take root on its borders, as Hamas and Hizbullah did. The international community must take concrete steps to prevent weapons smuggling and Hizbullah's military rebuilding efforts. Failure to act will only invite further instability. The Council must face reality. Israel's actions have prevented the collapse of order in southern Lebanon and the area of separation. By dismantling Hizbullah's terror networks and confronting threats in Syria, Israel has provided a

chance for the international community to reclaim peace. But this state of affairs will not last forever. The Council must support the ceasefire agreements, Israel's actions and the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

To the representative of Lebanon, I am saying here that Israel has given her Government a chance to rebuild. Her Government should seize the moment and the opportunity to reclaim its sovereignty and secure a future free from terror. And to Lebanon's people, I am saying that Lebanon belongs to them, not to Iran. This is their moment to take back their country and move towards a brighter future.

Israel has done its part. We are committed to the ceasefire understanding and the United States-led mechanism, having submitted hundreds of reports of violations, including 168 major ones. However, the LAF's progress remains slow and must accelerate. If Hizbullah attempts to rebuild, Israel will act decisively. UNIFIL and UNDOF must learn from their past failures and ensure that their mandates are robustly implemented.

In conclusion, the choice before the Council is clear. Will it stand by as Hizbullah regroup, as terror networks rebuild and as history threatens to repeat itself? Or will it act to ensure that Lebanon's future is one of peace and stability? Israel has shown what is possible when action replaces silence. The Council must follow that example.

The President: The presidency will now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, for his briefing. We support his efforts and work to implement the mission's mandate. We also welcome Major General Patrick Gauchat, Head of Mission and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), Acting Force Commander and Head of United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). We thank him for his briefing and, through him, we express our condolences to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the family and the Government of Mr. Amitabh Jha, late acting Force Commander.

Syria stresses the important role of UNDOF and UNTSO. We reaffirm our commitment to continue to support these two missions and to provide them with the necessary facilities so that they can carry out their mandates as require and to ensure the safety and security of their personnel. In that vein, we commend the previous Head of UNDOF, Major General Nirmal Thapa, and we welcome the appointment of Major General Anita Asma to head the Force.

My country stresses the need for the immediate and unconditional return of UNDOF to its assigned deployment sites to allow it to carry out its mandate appropriately and continue its work monitoring and documenting the continued Israeli attacks and violations of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement.

The Israeli acts of aggression against the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and against the security of its people, namely, the repeated Israeli raids on Syrian civilian infrastructure and areas, as well as Syrian military and service infrastructure, and the repeated Israeli incursions that have continued since 8 December 2024 in many areas in Mount Hermon, Qunaytirah governorate and neighbouring areas, reaching the governorates of Dara'a and Rural Damascus, amount to violations of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967) 338 (1973) and 497 (1981), as well as the resolution regarding the occupied Syrian Golan adopted by the General Assembly in December 2024 (General Assembly resolution 79/90).

The Israeli occupation forces have advanced dozens of kilometres beyond the ceasefire line and the areas of separation and limitation. They have attacked Syrian

citizens in areas they have entered, confiscated their homes and displaced large numbers of them, destroying civilian infrastructure. Those aggressive practices are unacceptable and cannot be justified by any pretext provided by the occupation authority. They must be condemned by the Council, and immediate steps must be taken to end them.

In that regard, my country fully rejects the statement by the Prime Minister of the Israeli occupation entity, claiming that the 1974 Disengagement Agreement had collapsed. Syria endorses the response by the UNDOF leadership concerning that statement, stating that the Disengagement Agreement remains valid, despite changes in the regimes and Governments of the parties, as guaranteed by established international law and international norms. We stress that we stand ready to take all necessary measures to ensure the continuation of the implementation of the Agreement.

Syria calls on the Council to compel the Israeli occupation authorities to immediately and unconditionally withdraw from areas in which they have carried out recent incursions in Syria and to respect the Disengagement Agreement, for which my country has repeatedly called. Syria has committed itself fully and unequivocally to that Agreement.

We reaffirm our inherent and inalienable right to recover the occupied Syrian Golan in full, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions. We reject Israeli attempts to impose a new occupation as a *fait accompli*. We thank the members that have supported the Syrian position during this meeting. The mandates of UNDOF and UNTSO remain necessary and serve to guarantee regional peace and security until a just, comprehensive and sustainable solution is reached in the area and until the Israeli occupation forces fully withdraw from the Syrian Golan in line with resolutions adopted on the basis of international law.

In conclusion, we would like to congratulate brotherly Lebanon for the election of Mr. Joseph Aoun as President and the appointment of Mr. Nawaf Salam as Prime Minister. We wish Lebanon every success and stability.

The President: The representative of Lebanon has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Zoghbi (Lebanon): I will be very brief, Mr. President. If Israel is concerned about the future of Lebanon and its people, it should start by, first, respecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity; secondly, respecting and implementing resolution 1701 (2006) and the arrangement of the cessation of hostilities; thirdly, ceasing its violations against my country; and fourthly, immediately withdrawing from all our occupied land.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.