



Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

8706th meeting

Tuesday, 21 January 2020, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Dang (Viet Nam)

Members:

Belgium	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
France	Mr. De Rivière
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Niger	Mr. A Barry
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
South Africa	Mr. Matjila
Tunisia	Mr. Baati
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
United States of America	Mrs. Craft

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).

20-01495 (E)



Accessible document

Please recycle



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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates to participate in this meeting.

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following to participate in this meeting: Her Excellency Mrs. Adela Raz, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations.

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

I give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: I brief the Security Council today amid heightened regional tensions that threaten to destabilize further an already volatile political and security environment. The Secretary-General has been clear in calling on all leaders to exercise maximum restraint and has emphasized that the world cannot afford another conflict.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not immune to the tensions in the region. At the same time, the effects of its persistence are felt far beyond Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. The United Nations has consistently stated that we cannot hope to bring sustainable peace to the Middle East without taking firm action to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and achieve a two-State solution based on international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and prior agreements.

It is, sadly, not a surprise that a recent survey of millennials by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) found that almost two thirds — 65 per cent — of Israeli millennials thought the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would never end, making them the least optimistic of people surveyed in countries affected by war. Palestinians were also pessimistic, although slightly less so, with 52 per cent believing that the conflict would never end. The international community bears a responsibility to help build a different future for those young Israelis and Palestinians, one that promises hope, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence rather than perpetual occupation and conflict.

During the past few weeks, the United Nations has continued its engagement with all Palestinian factions to stress the need for, and the prospect of, holding long-overdue legislative and presidential elections. Political parties have confirmed they would include more women candidates than the law requires. Discussions also continue regarding potentially amending the electoral law and raising the quota of women candidates on a list from 20 to 30 per cent.

Despite broad internal political agreement and a series of compromises by all factions, to date President Abbas has not issued the decree needed to schedule elections. In the past month, he has stated that he would not set dates until Israel agrees that elections can take place in East Jerusalem. Plans to organize the vote are now grinding to a halt. The Secretary-General and the

Special Coordinator remain hopeful that elections will be scheduled soon in line with previous practice.

With the political process deadlocked, negative developments continue to undermine the prospects for a two-State solution. The beginning of 2020 witnessed the continued expansion of settlement activity and the threat of annexation of parts of the West Bank. On 4 and 5 January, Israeli authorities advanced plans for some 1,900 residential units in settlements in Area C. The plans include the retroactive regularization under Israeli law of an outpost and the advancement of plans in two other locations that were regularized in 2019. In addition, tenders were announced for some 2,200 units in Area C and East Jerusalem.

On 5 January, an inter-ministerial committee tasked with discussing annexation plans for the Jordan Valley held its first meeting. On 9 January, the Office of the Minister of Defence announced the appointment of the director of a new task force to tackle so-called “illegal Palestinian construction” in Area C of the West Bank. Also in January, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced a new 150-unit compound to be built in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Beit Hanina, on land owned jointly by Israelis and Palestinians. The construction rights are expected to be split between the Israeli and Palestinian owners of the land, although the Palestinian owners had previously submitted objections to that plan.

On 15 January, following a ruling by Israel’s High Court of Justice, Israeli authorities demolished two houses in the outpost of Kumi Ori, in Area B of the West Bank. Also on 15 January, Israel’s Defence Ministry announced it was advancing the declaration of seven new nature reserves in Area C and the expansion of 12 existing ones. If implemented, those declarations would be the first of their kind since the start of the Oslo process.

I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain an obstacle to peace. The annexation of some or all of Area C, if implemented, would deal a devastating blow to the potential for reviving negotiations, advancing regional peace and the essence of the two-State solution.

Meanwhile, sporadic violence in the occupied West Bank, including Jerusalem, and Gaza continued throughout the reporting period. Two hundred and twenty Palestinians, including 80 children, were injured in various incidents, including during clashes,

protests, search-and-arrest operations and settler-related violence. Of those, 50 were injured by tear-gas inhalation. In addition, six Israelis, including one child, were injured during the reporting period.

Developments in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Al-Issawiya are a significant and growing concern. The area continues to be the focal point of ongoing clashes and numerous arrests, including of minors. The United Nations continues to monitor the situation closely.

While the situation remains extremely fragile, there has been a notable and welcome reduction in violence in and around Gaza, as the understandings brokered by the United Nations and Egypt continue to be broadly upheld. On 26 December, the organizers of the ongoing protests along the Gaza perimeter fence announced that the weekly demonstrations would be on hold until the end of March. Following the announcement, a relative calm has prevailed along the fence.

The limited demonstrations that took place prior to the announcement remained relatively peaceful, although some protesters engaged in violent activities, including approaching the fence and throwing Molotov cocktails and explosive devices towards Israeli forces. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) responded with riot dispersal means and live fire, injuring some 140 Palestinians, including some 75 women and children. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (OCHA), the number of injuries recorded during the Gaza protests during the reporting period was the lowest since the protests began, in March 2018. One Palestinian died of injuries sustained during a protest in May 2018.

It is concerning and regrettable, however, that there has been a resurgence in the past few days of incidents of incendiary balloons and kites being launched from Gaza towards Israel. Those actions are a risk to the civilian population. During the reporting period, Palestinian militants fired some 20 projectiles from the Gaza Strip towards Israeli communities, a significant decrease as compared to previous months. The rockets fell short, fell in open areas or were intercepted and did not cause any damage or injuries. In response to the rocket attacks, the IDF conducted several strikes against what it said were Hamas targets in Gaza. No injuries were reported. Assistant Secretary-General Mueller will elaborate in further detail on the humanitarian situation in the occupied territory.

Despite ongoing efforts, the socioeconomic situation in Gaza remains very difficult. Progress was made during the reporting period on the implementation of the package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions for Gaza endorsed in September 2018 by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC). I take this opportunity to thank those in the international community that have contributed to the implementation of the AHLC plan, and call on all to increase their support to United Nations programmes on the ground.

By the end of 2019, 37,000 temporary jobs had been created by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. The cash-for-work programmes specifically target women and young people, as they are underrepresented in the labour force and require specialized assistance to gain access to employment opportunities. Several thousand more jobs are expected to be created this year. The increased funding would allow United Nations agencies the capacity to significantly scale up and improve those job opportunities, as well as implement other programmes to support the economy and address unemployment in the longer term. Qatari-funded fuel supplies for the Gaza power plant also continued, allowing for increased and more stable electricity supplies in Gaza.

Meanwhile, many AHLC projects remain unfunded or in deficit. Critical health interventions identified in the package are still in deficit of \$4 million. Donors are encouraged to continue their support for those interventions to alleviate the suffering of the population and help avoid another deadly escalation.

Despite the welcome progress in advancing those projects, it is a fact that humanitarian and economic steps alone will not resolve Gaza's immense challenges. At their core, Gaza's problems are political, and they require political solutions. Palestinian leaders must take concrete steps to ensure that Gaza and the West Bank are reunited. At the same time, Israel must significantly improve movement and access for goods and people to and from Gaza, as a step towards the full lifting of the closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

In other developments during the reporting period, on 20 December, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) released a statement announcing that the ICC's preliminary examination into the situation

in Palestine had concluded with the determination that all the statutory criteria under the Rome Statute for the opening of an investigation had been met. In doing so, she expressed her view that, among other things, war crimes had been or were being committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. She also stated her position that the Court's jurisdiction applies to the occupied Palestinian territory.

In line with legislation passed in the Knesset in July 2018, on 29 December the Government decided to withhold \$43 million in clearance revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, in monthly instalments spread over the course of 2020. The amount was determined by Israeli authorities to be equal to what Palestinian authorities paid Palestinians injured in attacks against Israelis and families of those killed in such attacks. That deduction comes in addition to \$139 million already withheld by Israel against stipends paid in 2018 to prisoners convicted or accused of security offences against Israel. I am concerned that this development may strain the tenuous progress made in October 2019, when Israel and the Palestinian Authority reached a partial agreement on transferring clearance revenues. I reiterate my call on both sides to engage in a constructive manner to ensure compliance with the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations. The United Nations stands ready to assist in that process.

Turning to the region, efforts to form a Government in Lebanon have continued since Hassan Diab was nominated Prime Minister-designate on 19 December. The popular protests also continue, against the background of a deteriorating economic situation. The violent incidents that took place in Beirut between protesters and security forces in recent days and incidents of disproportionate use of force raise very serious concerns, particularly as the protests had been largely peaceful until now. Following recent tensions in the region, the Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Head of Mission and Force Commander encouraged parties to shield Lebanon from any potential spillover and to urge calm. The situation in the UNIFIL area of operations, including along the Blue Line, remained stable.

While the situation on the Golan had generally remained calm in the past weeks, on 14 January the Syrian armed forces issued a statement informing that the Israel Defense Forces had conducted an airstrike on targets located in Syria. The United Nations

Disengagement Observer Force engaged both parties in order to prevent an escalation of tensions and reminded them of their obligation to respect the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the continued urgency of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements. In the absence of progress towards an agreement that will resolve all final-status issues, the United Nations continues to focus its efforts on establishing an environment conducive to a return to negotiations. Recent events in the region have once again brought to fore the crucial necessity of dialogue and diplomacy in the region. What is more, we need look no further to find living examples of dialogue and coexistence at the community level: despite the political deadlock and tensions, Palestinians and Israelis on the ground continue to work every day to build a more peaceful and secure future. From youth creating new platforms to increase cultural understanding across religious and national lines, to women demanding a greater role in their Governments' decision-making, these remarkable individuals continue to serve as an inspiration to all of us to redouble our efforts towards a negotiated solution. I assure the Council that the United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis as they pursue a peaceful and just future.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Mueller.

Ms. Mueller: I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to update the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

I have just returned from a six-day mission to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, where I heard from Palestinian and Israeli people, as well as representatives of the international community and humanitarian partners. Those meetings conveyed hardships and challenges, and opportunities for positive change.

Today Palestinian families throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Gaza struggle to live in dignity across a fragmented territory. One in every two Palestinians — some 2.4 million people — need humanitarian aid in 2020, due to a protection crisis resulting from occupation, the blockade on Gaza, recurrent cycles of violence and over a decade

of Hamas control, which has fuelled the internal Palestinian political divide. Widespread humanitarian access and civilian movement restrictions, increasing demolitions and destruction of property, the excessive use of force, restrictive planning regimes, forced displacement, and impediments to livelihood and economic opportunity, combine as drivers of chronic vulnerability and humanitarian need. Humanitarian partners work to meet those growing needs in the face of increasing constraints on operations and record-low funding.

In Gaza, I met Salwa, a 53-year-old cancer survivor, who told me how she was overwhelmed with a sense of fear and devastation while battling her illness and trying to care for her family. She was allowed to leave Gaza to receive medical treatment in the West Bank, but her permit was subsequently denied without explanation, interrupting critical treatment, deepening her anxiety and creating a sense of hopelessness.

I also met Anas, a 24-year-old medical graduate, who spoke about the limited options for youth and how movement restrictions have severely curtailed opportunities for a productive life. He expressed concern that the energy and passion of Palestinians in Gaza is being lost, making young people more susceptible to extremism and driving too many to attempt suicide.

Those stories underscore the fragility in Gaza. But I also saw tremendous potential: for example, young women such as Bissan, who, at the age of 21, had already started a charity to help. Razan, another young woman, told me: "We have people here with high-level skills and abilities, with innovative ways of thinking, but we need opportunities."

In 2019, violence during the Great March of Return demonstrations at the Gaza fence caused injury and claimed lives. Since March 2018, more than 210 Palestinians, including 46 children, had been killed and more than 8,000 had been shot with live ammunition. While there were fewer casualties in the latter part of 2019, we continue to have concerns about Israel's excessive use of force during the demonstrations and the instrumentalization of Palestinian children by Hamas.

The large number of injuries from the demonstrations has overstretched Gaza's already limited health services, which suffer from acute shortages in drugs, personnel, equipment and electricity. More than 1,200 people required limb reconstruction and some 150 underwent amputations, all of whom need long-

term rehabilitation. The World Health Organization also reported more than 200 incidents involving health workers in Gaza in 2019, resulting in 270 injured.

Since the start of 2019, there have been multiple escalations in hostilities between armed groups in Gaza and Israel, most of which were fortunately contained thanks to an intense joint United Nations and Egyptian mediation effort. Nevertheless, 29 Palestinian civilians, as well as 33 members of armed groups, were killed in Israeli air strikes and five Israeli civilians were killed by Palestinian indiscriminate rocket fire. I urge all parties to take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian harm in the course of hostilities.

Unemployment in Gaza is at 45 per cent, with youth unemployment at over 60 per cent. Some 46 per cent of the population live below the \$5.5 poverty line and an estimated 60 per cent of households are food insecure. The young people whom I met in Gaza, like anywhere else in the world, simply ask for peace and the opportunity for a productive life.

While the efforts of the Government of Israel to ease movement by increasing the number of permits for people to leave Gaza are acknowledged, the approval rate of permit applications for patients to leave Gaza through the Erez crossing for medical treatment was 65 per cent on average in 2019. According to UNICEF, more than a third of the children who left Gaza for medical treatment between October 2018 and July 2019 were unaccompanied by a parent due to not being allowed to exit.

It is also acknowledged that efforts have been made by the Israeli authorities to ease the import and export of goods and to reduce the number of restricted items on the dual-use list. However, significant limits that undermine the economy and impede the ability to improve essential services and infrastructure remain. That is exacerbated by the long-standing political and administrative Palestinian divide, which has reduced the capacity of service providers in Gaza to provide basic services. Nearly half of essential medicines and approximately 30 per cent of essential supplies stand at less than one month's supply. According to the World Health Organization, Israel's restrictions on imports have impacted access to medical supplies and the maintenance of medical equipment.

Amid a decline in external aid, high unemployment and economic recession, vulnerable people in Gaza are trapped in a cycle of deepening poverty and insecurity,

with few opportunities to become self-reliant. They resort to harmful coping mechanisms that impact children the most. UNICEF reports rising rates of school dropout, child labour and child marriage and an estimated 270,000 children suffer from some form of mental disorder. Similarly, I have seen how the lives and well-being of residents in Israeli communities around Gaza are disrupted by rocket fire from Palestinian armed groups, with mental health impacts, particularly among children.

Within that larger picture, however, there is room for cautious optimism. The number of people permitted by the Israeli authorities to leave Gaza increased by 46 per cent in 2019, as compared to 2018, and reached the highest level since 2007. The volume of goods exiting Gaza increased by 20 per cent, as compared to 2018. December 2019 witnessed the largest number of goods exiting in any month, also since 2007.

The number of people leaving Gaza through the Egyptian-controlled Rafah crossing increased by nearly 40 per cent in 2019, as compared to 2018. Israel expanded the permissible fishing area along the southern and central parts of Gaza's coast to 15 nautical miles offshore, allowing access to deeper waters. Funding provided by the Government of Qatar enabled the electricity supply to increase in 2019 to an average of 12 hours a day. And, as Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo said, by the end of 2019, 37,000 jobs had been created by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

Such improvements give me hope for Gaza if we build on that momentum. It will be key for Israel to further relax restrictions on movement, alongside adopting measures that stimulate the economy, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). The Palestinian Authority must refrain from impeding the allocation of resources to people in Gaza as a way of exerting pressure on Hamas, which must prioritize people's needs in Gaza. All parties must uphold their international legal obligations.

In the West Bank, I visited a Palestinian Bedouin community in the Jordan Valley. I met Jamil and Manar, a young couple, who described the pressures that their community faces, including home demolitions, the constant threat of further demolition of their property and restrictions on movement. Manar, a 24-year-old mother, described her personal fears and challenges,

shared by her family and neighbours. She spoke of the anxiety over simple activities, such as transport to school without the threat of harassment from Israeli settlers, entry by the Israeli military into the community and her fear that she cannot protect her children. Families there are not connected to the water or electricity networks. Although they have lived in the area since the 1970s, the Israeli authorities consider their presence illegal.

Jamil and Manar's experience mirrors that of many Palestinians in the West Bank, where families face difficulty in securing adequate shelter, accessing basic services and protecting their children and the elderly. Economic development is undermined by Israeli administrative and physical constraints that fragment the territory, limiting Palestinian access to land and natural resources. That is most extreme in Area C, comprising 60 per cent of the West Bank, where the planning regime makes it virtually impossible for Palestinians to develop adequate housing and infrastructure. Most public land is allocated to Israeli settlements or to military use and most private land is zoned as agricultural or "green" areas.

Homes, clinics, schools, water cisterns and animal shelters without permits face the risk of demolition or confiscation. In 2019, 620 structures were demolished across the West Bank — mainly in Area C and East Jerusalem — displacing over 900 Palestinians and affecting access to services and livelihoods for tens of thousands of people. That represents an increase of 35 per cent in demolitions and nearly double the number of displaced persons as compared to 2018. The number of structures demolished in East Jerusalem is the highest in two decades. Over 12,500 demolition orders are pending today against Palestinian properties in Area C, and nearly one third of the homes in East Jerusalem face a risk of demolition because they lack building permits.

Such measures increase the vulnerability of communities, generating the need for humanitarian support; but the aid provided to those Palestinians is also impacted. A total of 126 structures demolished or confiscated in 2019 had been provided as humanitarian assistance. An estimated 162,000 Palestinians across Area C have limited access to primary health-care services, relying only on mobile clinics. Earlier this month, on 2 January, the Israeli authorities, citing a lack of prior coordination, seized a vehicle that was used to transport medical staff and equipment to a mobile health clinic in Masafer Yatta, south of Hebron,

impeding residents' access to health care. Through a range of legal and administrative measures, Israel has enabled the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the heart of Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem and Hebron city, at times resulting in the forced eviction of Palestinian families.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 340 attacks in 2019 carried out by Israelis, including settlers, resulting in two fatalities, 135 injuries and property damage, including to more than 6,200 fruit-bearing trees, representing a 100 per cent increase as compared to 2017. Such attacks undermine the physical security and livelihoods of Palestinians. Despite the Israeli authorities' efforts to prevent and address such violence, concerns remain about serious gaps in accountability that may contribute to the prevalence of settler attacks.

There were 112 Palestinian attacks against Israeli civilians in 2019, including settlers, in the West Bank and Israel, resulting in three deaths and 26 injuries, along with damage to Israeli property. In addition, 26 Palestinians were killed and 3,455 were injured by Israeli forces in the West Bank in search-and-arrest operations, demonstrations and clashes. There are concerns about excessive use of force by Israel in the context of law enforcement operations during protests and other clashes. The combined impact of many of those challenges places pressure on families to leave their communities, contributing to a coercive environment that places them at risk of forcible transfer.

Operating space for humanitarian actors is constrained by both the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities. Efforts to delegitimize humanitarian action in the occupied Palestinian territory continue to undermine our ability to provide protection and assistance to people in need. We are also facing record-low funding levels. The humanitarian response plan for 2020 is highly prioritized and requests \$348 million to provide basic food, protection, health care, shelter and water and sanitation to 1.5 million of the most vulnerable Palestinians. Over 75 per cent of the requested funds are for Gaza.

I urge Member States to increase their support to humanitarian operations in the occupied Palestinian territory to both the humanitarian response plan and the United Nations Occupied Palestinian Territory Humanitarian Fund. The Humanitarian Fund allocated \$27.4 million in 2019, benefiting 1.1 million people.

Providing funding to UNRWA, the largest humanitarian actor in the occupied Palestinian territory, is also critical in order to prevent deterioration, especially in Gaza. Member States are also encouraged to support interventions that strengthen humanitarian development collaboration and reduce Palestinians' reliance on humanitarian aid. Such strategic assistance is critical where deterioration risks further destabilization in an already volatile region. Aside from funding, strong support by Member States is required to ensure that humanitarian partners are able to operate according to humanitarian principles and counter the impact of unsubstantiated allegations against operational partners.

In order to decrease vulnerabilities in the longer term, it is vital that all parties work towards the policy shifts required to reduce humanitarian need and uphold obligations under international law. We saw improvements in Gaza in 2019 that, if developed and expanded to the West Bank, have the potential to generate positive change in 2020. We must galvanize our efforts as the international community to ensure that Palestinian families are increasingly able to live in dignity.

I continue to urge all parties — Israeli and Palestinian — to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The basic needs of Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, must be met, including by allowing the entry of essential supplies and humanitarian relief. Lethal force in law enforcement operations must be used only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

Ultimately, the solution for the occupied Palestinian territory is neither humanitarian nor development action, but lies in political discourse and agreement. In conclusion, I reiterate Special Coordinator Mladenov's call to this organ, urging leaders on all sides to summon the necessary political will to take concrete steps in support of ending the occupation and realizing a lasting peace, resulting in two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace.

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

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We congratulate Viet Nam and express our appreciation for its able leadership of the Security Council. We also congratulate the other

newly elected members — Estonia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Tunisia — and express our hope for their success, together with the rest of the Council, in upholding their responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security. Such responsibilities are ever-more critical during these troubled times for our world.

I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Ursula Mueller, for their important briefings on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Any impartial assessment of the situation reflects the dire political, socioeconomic, humanitarian and security conditions as Israel, the occupying Power, continues exploiting the Security Council's paralysis and the blind support of its main ally, further entrenching its illegal occupation of Palestinian land and destroying prospects for a peaceful solution.

The past year ended with disturbing figures, underscoring the severity of violations and the protection crisis being suffered by Palestinian children, women and men under Israeli occupation.

In 2019, Israeli occupying forces killed 134 Palestinians and injured over 15,000 people, the majority by air strikes and live fire. The casualty toll from the Great March of Return in the Gaza Strip has reached over 300 Palestinians killed, including children, and over 35,000 injured by the occupying forces since the protests began in 2018. That includes 50 persons blinded by bullets to the eyes, 150 limb amputations and another 200 expected, according to the World Health Organization. The scope and scale of injuries has pushed Gaza's already strained health system to the breaking point.

The year brought Gaza closer to the United Nations country team's *Gaza in 2020* report projection that the impact of Israel's illegal blockade, now nearing its fourteenth year, and military aggressions would leave Gaza uninhabitable by 2020 if not reversed. The humanitarian situation remains dire; we have an extensive report to that effect. World Bank estimates indicate 53 per cent unemployment and a shocking 67 per cent for youth in Gaza, where poverty, food insecurity and despair are also rampant and nearly 97 per cent of the water is unfit for human consumption.

Were it not for the assistance provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other international aid, the situation would have collapsed long ago. We are grateful for the General Assembly's resounding renewal of the UNRWA mandate and for the generous donor support. We urge the redoubling of support in the light of the financial crisis and immense pressures being endured by the Agency, including ongoing attempts by Israel to obstruct the presence and services of UNRWA in occupied East Jerusalem. Israel must be reminded that it is not the sovereign in the city. I repeat — Israel must be reminded that it is not the sovereign in the occupied city of East Jerusalem. It remains the occupying Power and is obligated to respect the United Nations immunity, international law and all relevant resolutions.

The year 2019 also witnessed daily arrests by the occupying forces. Over 5,500 Palestinians were detained, including 889 children and 128 women; some were released after interrogation and others imprisoned. Currently, more than 5,000 Palestinians, including 50 women and 200 children, are being held captive in Israeli jails, including 450 under administrative detention. Approximately 700 of these are suffering illnesses, including 10 cancer patients, all subjected to inhumane treatment and conditions.

Israel's illegal settlement activities also reached unprecedented rates in 2019, as confirmed in the Secretary-General's reports on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and countless other reports. Settlement construction and expansion, land confiscation, property demolitions, excavations and natural resource exploitation all escalated. Over 10,000 new settlement units were advanced, which will result in the illegal transfer of thousands upon thousands more Israeli settlers if not stopped. The start of 2020 began similarly, with Israel brazenly announcing plans for 2,000 more settlement units.

Israeli settler violence and terror against Palestinian civilians, including children, also continued unabated. Some 256 attacks were recorded in 2019, 50 carried out by terrorist price-tag militias and gangs, causing death, injury, damage to homes, churches, mosques, orchards and vehicles.

Annexation threats also grew louder in 2019. While Israeli officials continue to brag about Israel's illegal annexation of East Jerusalem and openly pursue

measures to alter the city's demographic composition, character and legal status unchallenged, their expansionist appetite has grown.

It is clear that Israeli officials believe that they have secured United States support for such an illegal scheme, notably after the December 2017 decision on Jerusalem and the November 2019 announcement on settlements, and have zero regard for the law — in this case, international law. Recent statements by the United States Ambassador to Israel, promising to deliver everything to Israel, have only furthered that belief, as heard in Prime Minister Netanyahu's constant vows of annexation, including his recent statement that:

“We are going to bring United States recognition for our sovereignty in the Jordan Valley, in all the settlements, those in the blocs and those that are beyond it.”

In 2019, demolitions escalated as well. Israel destroyed or seized 617 Palestinian homes and properties in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, forcibly displacing 898 Palestinians. In addition to homes, donor-funded humanitarian projects, water wells, agricultural structures and solar panels were destroyed, the majority in the so-called Area C of the West Bank, which is openly targeted for Israeli annexation.

In the past decade, over 10,000 Palestinians have been displaced by Israeli demolitions and the threat of displacement looms over thousands more, many refugees and the majority living in occupied East Jerusalem and surrounding areas. Ongoing threats to demolish Khan Al-Ahmar and forcibly transfer its inhabitants reflect that stark reality.

“Destroy Khan Al-Ahmar tomorrow morning, every day a different illegal outpost of Arabs and Europeans. In war as in war — took a heavy toll on all sides. In the coming year you will have American backing and that is definitely enough.”

Those are the words of Israel's Transport Minister. Similarly, a Knesset member has declared:

“The future of Judea and Samaria will be decided in actions, not words. Khan Al-Ahmar must be removed immediately.”

Both statements were made following the decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor to open an investigation into war crimes committed in Palestine as Israeli politicians join Prime Minister

and other officials in mocking the Court, flaunting their intentions to commit more crimes and competing in criminality. Such open provocation and incitement intensified throughout the year, including provocations against the holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem. Israeli officials continue to recklessly violate the historic status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, disrespect Jordan's custodianship and call for Israeli takeover of that holy site, fuelling the radicalism of Jewish extremists and fanning the flames of religious war.

All of that has compounded the hardships and suffering of the Palestinian civilian population, devastating millions of lives. At the same time, they are severely undermining the prospects of peace, making the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders, more remote than ever and a one-State apartheid reality more probable, to the detriment of all living on that land for the foreseeable future.

Barring immediate, tangible action, based on accountability under international law, first and foremost, the prognosis for the new year will be equally bleak, if not worse. Just weeks ago in this Chamber (see S/PV.8699), we heard lofty statements about the Charter of the United Nations. The consensus was clear in every pledge. Respect for the Charter and international law is key to ensuring global peace and security and the viability of the international rules-based order. Yet there are those who continue to recklessly trample the law without regard for the consequences.

For decades, Israel, the occupying Power, has trampled the Charter, United Nations resolutions and all relevant provisions of international law. As with common war criminals, even the spectre of an ICC investigation has not deterred Israeli Government officials and military commanders, who continue to blatantly challenge the Security Council and the international community as a whole. We must therefore once again call for actions to uphold the rule of law. This is an urgent, shared responsibility and obligation for the Security Council, the General Assembly, the ICC and all States.

It is past time to end to the double standard that has allowed such sheer impunity by Israel. It is past time to say "Enough". It does not make sense to speak eloquently about international law, principles and commitments, while allowing them to be shredded and ridiculed so systematically and without consequence. Upholding the Charter requires defending it in all circumstances and

insisting on compliance with zero exceptions. In cases of its breach, accountability is paramount.

All Israeli colonization in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, must be condemned and neither threats nor attempts at annexation should go unchallenged. They must be immediately halted. The Charter must be upheld. The prohibition on the acquisition of territory by force must stand. Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), must be respected. This must mean the complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as all measures of annexation and all other unlawful policies and practices, including collective punishment, an end to its illegal blockade of Gaza and all acts of provocation, incitement and violence.

Should Israel continue to defy the international community, there should be no hesitation to pursue the prosecution of the perpetrators and sanctions — I repeat, sanctions. For, absent accountability, it is clear that Israel will persist with its crimes, causing more human suffering, irreversibly dismantling the two-State solution and compounding the conflict with grave consequences. This worst-case scenario must be averted, and all must uphold their duties and pledges to seek peace, security and justice.

This is not Israel-bashing; it is a call for respect for the law and our shared values — the foundations of a safe, peaceful and prosperous world — and for safeguarding human rights and salvaging the just solution that can finally end this tragic conflict. The urgent need to stop Israeli annexation schemes cannot be underestimated. Immediate action is needed before it is too late — prevention, prevention, prevention. We need to stop annexation before it takes place. It is our collective responsibility to do so. Any talk of peace plans, which might be coming soon, should be about actualizing Palestinian independence and sovereignty, not advancing Israeli annexation. I repeat, not advancing Israeli annexation.

Initiatives endorsing such illegal schemes and departing from the global consensus enshrined in the Council's resolutions are rejected and doomed to fail, as all here, with the exception of one delegation, have repeated in the Council so many times. Any initiative not rooted in global consensus, international law and United Nations resolutions will fail. All here have said that. The representative of the United Kingdom, the

representative of France, the representative of Germany and the rest of the Council repeat this message all the time. Any initiative not rooted in global consensus to end the occupation to preserve the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders, without any changes unless agreed upon by the two parties through negotiations, will fail — I repeat, will fail.

In this year of the United Nations seventy-fifth anniversary, we appeal for a renewed commitment to the Charter. Should the Security Council continue to be obstructed from fulfilling its Charter duties, we call on all States, individually and collectively, to act in respect of their political, legal and moral obligations and the long-standing international consensus to justly resolve the Palestine question. Only such action can bring us back from the brink and make a just solution not only possible but inevitable. Such a solution must end the Israeli occupation and achieve the independence of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (II).

While the start of this year gives little cause for hope, we are by no means hopeless. Despite adversity and setbacks, we are steadfast in the pursuit of our rights, including to self-determination, and firm in our conviction with regard to the inevitability of justice. The Palestinian people are not going anywhere. Millions of them are rooted in our national homeland, and no one can remove them from our national homeland.

To those who believe that the destruction of the two-State solution will end the Palestinian struggle for freedom, we say that they are wrong — they are absolutely wrong. Despite all the challenges, we will never give up on our legitimate national aspirations for the Palestinian people to live freely and equally in their homeland, side by side with all of their neighbours, including the Israeli people, in peace and security.

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

Mr. Danon (Israel): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and welcome the new members to the Council.

Today I would like to address a people with an incredibly rich history and heritage, whom Israel considers a partner in building a better future in the Middle East — the Iranian people. Unfortunately, the Iranian people are ruled by a regime that remains the biggest threat to peace and security in the region.

The regime has proudly announced that it is enriching more uranium than before the disastrous Iran deal. It supports and funds terror, instead of investing in its own people. Its forces shoot live ammunition at protesters. The regime outright lied to the international community to cover up its fatal actions that took the lives of 176 passengers and crew aboard a Ukrainian aircraft.

It is encouraging to see that more and more countries are taking steps to hold the regime accountable, but there is still much more than can and must be done. It is inspiring to witness the brave Iranian people, who have been oppressed by their own Government for decades, fight back. The Iranian people are risking their lives by taking to the streets and demanding their rights.

I would like to take this opportunity to speak to the Iranian people directly. Our Persian neighbours have a tremendously rich heritage of which they should be proud. Since the time of the Achaemenid Empire in 550 BCE, the Persian people have made vital contributions. They gave the world its first declaration of human rights and racial equality, which freed slaves and gave people the right to choose their own religion. They created the world's first taxation system and postal service. They invented the world's first water supply system, refrigerator, algebra, animation, chess and the list goes on.

It is incredible to think of the great contrast between their rich history and the current regime. It is absurd that the people who invented human rights and protected the freedom of religion are ruled by a regime that tramples both. That absurdity has brought them to stand up for their heritage and their country's rich history and, while the Islamic Republic is doing all that it can to silence their voice, they stand strong and proud. They are not deterred by violence or by the threat of imprisonment. They do not allow the violation of their freedom of speech to prevent them from spreading their message. I say today to the Iranian people, Israel is on their side.

They are protesting because they are tired of being lied to by their Government. Allow me to share with the Council the story of one brave Iranian. Nikta Esfandani

had the courage to join the protests in November and fight for her future. Tragically, during one of the protests, she was shot and killed by the regime. She was 14 years old. As if that was not enough of a tragedy, the regime then tried to cover up her death. At first, it announced that her death had been caused by something else and then it forced her parents to say that she died from poisoning.

It appears that all options are on the table for the regime, except taking responsibility. The recent cover-up of the downing of the Ukrainian passenger airplane is just the tip of the iceberg, but it was enough to chip away at the regime's propaganda machine.

Gelare Jabbari was an anchor for Islamic Republic of Iran broadcasting television and radio company, whose head is appointed directly by the Supreme Leader. Jabbari resigned following the Ukrainian airline incident. After announcing her resignation, she wrote to the Iranian people, asking them to forgive her for the 13 years she had told them lies. The Iranian regime lies to its people and to the international community. It lies about its nuclear programme and about its terror-driven regional ambitions. The Iranian people know that it is time for the international community to recognize that the Iranian regime is deceitful and cannot be trusted.

The Iranian people are protesting because they are tired of the regime neglecting the economy and, instead, spending billions on its proxies. Iran suffers from serious infrastructure problems, a weak banking sector and widespread corruption. It is expected that by March of this year, 57 million Iranians will be living below the absolute poverty line. As a result, Iran is experiencing the world's greatest brain drain. Some 150,000 of Iran's best engineers, pilots, doctors and other highly sought-after professionals leave the country every year in search of a place where they can walk and live in freedom from the fear of the Islamic Republic.

Yet the regime continues to neglect its people and waste money on violence and terror. Since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, Iran has spent at least \$30 billion to support Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Every year, it transfers \$700 million to Hizbullah and \$100 million to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Those amounts pale in comparison to the estimated \$100 billion that the regime has spent on its nuclear programme. There is no doubt that that money could be better spent domestically, but we all know that the regime does not care about the Iranian people.

The Iranian people are protesting because they are tired of the violence and of being shot at by their own Government. Owing to the Iranian regime's attempts to cover up its crimes, the number of civilians who have lost their lives in protests since November 2018 is unclear, but some reports indicate as many as 1,500 — 1,500 Iranians killed by their Government for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

The Islamic Republic's violence is not contained to Iran and neither is the criticism against it. The regime has used its proxies to spread violence and terror throughout the region. At the recent Security Council debate on the implementation of the Charter of the United Nations, we all heard from our colleague, the representative of Yemen, that his country is experiencing the world's worst humanitarian crisis. He blamed the war there on "Houthi militias, supported by the Iranian regime" (*S/PV.8699 (Resumption 1), p. 5*). He spoke out against the regime. The Islamic Republic spreads violence within and outside its borders, and its people have had enough.

The Islamic revolution stripped the Iranian people of their rights and turned them into pawns in the regime's plan for regional domination. They are victims of the regime. Let us be clear. The campaign against Iran's nuclear aspirations, ballistic missile programme and regional agenda is a campaign against the Iranian regime not the Iranian people. We must empower the Iranian people. Israel sees the Iranian people as a partner in achieving a better, safer and more prosperous future in the Middle East. What the Iranian people are telling us now is that they see us as partners as well.

The Iranian people deserve a Government that respects them and protects them, not one that kills and abuses them. The international community must support the Iranian people. We must not allow their voices to be silenced by internet shutdowns, imprisonment or death. More pressure must be applied on the regime. Now is the time to make sure that all sanctions and embargoes continue and to put new ones in place. It is the only way to keep the Iranian people and the entire world safe.

The President: I now give the floor to the Council members who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Craft (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing. Addressing these issues in a fair manner is not easy and we appreciate her efforts and those of her team to

do so. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for her briefing.

As I have stated on many prior occasions, if we are to see genuine progress in our work to help bring peace to the Middle East, the Council must treat this issue more even-handedly. Given the likelihood that we will hear continued criticisms of Israel that are unfairly one-sided, I wanted to take a few moments to shed light on Israel's contributions to the international community and to appreciate publicly all that has been overcome in order to make those contributions.

This week and next week, in New York and around the world, we will be commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. No one in this Chamber should need reminding of the horrors that occurred just beyond Krakow and across Europe during the Second World War. Those are the horrors that lead us to say never again.

While we can never forget the unparalleled horrors of the Holocaust, Israelis consistently look to the future and the ways in which they can improve the lives of all people. Israelis have won 13 Nobel Prizes, including in chemistry and economics. They have improved drip-irrigation technologies that allow countless individuals in the desert environment around the world to be fed. They have enhanced surgical technologies that improve the success of medical operations.

Indeed, while the world criticizes Israel, Israel is making the world a better place. The Council should not lose sight of that fact. I will not allow us to and instead I call upon my colleagues to embrace a more appropriate focus for a Council dedicated to international peace and security — a focus on the regional actor fuelling division, violence and hatred; the regime that funds and trains militants focused on the destruction of Israel; the regime that provides weapons and other support to the Houthis and Hizbullah, props up the Al-Assad regime and seeks to interfere with Iraq's fragile democracy; the regime that guns down its own citizens when they protest the corruption, lies and mismanagement of the leadership.

Yet, despite a long history of advocating for the obliteration of Israel and aggressively undermining regional peace and security, Iran too often escapes serious scrutiny by this organ. When Iran attacked tankers in the Persian Gulf and energy facilities in Saudi Arabia last year, the Council was silent. When Iran provided weapons to the Houthis and Hizbullah,

the Council was silent. When Iran sought to prop up the Al-Assad regime's brutal repression of its own people, the Council was silent.

It is not as though Iran's malign behaviour occurs without the Council's knowledge. It has been well documented by the United Nations or is simply out in the open. Our failure to address Iran's central role in destabilizing the region sends a powerfully damaging message to those who seek lasting peace and prosperity in the region. It only encourages further instability, which puts the peace we all seek at greater risk.

I have said before that Israel has no better friend than the United States and I will say it again today — whether it is reminding the world what Israel has done to make substantive contributions to global peace and prosperity or what Iran is doing to frustrate efforts towards peace. President Donald Trump and the American people together will do what is required to stand by our partner, our ally and, indeed, our friend again and again.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Ms. Ursula Mueller for their comprehensive briefings. Ms. Mueller's briefing, in particular, remind us that the humanitarian situation in occupied Palestinian territory requires our full attention.

Belgium is especially concerned about the lack of funding of the humanitarian response plan and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and invites the international community to make a more active commitment in that area. I would like to underline the critical role of UNRWA in the absence of a lasting solution to the conflict. Belgium will continue to fully support its mandate.

The two-State solution, to which we once again renew our commitment, will require a calm international and, above all, regional environment, quite unlike the developments of recent weeks. We firmly condemn all policies that jeopardize the two-State solution. As we heard, the settlement policy in the West Bank and East Jerusalem continues, along with measures such as forced displacements, evictions and demolitions.

We call on the Israeli authorities to put an end to that settlement policy, which is illegal under international law, including resolution 2334 (2016). In 2019, 97 structures financed by the European

Union were demolished — a 90 per cent increase compared to 2018. We urge the Israeli authorities to put an end to such demolitions and either restore the structures or compensate the Palestinian people for the damages incurred, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

The continuation of the settlement policy is part of a rampant annexation, which is also marked by Israel's implementation of a dual legal system beyond the green line. The establishment of an Israeli interministerial committee tasked with making annexation proposals is also a troubling development in that regard. As we have already said on a number of occasions, all unilateral annexations undermine international order and are not recognized by Belgium.

We are extremely concerned about increased settler-related violence and encourage the Israeli authorities to prevent such violence and to effectively combat impunity. In addition, the developments in the situation in Al-Issawiya and the marked increase in violence are also a source of great concern. The parties concerned on the ground must exercise calm and restraint so as to avert any escalation. Incursions by Israeli forces are on the rise and many of them take place close to schools. We remind Israel of its obligation to protect, respect and implement the rights of the child by ensuring that schools are inviolable safe spaces for children.

The recurrent escalations of violence in Gaza also imperil the prospect of stable and lasting peace. All violence, regardless of its perpetrators, is unacceptable and impunity cannot be allowed to prevail. The rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law must be observed.

The decision taken by Israel to withhold part of the tax revenue due to the Palestinian Authority, under the Paris Protocol, risks increasing tensions. We encourage both parties to pursue negotiations in order to find a lasting solution. We stress the importance of setting a date for the holding of legislative and presidential elections throughout the Palestinian territory, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In that regard, it is essential that all the parties concerned cooperate to ensure that elections are held in an inclusive environment conducive to the full, meaningful and active participation of all citizens, including women and young people.

In conclusion, Belgium aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I would like to start where my colleague of Belgium ended, by referring to the common position of the European Union, which will be expressed later in our discussion.

As the Ambassador of Germany, I would like to echo the remarks made by the Ambassador of the United States about the Holocaust and the fact that we are commemorating the liberation of Auschwitz. In that context, it is very important for us never to ease up on the fight against anti-Semitism.

With regard to the remarks made by my colleague of Israel, I would like to echo what he said about respect for the Iranian people and about the conduct of Iranian policy, in relation to respect for human rights and foreign policy, in support of terrorist movements in the region. One point I would like to highlight, which is also very important in the context of our debate on the Middle East, is our appeal to Iran to finally recognize Israel and its right to exist.

I would like to pick up where the Observer of Palestine ended and remind the Security Council about the debate held a week ago (S/PV.8699). The Council issued a presidential statement (S/PRST/2020/1) in which we expressed our respect for international law and stated that international order must be based on international law. We must respect that statement and implement it. As I have said before in this organ, international law is not *à la carte*. We are all therefore called upon to implement the resolutions adopted by the Security Council. That is binding international law. Among those there are several resolutions on the Middle East. They are all summarized in the most recent resolution adopted on the matter — resolution 2334 (2016). According to that resolution and previous ones, settlements are illegal under international law. Annexations, which have been announced and are now part of the Israeli election campaign, are a violation of international law. That is also true of changes to the status of Jerusalem. That, too, is a violation of international law.

One sometimes forgets that resolution 2334 (2016) is a very balanced resolution, which condemns all acts of terror, violence against civilians, incitement, provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric. Germany condemns all attacks on Israel. The firing

of rockets from Gaza is not acceptable. Germany is steadfast in its commitment to Israel's right to self-defence and its proportionate response to attacks.

I would like to make a few final points. We very much are in favour of elections in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. It is very important that the Palestinian Government be democratically based. I echo what Ms. Mueller said with regard to the terrible humanitarian situation. In that respect, I would again like to confirm our commitment to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We believe UNRWA is crucial for regional stability and the provision of humanitarian assistance to schools, health systems and hospitals. To date, no one has explained to me what other agency Palestinians could turn to in order to go to school or to the hospital, if not to UNRWA.

Mr. Abarry (Niger) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes today's meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would like to thank Ms. DiCarlo and Ms. Mueller for their briefings on the situation, which must inspire us to act.

By adopting resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council turned down a number of expectations and recommendations that, had they been implemented, could have advanced the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Regrettably, three years later, my delegation notes with serious concern that the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate further, in particular in the occupied territories and on the Gaza Strip, which is under blockade. That situation makes the living conditions of Palestinians especially difficult. Ongoing settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem, the seizure or demolition of Palestinian infrastructure and other evictions are acts that are at odds with international law and violate relevant Security Council resolutions.

My delegation condemns, in no uncertain terms, the hateful and inflammatory statements of all kinds that have been made recently, often for electoral purposes. The ramifications of such actions will serve only to deepen mistrust and divisions and, consequently, reduce the likelihood of the resumption of dialogue between the two parties, which, unfortunately, is now at a standstill. However, the Niger is hopeful that the upcoming general elections, in both Israel and Palestine, will create a new dynamic for the resumption of dialogue between the two parties and truly pave the

way for sincere negotiations towards a resolution to the conflict, which has lasted for far too long.

With regard to the security situation, my country deplores the resurgence of provocative acts in the occupied territories and the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli security services in suppressing peaceful demonstrations, in particular on the Gaza Strip. The vicious cycle of rocket fire and the indiscriminate reprisals that follow must stop in order to protect civilians, who pay the price.

The parties to the conflict must work towards de-escalation, including through various existing structures. The situation in the region remains very volatile, as a result of serious incidents that occurred in recent weeks, such as the assassination of General Soleimani, Iranian missile launches at United States bases, the ongoing riots in Lebanon and Iraq, the crisis in Syria and the twists and turns of the Iranian nuclear deal, to name but a few.

For my country, the continued blockade of the Gaza Strip and other restrictions on the movement of people and goods and on access to basic social services, in particular for women and children, are unacceptable. The endemic shortages of all kinds, caused by the blockade, make the lives of the people of Gaza unsustainable and, in the long run, could lead to an increase in the number of acts of violence and desperation, in particular on the part of unemployed young people in the enclave. In that regard, I would like to reaffirm my delegation's support for the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and welcome the renewal of its mandate by the Security Council in December 2019. We call on all donors to provide their valuable support to the Agency so that it can continue to provide vital services to those in need. To that end, the aim is to protect the fundamental rights and dignity of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, I would like to urge the international community to continue its efforts in the quest for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that takes into account Israel's security aspirations and the legitimate and inalienable rights of Palestinians, including their right to self-determination. My delegation reaffirms its position in favour of a solution comprising two States living side-by-side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. Any solution based on force, and thereby unilateral in nature, would only further aggravate the situation. In that regard, the Security

Council must show itself capable of discharging its responsibilities under the Charter by ensuring compliance with its own resolutions to ensure that, like all other peoples, the Palestinian people may enjoy peace, security, respect and dignity.

Mr. Baati (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, for her valuable briefing. We would also like to thank Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, for her important information.

The Palestinian question, which is the essence of the Arab-Israeli conflict, is now several decades old. In that time, the world has witnessed major transformations and events, while this question remains idle with no solution. On the contrary, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories continues to deteriorate because of the insistence of Israel, the occupying Power, in forging ahead with its practices against the Palestinian people and implementing its expansionist settlement schemes, in flagrant violation of international law and Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016). That conduct is a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and undermines any possibility of reaching a just and comprehensive peace.

Despite all United Nations resolutions on the Palestinian question and the overall situation in the Middle East, including the occupied Arab Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territories, Israel's intransigence has not simply been limited to non-compliance with any of those resolutions; rather, it has adopted a dangerous escalatory approach by adopting many unilateral measures that entrench occupation and target the foundations and terms of reference of a settlement.

In that context, we once again express our deep concern about calls to annex parts of the West Bank and the continued implementation of settlement projects in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, as well as the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip and the measures taken to impose restrictions on the Palestinian economy.

The atrocious facts and figures cited by Ms. Mueller this morning with regard to the deteriorating living, security and economic conditions resulting from the occupying Power's continued illegal practices are grave indicators of how the situation risks further deterioration, not just in the Palestinian territories but

throughout the entire region. We therefore call for an end to those practices and the making of serious efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive solution.

Moreover, Tunisia rejects practices intended to change the legal, historic and demographic status of Jerusalem, as well as the violation of Islamic and Christian holy sites. Tunisia reiterates its support for the historic Hashemite guardianship over the holy sites and the role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the management, maintenance and preservation of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. That is based on our firm position on defending the causes of righteousness, international legitimacy and peace.

Tunisia will continue to support all efforts to resume negotiations based on the agreed terms of reference, especially the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution, which is the only realistic and viable solution for just and comprehensive peace. Accomplishing that goal is an urgent priority in restoring security and stability in the region. And it requires the international community to shoulder its legal and political responsibilities to implement international law and United Nations resolutions. Israel should be committed to ending its occupation and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate rights, primary among them their right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Given the Security Council's responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, we call on it to step up its efforts to end such Israeli practices and resolve the conflict. We reiterate the importance of the Security Council conducting a visit to the occupied Palestinian territories so that the Council can see for itself the tragic consequences of the occupation on the lives of the Palestinian people, and therefore take the necessary measures to end the occupation.

Tunisia emphasizes the need to stop the targeting of civilians. We call for full use of existing international mechanisms, for respecting international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention and for ensuring the necessary protection for the Palestinian people until a resolution of the conflict can be reached and all final-status issues resolved. In that context, given the significant importance of the Palestinian refugee issue, Tunisia reaffirms the imperative need to preserve the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for

Palestine Refugees in the Near East and to provide it with adequate financial resources.

We also stress the importance of achieving Palestinian national reconciliation, overcoming differences among Palestinian brothers and unifying their ranks with a view to supporting their negotiating position and thereby fulfilling the aspirations of the Palestinian people for freedom and independence.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our concern at the continuation of the Palestinian question with no solution on the horizon. The ongoing unilateral Israeli measures to impose a *fait accompli* policy while attempting to bypass the solution and undermining its terms of reference can lead only to an escalation of tensions and the exacerbation of violence, thereby threatening regional and international security and stability. Tunisia therefore stresses the importance of safeguarding the terms of reference and implementing resolutions of international legitimacy as the steadfast foundation of all international efforts to achieve just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Before I start, I want to pick up on what both the American and the German Ambassadors said about the Holocaust commemoration, which of course takes place this year. It is a very important commemoration. Some of us will be joining the Secretary-General at the weekend in New York to commemorate this important anniversary.

Turning to the open debate, the year 2020 opened with a new crisis in the Middle East following the killing of Qasem Soleimani in response to strikes by Iraqi militias against coalition bases, and the downing of Ukrainian Airlines Flight PS-752. The United Kingdom continues to urge all parties to de-escalate following the events and Iran to take the opportunity to come in from the cold and pursue its legitimate interests in the region peacefully and with full respect for international rules. I would like to echo what the German representative said about recognition of Israel in this context.

As demonstrated by the briefings we heard today, it is right the Security Council also remain engaged to resolve one of the longest-standing conflicts on its agenda, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We have made clear our concern over the situation on the ground, which, as the Secretary-General noted in his assessment last month (see S/2019/938), has deteriorated over the past three years, and the figures that the Under-Secretary-General cited are troubling and compelling. All sides

have a responsibility to arrest that deterioration and to create an atmosphere more conducive to peace.

For Israel, that means, first, an immediate halt to settlement expansion. We condemn the Israeli Government's advancement this month of yet more plans for more than 1,900 housing units across the West Bank. It is the United Kingdom's long-standing position that settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the viability of the two-State solution. Secondly, Israel must avoid any suggestion that parts of the occupied Palestinian territories should be annexed. Such a move would be contrary to international law and damaging to peace efforts and could not pass unchallenged. Thirdly, there must be an immediate end to the demolition of Palestinian-owned homes and structures, as well as the eviction of Palestinians from their homes. The targeting of donor-funded structures in Area C is of particular concern. We call on the Israeli authorities to provide a clear and transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C.

Turning to the responsibilities of the Palestinians, first, we unreservedly condemn the indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians by groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Such attacks are completely unacceptable and a violation of international law and need to cease immediately. Secondly, there should be renewed efforts towards Palestinian reconciliation. We encourage those involved in the reconciliation process to allow the Palestinian Authority to fully resume its Government functions in Gaza and ensure compliance with the Quartet principles. Thirdly, we call on the Palestinian Authority to set a date for free and fair elections in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Gaza as soon as possible. Genuine democratic national elections for all Palestinians are crucial to the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State.

The Security Council has a role to play in identifying and containing future flashpoints in conflicts. The resumption of the Great March of Return protests in March is once such possible flashpoint. Hamas operatives have cynically exploited those protests in the past. The United Kingdom's commitment to Israel's security is unwavering. Any protests must adhere to the principle of non-violence. We reiterate our long-standing concerns about the manner in which the Israel Defense Forces police non-violent protests, including the use of live ammunition and excessive force, and we

call on Israel to adhere to the principles of necessity and proportionality.

Turning to the economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza, as we have heard, it remains dire. The United Kingdom will provide approximately \$21 million in humanitarian assistance to Gaza in this financial year and, to help address the underlying causes, we are more than tripling our spending on economic development programming, providing some \$75 million between 2018 and 2023. Ultimately, only peace, stability and the easing of movement and access restrictions will allow the necessary investments to be made in a sustainable way.

We understand and share the deep frustration on all sides at the lack of progress on the Middle East peace process. A just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue. We remain committed to achieving a two-State solution and our long-standing position is clear. We support a negotiated settlement recognized by all sides, leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, based on the 1967 borders, with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees. We look forward to working with colleagues to advance our shared objectives of peace and prosperity in the year ahead.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for their briefings. I align myself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

The only way to achieve lasting peace and to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the Israelis and the Palestinians is through a negotiated two-State solution that respects the internationally agreed parameters and international law. Unfortunately, the developments on the ground are deteriorating and are preventing the resumption of meaningful negotiations in order to resolve this long-standing conflict. I would reiterate the importance of implementing resolution 2334 (2016), including its call for affirmative steps to reverse the negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution.

We are concerned about the continuation of Israel's settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, in violation of international law. We also call on Israel

to end the demolitions of Palestinian-owned buildings in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which have also included projects funded by the European Union and its member States. Concerning recent calls for the annexation of areas in the West Bank, I would like to stress that annexation would constitute a serious violation of international law and would harm prospects for moving forward with the peace process.

Reaching a sustainable political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also requires progress on intra-Palestinian reconciliation. We encourage all Palestinian factions to commit to inclusive, comprehensive and fair elections. Holding elections throughout the Palestinian territory, including in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, would be important for renewing the democratic legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority and ensuring its strong institutions.

Unfortunately, the situation in the Gaza Strip remains fragile. We condemn the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel. Such indiscriminate violence and targeting of the civilian population are completely unacceptable. We call on all parties to exercise restraint and to refrain from targeting civilians, in line with obligations under international humanitarian law. The cycle of violence in Gaza will only bring about more civilian casualties. It undermines the humanitarian situation in Gaza, resulting in further suffering and growing extremism.

I would also stress the importance of continued support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which remains crucial to providing essential services for Palestinian refugees, especially health care and children's education. Estonia has contributed with additional funding in recent years so as to support UNRWA's activities in the Middle East.

With regard to Syria, we want to reiterate our support for resolution 2254 (2015). As pointed out in that resolution, the success of the political process is closely interlinked with a nationwide ceasefire. Unfortunately, that is not the case for Idlib province, where the situation remains highly volatile despite the repeated ceasefire agreements by various parties to the conflict. The continued military operations in the area may have severe humanitarian consequences and lead to another influx of refugees as increased violence threatens millions of civilians. The humanitarian situation in the

area remains dreadful despite the renewal of the cross-border aid mechanism on 10 January. Millions of people remain in need of life-saving assistance and protection. The instability in Idlib and further military gains by the regime and its allies may harm the prospects for a meaningful political transition.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): At the outset, I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller for their important briefings.

As the seventy-fifth anniversary of our Organization approaches, we are reminded once again that no durable peace can be achieved without upholding the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as multilateralism. The absence of those elements, in practice, has shaped the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict and made the two-State vision harder to achieve. Recent regional tensions have also reminded us all of the critical necessity of upholding the principles of the Charter and multilateralism. We once again urge all parties to exercise maximum restraint, restart dialogue and renew international cooperation. Allow me to stress the following points.

First, there is an urgent need to reverse negative trends. The prevailing negative trends in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalate the threats to achieving durable peace and security in the region. On the settlement issue, for example, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 621 Palestinian structures were demolished or seized in the West Bank in 2019, displacing 914 Palestinians. Those figures represent a 35 and 95 per cent increase, respectively, as compared with 2018. If the de facto annexation is not brought to an end, it will cause profound human suffering to the Palestinians and make peace and stability impossible to attain. We must not let such unlawful acts go unnoticed. The Security Council must instead seriously address the issue and find a durable solution based on the United Nations Charter and in conformity with its resolutions. In that regard, I wish to reiterate Indonesia's profound commitment to, and support for, all efforts to bring the peace process back on track, based on the internationally agreed parameters.

Secondly, the Council must stand firm in upholding international law and multilateralism. The Council must not be silent in the face of continuous Israeli threats of formal annexation of the occupied territory,

including East Jerusalem. In resolution 2334 (2016), the Council affirmed that changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations, constitute a flagrant violation under international law. There is no other way forward on this matter, apart from ensuring Israel's compliance with international law and the relevant resolutions.

My third and final point pertains to the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. It is imperative to stop the blockade and related restrictions against civilians in the Gaza Strip, as they constitute collective punishment on the Palestinian people, imposed in clear violation of international humanitarian law. Meanwhile, the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank poses a serious threat to the life of every Palestinian, including women and children.

It is the responsibility of the international community to help those enduring the serious humanitarian situation in Gaza, the West Bank and places of refuge. Let me join other colleagues in stressing the vital role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), not only as a lifeline but also as a safeguard for the Palestinian right of return. I am glad to hear from Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Mueller about the capabilities and ability of UNRWA to increase employment among Palestinian youths. That is why we continue to support UNRWA.

I wish to reaffirm the solidarity of the Government and the people of Indonesia with the Palestinian people, as well as our unwavering support for their inalienable rights.

We heard from Assistant Secretary-General Mueller about the plights of Salwa, Jamil and Manar and Anas. How many more names will we learn, as the reality and the suffering of the people of Palestine are given a human face? That paints a clear picture of what is happening on the ground, as well as of what has to be done by all of us here in order to ensure that such suffering does not continue.

It is disturbing to hear that, on the first day of the year 2020, Israeli authorities uprooted 147 olive trees in the village of Al-Jaba'a, in Bethlehem, belonging to eight Palestinian families. For Palestinians and many communities, the olive tree represents peace and resilience. In the current context, the olive tree may also represent the two-State vision — a vision of

peace in the Middle East. It remains the obligation of the Council to safeguard that vision, first and foremost for the sake of the Palestinian people but also for the stability of the region and beyond.

Lastly, I find it hard to understand how we are expected to hold a dialogue in the Council when the delegation of Israel has not responded to a single query posed by our Palestinian colleagues today. We should have a conversation in this Chamber. We should have a discussion on how to move things forward. But the fact that the Israeli representative did not make a single reference to Palestine in his statement today shows that there is something wrong in the process and in our discussions thus far. I find it bewildering and shameful. It does not serve the purpose of peace. It is time for us in the Council to move forward and to find a solution.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): Allow me to begin by thanking Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for their informative and factual yet chilling briefings on the situation between Israel and Palestine. Ms. Mueller's report on the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory was sobering, especially with regard to unaccompanied Palestinian children seeking medical aid in foreign lands. We also note the compelling testimony of the Ambassador of the State of Palestine.

We would like to address four issues this morning, namely, the political process, the security concerns, the continuous land grabbing of Palestinian lands, and trust between Israel and Palestine.

Turning first to the political situation, the dark clouds hanging over the Middle East, tensions between the United States and Israel and Iran, tensions in Lebanon and ongoing difficulties in Syria, Iraq and Yemen are diverting attention away from the core problem in the region: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. South Africa calls on the Security Council and all other players to refocus on that core problem.

The lack of progress in the Middle East peace process is of great concern to South Africa. As we have heard before, and as many Council members have said here today, the only viable and sustainable solution to the crisis in the Middle East is a two-State solution that allows for a sovereign, independent Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, alongside a safe and secure State of

Israel. Any attempts to divert from those fundamental concepts and the premature closure of final-status issues are but a distraction from the internationally accepted framework for resolving the crisis. In that regard, we reaffirm that the only way to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East is through reaching a lasting peace between Palestine and Israel — there is no other alternative — and restoring all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, in accordance with the two-State solution and the relevant resolutions and international terms of reference.

With regard to the announcement of Palestinian elections, we thank Ms. DiCarlo for the update on the United Nations efforts to ensure the holding of inclusive Palestinian elections. We call on all parties to make a concerted effort to ensure that safe and inclusive elections are held throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Council has always emphasized, including Secretary-General António Guterres, that a surge in diplomacy is a critical tool for the mediation of seemingly intractable conflicts. Where is that surge in diplomacy on this more than 60-year-old conflict?

On the security situation, South Africa is deeply concerned by the tension around the Gaza Strip, which has led to further killing and a perpetuation of the conflict. In that regard, we call for a cessation of violent attacks by both sides and for a return to negotiations. South Africa believes that the current crises in Gaza will lead only to parties moving further and further apart from each other and undermine any hope for the resumption of negotiations. South Africa thanks Egypt and the Secretary-General for brokering the latest ceasefire between Israel and Gaza.

The current security situation and the continued blockade imposed on Gaza negatively affect the humanitarian situation, as we heard from Ms. Mueller today. In that regard, we commend the staff and officials of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for continuing to provide essential aid, including health and education services, to the people of Gaza.

With respect to the continued land-grabbing in Palestine, in these uncertain times, additional instability will only heighten tension. Threats and pronouncements of annexation, including large parts of the occupied West Bank, further undermine prospects for peace and hinder any chance of finding a sustainable

settlement to the crisis. Ms. DiCarlo gave details on the ongoing Israeli land-grab of Palestinian territories, carried out in defiance of the Council's resolutions and overwhelming global condemnation.

South Africa reiterates that the continued expansion of settlements violates international law, undermines the prospects for peace and contravenes the decisions of the Council, effectively damaging its credibility as the organ mandated to maintain international peace and security. We therefore continue to insist on the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We must highlight that overt violations of Security Council resolutions would usually elicit harsher measures imposed on the party responsible for such infractions. We also call for the continuation of written reports by the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions 2334 (2016).

With regard to trust between the parties, the Council must work towards restoring trust in the legitimate peace process that has been pursued for decades in order to prevent the further development of antagonism between the parties. We therefore call on the Council to be united and unified in encouraging gestures of hope and the building of trust between the parties in an effort to defuse tension and towards creating an environment conducive to the resumption of dialogue. The Council should decisively address the hopelessness of both Israeli and Palestinian children, who see no end to the conflict that their grandparents and parents started.

In conclusion, we reiterate our call for the Council to reconsider a visit to the region, which would be a clear indication — and not an infringement on the internal affairs of any parties — that the international community continues to support the resolution of the core and oldest conflict in the Middle East. As with other Council field visits, it would also provide an opportunity to meet all relevant actors in both Israel and Palestine and encourage them to move towards lasting peace for the sake of their own people. Israel and Palestine need help. The Council can provide that help. South Africa is ready to do its part to contribute to peacemaking efforts to assist both parties to move towards peace.

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. DiCarlo and Ms. Muller for their briefings.

France calls for the urgent resumption of a credible peace process, at a time when the deterioration of the situation on the ground is a major source of

instability. That is especially the case in Gaza, where the humanitarian situation is disastrous, as recalled by Ms. Muller, and in Jerusalem, where demolitions, expropriations and attacks on the status quo of holy sites are on the rise.

The parameters for a settlement to the conflict are well known: borders based on the 4 June 1967 lines, with agreed land swaps negotiated by the parties; a fair, equitable and agreed-upon solution to the refugee problem; Jerusalem as the capital of the two States; and security arrangements that allow the two States to live side by side in peace and security.

On that basis, agreed upon by the international community, negotiations between the two parties must resume without further delay in order to ensure the implementation of such a solution. It would be unrealistic and dangerous — above all for Israel — to believe that a solution that breaches those agreed parameters would be capable of delivering lasting stability to the region.

That is why France continues, and will continue, to defend the two-State solution, and therefore the establishment of a sovereign, viable and democratic Palestinian State, not only because it is a just position that complies with international law and the decisions of the Security Council, but also because it is realistic. In that regard, it is futile to think that it is possible to meet the aspirations of one people at the expense of another, and that political expectations can be met by exclusively economic incentives.

Any policy that has the effect of jeopardizing the two-State solution must be denounced. That is why I wish to reaffirm France's grave concern over the accelerated settlement activities on the ground and the slide towards an annexation mindset. On several occasions, I have had an opportunity to reiterate France's position on settlements, which contravene international law. That position remains unchanged, pursuant to Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016), which cannot be subjected to *à la carte* interpretation. The European Union also shares that position.

We have also condemned the calls by Israeli officials for the annexation of all or part of the West Bank. Any annexation of territory constitutes a serious violation of international law, as the Secretary-General recalled in September, and cannot go unanswered. In that context, we call on the Israeli authorities to renounce any plan that is liable to create *faits accomplis* on the ground that would undermine the two-State solution.

Lastly, I would like to relay France's call for the holding of Palestinian elections in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem in the near future. Such elections are an indispensable step towards inter-Palestinian reconciliation, which is necessary for the democratic strengthening of Palestinian institutions. They also represent a legitimate expectation of the Palestinian people, 14 years after the last elections were held, as well as a necessary step along the path towards negotiations and peace. In this context, we encourage the Palestinian leadership to pursue its efforts with a view towards the holding of plural and inclusive elections. It is important that the Palestinian authorities promptly issue a presidential decree setting the date for the elections and that, for their part, the Israeli authorities allow the proper conduct of elections in East Jerusalem. Together with its European Union partners, France stands ready to fully play its part in supporting the Palestinian authorities in the holding of the elections. That is the purpose of the work that we have begun.

France calls on the entire international community to take action so that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East can pursue its vital work. In this regard, we are concerned about the increasing number of obstacles the Agency is facing as it carries out its mission in East Jerusalem.

I should like to conclude by pointing out that President Macron will have the opportunity to discuss these issues with both sides during his visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories on 22 and 23 January.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I thank our briefers, Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Mueller.

I first would like to join my colleagues in acknowledging the important commemoration of the Holocaust this year. Never again must such atrocities be endured by humankind.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to stand with the State of Palestine as it strives for a peaceful and just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We reaffirm the internationally agreed two-State solution. Moreover, the current and expanding Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory constitute a flagrant violation of international law — a fact that no amount of legalistic creativity can change — and these settlements remain a substantial obstacle to peace

in the Middle East. We therefore call for all settlement activities to stop, without preconditions.

It is our duty to protect our universally accepted body of international law on this issue. To do otherwise would allow a jaundiced view of international law to weaken the existential pillars on which all States rely, especially the small and militarily weak ones. The international community has not given up on the two-State solution, and we should collectively and robustly resist any attempt to change the situation on the ground so as to make this internationally agreed goal more and more elusive. Each of us has the option to remain silent or to stand on principle.

We remain invested in the peace, security and development of Palestine, Israel and all their neighbours. The continuing conflict hinders Palestine in its quest to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In its 2018 voluntary national review, the Government of Palestine cited the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a key deterrent to fostering an internal enabling environment to achieve the SDGs.

With regard to Gaza, the humanitarian situation there remains one of great concern. Israel's blockade of Gaza breeds poverty and deprives Gazan residents of their rights. Accordingly, we call once again for the lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip.

We reiterate our strong support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its mandate. UNRWA continues to play a vital role in supporting the basic needs of millions of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank. At the same time, we remain concerned about the ongoing financial shortfall for the Agency and encourage States Members of the United Nations to step up their financial support in order to close the current funding gaps. In this vein, we note that UNRWA also needs access in order to do its work and fulfil its mandate.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains concerned about any attempts to deviate from the settled parameters governing the delicate quest for peace between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine. The Security Council has made clear that it will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations. We reiterate that the Palestinian people must have the right to govern

themselves and reach their potential in a sovereign and contiguous State.

Finally, those who commit crimes against humanity and war crimes should be held accountable. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines therefore welcomes the recent landmark recommendation of the International Criminal Court to open an investigation into these matters. We owe it to the young people in both the State of Palestine and the State of Israel to resolve the conflict. Their despair is heartbreaking.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation thanks Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for their briefings.

The question of Palestine has been dragging on for more than 70 years. It is at the root of the turbulence in the Middle East. It is also a wound to the conscience of humankind. At present, the Gaza Strip is gripped by endless conflicts and confrontation. Acts of violence and inflammatory rhetoric by the parties concerned have been frequent. The construction of settlements and the demolition of Palestinian homes continue to expand in scope and scale. The occupied Palestinian territory is in a grave humanitarian crisis, and the Middle East peace process is not on the right track. China is deeply concerned about all of this. Without a just and reasonable resolution to the Palestinian question, there will be no lasting peace or security in the Middle East.

We should continue to adhere to the overall goal of the two-State solution, which is the only appropriate way to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Independent statehood is the inalienable national right of the Palestinian people; it is a right that cannot be traded away. The international community, especially parties with significant influence in the Middle East, should make joint efforts based on Arabic Peace Initiative, the principle of land for peace and the relevant Security Council resolutions and encourage Israel and Palestine to resolve conflicts through negotiations on an equal footing.

Resolution 2334 (2016) clearly states that the construction of settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, is in violation of international law. The parties concerned should earnestly implement this resolution, immediately cease all settlement activities in occupied territory, stop the demolition of Palestinian homes and the destruction of their property, and prevent violence against civilians.

We should continue to promote dialogue, negotiations and political consultations. The Palestinian issue can be resolved only by political means. Countering violence with violence or the threat of force will lead nowhere. China encourages the relevant parties to meet each other halfway, stop military actions, cease incendiary rhetoric, refrain from taking unilateral measures that undermine trust, avoid any escalation of the tense situation in the region, earnestly safeguard the foundation of the Middle East peace process and create the favourable conditions for the resumption of dialogue.

Early this month, Chinese State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Wang Yi visited Egypt and exchanged views with the Egyptian leadership, including the country's Foreign Minister, on international affairs, the Middle East and the Palestinian question. He also met with Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the League of Arab States. State Councillor Wang Yi said that China has been and will always be a builder of peace, a promoter of stability and a contributor to development in the Middle East.

We should pay close attention to and help improve the Palestinian economic and humanitarian situation. China is concerned at the recent announcement by the relevant party of another deduction from the tax revenues collected on behalf of Palestine. We call upon that party to earnestly fulfil its obligations under the Paris Protocol and other relevant international treaties, fully implement relevant United Nations resolutions and completely lift the blockade on Gaza as soon as possible in order to create the conditions for improving the economic and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

China welcomes the General Assembly's adoption by an overwhelming majority of the resolution to renew the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (resolution 74/83). The international community should continue to increase its political and financial support for the Agency and provide concrete assistance to Palestinian refugees in host countries. It should also increase its investments with a view to boosting the reconstruction of the Palestinian economy and take an integrated approach to promoting peace through development.

As State Councillor Wang Yi said in an interview with the Egyptian press, China will continue to stand up for justice and speak out at various international forums. China will continue to unswervingly support the just cause of the Palestinian people as they strive for the restoration of their legitimate national rights and the establishment of an independent, fully sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the 1967 borders.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Ms. Ursula Mueller for their briefings. Particular thanks go to Ms. Muller for highlighting some positive aspects, however small, and for inviting us to use them to give new impetus to our collective actions.

The Middle East peace process is a phrase used by world leaders time and again to refer to efforts to end the conflict between Israel and Palestine. It is a conflict whose undeniable regional ramifications continue to heighten threats to international peace and security. One of the most important events of the past 50 years was the signing of the Oslo Accords of 1993, which established a series of commitments based on United Nations resolutions towards an independent, secure and self-reliant Palestinian State. However, almost 30 years later, neither Israelis nor Palestinians, for different reasons, have succeeded in conducting a dialogue that opens the door to the negotiations necessary to resolve their disputes. Peace in the region, including the Palestinian people's undeniable right to independence, seemed to be slowly eroding.

Much has changed since then, and the actors are certainly different, but we believe that it is essential to the resolution of this long conflict that the parties decide to relaunch with renewed impetus a peace process aimed at satisfying the legitimate aspirations of both peoples to live in peace. Dialogue is the vital avenue for improving the situation of those affected by the conflict and for taking firm steps towards sustainable development based on justice, equal opportunities and a peace that can be replicated throughout the Middle East region. Both parties must immediately desist from acts that contravene international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, and guarantee the health, dignity, freedom and well-being of a population that has suffered years of violence and conflict.

As an international community, we understand that our collective action must be aimed at contributing in an impartial and effective manner to the search for real solutions to a conflict that so often endangers the lives of so many civilians. We must move forward and reduce pointless processes. Open discussions such as today's are a platform to send a clear message that there is a collective will to put the process towards a negotiated peace back on track, not to point fingers and deepen divisions. We understand that any participation by the Security Council must be framed by recognition and respect for mutual rights, including self-determination and independence, non-interference and by the legacy of understandings reflected in previous agreements.

Before concluding, I would like to highlight a few points. It is essential to prevent the tensions between the parties from rising. We call for restraint and for respect for international law and existing ceasefire provisions. The resumption of dialogue must be the sole and central objective of all parties. The humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to be a source of concern and deserves the full attention of the international community. We believe that the Israeli settlements and their impact on the Palestinian people foster an atmosphere of tension and insecurity that affects women and children most. They face violence, threats, intimidation, restriction of movement and discrimination. The expansion not only contravenes international law but also undermines any possibility of reaching a point where the reconciliation and peace process between the parties can continue.

However, the deep division among Palestinians themselves also erodes efforts towards State-building and inflicts uncertainty that is difficult to bear. It is perhaps a problem that the Palestinian people must resolve before they can sit down and talk about a real and lasting peace with Israel. It is therefore necessary to insist on a Palestinian electoral process as soon as possible as the first step towards a new political transformation that will help strengthen the position of Palestinians in the concert of nations.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We wish to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Ms. Ursula Mueller for their briefings.

For the first time in 2020, we are holding a debate on the situation in the Middle East, and unfortunately we again begin the year with the alarming observation that not only has the region not seen positive trends, but we

are also witnessing a growing escalation. We view the killing of the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard, Major General Soleimani, and his associates, in Baghdad on 3 January, which was perpetrated on the soil of a sovereign State Member of the United Nations without its knowledge or consent, as an unacceptable act that undermines security and stability in the region. We call upon all parties to exercise restraint, demonstrate good judgment and prioritize diplomatic means. As a result of these actions, the region and the world found themselves on the brink of a conflict whose repercussions could have been unpredictable given that the margin of stability in the Middle East region is reaching its limit.

Reducing the artificially created tensions around Iran would facilitate the defusing of tensions in the region.

The countries of the Middle East and North Africa must themselves develop parameters to collectively ensure regional security. To that end, it is necessary to begin dialogue. Today's volatile situation in the Middle East is largely the result of States of the region not yet having established effective communication channels. Our shared objective is to help them do so. We have contributed to the fulfilment of this objective by proposing a blueprint for security in the Persian Gulf.

We have achieved significant milestones in the Syria track. Thanks to the collective efforts of the participants in the Astana format, we have realized de-escalation and stabilization in much of Syria. On 30 October, the Constitutional Committee began its work. In order to reach a lasting peace in Syria and to ensure the return of millions of Syrian refugees to their homes, we must focus efforts on rebuilding the country's economy without political constraints.

On Sunday, in Berlin, an important step forward was taken towards a political settlement in Libya. Furthermore, as part of an additional general de-escalation effort in Libya, meetings with representatives of the main Libyan forces were held in Moscow on 13 January. But these are only preliminary measures; they now must be underpinned by meaningful efforts, primarily within the United Nations and through Special Representative Ghassan Salamé. The Security Council has yet to consider the final agreements of the Berlin process, but the main premise for settlement is that it is up to the Libyans to decide the fate of their country.

We continue to hope that, thanks to the efforts of the Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, progress will also be made on a Yemeni settlement. In addition, we support the need for a speedy normalization of the situation in Iraq and Lebanon by harnessing mechanisms for broad nationwide dialogue. The establishment of calm in these countries is necessary for the entire region.

Notwithstanding our attention to the aforementioned raging conflicts, we cannot overlook the principal long-standing issue in the Middle East, namely, the Palestinian-Israeli settlement. Everyone who is familiar with the history of the region understands that absent a settlement to the Palestinian problem, lasting peace in the region cannot be achieved. However, solutions that are presented as modern and innovative merely stymie our efforts to resolve the Palestinian issue. Attempts to erode the existing international legal framework for a settlement will not help matters. We reject the fait accompli policy — the recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, the transfer of an embassy to Jerusalem, declarations of plans to annex the Jordan Valley, settlement activity and the demolition of Palestinian homes — which seeks to undermine the internationally recognized basis for a Middle East settlement. Such actions only undermines efforts to achieve a lasting settlement in the Middle East on the basis of the two-State principle.

Given those circumstances, it is more important than ever to mobilize the efforts of the international community to support the legal framework for a Middle East settlement, including the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. We must revitalize the work of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, namely, the Russian Federation, the United States, the European Union and the United Nations.

Moreover, we must overcome the inter-Palestinian divide between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In this regard, we welcome the confirmed readiness of all stakeholders to participate in general elections on the basis of previous inter-Palestinian agreements. We trust that these elections will be held on schedule in all the Palestinian territories.

Finally, we commend the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which is helping to stabilize the situation, and we call upon all stakeholders to continue to support the Agency.

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

I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for their briefings.

Viet Nam is deeply concerned about the continuing violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, which resulted in the death of nearly 3,000 Palestinians and 46 Israelis in only three months, between September and December 2019. We condemn all attacks on civilians, women, children — both Palestinian and Israeli — as well as assaults on civilian infrastructure, including schools, agricultural crops and civilian properties.

While the prospect of the two-State solution has yet to be realized, it is imperative that all relevant parties exercise the utmost restraint, refrain from all acts of provocation or violence, end attacks against civilians and act in strict compliance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. That is the only way to ease the people's suffering and put the peace process back on track.

We firmly reiterate our calls for Israel to cease all its illegal settlement activities and fulfil its obligations under resolution 2334 (2016), as well as to lift the restrictions on movement of people and commodities within the occupied Palestinian territories. We also express our concern about information regarding Israeli plans to annex the Jordan Valley and parts of the West Bank. We strongly believe that unconstructive acts, coupled with new, dangerous flashpoints in the region, will bring about only casualties and greater suffering for civilians, not solutions leading to sustainable peace and development in the region.

We commend the persistent efforts of the international community, the mediation role of the United Nations and Egypt, and we support the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We commend all Palestinian efforts and initiatives of the United Nations and its States Members to foster unity and improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Viet Nam reaffirms its unwavering support for the Palestinian people's legitimate struggle for their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and to become an independent and sovereign State. We strongly believe that the only solution for lasting peace and security is the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of pre-

1967 borders, living side by side with the Israeli State in peace, security and mutual recognition. Given the destabilizing regional context, it is time for the Security Council to enhance efforts to prevent jeopardizing the progress made thus far towards the sustainable safety and security of the Middle East.

While the root causes of the Middle East issues have yet to be addressed, Viet Nam is deeply concerned about the recent alarming developments in the region. We strongly urge all concerned parties to uphold the Charter of the United Nations, respect and fulfil their commitments, exercise the utmost restraint, refrain from any action that may further escalate tensions and resolve all conflicts by peaceful means, in accordance with international law.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver condensed versions when speaking in the Chamber.

I wish to inform all concerned that we will suspend this open debate at 1 p.m. and resume at 10 a.m. tomorrow.

I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Ms. Juul (Norway): Absent a credible political process to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is of key importance that we continue to build the institutional and economic foundations for a Palestinian State. Norway continues to assist in these efforts, as we have done since the Oslo Process, and we will continue do so, including by chairing the next meeting of the international donor group to Palestine, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, in Brussels this spring.

The recent efforts to resolve outstanding economic issues between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) need to continue with a view to improving the fiscal situation of the PA. Moreover, facilitating trade and easing restrictions on movement and access are preconditions for a more sustainable Palestinian economy.

The recent flare-ups of violence risk escalating tensions around Gaza. Norway notes the positive effects of donor efforts and that humanitarian and infrastructure programmes need to continue. The ongoing health crisis is of particular concern. We urge all parties to work closely with the United Nations to ensure proper supply lines to Gaza.

Norway's position on the Israeli establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, remains clear. Such settlements constitute a grave violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution towards just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Norway welcomes plans to hold general elections in Palestine this year. Free, fair and inclusive elections are important for renewing the legitimacy of Palestinian national institutions. We encourage all parties, including the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian factions and Israel, to act constructively in facilitating and holding elections across Palestine, including in East Jerusalem and Gaza.

Allow me to make a few remarks on the situation in the region.

We are deeply concerned about the increased tensions between the United States and Iran over the past weeks and the violent escalation in Iraq. While the situation seems to have calmed down for now, the conflict remains unresolved. Norway urges all parties involved to de-escalate, exercise maximum restraint and engage through dialogue and diplomacy. The people of Iraq deserve peace and security. Further escalation will put the stability and territorial integrity of Iraq at risk. We must safeguard the progress achieved so far, including through the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is important for regional and global security and remains key to continued confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme. While we regret the United States decision to withdraw from the JCPOA and to reimpose sanctions, we express our strong concern about Iran's steps to reduce its compliance with its nuclear commitments. Norway urges Iran to return without delay to full compliance with the provisions of the nuclear agreement. The efforts of European partners to preserve the JCPOA, within the framework of the agreement's dispute mechanism, have our full support.

Promoting peace and security in the Middle East, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, remains a priority for Norway. We stand ready to support any endeavour that seeks to further that aim. If the past weeks have taught us anything, it is that only diplomacy, de-escalation and credible political processes can lead to a more stable region.

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

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Sir, for your efforts during your country's presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representatives whose statements have focused without deviation on the essence of today's topic, namely, the Palestinian question and ending the Israeli occupation of the occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan.

This year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, while the Palestinian question has been an issue on its agenda for 73 years. We had hoped that the Organization would play an effective role in helping us achieve a just solution that would uphold Palestinian rights and return security and stability to the Middle East. However, we have seen positions of the Organization that have never been implemented. It is as though those positions were simply a smokescreen.

The Palestinian question and ending the Israeli occupation of occupied Arab territories have been issues on the agenda of the largest number of meetings, resolutions and statements allocated to this topic. However, under the pressure of some permanent members of the Council, our Organization remains unable to implement its resolutions and statements, achieve the hopes of the founding fathers to uphold the values of justice, based on respect for international law and the Charter of the United Nations, or put an end to the aggression, occupation and domination. What is worse is that Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, has violated his mandate and neglected to mention the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan in his briefings, with the aim of diverting attention from the dangerous crimes committed by Israel there.

Given the fact that decades have passed since the Israeli occupation started, we have the right to ask: Has the time not yet come for our people in the occupied Syrian Golan, Palestine and Lebanon to enjoy freedom

and liberation from the yoke of occupation? Has the time not yet come to implement the resolutions of our Organization? Has the time not yet come to establish an independent Palestinian State, as affirmed by General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947, which was adopted 73 years ago? Has the time not yet come for the Security Council to uphold its responsibility to maintain international peace and security and establish a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, instead of wasting its energies and resources and turning the Chamber into a place where certain prominent countries further their own agendas?

The inability of the United Nations to find a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question has encouraged some to shirk their legal commitments and the agreed terms of reference, seek to twist the facts and entrench the occupation. That has been seen over the past few months through unilateral and provocative actions, such as the United States Administration considering occupied Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, its declaration of what it referred to as recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan and its attempt to legitimize settlement activity.

My country strongly condemns those decisions and considers them unilateral conduct on the part of a party that lacks the legal, moral or political authority to determine the fate of the peoples of the world or of the territories that are part and parcel of the Syrian Arab Republic and occupied Palestine. My country also reiterates its call on the Security Council to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to cease its practices of defiling the history of the occupied Syrian Golan while stealing its antiquities and plundering its wealth, including Syrian oil, which it seeks to pillage with the cooperation of companies, such as the United States Genie Energy, whose Board of Directors includes people known throughout history for plundering the wealth of our countries. They include former United States Vice President Dick Cheney, Jacob Rothschild, Rupert Murdoch, former Central Intelligence Agency Director James Woolsey, former United States Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson and others.

We also demand that Israel put an end to its crimes in the Golan and its attempts to change the demography and Syrian national identity there. Israel must end its confiscation of land owned by Syrian citizens in the Golan with a view to expanding illegitimate settlements and establishing new occupation projects, including the wind energy project. Israel must refrain from forcing

our people in the Golan to register their land, which they inherited from their fathers and grandfathers, with Israeli State authorities, threatening to confiscate the land of those who refuse to do so, and falsely conducting so-called local elections. All that constitutes flagrant violations of international law and international humanitarian law, which some parties address with double standards and hypocrisy that exceeds all limits.

My Government stresses that the occupied Syrian Golan is part and parcel of the Syrian Arab Republic. It must be returned in conformity with the 4 June 1967 borders, as per international law. That is the main priority of Syrian policy and the compass that we will never divert from.

Syria underlines its support for the right of the Palestinian people to determine their own destiny and establish an independent State on all their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital, while guaranteeing the right of return to refugees, in accordance with resolution 194 (III) of 1948. My country reiterates its demand that Palestine be allowed to become a full-fledged Member of the United Nations.

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

Mr. Popolizio Bardales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru welcomes the convening of the quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East. We thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their very comprehensive briefings.

We have been following events surrounding the question of Palestine with deep concern. The rigidity of positions, the absence of dialogue between the parties and the constant occurrence of violent episodes have led to a stagnation in the peace process. The current scenario is unsustainable and destabilizing for the Middle East and for the international community. We are alarmed that the prospects of a political solution appear increasingly distant and that unilateral decisions and actions or announcements thereof may result in further escalations of violence.

Peru, guided by its commitment to multilateralism, international law and the peaceful resolution of disputes, supports the two-State solution, with internationally recognized and secure borders based on the pre-1967

lines, to be negotiated directly between Israel and Palestine. Such negotiations must also determine the final status of Jerusalem. We therefore encourage the political and religious leaders of Israel and Palestine, and all those with capacity to influence, to act responsibly and to promote the re-establishment of a high-level dialogue that will allow both peoples and the Middle East as a whole to advance towards sustainable peace. That will involve, inter alia, compliance with the resolutions of the Security Council. In particular, we deem it a matter of urgency to put an end to the growing practice of settlement-building, the demolition of property and evictions in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. Such practices undermine the two-State solution and contravene the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016). We also underscore the urgent need to address, immediately and in parallel, the serious humanitarian crisis affecting the Palestinian population, which has been aggravated in recent years by financing cuts to aid programmes.

To overcome this complex reality, we consider it essential to address its root causes, particularly the lack of basic goods and services and employment, as well as the isolation to which millions of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are subjected. The current situation provides fertile ground for those who promote violence and extremism. In that regard, we encourage the continuation of infrastructure and development projects and the promotion of efforts aimed at enabling the Palestinian Authority to resume effective control of the area and ensuring that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East enjoys stable and predictable funding.

Given the extremely delicate situation in the Persian Gulf, we echo timely calls for the leaders of the key actors concerned to demonstrate tangible signs of moderation, commitment to peace and respect for international law and the Charter of the United Nations. All differences must be channelled through the political and diplomatic track and never a military option.

We take this opportunity to urge the Iranian authorities to reverse measures aimed at reducing their obligations under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which is a central instrument for the preservation of the non-proliferation regime and for regional and global stability. We also appeal for a careful assessment of the imposition of any new national sanctions, due to their implications for Iranian civilians and their potential to exacerbate current tensions and further

erode trust. Against that backdrop, the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, is particularly pertinent.

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

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month, as well as on its accession to membership of the Council for the period 2020-2021. I also extend my congratulations to the other new elected members of the Security Council and express my sincere appreciation to the five non-permanent members that left the Security Council at the end of 2019.

I also thank Ms. DiCarlo and Ms. Mueller for their briefings.

With regard to the recent escalation of the situation in the Middle East, we stress the need to make every effort to seek calm and reduce tensions in order to avoid any further threat to the security and stability of the region. We would also like to reaffirm Jordan's unwavering support for Iraq in maintaining its security, stability and prosperity, protecting all factions of the Iraqi people and countering terrorism. Terrorism is a danger to all of us in the region and throughout the world. It constitutes a security and ideological threat that we must confront collectively, no matter where terrorist organizations are.

With regard to the Syrian crisis, the international community must step up its efforts and build on what has been achieved thus far in order to reach a political solution that preserves Syria's unity, cohesion and sovereignty, restores its security and stability and rids it of terrorism.

On Libya, we reaffirm the importance of adopting a political solution and supporting the efforts of the United Nations as a means to overcome the crisis and guarantee the security, stability and territorial integrity of the country.

The Palestinian question remains our central issue and deepest wound, as it is the main cause of the crises ravaging the Middle East. Unilateral measures continue, as do violence, injustice, the building of settlements and a lack of respect for international law. The frequency of violations and aggressions perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, in occupied Jerusalem continues to escalate in a systematic and dangerous manner. The

Israeli occupation is seeking, by various means and methods, to impose new conditions that may alter the Arab and Islamic identity and legal status of Jerusalem. The safety and integrity of Islamic and Christian holy sites, especially the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, are also under serious threat by the Israeli occupation.

Such attacks and violations, which have been internationally condemned, are in flagrant contravention of international law and international humanitarian law. Those breaches of international legitimacy have repeatedly and systematically been manifested since East Jerusalem and the West Bank came under Israeli military occupation in 1967. The numerous resolutions issued by the various organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council, consider all such Israeli measures, violations and aggressions in occupied East Jerusalem, including the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, as null and void and without legal or political effect.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II, the guardian of Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, continues to confront attacks on those holy sites head-on, using all diplomatic and legal means at its disposal. We will spare no effort in that regard and will continue to diligently protect, maintain and care for those holy sites. In that context, we commend the role played by the Al-Quds Committee, chaired by His Majesty King Mohammed VI of sisterly Morocco.

A more peaceful world cannot be achieved without a stable Middle East. Stability in the Middle East is not possible without peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The two-State solution is therefore the only path towards peace in the Middle East through the establishment of a Palestinian State with full

sovereignty over its national territory and along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In that regard, I need to stress that peace in the Middle East will pave the way for a life full of hope, opportunities, prosperity and progress for the millions of young people in our region and throughout the world who yearn for a better life and future. During its membership of the Security Council in 2014-2015, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan initiated the historic resolution 2250 (2015) on youth and peace and security. That resolution sought to involve young people as fundamental partners in peacebuilding and empower them to harness their capacities to build lasting peace and combat extremism, as well as to protect them from the negative impacts of conflict and prevent them from falling prey to the forces of evil, violence and extremism. To guarantee the effectiveness of the Organization and its Charter, we must work together and keep youth at the top of our priorities, with a view to building comprehensive and just peace through this Organization.

In conclusion, I recall the statement that His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al-Hussein delivered to the European Parliament last week, "My father, the late King Hussein, taught me that peacemaking is always the harder but the noblest way". Let us work together through the Council and the United Nations, with our Palestinian brethren, our friends and our partners, to seriously address the challenges before us in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

The President: There are still a number of speakers on my list for this meeting. With the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend this meeting until 10 a.m. tomorrow, Wednesday, 22 January.

The meeting was suspended at 1.10 p.m.