



Security Council

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Implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016)

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the twenty-sixth quarterly report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), covering the period from 14 March to 14 June 2023.

II. Settlement activities

2. In its resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council reaffirmed that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, had no legal validity and constituted a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. The Council reiterated its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and that it fully respect all of its legal obligations in that regard. No such steps were taken during the reporting period as settlement activities continued.

3. During the reporting period, Israeli authorities advanced plans for 920 housing units in occupied East Jerusalem and approved 1,890 housing units in Area C, 45 per cent of which are deep in the occupied West Bank. In East Jerusalem, plans advanced include 380 units in Ramot, 420 units in Gillo and 120 units in Ramot Allon. In addition, tenders were announced for 1,350 housing units, including 1,260 in Area C, of which 260, or 20 per cent, are deep in the West Bank, and almost another 90 are in East Jerusalem.

4. On 10 April, ministers in the Israeli Government and members of the Knesset joined over 15,000 settlers and other Israeli civilians and marched, under heavy security provided by the Israel Defense Forces, to the illegal settlement outpost of Evyatar in the northern West Bank, and they called on the Government to legalize it under Israeli law.

5. On 7 May, the Israeli Government approved nearly \$9 million for a project to develop an archaeological site located adjacent to the Palestinian village of Sabasityah, north of Nablus, in the occupied West Bank. The Israel Nature and Parks Authority was tasked to submit a development plan for the site within 60 days.



6. On 18 May, the Israeli military issued an order authorizing Israelis to enter the evacuated illegal settlement outpost of Homesh, which is built on private, Palestinian-owned land. That move followed the adoption on 21 March 2023 of an amendment to the 2005 Disengagement Law that repealed clauses in the legislation prohibiting Israelis from the area where the settlements of Homesh, Ganim, Kadim and Sa Nur in the northern West Bank once stood. Some 10 days later, Israeli settlers finished moving a religious school to nearby State-owned land as part of efforts aimed at legalizing the outpost under Israeli law.

7. During the reporting period, demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures continued across the occupied West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Israeli authorities, citing the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which remain almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, demolished, seized or forced people to demolish 117 structures. The demolition of those structures resulted in the displacement of 164 persons, including 82 children, and affected more than 1,000 other persons.

8. A total of 5 per cent of the structures were demolished or seized with no, or very short, notice based on military order 1797, which authorizes an expedited process for the demolition of unauthorized “new structures” in Area C and gives owners 96 hours to demonstrate possession of a valid building permit. Twenty-two of the structures were demolished by their owners after they received demolition orders in order to avoid heavy Israeli demolition fees. Of the structures that were demolished or seized, 14 had been funded by international donors.

9. On 7 May, Israeli authorities demolished the donor-funded Jubbit al-Dhib primary school for Palestinian children in the village Bayt Ta‘mar, which lies east of Bethlehem, in Area C of the occupied West Bank, affecting at least 40 children. During the demolition, water infrastructure was damaged, leaving more than 80 households without running water for several days. The demolition followed an Israeli court decision, which was handed down in response to a petition lodged by a settler organization, ordering the demolition because of safety hazards. Currently, 57 Palestinian schools in the occupied West Bank, serving 6,500 children, face the threat of demolition because of a lack of building permits.

10. Also on 7 May, the High Court of Justice of Israel rejected a petition requesting that the Israeli authorities be compelled to carry out demolition orders in the Palestinian village of Khan al-Ahmar. The justices agreed with the position of the Israeli Government that the High Court should not intervene in setting a timeline for the demolition and, citing the security and foreign relations of Israel, that the demolition could not be carried out in the current environment.

11. On 22 May, the almost 200 residents of the Palestinian herding community of Ayn Samyah, near Ramallah, began dismantling their homes and leaving their land, citing settler violence, extreme restrictions on building homes and infrastructure, repeated demolitions and reduction of grazing land owing to settlement activity. Their departure is in line with similar departures from the nearby villages of Wadi al-Siq and Ras al-Tin, as well as Lifjim, near Nablus.

12. On 15 March, the Supreme Court of Israel rejected a request by a Palestinian family to appeal against a court-ordered eviction from their home in the Muslim quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, where they have been living since 1954 and were designated protected tenants. The decision ended a legal battle to evict the family that was begun 2010 by an Israeli settler organization.

13. On 3 April, Supreme Court of Israel ruled against the eviction of a Palestinian family from their home in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan,

ending a 30-year legal battle. The Supreme Court ruled that the petition arguing that the home was absentee property had no basis.

14. In total, an estimated 970 Palestinians, including 424 children, in occupied East Jerusalem are members of households that are facing eviction cases in Israeli courts. Most cases were initiated by Israeli settler organizations and are based on the application of Israeli laws that allow for properties in occupied East Jerusalem that were owned by Jews prior to 1948 to be reclaimed. No similar law allows Palestinians to reclaim their property in Israel.

III. Violence against civilians, including acts of terror

15. In its resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction, called for accountability in that regard and called for compliance with obligations under international law for the strengthening of ongoing efforts to combat terrorism, including through existing security coordination, and to clearly condemn all acts of terrorism.

16. The reporting period was marked by high levels of violence throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, settler-related violence, attacks and alleged attacks by Palestinians against Israelis, and operations by Israeli security forces, including the use of lethal force against Palestinians.

17. In total, 72 Palestinians, including 5 women and 9 children, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, security operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis, air strikes, shelling, as well as in other incidents. One additional death has not yet been verified. Three Palestinians, including two children, were killed by rockets fired by Palestinian armed groups that fell short in the Gaza Strip, while one Palestinian was killed by a rocket that landed in Israel. In the occupied West Bank, 2,529 Palestinians, including 36 women and 310 children, were injured by Israeli security forces. Of that number, 2,051 were injured owing to tear gas inhalation, while 203 were injured by live ammunition. In Gaza, according to the Ministry of Health, 192 Palestinians were injured during the escalation, including at least 47 women and 63 children. In addition, one Palestinian was killed and 113 were injured, including 14 women and 10 children, in attacks by Israeli settlers or other civilians.

18. During the reporting period, six Israeli civilians, including four women and one child, were killed. One of the Israeli women was killed by a rocket fired from Gaza. Another 91 Israelis, including at least 5 women, 9 children and 25 members of the Israeli security forces, as well as 3 foreign nationals, were injured by Palestinians in attacks and clashes, rock- and Molotov-cocktail-throwing incidents, rockets and mortars indiscriminately fired from Gaza and in other incidents.

19. Israeli forces conducted 726 search-and-arrest operations, resulting in the arrest of at least 866 Palestinians, including 71 children. As at the end of March, Israel was holding 1,002 Palestinians in administrative detention. As at 31 May, Israeli authorities were withholding the bodies of 127 Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces, including 1 woman and 10 children.

20. The reporting period saw an influx of visitors to holy sites in Jerusalem, as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan coincided with the Jewish holiday of Passover and the Christian holiday of Easter. Millions of Muslims visited the Aqsa Mosque compound, the highest number of worshippers in years. Tensions increased as Israeli extremists called for Jews to conduct animal sacrifices at the holy sites to mark

Passover, while Hamas and other Palestinian factions called for Palestinians to go to the Aqsa Mosque compound to resist such acts. As in previous years, Israeli police blocked attempts to carry out animal sacrifices in the compound, arresting at least two Israelis on the grounds of disrupting public order.

21. On 4 and 5 April, clashes erupted when Israeli security forces entered the Qibli prayer hall of the Aqsa Mosque to forcibly remove Palestinians who had barricaded themselves inside the hall after evening prayers. Israeli security forces used stun grenades, beat people, including women, with batons and rifles and fired rubber-coated metal bullets, while some Palestinians inside the mosque launched fireworks and threw stones at Israeli security forces. Following these events, groups in Gaza and Lebanon fired dozens of rockets towards Israel from 4 to 6 April. While some of those rockets were intercepted by the aerial defence system of Israel, 46 of them fell in Israel, injuring one Israeli and causing damage to property.

22. In the occupied West Bank, an Israeli mother and her two daughters, one of whom was aged 15 years, were killed by Palestinians in a shooting attack on 7 April in the Jordan Valley. In the wake of that attack, Israel conducted a security operation in the Old City of Nablus on 4 May in which Israeli security forces fired several shoulder-launched explosive projectiles at a building, killing three Palestinians whom Israel and Hamas said were the perpetrators of the attack. Three more Palestinians were killed and 156 others were injured in subsequent armed clashes.

23. On 7 April, an Italian national was killed and seven other foreign nationals were wounded in Tel Aviv in what Israeli authorities said was a car ramming attack carried out by an Arab-Israeli man, who was shot dead by the Israeli police. The alleged perpetrator's family disputed the ramming allegation.

24. On 16 March, an undercover unit of the Israeli security forces conducted an operation in Jenin, killing two Palestinians claimed as members by Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Video footage of the incident has been circulated in which Israeli security forces seemingly shoot one of the men in the head at close range while he was lying on the ground. Clashes and an exchange of fire ensued in which two more Palestinians, including a 14-year-old bystander, were killed.

25. In search and arrest operations in Aqbat Jabr refugee camp in Jericho that were conducted on 22 April and 1 May, Israeli security forces shot and killed two Palestinians, including a 17-year-old, who witnesses identified as a bystander.

26. On 29 April, Israeli forces shot and killed a 15-year-old Palestinian boy at the entrance of the village of Tuqu', south-east of Bethlehem, who was among Palestinians throwing stones at Israeli security forces.

27. On 6 May, an Israeli security operation in Nur Shams refugee camp near Tulkarm led to an exchange of fire in which Israeli security forces killed two Palestinians. The Israeli security forces claimed that the two had been involved in a shooting attack against Israeli civilians. In armed exchanges that occurred during a separate operation conducted by Israeli security forces on 11 May, a 66-year-old bystander was shot by the security forces and later died of his injuries.

28. On 10 May, Palestinians and Israeli security forces exchanged fire in Qabatiyah, near Jenin, during an arrest operation being conducted by the security forces. Two Palestinians, including a bystander, were shot and killed by the security forces; another Palestinian later succumbed to his wounds.

29. On 13 May, two Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces when those forces conducted an undercover operation in Balata refugee camp near Nablus that led to armed exchanges. The circumstances of the two fatalities remain disputed, with

Israeli security forces saying that the men were armed, while eyewitnesses indicated that they were unarmed bystanders.

30. On 15 May 2023, clashes broke out as Israeli security forces conducted an operation in Askar refugee camp in the city of Nablus during which security forces shot and killed a 22-year-old Palestinian.

31. On 22 May, Israeli security forces killed three Palestinians during an operation and subsequent armed exchanges in the Balata refugee camp, near Nablus. According to the security forces, two of the men killed were armed. Eyewitnesses and online video footage indicate that Israeli forces shot one of the three Palestinians in the back as he attempted to flee the area.

32. On 29 May, Israeli security forces killed a Palestinian man in the Jenin refugee camp in the course of an Israeli operation and subsequent armed exchanges.

33. On 1 June, at the entrance to the West Bank village of Nabi Salih, Israeli security forces shot and injured a Palestinian man and his two-year-old son; the boy subsequently died of his injuries. Following an operational review of the incident, the Israel Defense Forces said that the two had been hit unintentionally as security forces responded to shooting by Palestinians from the village towards the settlement of Neve Tzuf.

34. On 13 June, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian man with a disability during a search-and-arrest operation and a subsequent exchange of fire with armed Palestinians in the Balata refugee camp.

35. On 14 June, Israeli security forces punitively demolished a home in Nablus belonging to the family of a Palestinian accused of killing an Israeli soldier in October 2022. Israeli forces and armed Palestinians exchanged fire during the operation. One Palestinian was killed.

36. On 1 April, Israeli security forces reportedly shot and killed a 23-year-old Palestinian man after a car ramming attack in Bayt Ummar, north of Hebron, in which three Israeli soldiers were injured.

37. On 24 April, a vehicle driven by a 39-year-old Palestinian from East Jerusalem rammed a group of Israelis near Mahane Yehuda market in West Jerusalem. Police said in a statement that a citizen who witnessed the incident shot and killed the Palestinian driver.

38. On 27 April, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 39-year-old Palestinian security officer who attempted to stab security forces personnel near Ari'el settlement, north-west of Salfit. According to Israeli security forces, the driver tried to ram into security forces before the attempted stabbing.

39. On 4 May, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 26-year-old Palestinian woman in the village of Huwwarah, south of Nablus, who attempted to stab security forces personnel in the area.

40. On 13 May, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 33-year-old Palestinian who attempted to stab security forces personnel on duty at the Umm al-Rihan checkpoint, west of Jenin.

41. On 26 May, an Israeli settler shot and killed a Palestinian man who entered the Israeli settlement of Tene (Ma'ale Omarim), south of Hebron. Israeli security forces said the man had attempted to carry out a stabbing attack before being shot.

42. On 30 May, Palestinians killed an Israeli man in a drive-by shooting attack near the settlement of Hermesh in the northern West Bank. The Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack. Following the incident, Israeli

settlers attacked Palestinians and their property in the surrounding villages and at road junctions.

43. On 9 June, at a checkpoint at the entrance to Rantis, near Ramallah, Israeli security forces killed a Palestinian man who, according to the Israel Defense Forces, tried to steal a soldier's weapon while Israeli forces were checking the vehicle he was driving, because they suspected that the vehicle was stolen.

44. In the Gaza Strip, tensions increased between Israel and Palestinian armed groups on 2 May when a senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader, Khader Adnan, died in Israeli custody following an 86-day hunger strike and on the day after an Israeli court refused to release him on bail. In response, on 3 May, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other armed factions in Gaza fired more than 100 rockets towards Israel, causing some damage. The Israeli Air Force responded with air strikes against what it said were Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza, killing one Palestinian and causing damage. The hostilities ended on 3 May following intensive efforts by Egypt and others, including Qatar and the United Nations.

45. In the early hours of 9 May, the Israeli Air Force conducted a series of air strikes in Gaza that killed three senior members of the military wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad in their homes. Israeli officials said that the three commanders were responsible for launching rockets towards Israel last month and planning further terror attacks against Israel. The strikes, which were targeted at residential structures, also killed 10 civilians – family members and neighbours of the three commanders, including women and children. Over a period of five days, Israel conducted 323 air strikes against what it said were Palestinian Islamic Jihad military targets in Gaza. Palestinian armed groups, mainly the Al-Quds Brigades of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, launched over 1,200 rockets and more than 250 mortar rounds towards Israel, of which nearly 300 fell short within Gaza and more than 400 of which were intercepted by the aerial defence system of Israel. A cessation of hostilities was reached on the evening of 13 May with the support of Egypt and regional and international partners, including Qatar.

46. Thirty-three Palestinians, including at least 12 civilians, of whom 4 were women and 6 were children, were killed in Gaza during the hostilities. One death has not yet been verified. Of the 33 Palestinians victims, 30 were killed by Israeli security forces, while the 3 others were killed by rockets launched by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza that fell short in the Strip. In addition, one Palestinian worker was killed in Israel by a rocket fired from Gaza, and one Israeli civilian woman was killed by rocket fire.

IV. Incitement, provocations and inflammatory rhetoric

47. In its resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called upon both parties to act on the basis of international law, including international humanitarian law, and their previous agreements and obligations, to observe calm and restraint and to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, with the aim, inter alia, of de-escalating the situation on the ground, rebuilding trust and confidence, demonstrating through policies and actions a genuine commitment to the two-State solution and creating the conditions necessary for promoting peace.

48. Some Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad officials praised and glorified those who perpetrated attacks against Israelis and called for additional attacks. A Hamas official said that Jews spread corruption, injustice and evil at the Aqsa Mosque and will only be defeated with weapons and by inflicting terror. A senior Palestinian political leader equated rhetoric by Israel with Nazi propaganda. A member of the

Palestinian National Council referred to a “global conflict” with a “society that is scheming to take over the world.” A Palestine Liberation Organization member of the Palestinian National Council argued that the only solution was to wage armed resistance against Israel until all of Palestine is liberated, “from the river to the sea.”

49. A minister in the Israeli Government made a provocative visit to the holy sites in Jerusalem, during which he used inflammatory political rhetoric. Another Israeli minister released a video in which she said, “Palestinian terrorists [are] brainwashed since age zero to murder Jews.” Yet another Israeli Government minister compared Palestinian Islamic Jihad fighters to “flies that must be killed.” On 18 May, several Israeli ministers and members of the Knesset joined right-wing Israelis in the annual “flag march” on Jerusalem Day. The participant marched through the Old City of Jerusalem, chanting racist, inciteful slogans, including “death to Arabs” and “may your village burn”.

V. Affirmative steps to reverse negative trends

50. In its resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council called for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse the negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution. Notwithstanding some positive steps, negative trends on the ground continued during the reporting period.

51. In Gaza, the United Nations continued to deliver vital humanitarian and development assistance amid declining donor support, resulting in cuts to beneficiaries. It is estimated that more than \$135 million is needed immediately. Most of that amount is included in the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, which is currently funded at 19 per cent. The most recent escalation mainly affected health care and shelter needs. As a result, 49 schools and kindergartens, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene structures, need to be rehabilitated. The reconstruction of homes that were fully or partially damaged during the May 2021 escalation continued. Altogether 1,022 of 1,688 destroyed housing units have been rebuilt, while the reconstruction of another 684 units faces a funding gap of \$33 million. An additional \$9.4 million is needed to repair 11,038 partially damaged units.

52. The United Nations continued diplomatic efforts to further ease restrictions on the movement of people and goods between Gaza and Israel, with a view to supporting the local economy and creating employment opportunities. During the reporting period, Israel removed 44 items from the list of materials previously requiring special coordination for entry into Gaza. Notwithstanding that development, access restrictions continued to affect the delivery of humanitarian and development programming in Gaza. Currently, 229 staff of the United Nations and implementing partners have either been denied or not received a response to permit applications. Access restrictions also continued to affect patients in Gaza in need of medical care, including 167 persons who were unable to exit Gaza to seek essential medical care during the most recent escalation between 9 and 13 May. Despite the removal of special coordination requirements for some 50 medical items in January, significant obstacles and delays continued to hinder the import of essential medical equipment into the Strip. Altogether 43 per cent of essential drugs are at zero stock level.

53. The financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains grave. On 2 June, the President of the General Assembly convened a pledging conference in support of UNRWA. While some additional funding was announced at the conference, the amounts were not sufficient to meet the Agency’s financial needs for 2023. UNRWA still requires some \$200 million to continue delivering its critical services, including education and health, from September until the end of 2023, as well as to pay the

salaries of more than 28,000 staff members and end the cycle of indebtedness. Another \$75 million, of which \$35 million must be received by August, is also needed in order to sustain food assistance to nearly 1.2 million Palestine refugees in Gaza. Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP) is facing a significant decline in bilateral financial support and a \$50 million shortfall, putting at risk its ability to maintain critical food and cash assistance to some 435,000 of the most vulnerable, food-insecure people across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. On 1 May, WFP reduced the value of its assistance from \$12.40 per month to \$10.30 per beneficiary per month. On 1 June, the Agency started suspending its food and cash assistance to 200,000 vulnerable Palestinians owing to limited funding, and it warned that all assistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territory would be suspended as of 1 August unless it received additional support.

54. The risk that critical United Nations assistance to vulnerable households will be discontinued is compounded by the severe financial crisis facing the Palestinian Authority. That crisis has caused, in particular since 2021, significant delays in the disbursement and reductions in the amount of social protection payments to the most vulnerable under the national cash transfer programme of the Palestinian Authority. Further cuts in the amount disbursed are expected in 2023.

55. On 3 and 4 May, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians convened in Brussels. The parties and donors discussed measures to support Palestinian institution-building and strengthen the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian economy amid the ongoing Palestinian fiscal crisis. In their reports and interventions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the United Nations presented an alarming picture not only of the immediate fiscal crisis facing the Palestinian Authority, but also of the looming threat to its institutional capacity to sustain basic service delivery amid negative, persistent conflict drivers and declining donor assistance and budget support. In the Chair's summary of the meeting, both sides are called upon to implement agreements that they had concluded previously, commit to de-escalation and refrain from taking steps that undermine Palestinian institutions and the two-State solution, while the international community is called upon to increase assistance to the Palestinians, including by providing support to UNRWA.

VI. Efforts by the parties and the international community to advance the peace process and other relevant developments

56. In its resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called upon all States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. No such steps were taken during the reporting period.

57. In its resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council also called upon all parties to continue, in the interest of the promotion of peace and security, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final status issues in the Middle East peace process and urged in that regard the intensification and acceleration of international and regional diplomatic efforts and support aimed at achieving, without delay, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, and an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967. The Council underlined that it would not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations.

58. On 19 March, senior Egyptian, Jordanian, Israeli, Palestinian and United States of America officials met in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to further understandings that had been arrived at in Aqaba, Jordan, on 23 February. Following the meeting, participants released a joint communiqué in which they noted, inter alia, that they had discussed how to “de-escalate tensions on the ground ... in order to pave a way forward towards the peaceful settlement between Israelis and Palestinians.” Reaffirming the commitments that had been made in Aqaba to “immediately work to end unilateral measures for a period of 3 to 6 months”, the parties also affirmed their commitment, inter alia, “to [respecting] all previous agreements between them, in particular, the legal right of the Palestinian National Authority to carry out the security responsibilities in Area A of the West Bank.” They further agreed to establish mechanisms to “curb and counter violence, incitement and inflammatory statements” as well as to improve the “economic conditions of the Palestinian people” and “the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority.”

59. On 11 May, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Munich Group, which comprises Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan, met in Berlin. In a joint declaration issued after the meeting, they stated that they had “consulted on measures needed to achieve a just and lasting peace” and had agreed to continue to work with all parties in order to create “realistic horizons for the resumption of a credible political process.” They also called upon the parties to “scrupulously implement their commitments undertaken in Aqaba on 26 February 2023, and reiterated in Sharm el-Sheikh on 19 March 2023.”

60. On 19 May, the States members of the League of Arab States, at their thirty-second summit meeting, held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, adopted the Jeddah Declaration, in which they affirmed “the centrality of the Palestinian issue ... as one of the key factors of stability in the region”. In addition, they stressed “the importance of intensifying efforts to achieve a comprehensive and just settlement to the Palestinian issue and find[ing] real grounds for achieving peace based on the two-State solution, in accordance with ... the Arab Peace Initiative, relevant international resolutions and the principles of international law”, and they called “upon the international community to fulfil its responsibilities to end the occupation.”

VII. Observations

61. I remain deeply troubled by the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, that is impeding access by Palestinians to their land and resources, reshaping the geography of the occupied West Bank and threatening the viability of a future Palestinian State. These efforts are not restricted to advancements made through the formal planning processes conducted by the High Planning Council of the Civil Administration of Israel. It is also being complemented by the efforts of the Israeli Government to advance a project of extensive settlement expansion. The growing settlement footprint, including far-flung outposts, illegal also under Israeli law, deep in the occupied West Bank, increases the friction points between Israeli settlers and Palestinian residents across the occupied West Bank, contributing to a rise in settler-related violence. Settlements and their municipal boundaries encompass tens of thousands of hectares of land to which Palestinians have little to no access, dividing and separating Palestinian population centres and hampering Palestinian economic development.

62. I am also deeply concerned by recent developments in the area of the evacuated settlement of Homesh, including steps by Israeli authorities to allow Israelis to enter and erect structures in the area, potentially paving the way for legalization, under Israeli law, of the outpost there.

63. I reiterate that all Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and are a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions. They are impeding the ability to achieve a viable two-State solution by further entrenching the military occupation of Israel, undermining the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, encroaching on Palestinian land and natural resources, and hampering the free movement of the Palestinian population. I urge the Government of Israel to cease all settlement activity immediately, in line with its obligations under international law.

64. I remain deeply concerned by the continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures, including the demolition of a donor-funded primary school in the village of Jubbit al-Dhib. Demolitions of and evictions, including internationally funded humanitarian projects, as well as structures related to income-generation and the provision of essential services, entail numerous human rights violations and raise concerns about the risk of the forcible transfer. I again call upon the Government of Israel to immediately end the demolition of Palestinian-owned property and prevent the possible displacement and forced eviction of Palestinians, in line with its international obligations, and to approve plans that would enable those communities to build legally and address their development needs, including the need for schools.

65. I remain gravely concerned by the further deterioration of the security situation on the ground and am deeply disturbed that civilians on both sides continue to bear the brunt of hostilities. I condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, which must end. There is no justification for acts of terror, which must be clearly condemned by all. All perpetrators must be brought to justice. The escalating violence threatens to plunge Palestinians and Israelis deeper into a deadly crisis while further eroding hope for a political solution. I remain concerned by the increasing use of small arms by Palestinians and Palestinian armed groups against Israeli security forces and civilians that has resulted in deaths and casualties. Political, religious and community leaders on all sides must play a crucial role in reversing the current negative trajectory.

66. Israel must abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law, including the proportional use of force and taking all feasible precautions to spare civilians in the conduct of military operations. I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint, use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life and conduct thorough, independent, impartial and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

67. I condemn the killing of Palestinian civilians, including women and children, by Israeli air strikes in Gaza. I also condemn the killing of Palestinian and Israeli civilians, including an Israeli woman, by rockets indiscriminately launched by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza towards Israel, including from densely populated residential areas into Israeli population centres, in violation of international humanitarian law.

68. The tragic killing of two-year-old Mohammed Tamimi by Israeli security forces and of 15-year-old Rina Dee by armed Palestinians are yet further reminders of the devastating toll that this conflict is having on children. It is intolerable that children continue to be victims of violence, arrested in large numbers and held for prolonged periods of time, including in military detention. I reiterate my call for Israel to use detention as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, prevent all forms of ill-treatment in detention and end the administrative detention of children, who are entitled to special protection. I reiterate that children must never be the target of violence or put in harm's way.

69. I am particularly disturbed by the high level of settler-related violence, including reports of armed settlers carrying out attacks inside Palestinian communities, sometimes in proximity to or with the support of Israeli security forces. Reports of Israeli security forces standing by and not preventing settler attacks against Palestinians or failing to intervene when violence begins are deeply concerning. Settlers are rarely held accountable for these attacks, increasing the level of threat to Palestinians and their property. Israel, as the occupying Power, has an obligation to protect Palestinians and their property in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and ensure prompt, independent, impartial and transparent investigations into all acts of violence.

70. I am also extremely disturbed by the multiple instances in which officials from both parties have used dangerous and hateful rhetoric, and engaged in provocative actions and incitement. Such conduct, which has the potential not only to increase tensions but also to spark more violence, must be unequivocally rejected by all.

71. I reiterate once again my call on the parties to respect and uphold the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem, taking into account the special and historic role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

72. The fate of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two Israel Defense Forces soldiers held by Hamas in Gaza remain an important humanitarian concern. I call upon Hamas to provide information on their status, as required under international humanitarian law, and to return them to their families.

73. I remain concerned by the continued Israeli practice of holding the bodies of killed Palestinians. I call upon Israel to return the withheld bodies to their families, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

74. In Gaza, the latest ceasefire is being upheld, but the situation remains fragile. Conflict mitigation must also be met with steps by all parties, supported by the international community, to find a way out of the cycle of violence and towards a political horizon. Despite some easing of access restrictions in Gaza, the private sector, as well as United Nations agencies and partners, continue to face significant challenges as they strive to bring essential materials, goods and equipment into Gaza, stifling employment and economic growth and affecting the ability of the United Nations to provide humanitarian and development assistance. Much more needs to be done to alleviate the humanitarian situation, improve the economy and lift the debilitating Israeli closures, in line with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). Only sustainable political solutions will restore hope to Gaza's long-suffering population.

75. Since the signing on 13 October 2022 of the Algiers Declaration, no progress has been made by Palestinian factions in implementing the commitments that they made therein, including the holding of elections "within a period not to exceed one year from the date of signature of this declaration." I encourage all factions to overcome their differences through dialogue and urge them to redouble efforts to ensure the reunification of Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, under a single, democratic, national government. Gaza is, and must remain, an integral part of a future Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution.

76. I recall the important understandings reached between Israeli and Palestinian officials at the Aqaba and Sharm el-Sheik meetings. I continue to urge all parties to take concrete steps to implement the commitments made in the joint communiqués issued following those meetings and to refrain from taking any steps that could exacerbate the situation.

77. I remain seriously concerned about the financial situation of UNRWA, WFP and the Palestinian Authority, which is putting the delivery of essential services, including

education, health and social protection, to millions of Palestine refugees and the most vulnerable Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the region at risk. The forecasted interruption in cash and food assistance to millions of Palestine refugees and other vulnerable households in Gaza between June and September 2023 is expected not only to have devastating humanitarian consequences, but also to further harm an economy that is already under serious stress and potentially undermine stability. I reiterate my urgent call to Member States to provide UNRWA with the funds that it needs to fully deliver on its mandate from the General Assembly. I also encourage Member States to maintain or increase their funding to WFP, in order to ensure that it too can continue delivering vital assistance on the ground.

78. Meanwhile, I remain gravely concerned by the fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority, which remains highly precarious despite some of the reforms that the Authority has made. It is crucial that the international community address the acute financial and institutional challenges it is facing and reverse the damaging pattern of reduced financial support to the Palestinian Authority.

79. The political and security dynamics in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remain highly concerning. The deepening occupation of the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the high levels of violence, including acts of terror, and, critically, the absence of a political horizon are rapidly eroding hope among Palestinians and Israelis that a resolution of the conflict is achievable. In addition, these dynamics are causing a fundamental shift in perceptions, in particular among youth, about how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict should ultimately be resolved.

80. In the absence of a meaningful political process, the United Nations and its partners have been engaged in extensive efforts to improve the dynamics on the ground while encouraging the parties to take concrete steps towards establishing an environment that is conducive to a return to negotiations. The Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, has continued to hold discussions with a range of Palestinian and Israeli officials and regional and international partners to address the dangerous dynamics in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza. In line with the commitments made in Aqaba and Sharm el-Sheikh, I urge all parties to exercise the utmost restraint, refrain from any steps that could exacerbate the situation and take tangible steps to implement the joint communiqués that were issued following the Aqaba and Sharm el-Sheikh meetings.

81. At the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians meeting in May, Special Coordinator Wennesland emphasized the need for a “strategic shift” and recalled the four-pillar approach for reversing the negative trajectory and safeguarding the Palestinian Authority that is outlined in report that the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process submitted to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in September 2022. I echo the appeal that was made in the summary of the meeting prepared by the Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee calling upon both sides to implement agreements that they had concluded previously, commit to de-escalation and refrain from steps that undermine Palestinian institutions and the two-State solution, and also calling upon the international community to increase assistance to the Palestinians, including by providing support to UNRWA.

82. The latest escalation between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza has, once again, served as a tragic reminder that there is no substitute for a legitimate political process that will resolve the core issues driving the conflict. No amount of humanitarian or economic support, on its own, will produce sustainable peace. Israelis, Palestinians, the States of the region and the broader international community must take steps that will enable the parties to re-engage on a legitimate political path. I remain committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis in ending the occupation

and resolving the conflict in line with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements in pursuit of the vision of two States – Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State – living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

83. I express my deep appreciation to my Special Coordinator for his outstanding service in what remains a challenging context. I also pay tribute to all United Nations personnel working under difficult circumstances in the service of the Organization.
