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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Esono Mbengono	(Equatorial Guinea)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Yao Shaojun
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Germany	Mr. Schulz
	Indonesia	Mr. Djani
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	South Africa	Mr. Matjila
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Mr. Mladenov is joining the meeting via video-conference from Jerusalem.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: I brief the Security Council today as we continue to face a growing humanitarian, security and political crisis in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The prospect of sustainable peace is fading by the day as the spectre of violence and radicalism grows. Our efforts today focus on the immediate challenges, namely, preventing the risk of an economic and humanitarian implosion in the West Bank and Gaza and preserving the hope, slim as it is, that Israelis and Palestinians will be able to live in peace, side by side, in States of their own that are recognized and integrated into the global and regional community. We are working hard to preserve that prospect as the viability of the two-State solution is systematically eroded by the deteriorating reality on the ground. The number of extremists is on the rise again and the risk of war continues to loom large. In order for Israelis and Palestinians to get back on track towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the first thing that is required is leadership that believes that peace is possible through negotiations. It also requires an international community that is committed to supporting both parties in reaching agreement on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements and that understands that the weaker party — the Palestinian people, who have lived

under occupation for more than 50 years — need our support now more than ever. It should never be about Israel or Palestine. It should always be about Israel and Palestine.

Unfortunately, unilateral steps, continuing violence, financial pressure and the lack of progress towards peace are exacting a heavy toll on Palestinian society and undermining the foundations of peace. In 2018, the Palestinian Authority (PA) had a budget deficit of approximately \$1.04 billion, over 60 per cent of which was covered by donor aid. That shortfall is expected to increase in 2019 because of the withdrawal of significant amounts of donor funding and a worsening economic situation.

Earlier this week the Government of Israel decided unilaterally to withhold approximately \$140 million in Palestinian tax revenue transfers. That decision is the result of legislation adopted by the Knesset last year that instructs the Israeli Government to withhold money equivalent to the amount that the PA pays to Palestinians convicted of involvement in terrorism or other security-related offences by Israeli courts and to their families.

Today the Palestinian leadership is meeting to discuss its financial and political response to that measure. These are very serious developments that put at risk the financial stability of the Palestinian Authority and, ultimately, the security of Israelis and Palestinians alike. The Secretary-General has repeatedly warned that unilateral moves undermine the chances for peace.

The recent halting of United States assistance to Palestinians may also impact ongoing efforts to bridge existing divisions. The ending of vital training, facilities and equipment support could potentially risk security coordination. I encourage ongoing efforts to ensure that this crucial assistance is continued. The important work being carried out by civil society organizations working towards peace is also under threat, and I hope that donors will continue their support to civil society, which serves a critical role in preserving the fraying links between Israelis and Palestinians.

We also regret Israel's decision on 28 January not to renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, established pursuant to the provisions of the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — also known as the Oslo II accord — between Israel and the Palestine

Liberation Organization (PLO). I echo the Secretary-General's appreciation for their service and the generous contribution of all participating countries over the years. The United Nations continues to engage with relevant Member States and the parties on the ground to ensure the protection, safety and well-being of civilians in Hebron and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Alongside these worrying developments, and despite the concerted efforts of Egypt to bring the Palestinian factions together, recent Palestinian political moves may further widen the growing divide between the West Bank and Gaza. On 27 January, the Fatah Central Committee recommended the formation of a new Government comprising PLO factions and independent figures. On 29 January, Prime Minister Hamdallah's Cabinet submitted its resignation. Consultations on the way forward continue, including on holding long-overdue legislative elections. Hamas and the other factions have called, instead, for the formation of a Government of national unity with the task of organizing legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections.

Elections conducted in line with Palestinian laws and with established international democratic standards throughout the occupied Palestinian territory may now be the only way out of the current internal political impasse. As the Palestinian political dynamics evolve and as we drift further away from the realization of a negotiated two-State solution, I again call on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to recommit to the principles and vision enshrined a quarter of a century ago in relevant resolutions and bilateral agreements.

Last month (see S/PV.8449), I outlined some steps that were necessary to support the stability of the Palestinian Authority, including expanding opportunities for free trade, addressing fiscal leakages, enabling the Palestinian Government to increase the services it provides to its people, and ensuring continued security coordination. Such steps are not a substitute for peace. They must be matched by political moves, including an end to the policy of settlement construction and expansion and the designation of land for exclusive Israeli use, as well as creating opportunities for Palestinian development in Area C.

In this context, I reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace. In the absence of final status

negotiations, however, such steps should significantly support Palestinian institution-building and improve lives. The United Nations, together with our partners in the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) format, will continue working to create an environment conducive to such developments.

Meanwhile, in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 11 Palestinians were killed during the reporting period by the Israeli security forces in various incidents, including attacks on Israeli civilians, demonstrations, clashes and military operations. On 7 February, an Israeli teenager was murdered in a park outside Jerusalem by a Palestinian perpetrator, who was later arrested by Israeli security forces. There is no justification for violence and terror.

Meanwhile protests and violent incidents at the Gaza fence continued, with seven Palestinians, including three children, killed by Israeli live fire on 8 February. This brings to 40 the number of children killed in the context of Gaza protests since they began in March 2018. Children must not be targeted or put in harm's way. They must be protected. Lethal force should be used only as a last resort.

During the reporting period, Palestinian militants fired 18 rockets towards Israel. The indiscriminate launching of rockets, mortars and incendiary kites or balloons from Gaza must stop. Hamas must ensure that protests remain peaceful and prevent provocations near the fence, including attempts to breach it.

In the West Bank this past month, Israeli forces killed four Palestinians, including two children. Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures also continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Thirty-nine structures were demolished or seized by the authorities or by their owners upon receipt of a demolition order, resulting in the displacement of some 70 people. Overall, some 200 Palestinian households in East Jerusalem have eviction cases filed against them, mostly by Israeli settler organizations, placing some 900 people at risk of displacement.

The upsurge in settler violence over the past year continues to be a serious concern. During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 20 incidents in which Israeli settlers injured Palestinians or damaged their property. On 26 January, armed Israeli settlers entered

Al-Mughayyir village near Ramallah, where they attacked Palestinian residents. Ensuing clashes, also involving the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), resulted in the killing of a 38-year-old Palestinian man and the injury of 15 others.

For years, we have described the situation facing the population and focused on the urgency of providing Palestinians confined within Gaza's boundaries with the means to live a dignified life and to have hope for the future. Hamas's continuing control of Gaza, Israel's severe movement and access restrictions, and the Palestinian Authority's restrictive measures are pushing the situation to a breaking point. The militant build-up continues as the risk of ever-more radical and extremist groups pushing both sides into war grows by the day. With the prospects of intra-Palestinian reconciliation dimming, the people of Gaza feel more and more left to their own devices, with no representation, no relief and no way out. On 5 February, the PA paid its employees in Gaza reduced salaries for the month of January and reportedly over 5,000 employees did not receive salaries or other payments due.

Despite the difficulties, the United Nations continues its efforts to implement the package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions in Gaza called for at the September AHLC meeting. The State of Qatar has donated an additional \$20 million to expand United Nations cash-for-work programming in Gaza. This will create some 10,000 new temporary jobs. The World Bank has also launched its \$17-million cash-for-work programme, which will create an additional 5,000 temporary jobs.

Job creation is critical to the stabilization of Gaza's economy. However, all our efforts that we are currently undertaking are short- to medium-term only. Ultimately, only sustainable political solutions — including reuniting Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian Government and ending the closures of the Strip — will genuinely change the current course. I welcome the tireless efforts of Egypt to continue dialogue with Palestinian factions with the aim of maintaining stability in Gaza and achieving genuine reconciliation. I urge all parties to remain engaged in this critical effort.

Turning very briefly to the region, recent incidents that occurred on the Golan, heightening tensions between Israel and Syria, are also of concern. On 11 February, the United Nations Disengagement

Observer Force observed, in several separate incidents, the Israel Defense Forces firing tank and high-explosive rounds into the area of separation, which was followed by three rockets being fired into a different part of the area of separation. These developments undermine the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and jeopardize the long-standing ceasefire between Israel and Syria.

Lebanon, meanwhile, formed a Government on 31 January, almost nine months after the last Parliamentary elections. The Cabinet adopted a ministerial statement that laid out a wide-ranging economic reform agenda. This was followed by a vote of confidence on 15 February, for which the Government gained majority support of 111 out of 128 votes.

The situation in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line remained generally calm, and on 13 February the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) facilitated the second tripartite meeting of this year. UNIFIL has also requested to visit and independently verify the sixth tunnel that the IDF discovered in January, but has yet to receive a date for an assessment.

In closing, I have repeatedly raised the alarm on the dangerous trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United Nations and its partners have provided a series of recommendations that, if implemented effectively, would begin to establish an environment that is conducive to a return to negotiations. We have advocated for a strengthened commitment to bilateral agreements; we are implementing a series of humanitarian interventions aiming at stabilizing Gaza, supporting Palestinian reconciliation and ultimately lifting the closures; and we have continued to stress that the recommendations of the 2016 Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) remain deeply relevant.

What is needed, first and foremost, is the necessary leadership and political will for change. Until that can be found, Palestinians and Israelis will continue to slide into increasingly hazardous territory.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I give the floor to Ms. Mueller.

Ms. Mueller: I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to update the Security Council on the humanitarian implications of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

As the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, noted, the situation on the ground is of concern. At its core, the situation remains a protection crisis. Violations of international humanitarian and human rights law are a key driver of high levels of acute vulnerability among Palestinians. The international community is mobilizing to provide assistance, but funding is diminishing, while needs and constraints continue to grow. Ultimately, the solution is not humanitarian.

The lives and well-being of people must be placed beyond political considerations, and humanitarian aid facilitated and supported. Overall, the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip, deteriorated in 2018. That included an increase in casualties associated with the demonstrations at the Gaza fence, limitations on the movement of people and goods, and financial restrictions.

The growing casualty figures cited by Special Coordinator Mladenov are stretching the capacity of health-care providers. The health system in Gaza is at risk of collapse as injuries during protests at the Gaza fence and in related violent incidents continue. Since the start of demonstrations in March 2018, over 27,000 Palestinians have been injured, more than 6,000 of them by live ammunition. According to the World Health Organization, 122 amputations, including 21 paediatric amputations, have taken place since the start of the mass demonstrations.

I join the numerous calls of the Secretary-General upon Israel to ensure that its use of force in response to those public demonstrations is in compliance with international law as a last resort and in response to an imminent threat of death or serious injury. I call upon the organizers of the demonstrations, the demonstrators themselves and Hamas to ensure non-violent protests. I condemn the continued launching of rockets and incendiary devices from Gaza.

Less than two weeks ago, three Palestinian children were killed in Gaza, bringing the total number of children killed this year to four. Since March, 40 children have been killed in the context of demonstrations. Great effort must be made to spare children from violence. They should never be put in harm's way.

The World Health Organization also reports that since the start of the protests, three health-care providers have been killed and over 620 others have been wounded. Medical personnel carrying out their duties

must be protected and their work facilitated. Many of the injuries sustained require complex treatment that is not available in Gaza. However, obtaining treatment outside of Gaza remains challenging. In 2018, 61 per cent of all patient requests to cross the Erez checkpoint with Israel to access appropriate health care were approved; since March last year, 17 per cent of the applications by those injured in demonstrations have been approved. Patients are also able to exit Gaza via the crossing with Egypt. That crossing has been open five days per week since July 2018. In December, 98 patients crossed through Rafah.

Compounding the burden on health services in Gaza, essential drugs and medical supplies are scarce. Health-care providers continue to coordinate and preposition field treatment posts to minimize the loss of life. The recent boost in the electricity supply, enabled by Qatar's donation of funding to purchase fuel, has remained steady, with 9 to 12 hours of electricity per day. However, emergency fuel for back-up generators to run emergency and surgery rooms during the outages is running out. Multiple times in the past year, the provision of essential services in Gaza have been at risk of shutdown, with potentially harsh consequences for the population.

The ongoing internal Palestinian divide has contributed to that deteriorating situation and the rising vulnerability of Palestinians in Gaza, who already struggle to meet basic daily needs. Recent reports of reductions or the withholding of the salaries of some public sector employees are of concern. Over 5,000 people have reportedly had their salaries cut, including in the health and education sectors. Unemployment exceeds 50 per cent and food insecurity is estimated to be nearly 70 per cent in Gaza. In order to avoid a recurring need for humanitarian aid, further sustained action is needed on longer-term projects, such as those of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, on which Special Coordinator Mladenov updated the Council.

As of 2 January, for the first time since 2000, Israel has partially expanded the fishing zone from 6 to 12 nautical miles in the middle area off the Gaza coast. That expansion may potentially help revive the fishing sector and provide a sustainable source of income.

While the humanitarian situation in the West Bank is less acute, many Palestinian families and communities in Area C, the city of Hebron and East

Jerusalem face growing pressures. Demolitions, evictions, restrictions on movement and access and rising settler-related violence continue to foster an environment that heightens the risk of forcible transfer for many Palestinians.

Between 22 January and 19 February, four Palestinians were killed and 85 were injured by Israeli forces in the West Bank within the context of search-and-arrest operations, demonstrations, clashes and Palestinian attacks and alleged attacks. In addition, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recorded 20 incidents in which Palestinians were injured and their property damaged by Israeli settlers.

On 26 January, armed Israeli settlers entered the village of Al-Mughayyir, where they reportedly attacked Palestinian residents. Subsequent clashes, also involving the Israeli Defense Forces, resulted in the death of a 38-year-old Palestinian man and injury to other Palestinians. In some 280 incidents during 2018, one Palestinian was killed and 115 others were injured as a result of settler-related violence. That is the highest recorded number of incidents in any single year since 2014.

Israeli authorities have stepped up law enforcement efforts in response to such events. I call on authorities to strengthen those efforts so as to ensure accountability and reverse the trend in growing settler-related violence.

Palestinian attacks against Israelis have also continued, resulting in one fatality and at least four injuries. Of note, on 7 February, a 19-year-old Israeli woman was stabbed to death in Jerusalem.

The protection of the Palestinian population in the H-2 section of Hebron is of concern. As described by Special Coordinator Mladenov, the departure of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron leaves Palestinians with a greater sense of exposure and vulnerability to settler harassment. A recent survey coordinated by OCHA in the H-2 settlement area, which is home to some 7,000 Palestinians, indicates that nearly 70 per cent of families have been exposed to settler-related violence and harassment in the past three years. The aid community is examining how it can increase the provision of assistance and promote protection.

As reflected by Special Coordinator Mladenov, Palestinians continue to face displacement and loss of property, which occurs due to demolitions of structures

lacking Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible to obtain. Many families live under the threat of eviction orders. As mentioned, approximately 200 Palestinian households in East Jerusalem have eviction cases filed against them, predominantly by settler organizations claiming ownership of the buildings.

On 17 February, members of the Abu Asab family were evicted following such a legal battle. Of similar concern is the risk of eviction facing 32 members of the Sabbagh family, who are Palestinian refugees. The Humanitarian Coordinator, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have called on the Israeli authorities to immediately halt the eviction of this family and those facing similar actions.

Alongside the deterioration of humanitarian conditions, our ability to provide humanitarian assistance is increasingly constrained. Funding last year was at a record low, with the 2018 appeal for the occupied Palestinian territory only 46 per cent funded — far below the global average of 60 per cent. The situation reflects not only cuts to UNRWA, the largest humanitarian provider in the occupied Palestinian territory, but also to other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, thereby reducing their ability to provide aid. For instance, funding cuts have forced the World Food Programme to suspend food assistance to about 27,000 people and reduce rations to another 166,000 beneficiaries. In addition, humanitarian organizations face challenges to their operating space from both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. There is mounting pressure on human rights defenders and attempts to delegitimize humanitarian action in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The humanitarian response plan for 2019 requests \$350 million to provide basic food, protection, health care, shelter, water and sanitation to 1.4 million Palestinians, down from the 1.9 million targeted last year. The request is based on the maximum number of vulnerable people whose needs we are able to address. Recognizing this lack of funding, the occupied Palestinian territory will receive an allocation of \$8 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund. About 70 per cent of this funding will help to address the immediate health crisis in Gaza, as well as water and sanitation issues; some 30 per cent will enhance international assistance in Hebron and the rest of the West Bank. However, the amount is far from enough

to bridge the considerable funding gaps. I therefore urge Member States to step up and increase their support to humanitarian operations in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In order to reduce vulnerability, it is also critical that all parties uphold their obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law. And, ultimately, the solution is not humanitarian. It is for stakeholders to continue to work towards a viable political solution.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Mueller for her briefing.

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

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing. The State of Kuwait renews its full support for his role in bringing about the resumption of the stalled peace process and improving the daily lives of Palestinians, who have been languishing under occupation for more than 50 years. We look forward to the Secretary-General presenting at least two written reports per year on the status of the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), in line with its provisions and the note by the President contained in document S/2017/507, and similar to other items on the Council's agenda.

We would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Ursula Mueller, who reminded us of the deteriorating humanitarian situation of Palestinians. If we compare her briefing to the last briefing to the Council by Mr. Stephen O'Brien, the previous Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, in November 2016, we can clearly see that the situation has deteriorated, raising the threat of the onset of a grave humanitarian situation (see S/PV.7820). A case in point is the decision by the Israeli authorities taken last Monday, which Ms. Mueller just mentioned, to evict a Palestinian family of 10, including three children, from their house in East Jerusalem where they had lived since 1951.

The Security Council discusses the Palestinian question every month, while there are growing calls from the international community for the Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations. At the same time, Israel continues to take

advantage of the Council's inaction by persisting in its illegal policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We have seen growing Israeli hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric, including on the part of Israeli authorities and members of the Knesset, thereby contributing to instability and undermining the hope for a peaceful solution.

The most recent example is the decision by the Israel to terminate the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, which is a unilateral and unjustified decision that ends a neutral two-decades-long international presence in one of the most sensitive areas. That is why, along with Indonesia, we called for the convening of Council consultations on 6 February to discuss the consequences of that decision under the item "Any other business". We have also seen increasing frequency in Israeli acts of hostilities and stepped-up violence from settlers against Palestinian civilians in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

That decision serves to underscore the need to provide Palestinian civilians with international protection, in line with the recommendations set forth in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Protection of the Palestinian civilian population" (A/ES-10/794). Their humanitarian and security situation is untenable and might lead to further tension and instability, especially since the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs noted that settler violence increased by 57 per cent in 2018 over 2017, and by 175 per cent over 2016.

The Council must not stand idly by while the occupying Power continues its practices. We must call on Israel, the occupying Power, to renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron in order to protect Palestinian civilians and to commit to fulfilling its international obligations, including those set forth in resolution 2334 (2016), resolution 904 (1994), the second Oslo Accord, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

In addition, Israel continues to raid the Al-Aqsa Mosque, while allowing settlers to enter the courtyards of the Mosque under the protection of Israeli security forces. The Israeli Agriculture Minister, accompanied by a number of settlers, repeatedly entered the Mosque courtyards under the protection of Israeli forces, most recently at the beginning of this month. We condemn that act, as we consider it to be a provocative action that would lead to fuelling sentiments, disturbances and acts

of violence. We call on the occupying Israeli authorities to ensure safe access to Muslim and Christian places of worship in Jerusalem, as a human right.

There are continued attempts to undermine Palestinian authority over the city of Jerusalem. We renew our rejection of any attempts to violate the legal status of Jerusalem. It is a violation of international law and the relevant international resolutions, especially resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), as well as General Assembly resolution 72/15, adopted in 2017. That resolution considers that any decision or measure to change the status or demographic structure of Jerusalem has no legal effect and is null and void. We call on all States to refrain from taking any stances or decisions that might undermine the legal status of Jerusalem. We also call on them not to establish any diplomatic missions in Jerusalem, as we stress that Jerusalem is one of the final-status issues.

We condemn any attacks on innocent civilians by any party, anywhere and at any time. We hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for any acts of violence or escalation. Israel would not have been able to carry out its acts as we have seen in recent years, including provocative actions against the Palestinian people, if the Council had been able to take a serious position against such acts, including during the peaceful Great March of Return in 2018, which resulted in 263 Palestinian martyrs, including scores of children, and left nearly 28,000 injured. Such acts amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, according to international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Given its imminent financial challenges, we renew our full support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Agency provides basic services to more than 5 million registered Palestinian refugees. We stress the need to provide sustained financial support for the Agency's programmes and activities. Funding UNRWA is the responsibility of the international community. It is not the responsibility of specific Member States. Kuwait has voluntarily contributed \$113 million to UNRWA over the past four years. We renew our rejection of any attempts to end or limit its role and mandate through systematic campaigns. We call on the international community to commit to the mandate of the Agency and provide it with the necessary sustainable funding in order for the Agency to continue its role and provide the necessary services to the victims of the Nakba. It is a right, and the international community must uphold

that right, according to General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

In conclusion, the realities and facts we mentioned today are not new. Regrettably, they have been present for the past five decades. They clearly reflect what Mr. Mladenov has been saying, namely, that the situation on the ground undermines the possibility of establishing the Palestinian State, thereby undermining the two-State solution. We call on the international community to honour its obligations and take the necessary measures to revive the peace process in order to achieve the two-State solution, end the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories occupied since 1967 and attain lasting and just peace, according to the relevant United Nations resolutions, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): Before I start my intervention, I would like to pay tribute to Ambassador Vitaly Churkin. We commemorate the second anniversary of his death today. His tireless efforts in the Security Council will forever be remembered.

At the outset, we join others in thanking Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing. Likewise, we welcome the briefing by the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Ursula Mueller, on the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and in some parts of the occupied Palestinian territory.

The briefing we heard today clearly indicates one thing: peace in Palestine remains elusive. As time goes on, we have seen the positions of the Israelis and Palestinians growing further and further apart. Key final-status issues that ought to be dealt with through negotiations are rapidly being eroded as the issue of Jerusalem is being predetermined and illegal settlements continue to be built on Palestinian land in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and numerous Security Council resolutions.

The briefing today takes place a few weeks after the Government of Israel decided not to renew the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, after 22 years of dedicated service to both Palestinians and Israelis. It is appropriate that I use this opportunity to express South Africa's deep regret at the decision taken by Israel, which clearly undermines one of the few confidence-building mechanisms between Palestinians and Israelis. We have no doubt that that decision by the

Israeli Government will be yet another step that will have negative implications on the Middle East peace process. It is also unfortunate that we were not even able to adopt a press statement to support the mechanism that promoted peace and stability in Hebron. Despite that setback, we appreciate the efforts by the President of the Council to consult with both Palestinians and Israelis on the matter, and we welcome the valuable feedback that he has provided to the Council in that regard.

The Council began dealing with the issue of Israel and Palestine almost from the beginning of its work, more than 70 years ago. Yet as the Council, we have regrettably done very little or, more often, nothing at all. On almost any other issue that the Council addresses, if there were a similar magnitude of violations or deterioration of the situation, we would waste no time in taking decisive action, including all other means to enforce its decisions and resolutions.

On 21 December 2018, Belgium, Bolivia, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, France, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden and my own country, South Africa, wrote to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council raising concern over the lack of implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), including the need for the Secretary-General to provide written reports every three months on its implementation.

We wish to reiterate our call for the submission of timely written reports by the Secretary-General to the Security Council on its implementation of resolution 2234 (2016), every three months, in order for progress to be adequately monitored. This Council receives written reports on other matters that it is seized with and the situation in Palestine should be no different. We must not allow the decisions made by the Council to be undermined and in some cases blatantly violated. This selectivity undermines the credibility of the Council and in fact erodes its legitimacy.

We express deep concern about the dire humanitarian situation of more than 2 million Palestinians living in Gaza and some parts of occupied Palestine, of whom about 50 per cent are children. The people of Gaza desperately need humanitarian assistance. In that connection, we wish to call upon the international community to continue to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which continues to play a pivotal role in providing the basic services to the people of Palestine.

I wish to reiterate South Africa's position in support of a two-State solution based on pre-1967 borders. We, as part of the international community, support and encourage both parties towards this endeavour. Dialogue and negotiation remain the only way forward to finding a lasting solution for peace between Palestine and Israel. The guidelines for these negotiations should be based on the already established international legal framework, including General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, among others.

South Africa was elected to this Council with the aspiration to work, together with other member States represented here, for a long-lasting peace in the Middle East. That is why we are elected to this Council. We must, as a Council, show consistency and act to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians. During our time in the Council, we will continue to call on the Council to show consistency and act on this matter without any favour and without any selectivity to advance peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): My delegation would like to join Ambassador Jerry Matjila in paying tribute to Ambassador Vitaly Churkin for his services to the Council as we honour him today, two years after his passing.

My delegation would also like to join other delegations in thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings. Today's briefings are of great importance as they follow the recent important incident of the termination of the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), less than one month ago.

The briefings provide a succinct demonstration that the situation is tense and fragile and that the cycle of violence is still escalating. After listening to the two briefers, I have the impression that people are continuing to die — money is being withheld and a number of children have died in the past few months.

Today, I will focus on three points.

First, regarding the termination of the TIPH — at a time when international attention is focused on developments on the situation on the ground,

the TIPH was abruptly been terminated. This is another in the series of policies in the occupied Palestinian territory that defy common sense and logic. Sadly, each time we need to do or see something positive, what is offered is something negative.

Take Hebron as an example. The basic fact that we need to bear in mind is that the presence of the occupying Power is wrong and illegal. It is also wrong to transfer the settlers there as this clearly violates international humanitarian law. It is furthermore wrong that the settlers and the occupying Power commit violence against the Palestinian people, in addition to the fact that the occupying Power is under obligation by international law to protect Palestinians in all parts of the occupied territory. There are many other wrongdoings and violations of human rights that we could mention, such as restrictions of movement, expansion of settlements and so on.

Despite all of this evidence before our eyes, the TIPH was closed. Am I exaggerating if I say that this phenomenon defies my logic? Yet statements have been made affirming the legality of the occupying Power's decision on these issues. Moreover, the Council has failed to express its position regarding this development and I must say that this has been an unpleasant way for us, as Indonesians, to end our first month in the Council. We again express our regret that the Council has failed to express its position in the form of a presidential statement, due to an objection by one member.

The closure of the TIPH is a very sad development. For over two decades, the civilian presence of the TIPH greatly helped to mitigate tensions between the Palestinians and Israelis in Hebron. At a time when Palestinians were left defenceless, it offered them a minimal sense of protection. These unnecessary and unilateral provocations harm not only the Palestinians — as they are intended to — but the very hopes and prospects of peace.

We fail to see any sign in the region that justifies the decision of the Government of Israel not to renew the mandate of the TIPH. Violence continues in many places, particularly in Hebron, where a group of extremist settlers attacked several Palestinian homes, injuring 48-year-old Hisham Saifan and his 10-year old son. On a bypass road near the village of Silwad, an Israeli soldier fired live ammunition at a group of young Palestinians, killing a 16-year old boy, Ahmed Othman Hamed.

The potential for violence is real and at any time may trigger an incident similar to the 1994 massacre that resulted in the call for an international presence in resolution 904 (1994). But do we need to wait for another massacre? Are the continued use of force by the occupying Power and the policies of arbitrary detention and restriction of movement, the 11 years of Gaza's blockade, and so on, not sufficient? In the past year, more than 200 Palestinians lost their lives and more than 20,000 were injured. What other justifications does this body need to react appropriately to activities that take the lives of innocent people? The Palestinians are defenceless, they are victims and are not equal in capacity to the occupying Power. It is our responsibility to fill the gap.

Secondly, regarding the humanitarian situation — the humanitarian situation in the occupied territory is also deteriorating and more assistance is needed, particularly for Gaza Access to health care, clean water and other basic necessities is being hindered. As I mentioned earlier, the already dire situation has been aggravated by massive casualties since the Great March of Return last year.

Apart from Gaza, one of the targets of humanitarian support is the vulnerable H-2 area in Hebron, which was formerly covered by the Temporary International Presence in Hebron. We need to anticipate the impact of increasing settlement activity in this area, more displaced Palestinians and further settler violence. In a report dated 13 February, for instance, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs points out that 55 Palestinians, including 20 children, have been forcibly evicted by the Israeli authorities from their homes in the Karm Al Jaouni area since late 2008.

Among the various grave physical, social, economic and emotional impacts on Palestinian families, one of the saddest is how the children concerned are often then unable, or afraid, to return to school, as they bear the burden of psychological scars that may last for life. Moreover, we join others in the call for the international community to continue to assist the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, including in terms of its financing. The socioeconomic situation of Palestinian children is at stake.

The third point is the silence of the Council. The occupied Palestinian territory is breaking apart, settlement activity is increasing, and the situation is

heading towards a one-State solution, even as we see no prospects of a political solution. The lives and freedom of the Palestinians are at risk because of our inaction.

No steps have been taken to implement resolution 2334 (2016). Actions prohibited under the resolution have been taken but totally ignored, at the expense of the victims. My question is, has the Council ever faced such contempt before?

We stress that the expansion of settlements, the increasing violence, the inflammatory rhetoric and many other violations are a blatant affront to the authority of this body. Instability in the occupied territories has a negative impact on the region and beyond, including in Indonesia. It will be impossible to bring about peace in the region if a just and lasting solution is not ensured.

Indonesia reiterates its call for an intensification of international and regional efforts, based on United Nations resolutions and the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, to end the Israeli occupation, which has existed since 1967. We call on countries to honour resolution 2334 (2016) and not move their diplomatic presence to Jerusalem. Moreover, I wish to reiterate Indonesia's request for another written report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). The aforementioned violations, and many others, deserve to be addressed in the context of comprehensive reports.

Let me close by calling on both sides, particularly the occupying Power, to stop the provocations and inflammatory rhetoric. These not only violate resolution 2334 (2016), but also fuel the conflict and the violence against the Palestinian people. I believe that all Members of the United Nations are peace-loving States and speak the same language. Inaction is not a language. It is a threat to peace.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the holding of this briefing on the latest developments in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It congratulates Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, on his edifying presentation, which has once again recalled for the members of the Council the need to collectively pursue efforts to ensure the lasting return of peace and stability to a region that for many years has been afflicted by multidimensional crises. I wish also to thank Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant

Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for her very clear briefing.

Seventy-two years after the adoption of resolution 181 (II), in 1947, on the Palestine Plan of Partition, the international community continues to face the challenge of addressing a complex crisis. In the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in particular, the political and security situation continues to deteriorate, resulting in a deeply worrisome humanitarian crisis. Given this concerning situation, my country would like to recall its commitment to both the security of the State of Israel and the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. It also reiterates its firm support for the two-State solution, with both States coexisting peacefully in the framework of the 1967 borders. Here my delegation urges the Palestinian and Israeli parties to demonstrate wisdom by relaunching the dialogue on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

According to the World Bank, the unemployment rate in the Palestinian territories is close to 32 per cent, a rate that has not been seen in more than two decades, while the poverty rate is approximately 29 per cent. The situation is even more concerning in the city of Gaza, where 54 per cent of the active population, including 70 per cent of the youth, is unemployed. In addition, there is an inadequate supply of decent housing and of basic services such as health care, education, access to drinking water and electricity.

In the face of this serious humanitarian situation, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its call on the Council to work in close coordination with the specialized agencies of the United Nations and all partners in the urgent quest to find solutions that would make it possible to mobilize the assistance necessary to meet the basic needs of the peoples affected.

On this point, it wishes to urge once again all international partners to step up their support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which plays a key role in the international architecture of support for the Palestinian people, who are in distress. Such support will make it possible not only to continue UNRWA's humanitarian efforts in the region but also to gradually reduce its budget deficit, which is estimated at more than \$200 million.

Here Côte d'Ivoire welcomes Switzerland's commitment to providing a significant contribution

with a view to UNRWA reform and to allowing the Agency to continue its mission of assisting the more than 5.4 million Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, and in Gaza and the West Bank.

My country believes that the worrisome humanitarian situation, as well as the threat of a region-wide spillover of the conflict, will be under control only when a consensual solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis is found. On this point, it welcomes the international consensus on the need to resume the peace process, which is the only viable framework for mutually acceptable solutions on such key issues as the status of Jerusalem, the lifting of the blockade of Gaza, putting an end to the building of settlements in the West Bank and the issue of the security of the Palestinian people in Hebron.

On this point, my country calls for the creation of conditions conducive to the renewal of the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, a civilian observation mission set up in the framework of the Protocol in accordance with the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, also known as Oslo II.

My delegation urges all parties to show restraint and to engage in a constructive dialogue in the framework of renewed peace negotiations and to refrain from any unilateral actions that could compromise the efforts of the international community to reach a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In that context, it supports all actions and initiatives that could contribute to inter-Palestinian reconciliation, in particular between Fatah and Hamas, so as to allow the Palestinian Authority to exercise its sovereign functions in Gaza and the West Bank.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its support to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov and Ms. Ursula Mueller in their tireless efforts to ensure a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its humanitarian consequences, which is necessary for the restoration of lasting peace and stability in the region as a whole.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Equatorial Guinea.

We would first echo those delegations that spoke before us in paying tribute to the late Ambassador Vitaly Churkin on the second anniversary of his death.

I should like at the outset to convey our usual thanks for the excellent work that Special Coordinator Mladenov and his team are doing in the Middle East. His briefing today, as on previous occasions, depicts the reality of the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. We also welcome and commend the clear-sighted briefing by Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator.

We are meeting today once again, as we do monthly, to address the Palestinian question, which for 71 years has been debated at the United Nations. If that is a long time for those of us sitting here today, it must seem like an eternity for those who suffer and have suffered through it. That is what causes hopelessness and despair and generates frustration among the Palestinians to the point of rioting against Israel, which always responds disproportionately, although we also recognize that it has a right to legitimate self-defence. This prevailing trend dynamic has caused and continues to cause tremendous damage to the parties and to sow hatred in several places in the region.

A few weeks ago, we expressed our concern about the unilateral decision of the Israeli Government not to renew agreement on the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), based on the Oslo Accords signed between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The TIPH has engaged for over two decades in monitoring and making the necessary efforts to maintain normal living conditions in the city of Hebron, which gave a sense of security to its Palestinian inhabitants. We hope that the Israeli decision will be accompanied by further measures to reassure the Council and the international community about the living conditions of the residents of Hebron and the entire West Bank, who have a right to an atmosphere of respect, calm and tranquillity, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

On the situation in Gaza, my delegation welcomes the continued efforts of Mr. Mladenov's team, donors and all partners who have been supporting various initiatives on the ground to improve the life of that Palestinian enclave. According to a series of reports, the people lack jobs and have very limited access to adequate services such as health care, education, water and electricity, which has wreaked havoc on the lives of almost 2 million of its inhabitants. In that regard, we associate ourselves with the words of Secretary-General António Guterres, who spoke to the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable

Rights of the Palestinian People on 15 February in Addis Ababa, where he urged Israel

“to lift restrictions on the movement of people and goods, which also hamper the efforts of the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies”.

Similarly, we call on Palestinian groups, such as Hamas and other extremist groups, to refrain from all attacks and provocations, which contribute only to the escalation of the conflict.

However, the main Palestinian factions must understand the importance of their collaboration in the management of the Gaza Strip, which in current conditions will always pose a problem for the security of Israel. To that end, we have called for the presence of the Palestinian National Authority, which must do a better job of safeguarding the socioeconomic situation and strive to ensure a secure environment. It is therefore necessary to fulfil the agreements and commitments already made by Fatah and Hamas in October 2017.

The tension between Israelis and Palestinians, apart from hindering the reopening of the stalled negotiations between the parties, has also affected the good relations that should exist between the countries of the region, given the prevalence of other, related issues

that jeopardize regional stability. In that connection and in view of the damage caused by this conflict, we cannot doubt the threat that the Palestinian question poses to international peace and security. Its potential harm cannot be underestimated. The various activities recently carried out by the parties, as mentioned by Mr. Mladenov and Ms. Mueller, are precisely those that the parties must refrain from carrying out as they only exacerbate an already explosive situation. We also ask countries with influence in the area to bring pressure to bear so as to find a just solution to this long-standing problem.

Finally, I reiterate the position of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea in support of any initiative that respects the resolutions of the United Nations and other instruments in force that allude to the creation of two States, based on the pre-1967 borders.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on my list.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.