



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8625th meeting

Friday, 20 September 2019, 10.05 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
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Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
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United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
United States of America	Mrs. Craft

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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19-28845 (E)



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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 Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Israel and Jordan to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Ayman Safadi, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard, I propose that the Council invite His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine, to participate in this meeting.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. Al-Malki to today's meeting.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: Today, I will devote my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to presenting, on behalf of the Secretary-General, the eleventh report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which covers the period between 11 June and 11 September.

Let me reiterate that developments during the reporting period cannot be divorced from the broader context — Israel's continued military occupation of Palestinian territory, settlement activity and the threat of annexation; Hamas' continuing hold over Gaza and its militant activity; unilateral actions that undermine peace efforts; severe challenges to the fiscal viability of the Palestinian Authority; and the persistent risk of military escalation in the region. All those developments collectively erode the prospects for a two-State solution.

Paragraph 2 of resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Israel to

“immediately and completely cease all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem” [and to] “fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard”.

No steps were taken to that effect during the reporting period. During this period, however, Israeli authorities advanced some 3,000 housing units in the occupied West Bank, including some 400 units in East Jerusalem. Among the plans advanced were 354 units in Nili, 346 in Beit El and 215 in Asfar, which are all located east of the route of the separation barrier. In addition, the Security Cabinet reportedly discussed on 30 July the advancement of another 6,000 housing units. However, in a rare step, the Government also approved granting construction permits for 715 housing units for Palestinians living in Area C.

A decision by the District Court in Jerusalem, published on 29 June, determined that under the so-called market regulation principle, four houses built in the Israeli settlement of Alei Zahav could be retroactively regularized under Israeli law, despite being built on private Palestinian land without the consent of the owner. The market regulation principle allows for houses built “in good faith” on private Palestinian land without the consent of the owner to be retroactively regularized under Israeli law and the owner compensated. The decision is the first implementation of this principle, according to which up to 2,000 housing units in settlements could be retroactively regularized. In response to the 23 August terrorist attack near Dolev, the Israeli Government decided to submit a plan for the establishment of a new neighbourhood in the settlement with approximately 300 new housing units. This decision is in line with the practice to expand settlements in the wake of attacks in the West Bank. Finally, on 29 August, a year after being evicted from a disputed building in Hebron's H2 area, several dozen Israelis moved into the compound, despite ongoing legal proceedings to determine ownership.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures by Israeli authorities have continued across the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain in Area C and in East Jerusalem, 165 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished or seized during the reporting period,

which resulted in the displacement of 170 people, including 85 children. Of those, nine structures were demolished by their owners, including seven in East Jerusalem and two in Area C of the West Bank.

On 22 June, Israeli authorities demolished nine buildings in the Wadi Al-Hummus neighbourhood in the village of Sur Bahir in East Jerusalem, most of them located in Areas A and B of the West Bank, although on the “Jerusalem” side of the wall, citing their proximity to the separation barrier as a security concern. This resulted in the displacement of 24 Palestinians, including 14 children.

On 3 July, the authorities delivered several demolition orders for structures in the Hebron governorate, the first such orders based on military order 1797, which authorizes an expedited process for demolition of unauthorized new structures in Area C and gives owners only 96 hours to demonstrate to the authorities that they possess a valid building permit. During the reporting period, three structures have been demolished on the basis of this military order.

On 10 July, after a costly 24-year legal battle, a Palestinian family was evicted from its property in the Silwan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem and the premises handed over to Israelis. This was done after the Israeli Court ruled in favour of a settler-related organization, which had obtained ownership of much of the property.

On 26 August, the authorities demolished a house and a restaurant — the latter for the third time — in Beit Jala, displacing five Palestinians and affecting the livelihoods of another 32. Following the demolition, a new Israeli settlement outpost was reportedly established nearby, without a building permit from the Israeli authorities.

Resolution 2334 (2016) also “calls for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction. However, the reporting period saw worrying levels of violence throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, three Palestinians, including one child, and two Israelis, also including one child, were killed, and 336 Palestinians and 21 Israelis were injured in various incidents, including clashes with the Israeli Security Forces (ISF), security operations, attacks and settler-related violence.

On 27 June, in the Al-Issawiya neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, a 21-year-old Palestinian, who is alleged to have targeted Israeli forces with fireworks, was shot and killed by a policeman. Throughout the following two months, tensions in the neighbourhood remained high, as security forces have conducted raids, house searches and arrests. These operations have triggered clashes with residents and were usually conducted at night, causing disruption and trauma to residents and businesses.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), on 30 June, three Israeli settlers physically assaulted a 70-year-old Palestinian man living near the Abraham Spring in the H2 area of Hebron. On 6 July, a group of seven Israeli children physically assaulted a 10-year-old Palestinian child near the Al-Ibrahimi Mosque in the H2 area of Hebron. On 12 July, a nine-year-old Palestinian boy was shot in the forehead by the ISF during clashes in Kafr Qaddum, in the West Bank, and remains in critical condition.

On 8 August, a 19-year old Israeli was stabbed to death in the West Bank, close to the settlement of Migdal Oz, south of Bethlehem. Two Palestinian suspects were later arrested by the ISF. On 15 August, two Palestinian teens stabbed and injured an Israeli police officer in Jerusalem’s Old City. One of the assailants was shot and killed. On 16 August, two Israeli teens were injured in a car-ramming attack near the settlement of Elazar, south of Bethlehem. The 26-year-old driver was shot and killed by an off-duty policeman. On 23 August, an improvised explosive device was detonated near the settlement of Dolev, northwest of Ramallah, killing a 17-year-old Israeli girl and severely injuring her father and brother. According to the OHCHR, a Palestinian family was forced to leave its home in the West Bank village of Urif after repeated attacks over the past year.

Tensions in Jerusalem’s Old City also continued. On 10 August, the Muslim Eid Al-Adha and the Jewish commemoration of Tisha B’Av coincided, which led to tensions at the holy sites. Israeli authorities allowed Jewish visitors to gain access to Al-Haram Al-Sharif/ Temple Mount on that day under police protection. In the days before the holiday, Muslim religious leaders had urged worshippers to come en masse to Al-Aqsa Mosque for Eid prayers. Clashes between police forces and worshippers reportedly resulted in 29 Palestinians and four Israeli security officers being injured.

In Gaza, the overall levels of violence and ensuing casualties have decreased during the reporting period, but tension continues. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) continues to use riot dispersal means and live ammunition against the continuing Great March of Return demonstrations. In this context, four Palestinians, including two children, were killed, and 496 were injured by live fire. Some 10 Palestinian militants, meanwhile, were killed in other incidents, and 13 were injured, while one Israeli soldier was injured by a grenade thrown across the fence, and three were injured in other incidents.

In the same period, 33 rockets and mortar shells were launched from Gaza towards Israel. Most were intercepted but 18 landed in Israeli towns, causing material damage. Although fewer incendiary kites, balloons and other devices have been launched from Gaza compared to the last reporting period, at least 140 fires were reported in Israel.

In a worrying development, on 27 August, three Palestinian policemen were killed, and three pedestrians were injured in two separate apparent suicide explosions targeting police checkpoints inside Gaza. On 6 September, the Israeli Security Forces shot and killed two Palestinian teenagers, aged 14 and 17, during the Great March of Return demonstrations at the Gaza perimeter fence. On 7 September, according to the IDF, an armed drone launched from Gaza dropped an explosive device on an Israeli military vehicle at the perimeter fence. In retaliation the IDF struck a number of Hamas targets in Gaza.

Separately, between 23 and 27 June, three men were arrested and reportedly subjected to ill treatment during interrogation by Hamas for organizing a charity event coordinated with a non-governmental organization connected to Israel. Between 6 and 8 August, at least four men were detained after they criticized Hamas on social media. All were subsequently released.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls upon the parties “to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric”. Unfortunately, such actions continued during the reporting period. On 12 July, a senior Hamas official called on Palestinians overseas “to attack every Jew on the globe by way of slaughter and killing,” telling them “enough of the warming up”. The official’s statement was condemned as repugnant by the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas later said that it did not represent the organization’s views. On several

occasions, however, officials from Hamas and other Palestinian factions welcomed and celebrated stabbing, car ramming and bombing attacks against Israelis in the occupied West Bank, calling the perpetrators heroic. Fatah officials also continued to honour and glorify perpetrators of past terrorist attacks.

Israeli officials also made provocative and inflammatory statements. Leading politicians have sought to publicly minimize the connection of Palestinians to their ancestral land, called for the annexation of Israeli settlements in Area C of the West Bank, and rejected the notion of Palestinian Statehood. During a visit to Hebron on 4 September, senior Israeli officials reiterated pledges for the expansion of settlements there and the annexation of the city. Further, on 10 September, the Prime Minister declared his intention, if elected, to “apply... Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea”, as a first step to applying Israeli sovereignty over

“settlements in Judea and Samaria, as well and also on other important regions for [Israel’s] security, for our heritage, and for our future”.

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterated calls by the Middle East Quartet for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution. Some positive developments were witnessed during the reporting period, but they were once again overshadowed by negative trends.

In Gaza, the United Nations and its partners continued to implement the critical economic and humanitarian interventions identified in the last two reports of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians. With those efforts, the energy supply to households in Gaza has more than doubled and some improvements in the economy have been felt. A slight decrease in the unemployment rate to 46.7 per cent in the second quarter of 2019, from 47 per cent, was reported.

Qatar has continued to generously fund the supply of fuel to the Gaza power plant and the daily availability of electricity has more than doubled. More than 10,000 jobs, including 3,000 for women, have been created by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other United

Nations agencies. Some easing of the import and export restrictions by Israel, additional permits, as well as the extension of the permitted fishing zone to 15 nautical miles from the coast and the return of confiscated fishing boats, are also welcome developments.

Despite those efforts, Gaza's health-care system remains on the brink of collapse. In July, 44 per cent of essential medicines in Gaza were completely depleted and 26 per cent of essential medical disposables had less than one month's supply remaining. Over 1,000 people injured in Gaza will require complex limb reconstruction treatment and may risk losing limbs due to infection.

On 22 August, Israel and the Palestinian Authority reached an arrangement, whereby the Palestinian Authority received on an ad hoc basis approximately \$568 million in reimbursed taxes levied by Israel on fuel. While providing some temporary relief, the Palestinian Government's ability to deliver services remains severely affected by the continued disagreement over the bulk of the tax revenue transfers.

On 27 August, Palestinian families demonstrated throughout the West Bank and Gaza, calling for the return by Israel of the bodies of the Palestinians killed, while allegedly carrying out attacks on or clashing with the Israeli security forces. In a decision on 9 September, the Israeli High Court of Justice reversed an earlier ruling and decided that Israel is authorized to withhold Palestinian bodies. According to the Palestinian Authority, 253 such bodies are being withheld by Israel. Sadly, almost two years after the reconciliation agreement brokered by Egypt, internal Palestinian divisions remain deeply entrenched.

The generous support of Member States to date has allowed UNRWA to reduce its funding shortfall from \$211 million in January 2019 to \$120 million. As a result, half a million Palestinian children resumed school on time this year. In East Jerusalem, however, UNRWA has reported on efforts by the Jerusalem municipality to interfere with its work, including obstructing solid waste services in Shuafat camp, replicating sanitation services and attempting to enter an UNRWA vocational training centre in Kalandia without authorization by the Agency.

In its paragraph 5, resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Member States "to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied in 1967". I note ongoing

separate proceedings in the European Court of Justice and the Federal Court of Canada related to the labelling of products originating in Israel and the territories occupied in 1967. The resolution also calls upon all parties to continue, inter alia, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations. No meaningful efforts were made in that direction during the reporting period.

In closing, on behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to share some broad observations concerning the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period.

The expansion of settlements has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, as stated in resolution 2334 (2016). It must cease immediately and completely. The expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continues unabated. The existence and expansion of settlements, including in East Jerusalem, fuel anger and disillusionment among the population and significantly undermine the prospects for establishing a contiguous and viable Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States.

I reiterate the Secretary-General's concern over statements regarding the annexation of the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea as a first step towards applying Israeli sovereignty over all settlements and other areas in the occupied West Bank. Such steps, if implemented, would constitute a serious violation of international law. They would be devastating to the potential of reviving negotiations and regional peace, while severely undermining the viability of the two-State solution.

The demolition and seizure of Palestinian structures also continues. The Sur Bahir demolitions and the evictions in Silwan, as well as the use of military order 1797 to demolish structures, are particularly concerning. Some 200 Palestinian families in East Jerusalem have eviction cases filed against them, mostly by settler-related organizations. The number of structures demolished and people displaced since the beginning of 2019 has already exceeded figures for the entire year of 2018. Such policies must be reversed, and Israel should abide by its obligations under international law.

The situation in Gaza remains volatile. It is shameful and intolerable that people, including children, continue to be killed and injured during demonstrations and by indiscriminate rocket attacks or other hostile acts. The Israeli security forces have the responsibility to

exercise maximum restraint and to use lethal force only when strictly necessary, as a last resort, in response to an imminent threat of death or serious injury and in accordance with international law. Children should never be the target of attacks or exposed to violence. The launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian populations is prohibited by international humanitarian law, and Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad must cease that practice immediately.

I unequivocally condemn all attacks on Palestinian and Israeli civilians, including settler-related violence, and call on all sides to refrain from violence and to clearly and unequivocally condemn attacks when they occur. All perpetrators must be held accountable for their crimes. I also reiterate the call for the status quo at the Holy Sites to be upheld, in line with the special and historic role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

I remain deeply concerned about developments relating to the clearance of revenues of the Palestinian Authority. Despite the Palestinian Authority's temporary reprieve as a result of the reimbursed taxes levied by Israel on fuel, the financial crisis is very far from over. I urge both sides to engage in a constructive manner with the goal of restoring the revenue transfers in full, in line with the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations.

I would like to also reiterate that the fate of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two Israeli Defence Forces soldiers missing in Gaza remain an important humanitarian concern for all of us.

Despite our sustained efforts, the deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza is a mounting concern. It is not possible to genuinely and sustainably improve the socioeconomic situation there without significantly easing restrictions on the movement and access of goods and people, with the goal of ultimately lifting them, in line with resolution 1860 (2009), and by reuniting Gaza and the West Bank under a single, legitimate Palestinian national authority. At the same time, it is critical to ensure that the current calm be sustained in order to gradually introduce longer-term projects that will support Gaza's development.

I reiterate the call on all Palestinian factions to actively engage with Egypt on reconciliation. Despite the challenges, it is critical that those efforts continue.

The United Nations remains steadfast in its support of Egyptian efforts in that regard, and all Palestinian factions must take concrete steps to ensure the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank. Gaza is and must remain an integral part of a future Palestinian State as part of the two-State solution.

As we approach third anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), we can only lament the worsening situation on the ground. Settlements have expanded, demolitions have accelerated, violence and incitement have continued. Achieving intra-Palestinian unity seems an ever-more distant prospect, and credible negotiations have yet to be launched.

It is hard to tolerate the steady deterioration of the already difficult status quo. It reflects the collective failure of leaders, politicians and the international community to deliver on the vision that peace between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine can be achieved through peaceful negotiations, with support from the international community, based on the 1967 lines, international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and previous agreements.

There is no other viable solution to end the conflict. Those who continue to support a two-State outcome must acknowledge that derailing that prospect means that Palestinians and Israelis are facing a grim future of perpetual occupation, endless violence and threats to regional stability.

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

I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Malki (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by expressing my sincere thanks and gratitude to the President of the Security Council and the Russian delegation for their able leadership of the Council and for convening this important meeting. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). I also welcome His Excellency Mr. Ayman Safadi, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the sisterly Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

We listened today to the eleventh report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution

2334 (2016). Unfortunately, it lists only further crimes, violations and arbitrary, as well as illegal Israeli policies. As was the case with previous reports, its outlook is not at all promising in terms of progress in the implementation of the resolution's provisions.

That leads us to wonder: In requesting the Secretary-General to submit these required reports, did the Security Council not intend to follow up on the implementation of the resolution on the ground, assess the parties' commitment to it and consequently take the necessary measures to ensure its implementation? We do not believe that the purpose of the Council's request for periodic reports by the Secretary-General was to listen only to the extent of violations of international law and the number of civilian casualties and ignore the reports' warnings about the diminishing prospects for peace, further incitement, violence and settlement activities.

At the next presentation of the report of the Secretary-General, we will not expect to hear any mention of positive steps towards the implementation of 2334 (2016), as long as there is no motivation or deterrence that would lead Israel to reconsider its military occupation of our Palestinian land, cease targeting Palestinians civilians and reverse its expansionist colonialist settlement activity, which preclude all hope of ending the illegal occupation of our territory and may render the two-State solution within the 1967 borders all but impossible.

Israel is not committed to upholding the relevant resolutions or the Charter of the United Nations; it has never respected the rights of the Palestinian people or recognized the Palestinian people's natural right to self-determination and to establish their independent and free Palestinian State. Israel has arrogantly continued to violate international law and resolutions without any regard for either, believing that it enjoys an exceptional status that affords it the right to assault the rights and territories of others and shields it from criticism and accountability.

Israel's disregard for the rights of the Palestinian people and for the security of the region as a whole has reached the point at which our precious national territories are presented as gifts to bribe extremist right-wing Israeli groups and win their votes. Netanyahu's declaration that he intends to annex occupied land in the valleys and the area north of the Dead Sea is merely a criminal's confession of the crime he has perpetrated. Will the criminal enjoy impunity?

Israel's systematic attempts to change the demographic and geographic structure of the Palestinian land, including East Jerusalem, occupied since 1967 are illegal and rejected, and will not change the legal status of Palestinian territory as occupied. Nor will such attempts legitimize the Israeli occupation of our land. The intention of the occupation authorities has been revealed. It is to usurp the occupied land by force, annex it, forcibly displace Palestinians and transfer Israeli citizens to our lands, which is in stark violation of international humanitarian law and constitutes war crimes under the Rome Statute.

Israel is the occupying Power. It has imposed an illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip, built an expansion racist wall in the West Bank and isolated occupied East Jerusalem. It deliberately murders a nurse and a journalist, kidnaps a child sleeping in his own bed at night and shoots him in the head or heart in a cowardly manner. It prevents a young girl from going to school in Khan Al-Ahmar; it demolishes a family home in Sur Baher; it stops a young man from Gaza from travelling abroad to pursue his studies or a woman from receiving urgent health care; it deprives a man of the right praying in Jerusalem; and it protects settlers who have seized a Palestinian house and forcibly taken up residence therein.

Israel also carries out provocative activities at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and other holy sites. It rejects the international presence documenting its racist practices in Hebron. It establishes arbitrary military checkpoints extending from the far north to the far south of our occupied land. It storms Palestinian villages and refugee camps searching for anyone who rejects its injustice and suppression, and locks away in its prisons and detention centres anyone who seeks freedom and dignity. It pillages our money and natural resources and refuses to accept any criticism at the United Nations or any other international forum.

Is that reasonable? Israel, the occupying Power, continues to create new realities on the ground with the purpose of changing the nature of the final status, while seeking to subjugate the Palestinian people, antagonize their leadership and blackmail their Government, while rejecting the implementation of all signed bilateral agreements. It imposes further absurd conditions requiring the Palestinian side to be content with that reality and accept the little offered to it, as though this were the only road that we can take in order to achieve

a fair and lasting peace among the peoples of the region and ensure the safety of future generations.

Is there anyone in the Council who would accept such a settlement? Our rights are not mere aspirations, and they are not to be compromised. We are a proud people, our land is precious, and our just cause is not for sale.

In fact, a peace plan that does not consider the presence of Israel on our land an occupation and considers the two-State solution a mere slogan, while it sees that the international resolutions and the agreed terms of reference are obsolete and out of date, as well as expecting from the international community as a whole to anticipate that the Palestinians would accept such a situation, runs counter to the conditions for peace. Any serious negotiation process must be based on ending the occupation since 1967, including that of East Jerusalem, within a set time frame and with the aim of addressing all final-status issues in line with the internationally agreed parameters, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, as well as the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital under international sponsorship, in line with the statement of President Mahmoud Abbas to the Council in February 2018 (see S/PV.8183).

It is not a Palestinian condition or argument, as some claim, to avoid dialogue, reject negotiations or obstruct peace. It is the settlement to which the entire world agreed. Today we reiterate our acceptance of that solution and our commitment to it. The reference to international law for negotiation is a requirement of common sense for any negotiation process and political initiative to resolve a conflict.

The Palestinian question must not be an exception. It is not reasonable that international resolutions be selectively implemented based on narrow interests.

(spoke in English)

While important, it is not enough to declare that there is no plan B. We need to identify the means for plan A to prevail and to be aware of the alternative reality that Israel is creating on the ground.

In order to be able to counter it, let us give it a name. It is not a one-State reality but an apartheid

reality. The will of peacebuilders needs to prevail over that of bulldozers.

In that regard, allow me to commend the steady and consistent positions expressed by Security Council members and the international community at large by demonstrating how deeply rooted and constant the international consensus for just and lasting peace is. I also wish to thank all those that provide support to the Palestinian people, including Palestinian refugees through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We also commend the strong response of the Arab world, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and freedom- and peace-loving nations around the world to provocative statements regarding the annexation of Palestinian land.

I also take this opportunity to thank Jordan for its role in support of the rights of the Palestinian people and as custodian over the Christian and Islamic holy sites in East Jerusalem, including its role in protecting the historic status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

In adopting its resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council was motivated by the pursuit of international peace and security in fulfilment of its mandate. However, stating the law is not enough. We must find the channels to act so as to ensure its enforcement. Each country represented here at the United Nations can further contribute to peace by upholding its obligations, including pursuant to resolution 2334 (2016). Member States should do that, first, by supporting our rights, including to self-determination and their fulfilment, and by providing humanitarian and development assistance to the Palestinian people. Secondly, they should not recognize Israel's illegal activities, including those that seek to alter the character and status of Jerusalem. Thirdly, they should not support or assist illegal settlement activities. Fourthly, in their relations Member States should distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. Fifthly, they should ensure accountability, since impunity is the greatest obstacle to peace.

We should make no mistake. At the United Nations the real bias towards Israel shields it from accountability. Impunity is the greatest obstacle to peace, as it allows the occupying Power to take advantage of its occupation instead of facing the consequences and promotes illegal actions instead of ensuring compliance with the law.

A State that believes that it is beyond the law will be tempted to continue to act as an outlaw State.

For the sake of peace, the benefit of all peoples of the region and the authority of international law, we must urgently and collectively act to change course, restore hope and achieve a just and lasting solution to the conflict. We seek justice, not vengeance, freedom, not conditional liberty, and peace, not apartheid.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I would like, Sir, to recognize your presidency of the Security Council this month and to welcome Ambassador Kelly Craft. We welcome her presence here and look forward to her voice being heard on behalf of the American people.

We look forward to hearing what the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan considers the security challenges in the Middle East. We value our relationship with the Kingdom. Our peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt provide a framework for reconciliation and security for the rest of the region. That peace is based on mutual respect and recognition and an understanding that our peoples face mutual challenges that demand cooperation.

Today I will share our perspective on the greatest challenges that every nation in the region, including Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Yemen and the Islamic Republic of Iran face. For years, Israel has too often been the lone voice in the international community calling attention to the danger and threats that the Iranian regime poses to its people, the region and the world. Many try to paint Israel as the boy who cried wolf. In truth, Israel is like the boy in the Dutch story who plugs a hole in the dyke with his finger, holding back the dangerous sea.

Today we have more partners and allies standing with us at that dyke preventing the sea from engulfing the town. That sea is the Iranian regime.

For more than 40 years, Iran has exported bloodshed and chaos. Let us consider what has transpired over the past few weeks alone. Only this weekend, a strike against the oil processing facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais in Saudi Arabia sent oil prices skyrocketing and threatened to destabilize the international energy market. Iran is trying to hide behind the Houthi militia, which it is funding and arming. But make no mistake that such as attack has Iran's fingerprints all over it.

Last month Iran attacked international shipping vessels in the Strait of Hormuz and shot down a United States drone in international airspace. After we discovered its secret nuclear warehouse in Turqzabad, which we exposed to the world last year, the regime covered up the site, trying to hide its violations. That was not the first time that Israel has caught the Iranians lying regarding their nuclear programme. Last week the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that it had found traces of uranium at the site, proving beyond a shadow of a doubt Iran's violations.

While Foreign Minister Zarif smiles and pretends to extend his hand in friendship, it is the Quds Force commander, Qasem Soleimani, who executes Iran's real destabilization strategy, sowing chaos and destruction at the instruction of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. If we were to consider only these most recent examples, it is clear that Iran is building its own case for why it is deserving of international sanction and condemnation. We have 40 years' worth of examples.

I recount this recent behaviour to demonstrate that Iran poses the greatest danger to regional stability and security. Iran must be stopped — not with smiles and handshakes, but with economic, political, diplomatic and any other pressure, as necessary. I call on the members of the Council to act against the Iranian violations and exert greater pressure on Iran. Faced with a regime that has genocidal ambitions and the largest stockpile of ballistic missiles in the region and spends billions of dollars a year supporting terrorist organizations on our border, Israel must take every threat seriously and act accordingly. We must be able to defend ourselves.

Israel is a small country with narrow borders, yet in negotiation with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, we returned the vast Sinai peninsula in exchange for peace. We did this because this came with a guarantee of security. This means defensible borders, something that every nation in this Chamber and around the world is entitled to. Currently our borders are threatened by the same strategy of aggression and terror that Iran applies to the region. On 24 August, the Israel Defense Forces prevented a large-scale terror attack in which the Quds Force had plotted to send explosive drones into Israel for one purpose: to kill Israelis. They did not intend to launch those drones from Iranian territory but rather from Syria, just outside Damascus.

We know that Iran does not operate just in Syria. It also operates in Lebanon, through its proxy Hizbullah,

an internationally designated terrorist organization. On 1 September, Hizbullah fired several anti-tank missiles from southern Lebanon, targeting and hitting an Israeli military outpost and vehicle in northern Israel. This flagrant violation of Israel's sovereignty marks yet another stage in Hizbullah's ongoing efforts to attack Israel. Furthermore, as we discussed here in the Council a few weeks ago, Iran has been converting rockets in Hizbullah's arsenal into precision-guided missiles. We cannot and will not allow it.

The Quds Force again oversaw this operation, which established facilities across Lebanon, including in Beirut. Israel will continue to act against these threats. Israel will continue to do whatever is necessary to protect its civilians and national security interests. Any country that would allow attacks against Israel from its territory should and will bear the consequences.

We are looking forward to hearing Jordan's position. Nonetheless, Israel has its own position, one that guarantees defensible borders for our country. Israel cannot have defensible borders without control of the Jordan Valley. In his final speech before the Knesset, Israel's former Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, said:

“The security border of the State of Israel will be located in the Jordan Valley in the broadest meaning of that term.”

Prime Minister Netanyahu repeated this exact phrase last week. Defensible borders are not just required for Israel's security but are a necessary condition for regional stability. We would never accept a situation in which Iran also conducts its terrorist strategy from the outskirts of Ramallah and in the Judean hills overlooking our Ben Gurion airport, Tel Aviv and Israeli civilian and financial centres. Their belief that Israel should compromise on its claims would sacrifice our security and potentially our existence on the altar of political expediency after a misreading of the regional situation.

This position is consistent not only with the resolutions of the Security Council but also with our right to self-defence and self-determination, which form the very basis of the United Nations Charter. That is our firm position. We understand that Jordan and others have their own stances; these differences create an opportunity for dialogue.

As we have always said, we would like to move the political process forward. We welcome the efforts of

the United States Administration to revive meaningful dialogue. We are still ready to engage in direct bilateral talks with the Palestinians. Will they come to the table? Will Foreign Minister Al-Malki come to the table to negotiate with us directly, bilaterally? We are waiting for that day. Would Mr. Abbas or Prime Minister Shtayyeh sit with Israel? It is only half an hour between Ramallah and Jerusalem. We can come to them, or they can come to us. Or will the Palestinian leadership continue down its own unilateral path to avoid making the bitter concessions necessary to bilateral negotiations?

The Arab States, the United Nations and other members of the international community ask themselves what they can do to break the stalemate and promote peace. The answer is simple: stop enabling Palestinian rejectionism, pull the Palestinians back from their maximalist demands and urge the leadership to come to the negotiating table without preconditions. Today, like every day for the past 71 years, Israel remains willing to discuss the political process. We are here, ready, waiting for a partner to decide that it is time to look forward, not backwards, and build a brighter future for our people.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to those members of the Council wishing to make statements.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, Mr. Riad Al-Malki, and His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Mr. Ayman Safadi, to our meeting. I also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his eleventh briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We commend the efforts that he has undertaken to implement his mandate, which we fully support.

In paragraph 2 of resolution 2334 (2016), the Council demands 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 this regard”.

It is for this reason that in my intervention I would like to underscore the main following points.

First, the Israeli occupying Power continues to build and expand illegal settlements in the occupied

State of Palestine, including in East Jerusalem. This is a clear message that proves the determination of Israel to defy the will of the international community, international law and international resolutions. We regretfully reiterate that international inaction has clearly encouraged Israel to persist in its defiance and obstinacy.

Secondly, as Mr. Mladenov has repeatedly said in this Hall, most recently today, new settlements are being built and the annexation of territory in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem undermines the possibility of creating a Palestinian State, in conformity with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the two-State solution.

Thirdly, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to take measures and adopt policies that defy international public opinion by announcing recently the construction of more than 2,300 housing units in the West Bank. This recent measure was followed by the provocative announcement concerning the annexation of territories occupied in 1967, in stark violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant international resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Fourthly, Israel's illegal plans to annex Palestinian territories has led to an increase in the number of settlers and, as a result, in the number of violent and criminal attacks waged by the settlers against Palestinian civilians, under the very noses of the Israeli occupying forces.

Fifthly, more than ever before, the international community is clearly responsible for upholding international law and holding Israel accountable for all its violations, including the seizure of Palestinian buildings and homes, the arbitrary arrest of Palestinian civilians and such unilateral decisions as depriving the Palestinian Authority of part of its tax revenue, putting pressure on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and using live ammunition against demonstrators taking part in the Great March of Return. Those actions could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In conclusion, the absence of serious measures to ensure accountability, pursuant to resolution 2334 (2016) and other United Nations relevant resolutions calling on the Israeli occupying authority to abandon to its illegal policies and measures in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, and end the

occupation, which has lasted more than 50 years, has unfortunately led to additional flagrant violations by the occupying Power. Nevertheless, we still believe that a lasting, comprehensive and fair solution must end occupation in accordance with agreed terms of reference, namely, relevant Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative based on the two-State solution — with a view to the Palestinian people recovering all their legitimate political rights and establishing their own independent State on their territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mrs. Craft (United States of America): As the Council is aware, this is my first time participating in this monthly briefing. With this in mind, I would like to step back for a moment and speak broadly on how I intend to approach issues related to the State of Israel.

First, I believe it is important to be clear on serious matters. So allow me to be clear on the relationship between the State of Israel and the United States of America. In the past, the United States has always supported Israel, the United States supports Israel today, and the United States will always support Israel going forward. Israel will have no better friend than Kelly Craft.

Unfortunately, on matters related to Israel at the United Nations, many Member States do not play fair. I could speak endlessly about the excessive attention Member States give to the affairs of Israel, including complaints, unwarranted criticism and the incessant number of resolutions condemning this great nation.

However, I do not wish to dwell on those well-worn points. As a person who finds value in emphasizing the positive, I wish to, instead, highlight Israel's astonishing record of achievements. Since its creation, Israel has served as a refuge and sanctuary for those fleeing persecution and repression. A vibrant and accomplished democracy, Israel has stood tall and steadfast despite constant threats to its peace and security. All the more impressive is that, in this threatening environment, Israel strongly supports press freedom, defends gender equality and houses a robust and innovative free-market economy. And in opposition to what has been stated here, Israel is a nation that deeply respects the rule of law. Indeed, we have much to learn from her.

Further, as a hub for innovation, Israel has cultivated and earned its reputation as a start-up nation. It is a global leader in research and development and

has a vast network of international collaboration in this space. In fact, it is a leading investor in research and development as a percentage of gross domestic product and has been home to 5,000 new start-ups in the past 10 years alone.

Much like the way they built their great nation, Israelis have used their spirit of courage, faith in education and dogged determination to help their brothers and sisters around the globe. Many nations that are eager to condemn Israel should instead study its resolve, its constant efforts toward making the country stand as first among equals to any of the modern world and its benevolent pursuits in arts and sciences. In so doing, I believe a different picture will emerge — one that showcases all that Israel is and all that the world can gain from this great nation.

Please do not mistake my remarks here. My statement is not meant to indicate that other issues discussed here today, including the continued violence and terror from Hamas in Gaza, as described by Mr. Mladenov in his briefing, are not important. However, as we sit in this building that was created as a hall of peace, I believe it critically important that we acknowledge that no country should face the ceaseless barrage of unwarranted criticism, one-sided antagonism or repeated negative spotlight.

The United States remains tirelessly committed to supporting Israel's fair treatment here in this organ as well as in the United Nations system in general. Further, it should come as no surprise that this is one of my chief priorities. The United States stands with our close friend and partner and will continue to oppose actions and statements that unfairly single it out. And as the representative of the United States to the United Nations, I will work relentlessly to fight every effort that seeks to delegitimize Israel or undermine its security. It is inexcusable that persuasive anti-Israel bias still exists in the United Nations and that we continue to witness attempts by some States Members of the United Nations to undermine Israel's standing as a full member of the community of nations. The United States vigorously opposes all such efforts.

As I said when opening my remarks, I believe it is very important that I be clear on serious matters, so allow me, once again, to be clear on the relationship between the State of Israel and the United States — in the past, the United States has always supported Israel, the United States supports Israel today and the United

States will support Israel going forward. Israel will have no better friend than Kelly Craft.

Mr. Ruddyard (Indonesia): Let me begin by thanking the delegation of the Russian Federation for convening this briefing and for presiding over the Security Council for the month of September.

I would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing. On behalf of my delegation, let me also welcome the Foreign Minister of Palestine, Mr. Riad Al-Malki, and the Foreign Minister of Jordan, Mr. Ayman Safadi, to this meeting.

Exactly one month ago, in this Chamber, the Council met in the spirit of responsibility to address the agenda item entitled "Maintenance of international peace and security: Challenges to peace and security in the Middle East" (see S/PV.8600). At that meeting, Member States expressed their views on the way forward for the Middle East, underlining the primacy of multilateralism and international law in our endeavour to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East.

Last week, however, the incumbent Prime Minister of Israel openly declared that if re-elected, he would annex parts of the West Bank. Against that backdrop, I would like to stress the following points.

First, we must denounce any act that undermines multilateralism and international law. There are times when it is dangerous to mince words. This is one of them. Indonesia unequivocally condemns Mr. Netanyahu's arrogant proposal. We affirm that such a proposal is not designed to — nor can it possibly — yield security or stability for Israel or for the region. If anything, the plan would bury the prospects for a negotiated two-State solution between Israelis and Palestinians upon which United Nations policy has rested for decades and the work of the Quartet has depended for so long. Secretary-General Guterres has already described the plan as being devastating to any hope of peace. Similarly, at the extraordinary meeting of Council of Foreign Ministers of the Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation last Sunday in Saudi Arabia, the Organization strongly rejected and condemned Mr. Netanyahu's stated intention.

My second point is that the Council must assert its authority in the event of any violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. For the Council, this is a very straightforward matter. In

resolution 2234 (2016), *inter alia*, the Council stressed that it would not, I repeat, 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. The Council affirmed that Israel's establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory constitutes a flagrant violation of international law. Not only does it threaten peace between them and in the region, it also promises permanent insecurity.

Lastly, I would like to also remind us all of the suffering of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories and of Palestinian refugees. While we defend the hope of a two-State solution, let us not forget the humanitarian crisis facing our Palestinian brothers and sisters. We need to remain steadfast in our efforts aimed at assisting the Palestinian people, not only for humanitarian reasons, but also to enhance the capacity of Palestinians to fully govern themselves. To this end, we need to renew our commitment to supporting all possible avenues by lending our utmost assistance to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and by strengthening our joint efforts through any possible means.

Indonesia wishes to reiterate that a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian issue can only be found in the vision of two States coexisting within internationally agreed parameters. We call on the international community to come together to put the peace process back on track and implement the two-State solution. This is the only way to ensure that dangerous proposals such as this do not arise again in future.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Mladenov, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the situation in Israel and Palestine and welcome Ministers for Foreign Affairs Al-Malki and Safadi of the State of Palestine and of Jordan to the Security Council.

As we and many other delegations have stated in the Council before, the only true and just resolution to the situation in the Middle East is one built on the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, in keeping with resolution 242 (1967), of 22 November 1967.

The continued disrespect and disregard for the prevailing and long-standing peace process, such as the systematic foreclosing of final status issues, particularly

with regard to the borders, the status of Jerusalem and continued settlement expansion, is deeply disturbing. The recent pronouncement by Israel on the possible annexation of large parts of the West Bank has gone unchallenged and further undermines prospects for peace. The continued expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories deliberately violates international law, undermines prospects for peace and contravenes decisions of the Security Council.

Since 1948, or 71 years ago, the Council has adopted numerous resolutions, including resolution 42 (1948), of 5 March 1948, resolution 43 (1948), of 1 April 1948, and others in 1944, 1945, 1947, 1948 and 1949 — we can go on and on. All in all, there has been a total of 72 Council resolutions, with zero implementation. What does that say about the Council?

As we sit here today, thousands of Palestinians live in fear of having their homes and schools destroyed, their property confiscated and their already severely limited freedoms further curtailed. Yet the Council has been unable to act to address these ongoing blatant violations of international law. Just yesterday, it deliberated on the protection of civilians and the dire humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.8623). When will the Council address these same concerns with regard to the Palestinian people? When?

The Security Council's lack of action reduces it to a body unable to uphold its own decisions, whose credibility is being eroded. Therefore, South Africa continues to insist on the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and underscores that violations of Security Council resolutions would in any other case lead to strict measures against the party responsible. In this regard, and in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), my delegation also strongly calls for written reports by the Secretary-General on the matter.

South Africa believes that the Council should make every effort to restore trust in the legitimate peace process that has been pursued for decades and prevent the further development of antagonism between Israel and Palestine. The exchange of hostilities, including rocket fire and bombings in Gaza, remains a case in point and is deeply concerning. My delegation remains deeply troubled by the continued violations of human rights in the occupied territories and emphasizes that such violations only contribute to fostering hatred and divisions between Palestinians and Israelis. In the place of such antagonistic gestures as the building of

additional barriers and walls, the closing of schools and the killing of civilians, the Council should encourage gestures of hope and the building of trust between Israel and Palestine, which have been lacking in recent times.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to reiterate our call for the Council to reconsider its long-delayed visit to the region. We would like to again suggest that should some members of the Council be unwilling to participate in the visit, the Council might consider a mini-mission, which would include those Council members interested in taking part. A visit to the region would be a clear indication that the international community has not washed its hands of the core and oldest conflict in the Middle East. Similar to the Council's other field visits, like the one we will take next month to Juba, it will also offer Council members an opportunity to meet relevant actors on the ground, including members of the Government in Israel and Palestine, civil society actors and all role-players, and ask them to embrace peace efforts, respect one another, coexist and live in harmony, as we all do in our own countries and regions. We in South Africa are ready to assist in that direction if we are asked to do so.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine to our debate.

I thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his informative briefing. His presentation of the eleventh report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) again draws our attention to the gravity of the situation, in particular with regard to the issue of colonization. Ahead of the meetings to be held under resolution 2334 (2016), I would again like to thank the Secretariat for granting our request for regular written reports. They are essential tools for documenting the issue of colonization, as well as that of violence, and for guiding the work of the Council.

The threats to the two-State solution are of great concern. Announcements concerning the possible annexation of some areas in the West Bank, in particular the Jordan Valley, the northern coast of the Dead Sea and, eventually, the settlements on the West Bank are very worrisome. If implemented, such measures would constitute not only a serious and unprecedented violation of international law, but would also provoke instability in the region by exacerbating tensions and fuelling extremism of all forms. We therefore call on

the parties to refrain from any action that is at variance with international law and that would jeopardize the viability of the two-State solution. Together with our European partners, we will continue to monitor the situation closely, including any move towards annexation, and act accordingly.

Ongoing colonization is also a cause for deep concern for France. We have condemned the decisions taken by the Israeli authorities in August to allow the construction of 2,300 housing units in the West Bank. We also condemn the decision by the Israeli Government on 15 September, under Israeli law, to legalize the illegal settlement in the Jordan Valley. As reaffirmed by resolution 2334 (2016), settlement activity is illegal; it serves to heighten tensions. By undermining the viability of the two-State solution, it jeopardizes the conditions for a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians and must stop. In that regard, I thank the Special Coordinator for his quarterly briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

Lastly, the deterioration of the situation in recent weeks in Gaza — where the firing of rockets into Israel has resumed and several more demonstrators have been killed — sparks fear of a further escalation. We call on all parties to show the utmost restraint. We reiterate our condemnation of the firing of rockets from Gaza into the occupied areas of Israel, as well as of the disproportionate use of force against Palestinian demonstrators. Those developments come against the backdrop of the deadlock in intra-Palestinian reconciliation, despite Egypt's efforts, which I welcome, and the deteriorating humanitarian situation, including a shortage of medicines and the crisis in the health-care system.

The support of the international community, in particular for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, is essential. However, there will be no lasting improvement in the situation in Gaza without a political solution, involving the return of the Palestinian Authority and the lifting of the blockade, along with credible guarantees for Israel, whose security, I repeat, is not negotiable. In that regard, the imminent session of the General Assembly should be an opportunity for us to reaffirm our collective commitment to the parameters agreed upon by the international community and to Security Council resolutions.

The objective must remain that of a Palestinian State, living in peace and security alongside the State of Israel, within secure and internationally recognized borders drawn on the basis of the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. France stands ready to support any peace effort in that context. Any attempt to deviate from those internationally agreed and collectively defined parameters would be doomed to failure. It could also lead to regional destabilization, as there is no viable alternative to the two-State solution. None of the two peoples can sustainably satisfy its aspirations to the detriment of the other. The path to lasting peace requires a two-State solution. As a friend of Israel and Palestine alike, France remains more determined than ever to support them on that path.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I, too, would also like to welcome Nickolay Mladenov and the representatives of Israel and Palestine. We would like to say a few special words to the Foreign Minister of Jordan. We consider Jordan to be the key pole of stability in the region. I welcome the Foreign Minister to today's meeting.

The last time I spoke to the Council (see S/PV.8623), I highlighted the importance of and need for respect for the rule of law and the implementation of international law. We believe that respect for international law is best for the harmonious coexistence of countries and the well-being of their people. Resolution 2334 (2016) is part of international law. It is a binding resolution that was adopted by the Council three years ago. There was no objection to it.

Germany believes that the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) would be best for the coexistence of Israel and Palestine and the well-being of their people. For once, let us just imagine that we had implemented resolution 2334 (2016) in 2016. There would be no more settlement activities, no announcements about annexation, no acts of terrorism, no violence against civilians, no incitement, no provocative actions and no inflammatory rhetoric. There would be no firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel by Hamas and others. If resolution 2334 (2016) had been implemented in 2016, I am sure we would now be following real negotiations for a two-State solution, based on internationally agreed parameters.

We believe that only a two-State solution could fulfil the aspirations of Israel and Palestine — Palestine's aspirations for statehood and sovereignty and Israel's aspirations to live in peace as a democratic Jewish State.

I again thank Mr. Mladenov for his report. His conclusion was quite depressing, as he spoke about the deteriorating situation and grim future. We believe that we must not stop trying to work towards the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) to ensure the well-being of Palestinians and the security of Israel, to which Germany remains committed.

Ms. Niamke (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I commend Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his detailed briefing on the latest developments in the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Côte d'Ivoire notes with regret the persistent climate of violence in the Middle East, which is increasingly detrimental to the prospect of the restoration of peace in the region. Given the complexity of the situation, it is important for the Council to propose innovative approaches to peacefully resolve the various conflicts in the region.

With regard to the conflict in Syria, the consequences on the region are worrisome. Côte d'Ivoire once again deplores the lack of consensus within the Council, which impeded the adoption of a draft resolution yesterday on the humanitarian situation in Syria aimed at easing the suffering of millions of Syrians. We are convinced that there is no military solution to that crisis. My country wishes to reiterate its support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts to find a lasting political solution to that crisis, in line with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

Turning to the Palestinian question, Côte d'Ivoire, given the impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, believes that the following imperatives are necessary. On the one hand, an appropriate framework for negotiations must be established and the political process launched, and, on the other, there must be compliance with the resolutions on the Palestinian question and international law.

My delegation laments the fact that to date no compromise has been reached to meet the aspirations of both sides, namely, the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and independence and Israel's right to ensure its security. In response to that, and in accordance with the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General dated 26 August, Côte d'Ivoire calls on the international community to

redouble its efforts to resume the political process for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the crisis, as soon as possible.

My country remains convinced that a lasting and mutually acceptable solution to the conflict can be reached only through strictly adhering to international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). In that regard, we reaffirm our commitment to the solution of two States peacefully coexisting within the framework of the 1967 borders.

My delegation also calls on the Palestinian and Israeli authorities to ensure respect for the rights of all vulnerable persons, including children, who are paying a high price in the conflict, an aspect that various UNICEF reports regularly stress. Similarly, Côte d'Ivoire supports all possible efforts towards inter-Palestinian reconciliation, including between Fatah and Hamas, with a view to enabling the Palestinian Authority, which has the primary responsibility for meeting the social and humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, to exercise its sovereign functions in Gaza and the West Bank.

My delegation also remains concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza owing to the extremely difficult socioeconomic conditions, as well as difficulties with the energy supply and in access to basic services. Those precarious living conditions represent potential threats to regional stability, especially since this humanitarian crisis is aggravated by a difficult socioeconomic situation, resulting in the irregular payment of civil servants' salaries and a high unemployment rate, which especially affects young people. The easing of restrictions is therefore necessary, both for the delivery of humanitarian aid and for the movement of goods and people. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire underscores the crucial role that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays in addressing the needs of nearly 5.4 million people.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the material and financial support of the United Nations specialized agencies and international partners of UNRWA and reiterates its call on them to continue their vital efforts for the benefit of the Palestinian population.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buyswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his detailed briefing and the work that

he is carrying out with his team. I also welcome the presence of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Jordan and Palestine.

We are deeply concerned over what is no longer a status quo but a continuous deterioration of the situation on the ground, which is moving us further and further away from the two-State solution. The settlement in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continues unabated and undermines the very foundation and feasibility of a two-State solution. Numerous legislative initiatives contribute to encouraging the settlement policy and facilitating accompanying measures, such as demolitions, evictions and forced displacements.

We note with concern, for example, that 51 schools are being threatened with demolition, including the Um Sidra school, in Hebron governorate. That policy seriously undercuts the exercise of the fundamental rights of Palestinians and is illegal under international law, including resolution 2334 (2016).

We reiterate our deep concern at the worrying increase in the demolition and confiscation of the infrastructure of humanitarian projects. We demand that the Israeli authorities put an end to those demolitions and grant reparations or compensation for the damage incurred. Moreover, we are deeply concerned about the increase in the use of violence by settlers, as well as against settlers. We reiterate our firm condemnation of any use of violence, regardless of the perpetrator.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls on States to make a distinction in their exchanges between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. In that regard, Belgium recalls that the European Union has adopted several measures and instruments to achieve that differentiation. Belgium remains committed to the full, continuous and effective implementation of that policy.

The viability of a Palestinian State also means a return to stability in Gaza. We call on all parties to exercise restraint and recall the imperatives of protecting civilians and respecting international humanitarian law, including the principles of proportionality and distinction.

We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian and health situation. All parties must ensure free humanitarian access at all times, also taking into account the gender dimension and the specific needs of women and girls. Here I would like to commend the

indispensable role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the mandate of which Belgium will continue to support.

The resolution of the crisis in Gaza requires a fundamental change, including the lifting of the blockade and the full opening of the crossing points, while taking into account Israel's legitimate security concerns. A political solution to the crisis also requires the return of Palestinian territory to the control of the Palestinian Authority. We call on all parties to engage constructively in inter-Palestinian reconciliation efforts.

For Belgium, there is no alternative to the two-State solution within secure and recognized borders, based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. We will not recognize any changes to the previous 1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, except those agreed by the parties.

In conclusion, Belgium calls on all parties to the conflict to refrain from unilateral measures and declarations taking us farther away from the parameters agreed by the international community and endorsed by the Council. It is time, now more than ever, to work for a solution under international law to achieve a just and lasting peace and a stable regional environment.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the holding of this meeting and to Mr. Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing and the work that he is doing with his team. We welcome the participation of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Palestine and Jordan.

Peru is following with deep concern the situation in Palestine. The uncompromising positions, the lack of dialogue between the parties and the continued violence have led to a stalemate in the peace process. The situation is unsustainable and destabilizing for the Middle East and the international community. We must continue to condemn the persistent indiscriminate attacks against the Israeli civilian population by Hamas and other radical Palestinian actors, the disproportionate response by the Israelis, and the aggressive rhetoric of their respective leaders, which perpetually fuel the hostile dynamics of the situation.

In that regard, we stress the importance for the Security Council to regain its unity on this sensitive issue so that it can speak out when the situation on the ground warrants and demand that the parties comply strictly with their obligations under international law,

international humanitarian law and human rights law. We are alarmed that the prospects for reaching a political solution are becoming increasingly faint and that unilateral decisions, actions and their subsequent declarations could degenerate into an even greater escalation of tension and violence.

We recognize Israel's right to safeguard its own security and existence through the exercise of legitimate self-defence, provided it do so in accordance with the principles of legality, proportionality and precaution. The human rights of Palestinian citizens, including those of minors, cannot be ignored. To that end, we must recall Israel's obligation to comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions. In particular, we believe it urgent, in line with resolution 2334 (2016), to end the rise in settlement activities, property demolitions and evictions in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. Such practices run contrary to international law, seriously jeopardize the territorial integrity of the Palestinian State and undermine the chances of reaching a two-State solution.

We also emphasize the urgent need to address the basic needs of the people of Gaza, as poverty and marginalization provide fertile ground for those advocating violence and terrorism. We encourage the continuation of infrastructure and development projects, the pursuit of efforts to ensure that the Palestinian Authority can regain effective control of the area, and the provision of stable and predictable funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

In conclusion, we express our full support for Mr. Mladenov in his efforts to prevent further escalation and to promote dialogue among the parties, while reaffirming our commitment to finding a solution to the question of Palestine, which will undoubtedly contribute to the achievement of sustainable peace in the region.

Mr. Fiallo Billini Portorreal (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his report and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs for their presence among us today.

In 2016, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), in which it calls on all parties to end territorial claims, respect sovereignty and liberate the occupied territories. Unfortunately, the situation has not changed since then. The reality is that the occupation

has illegally expanded without any consequences, thereby preventing any step towards achieving peace. According to reports, Israeli authorities have approved more than 12,000 housing units in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The Dominican Republic continues to agree with the existing international consensus that the only way forward for Palestinians and Israelis lies in the negotiation of the solution of two States living side by side in peace and security. The Security Council must remain committed to working with all parties concerned to achieve that goal.

The Dominican Republic remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian and security situation in Gaza, which continues to seriously deteriorate. The health-care system is on the verge of collapse after years of blockade and is now overburdened with the thousands of those injured as a consequence the recurrent Great March of Return demonstrations. The increase in violence and tension only raises concerns about a new escalation of hostilities. We therefore commend the vital work being carried out on the ground by the relevant organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, as well as the support of friendly countries, to alleviate suffering and bring about change.

In that regard, we also note with concern the violent incidents in the West Bank that have resulted in the death of or serious injury to Israelis and Palestinians alike. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 350,000 people living in 67 communities in the West Bank are vulnerable to settler violence. The Palestinian Authority cannot access that area to provide vital services, such as health care, education and social and policing services. Construction restrictions also hinder the economic and social development of that area. Access to and control over natural resources remain major problems facing the community.

We call on Hamas and other armed groups to end all acts of violence and provocation that endanger the lives of civilians, which we condemn in the strongest terms. We encourage the Palestinian Authority, Israel and regional and international actors to propose sustainable solutions to the threat posed to Israel's security by Hamas.

In conclusion, expressing how we feel — as we often do in this Chamber — does not relieve us of the key responsibility conferred upon the Security Council

for the maintenance of world peace and security, the achievement of which demands firm and effective actions, complemented by our positions, in accordance with the authority and respect that this beacon of world order deserves.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

The United Kingdom has long made its position clear that Israeli settlement activity is illegal. The increased pace of settlement advancement and the retroactive approval of unauthorized settlement outposts — as seen in the Jordan Valley on Sunday — further threaten the physical viability of a two-State solution. We have also previously made clear our deep concern about suggestions that any part of the occupied Palestinian territories could be annexed.

In the light of further recent comments, I want to reiterate the United Kingdom's opposition to the unilateral annexation of all or part of the West Bank. As we have stated before in the Security Council, such a move would be contrary to international law and damaging to peace efforts, and could not pass unchallenged. The United Kingdom remains seriously concerned by the continued demolition of Palestinian property by the Israeli authorities. In all but the most exceptional circumstances demolitions are contrary to international humanitarian law. The practice causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and is also harmful to the peace process. We urge both sides to enable Palestinian development to accelerate, including in Area C.

Settlements and demolitions are not the only obstacles to peace. The people of Israel deserve to live free from terrorism, anti-Semitism and incitement to violence.

Returning to Gaza, the ongoing levels of violence are troubling. The loss of life and the large number of injured Palestinians is tragic. We call on Israel to take all action possible to limit civilian casualties. But the recent increase and infiltration attempts risks Israel's security and contribute to an environment of terror. We call on Hamas and other armed groups to permanently end their incitement and rocket fire against Israel. Such violence is destructive to peace efforts. I would also add my voice to those who have called for the release of the remains of the deceased Israeli soldiers. Holding on to those soldiers' remains and not allowing their

families to complete their grieving is inhumane and beneath those who do it.

We continue to welcome the efforts of Egypt and the United Nations to work towards a cessation of violence and sustainable improvements in the humanitarian situation. Ultimately, a long-term solution that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict and returns the Palestinian Authority to Gaza is required to end the cycle of violence.

A just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace to both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue. As we have said before, we encourage the United States Administration to bring forward detailed proposals for a viable Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that addresses the legitimate concerns of both parties. The United Kingdom continues to believe that the best way to achieve that is through substantive peace talks between the parties leading to a two-State solution, with Jerusalem as a shared capital. We call on all parties to immediately end actions that undermine support for the two-State solution and ultimately make peace more difficult.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing, which was very precise and informative, as always. Allow me also to welcome in the Chamber Their Excellencies Mr. Riad Al-Malki and Mr. Ayman Safadi, Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Palestine and Jordan.

Let me begin by reaffirming Poland's commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-State solution, and an agreement that ends the occupation, which began in 1967, ending all claims and fulfilling the aspirations of both parties, including Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

Poland will continue to call on all parties to refrain from actions in contravention of international law that would imperil the viability of a two-State solution. In that context, we are concerned about the recent announcements of a possible annexation of areas in the West Bank, particularly the Jordan Valley and the northern shore of the Dead Sea. If implemented, that would constitute a serious breach of international law.

The situation in Gaza remains dire, continues to fuel extremism and radicalization and fosters instability.

We call on all parties to take urgent steps leading to a fundamental change in the humanitarian, political, security and economic situations in Gaza, including by ending the closure policy and a sustained opening of the crossing points important to the daily lives of Gazans, while at the same time addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. We commend the efforts led by Egypt, Qatar and the United Nations Special Coordinator to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, as part of the future Palestinian State.

We must be frank with ourselves. On the political track, we must acknowledge that the process is currently almost entirely blocked. The intra-Palestinian division only aggravates the situation of the people of Gaza and weakens the national aspirations of the Palestinians. There is an urgent need to relaunch the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process. Everyone must be committed to the Egyptian efforts in that regard.

We should uphold the existing international consensus that the only way forward for the Palestinians and Israel is the negotiation of a two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza living side by side in peace and security.

Today our main aim should be to restore a political horizon for the resumption of such a meaningful peace process. A resolution of all final-status issues, including Jerusalem, should be found through the negotiated two-State solution.

Regrettably, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, and the idea of a two-State solution continues to be dismantled piece by piece, in particular by an expansion of Israeli settlements. We are very close to the point at which it would be difficult, if not impossible, to establish a viable Palestinian State.

Poland's position on the Israeli settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territory is clear and remains unchanged. It is also the European Union's well-known stance. All settlement activity is illegal under international law. Not only does it erode the viability of the two-State solution and the prospects for a lasting peace, but — we must to be honest with ourselves — it is an obstacle to peace.

The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) provided a strong reaffirmation of the international consensus on that matter. The resolution underlines the illegality of the Israeli settlements, stressing that the cessation of

settlement activities is essential for salvaging the two-State solution.

Allow me to conclude by praising the collective efforts by the international community to allow the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to fulfil its mandate to provide essential relief, development and protection services to Palestinian refugees and those displaced by the conflict. In our opinion, UNRWA remains a key contributor, providing humanitarian assistance, stability and security in the region.

Mr. Elé Ela (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Equatorial Guinea welcomes Their Excellencies Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Jordan and the State of Palestine and wishes them a pleasant stay in New York. We also thank the team represented by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for the valuable briefing.

The prolonged lack of a lasting political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, consequently, the ongoing deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as the insecurity with which the Israelis live, remain a source of deep concern to Equatorial Guinea.

It is now almost 70 years since this question was first introduced at the United Nations in 1947. Most of those who were living at that time are clearly dead and many of those who were born during that period are now old. Both sides have lost many loved ones and significant basic infrastructure. Added to that are the millions of Palestinians who have been forced to flee their homes and properties to depend on humanitarian assistance in various parts of the Middle East and the world. This suffering, which has scarred the civilian population in the course of this long-running conflict, should sound alarm bells and means that we have run out of time to continue with the business-as-usual adoption of endless resolutions without any improvement whatsoever on the ground.

On 23 December 2016, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016) urging Israel to refrain from any measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, the character or the status of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem.

In that connection, and in order to preserve the viability of the two-State solution, Equatorial Guinea, a

friend of both Israel and Palestine, regrets the fact that today the Israeli Government is continuing to pursue its settlement policy, which is a flagrant violation of international law. Given that, and given past history, there is a good case to be made for the fact that in today's world we should be able to peacefully resolve many of the problems faced by our countries if all parties wish to do so.

The members of the Security Council must maintain a united front and demand that both parties implement the provisions of all relevant resolutions, which are one of the most important instruments for resolving conflicts. We cannot overlook Israeli concerns over the ongoing security threats coming from Gaza. The ongoing instability in that Palestinian enclave could lead it to become one of the preferred destinations of insurgents who wish to entrench terrorism in the region.

We therefore reiterate our call for the Palestinian Authority in Gaza to retake its place as the best-placed entity to deal with security and socioeconomic issues, which weigh so heavily on the minds of the civilian population there, including women and innocent children. Thus there is a growing need for the support of the international community for the mediation efforts of Egypt and the United Nations to accelerate the process of intra-Palestinian reconciliation, and here the restoration of the Palestinian Authority to its rightful place is vital.

Our delegation very much welcomes last month's agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which will see the latter body receive \$568 million as a reimbursement for fuel taxes collected by Israel. Nonetheless, it is key to resolve this question once and for all. Here we agree with Mr. Mladenov in that both parties must continue cooperating constructively and abide by the provisions of the Protocol on Economic Relations between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

We wish to pay tribute to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which, despite its precarious financial situation, is working tirelessly to improve humanitarian conditions for the millions of Palestinian refugees, reducing the pressure on host countries. The vital work of UNRWA must enjoy the full support of the international community in terms of financing to render it more effective.

Finally, on the Palestinian question in general, Equatorial Guinea reaffirms its commitment to support any initiative that takes into account existing instruments of international law, such as the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly and other internationally recognized agreements. As far as we are concerned, the most pressing issue is to find a solution that will bring about negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians and that is supported by the international community. Such a solution would necessarily involve two States, with East Jerusalem as the capital, living in peace and with security guarantees for both and other States of the region,

In that respect, we cherish the hope that the Government that results from the current electoral process in Israel will work for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which began when the United Nations had barely marked its second anniversary.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East and the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We welcome the presence of Mr. Al-Malki, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine, and Mr. Ayman Safadi, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan.

China has listened attentively to the statements made by both Palestine and Israel. The recent period has witnessed an increase in the negative momentum prevailing in the Middle East, where inflammatory statements have intensified tensions in the region. The construction of settlements continues unabated, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is further deteriorating and the Middle East peace process has stagnated. China is highly concerned over all these developments.

I wish to highlight the following.

First, resolution 2334 (2016) should be effectively implemented. The resolution bears great significance, as it reflects the common aspirations and expectations of the international community and responds to the legitimate calls of Palestinian and the Arab countries at large.

Continued advancement of the construction of settlements by the relevant parties would undermine mutual trust and seriously dampen the prospects of

a two-State solution. All settlement activities in the occupied territories should cease immediately. The demolition of Palestinian homes should be stopped, and the destruction of Palestinian properties should be stopped and measures taken to prevent violence against civilians. All illegal acts and unilateral initiatives aimed at legalizing settlements should be stopped immediately, concurrently with practical measures to eliminate their effects.

Secondly, it is imperative to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine on the basis of the existing international consensus. The international community should commit to the two-State solution as its ultimate goal, abide by the relevant United Nations resolutions, the land-for-peace principle and the Arab Peace Initiative as the fundamental guidelines, and take positive actions to promote the early resumption of peace talks between the Palestinians and Israelis, culminating in the establishment of a Palestinian State with full sovereignty, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Any new initiatives should, without exception, meet the aforementioned international guidelines.

Thirdly, dialogue, negotiations and political consultations are the fundamental way to resolve the Palestinian issue. Neither violence for violence nor inflammatory statements can help solve problems. China is concerned about some recent incendiary remarks concerning the annexation of the occupied Palestine territories, including the Jordan Valley, and opposes any unilateral act that may lead to the intensification of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In our view, Israel should act with caution and avoid aggravating regional tension and turbulence and earnestly safeguard the foundation of the Middle East peace process.

Fourthly, we should follow closely and improve Palestinian and economic and humanitarian conditions. Of late, the medical system in the Gaza Strip has suffered serious material shortages, and the humanitarian situation remains dire. The parties concerned should comprehensively lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip as soon as possible and fully implement the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The international community should continue to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and continue to

contribute to improving the humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian refugees.

China has always been committed to promoting the Middle East peace process and to playing a positive and constructive role in achieving peace in the Middle East. In September this year, China appointed Ambassador Zhai Jun as the special envoy of the Chinese Government on the Middle East. In future he will establish close cooperative relations with the relevant parties, actively promote peace talks and play a positive and constructive role in advancing a proper settlement of regional hot-button issues and achieving regional peace and stability.

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

We want to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, and we welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine, Mr. Riad Al-Malki, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, Mr. Ayman Safadi.

The Middle East is at the heart of world politics. The region is plagued by multiple crises, old and new. Russia is closely following the latest developments, as we have long-standing relations with the States of the region, based on mutual respect, mutually beneficial cooperation and common interests.

It is no accident that I mention common interests. We believe that the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa, including all ethnic and religious groups, are inextricably linked. They had struck a balance that was upset in the recent past and continues to be disrupted by geopolitical engineering imposed from outside, interference in internal affairs, the use of force and the collapse of entire States.

We note with concern the ongoing tense situation in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. It is further complicated by Israel's continued settlement activity and demolition of Palestinian buildings, as well as the situation in and around the Gaza Strip. Such activity is not only illegal under international law, but is also one of the most serious obstacles to the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

In that connection, we share concerns about recent statements by the Israeli leadership regarding its intention to extend Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan

Valley. Following through on those intentions will inevitably escalate tensions in the region and undermine hopes for the long-awaited peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours. That also applies to the decision of the United States Administration on Jerusalem and the illegitimate recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, which is a flagrant violation of international law, particularly resolution 497 (1981).

At the same time, we are seeing persistent attempts to impose alternative arrangements for a peace process — arrangements that undermine long-established and internationally recognized parameters for resolving the Palestinian problem. We believe that the intention to drag out the efforts to find a lasting comprehensive solution to this issue is counterproductive. Unilateral actions bring us no closer to resolving the long-standing and newer problems of the region. It is clear to us, as it is to most of our colleagues, that the only way forward is to combine international and regional efforts, with the key involvement of the United Nations and the Security Council. That tenet should be the starting point for all relevant efforts and initiatives.

We support the use of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators as a unique mechanism to assist the peace process that has been approved by the relevant Council resolutions. Russia is doing its utmost to promote the full spectrum of measures related to the peace process, including by providing a potential platform for meetings, without preconditions, between the leaders of Israel and Palestine. We are also taking steps to restore intra-Palestinian unity and welcome the steps taken by our Egyptian colleagues in that regard.

Against that backdrop, it is clear that sending a Security Council mission to the region is long overdue. Its goal will be to enhance trust, facilitate the relaunching of negotiations between the parties and to prevent the collapse of the international community's efforts to ensure conditions for the implementation of the only viable solution, based on international law. This basis was developed by the Security Council, and its revision should be undertaken within the Security Council, too. No unilateral steps can replace the key principles of a two-State solution, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We continue to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near

East, whose work has both humanitarian and political dimensions, as it has an important stabilizing role in the Palestinian territories and the countries of the Middle East.

All final status issues, including Jerusalem, fundamental security issues and refugees, must be resolved through direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis.

The unresolved Palestinian issue is one of the factors contributing to the emergence of new challenges in the Middle East. We are concerned about another flare-up of tension in the Gulf region. Against the backdrop of the ongoing exchange of accusations, we are seeing an increase in the military presence, including on the part of States outside of the region, which creates the risk of a military confrontation. Any incident could lead to a conflict that would have devastating consequences. We consistently call on all parties concerned to take steps to de-escalate and resolve the problems in the subregion through political and diplomatic means. It is becoming increasingly important to develop a sustainable mechanism for collective security in the region on the basis of dialogue among equals. A Russian initiative to that effect is aimed specifically at resolving conflict and developing confidence-building and oversight measures.

Russia will contribute actively to stabilizing the situation in the Middle East. We are ready to cooperate with all interested actors and invite everyone to engage in collective efforts.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Mr. Safadi (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the delegation of the Russian Federation for your outstanding efforts during your presidency of the Council for this month. I also thank Mr. Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing. I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Council today.

The long-standing and strenuous efforts to achieve comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East are today on the verge of collapse. The two-State solution, which enjoys the consensus of the international community as the only means to resolve the conflict and ensure the rights of the peoples of the region to live

in security and peace, is threatened by unilateral Israeli measures that violate the resolutions of international legitimacy and Council resolutions, leading to despair and stoking the flames of conflict and violence. Silence is not an option.

Effective action is required to salvage the remnants of hope for peace. The absence of a clear and strict position promoting international legitimacy and the right of the Palestinian people to live in freedom and establish their own State, as well as the right of the peoples of the region to live in security and stability, will only lead to despair, the decline of moderation, the expansion of extremism and the eruption of conflicts. That would be an immense threat to regional and international peace and security that must be prevented.

A lasting and comprehensive peace is an Arab strategic choice, and the means to achieve it is clear — a two-State solution that guarantees the establishment of an independent Palestinian State based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel, in accordance with international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

However, instead of upholding the resolutions of international legitimacy and interacting positively with the Arab Peace Initiative for achieving real peace that would ensure normal relations between all Arab States and Israel and provide comprehensive security guarantees for Israel, in the context of a comprehensive peace ending the occupation that began in 1967, Israel continues to take unilateral illegal measures that undermine the two-State solution and disregard the tenets of the peace process.

Peace and security are a right of all the peoples of the region and a goal that Jordan continues to seek in cooperation with the international community and in accordance with international law. However, peace will not be achieved by establishing and expanding illegal settlements, confiscating Palestinian land, demolishing their homes or displacing their children. Peace will not be achieved by targeting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) or depriving more than 500,000 Palestinian refugee children of their right to education and dignity. Nor will it be achieved by annexing the Golan Heights, the Jordan Valley and the area north of the Dead Sea in the occupied Palestinian territories, which represent

about one-third of the occupied West Bank. Such actions will kill the two-State solution and not achieve security.

Consecrating the occupation and deepening its injustice will not achieve peace, guarantee security or stability or promote development. Similarly, violations of international legitimacy and the selective implementation of Security Council resolutions erode the international order and lead to chaos and lawlessness. This is a reality that requires effective and urgent international action in order to start serious negotiations to save what remains of the chance for peace based on a two-State solution and to renew hope in that solution before Israeli violations and new illegitimate realities dash all remaining faith and make peace impossible.

The Security Council plays a major role in implementing international resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), and in adhering to international law, which considers the territories seized forcibly by Israel in 1967 to be occupied. International law requires Israel to honour its obligations as the occupying Power.

The magnitude of the danger requires immediate action by the international community to protect security and peace. The Council and the international community must act to end illegal settlement and its disastrous ramifications. The international community must reject the plan announced by the Prime Minister of Israel to annex one-third of the occupied West Bank, in violation of international law and threatening peace and security. That must be stopped.

The international community must support UNRWA and allow the Agency to continue its work and help over 5 million Palestinian refugees to live in dignity and allow their children to go to school and live in hope instead of leaving them prisoners of want, ignorance, oppression and depression.

We have a responsibility to stop Israel from changing the historic and legal status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. His Majesty King Abdullah II, who is the custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, has stressed that Jerusalem is the key to peace. It is the holy city of Muslims, Christians and Jews. It must be a city of peace, not the scene of occupation, injustice and deprivation.

Under international law and Security Council resolutions, East Jerusalem is an integral part of the

Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. Protecting Jerusalem and its historical status is protecting international law and peace. The continuous undermining of that status is a real threat to peace and security. East Jerusalem is an occupied territory that, in the context of a two-State solution, must be liberated as the capital of the Palestinian State. This is the only way to achieve peace. Sovereignty over the city's sanctuaries must be Palestinian. Custodianship over its Islamic and Christian sanctuaries is Hashemite. However, preserving Jerusalem's historical status is a collective responsibility we all bear, particularly in the light of Israeli provocations and violations. The international community must act to save the peace.

The Palestinian question remains the main issue in our region. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is at the root of all the tension and instability in the Middle East. A two-State solution is the prerequisite for comprehensive peace and security for all. Occupation, oppression and depriving Palestinians of their rights will not lead to peace or security. Security for all the peoples of the region, Palestinians and Israelis alike, will be achieved by respecting everyone's rights arising from our international law, principles and shared humanitarian values.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has spared no effort to achieve comprehensive, lasting and fair peace and is committed to continuing to work with the Security Council and with all our friends and partners in the international community to achieve a genuine peace that is accepted by all peoples and fulfils their right to a secure future.

When Jordan speaks, it does so with the credibility of a peace broker who remains a voice of truth and moderation and a force for peace. When we warn that the chances of peace may completely disappear soon, we do so with the voice of someone firmly committed to peace. This is a clear call for decisive and effective action now, before it is too late.

I thank you, Mr. President, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Security Council in order to end the deterioration and reclaim the lead by undertaking urgent and collective international efforts aimed at putting an end to a conflict that poses a threat to our security and achieving a comprehensive, fair and lasting peace which is a right for all of us.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.