



Security Council

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Letter dated 27 April 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose herewith copies of the briefing by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of Belgium, China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-teleconference convened on 23 April 2020 regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Statements were also delivered by the representative of Israel and the permanent observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members in relation to this video-teleconference, the following delegations and entities submitted written statements, copies of which are also enclosed: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, the European Union, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, the League of Arab States, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 2 April 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/273), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, these briefings and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) José **Singer Weisinger**
President of the Security Council



Annex 1**Statement by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov**

I am briefing the Council today as the Middle East continues to confront the monumental challenge of containing the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

On 23 March, the Secretary-General launched an appeal for an immediate global ceasefire. On 11 April, my fellow Special Envoys to the Middle East and I echoed the Secretary-General's call and restated our firm commitment to preventive diplomacy, to assisting all efforts to respond to the health and socioeconomic consequences of the crisis, to supporting cooperation in the interest of peace and to facilitating humanitarian access for the most vulnerable. The past month has seen inspiring examples of cooperation across conflict lines in the common battle against the virus. But it has also witnessed continued confrontation and fighting as the human toll of war continues to rise.

The dangerous prospect of annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied West Bank is a growing threat. If such a move were implemented, it would constitute a serious violation of international law, deal a devastating blow to the two-State solution, close the door to a renewal of negotiations and threaten efforts to advance regional peace. On 20 April, the two leading political parties in Israel signed a coalition agreement to form a Government. While the two sides reiterated a commitment to advance peace agreements and cooperate with Israel's neighbours, they also agreed on advancing annexation of parts of the West Bank, starting on 1 July. The Palestinian Authority has threatened that, if this move takes place, the Authority will cancel the implementation of all bilateral agreements.

Despite those worrisome developments, I am encouraged that the COVID-19 crisis has also created some opportunities for cooperation. I hope that those opportunities will not be undermined or destroyed if the political context between Israel and the Palestinian Authority deteriorates. With support from the United Nations, both sides are coordinating their efforts to tackle the common threat posed by the pandemic. Much more can — and must — be done. The recognition of that interdependence could, if there is political will, translate into tangible progress towards resolving the conflict. I strongly urge Israeli and Palestinian leaders to seize this moment to take steps towards peace and to reject unilateral moves that will only deepen the wedge between the two peoples and undermine the chances for peace.

Developments on the ground continue to be dominated by the COVID-19 crisis and efforts to respond to its medical, social and economic consequences. The United Nations has put together a response plan, requesting \$34 million to respond to the public health needs and immediate humanitarian consequences of the pandemic in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. The response plan, led by Deputy Special Coordinator McGoldrick, was developed in coordination with the Palestinian Ministry of Health. It will provide an important bridge to the Palestinian Government's broader socioeconomic recovery plan. I thank all Member States that have contributed and encourage others to urgently support those critical efforts.

Since the start of the crisis, the United Nations has delivered more than 1 million items such as essential drugs and equipment for the management of COVID-19, including personal protective equipment, laboratory materials, thousands of tests, oxygen therapy devices and advanced analysis machines. Those items have reached hospitals and clinics directly and also through the Palestinian Ministry of Health. The United Nations and its partners have provided training for Gaza health workers to build capacity on the ground, while the World Health Organization and UNICEF

continue efforts to procure essential intensive care unit and ventilator equipment. On 15 April, the Palestinian Ministry of Health sent a shipment of drugs and supplies to Gaza that included laboratory and testing materials, dialysis materials and some critical medication.

Israel also continues its efforts to provide and facilitate COVID-19-related assistance to the Palestinians. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is also engaged in response efforts, having opened its health services to non-refugees in Gaza. In that context, I welcome the efforts of Jordan and Sweden in hosting the second Ministerial Strategic Dialogue on UNRWA on 22 April, as well as the important focus placed on the need to continue supporting the Agency.

I take this opportunity to commend, once again, the Palestinian and Israeli authorities for their continued efforts and sustained coordination to contain the virus and mitigate its economic fallout.

However, despite the positive steps, significant challenges remain. Palestinian health services continue to report an acute shortage of medical equipment and personnel owing to insufficient funding. In Gaza, the Ministry of Health reported that it ran out of 44 per cent of essential medical supplies in March. In addition, there is an urgent need for laboratory materials for conducting testing, as well as intensive care unit equipment. Tens of thousands of Palestinian workers have remained in Israel, providing for their families during a difficult time. If they return home, they must be properly quarantined and screened. The United Nations country team is working with the Palestinian authorities to ensure that the necessary facilities are in place for such an eventuality.

In East Jerusalem, where the health network is chronically underfunded, only two of six hospitals are prepared to deal with cases of COVID-19 that require clinical care. The Israeli closure of a COVID-19 testing clinic in the Silwan area of East Jerusalem on 14 April has also raised concerns. Although no COVID-19 cases have been reported among prisoners thus far, the Palestinian leadership has expressed concern regarding the potential impact of the crisis on detainees in Israeli prisons. I encourage all authorities to consider the release of detainees or alternatives for those in various forms of detention who are particularly vulnerable, such as the elderly or those with pre-existing medical conditions, children and women.

The impact of the virus on women and girls is particularly concerning. Evidence is emerging that gender-based violence, including domestic violence, has increased since the onset of the pandemic. The crisis is also impacting women's engagement in economic activities and exacerbating pre-existing gender inequalities. According to a recent survey by UN-Women, 27 per cent of women's businesses have been shut down, and 73 per cent of women surveyed indicated that they can sustain their businesses under the current conditions for only a maximum of four months. I encourage the Palestinian Government to work with the United Nations and take all the necessary measures to protect women and girls.

Aside from the immediate health concerns, COVID-19 will also take a severe toll on the broader socioeconomic situation. If current trends continue, the damage to the economy jeopardizes the very existence of the Palestinian Authority. Revenues from trade, tourism and transfers have declined to their lowest levels in the last two decades. The Authority's fiscal gap for 2020 will likely exceed \$1 billion. Israel has a critical responsibility to ensure the well-being and safety of people under its control. As a result of the occupation, the Palestinian Authority has limited sway over its economy and does not have access to the conventional monetary and fiscal tools necessary to remedy the crisis.

Following a series of consultations recently held with the Israeli and Palestinian Ministers of Finance, I can report today that measures are being discussed that will ensure that, for the coming four months, clearance revenue transferred by Israel to the Palestinian Authority does not fall below \$137 million per month. That is the minimum amount necessary to ensure the Palestinian Authority's fiscal viability and critical service delivery to the Palestinian people. In that context, I also welcome the Palestinian Prime Minister's announcement of an emergency budget aimed at keeping public spending to a minimum. This budget should re-orient all spending towards health-related expenditures, income support to vulnerable people, support for affected firms and continuity of Government, including salaries and security-related expenditures. Gaza's specific needs must also be addressed in the budget.

Turning briefly to Gaza, a relative calm has prevailed in and around the Strip. Two rockets were launched towards Israel on 27 March, and in response the Israel Defense Forces fired three missiles at targets it identified as militant facilities. Earlier this month, however, Hamas security forces detained eight civil society activists on the grounds of "establishing a normalization activity with the Israeli occupation". Three have been released. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has raised serious concerns over the legality of the detentions, fair trial standards and the risk of ill-treatment in and outside detention. I reiterate its call for the civil society activists to be released.

Meanwhile, the Erez crossing has been largely shut down since 12 March, except for the exit of emergency medical cases and cancer patients. Severe movement restrictions have been put in place inside Gaza as well. Exit via the Rafah crossing was also halted on 15 March. Since 13 April, however, the crossing has reopened in one direction. Egypt has allowed some 1,600 Palestinians to return to Gaza. Local health authorities there have organized isolation facilities, placing all who return in a mandatory three-week quarantine. The United Nations is working with all stakeholders to ensure that those facilities are properly maintained and appropriate screening mechanisms are put in place.

Despite a notable decline in clashes owing to COVID-19-related movement restrictions, sporadic violent incidents continued in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Overall, three Palestinians were killed and 25 injured, including four children, in various incidents. Two Israelis were injured, including one civilian and one member of the security forces. On 22 March, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 32-year-old Palestinian man and injured his relative, while they were travelling on a main road in the central West Bank. The Israeli military reported that the two were throwing stones at vehicles, an account that has been disputed by family members. On 22 April, a Palestinian man carried out a car ramming and stabbing attack against an Israeli border police officer and was subsequently shot and killed. In East Jerusalem, the situation in the Al-Issawiya neighbourhood remained tense, with clashes and arrests taking place during the reporting period.

On 3 April, Israeli police detained the Palestinian Minister of Jerusalem Affairs for several hours and interrogated him over allegations of violating an Israeli law prohibiting Palestinian Authority activities in Jerusalem without coordination. The Minister was released on the condition that he abstain from such activities and was banned from movement within East Jerusalem for 14 days. Later, on 5 April, the Palestinian Authority's Governor of Jerusalem was arrested over similar allegations and released on the following day.

During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recorded an increase in settler-related violence as compared to January and February, with some 38 incidents of Israeli settlers injuring Palestinians or damaging their property. OCHA also recorded 11 Palestinian attacks against

Israeli civilians in the West Bank, resulting in one injured person and damage to 11 vehicles. Meanwhile, the Israeli authorities demolished 34 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C for lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which remain very difficult for Palestinians to obtain. No structures were demolished in East Jerusalem during the reporting period or in Area C of the West Bank since 26 March. While the temporary halt in home demolitions is a positive measure, the continued targeting of other structures, in particular water and hygiene-related structures, remains of concern.

Turning briefly to the region, on the Golan, where the ceasefire between Israel and Syria has been generally maintained, the overall security situation remains stable despite some continued violations by both parties, including the presence of unauthorized personnel and equipment in the areas of separation and limitation. On 13 April, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) observed 15 drones flying from the Alpha side to the Bravo side over the area of separation, with five of the drones heading towards the area of limitation on the Bravo side. On 17 April, UNDOF observed an aircraft from the Alpha side flying across the ceasefire line and over the area of separation. Around the same time, UNDOF saw the Syrian armed forces at a position in the area of separation fire shots across the ceasefire line towards an aircraft flying on the Alpha side. These developments have the potential to escalate the situation between the two sides. The parties have an obligation to respect the terms of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces.

In Lebanon, since the Government declared a state of general mobilization owing to the public health emergency on 15 March, state security forces have enforced lockdown measures and distributed aid to vulnerable Lebanese households. In parallel, the deteriorating socioeconomic situation has led to renewed demonstrations in parts of the country. The Palestine refugee camps are increasingly volatile as the population has been severely impacted by the economic crisis and is now facing the mounting threat of COVID-19, with the first case in a refugee camp confirmed this week. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Hassan Diab's promised economic rescue plan remains under discussion by Cabinet.

As we continue our collective efforts to contain COVID-19, we must not lose sight of the critical decisions that lie ahead for Israeli political leaders and which may impact the trajectory of the conflict for years to come. Moves to annex land and accelerate settlement expansion, combined with the devastating impact of COVID-19, could ignite the situation and destroy any hope of peace. The path of unilateral action will lead only to more conflict and suffering. However, there is a different path — one of working together to modernize and expand existing agreements, of solidifying the current relative calm in Gaza, of implementing the recommendations of the 2016 report of the Middle East Quartet (S/2016/595, annex) and of actively taking steps towards a negotiated two-State solution based on relevant United Nations resolutions, bilateral agreements and international law.

Nevertheless, I would like to end my briefing today by conveying my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the entire United Nations family, particularly to the World Health Organization team and Deputy Special Coordinator McGoldrick, who have been working tirelessly on the ground since the onset of COVID-19. They continue to demonstrate on a daily basis their unwavering commitment to support efforts to contain this deadly pandemic, protect the most vulnerable and uphold the values of the United Nations, never losing sight of our common path to sustainable peace.

Annex 2**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve**

I thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his statement. Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Let me first turn to the recent developments regarding the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. We echo the appeal of the United Nations Middle East envoys made in line with the Secretary-General's recent call for a global ceasefire during the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage cooperation and coordination between the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities and stress Israel's responsibility as an occupying Power in that regard. Measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus should be in line with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The situation in East Jerusalem is a cause for concern owing to both the lack of information as well as the lack of access to testing and appropriate medical care. The forced closure of a testing facility in Silwan is of particular concern.

In addition, with regard to the West Bank, we call for an end to the destruction and seizure of health, water and sanitation facilities, which not only constitutes a breach of international humanitarian law but also undermines efforts to contain the spread of the virus.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has a significant impact on the Palestinian health system, already strained by long-standing challenges, particularly in Gaza. We call on the Israeli authorities to immediately lift the blockade of Gaza and call on all duty bearers to enable the entry of essential medical supplies and humanitarian workers into Gaza to provide relief.

We welcome the efforts deployed by the United Nations, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in the fight against COVID-19. We remain concerned about UNRWA's lack of funding. The COVID-19 crisis will have dire socioeconomic consequences for an already weakened Palestinian economy and for the budget of the Palestinian Authority. We welcome the initial intentions of Israel to release the withheld clearance revenues, in line with its commitments under the Paris Protocol, and call for the smooth regular transfer of funds to the Palestinian Authority.

We are deeply concerned about the wider effects of the pandemic on the most vulnerable, including women and children. We call on all duty bearers to take immediate action to release all Palestinian child detainees in order to ensure their safety and health amid this pandemic.

The current COVID-19 pandemic only further exacerbates an already fragile situation on the ground, where security incidents and human rights violations occur every day. In that regard, we note with concern the sharp increase in settler violence in the past few weeks. We urge Israel, as an occupying Power, to protect the population and to ensure that those responsible are held accountable. The developments on the ground once again underline the need to reach a sustainable and peaceful resolution of the conflict that is in line with international law and the internationally agreed parameters. The international community needs to exert all possible efforts to get the parties around the table and to take a clear stance against any unilateral measure that undermines the viability of the two-State solution.

I would like to express our deepest concern about provisions regarding the prospect of the annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied Palestinian territories in the political agreement that has opened the way for the formation of a national

emergency Government in Israel. If put into practice, such provisions would constitute a clear breach of international law, as well as the resolutions of the Security Council, and would risk entailing significant legal, political, security and other consequences. Annexation would undermine any prospect for the start of negotiations. As a friend and close partner of Israel, we therefore strongly advise the Israeli Government against such steps. We also call on the international community to take a clear stance against any steps towards annexation in order to give space to international and multilateral efforts aimed at reaching a fair and durable peace.

Annex 3**Statement by the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Zhang Jun**

China thanks Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

During our last video-teleconference on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (see S/2020/263), many of us expressed some optimism at the signs of coordination between Israel and Palestine in fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. However, coming into this month, we witness more worrisome developments.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has recorded the persistent demolition of Palestinian-owned structures. Acts of violence against Palestinian civilians continue. Settlement activities are ongoing, while plans for annexation are reportedly being advanced.

China takes note of the recent letter from President Abbas to the Secretary-General, as well as the statement of members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries circulated for today's meeting, and shares their concerns. I would like to highlight the following.

The first issue is to put an end to unilateral acts that may aggravate conflict and tension. China is greatly concerned about the alleged plan to annex the occupied Palestinian territory, which goes against international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

We urge the relevant parties to refrain from taking any such unilateral steps. The Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire should be heeded. The relevant parties should cease all settlement activities and stop the demolition of Palestinian homes and the destruction of Palestinian properties. Measures should also be taken to prevent violence against civilians.^[F]^[SEP] Secondly, strengthening preparedness and response with regard to COVID-19 must be given top priority. The vulnerability of the occupied Palestinian territory under this pandemic is clear. Mr. Mladenov has repeatedly warned about the dire humanitarian situation and possible catastrophe, especially in the Gaza Strip.

We encourage Israel and the Palestinian Authority to sustain and enhance cooperation on the public health and security fronts, wherever the pandemic necessitates. The relevant parties should fulfil their obligations under international law in order to ensure the delivery of essential services and humanitarian aid to those in need.

We call for the lifting of the blockade against Gaza, which hinders pandemic responses. UNRWA has intensified its efforts to help the Palestine refugee community to address this unprecedented health crisis. Its critical work is highly recognized. The international community should continue to support the work of UNRWA, including through increased and stable financial support.

The third matter is to continue pursuing a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. In his letter to the Secretary-General, President Abbas called for the necessary mechanisms towards ending this conflict and called on the Security Council to adopt such mechanisms.

The international community should turn the current crisis of the pandemic into an opportunity, invest more efforts in pushing for a political process, commit to the two-State solution and work towards the early resumption of peace talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative should be observed. Any new initiatives should, without exception, meet those basic international parameters. The Council should work with the international community to advance the Middle East peace process.

China maintains its principled positions on the Palestine issue, and we stand ready to help the Palestinian people in their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chinese Government has provided emergency medical supplies, including testing kits, protective gear, protective goggles and N95 face masks, to the Palestinian people. Chinese charity institutions are also doing the same. We will continue to do so.

We remain committed to supporting the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights and establish a Palestinian State, with full sovereignty, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Annex 4

Statement by the Special Envoy to the Security Council of the Dominican Republic, José Singer Weisinger

I would like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

At the outset, the Dominican Republic would like to echo the Secretary-General's call for a worldwide ceasefire to allow a full response to the threat of the coronavirus disease pandemic. In these very difficult times, we continue to see a situation that is far from settled.

Although we have seen in various reports that there has been close coordination between the Israeli and Palestinian health authorities, which is unprecedented and must be commended, we must not ignore the underlying issues that still prevail.

Having pointed out the above, we must insist that the Security Council ensures that the situation between Israel and Palestine be resolved within the framework of the recognition of and respect for mutual rights. We favour a two-State solution, where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

We support continuing collaboration between Israel and the Palestinian people, especially during these challenging times. It is important to put in place facilities for the orderly return and testing of workers coming from Israel and to provide assistance to families who are financially affected by the virus. Israel should consider allowing access for humanitarian personnel and the needed medical supplies to Gaza.

We reiterate that the only way forward is through a political dialogue and positive leadership that ultimately lead the parties back to the negotiating table.

The Dominican Republic welcomes Prime Minister Shtayyeh's publication of an emergency budget aimed at keeping public spending to a minimum. Indeed, the budget should focus on health-related priorities to support vulnerable Palestinians.

The Palestinian Government is still very much in need of external support. We encourage donor countries to continue their contributions, which would make it possible to meet the deep basic needs of the Palestinian population and to work towards laying the foundations for development to alleviate them.

Finally, we recognize that an intra-Palestinian reconciliation process that allows the necessary national consolidation to advance the legitimate aspirations of the nation and leads to a process of political renewal, based on free and inclusive elections, must be initiated.

Annex 5**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Sven Jürgenson**

I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. I align myself with the statement submitted by the European Union.

Estonia is concerned about the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and we call for unity and solidarity with all those affected. We join the Secretary-General's call to put aside mistrust and animosity, to create corridors for life-saving aid and to open precious windows for diplomacy.

We also support the joint appeal by the five United Nations envoys to the Middle East calling on all parties to stop the rapid spread of the virus and to work to resolve their differences through dialogue, negotiation, mediation or other peaceful means.

We welcome the cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to fight against the coronavirus disease outbreak, and we encourage them to enhance such cooperation even further. The role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in supporting that cooperation and in stabilizing the region is central. The mitigation and response to the spread of the coronavirus needs special attention in the Gaza Strip, where resources remain limited. We have also noted the initial encouraging signs by the leaders of Israel and Gaza with regard to a possible prisoner exchange, which would be a welcome humanitarian gesture.

As the pandemic affects both the Israelis and the Palestinians, it also reminds us of the need to continue efforts to resolve the conflict. The initiative taken by the United States of America has given us the impetus to revive the process. We call on Israel and Palestine to take steps towards resuming direct and meaningful negotiations, in line with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, leading to a negotiated two-State solution and taking into account the legitimate aspirations of both parties. We urge the regional and international players, including the Middle East Quartet, to continue their efforts towards negotiations.

Recognizing the challenges ahead, the coronavirus not being the least of them, the most important goal should be to keep the prospects for moving towards peace alive and to call on the parties to refrain from actions that undermine that, in the spirit of resolution 2334 (2016).

In that regard, Israel's announcements of settlement development in several areas in East Jerusalem and around it, especially in Har Homa, Givat Hamatos and the E-1 area, are worrisome. Our position on settlement activity remains unchanged. It is illegal under international law and undermines the prospects for the peace process. In addition, we stress that the annexation of any parts of the occupied Palestinian territories would be in contravention of international law.

It is also crucial that all parties refrain from acts of violence, terror and incitement and focus on the common fight against the virus. We condemn firing rockets from Gaza into Israel, as well as any other form of violence targeting the civilian population. An escalation of violence would be negative for all sides and would further undermine the prospects for a resolution of the conflict.

Annex 6**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

I thank Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing. France aligns with the written statement of the European Union (EU), which reaffirms the EU's long-standing position on the two-State solution.

First and foremost, I want to reiterate France's grave concern over the threat of annexation in the light of the recent developments. France, along with its European partners, has repeatedly warned against the annexation of parts of the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley and settlements. It would constitute a blatant violation of international law, which strictly prohibits the acquisition by force of occupied territories. Such steps, if implemented, would not pass unchallenged and will not be overlooked in our relationship with Israel.

We have also condemned the recent announcements by the Israeli Government with regard to advancing settlements in Jerusalem and the West Bank, especially in the E1 area, as well as Givat Hamatos and Har Homa, which are located in particularly sensitive areas. Such announcements threaten the viability of a future Palestinian State.

We call on the Israeli Government to halt the publication of tenders or any measures aimed at promoting construction in Har Homa, Givat Hamatos and the E1 area, as well as not to take any unilateral action that would undermine the two-State solution and the prospect of renewed peace talks. We will not recognize any changes to the June 1967 lines unless agreed to by both parties. It is a matter of principle. Respect for international law, including the resolutions of the Security Council, is without exception. However, it is also about being pragmatic. The two-State solution is the only way to bring a sustainable peace to the region. That is in the interest of the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well as the neighbouring EU.

Secondly, let me stress the importance of increased Israeli-Palestinian coordination in the response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), with the adequate support of the international community.

In echo of the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, all actors must refrain from hostile acts, maintain the ceasefire and ensure rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all those in need. There is no alternative to effectively fight the pandemic.

I want to echo the Special Coordinator's concerns regarding the vulnerabilities of Gaza and the lack of sufficient medical equipment to respond to COVID-19. The Israeli Government should guarantee the continued delivery of medical equipment and allow humanitarian evacuations. The Palestinian Authority is also responsible for the provision of medical aid and supplies to the Strip.

Moreover, France recalls that there will be no sustainable stability in Gaza without the lifting of the blockade, with credible security guarantees for Israel and the restoration of the Palestinian Authority through intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

The Israeli and Palestinian authorities must enhance their cooperation to deal with the current health situation. More generally, I urge Israel to implement a full suspension of demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian and international infrastructure in the context of COVID-19, and to allow the delivery of medical equipment and humanitarian emergency evacuations, in accordance with its duties as occupying Power.

There is also a need for a comprehensive and lasting agreement to the clearance revenues issue to enable the Palestinian Authority to deal with the response to COVID-19.

Last but not least, the international community needs to step up its support to the Palestinian territories. The French Development Agency is mobilizing €3 million to support the Palestinian response to COVID-19. The European Union has mobilized €71 million in support of Palestinian health-care services and to alleviate the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.

In this context, I want to thank the United Nations, and particularly the World Health Organization and UNRWA's humanitarian workers, whose role notably remains crucial in the context of COVID-19. France remains concerned about the growing obstacles facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on the ground in Palestine and in East Jerusalem in particular, especially at a time when its work is all the more essential. UNRWA's mandate is crucial to allow for a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to be found to the refugee question.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate France's readiness to support the resumption of negotiations based on the internationally agreed parameters. COVID-19 shows the necessity to coordinate and the mutual interests of the Israeli and Palestinian people. Like public health, peace is a public good and the Security Council should unite its efforts to promote peace.

Annex 7**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, Juergen Schulz**

We remain concerned at the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. COVID-19 is a common threat that knows no boundaries and endangers Israelis and Palestinians alike. We therefore call on both parties to enhance their coordination and cooperation in order to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak in Israel, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

Recalling their respective responsibilities and obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, we call on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to ensure the delivery of COVID-19-related aid and to facilitate the access and movement of medical supplies, equipment, materials and personnel, in particular to the vulnerable population in the Gaza Strip.

We commend the United Nations for its efforts to support Israeli-Palestinian coordination and to respond to the humanitarian consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Germany has made an early disbursement of unearmarked funding in the amount of €18 million to provide the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) with more financial flexibility to tackle pandemic-related challenges. We have also made available funding for the Gaza Strip, in the amount of €19 million, and the Syria emergency appeal, in the amount of €14 million. As UNRWA plays a critical role in the current pandemic, Germany is currently considering how we can support specific COVID-19-related appeals. We call on other international donors to provide similar support to the Palestinian Authority, the United Nations Inter-Agency Response Plan and UNRWA.

However, international donor support alone will not suffice to effectively address the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis in the Palestinian territories. It is also of utmost importance that the Palestinian Authority be able to count on a regular, sufficient and predictable transfer of clearance revenues from Israel. We therefore call on both parties to renew their efforts to agree on the unresolved fiscal files, in accordance with the Paris Protocol.

We express our full support for the joint appeal of 11 April by the Secretary-General's Envoys to the Middle East.

The parties to the conflict and all international stakeholders must exercise maximum restraint and refrain from taking any measures that may lead to a further deterioration of the situation on the ground and risk undermining the viability of a negotiated two-State solution.

Germany remains convinced that a negotiated two-State solution based on international law and on the internationally agreed parameters is the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs, fulfils Palestinian aspirations to statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967, resolves all permanent status issues and guarantees equal rights for all inhabitants.

We have to find ways to revive the political process and to resume direct and meaningful negotiations between the parties in order to resolve the final status issues, including the issues related to borders, the status of Jerusalem, security and refugees, and achieve a just and lasting peace. Germany firmly believes that the

format and the basis of such direct and meaningful negotiations must be agreed by both parties.

That said, we consider reviving a multilateral format, such as the Middle East Quartet, and using Security Council resolutions, international law and the internationally agreed parameters as the basis for any discussions or negotiations to be the most promising way to advance towards a negotiated, just and viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is acceptable to both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Unilateral actions creating facts on the ground will not lead to sustainable peace and security but to perpetual instability and insecurity.

We have taken note of the coalition agreement in Israel, intended to end the stalemate following three rounds of national elections. We are extremely concerned about its provisions with regard to the application of Israeli sovereignty to parts of the occupied Palestinian territories.

We strongly advise any Israeli Government against the annexation of occupied Palestinian territories. This would constitute a clear violation of international law and have serious, negative repercussions not only for the viability of the two-State solution and the entire peace process, but potentially also for regional stability and Israel's standing within the international community.

Germany will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, unless agreed to by both parties, and we will continue to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. In this context, we reiterate our position that Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law and severely undermine the prospects for ending the occupation and achieving a negotiated two-State solution.

We call on Israel to end the expansion of settlements, including the recent construction plans for Har Homa, Givat Hamatos and the E-1 area, the legalization of settlement outposts, and the ongoing demolition and confiscation of Palestinian structures and land.

Resolution 2334 (2016) needs to be fully implemented, with regard not only to settlement activities, but also to acts of terror, violence against civilians, incitement, provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric, which also constitute obstacles to achieving peace. Germany condemns all attacks on Israel in the strongest possible terms, including the repeated firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Germany aligns itself with the statement submitted by the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations on behalf of the European Union.

Annex 8**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations, Dian Triansyah Djani**

I wish to begin by thanking Special Coordinator Mladenov for his important update to the Council on the latest developments on the ground.

With the unprecedented spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), it is high time for the Council once again to support the Secretary-General's call to protect the most vulnerable populations and those least able to protect themselves, including people under occupation. The Secretary-General has also reminded the world that

“international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law continue to apply, even — and especially — in challenging times like these”.

With that in mind, I would like to make the following points.

First, Israel must not be allowed to continue its path of annexation. Recent developments in Israel indicate that the occupying Power is persistently aiming to formally annex parts of Palestinian land in the West Bank. That intention, coupled with Israel's unrelenting statements, demolition of Palestinian properties and insistent creeping annexation — I repeat, creeping annexation — through its settlement activities, show that the threat of Israeli annexation is real and imminent.

These are clear violations of international law, including international humanitarian law, and various Security Council resolutions. Israel's insistence on continuing this path of annexation would demolish any prospect of peace, destabilize regional stability and ultimately undermine the security interests of Israel itself.

We therefore urge the Security Council to stand by its solemn mandate to maintain international peace and security and halt Israel's illegitimate actions in the West Bank. The Security Council must make its stance clear.

Secondly, Israel has the legal obligation to safeguard the lives and safety of the people under its occupation. Instead of pursuing the vicious objective of formally annexing Palestinian lands, Israel should be focusing on discharging its international legal obligations. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Based on figures from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, since 5 March Israel has demolished at least 53 Palestinian properties, conducted hundreds of arrests and raids, killed 3 Palestinians and injured another 52 persons. Not only are these measures illegal; they also clearly undermine efforts to address the pandemic.

Technical coordination between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities is a necessity during this crisis. This, however, does not absolve Israel of its legal obligation to take all necessary measures to enable Palestinians to better cope with COVID-19. Israel must ensure that Palestinians have the required medical facilities and equipment. It must also provide unhindered humanitarian access and stop all punitive and illegal actions against Palestinians, including the Gaza blockade.

I also concur with Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov on the need for Israel to release Palestinian detainees from Israeli prisons, in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thirdly, I turn to the need to ensure the availability of necessary assistance to the Palestinians. Palestine is facing immense challenges, including limited health-system capacity and a serious fiscal situation resulting from the occupying Power withholding Palestinian revenues. The public health implications of the outbreak

of the virus could be catastrophic, not only in Gaza but also in the West Bank, as alluded to by Mr. Mladenov. There is already case of COVID-19 in the refugee camp.

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to all the United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as well as all donor countries and various civil society organizations working hard to help Palestine cope with this situation.

On emergency response funding, the \$34 million targeted need for the COVID-19 Inter-Agency Response Plan has yet to be fulfilled. But again, this is only limited to 90 days emergency response funding; it does not cover the larger scope of the problem. I would therefore appeal to the international community to extend support to the Palestinians at this time of heightened need. We are in this crisis together, and only by joining hands can we prevail over it.

In closing, let us be reminded that the Security Council has a moral and legal obligation to hold Israel accountable for its illegal actions, and to end its occupation of Palestinian lands. Our objective should remain to achieve the vision of a region where two sovereign States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace, within secured and recognized borders based on those of 4 June 1967.

Finally, I once again reaffirm Indonesia's unequivocal solidarity and support of the Palestinian people, particularly during this difficult time. As tomorrow is the start of the holy month of Ramadan, I appeal for peace and for assistance for the people of Palestine. I also echo my Palestinian brother — now is the time for the occupying Power to be humane and have a heart.

Annex 9**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry**

I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing and assure him of our full support in his tireless efforts to bring about lasting peace in the Middle East.

The persistence of tensions between Palestine and Israel, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip with the advent of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the continued annexation of Palestinian land, and the cycle of violence and reprisals in the Middle East must stop for negotiations in the framework of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process to resume. To that end, we call on both parties to renounce all unilateral action in order to strengthen mutual confidence.

My delegation would like to stress that, if Israelis and Palestinians are to achieve their legitimate aspirations, respectively, to security and to the creation of a viable State, they must return to the negotiating table on sound, mutually acceptable bases, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We call on Israel to respect the principles of international law in the occupied territories and take steps to end the occupation of Palestinian land, including in East Jerusalem, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016). The continuation of the occupation and threat to grab additional land will only jeopardize the two-State solution backed by the international community at large.

I therefore express our hope that the spirit of 20 April consensus between Israeli political blocks regarding the formation of a coalition Government will carry over to the negotiating table so that the two parties may achieve tangible results on the road to sustainable peace.

On the humanitarian front, my delegation welcomes the cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in bringing in medical equipment and products to control the COVID-19 pandemic in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. That cooperation must be broadened and strengthened in order to adequately address the crisis. We hope that this commendable rapprochement can continue and serve as a springboard for the relaunching of the political process.

At this critical moment, my delegation appeals to the international community to strengthen its assistance to the Gaza Strip to alleviate the shortage of health workers, medicines, medical equipment and supplies, including through increased support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, so as to enable it to continue its useful activities on the ground.

In conclusion, I would like to stress, for the attention of our Council and the international community, that there is no better place in the world to show compassion and forgiveness than the region of the Middle East, the cradle of the three great monotheistic religions. The Secretary-General's message in declaring that "the fury of the virus shows the folly of war" must be heard clearly by the protagonists in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Annex 10**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia**

We thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

In the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, Russia supports the timely call of the Secretary-General to immediately stop the hostilities, secure a ceasefire and introduce a humanitarian pause in conflict areas. This has particular relevance for the longest-running crisis in the Middle East, the solution to which is vital for the region — the Palestinian question.

We welcome the ongoing contacts between Palestinians and Israelis to combat the coronavirus pandemic. The focus is on cooperation in the field of health care, but other issues are being discussed, too. We hope that those contacts will become part of a series of confidence-building measures in terms of a broader dialogue between the parties.

We echo the concerns expressed by others about the potential consequences of the spread of the disease in the Gaza Strip. We note the deliveries of medical equipment by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). However, given the humanitarian situation in Gaza, those efforts should be increased and multiplied. The work of UNRWA and support for it by the international community is more important than ever. Of course, the safety of UNRWA staff is a priority.

We are going through a difficult time in the Middle East peace process that is being even further aggravated by COVID-19. However, our principal approach remains unchanged. Russia supports a just and fair solution to the Palestinian question on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, which provide the basis for the creation of an independent, sovereign, territorially contiguous Palestinian State within 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Last month we took part in a teleconference of Special Envoys to the Middle East Quartet of international mediators and discussed the current challenges facing the Middle East peace process. It was agreed that it is important to revitalize the Quartet and to continue contacts. At the same time, we are ready to consider other formats for interaction, including through the participation of countries of the region and the League of Arab States.

The Palestinian side has repeatedly stated that it was ready to resume negotiations on final-status issues. Israeli representatives have said the same thing. Consultations with both parties should be continued so that they can determine the parameters of such negotiations and proceed with them as soon as possible.

Regrettably, reports indicate that settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian property continue. Deadly clashes have not stopped. We took note of the understanding reached between Israeli political leaders on overcoming the domestic political crisis. However, we note with concern the plans, according to incoming reports, for the unilateral implementation of the so-called deal of the century with regard to the annexation of Palestinian territories. In this regard, we consider it critical, in order to preserve the peace process, to refrain from any provocative actions or unilateral steps.

The task of achieving inter-Palestinian unity remains extremely urgent. Russia is making efforts to bring the Palestinian ranks together. We highly appreciate the role of our Egyptian friends in this regard.

Annex 11**Statement by the Second Deputy Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Halimah DeShong**

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened today's open video-teleconference. Let me also thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his valuable and comprehensive briefing on this important issue.

Today's meeting comes at a moment of great uncertainty for the occupied Palestinian territory. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is the greatest challenge we have faced in a generation, with far-reaching health, sociopolitical and security implications. It is also accompanied by the worst economic shock since the Great Depression of the 1930s, with repercussions in every country, including Palestine. We commend the solidarity and support between the Palestinian and Israeli authorities sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic and urge both parties to continue to enhance their cooperation. At the same time, the potential for better cooperation will be stymied by continuing illegal settlement activity and the threat of annexation of the occupied Palestinian territory.

We welcome and fully support the joint appeal by the Secretary-General's Envoys to the Middle East to all parties to engage, in good faith and without preconditions, in negotiating an immediate cessation of hostilities, sustaining existing ceasefires and putting in place more durable and comprehensive ceasefires to achieve longer-term resolutions to the conflicts across the region.

The two-State solution is facing serious challenges today. In addressing any political reality, solutions must adequately address the needs of all parties. Imposed solutions will not work. We firmly believe that a two-State solution provides the most coherent framework for a democratic Israeli State living in peace and security next to an independent and sovereign Palestine and would bring stability and prosperity to the wider region.

The deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza requires immediate action and the broad support of the international community. The Israeli and Palestinian leaderships ought to be pragmatic as they pursue the compromise necessary to secure a peaceful and prosperous future for their peoples. To that end, we reiterate the call for ending the 13-year blockade on the Gaza Strip in the face of COVID-19 and the humanitarian crisis.

Israeli settlements are one of the biggest impediments to the peace settlement. Therefore, we reiterate that all United Nations resolutions that call for an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories are to be enforced. We also call for the immediate and effective application of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which Israel has ratified.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines also reiterates its support for the principles embodied in the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. We hope for stability and peace throughout Palestinian territory through the rule of law and the support of the international community.

Let me conclude by expressing our continued support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. We must act collectively to support the Agency and to respond to the public-health needs and immediate humanitarian consequences of the

pandemic in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. In these times, we encourage the Israelis and Palestinians to immediately come together around the negotiating table in order to restore peace and prosperity to the occupied Palestinian territory and end the pain of the Palestinian people.

Annex 12**Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Jerry Matjila**

Allow me to begin by reiterating South Africa's position on the situation between Palestine and Israel. We will continue to support all efforts aimed at the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with Israel, within internationally recognized borders based on those of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with all relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and internationally agreed parameters.

Additionally, a viable and sustainable peace plan for the Middle East must ensure that Palestine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and economic viability are guaranteed, with sovereign equality between Palestine and Israel.

In the light of the recent developments pertaining to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, South Africa fully supports the call by the Secretary-General for an immediate global ceasefire as well as the call by the United Nations envoys to the Middle East for all parties to engage in negotiations in good faith and without preconditions. That call is particularly pertinent to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. In this regard, we have noted the coordination between Israel and Palestine in responding to the pandemic. It is important for all parties to use this opportunity, in jointly responding to the virus, to build trust and confidence between the parties. This health crisis should not be a means to further individual political objectives.

In that regard, it is disconcerting to hear that, during these unprecedented times, there is still a continual, indiscriminate use of force against Palestinians as well as the wanton destruction of their property, the annexation of occupied territory and the continuing establishment of settlements. Israel's policy of settling its civilians in occupied Palestinian territory and displacing the local population contravenes the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law, in reference to article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Moreover, South Africa has noted the recent announcement of a unity Government in Israel and consequent reports of its intention to advance legislation to annex parts of the West Bank from as early as 1 July 2020. This cannot be continued. No country should have the right to decide the fate of the Palestinians; only the Palestinians themselves do. These actions are in direct contravention of several Council resolutions, including resolution 446 (1979) and 2334 (2016), and go against the principles of international law. South Africa therefore continues to insist on the full implementation of those resolutions, as these threats and pronouncements of annexation undermine any prospect for peace between the parties.

In this time, when all efforts should be focused on fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel, as the occupying Power, must ensure that it fulfils its responsibility as mandated by international law to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to all who require it. That includes ensuring the unhindered and safe passage of humanitarian aid, medical supplies and volunteers providing medical assistance to the occupied territories.

With regard to the situation in Gaza, we are deeply concerned at the precarious situation prevailing there, given its severely overburdened and fragile health-care system. We share the concern expressed by the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that an outbreak of COVID-19 in the Gaza Strip would be a disaster of gigantic proportions.

Consequently, South Africa urges the Israeli authorities, in line with their obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, to waive the requirements for

transit permits to allow those in need of urgent medical attention and services to seek them freely outside Gaza. It is particularly concerning to note reports of children leaving Gaza to seek hospital treatment and having to do so without their parents, as their requests for permits have been denied. This inhumane practice must stop, and compassion must prevail.

In this regard, South Africa calls on Member States as well as the international community to support the efforts of UNRWA in providing much-needed humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees. Aside from the need to provide emergency support in the light of COVID-19, UNRWA is reliant on resources for the continuation of its core operations, which necessitate the provision of education and health services as well as food assistance to Palestinian refugees. We are concerned that, given current budget projections, there is a risk that UNRWA's resources could be exhausted by the end of May 2020.

South Africa is deeply troubled at the conditions that Palestinian political prisoners, including children, continue to face. These are now exacerbated by the potential impact of COVID-19. We call for the necessary measures to be taken to improve the provision of health care and hygiene for Palestinian prisoners and detainees, in line with the guidance provided by the World Health Organization for preventing the outbreak of COVID-19 in prisons and detention centres.

We would also like to take this opportunity to remind the occupying Power, Israel, of the United Nations Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners — the Nelson Mandela rules — which stipulate that:

“Prisoners shall have access to the health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation”. (*General Assembly resolution 45/111, annex, para. 9*)

To that end, South Africa reiterates its call for the immediate release of political prisoners, especially vulnerable groups such as the elderly, women, children and people with disabilities, in accordance with international law.

Allow me to conclude by stating that peace can prevail only once the parties have engaged in inclusive dialogue and peaceful negotiations, as this is the only means of ensuring lasting peace, security and stability.

Annex 13**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, Kais Kabtani**

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing as well as for his active engagement in these difficult circumstances.

The Tunisian delegation aligns itself with the statements submitted by the State of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the United Arab Emirates on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and wishes to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

As we have mentioned before, the chronic Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, violations of fundamental human rights and continuing aggressive unlawful practices on the part of the Israeli occupying Power continue to deepen the economic and social hardship for Palestinians and have had a tremendously devastating impact on their living conditions. All these factors, including occupation plans for settlement expansion, the closure system, the deterioration of the fiscal situation caused by Israel's withholding of Palestinian Authority revenue and the long blockade on Gaza, have devastated the Palestinian economy and limited Palestinian access to basic resources and basic services, including health care.

With a medical infrastructure and facilities damaged by occupation and very limited capabilities, the Palestinian authorities are struggling to combat the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. As the difficulties are huge and the humanitarian needs enormous, we call upon the international community to continue its vital support for the Palestinian Authority, including for the public-health response, the economic recovery efforts and to meet the most pressing needs of Palestine refugees. Tunisia, as a member of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), welcomes the statement by the Chair of the AHLC on 3 April 2020 calling for strong international donor support to strengthen the Palestinian Authority's capacity to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

In that connection, we commend the United Nations and the whole humanitarian community's exceptional efforts to assist in responding to the immediate humanitarian consequences of the pandemic in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. We particularly insist on the necessity of providing continued support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as its financial situation has continued to worsen, including to fund UNRWA's immediate response to COVID-19.

We appeal to the Security Council and the international community to urge Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by its obligations under international law to facilitate the free movement of medical staff, medical supplies and medicine throughout the State of Palestine, and particularly into Gaza, which is already suffering from severe medical shortages due to the siege. The occupying Power also has the responsibility to care for the Palestinian citizens who are in Israel, including Palestinian detainees and workers.

Echoing the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global humanitarian ceasefire, the Middle East Envoys appealed to all to exercise maximum restraint, de-escalate tensions and work to resolve differences through dialogue and negotiation. They further called on all to refrain from any activities that could lead to further deterioration of stability and security in any country or the region as a whole.

In the same spirit, and in line with the repeated calls by the international community, including the Council, Israel must fulfil its obligations under international law, especially by unconditionally ceasing all settlement activities, lifting its blockade on Gaza and ending its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

Unfortunately, the situation on the ground has been rather alarming — with the continuing expansion of settlements, the demolition of homes, discriminatory treatment and provocative actions and rhetoric. The latest reports on Israel's potential move towards annexation are alarming. Israel must refrain from any attempts to implement its long-planned de facto annexation of Palestinian land, which would constitute a grave breach of international law. It is our common responsibility to uphold international law, including the relevant Council resolutions, by strongly rejecting and preventing any such unilateral illegal move, all of which are major obstacles to peace.

In conclusion, I would like to stress once again that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is not sustainable. We should therefore walk the talk and intensify our efforts to revive prospects for peace in the Middle East based on the internationally endorsed terms of reference and parameters in order to end the world's longest ongoing occupation — that of the Palestinian territory — including East Jerusalem, since 4 June 1967, to ensure the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, to end tensions and to guarantee security and peace for all the peoples of the region.

Annex 14**Statement by the Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, James Roscoe**

As others have said this morning, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a global crisis with testing implications for us all. The virus does not respect borders or political, cultural or religious differences. Cooperation must therefore be our first instinct, and we should work to combat this unprecedented challenge together.

We therefore welcome the formation of a national unity Government by Israel. This is an important step that demonstrates the need to put political differences aside in the fight against COVID-19.

We continue to welcome the ongoing cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Government of Israel in their respective responses. It is an example of the responsible approach we need at this difficult time, and is particularly in the spirit of the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire.

The United Nations has played an important part in ensuring ongoing coordination among the Palestinian Authority, Israel and the relevant United Nations agencies, and we hope that will continue.

It is clear that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has an important role to play in helping to respond to the crisis brought about by COVID-19. The virus and its impact on Palestinians and the provision of basic services will put additional pressure on UNRWA. The United Kingdom remains firmly committed to supporting UNRWA and Palestinian refugees across the Middle East, providing over \$80 million for 2019-2020. In the light of the COVID-19 challenge, we are reviewing our contributions.

The United Kingdom is also providing vital support to help respond to COVID-19 in the occupied Palestinian territories. Our \$1 million funding contribution will enable the World Health Organization and UNICEF to purchase and coordinate medical supplies, treat critical-care patients, train front-line public health servants and scale up laboratory testing capabilities.

We must also be mindful of the impact of the virus on the Palestinian economy and economic development. The Palestinian Authority's revenues, which come mostly from levies on trade, are expected to decline by between 60 and 70 per cent as a result of the crisis. The occupied Palestinian territories are excluded from most international mechanisms, including the World Bank's \$14 billion COVID-19 fund. The Palestinian Authority does not issue a currency and cannot adopt the measures many countries are taking to increase liquidity.

We welcome the Palestinian Authority's emergency budget and the agreement of the Israeli Government to guarantee minimum levels of monthly revenue. We look to Israel to ensure that the Palestinian economy is permitted to function and to support the Palestinian Authority's economic stability.

During this fragile period, we call on both parties to refrain from provocative actions that might undermine the cooperation that is so critical. That includes incitement, settlement activity, demolitions and settler violence.

The United Kingdom is particularly concerned that demolitions have continued, including of temporary health centres. Such actions weaken the capacity of Palestinians to respond to COVID-19. Under international humanitarian law, an occupying Power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining public health and hygiene

in occupied territories to the fullest extent of the means available to it. That is why continued cooperation is so vital.

It is also with regret that we have heard about the deaths of two Palestinians, who were shot by Israeli forces during clashes near Nablus in March. It is important that the Israel Defense Forces investigate this incident in an independent and transparent manner and, if any wrongdoing is found, ensure that those responsible are held to account.

Finally, we are deeply concerned about reports that the new Israeli Government coalition has reached an agreement that paves the way for annexation of parts of the West Bank. The United Kingdom position in that regard is clear — any unilateral Israeli move towards annexation of any part of the West Bank would be damaging to efforts to restart peace negotiations and would be contrary to international law.

The United Kingdom's long-standing position on the Middle East peace process has not changed. We support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

Annex 15**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Cherith Norman-Chalet**

I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing and welcome him back to the virtual home the Council has been working in over the past few weeks. Especially in these uncertain times, we appreciate the way he and his team continue to work to address this conflict fairly. That is so important. From so many of this Council's discussions already, we have seen that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is affecting life all over the world. It does not respect persons or borders.

But while our attention is rightly focused on the immediate task of stopping the spread of the virus, we cannot allow our immediate goals to entirely overshadow the long-term goal of achieving progress in the Middle East — the focus of today's briefing. In the light of that long-term goal, I want to focus my remarks today on just one point — in a time of crisis, true leadership is the willingness to make the difficult but right choices for the people you serve. Those choices are neither easy nor in keeping with business as usual, but they lift up those who most need our help. With that point in mind, I want to look at some recent choices that demonstrate true leadership.

Israel is suffering from over 13,000 cases of coronavirus, and we understand that there are more than 300 cases in the West Bank and 15 in Gaza. Because of its limited medical infrastructure and fragile economy, Gaza is especially vulnerable to this virus. Fighting the pandemic must remain the focus of regional authorities. But even as authorities fight the pandemic, what has been striking is the way in which they are exhibiting true leadership — by putting aside politics and making bold decisions for the well-being of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

We have been heartened to see signs of goodwill, humanity and unity between Israelis and Palestinians. Israel has trained four teams of Palestinian health-care workers on the COVID-19 response, and Israeli and Palestinian leaders have established a joint virtual COVID-19 control room to enhance coordination and communication. Moreover, Israel is currently testing COVID-19 treatments that have had promising early results. We commend each of those efforts.

In many of the Council's meetings on this topic, there have been united calls for greater dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, as we believe it is the only way to achieve true and lasting progress. In the midst of this crisis, we are seeing evidence that bears out our belief. The United States is committed to helping leaders make choices that save human lives and honour human dignity. As a part of our own broader contributions to fighting the pandemic around the world, we recently announced \$5 million in aid to Palestinian hospitals and households to meet immediate needs in combating COVID-19.

We will continue to assess how United States assistance can most effectively and efficiently use the resources of our taxpayers, but I want to be clear that we are committed to making the right choices — those that save lives and honour human dignity everywhere. In the light of recent steps taken to form a national emergency Government, please know that Israel can count on our unwavering support as we face today's challenges side by side.

As Ambassador Craft has said on many occasions, Israel has no better friend than the United States. The COVID-19 crisis has been painful, but it has already provided important clarity about which of our priorities really matter. At the end of the day, the tired conversations we repeat and the political battles we continue to fight all pale in comparison to our responsibility to save lives.

Once this crisis passes, the United States hopes our view does not lose that clarity. The incentives for peace and progress between Israelis and Palestinians are stronger than ever. The task now before the Council is to help the parties choose true leadership over politics as usual and to work together to ensure that the prospect of peace remains within reach.

Annex 16**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy**

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his informative briefing.

As noted in the last video-teleconference on the Middle East peace process, we continue to be deeply concerned about the grave situation with regard to the Palestinian question. Dialogue between the two sides with regard to the peace process has stalled for a long time. There are worrisome reports about plans for annexation and further building of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In the last several weeks, there have been reports of a number of incidents between Israelis and Palestinians, including the arrest of hundreds of Palestinians by the Israeli authorities. We call for the immediate cessation of such activities.

Those complicated developments took place against the backdrop of an increasing number of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases in the West Bank and Gaza. There have been almost 400 people infected, many of whom live among communities with difficult living conditions. The risk of a major outbreak among the Palestinian people is extremely high. That is compounded by the dire economic situation that the Palestinians have been facing. Most recently, the World Bank forecasted that the Palestinian economy will contract by 2.5 per cent — in the best-case scenario — or 7 per cent if the COVID-19 pandemic continues for four months. That will seriously aggravate the ongoing public debt, unemployment and poverty.

Given the current circumstances, we are heartened by the most recent examples of cooperation between Palestine and Israel in the fight against COVID-19. The direct talks we have seen between the two Presidents is a very positive gesture and has provided much-needed impetus for the effective coordination between the two sides. We echo other Council members in welcoming the steps that Israel and Palestine have taken together to help treat cases of coronavirus and prevent its further spread. We cannot emphasize enough the need for continuing such important cooperation. It is therefore worrisome to learn of reports of incidents related to health facilities in East Jerusalem. In the light of this emergency, we call on all parties to set aside their differences and prioritize the search for an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In that connection, it is high time that all parties to the Middle East peace process support and faithfully implement the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, and heed the joint appeal by the five United Nations Special Envoys to the Middle East. The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, makes it increasingly urgent to exercise restraint and refrain from acts that may escalate tension, including plans of annexation and more settlements.

To that end, we reiterate our full and consistent support for the United Nations-led efforts. We greatly appreciate the efforts of the Special Coordinator to help ease tension, draw the attention of the international community to the dire need of the Palestinian people and bring the two sides to the table. We hope that those efforts, with the support and involvement of other parties and the international community, will help resume dialogue and negotiations between Israel and Palestine, in order to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the internationally agreed parameters, including the relevant United Nations resolutions. We echo the call of the international community to increase valuable support to the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency

for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order to help alleviate the hardships of the Palestinian people.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to reiterate our position that a lasting and just peace in the region can be achieved only through a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 lines and with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

Annex 17**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, Danny Danon**

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) does not distinguish between peoples or recognize borders. Although the pandemic affects some groups more than others, no group is immune to its devastating outcomes.

That is why a global response is required to contain, mitigate and defeat COVID-19 — one based on unity, solidarity and increased international cooperation. We must all work together to bring this pandemic to an end by offering assistance and support to one another, including the exchange of medical knowledge and best practices. This is not a time for politics, but rather for cooperation.

I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm Israel's commitment to and solidarity with all countries that are fighting this pandemic and to send our best wishes and prayers to people who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and their families. Israel will continue to work with Governments from around the world to help bring this crisis to an end.

In times of crisis, both people and regimes show their true colours, and, while we have witnessed examples of extreme kindness and goodwill the world over, some have resorted once again to their notorious behaviour. They have contaminated the global fight against the pandemic with their petty political interests.

Israel has chosen to put politics aside and embrace the spirit of cooperation. We have strengthened our work with the United Nations and the Palestinian Authority in order to mitigate the disastrous effects of the pandemic in our region. We have joined the effort to fund the emergency plan presented by Mr. Mladenov and Mr. McGoldrick.

Israel is also assisting the Palestinian Authority to counter the economic toll of the crisis. Israel has granted thousands of permits to allow Palestinians who work in Israel to continue to do so. Additionally, the flow of goods has continued in order to ensure the adequacy of supplies. In the past few weeks alone, over 600 tons of medical supplies, 25,000 tons of food and 60,000 tons of building materials have entered the Gaza Strip.

In terms of medical assistance, Israel is also collaborating with the Palestinian Authority to conduct professional medical training for Palestinian workers, helping to ensure that they have the tools and knowledge they need. In addition to sharing best practices, coordination and training, Israel has also donated large amounts of equipment to the Palestinian Authority, including testing kits, protection kits and other medical supplies.

Last month, Israel's Head of State, President Rivlin, and Chairman Abbas discussed coordination to fight the virus.

I wish to remind the Security Council that at its 30 March meeting at which Special Coordinator Mladenov briefed the Council, he and Council members praised the far-reaching measures that Israel has taken (see S/2020/263).

Unfortunately, in sharp contrast to our efforts, the Palestinian Authority has chosen a different path. Instead of joining Israel and the rest of the international community in promoting unity and solidarity, it has chosen hatred and libel. At the same time that it receives Israeli aid and assistance, the Palestinian Authority spreads lies and incitement against Israel in the media and in official letters to the Security Council. Members have received those letters. Although there is never a time to shamelessly lie and seek to incite, there is no doubt that an international

crisis the likes of which the world has never seen is an extremely inappropriate time to do so. Yet, even now, the Palestinian Authority cynically works to promote a false narrative.

This, of course, is nothing new. During times of crisis and disease, anti-Semitism has always raised its ugly head. For centuries, Jews have been used as scapegoats for the outbreak of diseases. As the Black Death ravaged Europe in the fourteenth century, rumours spread that Jews conspired and poisoned wells, extending the epidemic's wide reach. In the eighteenth century, the Jews were blamed for the plague in Algeria. In every generation, for every calamity that befalls our societies, people blame the Jews. We are witnessing this again today.

I ask the representative of Palestine how he could dare slander our efforts. How dare he lie about the brave soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces? How dare he blame them for spreading the virus? These soldiers risk their lives to contain the outbreak for Israelis and Palestinians alike. The Palestinian accusations are not only shameless lies; they are anti-Semitic. Mr. Mansour should be ashamed of himself. He should apologize for what he has said and what he has written. He has made it clear that he prefers hating Israel to helping the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian Authority would like to have its cake and eat it too. It happily accepts any and all assistance from Israel and expects it to continue to provide that help even as it incites hatred against us and spreads anti-Semitic libel. This outrageous and destructive behaviour cannot and will not be tolerated. The Palestinian Authority must decide if incitement against Israel is more important than the fruitful cooperation intended to save Palestinian lives.

It is absurd for the Palestinian Authority to be willing to sacrifice the important international solidarity that all members of the General Assembly have supported, in order to score a few cheap political points. These actions are shameful and should be met with contempt by the entire international community. These actions will have consequences.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian Authority is not alone in taking advantage of the crisis to try and promote the achievement of destructive goals. The Iranian regime has asked for the lifting of the sanctions that were put in place to stop its nuclear and malign regional activities so as to allow them to care for their citizens. However, the regime's sudden interest in the well-being of its citizens should not be mistaken for actual compassion. It is just another ploy for the regime to profit from its people's suffering.

There is no need to lift sanctions to provide the Iranian people with the medical and humanitarian assistance they need. President Rouhani said so himself at his Cabinet's economic meeting on 2 April. In reality, the sanctions have no real impact on the regime's ability to combat the pandemic.

The Iranian regime's attempt to launch a military satellite on Tuesday proves that it chooses to focus on military aggression rather than on dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. The regime continues to develop advanced missile technologies instead of caring for the tens of thousands of Iranian citizens who have been affected by the virus.

Israel calls upon the international community to condemn this latest launch and impose further sanctions on the Iranian regime. To be clear, Israel, as always, stands with the Iranian people. At the same time, we must not allow the regime to take advantage of this crisis nor permit the establishment of a nuclear-armed terrorist regime. A crisis is not the time for cynical political agendas.

Israel will continue to work tirelessly to find a vaccine that will serve the entire world. We will continue to offer assistance to all who need it, no matter their race, gender or religion.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented the world with an unprecedented crisis, but it has also presented us with an opportunity to come together. The pandemic has forced us to learn that in the globalized world of the twenty-first century our fates are very much dependent on one another and that there is more that unites us than divides us.

Annex 18**Statement by the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, Riyadh Mansour**

We congratulate the Dominican Republic on its leadership of the Security Council in these turbulent days. We also commend China for its stewardship of the Council in March.

We thank United Nations Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing and for his efforts at this critical time, as well as those of Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick and his team in Palestine, including those made in support of our collective efforts to combat the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Palestine, I wish to convey our deepest condolences to all bereaved families and countries on the tragic loss of life caused by this virus and reaffirm our solidarity with all the afflicted, wishing the restoration of health and stability to each of them.

We acknowledge the leadership of Secretary-General António Guterres and Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed in responding to the pandemic. We commend their efforts to mobilize the United Nations system, with the World Health Organization taking the lead in addressing the health impact of the pandemic, together with all relevant United Nations agencies that are helping to alleviate the pandemic's vast economic, social, humanitarian and security impacts, including on women, children and youth, refugees and displaced persons. This includes the valiant efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) undertaken to support Palestinian refugees, alongside those of the other United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations assisting the Palestinian people, helping to protect them from the ravages of the pandemic as they work to alleviate the needs and hardships caused by Israel's illegal occupation and the historic injustice Palestinians have been forced to endure for so long. We appeal for urgent international support to UNRWA to ensure continuity of its essential work.

We also underscore today the Secretary-General's wise call for a global ceasefire, which President Mahmoud Abbas has endorsed on behalf of the State of Palestine. This call must include an appeal to Israel, the occupying Power, to cease its war against the Palestinian people, stop its denial of their right to self-determination, halt its colonization and de facto annexation of Palestinian land, end its immoral blockade on the Gaza Strip and release the thousands of Palestinians that it has imprisoned, including children, who are at great risk of contagion in crowded, unsanitary prisons. Israel must be unequivocally called upon to respect its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention; accountability for violations is imperative. Only in this way can human lives be saved and the potential for peace and justice realized.

We recognize that many people are now suffering and that fears about our individual and collective futures are at an all-time high. However, the Palestinian situation in this pandemic is unique and painfully acute. Our coping capacities have been depleted by 53 years of an illegal occupation and the constant dispossession, deprivation and oppression of our people. This crisis will only exacerbate an already volatile situation.

The state of emergency declared on 5 March remains in place, therefore, with a view to stopping the spread of the virus, which would be disastrous, especially in Gaza, where the health system is near collapse and where an outbreak would gravely endanger lives, especially in the refugee camps. Despite limited resources and the severe restrictions imposed by the occupation, our Government Ministries

and relevant national institutions are exerting every effort to protect our population and respond to the vast humanitarian and socioeconomic repercussions of this crisis. They are doing so with the support of United Nations agencies and the generous assistance of countries the world over, for which we are grateful.

Regrettably, however, even the extreme challenges posed by this pandemic on all people have not convinced the occupying Power to stop committing its crimes. Instead, Israel carries on with its illegal policies and practices — business as usual. Whatever technical coordination has been achieved between the two sides in recent weeks to combat COVID-19 has been undercut by incessant violations. This is not a politicization of the matter, as the Israeli representative alleges; these are the hard facts.

The most flagrant of these violations has been Israel's annexation push. Officials and extremists openly vow to annex parts or all of the West Bank. They brag about plans to commit this crime and to do so in full coordination with the current United States Administration. Shockingly, annexation became the centrepiece of the recent negotiations to form the new Israeli Government. Indeed, while world leaders have been calling for negotiations to resolve all final status issues to end the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and achieve a just and lasting peace, we are certain they were not referring to negotiations between Netanyahu and Gantz to determine what Palestinian land they would steal and illegally annex. Yet, as revealed by the cynical agreement reached in the past few days, the Israeli Government is forging ahead, in breach of the Charter of the United Nations and all other relevant provisions of international law, in blatant contempt of the Security Council and undeterred by the international community, believing that only the support of its main patron State matters.

This situation should leave no doubt as to the extent to which Israel's sense of its own impunity has been emboldened by the United States plan unveiled on 28 January and its dismissal of the internationally endorsed terms of reference and other parameters for a just solution based on international law, including United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the framework of two States peacefully coexisting within the pre-1967 borders. We reiterate that the United States plan will not bring peace. This plan — and Israel's decision to proceed with annexation — will destroy the two-State solution and entrench Israel's military control over the Palestinian people and their land.

As stressed in Special Coordinator Mladenov's 30 March briefing,

“Unilateral steps are detrimental to peace... Israeli officials have repeatedly stated their intention to annex Israeli settlements and other parts of the occupied West Bank. If implemented, such steps would not only constitute a serious violation of international law, but they would also effectively end the prospect of the two-State solution and close the door to negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians” (*S/2020/263, annex I, p. 6*).

The result, we all know, will be a one-State reality of apartheid, guaranteeing more conflict and harming generations more of Palestinians and Israelis as well as the entire region.

Such an outcome must be averted at all costs. The international community must repudiate all annexation measures and demand a halt to them. It must not fall prey to the pretexts crafted by Israeli official, including today's excuse — the pandemic — to divert attention from these crimes. We must not be fooled by the naming of the new Government as a “national emergency Government”. Congratulatory words that ignore the fact that annexation is central to this Government's programme effectively bless such crimes.

Accordingly, we appreciate the many strong statements issued by Arab, European, African, Asian and Latin American States and organizations, by Special Envoys of concerned States and by the United Nations that oppose Israeli annexation plans and demand a halt to them. But experience over the years has proven that statements alone will not compel Israel's respect for the law, nor avert its looming destruction of the two-State solution, as annexation is unfolding on the ground as we speak.

We urge the international community to take immediate action to enforce concrete and practical measures that hold Israel accountable for its perverse impunity. There must be consequences. There must be deterrence. Only such action — by the Security Council, by the General Assembly, by the Quartet, by international judicial bodies, by Parliaments and Governments and by civil society — can ensure the accountability needed to halt violations and salvage the prospects for a just peace and security based on the global consensus. Without a cessation of these violations, no efforts to create a credible political horizon towards the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution will ever succeed.

The real concerns and worries raised worldwide by this horrible pandemic cannot be used as an excuse to ignore human rights violations and look the other way, as Israel would wish everyone to do. On the contrary, this pandemic has only further highlighted the absurdity, immorality and illegality of such crimes and the urgency of bringing them to an end, right now.

When people everywhere are being instructed to shelter at home, how can Israel justify destroying homes? When people everywhere are desperately seeking medical care, how can Israel justify the destruction of clinics, the denial of humanitarian assistance and the medical neglect of prisoners? When the Secretary-General, joined by Pope Francis and leaders around the world, appeals for a global ceasefire, how can Israel justify its entrenchment of occupation and pursuit of annexation?

Now is the time to cease those violations and reverse the negative trends on the ground, not escalate them in such a flagrant, provocative way. Now is the time to heed the global calls to respect international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant United Nations resolutions. Now is the time to become more humane and giving, not more brutal and insatiable by imposing apartheid and never-ending conflict. Now is the time to see the other as equal and as deserving of freedom, safety, security and prosperity as yourselves. Now is the time to recognize our common humanity and shared future and to revive hope and trust. Now is the time to recognize that no injustice will last forever.

Israel has a choice. It may feel emboldened to blindly and arrogantly move ahead with annexation. But, should it choose to go down that illegal, destructive path, then it should not be surprised at the chain of events that will ensue. Many countries have already warned that annexation will not go unchallenged and that there will be consequences. Those who are principled and respect international law and the authority of the Security Council and General Assembly as the pillars of the rules-based international order will not stand idly by while the law and human rights of an entire people are so flagrantly breached and while the foundations for a just peace are destroyed, setting dangerous global precedents. Moreover, the Palestinian people will never forgo their inalienable human rights, including to self-determination and independence and to exist as a free and equal people, living in dignity, security and prosperity in their homeland. Even if the two-State solution is ruined, it will not end their quest for freedom and justice. The Palestinian people and leadership remain resilient.

We must join together to uphold international law and insist on its respect without exception. It is time for an international peace conference to finally resolve the Palestine question and end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is time to bring the illegal occupation to an end. It is time for justice and for the Palestinian people to know freedom and dignity in their independent, sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to live side by side in peace and security with all of their neighbours, joining together to meet all the challenges before us and create a better, brighter future for all of our peoples.

Annex 19

Statement on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the 120 States members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM).

At the outset, we would like to congratulate the Dominican Republic on assuming the presidency of the Security Council.

The Non-Aligned Movement seizes this opportunity to reaffirm its abiding solidarity with the Palestinian people, its unwavering support for their inalienable rights, including to self-determination, and its commitment to the alleviation of their plight until a just solution is achieved. The Movement also continues to appeal for and support all efforts to achieve a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine in line with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant United Nations resolutions.

Regrettably, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, continues to deteriorate and become more unstable, while the Security Council remains paralysed on the matter. That organ must uphold its Charter duties and act to ensure the implementation of its own resolutions. Those resolutions not only constitute the foundation of a peaceful solution to the conflict, they are also legally binding on all United Nations Member States. We are deeply concerned that the Council has for too long been unable to fulfil its mandate on this important question. At this critical moment, immediate action is required to hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for its violations. It is patently clear that the absence of justice, across decades in this case, only fosters greater impunity, further compounds the conflict and the human suffering it is causing and further destabilizes the situation on the ground, severely diminishing the prospects for peace.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the East Jerusalem, has been critical for years, but the human rights violations and crimes perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, amid the current global crisis caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic are unprecedented. Israel is blatantly exploiting the state of emergency and lockdown to accelerate its illegal settlement policy, for instance through the continued demolition of Palestinian homes and properties, including water and sanitation infrastructure and humanitarian assistance, and through daily military raids and settler attacks on Palestinian civilians. Those illegal actions severely undermine the Palestinian efforts to combat the pandemic, particularly in the Gaza Strip, which is already facing dire humanitarian and socioeconomic conditions under the weight of Israel's 13-year illegal blockade.

The Movement's member States deplore the ongoing Israeli intransigence and illegal policies and measures that greatly undermine the realization of a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. NAM reiterates its call for an end to the illegal Israeli occupation and for the restoration of justice and rights to the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination. Those are fundamental pillars for the achievement of a peaceful solution.

The Non-Aligned Movement continues to believe that resolution 2334 (2016) provides the most viable path to peace, and we call for its full and effective implementation. The resolution sets forth the essential requirements and parameters for the achievement of the two-State solution along the pre-1967 borders in accordance with the long-standing terms of reference for peace endorsed by the international community and with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

Israel must be compelled to cease immediately and completely all illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem; the demolition of Palestinian homes and properties and forced displacement of Palestinian civilians; all acts of violence, provocation and incitement against Palestinian civilians; and other human rights violations, many of which may amount to war crimes, including the massive collective punishment of 2 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The illegal and inhumane blockade of Gaza must be completely lifted. As the occupying Power, Israel must fully comply with its duties and responsibilities under international law, including its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, without exceptions. It must immediately cease all policies and measures aimed at altering the demography, character, identity and legal status of the occupied territories.

The Non-Aligned Movement also demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Moreover, the Movement's member States urge Israel to cease its violation of Lebanon's territorial integrity and sovereignty, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

In the absence of a just solution, the Movement's member States reiterate their call for the continued provision of the necessary humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance to the Palestinian people, including Palestine refugees. The Movement expresses its deep appreciation for the invaluable work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees and its provision of assistance, such as education, health care — including essential emergency assistance to help Palestine refugees confront the coronavirus disease pandemic — and vital relief and social services, to the Palestine refugees. We urge once again that the Agency be provided with sufficient predictable funding to enable it to continue its operations, in line with its General Assembly mandate, pending a just solution.

In conclusion, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its abiding solidarity with the Palestinian people, as well as its unwavering support for their just cause, and renews its commitment to further strengthening and coordinating the international efforts to achieve a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including the plight of the Palestine refugees, based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We express our sincere hopes that this year will witness tangible progress in the heroic quest of the Palestinian people to attain justice and fulfil their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, including their right to self-determination, freedom and independence in their sovereign and independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That will most certainly open a new chapter for regional, as well as global, peace and stability — a goal strongly supported by our Movement.

Annex 20**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, Rabab Fatima**

Let me begin by congratulating the Dominican Republic presidency on their successful steering of the work of the Security Council for this month amid this profoundly challenging time. I take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his comprehensive briefing this morning. My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by United Arab Emirates on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of the resolution 2334 (2016), in which he observes that the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory has only deteriorated owing to illegal occupation policies by Israel, is concerning. It is more concerning that such activities are going on unabated even at this sobering time. As reported by the United Nations, since the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Israel has further intensified its military operations and has demolished a large number of Palestinian residential structures, thus displacing hundreds of Palestinians and also injuring and detaining many. Moreover, there has been a surge of violence by Israeli settlers. Israel's illegal settlement activity in Palestinian territory, land grab and construction of the wall are continuing, as are the provocative calls for annexation. It is unfortunate that Israel is exploiting the public health emergency to divert international pressure and attention from the crisis. This not only makes the prospect of peace bleak but also undermines the Palestinians' pandemic containment efforts. We join the international community in condemning those acts and call upon Israel to cease its hostilities responding to the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal.

Israel's decades-long blockade has severely impaired the Palestinian health system, which has been especially exposed during the pandemic. Palestinians are in urgent need of health-care materials, such as test kits, intensive care equipment and ventilators, which are scarce. Therefore, although the number of confirmed cases appears low so far, any outbreak could, as cautioned by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), be a disaster of gigantic proportions. Furthermore, Israel's discriminatory practices towards Palestinians in dealing with the pandemic are evident. Israel is neglecting its obligations to carry out vigorous testing, disseminate information and adhere to health regulations, which jeopardizes the existing coordination between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities that is critical to stop community spread of COVID-19.

Unfettered access to humanitarian and medical assistance for Palestinians and the entry of medical personnel must be ensured. It is important that patients in Gaza requiring hospitalization be allowed to avail themselves of it outside the Strip. In the event of community spread, closing the Gaza Strip could severely worsen the situation, which should be averted. Moreover, the restrictions imposed to contain COVID-19 have isolated vulnerable communities and crippled their capacity to earn a living and ought to be removed. Vulnerable categories of detained and imprisoned Palestinian civilians need to be released from the overcrowded Israeli prisons because they are at high risk of catching COVID-19 owing to a lack of health care and hygiene. The international community has to ensure Israel fulfils those critical requirements.

Israel's continued acts of aggression have given rise to an egregious culture of impunity that has to be brought to an end by ensuring accountability for all Israeli violations and by upholding the rule of international law.

It is encouraging that the United Nations system on the ground and the Palestinian authorities are doing good work despite all the constraints, but it is clearly not enough. UNRWA's perennial funding constraints have deteriorated further owing to the pandemic. The dedicated focus of the Secretary-General's Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 on this crisis is welcome. Nevertheless, it is deeply worrying that UNRWA estimates that its budget for core activities will last until the end of May. Therefore, UNRWA's flash appeal for its COVID-19 response requires immediate attention. We call upon the international community to come up with generous and predictable funding as well as technical assistance to enable UNRWA to continue its work, which is a lifeline for Palestinians.

Bangladesh believes that the timely implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map is the key to achieving a lasting peace for the people and the State of Palestine, as well as in the Middle East. We will continue to stand firmly in support of the Palestinian cause and of the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination until the establishment of the State of Palestine on the basis of two-State solution and pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, we expect the Security Council to renew efforts to end Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory in fulfilment of Israel's obligations under the Charter of the United Nations by ensuring the implementation of its relevant resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

Now living in self-quarantine ourselves, we can feel the pain of the Palestinian population, which has been living under siege conditions for decades. More than ever before, Palestinians need global solidarity to fight a dual battle against the pandemic and Israeli occupation. We must not fail them.

Annex 21**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations**

Brazil would like to thank the presidency of the Security Council for convening this important debate and for finding ways to continue the Council's work despite the current restrictions. We also thank the briefers.

Most of the world's attention is currently focused on the pandemic. That reality notwithstanding, and while we stand in solidarity with all those affected, Brazil would like to highlight its continued commitment to the achievement of peace in the Middle East, which is the theme of this quarterly debate.

Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Brazil wishes to reiterate its support for a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. We encourage the parties to seek a constructive political environment conducive to a return to meaningful negotiations and to engage in new and creative diplomatic efforts with an open mind in order to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement.

The cessation of hostilities in north-western Syria, while fragile, still seems to be holding, which is to be commended. In Yemen, despite repeated calls for a ceasefire, including the coalition's declaration two weeks ago, hostilities have persisted in many areas. With regard to Libya, Brazil urges all parties to resume dialogue under the auspices of the Acting Special Representative, Stephanie Williams, also with a view to undertaking joint efforts against the pandemic.

As the crises in the Middle East and North Africa unfold, we should bear in mind that long-term political stability and economic prosperity are mutually reinforcing. The impact of the coronavirus disease on the global economy, coupled with the sharp decline in oil prices and the currency depreciation experienced in many countries of the region, requires urgent attention. At the same time, regional socioeconomic development can be achieved only through the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Religious freedom for all is also essential.

While the current situation poses immense risks and challenges to the Middle East and North Africa, it also presents unique opportunities for dialogue and cooperation towards peace and prosperity. Brazil stands ready to contribute to efforts in that regard.

Annex 22**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations**

The Government of Canada thanks the Security Council, and the Dominican Republic as President, for the opportunity to contribute to this quarterly debate under circumstances never before experienced in the Council's 75-year history. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that has swept the globe has affected every country in profound ways and has added a new dimension of complexity and crisis management to regions already facing challenging and multifaceted security issues.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no exception to these new and urgent challenges. Despite the long-standing issues between the parties, we see positive signs of coordination and cooperation amid this pandemic. Both the Israeli and the Palestinian leadership recognize that the pandemic does not discriminate and both sides have a shared interest in combating the spread of COVID-19. Canada welcomes the positive engagement that we have witnessed between Israeli and Palestinian officials, including between Presidents Rivlin and Abbas, and we remain hopeful that this goodwill and cooperation can be sustained in the future, beyond the crisis response to the pandemic.

We also extend our sincere thanks for the efforts of the United Nations, led by Nickolay Mladenov and James McGoldrick, and its response to the crisis to date.

We would note in particular the early actions taken by the Government of Israel to prevent the spread of the virus and to expand its testing capacity, as well as the quick response by the Palestinian Authority, which has helped to contain the spread of the virus in the West Bank. We also welcome the assistance provided by the Government of Israel, including facilitating the transfer of urgently needed protective equipment, test kits and other resources. As with many Member States, we are particularly concerned about the potential consequences of a major outbreak in Gaza, which could quickly overwhelm its limited resources and its extremely fragile health-care system. In addition, the economic and food insecurity implications of the pandemic would further exacerbate such concerns. The training provided by non-governmental organizations that Israel has facilitated for Palestinian doctors and nurses, including Gazans, is a great example of positive steps to help protect Palestinians. We continue to call on the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities to take every step to protect the most vulnerable, including women and children, as they are disproportionately impacted by the crisis.

Canada has committed significant new funding in direct support of global efforts to address the COVID-19 crisis. The allocation of almost CAN\$160 million that we announced on 5 April includes a total of CAN\$4 million for the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to support the urgent health-care needs of at-risk Palestinians, including refugees, in response to the United Nations emergency appeals to counter COVID-19.

Canada also recognizes that the COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating the pre-existing needs of poor and vulnerable Palestinians, and that, collectively, we must avoid diverting resources from those needs as we respond to COVID-19. Canada remains committed to providing assistance focused on empowering Palestinian women and girls, economic growth that works for everyone, and inclusive governance. In addition, today Canada is announcing a new allocation of CAN\$18 million in humanitarian assistance to address urgent priorities identified in the United Nations 2020 humanitarian response plan for the West Bank and Gaza. This funding will help particularly vulnerable Palestinians, such as women and

girls, survivors of gender-based violence and marginalized communities, to access food, health care, water and sanitation services through experienced United Nations agencies and civil society organizations.

During this unprecedented global crisis, we reiterate Canada's steadfast commitment to multilateralism and the rules-based international order, as well as our strong support for Secretary-General Guterres' call for an immediate global ceasefire in the wake of the pandemic. We also reiterate Canada's long-standing support for a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During these trying times, Canada applauds how Israelis and Palestinians have found ways to work together during this crisis, and we encourage them to continue to seek creative and innovative ways to ensure that the Palestinian Authority has the resources it requires during this pandemic. We hope that the cooperation motivated by COVID-19 can form the basis for more sustained engagement in the longer term, and we encourage continued cooperation through a regional response to the pandemic.

We also wish to use this opportunity to express serious concern over the new and resurgent forms of antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination that we are witnessing at this time. We must continue to stand together to protect vulnerable communities and build more inclusive societies around the world.

Canada will continue to work together with all its partners, Israelis and Palestinians included, to respond to this global crisis.

Annex 23**Statement by the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Cheikh Niang**

First, I would like to congratulate the Dominican Republic on its professional handling of this month's presidency of the Security Council and on finding creative solutions to the procedural and technological challenges.

In these unprecedented times, when the world and the United Nations are fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, we must remind ourselves that the Palestinian people under occupation face an even bigger crisis. It is precisely in such challenging times that we must rally our support for, and solidarity with, them.

As the world's attention is turned to preventing loss of life and limiting the spread of the pandemic, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has continued to deteriorate and the occupation is still advancing, in grave breach of international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, and in violation of United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which call for an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and the fulfilment of the rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence.

With 437 confirmed cases, 15 of them in Gaza, and two deaths, as of 19 April, the State of Palestine has joined the rest of the world as a victim of the outbreak. The negative shock to the Palestinian economy will have profound implications for public welfare, employment, social cohesion and financial and institutional stability. Strong international donor support and targeted technical assistance will be crucial on the path to recovery.

While technical coordination between the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities is supporting the response to the virus on the ground, such measures cannot be mistaken for well-intentioned steps towards a peaceful solution. In fact, as the international community focuses its attention on the fight against the pandemic, the occupying Power, Israel, has continued to entrench the occupation and to openly discuss its intention to annex the occupied Palestinian territory, with measures being taken while this debate is held and the illegal Israeli blockade on Gaza continues.

Home demolitions, evictions, the confiscation of Palestinian property, the destruction of agricultural and livelihood structures, the expansion of settlement construction, human rights abuses and settler violence, as well as military incursions, have continued. The destruction of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities is putting thousands of Palestinians at an increased risk of contracting the virus and are jeopardizing their health and safety.

That is in breach of Israel's legal obligation to protect the right to health and life of Palestinians under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Children, especially the 194 currently in administrative detention in Israeli jails, are being affected by the virus. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People calls for the release of all Palestinian prisoners whose health is at increased risk of virus contagion in detention facilities. Similarly, as reported by Special Coordinator Mladenov on 30 March (see S/2020/263), the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) continue to be violated. Declarations of regret and concern have made no difference. The international community must ensure that the occupying Power meets its obligations in all these matters under international law and international humanitarian law and that there is accountability for not doing so.

During the virtual event organized by the Committee on 14 April, the Director of Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Mr. Matthias Schmale, mentioned that in the Gaza Strip the main concerns were a dilapidated economy and an inadequate health infrastructure, aggravated by high population density, especially in refugee camps. As UNRWA's core funding for Gaza is expected to last until May or June, the Committee urges the international community to continue to provide the Agency with adequate and reliable funding for the continuity of its operations in all fields in order to ensure its vital assistance to the Palestine refugees. The Committee reiterates its call for the total lifting of the Gaza blockade and to refrain from imposing further restrictions, which would be devastating for the economy of the Gaza Strip.

Statements reaffirming support for the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders and opposing the Israeli annexation have poured in from almost all countries, the Middle East Quartet as well as representatives of the United States Congress. As welcome as they are, statements are not enough, and the time for action is long overdue. The expansion of Israel's control over the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is eroding, literally, the possibility of achieving the two-State solution. The goal of seeing Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security along the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State, remains unchanged, still unattained and at great risk.

In the midst of this health scourge, we must not forget that, while everyone is affected by COVID-19, the pandemic's most devastating consequences are for women and girls, from health and the economy to security and social protection. Palestinian women and girls are no exception. Yet women are not just victims in the crisis; they also play a major role in the response and must be supported in their efforts.

The Secretary-General's recent call for a global ceasefire was heeded by many warring parties. The United Nations Middle East Envoys joined him in calling on parties to de-escalate tensions and urged greater humanitarian action to prevent the spread of the pandemic in the region. We also call on Israel, the occupying Power, to heed the long-standing call for a halt to illegal actions and practices, including all measures aimed at the annexation of territory, and, in accordance with its obligations under international law, to ensure the protection of the Palestinian civilian population under its control by providing humanitarian access and assistance so as to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

We in the United Nations have the tools to rein in violence and injustice and to seek peace, justice and security for all. We are committed to leaving no one behind. Not unlike the fight against the pandemic, we are in this together. Each of us, individually and collectively, must do our part, for only by caring for our neighbours can we save ourselves.

Annex 24**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative, Chargé d'affaires ad interim of Cuba to the United Nations, Ana Silvia Rodríguez Abascal**

We support the statement delivered by the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic poses a challenge for all of us, causing a crisis with numerous and devastating effects not only to health but also for the economy, trade and our societies in general. The pandemic does not respect borders or ideologies. Political differences must be put aside at this dramatic moment for humankind.

We express our deep concern about its impact in countries of the Middle East, and we call for the avoidance of any action that may lead to a further deterioration of regional stability and security.

While Governments around the world are working tirelessly to fight the pandemic, Israel continues to undermine Palestine's efforts in that regard. We condemn the occupation of Palestinian territory, the annexation policies and the increase in illegal and colonizing practices and measures, including the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, the punitive demolitions, the seizure of resources from Palestinian institutions, the forced displacement of hundreds of Palestinian civilians and the blockade of the Gaza Strip, which aggravate the emergency situation of the public health system and the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation of Palestine, especially in East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, hampering the possibility of counteracting the spreading of COVID-19.

It is regrettable that no measures have been taken in the past period to end the Israeli military aggression and occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), adopted by the Security Council, which remains silent while Israel, with impunity, consolidates its policy of expanding illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory and threatens to annex the Palestinian territories in the Jordan Valley and other regions of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

We reject the acts of provocation, terror, incitement and violence and the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against Palestinian civilians, in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law. Due to repeated obstruction by the United States, the Security Council has not even been able to condemn the escalation of violence and the tragic events that have taken place in the Gaza Strip since 30 March 2018.

The need to work together to address the challenges is clear. We must all come up with the necessary responses. We must complement each other, providing the resources within our grasp, however limited they may be. We cannot afford exclusion of any kind.

In this respect, we regret the precarious situation in which the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East finds itself as a result of the withdrawal of financial support by the United States.

The Security Council must fulfil its primary responsibility bestowed under the Charter to maintain international peace and security, and demand that Israel immediately and completely end its occupation of the Palestinian territories and its aggressive policies and colonizing practices.

We express our unwavering solidarity with the Government and the people of Palestine and the support for Palestine's entry as a full Member into the United Nations.

We reaffirm our unrestricted support for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that would enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and establish an independent and sovereign State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and which will guarantee the right of return for the refugees.

Washington's aggressive, unilateral and unjustified actions in the Middle East severely undermine the legitimate interests of the Arab and Islamic nations and lead to a dangerous escalation in the region. We reiterate our rejection of the so-called "deal of the century", drawn up by the current United States Administration, which does not envisage the creation of a Palestinian State, ignoring the two-State solution, which has been historically supported by the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and other international actors.

The unilateral decision of the United States Government to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to establish its diplomatic representation in that city, showing disrespect for its historic status, and its decision to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Syrian Golan constitute flagrant violations of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant resolutions adopted by the Security Council. We call once again for Israel's total and unconditional withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and from all occupied Arab territories.

We reaffirm our full support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and our condemnation of the withdrawal by the United States from the agreement as well as its reimposition of unilateral sanctions and military threats against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It is unacceptable that some countries have to endure the application of arbitrary unilateral coercive measures, in violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. We demand the immediate end, without political conditions, of the illegal unilateral measures imposed against sovereign States, which hamper the fight against the current situation.

As the international community is facing a major global threat, the United States — the largest military, economic, technological and communications Power on the planet — pursues a foreign policy aimed at stirring up and promoting conflicts, divisions, chauvinism and supremacist and racist positions.

As the world is fighting against the pandemic — which calls for the promotion of cooperation and the important role of international organizations, especially the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO) — the current Government of the United States is attacking multilateralism and seeking to discredit the recognized leadership of WHO.

The threat to international peace and security is real, and constant acts of aggression against certain countries aggravate it. We support the urgent call of the Secretary-General to "end the sickness of war and fight the disease that is ravaging our world: the coronavirus pandemic". All forms of war, including unconventional warfare, must cease.

Against this backdrop, it is the duty of all States — and in particular of the members of the Security Council — to defend multilateralism and the purposes and principles of the Charter, including respect for the sovereign equality of States and their political independence, unity and territorial integrity, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and refraining from the use or threat of use of force in international relations.

Annex 25**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations, Luis Gallegos Chiriboga**

[Original: Spanish]

At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, and through you the Dominican Republic, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April 2020. It has fallen to you, Sir, to preside over this important body at a crucial moment for humankind, in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

In this regard, I would also like to express my delegation's appreciation for the efforts made since March, under the Chinese presidency, and now, under Dominican leadership, to continue the work of the Security Council by leveraging technology. Likewise, I take this opportunity to reiterate the importance Ecuador attaches to the broadest possible participation of delegations in the work of the Security Council under rule 37 of the provisional rules of procedure. I therefore urge all members of the Security Council and the Secretariat to make the greatest possible effort to provide opportunities for Council non-members to participate via video-teleconference until in-person meetings resume at United Nations headquarters in New York.

I thank you, Sir, for convening this debate and, in addition to aligning ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

Last December marked three years since the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016). Since its adoption, the situation on the ground has only worsened. We deeply regret that, after yet another year, this conflict remains unresolved.

By reaffirming our unfailing solidarity with the Palestinian people, we reiterate our commitment to alleviating their dire situation until a peaceful, fair and definitive political solution can be reached by the parties, based on the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security, within recognized borders based on those of 1967 — a consensus reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016).

We reject any incitement to violence, which only takes us farther away from a peaceful, fair and definitive political solution between the parties. We reiterate the call made in resolution 2334 (2016) for both parties to act in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law, and to observe calm and restraint.

We are deeply concerned at the humanitarian situation, human rights violations and non-compliance with international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territories. We call on all parties to unite in a joint effort to launch credible negotiations and step up regional and international diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving, without delay, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Unfortunately, the report reflects no progress in this regard.

In our view, it is imperative that the Security Council act, as it has been repeatedly requested to do, and take measures to fully uphold the fundamental principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. What is needed are political solutions, based on justice, human rights and international law. Preventive diplomacy is a critical tool for calming tensions before they escalate and intensify.

I wish to reiterate Ecuador's full support for, and endorsement of, Secretary-General António Guterres's call for a global ceasefire and cessation of hostilities,

and to join forces in the fight against our common enemy, COVID-19. Heeding that call would be a first step towards achieving definitive and lasting peace.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic make all the more urgent our call to stop all types of illegal settlement policy, in particular demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian-owned structures, including water and sanitation and humanitarian assistance structures, throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Ecuador expresses its gratitude to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for its work in providing education, medical care, relief and social services to Palestine refugees, as well as the essential emergency assistance to help Palestine refugees face the COVID-19 pandemic. We once again urge that the Agency be provided sufficient and predictable funding to enable its operations to continue, in accordance with its mandate from the General Assembly.

Finally, it is our shared responsibility to fight the pandemic in all corners of the planet. We are only as strong as the weakest health system. Overcoming the pandemic in one country or region will be useless if it continues in any other corner of the world. Today cooperation and solidarity are the only vaccine we have against the destructive effects of COVID-19.

Annex 26**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations, Mohamed Fathi Ahmed Edrees**

[Original: Arabic]

I would like first to congratulate the Dominican Republic on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April, and to commend your endeavours, Mr. President, to make a success of the Council's work in the face of the challenges to multilateral action arising from the crisis unleashed by the coronavirus pandemic.

Egypt aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Arab and Islamic groups on this topic and appreciates the briefings provided by United Nations officials at the opening of this meeting.

The world is witnessing an unprecedented crisis as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, which is showing up a good many flaws, as yet only in outline, in how we conduct international affairs. When the conditions are right, we shall need to carry out a thorough review of the crisis and its repercussions and together examine how to avoid such crises in future.

In that regard, I wish to commend the Secretary-General for his efforts to deal with the crisis and create an environment conducive to addressing the repercussions of the pandemic and laying the groundwork for a comprehensive political process, which the Middle East so desperately needs, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions and terms of reference for the resolution of conflicts. Similar appeals have been made by United Nations envoys to the region and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

I would emphasize that the repercussions of this crisis have not passed the Middle East by. Rather, the region could be said to be in the eye of the storm in economic, health and human terms, especially given the internal crises that some countries in the region have been undergoing over the past years.

The communication and cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel in dealing with the consequences of the pandemic for both sides is definitely a positive development that Egypt trusts will continue. Egypt hopes that the cooperation established between the two sides will be extended with a view to improving the detention conditions of Palestinian prisoners, in particular the elderly and those with chronic illnesses, who are the most vulnerable to the disease. The cooperation between the two sides reflects the importance of communication, mutual understanding and coexistence in resolving international crises, and the fact that any crisis or dispute can be resolved through dialogue between those involved where there is the political will and genuine desire to arrive at a just and lasting settlement.

In spite of the positive cooperation between the two sides, the call by the Secretary-General for a general ceasefire and developments around the world that require solidarity and cooperation among all countries worldwide, the pattern of Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territory has gone on unabated, and even at a greater pace. That is particularly the case with regard to settlement activity, as the Israeli occupation authorities have continued to confiscate more land and expel Palestinians from it, demolish homes and announce plans to build more settlement units. That is on top of attacks by Israeli settlers against the Palestinian people in the West Bank, which must be contained and brought to an end.

The position of Egypt with regard to the Palestinian question remains firmly based on its support for a just and lasting solution whereby the Palestinian people

exercises its legitimate right to self-determination through the establishment of an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of 4 June 1967. It is critical to put a stop to all unilateral practices that could exacerbate instability and threaten the long-awaited two-State solution and to work towards the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations as soon as possible. Egypt welcomes any initiatives aimed at a resumption of negotiations on the basis of internationally recognized resolutions.

Egypt has followed with interest the press releases issued by the Security Council over the past two weeks regarding the demand for a ceasefire and de-escalation in Yemen and Syria and the call by the Secretary-General and his envoys to the countries of the Middle East for a comprehensive ceasefire in the region's armed conflicts.

Egypt again urges the Security Council to intensify efforts to reach sustainable political settlements in those armed conflicts in the Arab region and to live up to its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. In order to do so, the Council should show unity of purpose regarding a clear vision on the need to combat terrorism, hold its supporters to account and confront Governments and organizations that misuse the Islamic faith as incitement to take up arms and resort to violence to achieve a political project aimed at demolishing the concept of the civil nation State and the principles of citizenship. This tendentious political scheme is perhaps the principal reason for and common denominator behind the prolongation of the armed conflicts in the Arab region, in the absence of clear and practical steps or a unified vision on the part of the Security Council to address those threats.

With regard to the Libyan crisis, Egypt has maintained consistently, since the outset of the crisis, that there needs to be a political solution to pave the way for building a new, secure and stable State. That position is self-evident and is dictated by the close geographical and historical ties that bind the two countries and their peoples together, not to mention the national security concerns of Egypt. Egypt has therefore long supported the various regional and international efforts to achieve peace in Libya, most recently the Berlin conference on Libya. Cairo also recently hosted meetings of the Libya Expert Economic Commission, one of three tracks on which the United Nations Support Mission in Libya is working.

In that regard, Egypt reiterates its call for the Council to adopt a decisive position to address the negative actions of Turkey, which are common knowledge in Libya and are further complicating the conflict and stand in the way of achieving the yearned-for peace and stability in Libya. Turkey played a central and pivotal role in last week's clashes: it supported militias and mercenaries as they set free hundreds of terrorists and criminals, and the subsequent killing of civilians in Sabratha and Surman by terrorists. That unacceptable crime was passed over in silence by the international community.

In order to reach a peaceful settlement in Libya, certain marginalized areas of the country must be brought into the mainstream, thereby enabling a fair distribution of wealth and power and the rebuilding of national State institutions. That can be achieved only by forming an independent Government acceptable to Parliament, disarming the militias and confronting the terrorist organizations.

Egypt looks forward to a time of greater stability in the post-pandemic world. Priorities will need to be reordered, and the international community will need to set goals for the coming period, a time in which stability and peace shall prevail in the Middle East, which has for so long suffered from crises and instability. We look forward to, and will work towards, a better tomorrow for the region's peoples and its future generations.

Annex 27**Statement by the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, Olof Skoog**

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The European Union is united in its commitment to achieving a two-State solution that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967 and resolves all permanent-status issues in order to end the conflict. It strongly opposes all actions that undermine the viability of the two-State solution and urges both sides to demonstrate, through policies and actions, a genuine commitment to a two-State solution in order to rebuild trust and create a path back to meaningful negotiations. To that end, the EU will continue to closely monitor developments on the ground and their broader implications and will consider further action in order to protect the viability of the two-State solution, which is constantly being eroded by new facts on the ground.

The EU recalls that a lasting solution to the conflict must be achieved on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, including that of land for peace, the road map, the agreements previously reached by the parties and of the Arab Peace Initiative, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition.

Recalling that settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible, the EU reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions taken in this context, such as building the separation barrier beyond the 1967 line, demolitions and confiscation — including of EU-funded projects — evictions; forced transfers, including of Bedouins; illegal outposts; and restrictions on movement and access. It urges Israel to end all settlement activity and to dismantle the outposts erected since March 2001, in line with prior obligations. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States.

The EU calls for all parties to take swift steps to produce a fundamental change to the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, including the end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. Rocket fire by militant groups is unacceptable and underlines again the danger of escalation. All stakeholders must commit to non-violence and peace.

The EU urges all Palestinian factions to find common ground, based on non-violence and reconciliation, and to work together to address the needs of the Palestinian population. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is an important element for reaching the two-State solution. In that regard, the EU calls on the Palestinian factions to make reconciliation and the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza a top priority.

The EU reaffirms its readiness to work towards the resumption of meaningful negotiations to resolve all permanent-status issues and to achieve a just and lasting peace. It urges both sides to demonstrate, through policies and actions, a genuine commitment to the two-State solution as the only realistic way to end the conflict.

Please allow me to turn to the situation in Syria.

In Idlib, the recent and continuing offensive by the Syrian regime and its backers, including Russia, is creating untold human suffering and has provoked the worst humanitarian crisis since the beginning of the Syrian conflict.

The EU calls for an urgent de-escalation of the conflict in Syria in order to avert a slide into international military confrontation and prevent further suffering.

While acknowledging the increased migratory burden and risks that Turkey is facing on its territory and the substantial efforts it has made in hosting 3.7 million migrants and refugees, the EU reiterates its serious concern over the situation at the Greek-Turkish border and strongly rejects Turkey's use of migratory pressure for political purposes. The EU is liaising with other international partners, including the United Nations, NATO and the United States, so that the clear international consensus in favour of a de-escalation and a lasting ceasefire is strongly reinforced.

The EU reiterates in the strongest possible terms its call on all parties to keep in place an immediate and a sustainable ceasefire, to guarantee the protection of civilians on the ground and from the air and to enable the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance by the international community.

While the European Union recognizes the presence of United Nations-designated terrorist groups in the region, indiscriminate attacks and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including health facilities, schools and settlements for displaced persons by the Syrian regime and its allies cannot be justified under any circumstances and must stop. We reiterate the EU position that all the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity should be held accountable.

The European Union welcomes the release of the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team to the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 8 April. We fully support the report's findings and note with great concern its conclusions.

The European Union strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force, as concluded by the report. Those identified responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable for these reprehensible acts. The European Union reiterates its full support to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and underlines the complementarity of its work with that of the United Nations. We have full confidence in the objectivity, impartiality and independence of the Organization's Technical Secretariat and its Investigation and Identification Team.

The EU urges the Syrian regime to return to the negotiating table and repeats that any sustainable solution to the conflict requires a genuine political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), negotiated by the Syrian parties within the United Nations-led Geneva process, and remains committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian State. The EU will actively promote a renewed, concerted effort on the part of the international community in order to address the Syrian crisis and pave the way for a political solution.

The EU is addressing as a matter of priority the humanitarian situation. Deliveries of humanitarian assistance are being made to address the emergency needs for shelter, medical and food support of some 1 million persons displaced in the past weeks and of all other Syrians in need in the Idlib region. Safe, sustained and immediate access to populations in need must continue to be enabled, in full compliance with international humanitarian law. The EU strongly calls for the extension of resolution 2165 (2014) for cross-border access in order to ensure that

humanitarian assistance, including medical and surgical supplies, reaches people in need throughout Syria through the most direct routes.

On 17 February, the EU decided to add eight natural persons and two entities to the list of natural and legal persons, entities or bodies subject to restrictive measures. The decision was taken in view of the fact that prominent businesspersons are making large profits through their ties with the Al-Assad regime and are helping to finance that regime in return, including through joint ventures and entities.

Annex 28**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi**

The situation in Palestine has recently deteriorated owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Now the Palestinian people are faced with two great challenges, namely, the continued occupation of Palestine and the outbreak of this deadly disease, which, in turn, is a serious concern and needs to be addressed properly.

Despite the strong resistance of the Palestinians against the occupation of their ancestral land as well as their longstanding struggle for the realization of their inherent right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, this crisis has lasted for well over seven decades. The Palestinian question, as the world's longest crisis, has not yet been settled because the Israeli regime has been allowed to continue all its unlawful acts and inhumane practices with total impunity.

The Council, which has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, has been unable to end the occupation of Palestine, to protect the very basic rights of millions of oppressed Palestinians at home and abroad, or to confront an occupying regime that has systematically violated international law and committed all core international crimes.

The United States, through violations of the peremptory norms and basic principles of international law, disregarding all standards of international conduct and flouting all principles of humanity and morality, as well as by abusing its status as a permanent member of the Council, continues to completely, systematically and unreservedly shield the Israeli regime.

Those unjust measures have emboldened the occupying Power to commit more crimes with even greater brutality and to conduct more destabilizing activities in such a volatile region as the Middle East. The continued construction and expansion of settlements, the threat to annex parts or all of the West Bank, the continued inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip and the systematic violation of the sovereignty of Syria and Lebanon are only a few of the practices of the Israeli regime that continue in gross violation of international law.

The Israeli regime must therefore be compelled, first and foremost, to end the occupation of all the Palestinian territories as well as the occupied Syrian Golan and parts of Lebanon and put an end to all its destabilizing activities in the region.

With respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation in Palestine, in particular the Gaza Strip, is extremely alarming, including as a result of the illegal Israeli blockade and military aggressions against Gaza, widespread poverty, high population density and an inadequate health system resulting from many years of occupation and blockade. According to United Nations reports, Palestine is exceptionally vulnerable to infection and mortality as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

To address the unprecedented health and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on the life of Palestinians, the international community must take concrete measures.

In that context, Israel must be forced to end its more-than-a-decade-long cruel blockade against Gaza, permit the access of Palestinians to all health and medical services required for the detection, treatment and prevention of the further spread of the coronavirus disease, and release all Palestinian prisoners from the overcrowded Israeli jails, where they are at high risk of infection.

In conclusion, I must stress that the serious, severe and systematic violations of international law by the Israeli regime continue to gravely erode the credibility of and

trust and confidence in the Council. The Council must live up to its responsibilities in terms of preventing crimes and threats by the Israeli regime and support in practice the full realization of all the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Annex 29

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this important debate and for your leadership of the Security Council during these difficult times.

Ireland fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and thanks Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

At the outset, I would like to express Ireland's firm support for the joint appeal by the Secretary-General's Envoys to the Middle East for a ceasefire across the region. Ireland is deeply concerned by the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the Middle East, and the risks are exacerbated in countries affected by conflict.

The population of the Gaza Strip is particularly vulnerable, a vulnerability that is closely linked to the ongoing blockade, and we have increased our support for the provision of medical services there. Earlier this month, Ireland brought forward its annual €6 million contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to support its delivery of health-care and other essential services to Palestine refugees. We urge all parties to meet their obligations by facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid and ensuring that the Palestinian Authority and United Nations agencies have the funds they need to fight the pandemic.

While we welcome the coordination that has taken place between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities in response to the pandemic, we regret other actions that have continued in recent weeks, including the demolition of Palestinian structures in the West Bank, the arrests of the Palestinian Minister for Jerusalem Affairs and of the Palestinian Governor of Jerusalem, and incidents of settler violence. Violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law cannot be justified at any time, but they are particularly unacceptable in the current context.

Ireland remains committed to a negotiated two-State solution that ends the occupation that began in 1967, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, on the basis of international law, the internationally agreed parameters and the relevant Security Council resolutions. This accords with the European Union's firm position and with General Assembly resolution 73/89, of 6 December 2018, which Ireland introduced, on a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

We are therefore gravely concerned by the political agreement reached during coalition negotiations in Israel, which foresees the annexation of territory in the West Bank. The unilateral annexation of territory is clearly illegal under international law. Recent announcements on settlement development in and around East Jerusalem are also of grave concern. Moves on annexation would severely undermine prospects for a viable two-State solution, would undoubtedly represent a most serious unilateral departure from the Oslo Accords and would also have grave consequences for the lives and rights of Palestinians.

I now turn to the situation in Syria.

As the Syrian crisis enters its tenth year, Ireland remains deeply concerned about the ongoing suffering of the Syrian people, particularly in the north-west and north-east of the country.

Huge numbers of people remain displaced, many of whom are living with insufficient shelter, food and medicine, and are at severe risk. Effective humanitarian access is now more important than ever, and we urge the Security Council to extend

the authorization for cross-border humanitarian assistance and agree on additional crossing points.

Ireland strongly condemns all violations of international law in Syria, and we reiterate our call for the situation to be referred to the International Criminal Court. We also reiterate our support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. We welcome the recent United Nations Board of Inquiry report of 6 April on north-western Syria and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Investigation and Identification Team report of 8 April.

Ireland joins the call for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria, and we support the United Nations Special Envoy in his efforts to bring about a genuine, inclusive and comprehensive political solution, based on resolution 2254 (2015).

Annex 30**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, Ishikane Kimihiro**

At the outset, on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, I would like to extend my best wishes to our Muslim friends around the world. My heart goes out in particular to those who are affected by conflicts and other natural and man-made tragedies. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is causing a human security crisis worldwide, but conflict-affected people are among the most vulnerable and hardest hit by the pandemic. I fully echo the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire and his statement that there should be only one fight in our world today — our shared battle against COVID-19.

Some parties have expressed their acceptance of the call, but others have not. We are deeply concerned about the situation in the region, notably in Syria, Yemen and Libya. We urge all parties to immediately cease hostilities, allow humanitarian access and stop the spread of COVID-19 among innocent populations already under severe distress.

Under the current situation, Palestinians in Gaza are at particularly high risk of the pandemic due to the dense population and lack of essential medical facilities. In March, Japan made a contribution of approximately \$1.75 million to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to support the Palestinian people's fight against COVID-19.

Japan welcomes the ongoing cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians to stop the spread of COVID-19, with United Nations support. We call on both sides to continue and even scale up their joint endeavour to combat the common threat of COVID-19 and mitigate its impact, including the socioeconomic consequences. Japan stands ready to work hand in hand with United Nations agencies and other partners.

At this critical juncture, the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are more important than ever. The Agency provides fundamental daily services to sustain the livelihoods of the Palestinian people, including basic education, water and sanitation, as well as the essential medical support to cope with the pandemic. In March, Japan decided to contribute approximately \$1.9 million to UNRWA's programme budget for this fiscal year. In addition, we are considering a further contribution in response to the Agency's COVID-19 flash appeal. We believe that the swift response of UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority has, so far, contained the spread of the virus to a relatively low level. Japan calls on other donors and partners to join in supporting UNRWA's efforts, as Mr. Suzuki Keisuke, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, advocated yesterday at the Ministerial Strategic Dialogue on UNRWA.

It is disappointing to continue to hear about Israel's illegal settlement activities, including the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures and the threat of annexation. Japan deeply deplores those activities and once again strongly urges the Government of Israel to completely cease all settlement activities in the West Bank, including the implementation of construction plans that are undermining the viability of a two-State solution.

We are also deeply concerned about the continued violence in the region. We strongly condemn terrorism and attacks against innocent civilians, and call upon the parties to take immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence, provocation and incitement. Japan remains committed to supporting a two-State solution, in which Israel and an independent Palestinian State live side by side in peace and security, in line with relevant Council resolutions and other agreements. The final status of

Jerusalem should be resolved through negotiations based on the relevant Council resolutions and known parameters.

Restrictions on movement to counter COVID-19 may affect efforts to advance the peace process, but we must not allow any backtracking. In cooperation with its international partners, Japan will remain actively engaged to promote the peace process.

Annex 31**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Jordan to the United Nations**

Let me first start by congratulating the President of the Security Council and the Dominican Republic on their assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. Even in these unprecedented times, the President has proven, as always, to be exceptional in his leadership. We would also like to express our gratitude to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and his team for his briefing, tireless efforts and continued coordination with all stakeholders.

The meaning behind multilateralism goes back centuries. It is the idea that we can gain more by working together than alone, that cooperation and dialogue can prevent conflict and create opportunity, and that joint solutions are more likely to stick. That is more true today than ever as we witness the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) around the world.

According to a 31 March op-ed in the Financial Times, the five world leaders of Jordan, Germany, Singapore, Ecuador and Ethiopia asserted that we need a global alliance to fight the pandemic. They said that the most convincing way to address the global dimension of this crisis is through enhanced cooperation and solidarity, that we must assemble a truly global alliance to mobilize human ingenuity and solidarity and that we must articulate the benefits of a global response as a global public good.

Today we call on the international community to take a closer look at how the pandemic is affecting the peoples, economies and countries of the Middle East, which is already wracked by high numbers of unemployed youth, conflict and large numbers of refugees. The impact of COVID-19 threatens to leave in its wake significant economic turmoil across the region. It might also sow the seeds for more social unrest and instability in the region.

Jordan fully supports the appeal of Secretary-General António Guterres to warring parties throughout the world for an immediate ceasefire so as to enable the human family to tackle our common enemy: COVID-19. That appeal was the first step to help address the repercussions of the pandemic. Conflicts must stop, especially in the Middle East, and must be replaced with hope, peace and prosperity.

Our Palestinian brethren are facing difficult economic conditions that require us to intensify our efforts in support of their perseverance and resilience. We share Mr. Mladenov's concerns about the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 health crisis on the Palestinians, particularly the most vulnerable — those living in Gaza. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) is in urgent need of support so that it is able to continue to provide its health, education and social services to Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza — especially at this dire time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Today and every day, we continue to stress the need to guarantee the rights of more than 5 million Palestinian refugees, especially their right of return and compensation.

In that context, we welcome the appointment of Mr. Philippe Lazzarini as the Commissioner-General of UNRWA. Along with our partners, we will continue to provide UNRWA's leadership with every possible political and financial support to ensure that the Agency can keep providing vital services to Palestinian refugees and can secure the \$14 million it urgently needs to face the coronavirus in its fields of operations, since its current funds will only last through the end of May.

The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Jordan and Sweden and the Commissioner-General of UNRWA held a meeting on 14 April to discuss the critical need for

international and regional support of UNRWA as it faces increased financial and operational pressures, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. They called on the international community to respond to UNRWA's flash appeal and emphasized the importance of the Agency's work as a critical component for regional development, stability and security.

I avail myself of this opportunity today to reaffirm that the establishment of an independent Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace with Israel on the basis of a two-State solution that fulfils the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, in accordance with international law, is the only path to a comprehensive and lasting peace.

The achievement of a just and lasting peace that meets all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people is a strategic Jordanian, Palestinian and Arab choice. Jordan will continue to work with Arab countries and the international community to realize a just and lasting peace. There can be no peace or stability in the region without a just solution to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

We cannot turn a blind eye to unilateral Israeli measures, such as the threat of annexation of Palestinian lands, the building and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian lands and encroachments on the holy sites in Jerusalem — all aimed at imposing new realities on the ground. Jordan condemns such measures as violations of international law and provocative actions that will push the area towards more conflict and tension.

In furtherance of the directives of His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, custodian of all the Islamic and Christians holy sites in Jerusalem, Jordan will continue to devote all its efforts to protect Jerusalem and its holy sites, preserve their historical and legal status quo and protect their Muslim and Christian identity.

We need to safeguard the heritage and peace of Jerusalem, holy city to billions of people around the world. The Hashemite custodianship of Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem is a duty that Jordan is proud to carry. Jordan will persevere in upholding that responsibility, will continue to strengthen the resolve of Jerusalemites and will counter any attempts to impose new facts on the ground or change the historical and legal status quo of Jerusalem.

In conclusion, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan supports every genuine effort aimed at achieving just and comprehensive peace, and we stress the urgency of launching serious and direct negotiations that will resolve all final-status issues within a comprehensive solution, in accordance with the established terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and international law.

The Kingdom of Jordan genuinely seeks peace — a true and just peace that preserves the rights of the Palestinian people, guarantees the security of all sides and protects the interests of Jordan, including those related to final-status issues.

Annex 32**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Lazarus Amayo**

I congratulate the Dominican Republic on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of April and commend the conduct of work during these challenging circumstances. We thank the Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

As with the rest of the world, the Middle East region is experiencing the dire impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. That new threat is compounding the already existing crises in many parts of the region. Furthermore, it could have long-lasting socioeconomic and political implications, particularly for the most vulnerable, including women, young people, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

The pandemic is also having a huge impact on various socioeconomic and political transition processes in several parts of the Middle East, including ongoing peace negotiations between warring parties, humanitarian access and the flow of food and medical supplies, not to mention the living situations in refugee and internally displaced persons camps. This human crisis could also potentially create an environment where conflict and violent extremism can continue to thrive.

We are in agreement that the current situation calls for a recognition of interdependence and an opportunity for cooperation. The multiplicity of challenges during this pandemic is indeed a test of international crisis management. We need to act fast and act together. In that regard, my delegation stands firmly behind the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire in order to collectively focus our actions on fighting COVID-19. At the same time, the international community should ensure the continuation of processes mandated by the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the Security Council resolutions pertaining to the Middle East.

My delegation welcomes the ongoing Government and grass-roots efforts to combat the pandemic across political and conflict lines. The Palestinian Authority's timely issuance of a state of emergency socioeconomic response plan and its announcement of an emergency budget, on the one hand; and the Israeli Government's emergency fund transfer, including medical equipment and training facilities to the Palestinian Authority, on the other, is a demonstration that a people-focused approach is a critical element of effective leadership.

Although urgent challenges remain, Kenya commends the critical steps taken so far, including the movement of critical supplies and health workers and other personnel in and out of the West Bank and Gaza since the beginning of the crisis. The initiative of the Israeli Government and the private sector to manufacture critical health and testing equipment domestically will further ensure a sufficient supply of much-needed resources.

We call for regular engagement and cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities in order to build the resilience of health and service-delivery institutions for the entire population, and especially for the Palestinian people in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. Gaza needs more focused and immediate attention due to the heightened risk of spread of the coronavirus posed by Gaza's population density.

My delegation further supports the 11 April joint call by Special Coordinator Mladenov and other United Nations Envoys to the Middle East — including the Secretary-General's representatives in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen — urging warring parties in the region to end hostilities and maintain existing ceasefires in the

face of this global human crisis, which is unprecedented in recent history. It is our hope that, beyond the ceasefire, those steps will contribute to the establishment of durable peace and the realization of lasting solutions to conflicts across the region.

My delegation stands in solidarity with the Middle East community, including religious leaders, refugee host countries, peacekeepers, health and aid workers, civil society organizations, the United Nations country team, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and all those who are working tirelessly to defeat this common enemy in this challenging situation.

In conclusion, the current call for a global ceasefire should go hand in hand with the lifting of measures, including sanctions and blockades, that might act as bottlenecks to socioeconomic recovery during the pandemic. This is one instance where such measures may compound suffering for the most vulnerable segments of the population. Cooperation and coordination at the national, regional and global levels will prove crucial in addressing both the short- and long-term implications of COVID-19 in the Middle East region.

Annex 33**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Kuwait to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

We wish first to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and to reaffirm our support for his efforts to calm the situation and restore stability, in particular given the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Like everyone, we have been watching the unfolding repercussions of this invisible and dangerous epidemic as it spreads through all corners of the world. We all see that the brunt of it is being borne by the most vulnerable countries, regions and cities, perhaps chief among them Palestine, where the health sector has crumbled under decades of occupation, the serious impact of which has led to acute shortages of equipment and supplies. That is especially so in the Gaza Strip. After nearly 13 years of an illegal blockade, its vulnerable inhabitants are particularly exposed to this deadly epidemic. To make matters worse, the Palestinian authorities are undertaking efforts to contain the spread of the epidemic, in spite of their limited resources and in the face of the restrictions imposed by Israel, the occupying Power. However, by continuing their assaults, the occupying authorities have undermined those efforts and exploited the state of emergency on the ground. For instance, they recently demolished a hospital structure that was under construction, arrested a number of sterilization staff members and seized their equipment, and prevented volunteers in Hebron from carrying out sterilization procedures. They have ignored pleas by the Palestinian Authority to release Palestinian prisoners who are vulnerable to infection. Moreover, Israeli soldiers have deliberately spread the epidemic in Palestinian buildings and properties.

In line with its firm and principled position in support of our brothers in the State of Palestine, and on instructions from the Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait recently donated \$60 million to the World Health Organization, of which \$10 million was earmarked to support the measures implemented by the Palestinian Government to combat COVID-19.

There has been no let-up in the disgraceful attempts by Israel, the occupying Power, to exploit the current situation to entrench the occupation. It is pursuing its illegal settlement activities and policies, expanding and building thousands of settlement units and annexing land in flagrant violation of resolution 2334 (2016). Israeli breaches of the rights of the Palestinian people in the Jordan Valley are gaining in frequency in preparation for its annexation at a later date, in violation of internationally recognized resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Regrettably, the attacks by Israel do not stop there. Rather, in these trying times, they have been redoubled with impunity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They include the demolition and seizure of Palestinian buildings, the displacement of Palestinian families, growing waves of arbitrary arrests and an increase in settler crimes carried out against defenceless Palestinians, their property and their places of worship, with the connivance of the occupation authorities. We hold the latter wholly responsible for those crimes, which constitute a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The Israeli occupation authorities are undermining the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, continue to target Islamic and Christian holy places, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque, where they are forcing through a change in

the compound's legal status quo and its temporal and spatial division, and insist on taking unilateral illegal decisions, such as freezing Palestinian tax revenues. They are also taking measures to change the historic character and status of the city of Jerusalem and its demographic structure.

I put it to the Security Council at the last open debate on the situation in the Middle East (see S/PV.8706), which was held last January, that perhaps it was time for the Security Council to take a firm stand to stop those crimes and attacks. The Council needs to assume its responsibilities as a matter of urgency and effectively, before it is too late. Occupation and the trampling of the Palestinian people's rights will do nothing to foster peace or provide security, especially at a time when a deadly and merciless epidemic is spreading. One dare hope that such a desirable international movement might begin now, so that the Palestinian people might enjoy the coming of the holy month of Ramadan in security and peace.

Lastly, although the Israeli occupation authorities continue to ignore the will of the international community, we remain committed to the Arab, Islamic and international position that peace is a strategic choice and that a lasting, comprehensive and just solution must be based on the two-State solution, in accordance with the agreed terms of reference, namely, the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. In that way, the Palestinian people will exercise all its legitimate political rights and establish, on its territory, an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Annex 34**Statement by the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz**

[Original: Arabic]

Allow me to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your presidency of the Security Council for this month and by expressing the appreciation of all the Arab States for the intensive efforts being made at this difficult time by the United Nations team and the Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov. I wish to thank him for his oral report relating to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which we were unable to attend owing to the social distancing policy in place to deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

The League of Arab States has been following — and denounces with mounting concern — the recent serious developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, namely, the growing intensity of waves of settlement, the confiscation of land, the destruction of Palestinian crops and the demolition of Palestinian homes, with the aim of establishing Israeli settlement units, as well as the related violations of the human rights of Palestinians. Murder, imprisonment, forced detention and displacement are all part of the vicious expansionist settlement policy of Israel, the aim of which is to finally execute its plans to annex the entire occupied Palestinian territory, including all the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and the Jordan Valley.

This is a blatant challenge to the wishes of the international community, which are anchored in the well-established terms of reference of the peace process, notably, the Oslo, Madrid and Annapolis decisions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the decisions of the Middle East Quartet and the numerous resolutions of the Security Council, all of which themselves are based on the premise of the two-State solution and direct negotiations between the State of Palestine and Israel on the five final-status issues. There should be no dictating of terms by outsiders and no artificial peace plans put forward by parties that are not committed to those clearly defined terms under international law. Such initiatives are designed only to serve narrow interests that are not remotely connected with the peace that is yearned for in the Middle East.

Arab leaders and peoples are also increasingly concerned about the increasing frequency recently of statements by Israeli ministers and senior officials on the pressing need to seize the opportunity provided by the United States peace plan announced on 28 January 2020. That plan was rejected not only by the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the African Union, but also in the strongest possible terms by 14 members of the Security Council on 11 February 2020. Addressing that historic meeting (see S/PV.8717), the President of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, stressed in no uncertain terms that the Arab States utterly rejected the United States peace plan, warned the international community against killing the Palestinian people's hope of reaching a just and comprehensive peace through free and direct negotiations without external mediation or dictates, and warned of expected moves by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory to take advantage of the plan. Their calls have been echoed not only by many European leaders but also by various Parliaments, including prominent members, from both parties, of the United States Congress itself.

The situation is made worse by the fact that some in Israel are pushing for the expansion of settlements, an accelerated timetable for annexation and even the ratcheting up of human rights abuses against Palestinians to gain leverage as they and their parties jockey for position in the electoral campaigns currently under way

in Israel, to escape criminal prosecution in Israel or to garner support for the idea that it is imperative to establish what is falsely and antagonistically touted as Greater Israel on the entire territory that historically belongs to Palestine. That would pave the way for subjecting the Palestinian people to a still more abject form of apartheid. The perpetrators will need to be held to account before the relevant international criminal courts.

It is no secret that such developments not only pose a threat to international peace and security, but also to the credibility of the multilateral international system, as represented by the United Nations and its bodies, and in particular to the credibility of the Security Council. Israel aims to take all those illegal steps under the cover of one of the greatest and gravest of humanitarian crises to strike humankind, namely, the coronavirus that is sweeping the world, while making use of the fact that the international community is wholly preoccupied with, on the one hand, preventing its spread and, on the other, addressing its devastating health, human, economic and social impact.

The seriousness of the situation is compounded by the impact of the pandemic on the Palestinian people. As of 15 April, the spread of the virus had left 369 Palestinians infected and two deceased. That impact should be added to the devastating humanitarian effect of the illegal operations conducted by Israel over the same period, with 267 Palestinians arrested, three killed and 52 wounded, and underscores the extent to which the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation has been redoubled by the spread of the pandemic and the tight restrictions placed by Israel, the occupying Power, on the delivery of international aid that would enable the defenceless Palestinians to deal with the adverse effects of the virus. That stance shows a blatant disregard for the calls by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for a ceasefire to allow countries in conflict-affected regions, in particular the State of Palestine, to muster all their strength to combat the pandemic, for the joint statement issued by the Special Envoys of the Secretary-General to conflict areas in the Middle East, including Special Coordinator Mladenov, and for the latter's individual statement on the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, all of which have the full support of the League of Arab States.

It is regrettable, and indeed shameful, that all those shocking violations of the human rights of Palestinians, above all their rights to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of 4 June 1967, are being committed just as certain States are acting to shield Israel, the occupying Power, from being held accountable before the International Criminal Court. Israel must abide by the same international rules of accountability as are applied to all other States. There can be no preferential treatment, discrimination or double standards. The Council must send a clear message in that regard and warn Israel unequivocally against persisting in its violations of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Instead of just managing the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Council must formulate practical solutions and work to implement them in order to de-escalate the conflict and strengthen the frameworks for achieving a just and comprehensive peace. To that end, the Council must, first of all, affirm the following points.

That it utterly rejects a one-State solution, which Israel and its allies aim to impose as a *fait accompli*, and that it categorically refuses to accept the annexation or subjugation to its sovereignty by Israel of any part or parts of the occupied Palestinian territory, which has abjectly exploited the humanitarian crisis that is afflicting the international community because of the worsening coronavirus

pandemic and the temporary state of paralysis that has resulted from the application of social distancing policies in an attempt to limit its spread.

That it continues to insist on implementing the principle of the two-State solution, which has long been held by the whole international community as the basis for a just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question, and on the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of 4 June 1967, through direct negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides on final-status issues, under impartial international supervision and in full compliance with Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), and other international terms of reference established since 1948.

A guarantee should be given that the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination and statehood, will be upheld. That guarantee should be part of a commitment to the comprehensive vision that the Palestinian President has twice personally put before the Security Council, which provides for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, its international recognition and its admission as a full and effective Member of the United Nations. For that purpose, an international conference should be convened bringing together all parties for an immediate start to direct, serious and constructive negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides that would culminate in the achievement of the two-State solution. That vision was endorsed at the thirtieth Arab Summit, which was held in Tunisia and dubbed by Arab leaders the Summit of Determination and Solidarity, thereby clearly underscoring how essential joint Arab action is, the prominence of the Palestinian question and the importance of reaching a just and comprehensive settlement, as the delegation of Qatar set out in its statement today on behalf of the Arab Group, which the League of Arab States supports.

The Arab League looks forward to strengthening joint action with the Security Council with a view to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East; establishing an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 1967 borders; effectively addressing other conflicts in the Arab region, in Syria, Libya, Yemen and elsewhere; and to address the various threats to the region, including the current increase in external interference, in order to achieve international and regional peace and security. We trust that the Security Council will spare no effort in seeking solutions that are consistent with international law and strengthen the role of the United Nations and the multilateral international system.

Annex 35**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, Amal Mudallali**

First of all, I would like to thank China on its leadership of the Security Council in March and to congratulate the Dominican Republic on its assumption of the presidency for April. I would also like to thank the Dominican Republic for convening this video-teleconference on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and for making it possible for non-members of the Council to participate.

The world is facing a historic challenge — one that is testing everything, including our humanity. At such a difficult moment, we are meeting to discuss conflicts and crises that are human-made. I wish we were meeting to celebrate the silencing of guns, which the Secretary-General called for in his appeal for a global ceasefire. Even when we are facing a common enemy that “does not care about nationality or ethnicity, faction or faith”, as the Secretary-General put it, not only do conflicts persist but they provide an opening in many places around the world, especially in the Middle East, for opportunistic attempts to use this difficult moment to make political and military gains.

Before I turn to the Middle East, however, I wish to express my strong solidarity with those who have been affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and those who have suffered the loss of loved ones. I would also like to express my greatest support for and solidarity with the poorest countries on the planet, which are suffering from two pandemics at once: poverty and economic hardship, on the one hand, and the COVID-19 pandemic, on the other. Moreover, I cannot but express my profound gratitude to front-line workers, especially health workers, who deserve to be considered major pillars of all our societies around the world. No region is immune from this pandemic, including the Middle East, which is already facing a multitude of challenges and crises.

The pandemic has wrought havoc in the world economy and sent financial markets into a tailspin. The turmoil that has hit oil markets has added to the uncertainties. Like every other country around the world, Lebanon is enduring a difficult economic situation, whose impact on its people and economy it is trying to mitigate. While continuing its unflagging efforts aimed at implementing its agenda for economic reform, Lebanon has also been working to contain the spread of the virus. The Lebanese response to COVID-19 has been robust and efficient, but the virus is cruel, and no country can be safe until the whole world is safe.

Yet it seems that irresponsible behaviour is persistent in the Middle East. Not even a pandemic like the one we are suffering from now can change such behaviour. Instead of heeding the Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire and for focusing the world’s energies on fighting the virus, Israel maintains its usual policies of flouting international law and United Nations resolutions insofar as Lebanon and the Middle East are concerned.

In the south of Lebanon, Israeli violations of my country’s territorial sovereignty continue unabated. COVID-19 has not appeared to distract Israel from its daily utter disregard of international law, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). Its violations of resolution 1701 (2006) have long been documented in letters addressed to the Security Council. I would nevertheless remind the Council that at the height of the COVID-19 crisis, at a time when people are preoccupied with containing the virus in Lebanon, they have still had to endure hundreds of Israeli violations. In February, March and up to 13 April of this year, there were 140 sea violations, 142 land violations and 162 airspace violations. In some of these violations, Israeli

war planes breached and used Lebanese airspace to attack a third country, Syria. The Security Council has not condemned these violations of Lebanese sovereignty. Furthermore, Lebanon has expected the United Nations to have something to say about Israeli disregard for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) continues to do a commendable job in implementing its mandate in its area of operations and in assisting the Lebanese Armed Forces to preserve peace in the south of the country. I also wish to pay tribute to UNIFIL for its ongoing efforts aimed at assisting Lebanon in curbing the spread of COVID-19.

In occupied Palestine, COVID-19 has not distracted Israel from pursuing its aggressive policies designed to block all attempts to make progress on the establishment of a Palestinian State by dismantling any basis for such a State's viability. The latest example of this is the approval by Israeli authorities of the confiscation of Palestinian land near the Ibrahimi Mosque in the old city of Hebron, which was a move rightfully described by Hanan Ashrawi as reflecting

“an abject disregard for the status of Hebron's old city as a World Heritage site that must be protected from all acts of aggression, alteration, and destruction”.

The approval came a few hours after the formation of an Israeli Unity Government, whose plan is to annex and permanently occupy the West Bank.

We need not remind everyone of the illegality of such actions, which violate not only relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the most recent of which is resolution 2334 (2016), but also the Fourth Geneva Convention, which, specifically in article 56, requires Israel as the occupying Power to ensure and maintain

“medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory, with particular reference to the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics”,

including in Hebron. There is a great risk that the virus will spread into densely Palestinian areas, which will overburden the health infrastructure there. It is also high time for the Council to demand that the illegal decade-long blockade of Gaza be lifted so it can fight the COVID-19 threat without being under siege or lacking much-needed medical supplies and equipment.

The international community needs to stand by the Palestinian people now more than ever so as to overcome the current ordeal by renewing material and moral support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), especially since the investigation into its administration found no evidence to support allegations of corruption. I take this opportunity to wish the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, success in his new assignment.

Unfortunately, the Middle East under the threat of COVID-19 looks much the same as it looked before this grave menace to all of humankind arose. If such a pandemic cannot change the region and usher in an era of human dignity, an end to occupation and peace for its peoples, then I am not sure what would be able to bring about change.

Annex 36**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Malaysia to the United Nations**

Malaysia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The past few weeks have revealed that only diplomacy and de-escalation can lead to a safer and more stable world. We have seen a substantial number of parties to various conflicts expressing their support for an immediate ceasefire, including in the Middle East. In the latter case, a ceasefire does indeed offer a promising path for concerned parties to focus on what matters and work towards a peaceful solution to their conflict.

Malaysia fully supports the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world in the light of the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. But more importantly, we call on the relevant parties in the Middle East region to permanently end hostilities and return to the negotiating table and dialogue.

Malaysia's position on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains clear and consistent. A negotiated two-State solution is the only viable solution. We call on the international community to assume its responsibilities to end the suffering of the brotherly Palestinian people and establish an independent Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 border, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also urge the relevant parties to ensure full respect for and implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) on Israel's illegal settlements in the Palestinian territory.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to worsen the already dire situation by further aggravating the humanitarian crisis and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The restriction of movement as a result of the pandemic offers a glimpse of the grave situation in the occupied territory.

For Palestinians living in Gaza, the blockade has been forced upon them for as long as 13 years now. Malaysia stresses the need for the Security Council to act urgently to enable the unhindered transfer of required medical supplies and equipment, particularly into Gaza, and the easing of the movement of Palestinians who are in need of medical attention. Malaysia commends the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its partners in the effort to protect the Palestinian people in the fight against the pandemic. The Agency must be strongly supported.

In conclusion, my delegation remains convinced that the United Nations must continue to play a central role in realizing the two-State solution for Palestine and Israel. We will continue to extend our support for the Palestinian people in their quest for fundamental rights, particularly their inalienable right to self-determination, as well as their rights to a dignified life, justice and prosperity.

Annex 37**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Maldives to the United Nations**

My delegation wishes to thank the Dominican Republic for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Notwithstanding the difficulties of convening a physical gathering at this time, we are pleased that we can contribute to this important discussion. I also wish to congratulate the Dominican Republic on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April.

The Government and the people of the Maldives attach great importance to the issue of the Middle East, and in particular the question of Palestine. We once again take this opportunity to reaffirm our resolute solidarity with the people of Palestine. We will continue to do so until a just, lasting and peaceful solution is found to the Palestinian question, in line with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant resolutions.

Tomorrow Palestinians will begin the Muslim holy month of Ramadan not only under cruel occupation but with the additional severe challenges caused by the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Seven decades of conflict have brought unimaginable suffering to the people of Palestine, yet the human rights violations and crimes perpetrated by the occupying Power, Israel, amid the ongoing global crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, is exacerbating an already precarious situation.

Not surprisingly, as the public-health emergency persists in Palestine, Israel is actively exploiting the crisis to inflict more misery upon the Palestinian people. While Palestinians try to grapple with the health emergency, Israel is continuing with the demolition of Palestinian homes and properties, including water and sanitation infrastructure. Along with these illegal actions, daily military raids and settler attacks on Palestinian civilians are severely undermining Palestinian efforts to combat the pandemic.

This is particularly worrisome for the Gaza Strip, where 2 million Palestinians, most of them refugees, have been forced to live under appalling conditions as a result of Israel's 13-year-long blockade and repeated military aggression. The Government of Maldives condemns these deplorable acts of aggression and calls on Israel to lift the blockade that it has imposed on the civilian population in Gaza, cease its appalling attempts to spread fear and panic among Palestinian civilians, including dumping contaminated trash around Palestinian homes, and refrain from undermining Palestinian efforts to contain the COVID-19.

The Maldives has always believed that an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, established within the pre-1967 borders, living side by side in peace and harmony with Israel, and with East Jerusalem as its capital, as prescribed in resolution 2334 (2016), is the best and only solution to the conflict. We therefore believe that Israel must be compelled to immediately and completely cease all illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Furthermore, the demolition of Palestinian homes and properties, as well as the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, should stop immediately.

Some 5.6 million displaced Palestinian refugees depend on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for much-needed humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance, especially in the areas of education and health care, including essential emergency assistance to help confront the COVID-19 pandemic. Pending a just solution to the Palestinian cause,

the Maldives urges sufficient and predictable funding for UNRWA to enable the Agency to continue its work.

The Security Council needs to take urgent action to protect civilians and deliver the much-needed basic humanitarian assistance to millions of Palestinians. We urge the Council and the entire United Nations membership to redouble their efforts to end the conflict and bring meaningful and lasting peace to the people of Palestine, as well as to Israel.

It is an unfortunate reality that the Middle East continues to be susceptible to enduring conflicts, such as those in Yemen and Syria, with the attendant tragic human suffering. As a result, these areas have become, and continue to be, breeding grounds for terrorism, which is a global menace. Terrorism is a global threat to peace and security, requiring a global solution. The international community needs better coordination, information sharing and cooperative strategies to tackle this threat.

As the body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, the Security Council should do more to ensure that its authority and legitimacy are not compromised. The Maldives reaffirms its support for the Council and for the Secretary-General in all current efforts aimed at bringing lasting peace to the Middle East.

Annex 38**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Morocco to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

Allow me first to renew our congratulations to the delegation of the Dominican Republic on its successful presidency of the Security Council in April, as well as our thanks to the delegation of the People's Republic of China for steering the work of the Council in March. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

The world today is living through an extraordinary situation, brought about by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, that requires extraordinary measures to counter an enemy that threatens all of humankind. That situation is compounding the suffering of the Palestinian people, who live under the Israeli occupation of their territory, have poor health facilities and rely largely on humanitarian assistance, including food and medical supplies.

My country admires the steps taken by the Palestinian Authority, in spite of those constraints and its limited means, to combat the pandemic, in particular through its lockdown, testing and the isolation of infected persons and their contacts.

In that light, my country is concerned about the terrible consequences that could ensue from the pandemic, especially for Palestinians, unless the Israeli authorities allow the delivery of humanitarian aid, medical equipment and medicines throughout the Palestinian territories.

Faced with such a state of affairs, all sides have an obligation to respond to the call by the Secretary-General for a comprehensive ceasefire, which my country has supported, and to do all in their power to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

My delegation welcomes the joint appeal made by the Secretary-General's envoys to the Middle East to all parties to the region's conflicts for a ceasefire. Morocco also appreciates the joint call made by Miguel Angel Moratinos, the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, and Adama Dieng, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, in which they laid particular emphasis on the importance of unity, solidarity and international cooperation in combating the coronavirus.

The Palestinian people continue to suffer under the Israeli occupation of their territory, daily violations of their legitimate rights and conduct on their land that flouts internationally recognized resolutions and international humanitarian law. Such conduct includes ongoing settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, house demolitions and systematic assaults on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, all of which has a knock-on effect on the Palestinians' socioeconomic situation and undermines the chances of peace in the region.

Morocco, whose King Mohammed VI chairs the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, stands with the Palestinian people as they strive to achieve their legitimate right to establish an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of 4 June 1967, and reaffirms the importance of halting settlement activity and implementing resolution 2334 (2016).

East Jerusalem is part of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, and it is the capital of the State of Palestine. It is therefore one of the final-status issues that must be resolved through negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, lies at the heart of the conflict in the Middle East and is key to any resolution reached by the Palestinians and Israelis. Morocco rejects any unilateral actions affecting

Jerusalem that are contrary to resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980). Morocco further rejects any unilateral steps that would undermine the legal and historical status of Jerusalem as a holy city and the cradle of the three monotheistic religions.

With regard to Palestine refugees, Morocco reiterates its support for the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its efforts to alleviate their suffering in the countries of the region and to facilitate their access to basic services, in particular children's education and medical care, especially in these exceptional circumstances with the spread of the coronavirus.

For its part, the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency, the executive branch in the field of the Al-Quds Committee, continues to support the city's people through a range of key projects concerning, in particular, cultural and urban heritage conservation, social assistance and the preservation of the Palestinian national archives.

Morocco continues, as before, to believe that the Palestinian question will be resolved. The stalling of talks between the Palestinians and Israelis has nonetheless stymied any chance of breaking the cycle of violence, tension and mutual mistrust. It is therefore up to the international community to step up and work with a will effectively and creatively to bring the Palestinians and Israelis back to the negotiating table so as to achieve a two-State solution within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine. Such negotiations must be based on sound foundations and characterized by a sincere desire, within a specific timetable, to restore confidence between the parties and lay the foundations of a viable Palestinian State that would exist alongside Israel in security and peace, in line with internationally recognized resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. We also appreciate the international efforts to foster lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

Annex 39**Statement by the Chargé d'affaires of Nigeria to the United Nations,
Samson S. Iteboje**

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. My delegation would nonetheless like to make the following additional remarks in its national capacity.

Nigeria is deeply concerned about the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It is regrettable that all efforts of the international community to ease the tensions between the Israelis and the Palestinians seem not to be moving in the intended direction of finding a lasting and comprehensive solution to the peaceful coexistence of the two parties.

The question of Palestine has been a lingering issue affecting international peace and security. Nigeria's position on this issue remains unambiguous. We call for a viable, contiguous Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and based on the 1967 borders, in accordance with numerous United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council. We have severally called on States with influence over the concerned parties to encourage them to re-engage in dialogue on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and other existing agreements. We once again wish to renew that appeal to the influential States to muster enough political will and bring the parties to the negotiating table.

We also wish to reaffirm our unwavering support for a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine existing side by side in peace. In order to contribute to the two-State solution, we must acknowledge the fundamental root cause of this conflict, that is, the occupation. To be able to reach a sustainable peace, humanitarian, economic and political actions are all needed, but their full engagement will not suffice if the occupation of Palestine does not end.

In that regard, it is our expectation that this debate will offer more suggestions as to how best to address the prevailing challenges and gaps in the implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council, on this subject matter. To that end, we once again call on Israel to take concrete steps to freeze all settlement-related activities in the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem as a confidence-building measure. We also call on the State of Palestine to play its role in building confidence by signalling, through enhanced efforts, its return to the negotiating table in order to forge unity and deal with acts of militancy towards a just solution.

My delegation would once again state that the prolonged absence of a political horizon to resolve the broader conflict has coincided with a steady deterioration of the living conditions of Palestinians. The situation is further heightened by the coronavirus disease pandemic, with the Palestinian Authority reporting 155 confirmed cases of the virus and one death, as of 15 April. Nigeria therefore reaffirms its support for the rights of the Palestinian people, including the protection of their fundamental human rights and their right to free movement and self-determination.

My delegation once again reiterates its call on the international community to continue to support and encourage Israel and Palestine to sheathe their swords and embrace the peace process as a means of resolving the lingering conflicts.

In conclusion, it is my delegation's belief that achieving lasting peace in the Middle East will depend on the commitment and determination of both Israel and Palestine to make painful sacrifices. That would bring about the much-desired peace and justice, reduce the serious threat to regional and international peace and security and create more vistas of development for both States.

Annex 40**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, Mona Juul**

The effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) are deeply felt in the Middle East. The pandemic and its social and economic repercussions are exacerbating already dire humanitarian crises and threatening to create new ones.

On 3 April, Norway issued a statement in its capacity as Chair of the international donor group to Palestine, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC). The statement, which was drafted in consultation with the parties and key donors, called for increased budget assistance to the Palestinian Authority, as well as the funding of its efforts, together with those of the United Nations, to combat the pandemic.

The coronavirus crisis puts unprecedented strains on the already fragile Palestinian economy and on the Palestinian Authority's operating ability. In 2020, the fiscal gap after projected international donor support could exceed \$1 billion. Unless properly addressed, the crisis may paralyse Palestinian institutions, thereby undermining the goal of achieving a negotiated two-State solution.

Norway welcomes last month's emergency transfer of clearance revenues from Israel. We urge the parties to further stabilize the budget of the Palestinian Authority by agreeing on fixed and predictable transfers of revenues. Furthermore, we urge the Palestinian Authority to continue to deliver basic services to the Palestinian population and to adopt emergency measures to reduce monthly spending. Preserving the fiscal viability of the Palestinian Authority is vital to the well-being of Palestinians and Israelis alike.

A major COVID-19 outbreak in the densely populated Gaza Strip would be catastrophic for its people, who have been struggling through a humanitarian crisis for years. Life-saving medical equipment and essential supplies must be provided to Gaza. Norway encourages the Palestinian Authority to continue to carry out its responsibility for supporting Gaza's health-care system. We also encourage Israel to continue to facilitate the movement and access of goods and people to and from Gaza.

The coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated that unilateral steps to address common challenges will fall short of meeting the needs of the moment. In that context, Norway commends the constructive and effective cooperation that Israel and Palestine have already established so as to respond to the pandemic and to limit its economic repercussions.

It is our hope that, by jointly overcoming this extraordinary crisis, some much-needed impetus can be brought to the overarching goal of achieving a negotiated two-State solution. On 2 June, Norway will convene the AHLC donor group at the ministerial level in a video-teleconference format to further discuss these challenges.

The current crisis again underscores the critical role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which supports the basic health-care needs of millions of Palestine refugees in the region. UNRWA continues to do that both in these challenging circumstances and in the face of the most severe financial crisis in its history. Norway commends UNRWA's efforts to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak, including in Gaza, and calls on donors to increase their funding to the Agency.

Norway remains deeply concerned about Israel's continued settlement activities, as well as more far-reaching plans for unilateral annexations. Such actions

are in contravention of international law, and undermine the feasibility of the two-State solution. We are also concerned about recent reports of Israeli attacks on Gaza fishermen and that house demolitions, forced evictions and settler violence in the West Bank seem to have continued.

Now more than ever, we need to exchange mistrust and animosity for solidarity and collaboration. Norway supports the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire during the coronavirus pandemic.

Moreover, Norway stresses that economic sanctions imposed on countries should not prevent access to food and essential health supplies, which will be vital in the Middle East and beyond in this time of crisis. We also encourage the application of humanitarian exceptions where appropriate.

Global threats require global responses. We are all affected by the current crisis, and no country or region can resolve it alone.

Annex 41**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

We welcome the holding of a virtual open meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We thank Mr. Mladenov for his lucid briefing.

Peru notes with deep concern the gradual deterioration of the political and humanitarian situation surrounding the Palestinian issue. We continue to deplore the new fatalities, many of them minors, as well as the ongoing hostilities. Putting an end to that grave state of affairs is a major undertaking, but it is imperative.

We acknowledge Israel's right to safeguard its own security and existence through legitimate self-defence, provided that it is conducted in accordance with the principles of legality, proportionality and precaution. The human rights of Palestinian citizens cannot be ignored.

With regard to the latter point, we stress the need to hold the parties accountable for the many serious violations of international law and international humanitarian law. Impunity exacerbates the conflict and contributes to normalizing a disregard for human rights in other theatres of conflict in the Middle East.

Peru also condemns hate speech, anti-Semitism and discrimination in all its forms. Ethnic, cultural and religious differences should be regarded as values of any society, never as threats.

We are alarmed that the prospects for a political solution are becoming increasingly uncertain and that unilateral decisions and actions, or announcements of such with regard to possible annexations, may lead to an even greater escalation of tension and violence.

We must recall Israel's obligation to comply with Security Council resolutions. In particular, we believe it urgent to put an end to the intensified settlement activities, property demolitions and evictions in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in line with resolution 2334 (2016).

We also wish to reaffirm our commitment to the only solution to the Palestinian issue that we deem viable and consistent with international law, namely, that of two States with internationally recognized and secure borders, to be negotiated directly between Israel and Palestine, on the basis of the borders in place up to 1967, which must also lead to the determination of the final status of Jerusalem.

We are facing an extremely turbulent and uncertain situation, characterized by the serious impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which knows no borders and which requires the coordinated and joint response of the international community.

At this critical juncture, we emphasize the need to mobilize the support of the international community, with a view to mitigating the consequences of the disease among the most vulnerable Palestinian population. Providing greater financial resources to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East would be an important step in that direction.

In that regard, Peru welcomes the readiness seen in recent weeks on the part of the Governments of Palestine and Israel to collaborate in the fight against the pandemic. We look forward to its being effective and we hope that it continues, particularly in the Gaza Strip. This must be followed by concrete signs of moderation and commitment to peace by the respective leaders. It is a matter of urgency that they immediately comply with the global ceasefire requested by Secretary-General

António Guterres as an essential measure to prevent and mitigate the devastating effects of COVID-19 and to strengthen diplomatic action.

We would like to conclude by expressing our full support for Mr. Mladenov in his efforts to prevent further escalation and to promote dialogue between the parties.

Annex 42**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

We wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your accession to the presidency of the Council. We appreciate your efforts and those of your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of China, in guaranteeing the continuity of the Council's work and adopting innovative working methods in the face of unprecedented procedural challenges, in particular to ensure that those challenges did not prevent this very important meeting from going ahead. We also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his comprehensive briefing and valuable efforts.

The debate on the situation in the Middle East has taken on a particular urgency with the crisis unleashed by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The region is particularly vulnerable to its devastating effects, in terms both of public health and of its potential political and socioeconomic impact, compounded by humanitarian crises, faltering economies and the destruction and frailty of the health sector caused by the region's conflicts and crises. A further difficulty is how to cope with the potential spread of the virus in refugee and displaced persons camps and in communities that have been devastated by violence. The spread of the virus, which threatens us all, should serve to encourage a rapprochement in the region, to promote the search for solutions to crises and tensions and the cessation of hostilities, and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Qatar supports the efforts towards and calls of the United Nations for a ceasefire so that we might focus on addressing dangers of the pandemic. It also commends France, Tunisia and the other members of the Security Council for their efforts to promote the adoption of a resolution on the COVID-19 pandemic, which is of the utmost importance.

Qatar has treated this cross-border threat with all due seriousness and shown that it is eminently prepared to deal with it. It wasted no time in taking a number of precautionary measures at the national level, making sure that the health sector had sufficient capacity to handle coronavirus cases. It has also taken urgent and long-term measures to address the economic impact of the pandemic and to ensure a high degree of food security. At the international level, in accordance with the principle of shared responsibility and cooperation in facing global crises, Qatar has sent material aid to help countries affected by the pandemic and established air bridges for the rapid transport of critical medical equipment and to airlift people stranded in areas hit by the virus and United Nations personnel to their home countries. It has played an active role in facilitating their transit through Hamad International Airport. Qatar Airways has continued to operate, especially in humanitarian cases, at a time of restrictions on international aviation.

The call for definitive solutions to the region's crises necessarily includes the longest-standing of them all, the Palestinian question. Qatar reaffirms its position of principle in support of any efforts sincerely undertaken to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace and a resolution of the Palestinian question in all its facets, in line with international law and the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations. There is no alternative to a peaceful, negotiated settlement between the two sides based on the agreed terms of reference; the internationally recognized resolutions; the principle of land for peace; the Arab Peace Initiative; the achievement of a two-State solution leading to the creation of an independent and viable State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living alongside Israel in security and peace; an end to the occupation of all Arab territories; a guarantee that the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people will be upheld; and a just solution to the refugee issue. That requires the removal of obstacles that stand in the way of a

solution, such as the ongoing occupation and settlement activities; illegal attempts to annex territory; measures that affect the character, legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem; and all practices of the occupation authorities that contravene international law and United Nations resolutions.

Mindful of its responsibilities, Qatar has joined international partners in accelerating efforts to create conditions conducive to peace, including by helping to alleviate the difficult humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The spread of the COVID-19 is an additional threat and burden, in particular for the Gaza Strip, which has been exhausted by a stifling blockade. His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, has therefore directed that \$150 million in financial aid, including support to combat the pandemic, be provided to the Palestinians in Gaza over a period of six months as a contribution to joint worldwide efforts to confront this global challenge. That assistance is in addition to the humanitarian and development aid allocated to address urgent and long-term needs in Gaza in the areas of education, electricity supply, infrastructure improvements, housing and funding to create jobs, along with tangible contributions in support of the activities and programmes of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Those endeavours reflect the country's principled support for the Palestinian people until such time as it can exercise all its legitimate rights.

The Syrian crisis has entered its tenth year, and the Syrian people is still waiting for this painful chapter in its country's history to come to an end and for its unity, sovereignty and independence to be preserved. Attempts to impose a military solution cannot prosper and will lead only to humanitarian catastrophes, as has recently been demonstrated in north-western Syria, where the targeting of civilians has led to the largest wave of displacement since the crisis began, accompanied by gross violations of international humanitarian law, including the targeting of health facilities, which are supposed to be off limits to attack, according to the summary of the report of the United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry into certain incidents in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic since 17 September 2018 involving facilities on the United Nations deconfliction list and United Nations-supported facilities (S/2020/278, annex). The only way forward is through a political solution leading to a political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex); the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) in its entirety; and measures to ensure that the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity are held to account and brought to justice.

In Libya, people are yearning for security and stability after a prolonged period of great human suffering. The military operations against Tripoli and the targeting of the internationally recognized legitimate Government by Haftar's forces have posed a serious threat to the country's unity and stability. His forces have committed grave violations of international humanitarian law, the latest of which was a rocket attack on a hospital equipped to treat coronavirus patients in the capital. We therefore call again on all sides involved to put the interests of the Libyan people ahead of all else, to respect its desire for a peaceful solution and the preservation of its country's unity, to overcome human suffering, especially given the threat posed by the coronavirus pandemic, and to support efforts to stop the violence, achieve national consensus and implement the resolutions of the Security Council.

The humanitarian and economic suffering afflicting the people of Yemen is nothing short of a tragedy, and the need to end it has become more pressing than ever. The basic needs of all Yemenis must be met and action must be taken to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid as a matter of urgency, especially given the threat posed

by the coronavirus pandemic. In order to truly resolve this human tragedy, an end must be brought to the crisis through comprehensive dialogue aimed at achieving a political solution and national reconciliation on the basis of resolution 2216 (2015), preserving the country's unity and restoring its security and stability. We support the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen in his efforts to implement his mandate.

The situation in the region has been further complicated, and a pall cast over its security and stability, by an unjustifiable and artificial crisis that was manufactured on spurious grounds by States that arbitrarily imposed a blockade on and adopted illegal, unilateral measures against my country in June 2017. Since then, the malicious intent of that provocative and misleading campaign against Qatar has been revealed, as has the vacuity of the lies upon which it was based. The plan to defame Qatar and its sovereign decision-making has proved to be a miscalculation and the policy of sowing division among kindred peoples and wrecking regional solidarity and cooperation, which are needed now more than ever in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, has failed. Such illegal, unilateral measures undermine cooperation and have a direct impact on all the region's States and peoples as they seek to confront the spread of the pandemic. It has thus become a matter of still greater urgency to lift the illegal and unjust blockade imposed on Qatar and to remove the restrictions on the entry of Qatari aircraft into the airspace of the blockading countries. As Qatar has stated in the complaint filed with the International Civil Aviation Organization, those measures violate international law and the provisions of the Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation.

Despite those ongoing policies and measures against it, Qatar has stood by its principles, which are grounded in respect for international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and has successfully petitioned the international legal system, first and foremost the International Court of Justice, to confront those unjust measures, which are a flagrant violation of the Charter, the principles of international law, international agreements and covenants, and human rights. In accordance with its well-known policy of resolving disputes through dialogue, mediation and friendly relations among States, Qatar has consistently stressed that it is prepared to resolve the crisis peacefully through constructive, unconditional dialogue based on mutual respect that preserves the sovereignty of States. It has unfailingly commended the earnest efforts of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the kindred State of Kuwait, while the other side has continued to reject dialogue.

In conclusion, we call on the international community to reject any attempt to provoke crises, use underhanded means of eroding stability or jeopardize regional and international solidarity. We need such solidarity in order to confront a pandemic that threatens us all without distinction, and to address the many challenges and threats facing all humanity.

Annex 43**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations on behalf of the Group of Arab States**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I am pleased, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, to congratulate you, Sir, on your accession to the presidency of the Security Council and to convey to you our appreciation for your efforts in managing the work of the Council and ensuring its continuity. I would also like to thank you for holding this open meeting, which is especially significant for the Arab Group. We also wish to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his briefing and efforts.

The format for holding this quarterly meeting is unprecedented and reflects the far-reaching changes caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which poses a threat to the entire world, including the Middle East. What has not changed in our region for decades is the unresolved question of Palestine. Indeed, Israel, the occupying Power, is taking advantage of the fact that the world is focusing its attention on confronting the global pandemic to pursue its policies and plans to annex parts of the Palestinian territories that were occupied in 1967, step up the pace of its colonial settlement-building in those territories and violate the rights of the Palestinian people.

We therefore call on the international community and the United Nations, including the Security Council, to shoulder their responsibilities, to ensure compliance with international law and internationally recognized resolutions in the occupied Palestinian territory and to prevent the Israeli occupation Government from using this pandemic, which threatens the world and humankind as a whole, from carrying out its illegal policies in the territory of the State of Palestine, which has been under occupation since 1967.

Everyone knows full well that moving forward with those annexation schemes will have serious implications for regional and global security, peace and stability, and that there is no alternative to a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of this question in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the terms of reference of the peace process. And so today we turn once again to the Security Council, aware that this matter lies at the heart of its mandate under the Charter to maintain international peace and security and that the numerous Council resolutions on the Palestinian question must be put into effect.

The Palestinian question is crucially important to the Arab States, and the Arab Group reiterates its firm stance in favour of peace as a strategic choice. It repeats its call for a settlement of the Palestinian question on the basis of a two-State solution leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of 4 June 1967, and an agreement on the final-status issues, including those relating to borders, refugees and Jerusalem. To that end, we call for continued international efforts to relaunch serious and effective negotiations within a specific timetable with a view to reaching a settlement in accordance with the terms of reference of the peace process, internationally recognized resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, which the Arab States put forward in 2002 and by which they still stand. The success of such efforts in achieving that goal and reviving the peace process will depend on their being consistent with the principles of international law and the terms of reference of the peace process.

Compliance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and its resolutions calls for the rejection and condemnation of any measures or practices

carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, that violate them. Foremost among those measures are the continued occupation of Arab lands; illegal settlement activities in the occupied territory; attempts to annex land illegally; attempts to alter the character, legal status and demographic composition of the city of Jerusalem, encroaching on its Islamic and Christian holy places; and the blockade of the Gaza Strip. Apart from being blatant violations of international law and internationally recognized resolutions, those actions undermine the prospects for peace and stand in the way of a two-State solution. By continuing to carry them out, Israel is signalling its intransigence, its defiance of international law and Security Council resolutions, and its lack of sincerity in seeking peace.

The role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in providing basic services to more than 5 million Palestinians is indispensable, and it is therefore necessary to support the Agency to ensure that its activities continue in accordance with its mandate.

Lastly, the Arab Group supports the State of Palestine in its desire to obtain full membership of the United Nations. We take this opportunity to reaffirm the solidarity of all Arab States with the State of Palestine and our brothers, the Palestinian people, in its legitimate pursuit of an end to the historical injustice to which it has been subjected for many years and to its prolonged suffering, and as it strives to exercise all of its inalienable rights.

Annex 44

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the assumption by your country, the Dominican Republic, of the presidency of the Security Council this month, and I wish you every success.

Let me first express our deep gratitude to and total support for all health professionals around the world, and especially those on the front lines, for their enormous efforts and great courage in combating the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which affects all corners of the globe and peoples of all religions and races. The pandemic has claimed hundreds of thousands of innocent lives and left more than a million people infected.

The fight against the epidemic requires a transparent, strong, coordinated, broad and knowledge-based global response based on science and a spirit of solidarity. Saudi Arabia is committed to putting up a united front against this common threat. Addressing the epidemic and its interlocking health, social and economic effects is an absolute priority for our country. We are all facing the same battle against one and the same enemy, and it will require close cooperation and effective coordination for us to emerge from this crisis stronger than before. That point was underscored by the virtual summit of Group of 20 leaders, hosted by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, on 26 March.

At a time when our world is witnessing many unprecedented crises, risks and challenges, and even more so with the spread of the COVID-19 virus, which knows no international borders, and the danger it poses to societies and peoples, especially those under the yoke of occupation and settlement, the Israeli occupation authorities continue to pursue their settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territory. They do so with total disdain for all international covenants, the four Geneva Conventions and the relevant internationally recognized resolutions, which outlaw settlement-building and prohibit the prejudice caused to civil and public rights and property when settlements are expanded, or when those already in place are legalized.

Saudi Arabia categorically rejects all illegal Israeli policies, practices and plans as null and void. That includes recent moves by the Israeli authorities to annex land in and parts of the West Bank, in particular in the Jordan Valley, in an attempt to impose a new reality in the occupied territories. Saudi Arabia also rejects any Israeli move to institutionalize racial discrimination against the Palestinian people and obliterate its national identity, to displace an entire people and to revoke its right to its own land and holy places.

Saudi Arabia will continue to defend the cause of Palestine and its people in its quest to exercise its legitimate and inalienable rights, which are guaranteed under international law. For my country, the central pillars of the Palestinian question remain the ending of the occupation, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and within the 4 June 1967 border, and a guarantee of the right of return of Palestine refugees. Equally, we attach importance to a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East as a strategic choice, based on the two-State solution and in line with the international terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, which provides for the establishment of the State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967 and an end to the occupation of all Arab lands, including the Syrian Arab Golan and Lebanese territory.

The time has come for the international community and the Security Council to meet their responsibilities, come to the aid of the Palestinian people and champion its cause by seeing that justice is done and making its dream of building an independent State a reality. It is time to deal firmly with the ongoing practices and violations by Israel of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, which undermine any chance of peace and extinguish any glimmer of hope for a lasting and comprehensive peace in a region that has long been plagued by instability.

Saudi Arabia has provided support to the Yemeni people in recent years and is committed to fulfilling its duty to all Yemenis, without exception. Accordingly, in spite of the difficulties faced by the world's Governments in tackling the threat of the spread of the coronavirus, my Government has announced that it will support the United Nations humanitarian response plan in Yemen for 2020 in the amount of \$500 million, including \$25 million in aid to slow the spread of the pandemic in Yemen. In order to deal with the outbreak of the pandemic, it is crucial to foster an environment, far removed from military operations, in which the Government of Yemen can put into place effective health policies and initiatives to protect the Yemeni people.

My country has gone to great lengths to bring peace to Yemen and worked to facilitate access to the country. It has supported recent efforts by the United Nations to de-escalate the situation, achieve a ceasefire agreement and put in place measures to build trust between the parties in order to end the Yemeni people's suffering and reach a political solution. As part of international efforts, in line with the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire and for calm so as to make it possible to address the coronavirus outbreak and bring the parties together to reach a political solution to the crisis, the Arab coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen has backed the position of the Government of Yemen by accepting that call and declaring a two-week ceasefire that may be extended.

In spite of all of those international efforts to achieve a ceasefire, the Iranian-backed Houthi militia has yet again demonstrated to the international community its lack of seriousness about achieving the peace for which Yemen and its people are yearning. It has carried out terrorist attacks on cities and civilians in my country and has continued its military offensive inside Yemen. It has shown no concern for the urgent need to confront the spread of the pandemic; indeed, it has endangered efforts to pacify the situation. The Coalition, however, has continued to exercise maximum restraint by adhering to its declared ceasefire and supporting the efforts of the United Nations to reach a comprehensive political solution. Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia will not hesitate to resolutely defend its territory and its citizens, in accordance with international law, where its security is threatened.

Now more than ever, in circumstances in which the whole world needs to unite to achieve peace and confront a pandemic that makes no distinction between countries or societies, it is high time for the international community, and in particular the Security Council, to shoulder their responsibilities and to act firmly to prevail on the Houthi militia to accept and comply with the ceasefire and engage seriously and constructively with the United Nations in its efforts to arrive at a comprehensive political solution in Yemen in line with the three terms of reference, in particular resolution 2216 (2015). They must also convince the parties that back the rebel militia and are fanning the flames of insurrection, carnage and destruction in the region to put an end to those actions and abandon the subversive policy that they are pursuing in Yemen and other countries in the region.

Annex 45**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, Bashar Ja'afari**

I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on presiding over the Security Council this month. I am pleased to participate in this meeting, as my country is a main party concerned with this item.

The Israeli occupation forces, several days ago, once again committed a series of acts of aggression targeting the Syrian Arab Republic, using guided missiles that were fired over Lebanese territory, with the aim of enhancing the morale of the remaining proxy terrorist groups. That aggression is a blatant violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and related resolutions of the Security Council, as well as of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

Such acts of aggression would not have been committed had the Security Council not failed for decades to impose the implementation of its relevant resolutions regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict and had there not been unlimited support for that rogue entity from certain permanent members of the Security Council. Such behaviour has encouraged Israel to continue to repeatedly commit crimes, violations and State terrorism without even the most nominal accountability.

This year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations. The Palestinian question and ending the Israeli occupation of occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, have been issues on the agenda of the largest number of meetings, resolutions and statements allocated to this topic. Unfortunately, owing to the pressure of some permanent members of the Council, our Organization is still unable to find a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict or to implement its relevant resolutions, namely, resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981), or to oblige Israel to end its occupation of the Arab territories.

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

The Syrian Arab Republic, along with the overwhelming majority of Member States, strongly condemns those decisions and considers them unilateral conduct on the part of a party that lacks the legal, moral or political authority to determine the fate of the peoples of the world or of the territories that are part and parcel of the Syrian Arab Republic and occupied Palestine. These American practices in support of the Israeli aggression, occupation and settlement in the occupied Arab territories are not only a violation of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, but they also represent deliberate political and security blackmail of our countries and the peoples of the region.

The past period has witnessed systematic and dangerous Israeli practices through which the occupation authorities have sought to consolidate their control and impose their will on the occupied Syrian Golan, including, but not limited to: holding a meeting of the Israeli Government in the occupied Syrian Golan, seeking to organize illegal local elections there and concluding contracts and granting licences to usurp its natural resources.

The most recent instance in this respect was the looting of the property of Syrian citizens and their displacement in order to set up a project to generate power using wind turbines in an area of approximately 6,000 dunums in a number of locations surrounding the towns of Majdal Shams, Ayn Quniya, Baq'ata and Masada and to continue settlement activities, and forcing our people in the Golan to register the land that they inherited from their ancestors with the Israel Land Authority, under penalty of confiscation of the protesters' lands. All that constitutes flagrant violations of international law and international humanitarian law, which some parties address with double standards and hypocrisy that exceeds all limits.

Unfortunately, none of these issues attracted the attention of the Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov, to be included in his monthly briefings to the Council. Such gross ignorance represents an ethical and political breach of the duties of his mandate, in contravention of the principles and rules of procedure applicable in the United Nations, thus rendering his mandate illegitimate.

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

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

Annex 46**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Sinirlioğlu**

The situation across the Middle East continues to be a source of grave concern.

While terrorism, conflicts and humanitarian crises have engulfed millions of innocent people in the region, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further exacerbated conditions there by disrupting humanitarian aid flows, restricting peace operations and limiting diplomatic efforts.

Unfortunately, in this time of global crisis, the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Gaza are among the most vulnerable. Decades of Israeli occupation and blockade have severely damaged the Palestinian economy and its infrastructure and health system.

In Gaza, 2 million people have been living under extremely difficult conditions, in widespread poverty and with acute shortages of essential goods and services. The Palestinian Government has implemented several effective public-health restrictions and developed a socioeconomic response plan. We welcome and support all these measures to deal with the spread of the virus and its implications.

Yet, as in the rest of the world, the public-health restrictions have had serious effects on the economy of Palestine. With the shutdown of the economy and the decrease in revenues, the Palestinian economy will further contract. It is regrettable that, owing to the Israeli occupation, the Palestine Government does not have access to the conventional monetary and fiscal tools to cope with the crisis.

These are times that call for solidarity and cooperation. There are, however, reports of the obstruction of Palestinian efforts to contain the virus, including, but not limited to, the destruction of a health clinic and the seizure of disinfection equipment. It is also very concerning that Israeli operations against civilians continue during the crisis, even within the context of enforced lockdown and evening curfew. These actions by the Israeli authorities could amount to crimes against humanity and will have permanent implications for efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.

We are also appalled that, even during this global crisis, Israel is continuing with its illegal settlement activities, the destruction of Palestinian properties and the eviction of Palestinian people from their homes. There are also reports that settlers are attempting to take advantage of the lockdown to take over Palestinian land. We condemn all steps that might inflict more hardship and suffering on the Palestinian people during this pandemic.

The stability of Palestine is crucial for the stability of the region. The spread of the virus could lead to wider social and political destabilization, with broader consequences. The current crisis can also be an opportunity to restart the peace process with a view to finding a just and lasting solution to the conflict in line with the resolutions of the Security Council and the established parameters.

We therefore urge the Government of Israel to fulfil its responsibilities. It is time to stop the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

First, Israel must ensure that all Palestinians, including those held in prisons and detention centres, have access to the necessary humanitarian assistance and medical equipment needed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The illegal blockade of Gaza must end. The Palestine Government must be provided with all the financial support it needs, and all illegal settlement and demolition activities must stop.

As the occupying Power, Israel also has an obligation to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian people and their property. The disproportionate use of force by the security forces and settler violence must come to an end. We expect Israel to respect international law and principles of humanity.

The international community also needs to step up its support for the Palestinian people by providing bilateral humanitarian and financial assistance to the Palestinians. We need to support the United Nations COVID-19 response plan for the occupied Palestinian territory and ensure that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continues to have adequate resources.

We must also focus on the long-term socioeconomic implications of the pandemic, as economic contraction, further financial instability and increasing unemployment will have negative repercussions on social cohesion.

In the face of the crisis, Turkey has increased its support to Palestine to expand the capacity of the health system, prevent the transmission of the virus and mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic. We are sending more than 15 tons of medical supplies to Palestine. We are also going to provide \$5 million in budget assistance to Palestine.

As an emergency measure, we have agreed to the use of the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital in Gaza as a quarantine hospital.

The latest developments remind us once again of the urgency of revitalizing the peace process. Unfortunately, the newly formed Government of Israel has already pledged to consider the annexation of parts of the West Bank. The violations of international law committed so far have not brought peace to the region. It is not going to be any different now. Further unilateral steps would end hopes for peace in Israel and Palestine.

A two-State solution, with the establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the only way to bring about a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. That requires unity, courage and resilience, particularly on the part of the Security Council.

Annex 47**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations**

I have the honour to submit this statement on behalf of the States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in my capacity as Chair of the OIC Group.

At the outset, I thank the Dominican Republic for its stewardship of the Security Council in these difficult times. I would also like to express the OIC's sincere solidarity with all affected countries and convey our deepest condolences to all bereaved families on the tragic loss of thousands of lives caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In addition, we commend the positive responses around the world to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire during the pandemic and call on all parties to take action in line with the efforts of the Secretary-General's special envoys. The OIC member States stand ready to provide support to achieve that ceasefire and contribute to maintaining international peace and security.

Just like the rest of the world, the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including occupied East Jerusalem, are working to contain the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which poses unprecedented health, economic, social and security threats and challenges. Although the number of detected cases is relatively low to date, the United Nations has warned that the occupied Palestinian territories are exceptionally vulnerable to infection and mortality, with a severely impaired health system, high population density and widespread poverty, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where the impact of the illegal Israeli blockade and military aggression have devastated the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation.

The occupied Palestinian territories are at risk in the coming weeks and months of a rapidly deteriorating situation. In addition to this health crisis, the occupied Palestinian territories simultaneously face a debilitating fiscal crisis. They are also subject to severe restrictions imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, particularly in regard to access to areas in and around occupied East Jerusalem and in crossing to areas west of the illegal wall that limit the country's ability to respond effectively to the outbreak of the virus. As such, the OIC member States express deep concern about the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and urge the international community to demonstrate global solidarity with the Palestinian people to cope with the pandemic. In particular, the OIC member States urge the international community to consider taking the following measures.

First, they must support the United Nations COVID-19 response plan for the occupied Palestinian territory. That plan appeals for \$34 million to cover urgent and critical activities in the coming three months, with the aim of expanding the capacity of the health system, prevent the transmission of the virus and mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic. We thank the United Nations for its comprehensive plan, which covers important areas such as health, education and food security, and efficiently builds on its existing work and infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Secondly, it is important to ensure that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to have adequate resources to ensure that appropriate preparedness and response measures are in place at UNRWA installations, in particular health and education facilities. In addition to providing regular annual contributions to the Agency's core budget, Member States can also support UNRWA's COVID-19 flash appeal for Palestine refugees, which aims to mobilize \$14 million to cover immediate priorities for health

and other services related to the pandemic in the occupied Palestinian territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In that regard, OIC member States commend UNRWA's robust measures to cope with the spread of COVID-19, including by switching to online education and spreading awareness among the refugee communities about preventive measures and social distancing, in addition to the provision of essential health services.

Thirdly, it is vital to provide bilateral humanitarian and financial assistance to the Palestinians, including essential medical equipment, testing kits and other types of support, to enhance the capacity of the health system in the occupied Palestinian territories and the refugee camps, as well as to facilitate the reopening of the economy and basic services. In that vein, the OIC member States note with appreciation the quick and effective response of the Palestinian Government and institutions to the COVID-19 outbreak despite limited resources and the fiscal crisis.

While the international community is working to help the Palestinians to contain this pandemic, we cannot ignore that the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is exacerbated daily by the illegal policies of the Israeli occupation. These have continued and even escalated in the recent period, particularly in terms of settlement activities and annexation threats, as reflected in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2019/938) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). Israel's ongoing violations of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, continue to cause immense hardship and suffering for the Palestinian people, further deepening their vulnerability in this time of worldwide crisis. As such, the OIC member States urge the Security Council to pressure Israel to take three immediate steps to help mitigate the situation.

First, Israel must stop its inhumane treatment of more than 5,000 Palestinian political prisoners — among them 43 women, 180 children and 700 sick persons. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel needs to release all children, elderly persons, sick prisoners and administrative detainees incarcerated in overcrowded Israeli jails where they are at high risk of infection.

Secondly, Israel must end its illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip, which constitutes collective punishment, is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, has severe humanitarian consequences for the Palestinian people and is compounding their hardship and suffering during this pandemic.

Thirdly, Israel must ensure that Palestinians have access to the humanitarian assistance and medical equipment needed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

Israel is obligated to take all of those steps in accordance with international humanitarian law, and specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention, which governs situations of foreign occupation.

The OIC member States also remain deeply concerned about the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem and the Bethlehem area. In addition, the OIC deplors attacks by Israeli settlers, which have escalated in tandem with Israeli officials' continual threats of annexation. Settlers continue to abuse and intimidate Palestinians, raid Palestinian villages, appropriate Palestinian lands, destroy property, uproot olive trees, vandalize crops and contaminate groundwater by pumping industrial waste and sewage water into Palestinian lands.

Settlement activities gravely violate the rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, and undermine the possibility of achieving a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders. Settlement activity poses a challenge to the will of the international community and is a flagrant breach

of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Such illegal and destructive activities become even more worrisome in the context of escalating threats by Israel to annex parts or all of the West Bank. Those threats are the culmination of Israel's decades-long settlement colonization scheme and require the immediate attention and action of the international community in order to deter such a breach of the prohibition on the acquisition of territory by force and to salvage the prospects for a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders.

In conclusion, the OIC remains firm in its conviction that this organ must act with the utmost urgency to put an end to those Israeli violations. The United Nations must also continue its work to ensure that the Palestinian people achieve their right to self-determination — in the form of a sovereign and independent State in the territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital — and that a just solution is reached for Palestine refugees, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions. Moreover, we call for Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions. We further affirm the need to preserve the unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and social harmony of Syria and reiterate our support for a political solution to the Syrian crisis, consistent with resolution 2254 (2015).

Annex 48**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations, Samuel Moncada**

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has the honour to participate in this quarterly open debate of the Security Council to express its position on a matter of particular importance for international peace and security — the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. In that context, allow us, at the very outset, to express our appreciation to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing.

Similarly, the Venezuelan delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela notes with concern that, despite the appeal made by the Secretary-General for an immediate global ceasefire in order to devote our collective energy to the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that is ravaging humankind, the State of Israel continues to advance its colonial plans against the Palestinian people and territory through violence and terror.

We note Israel's recent accelerated progress in its policy of demolishing and confiscating Palestinian buildings. In the past month alone, at least 47 Palestinian structures were demolished, while the expansion of the Wall and the increasing appropriation of Palestinian land for the construction of illegal settlements pushes the international community — day by day — further and further from the realization of a two-State solution and long-awaited peace, pursuant to the relevant resolutions adopted by the Council and within the framework of international law.

The same is true of human rights violations and the rise in Palestinian detentions without any sort of due process. In March alone, 250 Palestinians, including 54 children, were detained. Moreover, during that period, 238 incursions were carried out, leaving three Palestinians dead and 52 injured.

Given that the non-compliance with international provisions, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations represents a major obstacle to international peace and security, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela believes that the international community should focus on addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A disturbing example of this arbitrary policy of increasing non-compliance with international law is the United States of America's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel, a measure that we consider to be null and void, out of order and unilateral, and one that has had catastrophic effects on regional peace and security due to its illegal character.

The only viable path to peace is a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders, as set out in resolution 2334 (2016). Similarly, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, are essential instruments aimed at guaranteeing the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and the safeguarding of their territorial integrity, for the consolidation of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In that regard, we believe that it is essential to strengthen the work of the Council, in order to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security through compliance with its own resolutions on this subject — in furtherance of its capacity and power to enforce the relevant provisions of the United Nations

Charter and its own jurisprudence — with a view to guaranteeing the feasibility of a structured, just, peaceful and lasting solution to this protracted conflict.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela condemns the increase in violent and supremacist inflammatory rhetoric as a means of securing political gains, seeking to justify non-compliance with the relevant international provisions, ignoring the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and the territorial integrity of the State of Palestine, encouraging the growth of Israeli settlements in occupied territories, increasing the confiscation of land and the demolition of buildings, expanding the construction of the wall and flagrantly violating the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to exist.

We are gravely concerned about the inhumane Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, which causes untold humanitarian, social and economic suffering to the Palestinian people. This appalling policy has created a severe humanitarian crisis by impeding the delivery of needed hospital, medical and other resources to address the COVID-19 pandemic and putting the Palestinian population at imminent risk. Recognizing the difficult global situation generated by this global pandemic and the risks that it entails for the most vulnerable populations obligates us to denounce what — as a result of the Israeli blockade — could be one of the worst tragedies for the Palestinian people, in one of the most densely populated areas of the world.

In that connection, we must recall that unilateral coercive measures and blockades of any sort are a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law. They may also constitute a form of aggression, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX). For that reason, Venezuela urges the State of Israel to completely and immediately lift the blockade imposed on Gaza and to refrain from promoting any type of unilateral, illegal or arbitrary coercive measures that undermine the possibility of building the much-desired peace.

The international community must act in a responsible, effective, coordinated and decisive manner in defence of international law and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. To that end, it is important to strengthen our support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order to address the serious humanitarian crisis on the ground and to provide a timely response to the needs of the Palestinian people and refugees.

In conclusion, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela joins the call of those countries that, like Palestine, urge the international community to put an end to the impunity of the State of Israel in its deliberate failure to comply with the provisions of the relevant Council resolutions, the United Nations Charter and the norms of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law. We must do so before it is too late and the colonial war, together with the excessive human suffering caused by those blatant violations, transcends the borders of this conflict and extends beyond the Middle East region.