



Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

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Provisional

President: Mr. Abarry. (Niger)

Members:

Belgium	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
France	Mr. De Rivière
Germany	Mr. Sautter
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
South Africa	Mr. Matjila
Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
United States of America	Mr. Hunter
Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

Mr. Mladenov is joining today's meeting via video-conference from Jerusalem.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: On behalf of the Secretary-General, I will devote this briefing to presenting his fifteenth report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), covering the period from 5 June to 20 September of this year.

Before presenting the report, I would like to note the recent agreements between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. The Secretary-General welcomes those agreements, which suspended Israeli annexation plans over parts of the occupied West Bank. The Secretary-General hopes that such developments will encourage Palestinian and Israeli leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations towards a two-State solution and create opportunities for regional cooperation. He reiterates that only a two-State solution that realizes the legitimate national aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis can lead to sustainable peace between the two peoples and contribute to broader peace in the region.

I am similarly encouraged by the call to restore hope in the peace process and resume negotiations on the basis of international law and agreed parameters, as made by the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, Egypt, France and Germany in Amman.

The recent moves towards strengthening Palestinian unity, as demonstrated by the outcome of the Fatah-Hamas meetings calling for the long-awaited national presidential and legislative elections, are also encouraging. Elections and legitimate

democratic institutions are critical to uniting Gaza and the West Bank under a single national authority and vital to upholding the prospect of a negotiated two-State solution.

However, I am concerned by the rising coronavirus disease (COVID-19) infection rates in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel. The Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process is working with the relevant stakeholders to address the needs in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I welcome the initial response from the donor community to the United Nations COVID-19 efforts, and I urge increased support, particularly as the health emergency is rapidly becoming a socioeconomic crisis. All efforts must be mobilized in order to respond to the pandemic, particularly in Gaza.

Turning to the report, from the outset let me state that developments during the reporting period cannot be divorced from the broader context — Israel's continued military occupation of the Palestinian territory; the illegal settlement activity and demolitions; the situation in Gaza, with more than a decade of control by Hamas over the Gaza Strip and ensuing rocket fire, militant activity and Israeli closures; unilateral actions that undermine peace efforts; severe challenges to the viability of the Palestinian Authority; and the persistent risk of military escalation. The global pandemic has further increased the needs and vulnerabilities of Palestinians.

Those factors collectively erode the prospects for achieving a viable two-State solution, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

Resolution 2334 (2016), in paragraph 2, calls on Israel to "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem" and to "fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard". No steps were taken to that effect during the reporting period.

During this and the previous reporting period, there were no settlement housing plans advanced, approved or tendered in Area C. On 21 June, however, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced plans for a building with 72 housing units in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Beit Hanina.

On 9 June, the High Court of Justice struck down a 2017 law enabling the wide-scale expropriation of private

Palestinian land and the retroactive regularization, under Israeli law, of thousands of housing units in settlements and unauthorized outposts. The Court ruled that the law was unconstitutional owing to its violation of the rights of Palestinians to property and equality as a protected population in the occupied West Bank.

On 27 August, the High Court of Justice also ordered the evacuation of approximately 40 structures in the illegal settlement outpost of Mitzpe Kramim, illegal also under Israeli law, and the relocation of its residents. Meanwhile, two new outposts were established in Um Zaituna, between the occupied West Bank settlements of Ma'on and Carmel, and on Mount Eival, north of Nablus.

On several occasions during the reporting period, Israeli authorities removed or destroyed structures in illegal outposts, in some cases leading to violent clashes with the Israeli security forces and settlers. As highlighted in a statement by the Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory on 10 September, demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures by Israeli authorities continued across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, reaching the highest demolition rate in the past four years.

Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which remain almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, 250 structures were seized or demolished, resulting in the displacement of 360 Palestinians, including 179 children and 87 women. Of the structures demolished, 181 were in Area C and 69 in East Jerusalem. In 32 cases, Palestinians were forced to demolish their own homes so as not to incur the heavy Israeli demolition fees. Health and water facilities, as well as agricultural structures, were also demolished, affecting the services and livelihoods of up to 2,000 Palestinians.

Resolution 2334 (2016), in paragraph 6, calls for “immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction”. Unfortunately, violence continues almost on a daily basis.

In August, Palestinian militants resumed launching incendiary balloons from Gaza towards Israel, sometimes escalating to rockets and mortars. Israel retaliated by striking targets in Gaza and temporarily tightening the closures, until a temporary de-escalation was achieved at the end of the month. Overall, 63 rockets and mortars were fired towards Israel from

Gaza, 22 were intercepted by the Iron Dome system and 19 landed in Israel. At least eight Israeli civilians, two of them children, were injured and at least two houses were damaged, while over 400 balloons carrying incendiary devices were launched into Israel, causing hundreds of fires in the vicinity of Gaza.

Israeli security forces launched over 160 missiles and tank shells against Hamas positions in Gaza. Ten Palestinian civilians, including four children and a pregnant woman, were injured, and at least two houses were damaged. Following one strike, an unexploded Israeli missile was found in a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) school in the Al-Shati refugee camp.

Meanwhile in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, during the reporting period, four Palestinians, including one child, were killed by the Israeli security forces and 40 people injured by live ammunition. One Israeli was killed and 37 were injured by Palestinians, including three children, in stabbings, clashes, rocket attacks, and other incidents.

On 23 June, a 27-year-old Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israeli security forces while reportedly carrying out a ramming attack at a checkpoint near Jerusalem in which one soldier was injured.

On 9 July, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 34-year-old Palestinian man and wounded a 17-year-old in the West Bank village of Kifl Haris.

Later in July, several Palestinian workers were severely beaten and robbed of their possessions near Mitar Terminal, south of Hebron. The Israeli Justice Ministry subsequently submitted indictments against five border police officers.

In early August, a 23-year-old Palestinian woman was killed by live fire in her home in Jenin during an Israeli security forces operation and the ensuing clash with residents. There are contradictory claims over responsibility for the shooting, and a Palestinian prosecutor is investigating the incident.

On 17 August, a Palestinian man, who was attempting to carry out a stabbing attack against an Israeli border police officer, was shot and killed in the Old City of Jerusalem.

On the same day, Israeli security forces shot and injured a 60-year-old Palestinian man with hearing and

speech impairments at the Qalandiya checkpoint when he did not respond to their calls to halt.

Later in August, a 16-year-old Palestinian died, and two others were injured, after being shot in a village west of Ramallah. The Israeli security forces stated that the three were preparing to throw Molotov cocktails and set alight tires to attack passing vehicles.

On 26 August, a Palestinian man from Nablus stabbed and killed an Israeli man in Petach Tikva. The perpetrator was later arrested.

On 2 September, an Israeli police officer and a soldier were injured in an alleged ramming attack south of Nablus. The Palestinian driver was shot and apprehended.

Settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank continued during the reporting period. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported 73 attacks against Palestinians by Israeli settlers, with 30 injuries resulting from those incidents. Approximately 100 attacks resulting in some 20 injuries and damage to property by Palestinians against settlers and other Israeli civilians were also reported.

On 14 September, an Israeli court sentenced the convicted killer of a Palestinian family in a 2015 gruesome arson attack in Duma village to three life sentences for murder and 20 years for attempted murder, as well ordering compensation to the family.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls for the parties to refrain from acts of provocation, incitement or inflammatory rhetoric. During the reporting period, one senior Fatah official said that anyone who cooperates with Israel “should be shot”, and in its weekly guidance for Friday sermons, the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Religious Affairs used anti-Semitic language in messaging on the recent normalization agreements that “there is nothing that harms Palestine and its holy sites more than making an alliance with the Jews, being connected to them, and relying on them.” Some Israeli officials also made provocative and concerning statements in support of the annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank and rejected the prospect of Palestinian statehood.

One Israeli member of the Knesset and former Minister incited to violence, deprecating a video showing restraint by soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the face of a 15-year-old Palestinian child throwing stones at them. Referring to the

manslaughter conviction of a member of the IDF after fatally having shot a Palestinian assailant in Hebron, he said: “I would prefer 1,000 videos of Elor Azaria instead of an embarrassing and dangerous one like this one.”

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterated calls by the Middle East Quartet for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution. On 3 September, for the first time in nearly a decade, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Executive Committee held its first meeting together with the heads of all Palestinian factions. Speakers focused on the need to restore unity and reform the PLO. President Abbas reiterated his known position that he is ready to launch negotiations with Israel under United Nations or international auspices, while also calling for popular resistance to confront the annexation threat.

Following an escalation in violence between Hamas and Israel, Qatar mediated a de-escalation arrangement announced on 31 August and provided significant assistance to Gaza, including to support COVID-19 response and to vulnerable families. As a result, Israel allowed the delivery of fuel, reinstated the fishing zone and reopened the Kerem Shalom crossing for goods, and Hamas agreed to halt incendiary balloons and other attacks.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of coordination between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel in response to the plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank have contributed to worsening the already dire humanitarian, economic and political situation in Gaza and impacted the health and socioeconomic situation in the West Bank. The PA’s decision to stop accepting the clearance revenues that Israel collects on its behalf has exacerbated an already concerning fiscal crisis, with an 80 per cent reduction in Palestinian revenues, which has impacted salaries and service provision. It is unclear whether the Government will have sufficient resources to make any future salary payments or carry out its functions in the coming months.

In Gaza, COVID-19-related restrictions halted the crossing of workers and traders into Israel and prevented revenue transfers to Gaza’s exporters. The absence of coordination also delayed critical infrastructure projects, exacerbating the high unemployment rate in the Strip, which is nearly 50 per cent.

In response, the United Nations has engaged with all sides to ensure the unimpeded provision of humanitarian assistance. Agreements were reached with the PA to enable the coordination of humanitarian deliveries under United Nations auspices and with Israel to streamline its administrative procedures. In early September, the Palestinian Authority also re-engaged in its support to donor-funded projects in Gaza. Still, the lack of coordination has significantly compounded the challenge of confronting the rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. During the reporting period, three patients, including two children, who needed urgent medical treatment outside Gaza died because of related delays. On 6 September, however, the United Nations brokered arrangements to enable patient transfers from Gaza with the support of the World Health Organization.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) faces a \$200 million financial shortfall in its 2020 core programme budget and is seeking an additional \$31 million to cover its 2020 emergency appeal for critical humanitarian needs in Gaza. UNRWA's extended COVID-19 response plan for \$94.6 million to cover needs through the end of the year is only 5 per cent funded.

Concerning arrests have also taken place. On 19 July, Israeli police arrested and detained the PA Governor of Jerusalem. On 9 September, the Internal Security Force (ISF) further notified the Governor of an order restricting his movement. Later, on 21 September, the Palestinian Security Forces arrested seven members of the Fatah Democratic Reform Bloc.

In another negative development, the media reported that Israel's Security Cabinet passed a motion on 2 September to withhold the bodies of Palestinians killed in armed attacks, or alleged armed attacks, that caused injury or death to Israelis, expanding its existing policy to withhold the bodies of Palestinians whom Israel identifies as known militants.

In its resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council called upon all States

“to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967”.

No such steps were known to have been taken during the reporting period.

Resolution 2334 (2016) also called upon all parties to continue, inter alia, “to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations”.

The agreements between Israel and Bahrain and between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, which were formalized in a signing ceremony at the White House on 15 September, highlight the criticality of achieving a just, comprehensive and enduring resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that meets the legitimate needs and aspirations of both peoples.

On 27 August and earlier today, the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet met virtually to discuss these latest developments and agreed to remain engaged on the matter and chart a way forward.

On 9 September, the League of Arab States held a ministerial meeting. In the final statement, participants reinforced the commitment of all Arab League States to ending the occupation and establishing an independent Palestinian State based on the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and stated that the Arab Peace Initiative remains the basis for achieving a lasting, just and comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.

I would like to share some broad observations concerning the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period.

First, the resurgence of COVID-19 is having a devastating effect on the ground. The United Nations and its partners will continue to support the Palestinians in responding to the pandemic, including by addressing critical gaps in medical supplies and equipment. It is important to focus particularly on Gaza, given the unique situation and extreme vulnerability of the population. Any increased responsibilities taken on by the United Nations should be limited, time-bound and not replace the responsibilities of the Palestinian Authority or the Government of Israel. I urge the parties to find a path forward to address this urgent health crisis. I also urge support for UNRWA as well as for the inter-agency COVID-19 plan and the United Nations development response plan in support of the efforts of the Palestinian Government.

Second, we must also remain focused on addressing the steadily eroding situation on the ground. While over the past reporting periods we have seen limited settlement advancement, I remain concerned by plans for settlement construction in the E1 area and other sensitive locations in the occupied West Bank, which are

pending approval by the Israeli authorities. As clearly set out in resolution 2334 (2016), the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of international law.

Third, I am deeply concerned by the serious spike in demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I urge Israel to cease this policy immediately, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

Fourth, Israel's suspension of plans to annex parts of the West Bank removed a critical threat that had the potential to upend peace and regional stability. Annexation would have constituted a most serious violation of international law and dealt a devastating blow to the prospect of the two-State solution. The threat, however, to the viability of the two-State solution posed by continued settlement expansion and demolitions remains. In that regard, I am concerned by recent discussions in the Knesset that demonstrate the intensifying pressure by the Government on Palestinians living in Area C.

Fifth, given the severe economic and health crisis faced by the Palestinian people, I take this opportunity to call on the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to urgently re-engage and strengthen efforts to advance the goal of a negotiated two-State solution. This financial crisis can and must end. Both sides should re-examine the nature of their economic relationship and improve it to the benefit of both peoples.

Sixth, daily violence continues to fuel mistrust and drives us further from a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Settler-related violence continues, and I urge Israel, as the occupying Power, to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population and to hold the perpetrators of the attacks accountable. I reiterate that the Israeli security forces must exercise maximum restraint and should use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life and also investigate all incidents of the possible excessive use of force swiftly, thoroughly and independently.

Seventh, I also emphasize that the indiscriminate launching of rockets and incendiary devices towards Israeli population centres violates international law, and I call on all Palestinian militants in Gaza to halt such attacks. Likewise, children and schools should

never be the target of violence by any party; children should not be exposed to violence at all.

Eighth, I also welcome the 13 August understandings, which have de-escalated tensions in and around Gaza and appreciate Qatar's continued generous support to the Gaza population. I nevertheless remain seriously concerned about the fragile calm and the unacceptable suffering of Palestinians in Gaza. The risk of another major escalation has not been eliminated. No amount of humanitarian or economic support alone will overcome Gaza's challenges. The fundamental problems are political. They require the necessary leadership to reunite Gaza and the West Bank under a single democratic, national leadership as well as to lift Israeli closures in line with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

Ninth, I welcome the recent meeting of the PLO Executive Committee and the heads of Palestinian factions as well as the subsequent efforts made by the leadership to strengthen Palestinian unity. It is critical that the important Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts also continue. The United Nations firmly supports all such efforts, and I call upon all Palestinian factions to build on this momentum to reunite Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic national Government and advance towards general elections, which are critical for restoring belief in the democratic Palestinian leadership and institutions. Gaza must remain an integral part of a future Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution.

I am concerned about reports by Palestinian rights groups of arrests by Palestinian security forces in Gaza and the West Bank based on political affiliation, without clear charges or accusations. Such politically motivated arrests should stop, and the rule of law should prevail.

I would like to reiterate that the fate of two Israeli civilians and the remains of two Israeli soldiers held by Hamas in Gaza remains an important humanitarian concern. I call upon Hamas to provide full information on them, as required by international humanitarian law.

I also remain concerned about Israel's practice of holding the bodies of killed Palestinians and about reports of a recent expansion of that policy. I call for the return of the withheld bodies, in line with Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law.

In conclusion, we are again at a pivotal moment in the search for peace as a convergence of destabilizing

factors threatens to pull Israelis and Palestinians further towards a one-State reality of perpetual occupation and conflict. I remain committed to supporting both sides to resolve the conflict and end the occupation, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements, in pursuit of achieving the vision of two States — Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State — within secure and recognized borders, based on the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for the members of the Middle East Quartet, key Arab partners and the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to urgently re-engage and strengthen efforts to advance the goal of a negotiated two-State solution before it is too late.

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

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

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): I will lead off today by offering our condolences to the people of Kuwait for the death of their Amir, Sheikh Al-Sabah. The Amir was a peacemaker in every sense of the word, and we are grateful for his years of dedicated service to the people of Kuwait and to making the region a more stable, prosperous and peaceful place. His leadership during Kuwait's two years on the Security Council were particularly noteworthy and appreciated. Our thoughts and prayers today are with the people of Kuwait and his family.

I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing today. As always, we appreciate his hard work and that of his team in addressing this issue.

Last month, the United States began by highlighting the most significant step towards peace in the Middle East in over 25 years — the agreement to normalize relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (see S/2020/837). For the second month in a row, we are pleased to draw the Council's attention to yet another momentous step on the path towards peace in the Middle East — on 11 September, Bahrain and Israel agreed to normalize relations.

President Trump's bold diplomacy and rejection of the old conventional wisdom enabled him to broker these agreements — the Abraham accords — the first such agreements between Israel and Arab countries

since 1994. I want to emphasize what President Trump highlighted about those agreements: in Israel's entire history, there had previously been only two such agreements. Now we have achieved two in a single month's time, and we are hopeful there will be more to follow.

To commemorate those breakthroughs, President Trump hosted a historic signing ceremony on 15 September at the White House, where the Israeli Prime Minister and the Foreign Ministers of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed the Abraham Accords Declaration. Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have committed to the exchange of embassies and ambassadors, as well as cooperation in a broad range of fields including education, health care, trade, energy and security.

President Trump's leadership, vision and expertise made this momentous event possible. He built trust with our regional allies and reoriented their strategic calculus by identifying shared interests and common opportunities, moving them away from a vested interest in perpetuating the same old conflicts. Instead of just talking about peace month after month, Security Council meeting after Security Council meeting, the United States led the way through action, and we achieved tangible results.

We began this year by laying out the President's vision for peace — a comprehensive, fair and realistic plan for Israel and the Palestinians to live peacefully, side by side. The Abraham accords will allow further exploration of that vision. Both the vision for peace and the Abraham accords demonstrate the commitment of the United States and Israel to peace, prosperity and security throughout the Middle East.

Despite those achievements, however, Palestinian terrorists fired a barrage of rockets on 15 and 16 September, just as Israel and its new Arab partners were commemorating their historic peace deals. We deplore and reject such violence, which has only brought misery and suffering for far too long.

We now call on Palestinian leaders, who owe it to their people to reject violence, to embrace the opportunities for broader peace that the Abraham accords offer, and to work with Israel to resolve their long-standing issues. We hope that other Arab States can build on the accords while also encouraging the Palestinians to hold direct talks with Israel.

Tomorrow, along with the United Arab Emirates, we will be co-hosting an informal briefing with Security Council members to discuss these peace agreements. That briefing will provide an opportunity for candid discussion about how these agreements could serve as a springboard to break the deadlock on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We encourage the members of the Security Council to embrace the opportunities presented by the Abraham accords, and we hope they will join us in publicly supporting these historic breakthroughs.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): Let me begin by thanking Special Coordinator Mladenov for his useful and frank briefing on the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

I join my colleague from the United States in offering our heartfelt condolences to Kuwait for the passing on of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait.

During the recently held general debate of the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session, we heard many Member States reflect on the birth of the United Nations and its shared values of peace, justice, equality and dignity for all, as well as the notion of saving successive generations from the scourge of war. However, despite those august ideals, Palestine and its people remain under illegal occupation and continue to be deprived of the shared values and ideals we spoke about. Palestine is one of the world's oldest unresolved international conflicts, firmly entrenched in the agendas of both the General Assembly and the Security Council for almost as long as the United Nations has been in existence. Nevertheless, 72 years later, the status quo remains and little progress has been made to ensuring the right of Palestinians to self-determination, independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Despite numerous agreements and newly forged partnerships, it is shameful that Palestinians continue to live under occupation and are denied their very basic civil and human rights. We should ask ourselves — do these agreements that some of us welcome change the day-to-day lives of those living under occupation?

In that regard, South Africa reiterates its position that no peace plan or initiative can have any merit or succeed if it does not include all parties to the conflict in the talks as equal partners from the very beginning. Any initiative aimed at resolving the Israeli occupation must take into account the needs and aspirations of the

Palestinian people. In addition, any such peace plan must ensure that Palestinian statehood is not reduced to an entity without the basic tenets of sovereignty, territorial contiguity and economic viability. A realistic and credible peace plan will result in a genuine two-State solution; not one viable State and a Bantustan.

South Africa will continue to work with like-minded countries to support international efforts aimed at the establishment of a viable Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with Israel within internationally recognized borders, based on those existing on 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as capital of both States, in line with all relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and internationally agreed parameters. We therefore support President Abbas' call in his statement at the general debate of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly for the Secretary-General, together with the Middle East Quartet and the Security Council, to begin preparations for an international conference with the participation of all the parties concerned and for discussions on a genuine peace process, including to resolve all final-status issues.

Turning to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), South Africa once again calls for the full implementation of this and previous resolutions on the question of Palestine. The Council heard today that, while settlement activity may have slowed slightly due to the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic, this illegal practice by the Israeli authorities continues, in contravention of international law.

With regard to the demolition and seizure of Palestinian property, the recent statement by Mr. Jamie McGoldrick, Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, is deeply disturbing. From March to August 2020, we saw the demolition or seizure of 389 Palestinian-owned structures, the highest average destruction rate in four years. This activity took place despite the Israeli authorities' indication that they would refrain from such actions during the global pandemic.

As Special Coordinator Mladenov indicated, these demolitions and seizures have left 442 Palestinians homeless, at a time when Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories are under lockdown. Where are these Palestinians, deprived of their rightful homes, meant to go? Where must they go? Of additional concern is the destruction of critical infrastructure, such as water, hygiene and sanitation facilities, during

a pandemic where universal guidance leans towards the need for regular hand-washing and social distancing.

All resolutions adopted by the Security Council, be they unanimous or not, must be uniformly implemented. We cannot pick and choose which Council resolutions should be implemented. In a similar vein, overt violations of Council resolutions, as is the case with the continued settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, usually evoke stricter measures on the party responsible for the infringement.

In conclusion, South Africa reiterates its position that direct dialogue and negotiation between the relevant parties on an equal footing is the only credible and sustainable path to peace in the Middle East. We must all do our part to bring the parties together, instead of driving them further apart.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, for his comprehensive briefing.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains deeply concerned about the trends unfolding on the ground. It is time for us as the Security Council to take significant steps that would stabilize the current situation and promote meaningful progress towards a two-State solution.

The prolonged occupation and conflict have caused immense suffering for the Palestinian people, as clearly highlighted in the latest report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). Consequently, we remain particularly concerned about the numerous reports of violent incidents against civilians throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We therefore call on those responsible to respect their obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure civilian safety, protection and well-being.

We wish to draw urgent attention to the grave breaches of international law being perpetrated by Israel, despite the international community's continuous calls for the complete, immediate cessation and reversal of settlement activities. Israel continues its illegal activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Demolitions and settlement activity contravene international humanitarian law and human rights law and erode the viability of the two-State solution. We strongly call on Israel to fully respect resolution 2334

(2016) and all other relevant provisions of international law and United Nations resolutions.

In this context, it is relevant to underscore that international efforts to promote a peaceful settlement can bear success only by facilitating direct and meaningful negotiations between the parties. We call on the Middle East Quartet to renew its efforts and restore belief among Palestinians and Israelis that a negotiated peace agreement remains possible.

Turning to Gaza, Israel continues to intensify measures of repression against the Palestinians under its control, most flagrantly by its illegal inhumane blockade of Gaza. Over the years, the blockade has deepened poverty in Gaza. According to *State of Palestine, Atlas of Sustainable Development 2020*, poverty rates in Gaza are higher and more severe than in the West Bank, 53 per cent versus 13.9 per cent. We commend the United Nations and its partners for their continued efforts aimed at implementing urgent humanitarian and economic interventions to help sustain lives and livelihoods of the Palestinians in Gaza. We call on Israel to end its blockade of Gaza.

We commend the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in its rapid and responsive support to the needs of Palestinian refugees that have been exacerbated by the coronavirus disease. UNRWA continues to deliver in a constrained financial environment. In this regard, we call on the international community to redouble its support to the Agency's new humanitarian appeal from August through December 2020 in order to address the worst impacts of the pandemic on Palestine refugees across its five fields of operation.

The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reaffirms its principled position in relation to the Palestinian question and remains committed to achieving a negotiated two-State solution in conformity with the international consensus. We wish to emphasize our commitment to a peaceful and just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Finally, I would also like to express our condolences on the passing of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, Amir of the State of Kuwait, who will most certainly be remembered for his dedication and contribution to peace and security in the region.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I wish to take this opportunity to express

our deep sorrow over the passing of the Amir of the State of Kuwait and extend express our sympathy and condolences to the Government and the people of Kuwait. The Amir was a distinguished leader in the Arab world who contributed to the development of friendly and cooperative relations between China and Kuwait.

I wish to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

Today is the last day of the general debate of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. In their addresses in the general debate over the past week, many leaders referred to the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. Ceasefire, cessation of violence, peace process, political settlement and two-State are frequently used expressions by many speakers. That fully demonstrates that the Palestinian question has always caused concern among the international community and has never been forgotten. It remains the international community's common expectation to push for a comprehensive, just and enduring solution to the Palestine question as soon as possible.

The Security Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and is duty bound to promote the settlement of the Palestinian issue. There have been recent developments in the situation in the Middle East, and the Palestinian issue also now faces new dynamics. The Security Council should listen to the voice of the Palestinian people and countries of the region, strengthen communication and coordination with all parties in the international community and play its part through ongoing efforts to promote the Middle East peace process and the settlement of the Palestinian issue.

First, with regard to strengthening political support, the question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East issue and should remain high on the international agenda. In his address to the General Assembly last week, President Abbas called on Secretary-General Guterres to join the Quartet and the members of the Security Council in convening an international conference early next year to discuss a genuine peace process. China believes that such an initiative demonstrates Palestine's readiness to participate in the peace talks and promote the peace process. All parties should attach importance to it and make the necessary efforts to create favourable conditions for the political settlement of the Palestinian

issue. The international community, especially countries with influence on Palestine and Israel, should uphold an impartial and just position, actively promote peace talks and make genuine efforts to advance the Middle East peace process. President Abbas also said that the Palestinian side was preparing to hold presidential and parliamentary elections involving all political factions. China wishes to place on record its appreciation and looks forward to prompt and positive progress in intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the relevant political processes.

Secondly, with regard to abiding by the international consensus, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution are important foundational agreements for resolving the Palestinian issue that must be upheld in order to achieve peace in the Middle East. The plan to annex parts of the occupied Palestinian territory, if implemented, would be a serious violation of international law and United Nations resolutions and would undermine the two-State solution. China is therefore seriously concerned. We note that the implementation of the plan has been suspended, and hope that the party concerned will respond to the Secretary-General's appeal by abandoning the annexation plan and returning to the track of dialogue and negotiations on an equal footing.

In addition, recently the situation in the Gaza Strip has remained tense. It is hoped that all the parties concerned will respond to the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal by sincerely observing the ceasefire agreement reached at the end of August and refrain from taking actions that exacerbate the situation.

Thirdly, on a people-centred approach, according to the United Nations, the number of Palestinian homes demolished between March and August this year reached a four-year record, with hundreds of people displaced. We urge the relevant parties to earnestly implement resolution 2334 (2016), cease all settlement activities in the occupied territories, stop the demolition of Palestinian homes and the destruction of Palestinian property and refrain from acts of violence against civilians. At the same time, the relevant parties should fulfil their obligations under international law, ensure the coverage of basic services and humanitarian assistance to those in need in the occupied territories and fully lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has had a severe impact on the economic and social development of Palestine. Israel and Palestine should resolve their differences, strengthen cooperation and spare no efforts in fighting the pandemic and saving lives. The international community should enhance its support to help Palestine to overcome its economic and humanitarian challenges. China appreciates the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to ease the humanitarian situation of Palestinian refugees and help them to fight against the pandemic.

As a sincere friend of the Palestinian people, China firmly supports the just demands of the Palestinian people and all efforts to resolve the Palestinian issue. We also support the Palestinian people in establishing an independent State of Palestine that enjoys full sovereignty on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

China recently handed over the fourth batch of anti-pandemic supplies to Palestine and signed a donation agreement with UNRWA. In addition, further progress has also been made in the Ramallah school project, supported by the Chinese Government. We will continue to provide assistance, within our capacity, to the Palestinian people to combat the pandemic, develop the economy, improve people's livelihoods and make a positive contribution towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue as soon as possible.

Mr. De Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The recent developments serve to underscore the ongoing significance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The parameters for its settlement have long been known — two States, living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines, both with Jerusalem as their capital. On that basis, it is now our responsibility to work towards a resumption of dialogue between the two parties.

The announcement of the normalization of Israel's relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signals a new dynamic, which may make a positive contribution to regional stability. We welcome it.

However, regional stability also requires a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that

respects the aspirations and rights of both parties and is consistent with international law and the parameters agreed by the Security Council. France, which is a friend of both the Israelis and the Palestinians, remains convinced that neither of the two peoples will be able to fulfil its aspirations at the expense of those of the other. France will not compromise Israel's security, just as it will not abandon the Palestinian people in the pursuit of their rights.

In conjunction with its European and Arab partners, France is ready to support a gradual resumption of dialogue. In that spirit, Minister Le Drian and his German, Egyptian and Jordanian counterparts met in Amman on 24 September in the presence of the European Union Special Representative. The four ministers expressed their determination to act collectively to that end on the basis of tangible and realistic commitments to be made by both parties. It is also important that the parties resume their cooperation at all levels, in accordance with the agreements reached, including in dealing with the current pandemic.

In order to achieve a resumption of dialogue, there is an urgent need to re-establish a climate of trust between the parties. That first requires that the suspension by the Israeli authorities of the planned annexation of Palestinian territories become a definitive measure. That is the message that our ministers reiterated in Amman. It is also the message that, together with my European counterparts, we conveyed ahead of this Council meeting.

It also requires an end to the settlement policy and the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). France is very concerned about the continuing settlement activities and the unprecedented increase in the demolition of Palestinian structures over the past six months despite the health situation. Settlement activities must not allow a de facto annexation. France calls on Israel to suspend the construction of new housing units in the West Bank settlements and East Jerusalem, particularly in sensitive areas around Jerusalem, such as Givat Hamatos, Har Homa and in the E-1 area, and to implement an effective freeze on demolitions.

France also calls for progress in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process and hopes that the meeting in Ankara will allow progress to be made in that direction. We welcome the Palestinian Authority's renewed commitment to holding elections and encourage it to

make rapid progress in preparing for this important date for the Palestinian people.

Moreover, France will continue to give its full support to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We call on all States to contribute to its budget to help it overcome its financial crisis.

Lastly, France remains committed to upholding international humanitarian law and human rights, in particular through support for Palestinian and Israeli civil society organizations.

France stands ready to support any initiative based on international law and the agreed parameters. It calls on the Council to come together on that basis, which we have built together.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

Estonia welcomes the signing of agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and between Israel and the Kingdom of Bahrain. We also welcome the constructive role played by the United States in this respect. The normalization of relations is a positive development that contributes to the peace and stability of the whole region. It is positive that, along with these agreements, Israel has committed to suspending plans to unilaterally annex areas of the occupied Palestinian territory.

We believe that these historic developments contribute to peace and stability in the whole region and give momentum to finding a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A two-State solution and a lasting peace can be achieved only through direct negotiations, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of both parties and Israeli security concerns. We urge the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations.

We also call on the parties for the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and to refrain from any unilateral steps that could undermine the prospects of the two-State solution and increase instability in the region. We would like to recall that the resolution calls for immediate steps to prevent acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as acts of provocation, incitement and destruction. We condemn the continued firing of rockets into Israel and the attacks against civilians.

Estonia strongly condemns the heinous killing of Rabbi Shai Ohayon on 26 August. We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint in order to avoid an escalation of violence.

We call on the Palestinian Authority to resume cooperation based on cooperation agreements with Israel. This would be especially vital in the context of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

Finally, we note the positive signals that the Palestinian factions have once again reached consensus on holding elections. Hopefully, this agreement will soon result in the announcement of a date for the elections throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like at the outset to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov, for his detailed briefing and him and his team for their tireless efforts.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at an impasse. The situation on the ground remains unstable in both Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the parties seem further apart than ever. Our priority today must therefore be the resumption of negotiations.

First of all, we call on Israelis and Palestinians to come to the negotiating table without preconditions and to resume meaningful negotiations. This is indeed the only way to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. We also call on all parties to refrain from any unilateral action that could jeopardize the resumption of these negotiations.

This conflict, which has been the subject of many Council resolutions, will find a positive solution only if these resolutions and international law are respected. Belgium, together with its European partners, remains committed to a negotiated and viable two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States, based on agreed parameters and international law.

My second point concerns the normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world, which is an important element for peace and stability in the region. We welcome the agreements reached between Israel and Bahrain and between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. We hope that these developments will create a new momentum towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the two-State solution.

The announcement of the suspension of plans to formalize the annexation of certain parts of the occupied Palestinian territory is a step in the right direction. However, we urge Israel to definitively abandon its annexation plans. Annexation, regardless of its scope and how it is described, is a serious violation of international law. Moreover, annexation would definitively close the door to the resumption of negotiations and deal a final blow to the two-State solution.

Now more than ever, it is time to reverse the negative trends on the ground. We call for full respect for and full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We also call on the Palestinian Authority to resume fiscal and security coordination with Israel, given its impact on the Palestinian people.

The third point of my intervention concerns settlements. Israel's illegal settlement activities, which are accompanied by expropriations, demolitions, confiscations and displacements of population, must cease immediately. We are deeply concerned about the recent increase in demolitions, despite indications by the Israeli authorities that they are refraining from demolishing inhabited Palestinian homes. The demolitions have also included water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, further limiting Palestinian access to basic services and commodities, which is particularly worrisome in the context of the current pandemic.

My fourth point concerns Gaza. Belgium welcomes the relative calm that has prevailed in Gaza following the escalations in August and calls on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint. We recall the obligation of the parties to respect international humanitarian law and to ensure the protection of the civilian population. We welcome the de-escalation efforts in this regard, including those of the United Nations, to temporarily facilitate the transfer of patients out of Gaza. If we want to reverse the trend in Gaza, we must invest at both the humanitarian and political levels. We call on all parties to ensure the free access of humanitarian actors and underscore the crucial role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. At the political level, the only just solution is the lifting of the blockade and the full reopening of the crossings, while taking Israel's legitimate security concerns into account.

My fifth point concerns the organization of elections in Gaza and the West Bank. A strong,

accountable, inclusive and functional Palestinian Government, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights, is essential to the two-State solution. Elections are an important element in this regard. We welcome the recent efforts of the Palestinian factions towards reconciliation and hope that these will pave the way for genuine, free, fair and inclusive legislative and presidential elections throughout the Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem.

Finally, I would like to express Belgium's concern about the continued hostile actions and policies against civil society and human rights defenders. Their work contributes to creating an environment that is conducive to peace and respect for human rights. They are an important element of an open and democratic society and, therefore, must be allowed to carry out their work without impediment.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefings.

I join other members in expressing our deepest condolences to the Government and the people of Kuwait on the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Al-Sabah, late Amir of the State of Kuwait.

Viet Nam joins the Secretary-General, his Special Coordinator and many other countries in expressing its serious concern over the grave, mounting hardship that the Palestinian Authority and people have had to suffer in recent months. The spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic in Palestine continues to be a major concern, as the number of confirmed cases and deaths almost doubled in the past month. The impact of the pandemic and the restriction measures on Palestine's economy is devastating. The socioeconomic conditions in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territory have gone from bad to worse. In addition to the economic constraints, foreign aid to Palestine has dropped sharply since early 2020. Against that backdrop, we call on international donors to continue their assistance to the Palestinians to help them overcome the ongoing crisis. We also urge all parties to strengthen their cooperation and to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance in accordance with their respective obligations. It is therefore also important to maintain and increase assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East so that essential agency can fulfil its important task of helping the Palestinian people.

In the face of such multifaceted challenges — the hostilities continue and civilians, including children, are being killed — the long-standing issue of the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank remain unresolved. We also note with concern the increased number of demolitions of Palestinian homes in the West Bank, which have led to the displacement of more and more people. As resolution 2334 (2016) clearly affirms, the establishment by Israel of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory has no legal validity and constitutes a violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

We call on all parties to stop the hostilities so that the tension and violence do not escalate into a large-scale conflict. We commend the Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator and the countries of the region on their efforts to reduce tensions and restore calm. We also welcome the recent steps by the relevant Palestinian parties to prepare for elections in the months ahead, which will hopefully help them address common challenges and meet the expectations of the Palestinian people.

However, we remain concerned that the situation is fragile, since the deep-seated roots of the conflict have not been eradicated. We continue to urge all parties to refrain from any unilateral action that could lead to recurrent violence. At the same time, we welcome all initiatives and measures in the pursuit of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestine question that would contribute to promoting dialogue, cooperation and stability in the Middle East.

We reaffirm our strong support for the Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator. Given the grave situation in which the Palestinians find themselves, it is high time that the international community, the countries of the region, the United Nations and other relevant partners redouble their efforts to restart international negotiations as well as those among the parties directly concerned in order to bring about concrete steps toward de-escalation and the resolution of all outstanding issues.

To conclude, we would like to reiterate Viet Nam's unwavering support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights. We strongly support the two-State solution, including the establishment of a State of Palestine that peacefully coexists alongside the State of Israel,

with East Jerusalem as its capital, and with secure and internationally recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines and in accordance with international law, the United Nations Charter and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Let me start by expressing our sincere condolences on the passing of His Royal Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait. May His Highness rest in peace.

Let me also begin by expressing my appreciation to the presidency of the Niger for having convened today's meeting and, of course, to the Special Coordinator, Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing.

As we commemorate the historic seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, we are constantly reminded of what the United Nations stands for. It stands for peace, it stands for international order, and it stands for equality. These are the principles that Indonesia also believes in and emphasized at the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference as pivotal guidelines on the subject of the independence of nations that are under occupation or colonization.

Sadly, despite various United Nations resolutions and widespread global support, and in defiance of international law, Palestine remains the only country attending the Conference that has not enjoyed its independence. To this day, it is still illegally occupied, and its people are discriminated against and their lands often arbitrarily seized.

Indonesia affirms that it is time for the United Nations to do more. We all need to do more. With that in mind, allow me to share three important points.

First, peace without addressing the relevant root causes is not peace at all. Indonesia would like to take this opportunity to remind Member States that the root cause of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict is the illegal occupation. The conflict has been further amplified by decades of Israel's creeping annexation and illegal settlement policy in the occupied territories, a policy that is flagrantly unlawful and goes against resolution 2334 (2016).

As such, the idea of promising peace without addressing root causes is just an illusion of peace. Any efforts to resolve the conflict and achieve peace should first and foremost be undertaken with the involvement of the two main parties, the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Seeking solutions that disregard other parties is unjust and one-sided.

I thus come to my second point: restarting a credible peace process. We need to show our support for the Secretary-General's call urging both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations. We also should welcome President Abbas's call at the high-level debate last week for the Secretary-General to commence, together with the Quartet and the Security Council, an international conference with all concerned parties to engage in a peace process based on international law, United Nations resolutions and other internationally agreed parameters.

My third point is continued support for the Palestinian cause. In addition to facing the menace of forced evictions, the demolition of homes and discrimination and violence, as well as years of blockade, the Palestinians are now, sadly, also confronted with the increasing coronavirus disease pandemic and its socioeconomic spillover effects. Once again, Nickolay's briefing presented a gloomy picture of the situation on the ground.

According to the World Health Organization, between July and September the number of cases soared from around 3,000 to more than 40,000. In these crises, we need to show our solidarity. We need to show our humanity.

I urge the Israeli Government to end the blockade of Gaza and to allow unhindered access to humanitarian assistance and goods. Furthermore, I urge the international community to strengthen its commitment to providing humanitarian and development aid to the Palestinian people, particularly through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East UNRWA, which supports more than 5.6 million Palestine refugees.

To conclude, I would like to reaffirm Indonesia's unequivocal solidarity with and support for the Palestinian people gaining their rights, including the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to begin by expressing my condolences to the brotherly people of Kuwait following the death of His Highness Amir Al-Sabah, who contributed greatly to humanitarian efforts and to peace and security in the region and worldwide.

I thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing, which contained updated information reflecting the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as human rights violations, the policy of *fait accompli*, the continuing occupation and the lack of desire to build peace.

During the high-level debate, world leaders reiterated their countries' commitment to the internationally agreed upon parameters and United Nations resolutions as a basis for achieving a lasting solution to the conflict in order to put an end to the occupation and allow the Palestinian people to regain their legitimate rights, particularly their right to self-determination and their right to an independent State based on 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That position has been continuously reiterated by the international community, which has always supported the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people and promoted a solution to the conflict.

In that context, Tunisia reiterates its support for the just Palestinian cause and for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We also call on the international community and the Security Council, in particular, to force Israel to freeze its settlement activities, which run counter to international law, and to implement the relevant Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

Tunisia rejects Israel's annexationist efforts and calls on Israel to abandon them once and for all. My country remains attached to peace as a strategic goal and is ready to support any initiative aimed at shoring up peace based on the agreed parameters, including the Arab Peace Initiative, in order to re-establish peace, justice and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the region. We believe that the participation of the Palestinian side is a prerequisite to any initiative to resolve the conflict and to find a fair and lasting solution to the conflict.

We believe that it is the responsibility of the Security Council to maintain international peace and security and to resolve conflicts. With that in mind, we recall the role of the Council in advancing the peace process and putting an end to the impunity of Israel, which continues to violate international law. We call on the Quartet to play its rightful role and to revive negotiations, in conformity with the agreed terms of reference, in order to put an end to the occupation,

achieve an independent Palestinian State based on 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and resolve all final-status issues.

We support the call of President Abbas for the convening of an international conference in order to relaunch a credible peace process with a clear timetable. We also welcome the genuine reconciliation measures undertaken by Palestinian factions, as well as the fact that presidential and legislative elections will be organized in the upcoming months.

Israel pursues its aggressive policies and its violations of legitimate Palestinian rights. We condemn all incitement, destruction and actions that target civilians. We must protect Palestinian civilians, who suffer daily violations of their rights, and put an end to the blockade imposed on Gaza, which is a form of collective punishment and only serves to aggravate the suffering of men and women and to complicate the situation in the context of the pandemic by creating an additional challenge.

We welcome the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which provides support for 5.5 million Palestinian refugees, and we call on donors to continue supporting the Agency in order to meet the humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees. We urge regional and international actors to step up their efforts to support the Palestinians and the Palestinian authority.

In conclusion, we believe that in order to ease tensions and re-establish peace and security in the Middle East, it is essential to put an end to the occupation and to ensure justice for the victims.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Dominican Republic wishes to offer its most heartfelt condolences to the people of Kuwait over the death of Amir Al-Sabah.

We thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. We are extremely concerned about the latest details on the pronounced deterioration of the situation on the ground, as we note the resurgence of cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on occupied Palestinian territory and in Israel. This month, COVID-19 cases in occupied Palestinian territory have increased by 30 per cent and by 83 per cent in the Gaza Strip, where it has more readily spread throughout the community. Immediate measures are needed to alleviate the humanitarian situation and prevent greater deterioration. That includes the full cooperation of Israeli authorities in allowing the Palestinians to

respond effectively to the needs of the sick and the most vulnerable. A permanent ceasefire is critical to enabling both countries to respond to the pandemic.

We welcome the announcement of President Abbas, in his address to the General Assembly, of the preparations under way for the holding of parliamentary elections, followed by presidential elections, with the participation of all political parties.

The Dominican Republic supports regional efforts that seek to create new conditions that are conducive to peacebuilding. That is why we welcome the normalization agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and, more recently, between Israel and Bahrain, which has become the fourth Arab country to establish direct dialogue with and links to Israel. These efforts and strategies all deepen cooperation among these nations, promote positive transformation and could increase stability and security in the region. However, above all, they should serve to promote the legitimate aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians alike to live in peace, prosperity and justice after so many years of division, hostility and suffering.

Although we understand its position of resigning from the chairmanship of the League of Arab States, we call on Palestine to maintain its indisputable place in the Arab world and take advantage of all spaces to promote constructive commitments towards the creation of new opportunities for its cause.

For many Palestinians, this could be the darkest hour, but we would like to remind them that it is precisely after the darkest hour that there is always a new dawn.

We reiterate that any movement towards annexation in the occupied Palestinian territory would have serious implications and violate international law, including resolution 2334 (2016). The settlements not only contribute to the escalation of tensions on the ground, but also make the possibility of a peaceful two-State solution more remote, hindering both social inclusion and the aspiration to a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Accordingly, we reaffirm our full support for a two-State solution as set out in United Nations resolutions and continue to adhere to the framework of agreements between Israelis and Palestinians.

The fundamentals have not changed; there must be a peace agreement between these nations. The political leadership of both countries must be willing to compromise, realize that the only way forward is to negotiate their way out of this long and painful conflict

and lead their peoples on their own paths towards a lasting peace for present and future generations.

I would like to take advantage of this penultimate meeting for the month of the Niger's presidency of the Security Council, which ends tomorrow, to thank President Abarry for the magnificent work he and his team have accomplished on behalf of his country. President Abarry has guided the Council in a manner we have rarely seen, for which we sincerely congratulate him.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): As always, I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his words.

Like others, I would like to start today by expressing sincere condolences following the death of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, the Amir of the State of Kuwait. As Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said, the personal contribution His Highness made to regional stability and humanitarian assistance will long be remembered.

The United Kingdom has warmly welcomed the historic steps taken over the last two months, with the normalization of relations between three great friends of the United Kingdom: Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Israel. These positive steps are already having an impact, such as direct flights from Israel to the United Arab Emirates and early commercial agreements. More positive progress is to come in trade, cultural and scientific links and much more. We urge others across the region to follow the example of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

We must acknowledge that the agreements represent a profound shift in the region. It is critical that as the international community we build on the momentum of normalization to take forward resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In his recent visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab encouraged both the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to use the suspension of annexation plans — plans the United Kingdom strongly opposed — as an opportunity. We urge the Palestinian Authority to resume cooperation with Israel in the interests of the Palestinian people. We also call on both parties to make constructive and open steps towards a return to dialogue.

While the threat of annexation appears to have receded, the United Kingdom remains concerned by a number of negative trends on the ground. We reiterate our call on both sides to halt any activity that

makes peace more difficult to achieve. In accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), this includes terrorism, incitement, violence against civilians, demolition of Palestinian property and settlement advancements.

In Gaza, we welcome the agreement reached on 31 August, which has restored a degree of calm and led Israel to lift its ban on fuel and goods imports through the Kerem Shalom crossing. On 15 September, Hamas launched rockets into Israel once more. We condemn these actions; they are unacceptable, unjustifiable and must stop. As ever, dialogue is the only way to address the situation.

We remain concerned at ongoing plans to take forward settlements, including in Givat Hamatos and Har Homa and in the E1 area. All settlements are illegal under international law. Settlement construction in these highly sensitive areas would damage prospects for a two-State solution and threaten to further undermine the viability of a future Palestinian State with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Despite the spread of the coronavirus disease, 2020 is on course to be the worst year since 2016 for Israeli demolition of Palestinian property, including of donor-funded structures paid for by Council members and international partners. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances, demolitions are contrary to international humanitarian law. We call on Israel to desist from such actions and to provide a clear and transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C. We are also concerned about ongoing evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem.

Like all countries, Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence and to defend its citizens from attack. But in doing this, it is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with international law and that they are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties. For example, the shooting and injuring by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) of an unarmed, deaf and mute Palestinian at the Qalandia checkpoint on 17 August is deeply concerning. The Israeli security forces must provide appropriate protection to the Palestinian people and be seen to conduct prompt and transparent investigations into claims of IDF misconduct.

The Palestinian leadership must continue its efforts aimed at tackling terror and incitement, strengthen institutions and develop a sustainable economy. Hamas and other terrorist groups must permanently end their incitement and rocket fire against Israel.

The Government of the United Kingdom strongly condemns all forms of violence and incitement to violence. We welcome Fatah and Hamas efforts towards reconciliation and hope that this can lead to the holding of democratic elections across the occupied Palestinian territories.

Let me end by reaffirming that the United Kingdom remains active in the Middle East peace process. We continue to work closely with international partners to advocate a two-State solution and encourage a return to meaningful negotiations.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, we would like to express our sincere condolences in connection with the death of the Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Sabah. His passing is an enormous loss, especially given the important role he played in the region. I would like to offer our condolences to the Government and all the people of Kuwait.

We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. This month, we have seen the signing of agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirate and Bahrain. At every juncture of work on the Middle East peace process, Russia, as a permanent member of the Security Council and a participant in the Middle East Quartet, has always believed in the need for a comprehensive solution to the conflict. However, there has been an understanding that a just settlement of the Palestinian question based on international law as endorsed by the United Nations — including its resolutions, and on the Arab Peace Initiative and the fundamental principle of the two-State solution — must be an inherent component of that solution. That basis provides for the creation of an independent, sovereign and territorially contiguous Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and with its capital in East Jerusalem, which would live in peace with Israel.

At the same time, we note once again that the whole range of final-status issues should be determined through direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. These negotiations must be launched at the first possible opportunity. In his statement at the general debate of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly on 25 September, Palestinian President Abbas addressed that aspect and put forward an initiative aimed at the resumption of negotiations to resolve the Palestinian question.

We firmly believe that one-sided efforts will not achieve a breakthrough. We need to strengthen collective diplomacy to ensure that the international community's efforts to create the necessary conditions for the implementation of the only viable two-State solution through direct Palestinian-Israeli talks do not fail.

We call on our partners in the Quartet — the United Nations, the European Union and the United States — to strengthen cooperation to that end. We are also ready to engage in dialogue with key regional actors and to involve them in the work of the Quartet. In addition, Russia is actively working with various Palestinian representatives in order to bridge differences, while supporting the efforts of its Egyptian friends.

In that regard, we reiterate our call to refrain from provocative actions and unilateral measures. First of all, annexation plans must stop. Israel must cease its settlement activities in the West Bank and its policy of demolishing Palestinian property. There must be an end to violence and terrorist activities. In addition, the parties should refrain from aggressive or provocative rhetoric.

The international community should take active steps to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and the Palestinian territories, which are experiencing a socioeconomic crisis. The Palestinian people need assistance in combating the coronavirus. We will continue to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). There is both a humanitarian and a political dimension to UNRWA's work, as it has an important stabilizing effect on the Palestinian territories and the countries of the Middle East.

Mr. Sautter (Germany): Let me express our condolences on the passing of His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, a tireless mediator in the Middle East. Let me also express our thanks to Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing and his important work. I would like to make five points.

First, on the normalization agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, as well as between Israel and Bahrain, Germany welcomes the recent signings of the normalization agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and between Israel and Bahrain. We acknowledge the role played by the United States in that regard and express our hope that

those agreements will contribute to achieving peace and stability in the Middle East.

The momentum generated by the signing of those accords should now be focused on finally reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters. Normalization must not result in consolidating the status quo but, rather, it should accompany the resumption of peace talks.

My second remark is on the two-State solution, Germany remains committed to a negotiated two-State solution, where two sovereign, democratic and independent States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders on the basis of the 4 June 1967 lines. That is the only viable and the most realistic path to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis for a life in peace and dignity with equal rights.

We call on both parties to recommit to their signed agreements and to fully restore the cooperation under the Oslo Accords and the Paris Protocol.

Together with our partners Egypt, France and Jordan, we will continue our efforts and offer our active support and our good offices in facilitating a path back to a credible dialogue and towards a negotiated, peaceful settlement. At our meeting in Amman last week, we emphasized that such serious, meaningful and effective negotiations must be based on international law and agreed parameters and be conducted either directly between the parties or under a United Nations umbrella, including the Middle East Quartet.

We have taken note of the call by President Abbas on the Secretary-General to convene an international conference early next year. Germany would be willing to participate in such a conference and encourages the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator Mladenov to consult with all relevant parties.

My third remark is on settlement activities. We reiterate our position that Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law. They severely undermine the prospects for ending the occupation and for a viable and contiguous Palestinian State within the framework of a negotiated two-State solution.

We trust that Israeli annexation plans are truly and permanently suspended. We call upon Israel to end the expansion of settlements, in particular in critical

areas around East Jerusalem, and the legalization of settlement outposts in order to prevent a de facto annexation.

We are particularly concerned about the ongoing confiscation and demolition of Palestinian-owned structures and properties in Area C of the West Bank. Such practices, as currently under way in so-called Firing Zone 918 in the South Hebron Hills, lead to the forced eviction and displacement of vulnerable Palestinian residents in the midst of the pandemic. In some cases, they contravene existing property rights of Palestinian residents in the area, rendering such practices incompatible with international law.

Any changes to the legal and traditional status quo on Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount, as well as in the city of Hebron, would further erode the substance of signed agreements and mutual trust at a time when the coronavirus disease crisis warrants close cooperation.

My fourth remark is on the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We call on both sides to fully implement resolution 2334 (2016) with regard to settlement activities, as well as all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terrorism, incitement, provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric.

In that context, we reiterate Germany's condemnation of all attacks and threats against Israel by Hamas and other terrorist groups, including the repeated firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel. Israel has the right to defend itself against such acts in a proportional manner.

My fifth, and last, remark is on intra-Palestinian reconciliation. We keep stressing that intra-Palestinian reconciliation remains key to achieving a negotiated two-State solution. Gaza and the occupied West Bank must be reunited under a single Government. The democratic legitimacy of Palestinian institutions must be renewed, and governance and responsiveness to the needs of the Palestinian population must be strengthened.

We therefore welcome the recent agreement to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza. We hope that such elections will take place soon.

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

I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing on the recent developments in the situation in the Middle East.

I join previous speakers in addressing my heartfelt condolences to Kuwait following the passing of His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait.

On 15 September, we followed with interest the signing in Washington, D.C., of the accords normalizing relations between Israel and some of its regional neighbours, including the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. The Niger supports all initiatives that enable the region to return to peace and stability.

While the Abraham accords mark a new dynamic, they should not overshadow the pressing need for a just and lasting resolution of the Palestinian question, the main source of tension in the Middle East for decades, as we all know. Moreover, we welcome the rapprochement between Palestinian factions that has taken place in recent days, as it will enable Palestinians to speak with one voice in the peace process.

Faced with this state of affairs, we must redouble our efforts to bring the Israeli and Palestinian parties back to dialogue. The United Nations and the members of the international community that have influence on the parties must spare no effort to seize this opportunity presented by the warming of relations between the Arab countries and Israel, to revitalize the peace talks, in accordance with the internationally recognized parameters and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). That is why the Niger calls for a mobilization of all efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians to resume dialogue as soon as possible.

In that regard, I would like to recall that the cardinal principles that should pave the way for dialogue towards a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians have already been clearly defined and are known to all. They are: an end to the illegal occupation and annexation of Palestinian land, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), and the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, on the basis of the 1967 borders, which is the basis for resolving the conflict in accordance with the provisions of resolution 1515 (2003).

At the humanitarian level, my delegation is concerned about the spread of the coronavirus disease in the region, in particular with the increase in the number of cases of infection observed on both sides.

A few days ago, this situation prompted the Israeli authorities to tighten restrictive measures and impose a new lockdown. It is urgent that the cooperation we just recognized resume between the two parties in the interest of their respective populations.

In order to prevent the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, my delegation calls on the international community to show more generosity to ensure the continuity of the programmes of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, on which nearly 5 million Palestinians depend today. It is also a duty of Israel, as the occupying Power, to assume the responsibility imposed upon it under international law in the administration of territories under its control.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the time has come for us to resolutely seek a true and just peace that takes into account Israel's legitimate security aspirations, as well as the inalienable right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. We must safeguard the two-State solution at all costs.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no further names inscribed on the list of speakers. Before adjourning the meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Security Council for the month of September, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of the Niger to the members of the Security Council and to the Council's secretariat for all the invaluable support they have given us throughout this month. At the end of a busy month, we can take pride in the fact that we were able to reach consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it without the hard work, support and cooperation of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, including the technical support personnel, conference service officers, interpreters, translators, verbatim reporters and security personnel. I wish to express to all of them our sincere and profound gratitude. As our presidency comes to an end, I know that I speak on behalf of all the members of the Council in wishing the delegation of the Russian Federation, with Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia at its head, the best of luck in assuming the presidency during the month of October.

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

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.